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Discursive Construction of Geography in Populist Mobilization: Superority or Victimhood?
Popülist Mobilizasyonda Coğrafyanın Söylemsel İnşası: Üstünlük mü, Mağduriyet mi?

Abstract

The article argues that geographies are discursive constructs, designed to mobilize the crowd through the collective sense made by political leaders. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the ways in which the leaders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have mobilized voters by means of re-instituting geography during election campaigns. It contributes to investigating the political mobilization of the AKP by appealing to attachment of geography. The findings demonstrate three main narratives: the construction of geographical perception, place satisfaction, and the imagination of place identity with the "chameleonic nature" of populism. In brief words, the article explores the ways in which the AKP leaders have leveraged geographic beliefs, stimulating the "we-ness," in mobilizing.

Öz

Makale siyasi liderlerin kitleyi mobilize etmek için kolektif bir "biz'lik" aracılığıyla coğrafyaların söylemsel olarak inşa edildiğini öne sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin liderlerinin seçim kampanyaları boyunca coğrafyayı nasıl yeniden inşa ettiğini aktarmayı amaçlamaktadır. AKP'nin coğrafya aidiyetine başvurarak siyasal mobilizasyonun nasıl gerçekleştirildiğine dair bir katkı sunmaktadır. Bulgular üç anlatıyı ele almaktadır: coğrafi algının inşası, mekansal memnuniyet ve mekansal kimliğin tahayyül edilmesi. Kısacası, bu çalışma mobilizasyonda "bizlik" ile inşa edilen coğrafya kaderinin nasıl araçsallaştırdığını anlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Keywords

Anahtar kelimeler

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Introduction

Political leaders craft symbolic constructions pertaining to political mobilization, which transform collective sense-making in the direction of persuasion through social narratives concerned with identity, as the "we-ness" provides a bond between leaders and audiences as part of a discursive performance. Diverging critical moments, contextual needs, and electoral campaigns drive a language concerning the "we-ness," this kind of repertoire frames the imagination of boundaries by all attachments. For human geographers, the discussion between place and identity has an affective perspective. Narratives of place fabricate the notion of identity through various factors, such as history, opinions, values, and ideologies, all of which are substantial features of a collective identity. It is important to note that experiences and meanings shape identity (Castells, 1997); similarly, the sense of place socializes groups with deeper connections through human experience (Hummon 1992). Accordingly, place entails a vibrant factor for attachment occurring within the reproduction of differentiation (Wilson, 2000).

Harvey conceives the notion of identity as integral to political mobilization, which leads to a discourse suggesting that place is a social construct that yields to formulate collective sense. In another study, he also draws attention to the danger of instrumentalizing the geographical to serve as propaganda (Harvey, 2009, p. 15). Thus, boundaries become modes of narratives as well as manifestations of political leaders, rather than mere fixed forms. The discourse discusses the "we-ness" with concepts inherent to geography while conceiving the sense of belonging as a mode that mobilizes the electorate by forging a sense of identity. This is because the process of constituting a place involves dealing with historical backgrounds, myths, victories, grievances, economic successes, moralities, and marginalizations (Paasi, 2003), namely the images that give way to the notion of "us", which institute both superiority and victimhood. Frontal relations, social practices, shared experiences, knowledge transfers, political orders have substantial imports for everyday communications (Lefebvre 1991). It is inevitable to be involved in studying narratives that are concerned with geography, given that they are crucial aspects of mobilization, determining the collective sense-making.

This article argues that geographies/places are discursive constructs that mobilize the masses. In line with this argument, the study seeks to address how the leaders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have mobilized voters in tandem with place-based framings, for which they set boundaries. Thus, it illustrates which issues influence the processes inherent to the construction of "we-ness" through geography while highlighting the pertaining internal and external distinctions. In other words, the mobilizing discourse contains internal appeals; besides, narratives on the construction of geography present external extension to various regions through values (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, 2015).

Discussing whether the leaders make use of superiority or victimhood in constructing the notion of place, this paper aims to discuss further the influential factors that are integral to place in formulating the "we-ness" as well as how the notion of place is constructed

through collective sense-making, and how the leaders achieve to reverberate their rhetoric in and beyond the borders of Turkey by reproducing a new understanding of geography. A mobilizing discursive performance does not only highlight current merits and demerits, but it also produces a collective sense that cement mutual feelings and experiences, resulting in both positive and negative contexts. The electoral speeches are analyzed accordingly in this study since the performatives produce conditions that are integral to this framework. The findings examine three narratives: the construction of geographical perception, place satisfaction, and the reimagined place identity with a chameleonic nature in populist discourse. While probing how political actors discursively construct geographical faith, the study raises the following question as to its primary focus: Is geography a faith? The study argues that political actors discursively construct geographical faith.

Theoretical Framework
The "We-ness", Place Attachment and Discourse

In order to clarify the transformation through which the "I" becomes the "we", it is necessary to give a close reading to the perspective of social identity. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), groups are forms of collection of individuals, of which their members share common beliefs, opinions, experiences, ideologies, norms, attitudes, and emotions by which they perceive themselves as members through attachment (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001). The definition of the group also depends on a tactile comparison involving differences that leads to the necessity of defining the question "who we are," which by categorization lead us to another question, "who we are not." (Stets and Burke, 2000).

As Haslam (1992) points out, the intergroup differentiation primarily involves comparing the positively connoted "we-ness" with constructed "others", which are situated within the "enemy" camp. According to Hall, identification with a group is continuous progress, for which solidarity and shared characteristics are definitive boundaries of the in-group that construct antagonism towards "others" during this process. The "sense of belonging composes the in-group by constituting differences (Wojcieszak and Garrett, 2018). Similarly, Reicher et al. (2010) note that a sense of belonging provides an identification, leading individuals to emotional connection and cohesiveness with social groups. (Zahavi, 2014). Furthermore, attachment to a group conditions its members to behave in accordance within the group. It manifests prototypical actions and attraction to the in-group (Turner et al., 1987; Haslam and turner, 1992).

Social identities emerge depending on their relevance, and the relevant context provides them with a hierarchy, which might rely on symbolic possessions such as places. Geographical attachment causes sentiments of individuals to surface (Paasi, 2002). It underlines the presence of satisfaction with a setting (Stedman, 2002), shared meanings (Hernandez et al., 2007), and emotional bond (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Peng et al., 2020). Stedman (2002) argues

that "place is a part of identity," which constitutes modifiers in an attachment. Attachment to a place involves symbolic meanings, of which certain aspects such as shared experiences, memories, history, socialization, and ideologies can provide exclusive insights (Hummon, 1992; Stedman, 2002; Paasi, 2002). These are crucial in constructing the substantial imports as well as the image of a place by reflecting the "we-ness". Waster-Herber (2004) positively correlates this peculiarity that is akin to groups with the notion of place, suggesting it as a cementing factor for an individual's self-identity. Following the social identity approach, we can argue that the sense of belonging to a place is also a medium through which the "we-ness" gets constructed.

As mentioned earlier, narratives shape identities, which embody place-based meanings. According to Paasi (2001), both elites and popular discourses articulate identity, situating categorizations one next to the other while imposing differentiation. As the discourse plays a role in reproducing and shaping the knowledge transfer pertaining to social identities, this relationship constitutes parts of the cognitive process (Van Dijk, 2009), designating the shared commonalities of the in-group while exposing who do not share commonalities as "others". This suggests that narratives take positions to connote the representation of stories that define identities (de Finna, 2011), either with oral or verbal interaction, representing social groups in particular contexts. (Wodak, 2011; Molek-Kozakowska, 2017). Discourse, in this case, ascertains identity representation, situating experiences and images.

Reproducing "selves" and "others yields the repertoire to construct an image while positioning groups and boundaries. Thus, political rhetoric manifests categorizations by way of articulating "we-ness" within the appeal of interpretations. As such, populist language conveys emotional, identical and at times conflicting messages to stimulate a sense of belonging. To address this approach, the salient concept of populism should be underlined with the understanding of collective identity.

Populism and the "We-ness"

A variety of definitions have emerged, with some scholars viewing populism from the perspective of thin-centered ideology (Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2010), while others rely on the communicative performance by contemplating populist discourse and style in tandem with identifying features that are emotional, conflictual, non-formal colorful, and dedicated to close relationships with the people. (Taguieff, 1995; Panizza, 2005; Laclau, 2005; Aslanidis, 2015; Moffitt, 2016; With et al., 2019). Some other scholars, on the other hand, propose populism as a strategy involving the presence of political organizations or appeals in favor of change and reformist policies (Weyland, 2001; Betz, 2002; Enyedi, 2005; Barr, 2009; Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013; de la Torre, 2017).

While the notions of populism vary, there are key concepts: It sets the conditions of an idealized homogeneous group of people, the demand for a general will (Kriesi, 2014), and

the use of antagonistic language targeting elites and "others" by labeling people either "us" or "them". (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Stanley and Czésnik, 2018; Newth, 2021). The repertoire and communicative performance are central to socialize knowledge and group-based relations. In this regard, this article defines populism as a discursive performance, representing a unifying identity formation in contrast to the conception of "other" by appealing to the process of imagination through emotions and commonalities. Reflecting on this approach with the following paragraph, the article discusses the application means of the populist discourse and its relation to the mobilization of "we-ness".

Populism manifests itself in a group through the construction of homogeneity and leadership, which represents the like-minded and defines what remains outside the group as "corrupt/elites" and/or "dangerous others". (Canovan, 2002; Panizza, 2005; Wodak, 2013; Noury and Rolan, 2020). Transformation into groups further builds the sense of superiority over the in-group, which portrays the roles of "the people" and "the leader among the people" in populism (Perdue et al., 1998; Reicher, 2004; Roccas et al., 2008; Spears, 2011). Accordingly, "blame-worthy" out-group members are demonized to justify the victimization of the in-group (Pelinka, 2013; Vasilopoulou et al., 2014; Hameleers et al., 2019) by declaring the elites and establishment actors or, "others" such as opposition, migrants, and media, etc. as harmful or ignorant for the population (Rooduijn et al., 2014; Albertazzi, 2008). The existing categorization in populism deems mobilization with a sense of belonging, which calls on the glorification of the "pure" people (Taggart, 2002), especially those with shared signifiers.

A place can be likewise categorically constructed with an image of "us", which can be positioned in an idealized sense (Paasi, 2001). Critical moments in particular, such as election campaigns, require symbolic meanings to mobilize the crowd. Both conceptions of place and its re-imaginings can be situated based on how the narratives used by politicians are interpreted (Peng et al., 2020) over the interpretation of politicians' narratives.

Geographical Narratives of the Populist AKP in the Electoral Campaigns

This section aims to analyze the campaign speeches of the AKP, taking place during the election campaigns from 2015 to 2018. The findings address the evident relationship that denotes geographic appeal and populist mobilization. The string of repertoire clarifies using the lens of "we-ness" coupled with a sense of place belonging through persuasive language. Given that place is intrinsic to the process of identification (Peng et al., 2020), and surfaces as an affective connection, place attachment portrays diversity concerning its scope and disposition (Hernandez et al., 2007). Therefore, references ranging from statewide to transborder cases were selected for analysis.

While discussing geographical narratives, it should be noted that populism and nationalism share common nuances; however, De Cleen (2017) explicitly clarifies that the clearest

distinction derives from hierarchies: nationalist discourse formulates differentiation between members and non-members of the nation in terms of "in-out axis", on the other hand, populism articulates the homogeneous group of the people by "up-down axis". Likewise, Erdoğan and Uyan Semerci (2020) have underlined that nationalism contributes to the *survival of the nation and the state, whereas populism comprehends the survival of sovereign people* (p.4). Right-wing populism tends to diminish the difference due to nativist and exclusionary approaches (Betz 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017). Although nationalism and populism overlap in this case (Brubaker 2019), as major contents of populism, people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-establishment invoke this discourse by "us-them" division. Hereby, Katsambekis and Stavrakakis (2017) pointed out that the people of populism are positioned against the establishment and "others" (p. 394) that demonstrates "the people versus others", it appeals to the people-centrism as the homogeneous source of will (Abts and Rummens, 2007), labeling "others" against the people. Hence, the study observes that populist discourse is more dominant in the AKP case. To voice the shared identity in reaching to the people, the campaign reveals commonalities through the place. Since mobilization of the people is the driving force, the articulation of geography is populist in the AKP electoral speeches. It does not mean that the speeches do not involve nationalist sentiments, but populism is the dominant repertoire in the observation. Accordingly, the analysis section elaborates three narratives: the construction of geographical perception, place satisfaction, and imagined place identity.

The Construction of Geographical Perception

An imagined community with membership and shared place can be quantified by borders, language, culture (Venizelos 2021), and other commonalities through religion, ethnicity, sentiment, and historical experience. Historical origins are one of the symbolic signifiers of the "we-ness", being places founded on history setting continuity by instituting signs of the group (Lewicka 2008). Lewicka argues that individuals may have different reasons for having a sense of place, as places are "the product of different symbolisms and thus different identities" (p. 212), making places salient to identities. To further advance this argument, we can pair it with Taggart's concept of "heartland," which is an imagination of a better life (2002) and clarifies the ideal place "retrospectively from the past, pointing to the vision originating in the past and projected onto the present as that which has been lost." (2004, p. 274). A paired argument as such portrays the idealized people drawing a boundary with the "others" as a means of constituting a positive image and referring to a superior past. According to De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), Taggart's concept juxtaposes populism with nationalism. However, the AKP case portrays the ideal place through commonalities with the people. The Ottoman imagination – designs the "heartland," distinguishing the homogeneous group of the people and their norms from the actors and institutions of the establishment in a populist sense.

Moreover, current views or narratives about place heighten awareness of the production of geography (Paasi, 2003). During AKP election rallies, a collective past was made visible, of which the rhetoric regarding the commonalities was an essential part of the statements to reflect a sense of belonging together with the audience. This yields a "unity" with the people, as it conveys a shared identity through the history of the place and its representation of common (religious and national) values. The discourse of the AKP leaders forms a bond with the crowd that resonates with the "we-feeling" by constructing a perception through geography, which is demonstrated in the literature. The "glorious and proud" days of the Ottoman and Seljuk empires are shown to have continuity in AKP discourse (Elçi 2021) by outlining a superiority and portraying the desired rise in the territories. Ergin and Karakaya (2017) clarify the constitutive features of the issue of identity in Turkey as crystallizations of its historical heritage. It leads to homogeneity, given with common attributes of the in-group. Such place- and history-based discursive performance serves to differentiate social groups in society, which position themselves as a positive category reflecting the group with those internalizations.

The Ottoman past is substantial for the AKP to manifest superiority, which makes its discourse portray Ottoman Empire as a superior and advanced civilization compared to Western history (Uzer, 2020). Adopting the Ottoman imagination is not solely a comparison with the West, also related to internalized values within the boundaries. Ünal Çınar (2020) defines the Ottoman-influenced references made under the AKP rule as an "imagined capacity", which facilitates the portrayal of victimhood with an "imagined nostalgia" that has not lived itself. Claiming to be the "heir to the Ottoman legacy," the party accuses the Kemalist rule of having lost all the gains, which has proved to be a resounding argument allowing it to scapegoat republican elites/establishment and self-defining itself as the conveyer of "stability" and "capability". This portrayal underlines the superiority of the AKP's rule in asserting the reconstitution of idealization, a value that was said to have been lost (p. 98-99). It generates blaming discourse against the establishment while glorifying the AKP itself. Wielding the past as a weapon and claiming to be the representation of its continuity manifests itself in the repertoire of the party: "You will not succeed in making us 'pariahs' in our 1000-year-old homeland." (Erdoğan, October 19, 2015).

Karakaya (2018) describes the nostalgic Ottoman narrative to differentiate social groups, which homogenize by being "the source of Turkish heritage". (p. 126). The distinction between nationalism and populism is more apparent with this ascendency of content; the "up-down axis" implies the fictionalized people differentiating "others" (De Cleen, 2016). Thus, the party articulates the in-group's label with the characteristics of "Ottoman heritage" that also provides anti-elitism. For instance, Tokdoğan (2019) notes that the idealization of the Ottoman Empire serves to expand the scope of national identity in mobilizing the Islamist notions, which constitute a state image separate from the republican elites as we can see that narrating the Ottoman concentrates on a superior image, shared identity, people-centrism, and anti-elitism which are dominant.

The framing of superiority coupled with Ottoman references aims to attribute common values for the people. In order to emphasize such a message concerning the collective identity, specific names of places are explicitly cited: "This is our flag colored after the blood of our martyrs, this is Diyarbekir's flag, this is Hakkari's flag, this is Edirne's flag, this is Gaza's flag, this is Jerusalem's flag, this is Sarajevo's flag" (Davutoğlu, October 29, 2015), as we can see that campaigns refer to the lands of Ottoman, Erdoğan states: "from Africa to Syria, from Balkans to central Asia" in another speech (June 11, 2018). This discursive symbolization yields a perception that stresses a continuity composed of historical achievements and homogeneous values—in the speeches, defining a historical continuity as such denotes a homogeneous construct as to the extent of the "we-ness", which aims to expand the scope of the Turkishness framework by convoluting it with Muslim and Turkish image. Historical myths, experiences, and names transfer an alternate and continuing perception of the "good old days" to the audience. Following this, we see that the AKP incorporates the Ottoman's victories in articulating its "guardianship" image. For the commemoration of the conquest of Istanbul, Erdoğan's speech constructs the "us-them" division framing "glorious" history and "traitor" attempts of "others". Based on this narrative, he manifests the distinctiveness of the place by featuring its credentials in terms of religious symbols and Islamic and sites places with substantial connotations such as Mecca, Kaaba, Jerusalem, and Al-Aqsa Mosque. By highlighting names that are substantial for the Ottoman history, such as Fatih the Conqueror, Osman Gazi, Suleiman the Magnificent, and the second Abdülhamid, the president - "the guardian of the people" - equates his achievements with the historical heritage and strengthens his position by embodying the Ottoman sultans within his image.

> "Our ancestor, Fatih built Rumeli Hisar before conquering the city. In similar sense, today, we will also prepare for the new airport, Eurasian tunnel, high-speed train of 2053. (…) Oppression started in 1453. We will not tolerate traitors, who recognize the Pontian genocide, the Armenian genocide. We will not allow others who aim to stop Qur'an resonating in Istanbul." (Erdoğan May 30, 2015)

Identification with ancestors is not merely a condition to display a strong background but also an attempt to strengthen the party's position, which is one of the primary concerns of the election campaign. This internalization has an influential role as the history of geography shapes the belongingness of place (Paasi, 2002), rendering the feelings that convey a shared identity. Narratives centering on the achievements of the Ottoman and Seljuk Empires are deemed, for crowd mobilization through place attachment yields to create a perception, resulting in a positive category. It provides a sense of durability and stability as manifested in the speech issued by the Presidential Communications Department in 2020:

"This geography is auspicious either for us and for humanity. Our ancestors left these territories as a homeland by struggling night and day and making great sacrifices. We are also looking up to our ancestors and follow their path. Like nothing else, the Malazgirt victory did not emerge by itself. Behind this triumph, there is a big tenacity, preparation, and determination." (Erdoğan, August 26, 2020).

Symbolic meanings have also sustained the resonances of the Ottoman past, with leaders referring to the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge or the Osman Gazi Bridge, which together complete the populist party's services to the people and its alignment with the Ottoman past. Narratives on Ottoman history suggest people-centrism with its institutional services. Experiences of the place and feelings that stem from it are keys to reach the people. Specifically, the party leader connected the territories' collective moral history with the ombudsman. It indicates a two-fold performance: a) the place attachment with historical legacy and an affective dimension; and b) Directing the focus of the imagined geography to the people:

"Ombudsman exists in our history. During Ottoman and Seljukian periods, there were several mechanisms to listen to the peoples' grievances and demands under different names. In immense geography, the survival of states for centuries derives from this healthy and powerful relationship with citizens." (Erdoğan, September 16, 2015)

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Besides, we should accept the stimulus effect that has led the government to create a different image for the people by identifying/delineating itself with different geographies. Other than the Ottoman past and the reimagining of its geography with AKP-internalized empowerment, a contextual spatial positioning has emerged during the AKP years. Incumbents have at times claimed Turkey's position in the European Union. This contextual image should be noted because its mobilizing image is instrumental in creating a geographic perception resulting from the notion of place articulating interests.

While the Turkish leadership glorifies the country with the needed role and potential with respect to the EU, the differences with the EU have also led to a victimizing discourse. According to Aydın-Düzgit's (2016) study, the AKP's discourse aims to construct a superior identity by accentuating the economic and political assets that Turkey would potentially bring and contribute to the EU. In contrast, Erdoğan has exposed the discriminatory corpus of the EU, especially the one positioned against Muslim groups. "Others" or elites of the establishment meaning in populism which in turn encapsulate international actors and institutions (De Cleen, 2016). The country and its people can be described as "victims" in antagonistic position with the international elite (De Cleen, 2017). We see a burgeoning double discourse regarding the EU, causing more detachment for Turkey and its constructed superior image and victimhood as a result of the EU's actions. Mentioning changes are inevitable here. Balkır and Eylemler (2016) poignantly examine the transformation of the AKP's manifestos, which in

2007 were colored with statements about the EU's economic and foreign policy advantages (p. 36). During the beginning of the AKP rule, spatial connection with the EU was an opportunity to comply with requirements, aiming to secure reforms. In order to cope with the international challenges, the positioning of Turkey concerning the European Union has turned out to be positive due to its commitment to the well-being of the country.

Yet, in conflicting ways, the government's recent election campaigns have negatively categorized the EU. The division of the EU countries defames the "external others" and the moral connotations of the "us". By claiming that European values and norms regarding democracy, human rights, and freedoms are nothing but hypocrites, former Prime Minister Yıldırım has rendered the moral justification offers made for constitutional revisions as potential non-native support for "the opposing side of the referendum" (March 16, 2017). One of the reasons sparking these tensions was a demonstration to be organized by a Turkish diplomat in the Netherlands but was prevented by the authorities on security concerns. The government's reaction was to instrumentalize this as a means of manipulation to consolidate its positioning of victimhood. Then, Erdoğan used the reference to "Nazism" in describing the European countries, and Yıldırım was in favor of calling it racism and islamophobia. Homogenizing values of the in-group, antagonistic reactions came out. In addition, the flow of Syrian refugees and the open-door policy of Turkey generated a morally superior image in comparison with the "external others," which represents the change in place-based discourse:

> "Turkey is hosting and harboring 2.5 million brothers/sisters for 4.5 years. We opened our hearts and were doing something. However, European countries got into a panic encountering 150-200 thousand refugees. They are not poorer than us; they are much richer than us. Why are you worried?" (Erdoğan, November 4, 2015)

The AKP actors determine the spatial position and boundaries in the Middle East while addressing the Syrian refugees. To ensure its geographical role beyond its borders, the moral superiority of the "we-ness" has been framed; it is possible to encounter notable coverage of the Syrian refugees' situation in creating a geographical perception, with the ruling party labeling it with a positive identity. Comparing the AKP and CHP elites, the out-group's mentality was dispersed from the culture of the "self". This is strategically concentrated on the opposition's critical approach while justifying the government's open-door policy. In promoting the "*ensar* culture" of the group, a place attachment was presented, which resonated with common values that cement ties with the audience. According to Polat (2018), the term "*ensar*" expresses a more positive depiction of Medina's inhabitants in association with their help for Muslims fleeing from Mecca. The scholar argues that this preferred description is coherent with the AKP voters (p.505). The campaigns uphold the open-door policy for Syrian refugees, mirroring the sense of belongingness to geography with a shared identity, and stressing the situation of the "oppressed people" by the manifestation of group solidarity references: "we

opened our doors to 3.5 million refugees who ran from bombs, they were our siblings and opening our doors, we showed our fraternity" (Erdoğan, June 18, 2018). Resonating concerns and attachment to shared values, the actors construct a homogeneity, creating an image in the geography and mobilizing the conservative mass.

Furthermore, geographical perception construction also stems from both superiority and victimization synchronically. The statement, "the world is bigger than five" (Erdoğan, June 12, 2015) is a critical perspective towards the United Nations Security Council, due to the advantageous position of the five permanent members: reference to The United Kingdom, The United States, France, Russia, and China appeals to the possibility of a showdown, underlining the challenger role in the geography and symbolizing Turkey's charismatic leadership, which in contrast is seen as "capable". Here, assigning a prototypical "guardian role" of the place, the AKP discourse enhances the superior image of the "we-ness" from the east compared to the west. This discontent tries to prove the willingness to compete with "others" regardless of their power, externalizing the country's positive impact beyond its boundaries. The discourse allows us to see overlap between nationalism and populism. This suggests articulating nationalist sentiments and shows the "charismatic and savior image" claiming anti-elitism by anti-western nuances.

Although victimization narrative displays particular misfortunes, "the savior leader" image emanates from the discursive place manifestation. Experiences of place are transferred through the framework of wars, exploitation, and confrontations in the mobilization of the mass. Framing victimhood of the in-group's place, glorification of the "we-ness", surfaces while addressing how the populist AKP overcame the establishment's attempts at coercion. The imagination of the "protector" role of the geography facilitates the justification of the AKP's foreign policy: "Our struggle in Iraq and Syria challenges those who played us off for centuries and established the system of exploitation" (Erdoğan, June 3, 2018).

Specific experiences articulate superiority, victimization, people-centrism, and anti-elitism simultaneously. In other words, the moral superiority of the AKP leaders and their policies are transferred with the understanding of "safety of the people," producing fear. This emotional appeal relies on the perception of threat and the feeling of danger regarding the possibility of insecurity within territories. It strengthens the sense of uncertainty triggering place belongingness. The Operation Olive Branch (Zeytindalı Operasyonu) against the Kurdistan Workers' Party-affiliated People's Protection Units (YPG) in Afrin, was launched on 20 January 2018 and took 58 days. The timing seems strategic; the operation was brought to the agenda and ended before the elections. On March 18th Martyr's Day, which was also the 103rd Anniversary of the Çanakkale Victory, the President declared that Afrin had been taken under control:[1] "Now, the symbols of peace and security are waving in Afrin, not the rags of the terrorist organization. The flags of Turkey and FSA are currently waving there" (Erdoğan, March 18, 2018). Using the entirety of symbols such as the flag and the anniversary of the victory, the collectivity's enthusiasm took off. The target of the operation was the YPG-PYD, seizing

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and controlling terrain for border security. In 2012, the PYD had taken control after the withdrawal of the army from Syria. During this period, the resolution process was on Turkey's agenda. Yet, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, invited the co-chair of the PYD Salih Muslim to visit for meetings (Kayhan Pusane, 2020). However, in 2014, when declared as a Kurdish canton, Afrin in the northwest of Syria became a significant part of the autonomous government. Turkey took a tougher line as a result of defining the PYD-YPG as a terror organization.

Both Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch aimed to control terrain and eliminate the Islamic State, creating a buffer zone between Afrin and Kobane (Gürcan, 2018) that prevented a "Kurdish corridor" Turkey's borders. The portrayal of Operation Olive Branch exhibited two elements for the citizens: the perceived threat of terrorism and the determination of the neighbor on edge; the former one frames victimization, while the latter frames superiority. These illustrate a desire to merge a geographical position with the role of the populist party and people-centrism as the campaign-based claims, which indicate how the leaders resonated with the consideration of interests and the safety of the people and the place. As the discourse had formulated the peoples' safety, territorial/national operation sounds more populist than nationalism. The thin line derives from the people who may refer to the nation and national interests; however, declaring the opposition's unwillingness and unresponsive approach generates a homogeneous in-group in the nation. With the nationalist tone, critical discourse toward the opponent, articulating the peoples' safety implies a moral hierarchy. On this basis, the operation-based speeches indicate people-centrism and anti-elitism and the danger of "others".

"What did they (the opposition) say about Afrin? They said: do not go there. What did say for Jarabulus? They said: do not go there. What did we say about it? We said that we would go there and we did. Our soldiers and Free Syrian Army gave a battle there, and we removed the corridor of terrorism in the north part of Syria" (Erdoğan, June 15, 2018)

"If terrorists do not surrender, we will dump Afrin in their lap. (…) They will see what we will do in a week" (Erdoğan, January 13, 2018).

"We will not stop if anyone disturbs our country's boundaries. Today, our friends and relatives from different places of the world are proud of us" (Erdoğan, June 11, 2018).

In line with populist discourse, the AKP leaders' relative appeal to people-centrism canalizes an antagonistic division, "the people vs. dangerous others", while identifying themselves with the voters. This group-based differentiation creates a "play-maker or arbiter" image in addressing place attachment. Concerning Operation Euphrates Shield, the former prime minister Yıldırım also described the bombing attacks as the incarnation of danger, stressing how the "hero" army and security forces, by virtue of governmental policies, victoriously completed the operation for the people.

The framing of electoral speeches firmly articulates place-based concerns through victimization of the people and the country, in conjunction with the dignification of the government. One of the most explicit observations is the construction of a role and legitimizing policies in the geography, which depict sentiments related to the place, labeling the "savior" or "one among the people" role in preference to common grievances and feelings. In this sense, the AKP's place-based victimization narrative appeals to both positive and negative emotions, such as fear and hope. It produces fear about the possibility of danger, whereas the party and the leaders were manifested in the hope which serves the people. Populist leaders interpret themselves as "hope" compared to the elites and the establishment (Mols and Jetten, 2014) in claiming the protection of the people (Brubaker, 2019); likewise, the AKP leaders claim that only they are capable of overcoming challenges against the people, considering the stability and harmony of the country.

> "I will do everything for the peace of my people. (…) Because no one will disrupt the peace, welfare, and security of this country; but a government with wisdom is necessary." (Erdoğan, June 11, 2018)

> "Extraordinary events are happening in and around Turkey. We are really living historical days. Some are trying to draw new boundaries with blood, ensanguining our geography with their states or organizations." (Yıldırım, April 6, 2017)

Creating a geographical perception of the country with the party's role can be seen as populist repertoire inciting the "we-ness" in terms of the place belongingness. It appeals to common feelings and experiences in strengthening the bond between the leaders and the people. In short, the mobilization of the people hinges on place attachment by claiming the protection of geographical interests and identity with the people.

Place Satisfaction vs. "Others"

Place satisfaction correlates with the perceived quality of a spatial setting and meanings in terms of needs and services (Stedman, 2002; Ramkissoon et al., 2013). The opportunities or disadvantages might change the perception of the environment; in other words, conditions are constitutive of place attachment due to the degree of satisfaction. In the simplest terms, it refers to meeting and fulfilling basic needs that reinforce ties between the place and its people (Özkan et al., 2019). Steadman (2002) argues that a place's symbolic meanings are not far from beliefs determining individuals' sense of place. According to Paasi (2002), ideologies and social transformations are influential in constructing social identities. When we concentrate on these arguments, place satisfaction or a repertoire relying on changes or modification has a mobilizing impact on the political stage. In such a case, populist narrative appeals to feelings and opinions on the place, categorizing the party and its leaders in the positive camp regar-

ding achievements and people-centrist statements that assert an antagonistic division with "others'" capacities in both denigrating and blaming discourse. To do this, mobilizing discourse can transfer ideal behaviors or acts to identify the party's position with the place attachment and glorify the place as "their success".

As we will see in the speeches, the group differentiation frames the superiority of the AKP and victimization of the people due to the source of discontent that proceeds from "others". The AKP leaders' discourse constructs a positive identity, embodying the place's services and needs. This language creates a manifestation of the geography, narrating place attachment over the interests, needs, and harmony of the "we-ness" that comprehends the party and the people as the in-group. On the one hand, it amplifies anti-elitism and negative opinions of "others," the leaders claiming how "they" harmed the place and generated obstacles in the way of the place's opportunities instead of serving up satisfaction.

De Cleen (2017) states that populism intensifies dissatisfaction with elites (p. 7). From this perspective, this section indicates how the AKP campaigns articulate dignification of the place with the ruling party's succeeding actions and the failure of "others" that induce hazardous conditions for the people. Although place satisfaction raises a nationalist tone, the AKP's discourse reflects people-centrism and anti-elitism, emphasizing how the AKP served the people in developing conditions and opportunities. Populist repertoire produces the substance of options for the people (Brubaker 2019, p. 8). Thus, it is worth including how the populist discourse opted to articulate place satisfaction to empower the bond with the people appealing to changes and developments by the party in targeting the opposition and "dangerous others". Depending on the periods, the campaigns polarize groups by an "up-down" axis, as De Cleen (2017) argues. Associating with terrorism, instability, and obstacles to developments, various groups were differentiated from the welfare or harmony of the people.

Scrutinizing place-based changes/transformations, the speeches intended to capture the inclusiveness of the people with spatial conditions. Based on this repertoire, the fortification of various provinces around Turkey demonstrates statements regarding the AKP's moral superiority in serving the people and their needs. Hence, Erdoğan compares with the political elites, defining them as "negligent" in working for the people. During the first election in 2015, he depicted the east and southeastern regions through images of backwardness, poverty, and hardship, comparing them with today's advantages under the rule of the incumbents. In general, those so-called advantages involve the AKP's services in hospitals and health facilities, educational opportunities, classrooms, higher education dormitories, agricultural support, social policies, an improvement in railways, bridges, and roads, schools, tunnels, highways, high-speed train projects, airports, implementations of cultural and social rights, abolishment of assimilation policies, the planting of national gardens (*millet bahçesi*), and housing. In each city they visited, electoral campaigns were likely to fuel the performative message in persuading voters of their competence.

Appealing to the peoples' needs and values, the populist discourse of the leaders frames the "we-ness" in several ways: references to commonalities (values and opinions), concerns about the peoples' needs, improvements in services in different fields, and understanding the peoples' grievances which all point out the place satisfaction over the "savior leader" image. Particular expressions highlight perpetuity when connected with the geographical existence of "us" and its homogeneous qualifications. The important message shows how the peoples' party brought "good things" appealing to values. Therefore, the discursive exhibition on the new mosques or nation gardens is inevitable. This kind of statement symbolizes the place changes, which represent the in-group's concerns and religious values. By arguing that "changes and transformations come with the AKP," they foster an understanding as to who is "the only representative for the people," as Müller (2016) advocates.

> (Uses a Turkish idiom to represent the party's pioneer role for developments) "All these things came with us; it happened with us." (Erdoğan, May 14, 2015).

> "Its name is Beştepe Millet Camii (The Beştepe Nation Mosque). (…) I believe that this mosque's architecture and the Islamic-Ottoman social complex's integrity (*külliye*) have made vital contributions to the region, Ankara, and our country. Our civilization's most critical material element is our mosques. Each mosque built is a seal in these territories. All these seals are a land title of our geography." (Erdoğan, July 3, 2015)

> "We opened 12 faculties, 1college, and seven vocational schools at Kırıkkale University. (…) We supported agriculture and livestock by 460 million." (Yıldırım, April 4, 2017)

> "We did not come to patronize the people; rather, we came to be a servant for the people. In 16 years, we nourished our country by tripling in every arena; now, we are planning to advance the country reaching the 2023 objectives." (Erdoğan, June 1, 2018)

> "If the United States has Central Park and the United Kingdom has Hyde Park; we have our national gardens (*millet bahçesi*)." (Erdoğan, June 11, 2018)

When leaders visit provinces, they have intensified communication with the people by addressing how the incumbents and relevant institutional progress have improved their quality. Although it is not only limited to İzmir, we can give one example from the electoral rally there:

> "natural gas was coming to Urla in 2018. We have increased our universities' number, the capacity of dormitories from 10 thousand to 16 thousand. (…) We raised the number of beaches with a blue flag to 47, which was 23 in 2002. We established Katip Çelebi University and İzmir Demokrasi University. We solved the drinking water problem with Gördes barrage in İzmir. There will be no drinking water problem until 2050. We connected İzmir to Balıkesir, Manisa, İstanbul, Ankara, and Aydın through roads divided into dual carriageways. We divided roads but compounded lives" (Yıldırım, April 9, 2017).

The party leaders narrate an Ottoman past that seems to have a strategic appeal to convince people about policies and efforts according to place satisfaction. As this paper has already clarified in the previous paragraphs, framing the superiority of the Ottoman past is a leverage for the AKP in claiming "the revival or continuity" of it:

> "Do not forget, cowards cannot establish a triumphal monument. People who say 'no' to change and development; cannot produce a piece. People who are afraid of novelty cannot write history. While Sultan Alparslan was surrounding Malazgirt with his heroic army, others said 'no' to his armies; but he did not care and changed history's flow. (…) Some said 'no' while Sultan Fatih Mehmet was conquering İstanbul. But Fatih opened a new period without credence to ones who preferred slackness and cowardice and conquered İstanbul." (Yıldırım, February 25, 2017)

Aside from the superiority of the in-group, both anti-elitist and anti-establishment statements frame the people's victimization. It emphasizes the party's consistent description, "the new Turkey," that represents the novelties in the AKP's ruling period. From this perspective, the efforts of the place satisfaction are framed with the victimhood of the in-group; to signal the place attachment of the AKP, a group-based differentiation concerning place belongingness is observable. It distinguishes whether "others" are "reasonable, national, and native" in terms of symbolic meanings of the place or destructive following "separatist" acts in the territories. Working for place satisfaction is an indicative factor for political actors investigating someone's place attachment; it enables a comparison within those competitive periods.

> "We are a powerful and prosperous country, living with our 78 million citizens in 270 thousand square kilometers. But our richness does not occur underground; it's above. We have courageous people from Istanbul, Diyarbakır, Ankara, İzmir; we have faithful women; we have daredevil youth. This is our affluence. We have to protect it. In the past, incapable politicians took Turkey to bankruptcy. The IMF was ruling the country rather than the peoples' elected." (Davutoğlu, October 30, 2015)

The year 2017 experienced a constitutional referendum as a result of the reconciliation between the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the AKP, that offered to change the parliamentary system into a new presidential system (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2017). For the referendum, two voting blocks were separated into "yes" for who endorsed the amendments and "no". During the campaign of the AKP in supporting the "yes camp", Yıldırım broadly expressed disappointment towards the opposition, blaming them for the stagnation of development in the country. Expansion of the in-group with the supporters of the "yes vote," negative categorization against the "we-ness" framed victimhood in place dissatisfaction with the disposition of "no block". Such claims engage with an antagonistic comparison for strategic reasons, as these accusations are more attractive in voting.

"Now, they are saying 'no' to prevent the rise of the homeland. There is no goodness from 'no', but there is abundance in 'yes'. My people from Ardahan can distinguish between the producer of services and the talker. (…) We know the 'no block' who do not want the development and growth of the country. They could not stop acting with coups, tutelage, and plots. They pave the way for terror, polarization. Those who could not rule the country in time, are making judgments about the future of Turkey now." (Yıldırım, March 15, 2017)

As the literature on populism suggests, not solely elites are the target of the discourse; there are always "scapegoats" or chosen "others" concerning the context. The blaming narrative of Erdoğan proceeded to a more aggressive tone approaching the second election in 2015; the failure to establish a coalition and attacks escalated the tension (Erçetin and Erdoğan, 2018). Articulating perceived instability, place dissatisfaction was associated with "others," which comprised the opposition, media, intellectuals, and terror organizations. This allowed the portrayal of "others" as disconnected from the peoples' conditions and satisfaction. From 2015 to 2018, the continuity of the blaming discourse showed a bulk of references, quite progressively, the narrative touching upon the removal of the country's potential, damaging stability and trust. Not surprisingly, the leaders found the political elites, specifically the opposition, responsible to some extent, so the categorization of these "others" became negative.

The campaigns spread a particular definition of the relationship between place dissatisfaction and the opposition: incapable of providing a solution; alienated from the people and the country; and a failure to produce reasonable national solutions. Spatial dissatisfaction with "others" evoked the distinction between insecurity and safety for the people. On numerous occasions, the AKP pursued an association of the opposition with terror groups grudging their settings; therefore, the categorization of "destructive others" was adopted by the actors. The repetition of "burning schools, bombing houses, and demolishing mosques" was a significant portion of the stigmatizing narrative. The responsibility for providing security of the place transferred place attachment to the recipients. Anti-intellectualism was voiced through the academics who signed a peace petition in 2016. Referring to those academics, the demonizing language widened the label to "unreasonable members" of the geography due to the claims of "being a drawback for the place satisfaction".

"The darkness did not stop the wasting of Turkey's acquisitions. They do not want a powerful Turkey; they cannot tolerate this. They never want a powerful Turkey economically, politically, and militarily. They are in an endeavor to separate, splitting the country. However, they will not be successful. (…) We will be in a more powerful place. Turkey of 2023 will be greater." (Erdoğan, August 12, 2015)

"They state that Turkey is a so-called unlivable country according to their petition. Cemil Meriç has made a statement: individuals who find this country unlivable make it like that. (…) When we conduct a foreign policy in harmony with our history, culture, and values, others object to them.

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> (…) The ones who are not able to achieve political rule through the support of the people try to stalemate the government through the so-called academics" who are alienated from their people." (Erdoğan, October 19, 2015)

The performance of the party and its members was favored to convince the audience by referring to "others"; in contrast, the "savior" image was inevitable. As we can see, this was one of the populist repertoires of the AKP, blaming the out-group members for adverse incidents or failures and glorifying the in-group who was the "real victim" within the electoral campaigns (Erçetin and Erdoğan 2018). Sending hopeful messages out to the country, the AKP created a positive identity for the place attachment, but it only depended on their rule; the prototypical leader of the people who can struggle for the interests and unity of the people and country. In this sense, the theme, change, and transformation of the place are visible in the electoral speeches, which reflected this message.

Imagined Place Identity in the Mobilization

Populism literature indicates that the in-group construction (the people and like-minded) should be homogeneous, involving a shared identity. In a similar vein, the AKP leaders determined idealized geography with spatial imagination, designating the "pure" and "reasonable" people. Territorial manifestations strategically reconstruct the place in the imagination of the people. In this sense, we can argue that the AKP's populism constructs the place identity within a mobilizing narrative. In other words, electoral rallies mobilize the crowd through the imagined "we-ness," framing superiority and homogeneity of the place with its people. Appealing to attachments, a constructed place identity is instrumentalized within electoral speeches. Moreover, framing particular components create distance between groups who share similarities, leaving the "others" on the boundaries. Hence, this section of the findings examines how the populist party AKP constructs the ideal place through the frames on commonalities in mobilization.

A symbolic sign is one of the underpinning designations at the AKP rallies. It is "Rabia", which means "four" in Arabic. It is a sign holding up their right hand, used by the Muslim Brotherhood supporters to show a reaction and commemorate anti-coup demonstrators on Rabia al-Adawiyya square in Egypt. It became a symbol for the coalition against the coup d'état.[2] In Turkey, the sign became representative of Islamic unity, framing moral superiority and criticizing Western values. The gesture encapsulated the country's pious conservative segment in a performative way, which appealed to religious feelings (Hecker 2020, p. 69). After the President's usage of the Rabia in 2013, a brochure was circulated to explain the symbol's meanings.[3] Wide practice illustrates how the AKP actors imagine a place, while the symbol Rabia is addressing unitary spatial patterns through the definition: "one nation, one flag, one homeland, and one state". Adısönmez and Onursal (2020) evaluate this consistent imagina-

tion as articulating *a homogeneous collective entity, unification without a division, a single space, and a symbol* (p. 299). This produces a homogeneous place identity appealing to the audience's sense of belongingness, along with their commonalities. During the 2018 elections, Erdoğan completed his speeches by voicing these four characteristics at almost all the meetings, and the crowd accompanied him. He also exhibited criteria to realize the constructed place identity: "we will be one, we will be alive, we will be siblings, and we will be Turkey all together". (April 1, 2018).

Although the AKP unifies a diverse group, this verbal alignment does not extend to non-Muslim groups. Messages undertake solidarity and inclusivity besides religious differences: "Is there a difference among Turkish, Kurdish, Laz, Circassian, Georgian, Abkhazian, and Roman?" (Erdoğan, June 20, 2018), but statements articulated an emphasis on Muslim identity, including "99% Muslim" definition of the country. The actors include Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Circassians… but never "others" who live in the territories. Hereby, core elements that constitute Turkey are delineated through Muslim groups by the AKP. Employing only Muslim groups is an exclusionary language since Turkey comprises non-Muslim citizens, such as Armenians, Jews, the Greeks of Turkish nationality, etc. However, the ruling party leaders describe those groups by exclusionary or othering words from time to time. For instance, "pardon me, I apologize, but Armenians…" is an apparent reference; it drives a negative categorization by making "being Armenian" offensive (Selen 2020). Recently, Erdoğan gave a speech and used the term "infidel" (gevur), which represents "foreigners/non-Muslims" within the exclusive discourse of Turkish society: "they make an opposition supposedly, but they swing the sword of the infidels even if they have Turkish Republican identity" (April 11, 2021).[4]

Place-based historical experiences and "heroes" of history have often been identified with the people, while the leaders were saluting citizens in different provinces. It functions as a means to remind them of their proud and glorious historical roots in constructing a homogeneity over collective values and opinions on the past. Here, the populist tone contributes with symbolic meanings; for example, associating Amasya as the city of Yıldırım Beyazıd, Yavuz Sultan Selim, or the place where Mustafa Kemal launched the struggle for independence is egregious. Glorification of place identity enhances the people's superiority within the identification of language; it attracts place sentiments residing in place-based experiences. The cultivation of symbolic meanings animates a shared history in the common memory; its socializing enables leaders to reach the people because it is always influential in transforming individuals into a social group.

Consideration of people's positions to the positive identity has framed morality and frustration simultaneously, depending on spatial meanings. Following this routine, the campaigns adhered to the discursive construction of geography. This has not changed in the AKP's discourse; instead, a sense of continuity revived the categorization of place-based depictions. Therefore, at the last congress of the AKP, which occurred on 24 March 2021, Erdoğan sorted out the features of the 81 provinces.

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> "Kilis is the city of toleration. Kilis is an *ensar* city. Kilis has experienced the suffering of the 'old Turkey'. You could not speak your language, which is as halal as a mother's milk. Songs were prohibited." (Yıldırım, April 6, 2017)

> "Balıkesir is the city of history. It is the city of Turkish revolutionaries. Balıkesir is the city of civilization. Balıkesir is the city of heroes." (Yıldırım, March 11, 2017)

Clarifying the themes of populism, Taggart (2002) elaborates its chameleonic nature. This suggests that the context has an impact in framing the populist language. Specific times and places can lead to caveats within diversity. For each context, the populist discourse concentrates on the relevant frustration reacting through their features. Taken together, it enables leaders to change the appeal and content in mobilization. It is not simply the ambivalence of the interaction with the crowd but the scope of discursive performance.

According to a spatial cleavage in the AKP discourse, it is also worth mentioning the observation of the people-centrist articulation's spatial characteristics. Electoral speeches carry out entirely spatial relevancy to constitute some sort of intimacy. Framing the victimization of the Kurdish people is essential content in comparison to other provinces. Describing the leaders themselves as "the representatives of the people" or "one among the people" is formulated by voicing marginalization with ethnicity and regional dynamics. The propensity of concern-based references conveys sensitivity towards regional stability, security, and opportunities to use one's rights. When the leaders visit cities, known as the most prominent places for the Kurdish populated region, the actors are inclined to change the narrative concerning place meanings and experiences. This approach tells us that the populist discourse of the AKP follows contextual developments and place-based identity considering the "we-ness" in mobilization.

There are numerous instances of so-called concerns for particular places that focus on those cities' central issues. These drive the appeal towards regional discontentments, such as terrorism, access to rights and freedoms, instability, and specific exclusionary prohibitions like language, that narrates an anti-establishment feeling. Approaching the first election in 2015, it is no coincidence that, in the provinces where Kurds predominantly live, Erdoğan highlighted the Qur'an, which the Directorate of Religious Affairs had published in Kurdish.[5] Likewise, his repertoire emphasized the contents which could be a potential solution for the places' grievances. In this sense, targeting elites and the establishment, the campaigns sought to highlight the party's stand, positioning themselves with the people.

For this reason, the AKP's difference has been reflected in the slogan "we do not state 'there is no Kurd', but we advocate 'there is no Kurdish question'". Antagonistically constructed division between the people and "others" promotes a concomitant distance. What is not incontestable is that the ruling party's political actors use a hierarchical narrative in mobilization, which frames the victimization of the people in the Kurdish populated region. Yet, blaming references deepen this categorization, engendering the "culprits" as the source of grievances of

the population in that location. Mainly, the opposition parties and terror organizations were lined up against the people.

(Calling to the people in Diyarbakır). "You have known us for years. I came here many times. I will come until the end of my life. Have you ever heard anything other than brotherhood/sisterhood from us? Have you ever heard hateful language from us? Have you ever heard racist, discriminatory language from us? They create heartache for the people. (…) There is no us and you; we are Diyarbakir, Diyarbakir is us." (Davutoğlu, October 29, 2015)

"We did all these things for you. (…) Didn't you want to see your children coming back home? (…) Is there any obstacle to using your mother tongue now? You can practice your religion, right? Are there any denial policies? Who removed them? Alhamdulillah's, we did our job. There is no prohibition for your identity and belief anymore." (Erdoğan, June 3, 2018)

"Terror is the old practice of the 'old Turkey,' and it was a valid method in 'old Turkey.' There will be no space for either terror or people who make politics hiding behind the terror. We will not allow them to construct a future over the blood of my Kurdish brothers." (Erdoğan, May 14, 2015)

Conclusion

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This article has aimed to investigate the sense of place in the mobilization of populist discourse by the AKP, trying to explain the construction of the "we-ness" which articulates "people-centrism" and "others". To understand the relationship between populist discourse and the social identity perspective, an attempt has been made to examine the place attachment and its role in the mobilization.

Findings demonstrate that the AKP leaders discursively construct geographical faith by constructing geographical perception, appeals to place satisfaction, and the imagination of place identity that frames populist content. Narratives on the collective past focus on those Ottoman references that frame superiority, defining the party as personifying the continuity of "glorious days" and representing their values. In this sense, voicing the significance of the Ottoman lands, institutional people-centrist services, or notable names have constituted efforts to preserve the positive image in dignified language. To create a geographical perception, glorifying discourse becomes noteworthy; therefore, international operations and foreign policy rather than territorial concerns are instrumental in justifying the party's actions. The "protector image" for the place with its people has been made its symbol. Although the Ottoman past manifests an emotional bond and glorification, the contextual developments are observed as significant in the AKP's place-based appeal. Secondly, the paper analyzes the electoral speeches wherein the leaders appealed to a sense of place satisfaction, comparing opportunities and disadvantages that led to group differentiation framing anti-elitism, anti-establishment, and defining "dangerous others". Place satisfaction is determined by meeting needs, services, and living conditions for the people. Transformation and social change have a mobilizing impact

through people-centrism, and consideration of the place's needs is evaluated as place attachment by the party. At the same time, the leaders appeal to the peoples' place-based grievances, contrasting them with its current favorable situation. Lastly, the imagination of place identity is found to be crucial in mobilizing the crowds. Electoral speeches illustrate that the AKP's populist discourse creates an idealized place in homogeneity; however, the repertoire also reflects the chameleonic nature of the AKP's populism, which resonates the context's impact in highlighting its place-based identity during the campaigns.

Both superiority and victimization are designed as a geographical faith within the AKP's populist mobilization. The party leaders frame a victimization narrative over the grievances of the people and the place. In contrast, they manifest their superiority to strengthen "the savior leader" image and legitimize their policies. The construction of the image of a superior rule is transferred through a glorious collective past, and the party's significant role in the geography underlines this positive identity. Furthermore, it is possible to observe the superior "we-ness" exhibition by the identification with the place. The AKP leaders mobilize the audience by appealing to the place belongingness of the people and reflecting their attachment to it. Is geography a faith? My answer is that political actors discursively construct geographical faith. The content of faith relies on the imagination. Whatever context and politics in the repertoire highlight experiences and feelings, the characteristics of this faith are shaped accordingly.

1   Please see details: https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/91811/now-the-symbols-of-peace-and-security-are-waving-in-af-rin-not-the-rags-of-the-terrorist-organization (accessed on 15 April 2021).

2   For more details, please check: http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/5449/rabia-isaretinin-anlami-ne-rabia-kim (accessed on April 12, 2021).

3   For more details, please see: https://t24.com.tr/haber/akplilere-rabia-isareti-brosoru-dagitildi-anlami-anlatildi,453377 (accessed on April 12, 2021).

4   For details, please see: https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/erdogan-gavurun-kilicini-sallayarak-uzerimize-geliyorlar-ha-ber-1518910 (accessed on 12 April 2021).

5   Please check the article by Rengin Arslan: https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/05/150505_kuran_polemik_ren-gin_arslan accessed on 12 April 2021.

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