

ÜMİT EROL ARAS

UNDERSTANDING ANTI-WESTERNISM(S)
IN TURKISH MEDIA

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“NEVER TRUST THE WEST:” UNDERSTANDING ANTI-WESTERNISM(S) IN TURKISH MEDIA

A Master's Thesis

by
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June 2023

To my dear grandmother Sebahat Küçük



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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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by

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NEVER TRUST THE WEST:" UNDERSTANDING ANTI-WESTERNISM(S) IN
TURKISH MEDIA
Ümit Erol Aras

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Political Science and Public Administration.

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ABSTRACT

“NEVER TRUST THE WEST:” UNDERSTANDING ANTI-WESTERNISM(S) IN TURKISH MEDIA

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Despite the burgeoning literature on Turkish anti-Westernism on elite and public opinion levels, the role of the media in and discourses of anti-Westernism remains relatively understudied. To remedy this, after introducing Occidentalist literature and various strands of anti-Westernism, this study presents a thematic analysis of around 750 articles from five nationwide newspapers published between November 2020 and May 2022. Widespread distrust, hostility, and insecurity towards an Occidentalist caricature of the West are documented in Turkish media coupled with conspiracy theories; these are present in both anti- and pro-government newspapers. Turkish media, in unison, presents the West as Turkey’s arch-rival and responsible for most of its past and present woes. Turkish media also often instrumentalizes the West in deflecting attention from policy

failures of the political camps they align with. These representations justify homegrown authoritarianism and undemocratic measures by stoking an “under-siege” mentality, which is argued to require swift and assertive measures against external and internal agents puppeteered by the West. It is argued that the constant negative representations fuel anti-Westernism, driving a wider wedge between the West and Turkey.

Keywords: anti-Westernism, Occidentalism, media, Turkey, foreign policy, conspiracy theories

ÖZET

“BATI'YA ASLA GÜVEN OLMAZ:” TÜRKİYE MEDYASI'NDAKİ BATI KARŞITLIKLARINI ANLAMAK

Aras, Ümit Erol Aras

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

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Türkiye'de Batı karşıtlığı literatürü hükümet elitleri ve kamuoyu düzeylerinde filizlenmesine rağmen, medyanın Batı karşıtlığındaki rolü ve Batı karşıtı söylemleri nispeten daha az çalışılmış durumda. Literatüre bu açıdan katkı sağlamak amacıyla, Oksidentalizm literatürü ve Batı karşıtlığının çeşitli akımlarını tanıttıktan sonra, bu çalışma, Kasım 2020 ile Mayıs 2022 arasında ülke çapında yayınlanan beş gazeteden yaklaşık 750 makalenin tematik analizini sunuyor. Türk medyasında, Batı'nın Oksidentalist bir karikatürüne karşı, çoğu zaman komplo teorileriyle birlikte sunulan, yaygın bir şüphe, güvensizlik ve düşmanlık olduğu belgeleniyor; bunlar hem hükümet karşıtı hem de hükümet yanlısı gazetelerde yer alıyor. Türkiye medyası, neredeyse tek bir ağızdan, Batı'yı Türkiye'nin ezeli düşmanı olarak tasvir ediyor ve geçmişteki ve şimdiki sıkıntılarının çoğundan Batı'yı sorumlu tutuyor. Aynı zamanda, Türkiye'deki yayın organları sık sık yandaş

oldukları siyasi kampların politika başarısızlıklarının suç ve sorumluluğunu siyasi aktörlerin üzerinden Batı'ya atarak için Batı'yı araçsallaştırıyor. Bu tür betimlemeler, Batı kuklası olduğu iddia edilen dış ve iç aktörlere karşı hızlı ve agresif önlemler alınması gerektiren bir “kuşatma altındalık” zihniyetini körükleyerek otoriteryenliği ve demokratik olmayan önlemleri meşrulaştırıyor. Bu daimi olarak olumsuz olan temsillerin Türkiye’de Batı karşıtlığını beslediği ve Batı ile Türkiye arasında daha geniş bir uçurum açtığı da bu tezde öne sürülüyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Batı karşıtlığı, Oksidentalizm, medya, Türkiye, dış politika, komplo teorileri

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

“You should never trust the West. Lies are rampant there,” declared Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in June 2022 in a meeting with Turkish youth (*Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Batı’ya Güven Olmaz*, 2022). A few months before, he had also argued, “Western civilization has *invaded* the world through its production of soft power elements” (Alyanak, Mutlu & Rakipoğlu, 2022; emphasis added). During an interview about his upcoming book about the UN and the international system, however, Erdoğan was the most candid: “The problematic understanding that the West is superior has come to an end. Hundreds of years of Western hegemony has ended” (Türkten & Akan, 2021).

For many international observers, this open distrust of and thinly veiled hostility towards the West is anything but new. In the last decade, the AKP has relied on an anti-Western discourse to garner legitimacy at home and mobilize support for its foreign policy that grew increasingly at odds with the West. This intensifying anti-Western discourse of the AKP and Erdoğan is

well explored by many scholars, often in relation to the AKP's rampant right-wing populism. Indeed, the AKP's right-wing populist discourses, coupled with increasingly fierce anti-Westernism, were not limited to its foreign policy activism; it is part and parcel of its appeals to the Turkish audience.

In Erdoğan's campaign trail for the 2023 elections, these discourses were crystallized, as Erdoğan repeatedly accused the Western powers of scheming against him and the Turkish opposition leaders of complicity, who, Erdoğan argued, if elected, would compromise Turkish sovereignty and interests. For example, in his grand Istanbul campaign rally of 7 May 2023, Erdoğan claimed that the "European newspapers and magazines are watching [us], asking to themselves, 'what is going on there' May the [sinister] plans of those who scheme against the country [fail]" (*İstanbul mitingi konuşması*, 2023). The following day, he made a similar point: "There were one million seven hundred thousand people [at the Istanbul rally]. The West will get used to [not getting their way]. [They will see that] attacking Erdoğan is futile" (*'Batı alıṡacak' diyerek tepki gösterdi*, 2023). He was more open in a series of tweets, saying that "We trust the Anatolian wisdom, and not what the Western powers whisper to our ears like some others" (@RTErdoğan, 2023b) and "What [Kilicdaroglu] promised to the baby-killing terrorists and the ambassadors of Western countries is slowly being revealed" (@RTErdoğan, 2023a). These are all populist discourses with clear distinctions between us ("people of Anatolia") and them ("the Western agents in Turkey"), where the West is depicted as a vague but ever-present antagonist of the good people of Turkey.

However, anti-Westernism in Turkey has not become prominent with the AKP rule, nor is it limited to AKP's discourse. These examples are only a glimpse of the place and role of the West in the Turkish political psyche, and the role of the West in Turkish identity and politics is immeasurably vast. From the cliché sayings like "borrowing the West's science but not its morality" (in Turkish, *Batı'nın ahlakını değil bilimini almak*) to the concrete political processes such as the troubled EU accession, the West's place in the formation of Turkish cultural and political identity as well as place in the world is substantial and continues to influence Turkey's vision for itself in the world. Naturally, as in the case of any society, discourses towards the West are plural and often contradictory. In Turkish politics, the West is a place that is historically defined very differently. Some define it as a depraved collection of polities whose morality we should avoid; others view and depict it as a place where we should learn from but without compromising the essence of our identity; while some, albeit only mutedly, argue that Turkey's natural place is the West, which is a place of modernity and wealth.

More recent literature on anti-Westernism, on the other hand, focuses on the rhetoric of the AKP officials and the general anti-Westernism of the AKP's foreign policy is examined and studied to various extents in the literature. Similarly, although the scholarly work on public opinion of the West (and in particular the US) has been sparse, an increasing number of public opinion studies continue to illuminate the general views of the West in Turkish society. However, media is one particular level in which Turkish anti-Westernism has not been explored and studied at length. Although there are

some studies that address the topic, these are very sparse and limited in scope.

In an attempt to complement the existing literature and shed light on the less-explored aspects of anti-Westernism in Turkey, this thesis provides a general view of anti-Westernism in Turkish media. The first set of questions this thesis answers are diagnostic, aiming to explore the imaginations of the West and the strands of anti-Westernism in the Turkish media and examine them in light of the various types of anti-Westernism in the world and Turkey. So, in specific, this thesis seeks answers to the questions as to what extent the anti-Western discourses are prevalent in the Turkish media and what are their qualities and criticisms of the West.

After providing a general overview of the representations of the West in the media, this thesis will seek answers to the second set of research questions. What are the functions of anti-Western rhetoric in the media? What are the rhetorical ends of anti-Western arguments; what do they try to convince the reader of? So, while determining the prevalence of anti-Westernism in the media will be the first step, it is equally, if not more, important to find out the functions of anti-Western rhetoric, its arguments and the proposed ends. The answers to this second set of questions will be discussed in conjunction with the growing authoritarianism in Turkey.

However, unlike commonly done in the literature, I will not exclusively focus on the rhetoric of the government officials and prominent pro-government groups, but I will also examine the anti-Westernism of the opposition groups to contrast the different views of the West and various strands of anti-

Westernism in Turkey. Thus, in this thesis, my aim is to give a holistic account of anti-Westernism in the Turkish media and delineate the potential functions of these representations within the context of the current Turkish regime.

As so, 750 articles were collected from 5 nationwide Turkish newspapers with different political allegiances over more than one and a half years, specifically from November 2020 to May 2022. All collected articles mention the West and carry a judgment towards the West. Although the primary topic of this thesis is anti-Westernism, the articles that depicted the West in a positive light were not excluded from the analysis, as they would provide interesting contrasts with anti-Westernisms. These articles were then analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover the assumptions and ideas underlying the representations of the West.

Overall, my findings show that anti-Westernism is almost omnipresent in the Turkish media. Regardless of the configuration of the actual relations between the West and Turkey, the inherent character of the West is always depicted the same. Thus, I argue that these representations of the West are essentialized; they represent a West that is inherently hostile, morally bankrupt, and always politically conniving, against which various authoritarian measures taken by Turkish governments, leaders, juntas, etc., are justified. This essentialization involves reducing complex and diverse Western polities to a set of simplistic and fixed characteristics while ignoring or suppressing any policies that do not fit into their view of the West.

These representations are nearly always instrumentalized by both pro-government and opposition media to discredit their political opponents and blame the failures of their respective political camps on an essentialized representation of the West, which is argued to be and depicted as an ever-scheming force that seeks to undermine the Turkish interests both domestically and internationally. While the pro-government and opposition groups in Turkey, on the surface, have slightly different views of the West, the functions of anti-Western rhetoric share many important qualities. All depictions and discourses draw a picture where hostile Western forces incessantly try to undermine the Turkish national interests and will through internal and external agents, who are always at the disposal of the West. These agents can be incumbents, opposition parties, terrorist organizations, smaller states, political movements, or even singular figures, and they all serve Western interests with no agency of their own.

Most crucially, I argue that such depictions serve to legitimize both the contemporary and past authoritarian practices in Turkey. Such discourses that depict Turkey as always under siege by the West, whether of the pro-government groups or opposition groups, legitimize the proposition that this under-siege perception can only be overcome by a strong hand that will unite Turkey and break the Western siege. This strong hand is often a strong leader but can also be institutions that are argued to guard Turkish interests and values against internal and external enemies.

After this brief introduction to the study, this thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I review and discuss the concept of Occidentalism/anti-

Westernism and clarify its meaning and scope for the current study, which is a concept that unfortunately came to be a controversial term used for general alarmism about the decline of the West, mostly in the non-scholarly works. Thus, after acknowledging the problematic uses of anti-Westernism, I delineate the meaning and usage of anti-Westernism for this thesis. Followingly, I provide a review of the current literature on the anti-Westernism, authoritarianism, and media landscape in Turkey. I will begin by discussing the historical developments of various strands of anti-Westernism in the world and then in Turkey, providing an analysis of the most influential strands in the current political atmosphere. Then I finalize Chapter 2 by discussing the method selected for the present study and why it is deemed suitable, the data collected, and the news outlets picked for the thesis. In Chapter 3, I present my findings and introduce the two themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. I elaborate on the specifics of anti-Western discourses in both pro- and anti-government with ample evidence from the dataset. Finally, in Chapter 4, I discuss the functions of anti-Westernism in Turkish media, with a comparative look at the anti-Western rhetoric of the opposition and the pro-government media, and discuss their implications.

CHAPTER 2

ANTI-WESTERNISM: IN TURKEY AND BEYOND

2.1. Occidentalism and Anti-Westernism

Before delving into Occidentalism, a brief introduction to Orientalism as conceptualized by Said must be given. The title of Edward Said's foundational book, *Orientalism* (1978), refers to the way that Western societies have historically constructed and represented the "Orient" - a term that refers to the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia - through cultural, political, and intellectual frameworks. Said argues that Orientalism is not simply a collection of objective knowledge about the East but rather a way of controlling it, portraying the non-West as exotic, mysterious, and, most crucially, inferior. Western scholars, writers, and artists' false and inaccurate representations of the East were then used to justify Western imperialism, colonization, and domination. Furthermore, Orientalism is not merely a historical phenomenon but also an ongoing process, with contemporary media and cultural representations perpetuating the same stereotypes and assumptions. Said calls for a critical examination of how Western societies

have constructed and represented the Orient and for a recognition of the diversity and complexity of the societies and cultures of the East.

Originally derived from the concept of Orientalism, Occidentalism is a term with multiple interrelated but different conceptualizations. The first of these conceptualizations examines the processes by which it became the “West” and defined itself through various positive cultural, social, political, and economic values, such as modernity, democracy, human rights, scientific progress, capitalism, and individualism. This conception of Occidentalism has been primarily rooted in the self-perception of European thought. “The Orientalists compared, even if only implicitly, themselves and the strangers they studied in a way that would allow them to identify and heighten distinguishing characteristics” (Said, 1978, p. 43), and through emphasizing the better qualities of the West vis-à-vis the worse qualities of the non-West, the West to constructed its identity upon the ideas of rationality and modernity, as opposed to the non-modern and less-than-rational East (Allison, 2013; Carrier, 1995; Venn, 2000).

While this conceptualization and the line of inquiry are interesting and revealing in their own right, the scope and this thesis use the second conceptualization of the West, which is the one introduced by Buruma and Margalit. Buruma and Margalit, in a reversal of the concept of Orientalism by Said, define Occidentalism as “the dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies” (Buruma & Margalit, 2005, p. 5), the essentialization of the West by the non-West and its identification with “hubris, empire building, secularism, individualism, and the power and attraction of money,” (Buruma

& Margalit, 2005, p. 16) as well as soullessness and dissipation of morality in pursuit of wealth. These stereotypes are often used to, the authors argue, justify violent opposition to Western influence and power, whether through terrorism, revolution, or other means. This definition of anti-Westernism essentialized and/or dehumanized descriptions of the West by the non-West.¹

So, in contrast to the first conceptualization of Occidentalism, which is the West's own representations of themselves and how they have become the modern West, Buruma and Margalit's conceptualization refers to unfair representations of the West by the non-West. While in former conceptualization, Orientalism and Occidentalism are complementary terms, Buruma and Margalit's conceptualization of Occidentalism refers to the dehumanizing representations of the West painted by the non-West, not the positive representations of the West painted about themselves, which means that the two conceptualizations are contradictory.

Buruma and Margalit contend that Occidentalism is not limited to any particular region or religion but can be found across the world in different cultures and societies, including Western ones, providing examples of Occidentalist movements not only from the Middle East but also from Japan, Russia, and Germany. Buruma and Margalit also argue that Occidentalism is not a direct response to Western actions but a selective and often distorted interpretation of Western history and culture. They suggest that

¹ Throughout the rest of this thesis, anti-Westernism and Occidentalism is used interchangeably, mostly preferring the former to avoid a confusion of the two different conceptualizations of the term Occidentalism. For clear and concise discussion of the two concepts and their relationship, see Göksel, 2019a.

Occidentalism is not just a product of ignorance or misunderstanding but rather a deliberate attempt to construct a self-identity in opposition to and justify violence against the West. Overall, Buruma and Margalit argue that their book is not aimed “to gather ammunition in a global ‘war against terrorism’ nor to demonize the current enemies of the West,” but rather to “understand what drives Occidentalism, and to show that today’s suicide bombers and holy warriors do not suffer from some unique pathology but are fired by ideas that have a history” (Buruma & Margalit, 2005, pp. 11-2).

This conceptualization has drawn criticism, mainly on the point of how it may serve to absolve the West of its legitimate criticisms (Aydin, 2006; Bilgrami, 2006). Unfortunately, the term anti-Westernism has been and is still used as a common buzzword to justify the global war on terror and legitimize Western interventionism around the world. For instance, in one of the particularly apt reviews of the book, Bilgrami argues that, in Buruma and Margalit’s (2005) work, the “West is advised not to be made to feel so guilty [about its history of colonization and corporate exploitation] that it gives up on its essential commitments to its defining principles [of scientific rationality and democracy]” (Bilgrami, 2006, p. 386). Indeed, Occidentalism, as conceived by Buruma and Margalit and as often utilized in the Western mainstream media, implicitly but inherently associates the West with scientific rationality and liberal democracy. In turn, the so-called enemies of the West are also argued to be haters of these qualities.

Alarming descriptions of the radical anti-Western movements within the non-West, akin to Buruma and Margalit’s descriptions, tend to result in preventing

the discussion of the legitimate discussions of sovereignty and post-colonialism in the non-West, which often results in downplaying not only the history of the Western colonial rule but also its implications for the current international political landscape. These often reduce these legitimate grievances to a dichotomous cultural clash, where the West is characterized by rationality and democracy and the East is associated with irrationality and authoritarianism, thus inherently incompatible and perpetually in a conflictual relationship. These essentialized portrayals ignore the vast historical political context surrounding the current political situation the East is in and the role of the West in this (Mamdani, 2005). Indeed, the fact that Buruma and Margalit implicitly associate the West with scientific rationality and liberal democracy, which they encourage the West to further embrace in the face of radical anti-Westernism, implies that all critics of the West are critical of these specific qualities of democracy and rationality that the West is argued to have inherently (Göksel, 2019a). Thus, the discussion ends up revolving around Western and Eastern cultures, where the critics of the West are automatically reduced to less-than-rational, undemocratic groups. This, in turn, delegitimizes genuine grievances with the real effects of Western colonialism and imperialism around the world.

Although this will be discussed at length later, it should be stated here that some criticisms of the West that are prevalent in the Turkish media are not meritless and are based on the history and the current political ripples of the Western colonial rule over the non-West and the contemporary interventions in the Middle East. For instance, the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan are frequently mentioned and criticized by the Turkish media, both of which

could be justifiably criticized for myriad reasons. Similarly, the history of Western colonialism around the world is frequently mentioned as a reason to distrust the West no matter what. Thus, it should be stated at this stage that the purpose of this thesis is not to divulge the West of its various failures and ill-intents, invalidate all the criticisms of the West, or depict the West as inherently rational and democratic by gathering attention to the undemocratic Occidental/anti-Western depictions in Turkey. I do not engage in any “cultural talk” but discuss the politics embedded in the anti-Western/Occidental discourses in Turkey and identify its role in the past and contemporary authoritarianism in Turkey.

It is certainly critical to study anti-Westernism without reducing the discussion to “a clash of civilizations.” However, it is also important not to completely minimize the effect of culture, not as something inherent and fixed but as something that shapes and is shaped by the political context. Bilgrami, while criticizing the conception of culture as a fixed effect that Buruma and Margalit adopt, mentions that the role of culture in the study of anti-Westernism should not be ignored (Bilgrami, 2006, also see, 2009). For instance, Bilgrami argues that Mamdani, while disregarding the shallow cultural talk, “fails to make [his] analysis connect with the deeper cultural issues” (2006, p. 388). Agreeing with this assessment, in the following pages, I provide a brief summary of the movements of anti-Westernism in Turkey and how they have evolved over time and discuss their implications in the media discourses in the final chapter. In particular, I argue that how the arguments and lines of thinking that have been influenced by the 20th and 21st-century events have also become elements of culture that are regularly repeated by the media

and are used to make sense of contemporary domestic and international politics.

Furthermore, although some critics tend to identify Occidental discourses as mere reactions against the ongoing Western imperialism and domination in the world, Occidentalism is not always only, or solely the victim's reaction, as actors within the non-West can also utilize the status of the "victim to build a certain regime of power and to constitute itself as a hegemonic discourse. The category of the Other is interpellated within Occidentalism to produce a nativism by which *other* Others are produced, judged and marginalized" (Ahiska, 2010, p. 7; emphasis added). This is especially true for Turkey. While Turkey may be the prime "Other" for the West (see Diez, 2004; Morozov & Rumelili, 2012), through Occidentalism, actors within Turkey are able to create their own Others, most often minorities, any opposition, and (weaker) neighbouring countries, while claiming a position of weakness and Otherness vis-à-vis the West. Indeed, in many cases, the anti-Western rhetoric, although nominally targets the Western countries, actually results in harming the perceived "agents" of the West, who are, in actuality, minorities and opposition groups that attempt to challenge the dominant discourse of the AKP, in which a fierce anti-Westernism embedded, that is also intrinsically linked to authoritarianism.

Agreeing with Ahiska's assertion, I argue that we should be able to criticize the homegrown authoritarianism and imperialism of the non-West, in this case, of Turkey, and especially delineate how these are justified by the discourses of anti-Westernism, without absolving the West's past or

contemporary wrongdoings. Aydin (2007b), for instance, strikes a good balance in examining the anti-Westernisms in pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism, exploring the cultural context surrounding them without resorting to cultural talk or foregoing the political context. Similarly, Bonnett (2004) discusses various anti-Western ideologies and movements around the world in conjunction with the role of culture but without reducing the discussion to a simple clash of cultures.

Keeping in mind these shortfalls of Occidentalism as conceptualized by Buruma and Margalit, in the present thesis, I argue that this conceptualization is useful to delineate the functions of anti-Western discourses. Unlike Buruma and Margalit, I do not assume that these essentialized and dehumanized pictures of the West painted by the non-West are a threat towards the West, nor are they hateful of the “essential qualities” of the West. However, I also do not argue that we should take them as discourses that problematize Western-led global order, at least in a manner that the post-colonial literature does. I will demonstrate in the coming chapters that the criticisms of the West in the Turkish media tend to be thinly-veiled attempts to generate excuses for the old and new authoritarian practices in Turkey. While Occidentalism, as conceptualized by Buruma and Margalit, may be prone to unburdening the West of its, mildly put, complicated history, it is argued that in the Turkish case, anti-Westernism Occidentalism serves not to have genuine conversations about colonialism, imperialism, or interventionism but to prop up the homegrown authoritarianism and populism.

2.2. Variations of Anti-Westernism in the World

While Occidentalism is a conceptually loaded and disputed term, general theories of anti-Westernism have been sparse. To contextualize the upcoming discussions of anti-Westernism in Turkey and provide a more general view of strands of anti-Westernism in the world, this section briefly delves into larger currents of anti-Westernism in the non-West. There have been some careful attempts to identify the meaning of the West from the eyes of the non-West and the politics of anti-Westernism, though these works do not engage in theory-building and attempt to generalize qualities of anti-Westernism. This is not entirely unexpected given the often fickle meaning of the “West,” thus, of anti-Westernisms (Bonnett, 2004), but from the various works that delve into the politics of anti-Westernism, we can get a sense of some common qualities of anti-Westernism in the world.

Aydin’s work (2007b) on anti-Westernism in pan-Asianist and pan-Islamist ideology gives us a good view of how anti-Westernist ideologies developed during the 19th century when Western colonialism and its Orientalist discussions peaked. Examining the different contexts of the Ottoman Empire and Japan during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Aydin concludes that anti-Westernism in both contexts developed firstly as demands for equal recognition in the eyes of the West. In other words, anti-Westernism initially began as criticisms of the West for not living up to the ideals it champions, such as respect for national sovereignty and equal recognition of each state in the international system. The brutal Western colonial rule over many regions in the world especially evidenced the hypocrisy of the Western powers in the two non-Western and non-colonized nations, the Ottomans and

Japan, both of which were attempting to modernize at the time. As the demands for equality and respect were not met during the century, the criticisms of the West in the Ottomans and Japan increasingly became fiercer, eventually culminating in assertions that the Western-led order was unjust. The Western powers, in their hypocrisy, were not willing to provide the same rights or recognition to the sovereign nations of the non-West; thus, the international order must be revised in a way that the excluded, as well as the colonized, nations of the non-West may participate as equals.

Aydin traces the development of the two such visions for an alternative international order, namely, pan-Asianist and pan-Islamist movements, which had gained significant traction during the first half of the 20th century. The Russo-Japanese War in 1905, resulting in a Japanese victory, was a key moment that “sealed the loss of legitimacy for the existing Eurocentric world order,” after which the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asianist visions for an international order became part of the realist discourse of world politics, as “nationalist movements all over Asia embraced the anti-Western internationalism of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought as a potential form of empowerment in their demands for autonomy and equality in the international system” (Aydin, 2007a, p. 229). As the 20th century went on, and with their newly-gained legitimacy, pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism were opportunistically instrumentalized by the ruling elites of Ottomans during World War I and of Japan during World War II in their war effort against Western powers. However, as both the Ottoman Empire and Imperial Japan were replaced with pro-Western successor regimes, the influence of such ideologies, too, faded. With the beginning of the Cold War, the foremost

challenger of the Western-led international order became the socialist (re)visions for the international order.

The socialist anti-Westernism is different in content compared to pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism, but the underlying logic for the criticisms of the West remains similar. Although the different socialist eras in different socialist contexts had slightly different anti-Westernisms, socialist anti-Westernisms often emphasize the inherent harms of Western “capitalism,” such as labour exploitation and economic inequality. Internationally, these arguments depict the Western-led international order as a form of imperialism that seeks to dominate and exploit the non-West. Thus, the Western-led international order is an inherently unjust one and, expectedly, alternative socialist models are argued to be able to provide a more equitable and just international order. The core of the socialist anti-Westernism was again the insecurity towards the West. Anti-Western campaigns in post-WWII in the USSR, for example, “were directed against abstract foreign foes on the one hand (e.g., global imperialism) and against specific groups and nations within the USSR on the other” (Azadovskii & Egorov, 2002, p. 68). Internationally, “the Soviet Union’s commitment to assist noncommunist but anti-western states did not emerge only with the onset of the Cold War and the death of Iosif Stalin” (Hirst, 2013, p. 34); the frustration with Western predominance was a consistent element of Bolshevik political culture from the start.

Within this context of the Cold War, a more radical strand of anti-Westernism was developed under Islamist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb and Abu’l Ala Mawdudi. Both thinkers agreed that Western society and its values, culture,

and political systems were corrupt, a hindrance to the furtherance of good values in the world, unlike Islamic principles. Furthermore, they argued that the West was engaged in a relentless assault on Islam, seeking to dominate and subjugate Muslim nations. Qutb's writings, notably his book *Milestones* (1964), emphasize the idea of *jahiliyyah*, which refers to a state of ignorance and barbarism. According to Qutb, the West, in its pursuit of materialism, individualism, and secularism, had fallen into this state of *jahiliyyah*, which needed to be replaced by an Islamic social and political order. Qutb's ideas on the West significantly impacted the development of radical Islamist ideologies and movements. Such ideas would be claimed as ideological foundations by various radical Islamist organizations, including terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Lastly, one theoretical view pertinent to the current discussion and should be mentioned here is the theory of anti-Americanism developed by Katzenstein and Keohane (2006). Although this theory explicitly relates to the opposition to the US as a polity, it still has implications for the understanding of anti-Westernism. Distinguishing between opinion, distrust, and bias, Katzenstein and Keohane identify four types of anti-Americanism. The first and mildest type among these is liberal anti-Americanism, whose criticisms revolve around the US's inability to live up to its own ideals of democracy and free market, which is quite similar to the initial criticisms of the Western-led international order during the 19th and early 20th centuries that were discussed above, as what is opposed is not the values but the West's inability to live up to them. The second type of anti-Americanism, social anti-

Americanism, criticizes the US's lack of welfare policies or the continuation of the death penalty.

The third and the most relevant to the case at hand is sovereign-national anti-Americanism, which is comprised of the emphasis on state sovereignty vis-à-vis the US and the value of a strong collective identity within the state, which is pitted against the perceived US intrusion into the state sovereignty. Sovereign-nationalist anti-Americanism is constituted by the perceived American interventionism in state sovereignty and is more prevalent in countries where sovereignty is won after hard-fought wars and is much cherished. The last and the most extreme type of anti-Americanism is radical anti-Americanism, which represents a total clash and diametrical opposition to the perceived American values and policies. This attitude holds that the American polity and society are immoral and illegitimate,² and they should be transformed or destroyed for the furtherance of good values in the world (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2006, pp. 28–34). While the theory of anti-Americanism is difficult to apply to the topic at hand because of its specificity, i.e. its focus on the US polity alone, it still provides a good way of thinking about anti-Westernism and can be helpful in conceptualizing and theorizing anti-Westernism. Especially sovereign-nationalist and radical anti-Americanism are motifs very much present in the anti-Western movements described so far.

Each version of anti-Westernism described above has embedded within a deep sense of insecurity towards the West, mostly caused by Western

² Most Western societies are seen very similar as well, but the US is perceived as the archetype of a Western society: corrupt, internationally aggressive, and morally bankrupt.

imperialism around the world, which, in time, crystallized into more radical anti-Westernisms. These often result in visions of a new international order, where the injustices and exploitation perpetuated by the Western-led order are corrected. While anti-Westernism lacks a dedicated typology, the various types of anti-Westernism discussed in this section, as well as the theory of anti-Americanism, help make sense of and identify anti-Westernism in the Turkish context. Having presented a concise overview of the history of anti-Westernisms in the world, I will now discuss anti-Westernisms in Turkey.

2.3. A Historical Account of Turkish Anti-Westernism(s)

In this section, I will focus on the historical currents of anti-Westernism and cover the period between roughly the establishment of the Turkish Republic to 2002. The years of AKP rule and the anti-Westernism of AKP will be examined in the next section in conjunction with the discussion of authoritarianism and populism in Turkey. This section intends to contextualize the data and the findings, especially since the newspapers that this article focuses on are from a variety of political allegiances, thus, giving an exhaustive overview of the anti-Westernisms in Turkey.

When discussing anti-Westernism in modern Turkey, the “Sèvres Syndrome” emerges as the core of nearly all strands. The name derives from the Sèvres Treaty of 1920 between the Ottoman Empire and the Entente, which envisaged many territories ceded to Greece, Armenia, an independent Kurdish state and colonial mandates, but was replaced with the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 through the efforts of what is to become Kemalist leadership. While the Kemalists initiated an ambitious Westernization process, their

distrust of the West, due to the WWI experience and Sèvres Treaty, led them to nuance the Turkish modernization process from being a mere imitation of Western civilization (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009; Helvaçioğlu, 1999). Indeed, although they appreciated the Western principles of national and universal freedom, the early republican leadership appeared dismayed with the imperialist face of the West and kept referring to “untrustworthy, unreliable Western great power politics and neo-imperialism” (Aydın, 2006, p. 451).

Indeed, the Westernization project of the late Ottomans and the Early Republic were not mere altruistic attempts to join the civilized nations, instrumental reforms to prevent the military decline and battlefield losses, or lifestyle choices that reflected the thinking of the ruling Kemalist cadres, but were intended to keep the European powers at the time from interfering in Turkish affairs – it was “a strategy of seeking to become ‘similar’ in a world that was perceived to be not-so-hospitable to ‘difference’” (Bilgin, 2008, p. 17). Thus, although the Kemalist cadres of the 1920s and 1930s oversaw an ambitious Westernization project, one of its main rationales was to secure Turkey against Western imperialists, who only several years ago almost managed to carve and distribute the remaining Ottoman territories to minorities and smaller neighbours (Greece, Armenia, Kurdish), leaving only a small part of Anatolia to Turks. This wariness and vigilance against Western imperialism became a leitmotif in Turkish politics, political ideologies, and anti-Westernism. Westernization against the West (*Batı'ya rağmen batılılaşmak*) was and still is a favourite and very illuminating trope.

This insecurity still lingers on in the form of the “Sèvres Syndrome,” described as the “irrational fear that Western powers are bent on dismantling Turkey vis-à-vis the abortive Treaty of Sèvres in 1920” (Guida, 2008, p. 38). This siege mentality is reinforced with perceived threats to Turkish national security emanating from neighbouring states or internal forces, such as ethnic minorities, all supposedly deployed by Western powers to divide Turkey. The Sèvres Syndrome is, then, “a certain mode of perception and a resulting code of operation which are rooted in a traumatic past experience with the West and have not been revised since, no matter how the real relationship with the West has changed” (H. Yılmaz, 2011, p. 188). Indeed, while the Kemalist distrust towards the West is easier to make sense of over the outcome of World War I and the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the irrational fears of Western imperialism, conceptualized as Sèvres Syndrome, disregard the decades-long alliance and countless dimensions of cooperation with the West. Indeed, not long after World War II had ended, Turkey would place itself firmly within the Western camp during the Cold War.

With the end of WWII and the transition into multiparty politics that saw the Early Republican leadership divided and replaced, Turkey conclusively placed itself in the Western camp during the Cold War by joining NATO. However, this era of a relatively liberal political environment saw the rise of left-wing, Islamist, and right-wing anti-Westernisms rise. While determining the general public opinion of the West and the US is difficult, one can easily trace the proliferation of fringe yet radical forms of anti-Westernism during the 1960s and 1970s, a period when Turkey was growing increasingly polarized between radical left, far-right, and Islamist camps. What is more or less

common for all these groups was their agreement that the Western and primarily American³ influence on Turkey was harmful and degrading.

As Duran and Aydin (2013, 480) put it:

... it should be noted that Kemalist, secular and leftist intellectuals have their own versions of West-essentialisms, some of which have striking similarities to Islamist essentialism. In other words, the ideological clash over the images of “the West” between Kemalists and Islamists has produced different versions of occidentalisms, yet often with many similar themes.

This point is quite interesting, as it demonstrates that both Islamists and leftists had a deep distrust and sense of insecurity towards the West, in a similar form to the insecurity of the Kemalists. Their reactions and measures they proposed against the West were completely different; whereas Kemalists were in favour of elevating Turkey to the level of “civilized” peoples, Islamists have envisioned an Ottoman Islamic restoration based not on a Western but authentic and Islamic set of societal norms (Akkoyunlu & Öktem, 2016). However, both propositions were essentially aiming for the same end: secure Turkey against the West. For the radical left, in accordance with the strand of international socialist anti-Westernism, the West was seen as corrupt as the abode of capitalism and imperialism and had no regard for the sovereignty or prosperity of the people, whether allies or not (Güney, 2008).

³ The global reconfiguration of international politics now saw the traditional great powers of Europe (the UK, France, and Germany) reduced to a more minor role, as the “West” was now led by the US.

Although they did not feel primarily threatened by the West but by communism, far-right nationalists too believed that American and European influence would allow the Western powers to meddle in Turkish sovereignty and stir discord among minorities, as they have historically done. Similarly, European integration was seen, by the left and right-wing extremists alike, as “an appendage of American imperialism, from which they were trying to save Turkey” (H. Yılmaz, 2011, p. 190). On the other hand, the political Islamists of the late 20th century believed that Turkey had no place in the West but belonged to the Muslim world (*ummah* or *ümmet*). The chief ideologue and leader of the National Outlook Movement, from which the AKP would emerge in a few decades, Necmettin Erbakan, viewed the West as having lost its human conscience, being overly materialistic, and irredeemably selfish (Cornell, 2018).

The role of another chief ideologue of political Islam in Turkey, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, is crucial here. Kısakürek was a writer, poet and a leading ideologue of Turkish right, active during most of the twentieth century, who, similar to Erbakan, saw the West having a shortage of spiritual order, morality and in a worsening crisis, which has manifested in the world wars. Although he has commended the Western rationalism and domination over nature, hence the material,⁴ he, in a typical Occidentalist manner, has argued that the West has lost its spirituality in pursuit of material, and although it has achieved domination over the material, it lacked the spirituality of the Islam. Hence, its political hegemony was a façade as it essentially lacked the true

⁴ Even then, this commendation of the West was coupled with the claim that the good aspects of West, which had given rise to Western political hegemony, were already inherent in Islam. According to him, everything good came from the East. See, Duran & Aydın, 2013.

spirit (Duran, 2001). His ideas were also marred with unique mixes of conspiracy theories and virulent anti-Semitism.

In Kısakürek's imagination, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the "fake" liberation of Turkey from the Western powers in the 1920s, and the following modernization of Turkey under Kemalism were all machinations of Jews, who controlled the Western states and worked relentlessly to rid of the Turkish nation, the true and most successful representative of the "East," of its spirituality. Turkey's recent drift away from the West becomes much more meaningful when one considers the tremendous influence Kısakürek had on the AKP elite, particularly Erdoğan. Indeed, Cornell illustrates how the worldview of the young Erdoğan during the 1970s was shaped by the Kısakürek's violently anti-Western and anti-Semitic influence (Cornell, 2018).

While the right-wing anti-Westernism, whose views of the West were significantly influenced by Erbakan and Kısakürek, had prevented further collaboration with the West during the 1970s through their participation in coalitions with centre-right parties, the center-left also had its anti-Western outbursts during this era (Grigoriadis, 2010, pp. 51–66). Indeed, although the fringe elements within Turkey always maintained their anti-Westernism, international crises between the US and Turkey, particularly those revolving around the Cyprus issue, saw more mainstream parties become disillusioned by the US and the West.

The event of the Johnson Letter is remarkably illustrative here. Turkey's intentions to intervene in the island due to the political and ethnic turmoil in Cyprus in the 1960s would prompt a letter from US President Johnson in

1964, in which he implied that if Turkey intervened in Cyprus, NATO might not protect Turkey from a possible Soviet invasion. This letter would mark the first serious instance of divergence between the countries (Criss, 2002), and it was so infamous that its notoriety would eclipse decades, still being remembered and cited to date by the media (Ergin, 2019; Hayatsever, 2019; Kardaş, 2018). Though initially backed down, Turkey would invade the island ten years later following the 1974 coup in Cyprus, and the invasion would prompt a United States arms embargo on Turkey. Although the embargo was lifted a few years later, it led the Turkish public to believe the US was behaving as a suzerain, not as an ally (Criss, 2007). Another problem stemmed from opium farming in Turkey, which the US wanted to halt due to its domestic concerns about drug-related crime. US government would push Turkey to stop opium farming, achieving a complete ban on opium production in Turkey. While the US would compensate Turkish losses due to the ban, it would still cause a downfall in Turkish public opinion of the US, leading to anti-American protests (Güney, 2008). However, despite the above-mentioned crises, it should be acknowledged that the alliance held firm throughout the Cold War era.

Although the 1980 coup in Turkey stomped out the radical left and, to an extent, the far right, political Islam resurged during the 1990s. While all three groups maintained their strict opposition to EU membership and deepening US-Turkey relations in the post-coup era, political Islam was much more successful electorally. It was in this era that political Islam (prior to AKP) became most visible, positioning Turkey's place in the world "not [in] the West but the Muslim world [...], where Turkey could enhance her influence

and become a leading country, whereby she could restore her lost honor internationally” (Yilmaz, 2012, p. 369). Although Erbakan’s Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* - RP) was first ousted by the military and then closed down by the Constitutional Court, their offshoot, the AKP, would come to power in 2002.

Between the beginning of multiparty politics and the start of the rule of AKP, Turkish democracy is described as a tutelary democracy, guardianship democracy, or semi-democracy. These terms refer to a political system in which the military and other non-elected institutions exert significant influence or control over the democratic process and decision-making. In the case of Turkey, a military-bureaucratic alliance has intermittently intervened in domestic politics throughout the second half of the 20th century, often justifying their interventions by claiming to protect the principles of the country’s secular and founding ideology of Kemalism. These interventions took various forms but were often military interventions that resulted in the suspension of democratic processes, the dissolution of political parties, and the imposition of military-backed governments, as well as constitutional and legal arrangements through which the influence of the military over the civilian government was guaranteed (Akkoyunlu, 2017; Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Przeworski, 1988; Somer, 2016; Z. Yilmaz & Turner, 2019). However, as will be elaborated below, it is essential to note that Turkey has undergone significant political changes, and the influence of the military has decreased since the early 2000s.

2.4. Rising Authoritarianism in Turkey and Turkish Anti-Westernism under the AKP Rule

One of the interesting reconfigurations of the 2000s was the relatively warm outlook of the AKP towards the West and the cold, if not hostile, attitudes of the opposition parties at the time. Indeed, the AKP had come to the government with a much more pro-Western agenda than the RP, and the initial decade of the AKP government would mark significantly improved relations with the West. In complete contrast to today, the AKP had a relatively liberal, democratic and pro-EU agenda until the late 2000s. Many in the literature have interpreted this as AKP's struggle for survival. Under pressure from the secular establishment and the military, the AKP's embrace of a democratization agenda was a way of surviving in the face of hostile secular state institutions, such as the military, which forced the RP from the government, and Constitutional Court, which shut RP down (Taş, 2022). Dagi offers an interesting, if not too optimistic, account from the time, putting forward the idea that Islamist thinking in Turkey, which was so far based on strict opposition to Western influence, was now modifying its outlook towards the West, whereas the traditional pro-Western forces, Kemalists and seculars, were reevaluating their pro-Western stances, as they thought that the West, through the process of EU accession and general international recognition, was empowering the reactionary Islamists (DAI, 2005).

Nevertheless, the troubles in the background continued to plague relations with the West and, in particular, the US. In March 2003, the Turkish parliament failed to approve US troop deployment in Turkey, with many AKP deputies voting against the bill. Only a few months later, the US troops would detain

members of the Turkish special forces in Iraq, who were allegedly planning the assassination of a Kurdish governor. The Turkish soldiers were cuffed with hoods covering their heads, which led to an incredible outcry and anti-Americanism in the country, to the extent that popular culture elements spawned out of the incident. A best-selling novel called “Metal Storm” was one of them, depicting a war between the US and Turkey and a Turkish agent blowing a dirty bomb in Washington. Another was an explicitly anti-American and anti-Semitic movie called “Valley of the Wolves: Iraq,” in which a fictitious Turkish agent avenged the hood incident. Both had met with great reception from the Turkish public and even from government officials (Grigoriadis, 2010; Türkmen, 2010). Meanwhile, the main opposition parties, the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP) and the ultranationalist National Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* - MHP) were continuing to adamantly oppose the EU accession process, which they perceived to be compromising the national sovereignty of Turkey. While the AKP’s resolve to bettering relations with the West stood firm at the time, anti-Western elements have continued to maintain their presence in the mainstream politics of Turkey (Grigoriadis, 2010).

One particular current of anti-Westernism during the 2000s, when the AKP was more amicable towards the West, that utilized the “Sèvres Syndrome” to the fullest extent was that of the neo-nationalist *Ulusalçıs*, an influential, loosely connected group of civil society organizations, underground establishments, and media outlets. The rise of the *Ulusalçıs* is tied to the successive electoral victories of the AKP and the subsequent insecurities among the Kemalist bureaucracy, judiciary, and military, as well as the

secular segments of the society. The EU accession process led by the AKP, which diminished the influence of the secular Kemalist military and judiciary and expanded political and civil rights, especially for the minorities, was seen as a concession and compromise of Turkish sovereignty and state authority and a Western ploy to divide Turkey, executed by the AKP. Core tenets of neo-nationalism were anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism, which disassociated Kemalism from Westernism and exploited the Sèvres Syndrome to galvanize and fuel the anti-Western sentiment among the secular segments of the society (Grigoriadis & Özer, 2010; Uslu, 2008).

The liberalizing agenda of the AKP, however, was not to last for long. Although the semi-democratic political system with military-bureaucratic tutelage was disempowered by the end of the 2000s, this did not lead to democratic consolidation. The “old” authoritarianism in Turkey, where the above-mentioned military-bureaucratic alliance held the capacity to intervene to correct undesirable state of affairs, had merely changed form. This old authoritarianism was in part dismantled and in part reappropriated by the AKP, initially under the sponsorship of the EU and through more conventional political strategies, but then under a clearer electoral mandate and through typical populist strategies (Castaldo, 2018). As Somer concludes, “Compared to old authoritarianism, the emergent new authoritarian regime [of the AKP] has more potential for both repression and democratization in the long run because it is based on more mass support, elite economic interests and heavy manipulation of political information” (Somer, 2016, p. 497). This new regime was dubbed a hybrid regime or competitive authoritarian regime,

where the electoral competition continued but in a heavily skewed way in favour of the incumbent (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Levitsky & Way, 2010).

As the AKP rule grew more authoritarian, the EU and the US became increasingly disillusioned with the AKP, and the AKP's outlook towards the US and the West increasingly grew colder. In addition to the underwhelming results of the democratic agenda of the AKP, Turkish foreign policy was also growing diverging from its traditional pro-Western position of the Cold War era, with the AKP envisioning a Turkey that led like-minded countries in the Middle East and the Balkans (Kaliber, 2013).

While the actual foreign policy conduct of Turkey is beyond the scope of this thesis, the domestic component of this anti-Westernism is crucial. Kaliber and Kaliber's (2019) analysis of the transformation of the AKP's anti-Western discourse sketches an apt trajectory of the AKP's international outlook in conjunction with its rampant authoritarianism and populism. They posit that the AKP's "thin populism" of the 2000s occasionally and marginally manifested itself in regionalist discourses that proposed Turkey to be autonomous from the West, though it did not lead to a severe divergence from it. However, beginning with the Gezi Protests against the AKP government and reaching its zenith after the failed coup attempt in 2016, the "thick populism," through its escalating anti-Western discourses, conclusively placed the West as the "other" of Turkish political identity. In this worsening authoritarian environment, anti-Westernism has proved an effective discourse to garner domestic support, where the West and the internal agents of the West, who, from the AKP's perspective, were the opposition,

various terrorist organizations, NGOs, and individual journalists became the other (Göksel, 2019b). Indeed, for the AKP, anti-Westernism has become a handy tool of the broader method of populism, where anti-Westernism is used to reinforce the true representative of people's image against the elites, i.e., the Western states and the domestic Westernized elite (Yesil, 2020).

While the Western countries and the Westernized, i.e., inauthentic Turks, were routinely criticized and chastised in AKP rhetoric for their cultural immorality, the AKP also paradoxically referred to the West's democratic shortcomings to justify Turkey's own encroachments on civil rights and liberties. "The reading of any and all challenges, including democratic, legitimate and non-threatening ones, through the prism of a global conspiracy reveals a *siege mentality* that has rendered democratic processes and institutions powerless and in effect created conditions for both a vicious cycle and a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Akkoyunlu & Öktem, 2016, p. 519, emphasis added). Thus, most scholars agree that the AKP, throughout its rule, increasingly instrumentalized anti-Westernism as one of the core elements of its populism to galvanize support for the regime by interpreting any domestic challenge and international criticism of their rule as parts of a Western-led siege, not only the AKP but the whole of Turkey was supposedly under. Kaliber and Kaliber (2019, p.13, emphasis added) conclude that:

A discursive move frequently observable throughout anti-Westernist populism is to *discredit the domestic political opposition through its direct association with Turkey's external enemies*, thereby serving the interests of the transnational elite rather than those of ordinary citizens and the national will, and delegitimizing critiques levelled against the incumbent government.

How is, then, AKP's vehement anti-Westernism received by the Turkish public? There have not been comprehensive scholarly studies on the topic, and public opinion data on the perceptions of the West was virtually non-existent prior to the 2010s. However, the increasing prevalence of public opinion polling on international perceptions evidences that the distrust towards the West is unusually high, especially for a NATO member. The Turkish public opinion of the West appears to mirror the vehement distrust of the West in the AKP rhetoric, no doubt influenced by the very same anti-Western rhetoric. A survey of the most up-to-date and comprehensive foreign policy perception polls shows that the Turkish public is quite suspicious of the US, while other Western states, too, are perceived with distrust and caution, but not as severe as towards the US. A crucial and in-depth KONDA poll from 2016 shows that 40 percent of AKP voters, 43 percent of MHP voters, 25 percent of CHP voters, and overall a one-third of all respondents believed, for example, that the biggest threat against Turkey was Western attempts to divide the country, while another one-fourth of all respondents believed that it was the confrontations with the US (*KONDA Barometresi - Dış Politika*, 2016, p. 38). A recent poll from 2022 shows that almost 60 percent of the Turkish public views the US as the biggest threat against Turkey, with various other Western countries, such as the UK and France, also being identified as threatening (*Turkish Perceptions of the European Union*, 2022, p. 5). Another poll from 2022 shows that 47 percent of the respondents stated that the US is a threat towards Turkey, the most popular answer (M. Aydın et al., 2022). Interestingly, the EU and NATO membership is seen as positive by a slight majority in most surveys, though the prospects of EU membership are again

seen as unlikely and blocked by unfriendly European states. In contrast, most polls show that traditional rivals of the West, such as Russia and Iran, are viewed much more positively than the US and equally negatively or slightly more positively than European states. Polls, thus, show that Turkish anti-Westernism manifests itself primarily in anti-American attitudes, but distrust towards European states is significant as well.⁵

What is quite pertinent to but remains somewhat neglected in the study of Turkish anti-Westernism is anti-Western discourses in Turkish media. By disseminating the anti-Westernism of the AKP and potentially justifying and elaborating on them further, media attitudes wield a significant influence on Turkish public opinion vis-à-vis the West, especially in a media landscape where the AKP has been consolidating its power evermore. Indeed, the rampant authoritarianism of the AKP was coupled with a decisive capture of the media and a steep decline in press freedom, as after 2007, “AKP instrumentalized political trials, property transfers, and dismissals to disturb existing power hierarchies between secularists, religious-conservatives, Kurds, and leftists while presenting these measures as parts of a broader project of punishment and purge of ‘the nation’s enemies’” (Över, 2021, p. 355). Censorship of media was especially aggravated after the failed coup attempt, and the media control tools of the business cadres use were strengthened by AKP and led the way to the creation of a corporatist media under ever-increasing pressure (Akser, 2018). State control and intervention in the media, mirroring the old vs new authoritarianism in Turkey, was not a

⁵ Although specifics of these polls will not be shared in detail, for a survey of recent polls from 2010s, see: KONDA, 2016; Aydin et al., 2022; ELIAMEP-IPC, 2022; The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2022.

phenomenon that started with the AKP and was made possible with legal and institutional arrangements that were set up prior to the AKP, but it was AKP started to weaponize the government influence over the media to an extent unprecedented in a long time (Yeşil, 2018).

Thus, given the anti-Westernism's key role in the AKP rhetoric, it becomes crucial to ask how the Turkish media depicts the West, what are the major arguments in these depictions, and what the differences may be in the depictions of media outlets with different political leanings.

Only a few works with similar objectives exist, including Onat et al. (2020), who examine the anti-Americanism of the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak* and neutral/foreign-owned media outlets of *Deutsche Welle* and *BBC Türkçe* and find that news related to the US is presented more negatively in pro-government media, as opposed to the neutral tone of foreign-owned outlets. Another example with a more similar objective to this thesis, but with quite limited data, is Guida's work on the "Sèvres Syndrome," which evidences the prevalence of the paranoia of Western intrusion in both Kemalist and Islamist Turkish media. While both works are valuable explorations into the subject, this study offers a more comprehensive analysis of anti-Westernism through a significantly richer dataset. Furthermore, this study aims to study anti-Western discourses in Turkish media in conjunction with Turkey's old and new authoritarianism and the AKP's populism.

2.5. Methods and Data

2.5.1. Methodology

To shed light on this underexplored dimension of Turkish anti-Westernism, this article analyzes the general attitudes of five nationwide Turkish newspapers toward the West through a combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as the primary method of this study, mostly due to its flexibility. Thematic analysis is a method that involves identifying and analyzing recurring themes or patterns within qualitative data, and it aims to uncover underlying meanings and organize data into meaningful categories. In contrast to most qualitative approaches, it is unique in that it does not come with already established ontological and epistemological assumptions or theoretical positions, and it does not prescribe a certain data collection method. Instead, it is a way of structuring and looking at the qualitative data at hand and readying it for further analysis.

Thematic analysis takes themes as its core, which are expressions that “capture something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned response or meaning* within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82, emphasis added). Themes, typically implicit and embedded in repetitive expressions, must be carefully derived and are actively constructed, reflecting their interpretative choices. A theme can exist as a meaningful statement on its own, and it is crucial to support the theme with relevant examples from the data. Underdeveloped themes, such as exact word or phrase matches without interpretative efforts, are common errors that impede the publication of research findings, errors to

which this thesis paid special attention not to do. While thematic analysis could be done with *a priori* themes, this article prefers a grounded approach due to the conceptually vacillating nature of the subject, as, unlike the theory of anti-Americanism (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2006), anti-Westernism literature so far does not offer a dedicated typology through which one can set *a priori* themes. Therefore, thematic analysis “can be used to address most types of research questions, from questions about people’s practices and views and opinions to questions about the representation and construction of particular social and psychological objects and subjects in particular contexts” (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p. 1948). Similarly, it can be used to analyze any kind of data, including larger and smaller datasets.

Critically, thematic analysis “can also be used to develop a critical, constructionist analysis which can identify the concepts and ideas that underpin the explicit data content, or the assumptions and meanings in the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178), which is precisely the purpose of this thesis. As such, a latent reading of the press articles will be done to uncover the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies within the press articles in the Turkish media. This quality also makes it a well-suited method for studying press articles, as thematic analysis can be applied to various types of textual data, including media articles (Herzog et al., 2019), and can help understand the key topics, ideas, and narratives that are being communicated through the articles, as well as explore underlying meanings or biases.

2.5.2. Newspaper Selection and Dataset

In this thesis, five national newspapers were chosen based on their political leanings, popularity, and frequency of publishing articles regarding foreign policy and the West. As previously stated, not only the pro-government newspapers but also oppositional outlets were also considered for this analysis to give a comprehensive look at the descriptions of the West in the Turkish media. Although opposition media in Turkey is under pressure and the minority in the larger media landscape in Turkey, I argue that they are still significant as they represent an alternative look to the West that is different from the government's views. Indeed, since the AKP's rhetoric towards the West is well-explored and analyzed, and given the overwhelming AKP predominance and control over the Turkish press, we can expect the pro-government media to mirror, justify, interpret, and build upon the AKP rhetoric, but seldom contradict or criticize it. However, the anti-government media would be an interesting case where we can observe how the populist anti-Westernism of the AKP is interpreted by their detractors. A straightforward prediction would be to expect the anti-government media to depict the West as positive or, at least, provide a realistic account of the West to counter the anti-Western rhetoric of the AKP, which uses this rhetoric to discredit their political opponents, including the oppositional media itself.

The following nationwide newspapers were selected after a preliminary study of the media landscape of Turkey from the nexus of pro- and anti-government positions. It should be stated that, in this thesis, I do not intend to give an exhaustive look at the whole Turkish media but at the strands of anti-

Westernism in the Turkish media. In other words, the primary purpose of this thesis is to explore and analyze the representations of the West in the Turkish media, not to give an all-encompassing analysis of the Turkish media itself. The articles and columns were collected from newspaper websites, as data collection in print would be unnecessarily cumbersome with no added benefit. Similarly, the popularity of the newspapers was primarily measured with the number of visits to their websites and only secondarily with respect to their print circulations, as the former is a much more suitable metric for determining the popularity of an outlet in the era of digitalized news consumption.⁶

Thus, with these considerations in mind, five national newspapers were chosen for the final analysis: three pro-government and two oppositional newspapers. Among the pro-government ones, *Hürriyet* was chosen for its popularity as its website is the most visited news site in Turkey and the 12th most visited website in Turkey. Its print circulation is also consistently the highest in Turkey. It was owned by Dogan Group until 2018. Although the newspaper was tacitly supportive of the AKP during the 2000s, it had grown increasingly critical of the AKP during the 2010s as Dogan Group started feuding with the government. In 2018, it was bought by Demirören Group, a government-friendly holding, with a controversial acquisition process (Akser, 2018). As a centre-right newspaper with a clear pro-government position, I

⁶ The website metrics were taken from the publicly available databases of two US-based marketing consultancy companies: Similarweb Digital Data and Semrush. The visit metrics and rankings of top visited websites are dated March 2022 and still holds true for 2023. This data can be accessed from, Semrush, 2023; Similarweb, 2023.

expect Hürriyet to shed light on the more mainstream strands of right-wing anti-Westernism in Turkey.

The second chosen pro-government newspaper was *Yeni Akit*. Yeni Akit is a radical conservative newspaper known for its controversial and extreme positions, particularly vis-à-vis Kemalism, secularism, the opposition, and, of course, the West. Yeni Akit, unlike Hürriyet, is not part of the mainstream media but a fringe outlet. It is only the 55th most visited website in Turkey and only the 25th most visited website among news outlets. It is the 10th most circulated newspaper in print. Nonetheless, as stated above, the aim of this thesis is to explore as many anti-Western stances as possible, and Yeni Akit is suitable for this purpose as it very likely has more extreme forms of anti-Westernism, different than the likely milder anti-Westernism of Hürriyet.

Last among the pro-government newspapers, *Aydınlık*, the daily of the neo-nationalist/Eurasianist Homeland Party (*Vatan Partisi*), was chosen for its neo-nationalist, Eurasianist, and pro-Russian leanings. Having been initially founded as a socialist newspaper at the beginning of the 20th century, *Aydınlık* has been closed down by the government and ceased publication on multiple occasions. It grew closer to the AKP government in the second half of the 2010s and explicitly became a pro-Russian outlet. As such, its general criticisms and positions vary from the other pro-government outlets. It is also a fringe outlet whose website is only Turkey's 35th most visited news website. However, due to its unique position as a neo-nationalist pro-government newspaper, it was included in the final analysis.

In the opposition camp, two newspapers were selected. *Sözcü* was chosen due to its position as the most popular oppositional newspaper. Its website is the 5th most visited news website in Turkey and the 16th most visited website overall. It is also consistently in the top 5 most circulated newspapers in print. *Sözcü* was founded in 2007 by anti-government journalists in a dispute with Dogan Group. *Sözcü*'s journalists and the newspaper itself were repeatedly targeted by the government, which was intensified after the failed 2016 coup (Akser, 2018).

Lastly, the oppositional newspaper *Cumhuriyet* was chosen to represent the relatively more neo-nationalist opposition camp. *Cumhuriyet* was established in 1920 with close ties to the CHP, though the newspaper has changed its tone and positions throughout its history. Its relationship with the AKP, however, has mostly been antagonistic, as the newspaper and its journalists were targeted by the AKP on multiple occasions, the most infamous of which is Can Dündar, the former chief editor of *Cumhuriyet*. *Cumhuriyet*'s website is the 28th most visited website in Turkey and ranks 11th most visited news website in Turkey, though its circulation in print is much lower, often not making it into the top 20 most circulated newspapers in print. *Cumhuriyet*'s relatively stricter Kemalist position, as well as its Ulusalçı credentials, I argue, would provide a good contrast with the relatively more mainstream oppositional outlook of *Sözcü* and the pro-government neo-nationalist anti-Westernism of *Aydınlık*.

I should, here, acknowledge several limitations of picking only five newspapers and picking these newspapers in specific. Data would be,

indeed, more revealing if the analysis included other popular newspapers as well. For example, the potential inclusion of *Sabah* and *Milliyet*, both pro-government and rather popular newspapers whose websites are among the top 5 most visited news websites in Turkey, may have helped enrich the data further and perhaps capture more varied representations of the West.

However, given the extremely limited plurality of media narratives in Turkey, especially in the pro-government media (Över, 2021), I argue that the inclusion of these mainstream pro-government newspapers would be only *marginally* more revealing. Thus, I argue that the inclusion of the pro-government *Hurriyet* as the most popular newspaper in Turkey is the most illustrative of mainstream pro-government anti-Westernism, and it is more fruitful to focus on fringe yet ideologically diverse newspapers, namely *Yeni Akit* and *Aydınlık*.

Moreover, although these newspapers are not part of the mainstream media, they still boast unignorable amounts of readership. For example, the least popular newspaper among all the outlets, *Aydınlık*, still boasted 7.4 million online visits in April 2023, while *Yeni Akit* got 23.8 million online visits in April 2023. In the same month, *Cumhuriyet* got 63.9 million visits, *Sözcü* got 87.9 million visits, and *Hurriyet* trumped them all with 158.2 million visits.

Furthermore, I also acknowledge that certain political ideologies are absent from this bundle of newspapers, such as the radical left and ultranationalist right. Nonetheless, this bundle was deemed representative enough since the radical leftist representations of the West can be found in Eurasianist and opposition newspapers, as many columnists in those newspapers have

radical leftist backgrounds. The same is true for the ultranationalists, as their alignment with the AKP government indicates, to an extent, that their views of the West are not dissimilar to that of pro-government media.

From these five newspapers, every article that mentioned the West, published between 1 November 2020 and 10 May 2022, was collected.

Among these, those only reported developments were omitted, as they did not reveal any attitudes or themes towards the West and only reported factual information. In the last analysis, around 150 articles from each newspaper were included, composed exclusively of articles and columns that convey a judgment towards the West, regardless of whether positive or negative, totalling around 750 news articles. Among these, some were only marginally about the West, with one paragraph or two about the West in an article whose main topic is not the West but another issue. Nonetheless, these helped saturate the data and reveal as many attitudes as possible.

November 2020 was chosen as the starting point because the US presidential election has increased coverage of the West and the US, as did the 6 January 2022 US Congress insurrection, President Biden's remarks on toppling the Turkish government, or the Armenian genocide resolution of the US Congress (Borger & Chulov, 2021; Kucukgocmen, 2023).

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND THEMES: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WEST IN THE TURKISH MEDIA

The thematic analysis of the articles collected during the given period reveals the near complete convergence of the representations of the West and the similar nature of anti-Westernism in all news outlets studied in this thesis. The overarching theme of the anti-Westernism in the Turkish media that this thesis has uncovered is what can be described as widespread anger and distrust towards the West, which is portrayed and essentialized as an ever-scheming and hostile force in international politics, incessantly targeting Turkey through internal and external “puppets” to undermine its sovereignty, independence, and security — virtually none of the articles had a, even slightly, pro-Western stance or argued that Turkey should cooperate with the West. The most “positive” ones were those that Turkey should not cease cooperating with the West immediately but must never trust the West and approach any Western power cautiously.

The initial facet of anti-Westernism is the essentialization of the West into an always hostile, manipulative, warmongering, and inherently distrustful actor that is always in pursuit of domination, wealth, and profit, which is quite

similar to Buruma and Margalit's conception of Occidentalism. Turkish media interprets most contemporary or historical international events as supporting evidence for this conceptualization of the West. The West always emerges as the focus of the blame regardless of the context or their actual role in the event, and in turn, this becomes supporting evidence for the West's attempted interference in Turkish politics. Such international events include wars such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, where, as admitted earlier, the criticisms of the West are granted. However, the content of these criticisms is essentially different from justified criticisms of the West that intend to problematize Western influence around the world. Instead, these criticisms of the West's role and participation in the interventions conceptualize the West as an inherently hostile civilization and interpret its influence in the world as an ever-present obstacle to the progress of non-West. In a typical Occidentalist manner, these portrayals disregard any and all anti-war and anti-intervention voices within the West that opposed the said interventions and invasions of Middle Eastern countries. These are criticisms also riddled with many unfounded claims and conspiracy theories that do not serve to have genuine conversations about Western colonialism or interventionism; they only blur the lines between legitimate criticisms of the West with blatant conspiracy theories, inadvertently undermining the former.

Whatever the real configuration of the conflicts or international phenomena, the West is depicted in the same light: as a warmonger, expansionist, interventionist, and conniving international actor, who not only isolates and militarily subjugates any independent-minded countries but also deprives them of their economic independence. These representations also extend to

the wars, unlike the war in Iraq or Afghanistan, that Western countries were not directly involved in nor had a role in inciting. The prime example of this is the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where the West is blamed as much as, and often more than, Russia. The real configuration of the events and relations is treated as insignificant details; the West *must* be the culprit of most of these wars in the world. Even in the slight chance that it is not, the West stands to gain from these wars, thus, does everything to enable conflict.

Common to all these portrayals, expectedly, is the argument that the West has no respect for the sovereignty of other countries or international law altogether and only invokes international law or respect for sovereignty when it serves its interests, which also evidences its hypocrisy in promoting coups and sowing chaos in other countries while preaching democracy and respect for international law. The West's urges and efforts for democracy and human rights are a sinister mask for promoting their interests in other countries. The West has double standards and is a hypocritical civilization; its promotion of human rights, democracy, and multilateralism are ruses to strip the non-Western nations of their defences and ready them for the creeping Western influence.

These portrayals of the West in international politics, then, are utilized to argue that the West wants to do the same to Turkey. Many in the media argue that the West intends to invade Turkey outright, but the majority offers more nuanced takes, arguing that the West cannot outright invade Turkey and win; thus, it recruits and instrumentalizes external and internal actors that encircle and besiege Turkey, tries to undermine its stability and unity in the

long-run, readying the country for total subjugation all but in the name. It weakens the Turkish strategic positions by supporting terrorist organizations. It disunites its society through complicit local politicians and weakens the Turkish economy through currency operations. When it can, the West wants to drag Turkey into unnecessary wars and wants Turkey to fight their wars while the West politically benefits and financially profits from these wars. Western calls for democracy and criticisms of worsening human rights in Turkey are a façade to undermine Turkish sovereignty.

This is a compelling, graphic and recurrent theme present in every newspaper analyzed, including oppositional outlets. While I did not expect the opposition papers to be openly pro-Western, I expected them to be more amenable to the West or portray the West in a realistic/neutral manner. Nevertheless, all the arguments outlined above are true for opposition outlets too. Although portrayals of the West sometimes differ slightly in the manifestations of this anger and distrust, which I will delve into in detail, the arch-rival of Turkey and the Turkish nation always emerges as the West. The West is depicted as being and has always been an imperialist force that orchestrated and still orchestrates coups, interventions, and occupation of all non-Western countries with the objective to become/remain the world's hegemon and establish a political and economic system that only serves Western interests. It encircles and besieges any country that opposes its plans for complete domination, foremost of which is Turkey, through collaboration with enemy states, such as Greece and Armenia, and terrorist organizations, such as the PKK and FETÖ. This overarching theme is an

evident manifestation of the Sèvres Syndrome in both pro- and anti-government newspapers.

Seemingly paradoxically, the West is portrayed as both an immensely powerful actor and an actor repeatedly defeated throughout Turkish history. The West is almost all-powerful; it can, at will, can subvert governments, bring down political parties, incite interstate and intrastate wars, and overthrow legitimate local politicians who do not submit to Western hegemony. It can and continuously does establish and support terrorist organizations. At the same time, however, the West is also repeatedly defeated by the representatives of the Turkish national will. As the media portrays it, Turkish history is replete with triumphs against Western encroachments on Turkish sovereignty and independence. Despite all its power and potential for subversion, the West will never be successful in carving up Turkey or subjugating the Turkish nation fully. It may succeed in the short term, but Turkish national will will never be completely subjugated.

At this point, there is a small but critical difference between the pro-government and oppositional media. The overall antagonistic relationship between the West and Turkey is present in portrayals of both, and the West is always the antagonist. Both groups in the media, interestingly, use very explicitly populist discourses and nearly the same definitions for the qualities of “us” and “them,” where “us” is the Turkish nation and its true defenders, and “them” is the complicit internal agents sponsored by the West. However, the actor who is argued to be the “true defender of the Turkish nation” and the actor who is argued to be argued the “complicit internal agent of the

West” change. For pro-government newspapers, the representative and the defender of the Turkish nation is, expectedly, Erdoğan and the AKP, while the complicit agents of the West are the Turkish opposition as well as whoever opposes the AKP rule. For the opposition, it is mostly the reverse: the traitor within is the AKP and Erdoğan, who have disempowered the true defender and guardians of the Turkish nation (i.e. the military, the judiciary, and the secular establishment) against the imperialist West, and replaced it with a system of authoritarian governance that does the bidding of the West at the expense of the Turkish national interests.

In the following subsections, I will delve into these portrayals in detail and provide ample evidence from the data regarding these representations. This will be done in two different but interrelated themes. The first theme is what I termed the “interventionist West.” This theme is predominantly composed of narratives about the West and its objectives and ambitions in the world and refers to the portrayals of the West in general, not specific to its influence on Turkey, where its global interventionism emerges as the foremost quality of the West. This initial theme, I observed, often sets the scene for the second theme, which delves into Turkish domestic politics itself. The second theme is “Western agents and paranoia,” which refers to the paranoia about Western intrusion in Turkish politics and explores the narratives and imaginations of the West that relates explicitly to Turkey. In both themes, I comparatively analyze the portrayals of the West in both pro- and anti-government media to highlight the differences but also to underline the similarities, which are plenty.

3.1. Theme 1: The Interventionist West

This subtheme generally refers to the accusations of the West for being responsible for the destabilization of various regions and countries, especially those that refused to submit to their domination, ultimately to further Western interests. These portrayals include the claims that the West has orchestrated numerous coups, interventions, and violent overthrowals of legitimate national governments worldwide. Where it could not oust forcefully, the West is argued to have destabilized and isolated these national governments.

Within this theme, the Middle East's current predicaments are completely attributed to Western meddling, while Israel and the Kurds are argued to be the primary Western "vassals" in the region, serving the Western interests to shape a Middle East that is always subservient to the West and, in particular, the US. The US-sponsored coups and interventions in South America are also presented as supporting evidence. I specifically chose the term "interventionist" over other terms, such as "imperialist" or "colonialist," because the form of Western intrusion over the world changes in the media discourse. It can be outright invasions, sinister coups, internal subversive operations, or supporting various local groups or parties, but what is common to all of these is the argued interventionism in the domestic politics of the said nation.

It has to be restated here that, considering the West's history of colonialism, these portrayals are not entirely inaccurate. Many of the criticisms wielded against the West refer to real interventionist practices of the West. Therefore, my intention is not to minimize the role of the Western and the US role in the past or current predicaments of Iraq or Afghanistan by pointing out

Occidentalism representations of the West. However, I want to delineate how these cases are discussed and instrumentalized in the media discourse. As the examples from the data will show below, these claims are nearly always coupled with conspiracy theories and essentialized descriptions of the West that only undermine these otherwise legitimate criticisms. For instance, Turkish media's portrayals of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are illustrative of this essentially conspiratorial thinking against the West, not aimed to problematize Western influence but instrumentalize it to justify domestic (authoritarian) policies and practices.

Both pro- and anti-government media blames the West for the Russo-Ukrainian War, often even more than Russia. This topic especially evidences the Occidentalism thinking in Turkey and the "bad faith" nature of their rhetoric. While adamantly (and, I would argue, insincerely) defending the sovereignty of the Middle Eastern nations vis-à-vis Western intrusions, the sovereignty of another country (Ukraine) is seen as disposable, as the invader (Russia) is perceived to be defending its rights against the encroaching West. This theme often follows that the West is responsible for aggression, genocides, and countless human rights violations worldwide, and thus, it has no right to preach human rights and even condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine. This very point is again usually invoked when addressing the Armenian genocide issue. The media is adamant that the West has no right to condemn the Armenian genocide while also somehow asserting that there was no Armenian genocide.

For pro-government newspapers, this theme is the primary way of making sense of most international developments; the West is always, either directly or indirectly, attributed to the present woes of the world. In contrast, Turkish interventionism in Syria or Libya either goes unmentioned or is justified, arguing it was done to protect Turkey against the encroaching Western powers. For example, Yeni Akit columnists frequently remind readers of “the endless cruelty and hypocrisies of America and Europe, and NATO and the UN” (Alpay, 2022b). One goes as far as to say, in a typical Occidentalist fashion, “Let us not call something that exploits everywhere it goes a ‘civilization.’ Let us not call barbarism civilization” (Değirmenci, 2022). Although their arguments are not as far-fetched, the same sentiments are true for Hürriyet columnists as well. One states, “How can we forget the burnt children faces the US left in Vietnam? Or Afghanistan? Remember Syria and Iraq” (Çekirge, 2022). Another columnist adds, “The West (the US) invaded Iraq in the same way [Russia invaded Ukraine] and massacred 1.5 million people” (Bol, 2022a). Another column reads, “those who cannot see *the real face of the West* can look at Afghanistan” (Bol, 2021a; emphasis added). Indeed, one can see that the representations of the West are normative; the destruction the West causes around the world is proposed to be a result of the moral bankruptcy of the West, a manifestation of its *real face*. Thus, the decline of the West is argued to be primarily cultural and moral, which is followed by the decline of their geopolitical hegemony, which the West desperately tries to hold unto.

The same sentiments are true for Aydınlik, though their anti-Westernism, somewhat parallel to socialist strands of the anti-Westernism, highlights the

unequal and hypocritical essence of the Western order. Likely a result of their neo-nationalist leanings, they also attribute the foremost role in the fight against the West to the Turkish army, which is more muted in other pro-government newspapers studied. One columnist, for example, says that “Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Libya, Syria. [The US] attacked them all under the guise of democracy” (Özçelik, 2022a). Another column states that “the Turkish army is fighting against the US imperialism with tooth and nail [...] [Erdoğan and the AKP] have purged 21 thousand US and FETO affiliated reactionaries from the army” (Perinçek, 2021b). For many columnists of *Aydınlık*, the West’s decline is obvious, and the West is weakening in the face of other emerging powers, such as Russia and China. One columnist states, “The international system established [by the West] after WWII is collapsing. That is why NATO and the EU are panicking” (Akfırat, 2022b). This theme is also present in opposition newspapers, mostly in the same form. One *Sözcü* columnist accuses the West of forcefully establishing hegemony over the world and exporting state models that serve Western interests under the guise of democratization (Yalçın, 2022b). Another states that “the savage, the hostile West (the US and the EU) has found collaborationists throughout the Middle East. And now, Iraq has collapsed, has been ruined. Syria is thrown to insanity, burning. Libya is set ablaze, burning. Afghanistan is left to the Taliban” (Doğru, 2021b). Although accusations of the oppositional media towards the West tend to be relatively less vicious and more nuanced, many articles still say the quiet part out loud: “The US is behind every war and coup in the world since WWII. The US is

the murderer of the millions that died in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa” (Turan, 2021a).

Many also seem to blame the US and the West, along with AKP, for the refugee influx to Turkey, often by employing conspiracy theories and arguing that the Turkish demographic in Turkey is being actively undermined under the sponsorship of the West and the AKP (Doğru, 2021a; Turan, 2021b), a theme that is non-existent in the pro-government media. Cumhuriyet columnists often present the same points, arguing how the West wants to establish and consolidate its hegemony over the world through NATO (Güller, 2022). One explicitly states that “NATO is the tool for American imperialism. NATO is the biggest threat to world peace” (Doster, 2022). Another adds, “The US is more interested in destroying than building. We have many examples of this, from Somalia to Libya, from Syria to Iraq” (Balbay, 2021a).

The representation of the West as an inherently conniving and hostile actor becomes especially visible in the articles that are published after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. A Hürriyet columnist notes, for example, that “[Russo-Ukrainian war] is instigated by the insatiable Western imperialists” (BoI, 2022c), while another one states that “the cost of the war is paid by Ukraine, which is the victim of the provocations of the West and particularly the US” (Şener, 2022). Yeni Akit columnists follow a similar line, stating that the war in Ukraine was just a ruse to expand NATO towards the Black Sea and the Caucasus (Dilipak, 2022b) and peddling conspiracy theories about

the US biological weapons and neo-Nazi government in Ukraine (Dilipak, 2022a).

Aydınlık is the most vocal on this issue and is the first to blame the US for the war in Ukraine, though given their pro-Russia stance, this is not surprising. One columnist argues, “After Russia’s operation to expulse NATO from its borders, the West [showed its true face] and its racism was exposed. [The war] showed the rotten humanity of the West,” adding that “may [the Western] civilization perish” (Reyhan, 2022c). The same columnist adds in another article, “Ukraine was already under American occupation [before Russia’s operation]” in an article titled “Turkey will not share the defeat of the West” (Reyhan, 2022b). A myriad of articles accuses the West of provoking war, often through conspiracy theories on the West financing and supporting neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine (Akfırat, 2022a; Nezir, 2022; Yuva, 2022).

Opposition newspapers share this sentiment, accusing the West of provoking Russia through its Ukrainian “vassal,” with several Sözcü columnists accusing the West of instigating the war and even accusing the West of making up the Bucha Massacre as a false flag operation (Yalçın, 2022c). One famous opposition columnist egregiously argues, “We all know from our own history that following the war from the Western media is a bigger crime than committing a massacre” (Özdil, 2022), referring to the Armenian Genocide and how the Western powers promoted a “made-up” genocide.

Cumhuriyet is no exception, with prevalent and repeated arguments on how the US has instigated the war in hopes that the war would lead to the collapse of Russia. In doing so, it has sacrificed Ukraine and is now running

the war, which is used to argue that being a NATO member and a US ally leads to more insecurity than security (Balbay, 2022; Bursalı, 2022). Overall, it is interesting, but very concerning, that both pro- and anti-government media agrees that the war in Ukraine is the fault of the West. This is not only a very problematic reading of the ongoing conflict, but it is essentially the discourse with which Russia justifies its brutal war on Ukraine (see Götz & Staun, 2022).

A common point in all newspapers is that they accuse the West and the US of doing the very same thing they do around the world to Turkey, putting Turkey under siege from all sides: from the Mediterranean and Thrace via Greece and from the Middle East through the PKK and YPG. It promoted and supported numerous coups in Turkey to topple legitimate governments which genuinely tried to protect Turkish national interests. A Hürriyet columnist claims that the 1980 and 2016 coups were orchestrated by the US (Hakan, 2021), with another sarcastically stating that “the only country where no coups happen is the US because there is no US embassy there” (Selvi, 2021),. Another columnist argues that “the US has activated its plan [to put Turkey under siege] with Greece from the west and the PKK from the south,” supported by the EU (Şener, 2021b).

Many Yeni Akit columnists join the choir, arguing that all the coups in Turkish history are orchestrated by the US (Alpay, 2021a). Another adds, “starting with Greece and Balkans, continuing with our south and collaborating with the PKK and YPG, an imperialist plan unfolds” (Alpay, 2021b). Aydınlık poses even wilder accusations of the US being behind “numerous coups,

provocations, assassinations, massacres starting with 1955 and ending with July 2016,” when the Turkish nation and the AKP successfully thwarted another grievous attempt to oust a legitimate Turkish government (Reyhan, 2021) while making the usual arguments on how Turkey is under siege by the US (Perinçek, 2020).

Opposition newspapers are no exception to this. One Sözcü columnist states that the US has planned the July 2016 coup attempt (Yalçın, 2022a), as well as the 1980 coup (Yalçın, 2021b). These are often followed by the claims that the US and the West are trying to push Turkey to collapse with their agents; “the PKK/YPG attacks and the fight between FETÖ and AKP are prime examples of this” (Turan, 2021c). Cumhuriyet follows along with more of the same on how all the coups in Turkish history were orchestrated by the West (interestingly, with the interesting exception of the 28 February 1998 coup that had ousted the RP government, see Coşkun, 2021; Güller, 2021a; Kansu, 2022) as well as more of the same arguments on the siege Turkey is supposedly under (Doster, 2021).

It is clear, then, that the West is resolutely distrusted and perceived negatively by both the pro-government and the opposition media. Its influence around the is not only completely negative and harmful, but anybody that (claims to) struggle against the West, including authoritarian and aggressive states like Russia, is perceived positively. These representations are the West, though not immediately relating to Turkish politics, are then used to make sense of Turkish politics and discredit the opponents. The Western siege Turkey is under, then, is not an exception but

the rule itself; it is the West doing what it had always done to all non-West. The exception is, as the next section will demonstrate, how the West is resisted and defeated by the defenders of the Turkish nation. Therefore, the prevalence of the Sèvres Syndrome is evident and not confined to the Kemalist and secular media, similar to Guida's (2008) findings more than a decade earlier, as the very same, often conspiratorial, arguments and perceptions are well-present in pro-government media.

3.2. Theme 2: Western agents and paranoia

The second theme, "Western agents and paranoia," is again a recurring and potent theme in the media. Whereas the previous theme mostly demonstrated portrayals of the West's role in international politics, this theme is about how the West and anti-Westernisms, including its perceived role in the international politics that the previous theme elaborated on, are instrumentalized to make sense of the domestic politics and political actors in Turkey.

In general, this theme is composed of portrayals that argue for the existence of Western agents⁷ in every country that only further Western interests at the expense of the national interest. These agents are rewarded when they diminish the "national" actors and punished when they cannot. The reward can be becoming the ruling government after a coup; it can be a financial reward or general international recognition, or it can be a combination of all. Who can be a Western agent ranges widely too. The West can, apparently,

⁷In particular, *piyon* (pawn, in English), *kukla* (puppet) and *hizmetkar* (servant) are popular terms while referring to complicit Western agents, and *efendi* (master) is a popular term to refer to the West.

recruit any kind of organization: incumbent and opposition parties, military, NGOs, terrorist organizations, corporations, or individual columnists and politicians. The West and these agents, then, collectively become the Other, or “them.” I argue that this internal enemy is changeable, and the rewards the enemy is promised are undetermined because these details are unimportant. The important part is that “they” exist and are dangerous, and this justifies everything done in the struggle against them, which is the important point. Indeed, another person, organization, or ideology is often assigned to the role of the defender of the national will (“us”), whose transgressions against democracy, civil liberties, or political rights are justified against this overwhelming threat of “them”, i.e. the Western agents.

Who is assigned which role differs between the pro- and anti-government media. Nevertheless, although the specific roles assigned vary, the theme of the ultimate arch-rival of Turkey again emerges as the West and their internal complicit agents of the West. This may have been the case with many countries and governments in the past and over the world, especially in the former colonies and the Middle East, as the US and Western support for authoritarian regimes and the establishment of friendly governments is something founded in reality; but the arguments in Turkish media are essentially in bad faith and serves as ammunition to justify homegrown authoritarianism and imperialism of the AKP and delegitimize the Turkish opposition to Erdoğan for pro-government newspapers, and vice-versa for the opposition media, as the following examples from the data will demonstrate.

For the pro-government newspapers, expectedly, the defender of the national will is the AKP, Erdoğan in particular. The Western agents are nearly every opposition party and politician and whoever opposes the AKP in general, as well as the PKK, PYD/YPG and FETÖ, all supposedly being supported and controlled by the US and the EU.

One Hürriyet columnist valorizes the role of Erdoğan in the fight against the West and their agents, arguing that Turkey is no longer pushed around by superpowers thanks to him (Selvi, 2022) while implying that the opposition wants US support to oust Erdoğan (Selvi, 2020). Another columnist argues that Biden and the opposition work together to overthrow Erdoğan (Bol, 2022b), a point that was repeated multiple times by Erdoğan himself during the 2023 elections in Turkey (Kucukgocmen, 2023). In another column, the same columnist argues that “PKK(PYD/YPG) and FETÖ are all tools of the US and every other foreign power” (Bol, 2021c) and that Erdoğan has survived countless coups launched by the US in collaboration with inside agents, i.e. the opposition parties (Bol, 2021b). “Biden wants to overthrow the government, in collaboration with the opposition and terrorist organizations,” argues one columnist. “The US wants a government that does its bidding,” which, of course, implies the AKP and Erdoğan refuse to do the Western bidding (Şener, 2021a).

Yeni Akit columnists, in their radical anti-Westernism, often go further. One says, “The reason Erdoğan is under attack by currency operations, coup attempts, and is targeted by traitors and agents is his [anti-Western] leadership” (Alan, 2021a). Another column exemplifies the general paranoia

clearly, pointing to an alleged relationship between the opposition and the US, saying, “[the presidential candidate] of the opposition will be chosen by FETÖ. The US will dictate this to FETÖ” (Erdoğan, 2021). Another is as blunt, stating that “[Their] masters have told the [opposition parties] to ‘overthrow President Erdoğan, become [our] colonial governors’” (Alan, 2021b). Another one claims that “the US has intervened in elections to overthrow Erdoğan. [Yet] *Turkey has repelled every secret/economic coup attempt*, and the pawns of the West have complained to their masters about [their inability to defeat Erdoğan]” (Alpay, 2022a, emphasis added).

Aydınlık, again, is no exception to this pattern. One columnist says, “PKK-FETÖ-pro-American opposition, all collude to [overthrow the government]” (Reyhan, 2022a). Another columnist repeats the usual argument that a sinister operation is going on to overthrow the AKP and Erdoğan, and the opposition is a part of this operation (Özçelik, 2022b). “Turkey has been at war with the pawns of the US since 2015. The PKK and FETÖ are the armed forces of the US inside Turkey,” argues another column (Perinçek, 2021a). Another columnist again claims that the US has promised the control of Turkey to the opposition if they overthrew Erdoğan (Yuva, 2021).

The all-powerful representation of the West can be observed, where the West is apparently able to support terrorist organizations and opposition parties and attempt countless coups in Turkey. Western agents are able to infiltrate the state organizations and the army, and the West is able to launch currency operations at will. However, all these are, in the end, futile. Erdoğan and the AKP manage to repel all these attempts. These representations of

the West, being simultaneously an omnipresent foe and a hopelessly incompetent villain, may seem paradoxical on the surface.

In the opposition newspapers, one can observe an interesting shift in the roles, although the overarching theme is the same. According to the opposition media, the Western agents are the AKP and Erdoğan. While the defender of the national interests is not specific, this role is generally given to Kemalism as an ideology and the Kemalist officers in the army who were purged by the AKP, but not to the opposition parties in most cases. Often recalling the EU and US support for the AKP during the 2000s, when the AKP dismantled the hold of the military and the judiciary over the Turkish government, the opposition media argue that the institutions and actors that protected Turkish sovereignty against the encroachments from the West are dismantled by the AKP under the guidance of the West. Consequently, Turkey has become an authoritarian regime with an economy in shambles and, thus, is under the thumb of the Western powers. The AKP gets to rule Turkey, awarded for its role in undermining Turkish sovereignty.

One Sözcü columnist, for instance, states that Erdoğan has followed the US's "command" in joining the war in Syria (Çölaşan, 2022) and accuses him of not standing up to the US, especially regarding the Armenian genocide declaration by Biden (Çölaşan, 2021a, 2021b). Many either imply or bluntly state that the AKP's coming to power in 2002 was orchestrated by the US, Soros, and other foreign powers (Erkin, 2021b, 2022; Yalçın, 2021a) and blame the AKP for making Turkey dependent on the West (Turan, 2021d). While one columnist, interestingly, states that "when Erdoğan started to

opposing the West/the US [...], he started to follow the independent foreign policy approach of Atatürk” (Yalçın, 2022b), while another adds that “[the Ergenekon affair] was the revenge of the US against the Kemalist [officers in the army]” (Erkin, 2021a). The supposed policies of Atatürk and Kemalism, as well as the Turkish military, are assigned the role of the defender of the national interests.

The same patterns are also valid for Cumhuriyet, which makes even more frequent claims of AKP being a “US project” that is intended to strip Turkey of its sovereignty, which was being closely guarded by the secular establishment. Columnists argue that the AKP’s coming to power in Turkey was part of a larger American project intended to bring the Middle East to its sphere of influence (Kongar, 2021; Sirmen, 2021). “The EU has used the AKP to undermine the independence of Turkey and get economic concessions,” argues one columnist (Kansu, 2020). One columnist notably claims that the US cultivated Erdoğan’s one-person regime in Turkey to undermine its independence of Turkey (Balbay, 2021c). In the meantime, they also accuse the AKP of doing the bidding of the West and the US while adding that the anti-Western rhetoric of the AKP is merely insincere performances and lacks substance (Balbay, 2021b; Güller, 2021b).

Nonetheless, opposition columnists caution against being too defeatist, as they remind the readers of the fact that the Turkish nation has survived far worse situations. It has survived and came out of the 1910s and 1920s triumphant, and it will surely survive this period, too (Erkin, 2021b; Turan,

2021d), because the enemy, both the West and the AKP, lacks the conviction of the true defenders of the Turkish nation.



CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: FUNCTIONS OF ESSENTIALIZED PORTRAYALS OF THE WEST

4.1. “It is all West’s Fault:” Functions of anti-Westernism in Turkish Media

The common to all themes presented above is the fact that the West is presented almost as a villain of a movie, constantly engaged in mischief, chaos, and evil around the world, and this representation is often peddled with a hefty dose of conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated claims, essentializing the West into a constantly scheming amalgam of Western countries and international institutions that are somehow all-powerful but also constantly defeated by the defender of the Turkish national will. In this section, I will argue that this essentialization instrumentalizes the West in justifying various forms of authoritarianism and explaining the domestic failures of their respective political camps. I discuss and elaborate on these two interrelated functions of anti-Westernism in Turkey. First, anti-Western rhetoric is used to justify the various contemporary and historical authoritarian practices in Turkey by portraying an Occidental caricature of the West that always wishes to subjugate Turkey. Second, anti-Western discourses, I argue, serve to deprive Turkish political actors of their agency

and responsibility by blaming every failure on the same caricature of the West.

4.1.2. Justifying Authoritarian Practices

When I was going over the data I collected in order to form the main themes of the study, I was continually reminded of Umberto Eco's essay titled *Ur-Fascism* or *Eternal Fascism* (1995), in which Eco identifies several underlying characteristics and common elements that define fascist ideologies throughout history. Specifically, Eco (1995) argues that:

The followers must feel humiliated by the ostentatious wealth and force of their enemies. [...] However, the followers must be convinced that they can overwhelm the enemies. Thus, by a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak.

Eco argues here that, to justify the sheer volume of the force the fascists are planning to unleash, the fascists need an omnipresent enemy. In other words, the presence of a strong and conniving opposition is needed because only such a powerful enemy would justify total state domination of both public and private spheres. However, at the same time, this opposition must not be undefeatable to not demotivate the nation and to assure them of victory if the fascists had their way. Thus, this is the reason for the continuous shifting of the rhetorical focus, where the opposition members are weak degenerates who secretly control everything.

Reading through hundreds of newspaper articles and stumbling upon similar descriptions of the West, I could not escape drawing parallels between Eco's point and the representations of the West in the media. Although none of the

newspapers or the anti-Western political movements I was studying was explicitly fascist, the underlying logic in their anti-Western arguments was parallel to how fascists legitimized their authoritarian/totalitarian practices, as argued by Eco.

Therefore, I argue that justifying various forms of authoritarianism is one of the essential functions of anti-Westernism in Turkish media. Both pro- and anti-government outlets constantly refer to the West as both secretly controlling everything and behind every threat Turkey faces. Through this representation, pro-government newspapers justify the authoritarianism of Erdoğan and AKP, who are argued to be struggling and fighting against an overwhelming enemy that targets Turkey with coups, terrorist organizations, economic operations, and false flag attacks. Against such an omnipresent foe, Erdoğan, naturally, needs to take up drastic measures, such as suppressing civil liberties, imprisoning journalists and politicians, and launching operations against other countries because the West, the omnipresent and nearly omnipotent enemy, is literally at the gates.

In the face of such a threat, then, opposing Erdoğan becomes equal to complicity; it translates into support for the sinister Western ploy to divide Turkey, from which Erdoğan tries to protect Turkey. The curbing of civil liberties and the economic downturn are argued to be the cost of independence against the West, and those who complain about the burden compromise the independence of Turkey. This is not a point the columnists make explicitly; nearly all columnist is sure to pay lip service to democracy and human rights. However, it is clear from their emphasis that these are secondary concerns in the face of such an overwhelming foe; the justification

of various authoritarian measures is the natural outcome of their anti-Western rhetoric. However, the rhetoric is simultaneously motivating and triumphant. The reader must not feel desperate because Erdoğan defeated numerous such attempts throughout his rule with the support of his people, and he will continue to do so if the reader continues to support him and does not complain about the political and economic burden of “independence from the West.”

The rhetorical end for the opposition newspapers is quite similar, as well. The only difference is that their anti-Westernism does not end up justifying the authoritarianism of the AKP government but the “old” authoritarianism of Turkey (Somer, 2016), i.e. the authoritarian practices of the secular establishment, the military’s intervention in politics and suppression of civil liberties, but this time specifically of the conservatives and the Kurdish. They point to the Western support for the AKP’s liberal agenda of the 2000s and argue that the current state of Turkey is a result of subservience to the West and of dislocating the military and the judiciary, who closely guarded the independence and sovereignty of Turkey against the West and against Western agents within, the Islamists. Indeed, the current authoritarianism of the AKP is argued to be evidence of the ongoing Western scheme to subjugate Turkey. The oppositional media, too, pays lip service to democratic governance and human rights, but these are, again, secondary and disposable concerns in the face of such a domineering foe.

Another implicit but ever-present quality of such discourses is that the supposed siege of Turkey is an “unending” one, which evidences the omnipresence of the Western threat. Most columnists, both pro- and anti-

government, will point to international events, such as WWI and the Turkish Independence War, the arms embargo after the invasion of Cyprus, the opium production ban, US-Kurdish cooperation in the Gulf Wars, and various coups in Turkish history and argue that the siege of Turkey has been going on for a long time and is conclusively lifted. For pro-government newspapers, the siege Turkey is under has been going on since the late Ottomans, only halted during the rules of adhered figures like Abdulhamid II or, more recently, Erdoğan. The threat of Western intervention or coup is always present, and if Turkey shows any weakness or evidence of disunity, the Western countries will not hesitate to subjugate Turkey without impunity. Thus, it is essential that Turkey unites under one cause and suppresses dissent to dissuade Western powers from intervening in Turkish politics.

For opposition newspapers, though the roles of who is resisting the West and who are the internal agents of the West change, this discourse is dramatically similar. The argument that the West is an ever-present threat, which requires unity under a certain cause, is similar, and the legitimization of authoritarian measures, whether prospectively or retroactively, is present mostly in the same form. Atatürk, his successors, and the secular establishment were able to keep the West at the gates for a long time. Yet, since the AKP removed the guardians of the republic, the sovereignty of Turkey is once again facing an existential threat.

Thus, here lies the convergence of anti-Western rhetoric and its function. Every outlet studied utilizes this caricature of the West to justify authoritarian practices, which are argued to be drastic measures that had to be taken against such an imposing foe and against endless attempts to undermine

Turkish independence. The lack of democratic governance and the curbed civil liberties are essentially the West's fault, a result of their schemes.

4.1.3. Shifting the Blame and Discrediting the Opponents

The second function of anti-Western rhetoric in the media is to shift the blame for any policy failure or general decline to a caricatured portrayal of the West. The decline of Turkey in any sphere, political, economic, or international, is attributed to the Western schemes and the doings of their internal "pawns." This, I argue, deprives the Turkish political actors of their agency and dissuades them from taking any responsibility or making amends. The West is merely a sock puppet for explaining everything wrong in Turkey and the world one can always be frustrated and angry with. It is not that the policies of any group have failed, that ideas and propositions lack substantial support from the people, or that economic policies have been unsuccessful; it is the West's fault.

Shifting the blame to an Occidentalist caricature of the West deprives Turkish political actors of their ability to make any amends. Whether it is the Turkish military, the AKP government, the opposition, or any other group, what an actor's opponent is doing ultimately becomes the West's bidding. From this, one's political opponent inevitably becomes a delegitimate traitor who cannot be trusted and should not be listened to. This leaves no reason for any political actor to recognize policy failures or change them since they can freely blame a dehumanized and caricatured version of the West, whose responses and criticisms are invalid, especially when one stands to benefit

from this politically. Furthermore, it also helps them discredit their opponents, whose criticisms and successes are inherently hollow and insincere.

For pro-government papers, for example, the economic downturn is not due to the AKP's economic policies failing; it is due to the covert financial operations of the West. The opposition parties and politicians are, thus, Western agents for pointing out these failures, and they should not be taken seriously. Similarly, the terrorist organizations are not the results of decades-old ethnic grievances (the PKK) or gross miscalculations and failing alliances of the government (FETÖ); they are all Western puppets bent on bringing down the AKP government. If the opposition claims that the AKP should bear the responsibility for these failures, then this can only mean that the opposition groups are Western puppets. There is no reason to revise or rethink the ways of conducting policy and navigating complicated issues, such as ethnic tensions, economic policies, or civil liberties, because these issues are all made up by the West. Similarly, Turkey's isolation in foreign policy and its worsening relations with most neighbours are the results of Western attempts to undermine Turkey internationally. Therefore, Turkey's isolation is not due to foreign policy failures or rampant authoritarianism. The West has been doing this for centuries all over the world, and it is now doing it to Turkey; it is trying to encircle Turkey, and thus, we must further embrace the current foreign policy.

For the opposition, although the roles are different, the core of the argument remains the same. For instance, it is not that the AKP rightfully won the popular vote during the 2000s or that the Turkish electorate genuinely

elected the AKP; the AKP's electoral victories are all because of Western support and foul play. Therefore, There is no reason for the AKP's victories or the genuine support they might have from the public to make "us" revise our thinking about Turkish politics. The AKP is a project of the West, of the US and Soros, and anything they do or succeed in is inherently illegitimate and a facade. Similarly, the military interventions in Turkish politics were justified, as Turkey is far worse off now that they are gone. Thus, Turkey must return to the old state of affairs when a military-bureaucratic alliance has intervened in politics to correct the path Turkey is in and closely guard Turkish interests against the West.

While I do not argue or expect the political actors in Turkey would always accept responsibilities and try to amend their failures if anti-Westernism in Turkey was not as prevalent, it is very problematic that media, which ideally should be a critical voice in politics and policy debates actively amplifies discourses that stifle any meaningful debate and responsibility. It actively provides the political actors with ample arguments to shift the blame and discredit their opponents. In the current authoritarian environment of Turkey, this is not surprising for the pro-government media, but the fact that the oppositional media is doing the very same is concerning.

4.2. Conclusions: Implications of Prevalent Anti-Westernism in Turkish Media

Going back to the discussion of Occidentalism and anti-Westernism, I think that the anti-Westernism in Turkey is different from the two general ways of interpreting anti-Westernism in the scholarship. Parallel to Buruma and Margalit's conceptualization of Occidentalism, the representations of the

West in the Turkish media are all essentialized and extremely distorted portrayals of the West (Buruma & Margalit, 2005, p. 5). This means that the general post-colonial way of looking at anti-Westernism is not the way Turkish media discourses discuss the West. Media figures do not question and problematize the Western influence in the world. However, in the meantime, Buruma and Margalit's argument on how these stereotypes of the West are used to justify violent opposition to the West is not true for Turkish media discourses, as anti-Westernism In Turkey is mostly used to make sense of domestic politics.

Indeed, one important conclusion of this thesis is that the anti-Westernism in Turkish media is intended for domestic consumption and relates primarily to domestic politics. The West is a rhetorical device, a too-convenient sock puppet to shift the focus of the debates, discredit opponents and avoid difficult discussions of ethnic grievances, democratization, and polarization. What is essentially opposed in the end is not the Western influence on Turkey or around the world; it is the immediate political opponent. For the pro-government media, anti-Westernism is one of the rhetorical tools to excuse AKP's authoritarianism and discredit the opposition. For the oppositional media, it is a way of discrediting the AKP and whatever legitimacy it may genuinely have and valorizing the old authoritarianism, where they were the ones who got to push around others. This highly resonates with Ahiska's (2010, p.7) point on how Occidentalism can also be a way to create other Others and construct a hegemonic discourse where the immediate focus is the domestic internal enemy, who is argued to be one of "them" through Occidentalist discourses.

These caricaturized pictures of the West are also instrumental in the Turkish media to shift the blame for any failure or decline in their respective camps or ideologies to this Occidentalist imagination of the West. The West, thus their agents in Turkey, can be endlessly battered and criticized since nobody should listen to the West ever, as it has no right to preach about democracy, human rights, genocide, or expansionism. This, then, deprives the Turkish political actors of any agency to make mistakes, therefore, make meaningful amends. Any political group that remotely supports reconciliation with the political opponents, a return to normalcy and dialogue, or a reorientation towards the West can be accused of being complicit and traitorous. The arguments follow that conversations with the political rivals are equal to treason, as they are the puppets of an inherently dangerous and hostile foe, the West.

Indeed, unlike what one would expect, anti-Westernism in Turkey is not primarily about questioning or deconstructing the role of the West in international politics or in Turkish politics. Except for a few voices, no media outlet had calls for a complete divergence from the West or proposals of concrete policies in foreign policy. The role of the West in international politics is always criticized, but these are almost always used to frame domestic politics and discredit domestic opponents. For instance, Russia is supported in its war against Ukraine because it is perceived to be struggling against the West and its puppets because, the media figures propose, Turkey, too, is struggling against the West and Western puppets. The predicaments of the Middle East will be frequently mentioned, not because it is of genuine concern or the columnists are in favor of a certain vision for the

Middle East, but because the Middle East is in a state in which Turkey will fall if their political opponents have their way. Thus, the immediate enemy is always the domestic opponent, not the West; the concern is always Turkish politics, not the Middle East or the Western influence in the world.

The prevalence of anti-Westernism in ideologies and political movements across the Turkish political spectrum and throughout Turkish political history helps explain why anti-Westernism is so prevalent in Turkish media and why it is such a convenient rhetorical instrument. As explored in depth in Chapter 2, anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism have latched themselves onto nearly all ideologies in modern Turkish political thought. Kemalism, political Islamism, leftism, ultranationalism, and neo-nationalism all had their own, often essentially similar perceptions regarding the West (Akkoyunlu & Öktem, 2016; Aydin, 2006), which is well-reflected in the media. Despite being chosen for their different ideological allegiances, the findings showed all newspapers harbour a very similar form of anti-Westernism and draw similar Occidentalistic caricatures of the West.

Overall, Turkey's alienation from the West or the prevalence of anti-Westernism in Turkey is not exactly news. As discussed in the literature review, the divergence from the West, especially in foreign policy, is continuing to be discussed by scholars. However, what is neglected in dissecting this alienation from the West is the media's potential role in disseminating, mainstreaming, and amplifying the anti-Westernism in Turkey. Employed frequently and widely by the Turkish media, this Occidentalistic caricature of the West, which is constantly engaged in schemes to sow chaos in the world to further their interests, draws significantly on Turkish political

history and Turkey's problematic encounters with the West. Whether Kemalism, Islamism, left- or right-wing radicalism, anti-Western elements and perceptions have latched onto most ideologies in Turkey, recently culminating in a media atmosphere that is unapologetically and proudly anti-Western.

These points become especially critical when considering that the analysis includes the newspapers that are among the most circulated in Turkey, with many of the columnists included in the study frequenting national television. Although the media effects or how these representations may lead to a change of beliefs and behaviours is beyond the objectives of this study, they must have at least *some* effect on the readers. These newspapers and columnists, individually and collectively, have an audience of millions to tens of millions. Their columns have a nationwide reach, with each newspaper and columnist having multiple active websites and numerous social media accounts. Many columnists are also authors of several books, some of which are best-sellers. Thus, anti-Western attitudes studied in this thesis are not fringe views that barely make it to the mainstream; they are the mainstream, and they are all essentially attempting to justify various forms of authoritarianism and effectively stifling any genuine conversations about democratization and civil liberties in Turkey. Given the audience these news outlets collectively have, which includes nearly all segments of Turkish society, including secular, conservative, (neo)nationalist, and leftist, anti-Western discourses in Turkish media are a significant and persistent obstacle to the furtherance of democracy and civil liberties in Turkey.

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