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Reframing the ideal citizen in Turkey: National belonging and economic success in the era of neo-liberalism

Özlem Altan-Olcay

Abstract

This paper explores how discourses of nationalism and neo-liberal conceptualizations of economic performance interact in Turkey, by analyzing cultural productions about business elites and workers in the media. I take up both business elites' attempts at self-representation and how mainstream media portrays them to argue that these actors attempt to draw the contours of national belonging with respect to economic success. Even though the representations are diverse in definitions of national identity, they all formulate service to the nation in terms of business success and market performance. In addition, struggles with syndicated labor also produce relevant discourses of economic necessity and rationality only to be challenged by other ideas of political belonging, drawing their force from social rights. These reveal the contingency of formulations that construct desirable citizenship on the basis of one's ability to contribute to economic growth. Through these examples, I suggest that discourses about market economies do not necessarily divest themselves of nation-state frameworks. Instead, they interact with cultural tools in local contexts, producing new social and political constellations that attempt to explain shifting social stratifications. I argue that these struggles over representation are part of a terrain of banal nationalism, transforming connotations of economic rationality, national belonging, and citizenship.

Keywords: *Business elites, banal nationalism, neo-liberal citizenship, economic rationality*

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Introduction

This paper explores the interaction between discourses of nationalism and neo-liberal conceptualizations of economic performance, by tracing cultural productions about business elites in the media. Its central questions are as follows: How are neo-liberal knowledge constructions articulated through nationalist sensibilities? What is the overall effect of this relationship? In exploring these questions, I look at individual success stories of the business elite, which have had extensive coverage in the mainstream media. I discuss these representations in terms of competitions and negotiations of legitimacy among elites, as well as between elites and syndicated labor.¹ These stories equate business success with contribution to economic growth, which in turn is formulated in terms of service to the nation. I argue that frequent references to the nation in stories of individual economic success can be seen as part of a terrain of banal nationalism.² In other words, it is only through establishing connections with the everyday reproduction of nationalist sentiments that proliferation of neo-liberal logics about individual rationality and responsibility in economic matters appear to make sense.

Proponents of neo-liberal agendas have often promoted economic restructuring on the basis of the argument that this is inevitable and required by global trends.³ I argue here that these discourses of economic rationality are not as sterile, technical, and inevitable as they attest to be. They interact with other discourses, myths, and knowledges. Nationalist discourses are one way in which market rationalities work in contextualized, specific terms. A case in point can be found in Turkey, whose economic structure has been transformed in accordance with neo-liberal tenets over the past thirty years. Starting with the 1980s, and accelerating in the 2000s, the state has dismantled the protectionist economic policies of the 1960s and 1970s; increased the power of the business elite in public decision-making; and instigated a dramatic retrenchment in the rights of the working classes. During the same period, nationalist discourses have continued to be a salient feature of public life.

With this study, I aim to make three contributions to debates on nationalism and economic transformation in general and to citizenship discourses in Turkey in particular. First, I argue that nationalism as a discourse facilitates the proliferation of neo-liberal agendas. It does so by contributing to the public re-conceptualization of the merits of re-

1 I would like to thank Aslı Karaca and Merve Sancak for their assistance in the collection of media coverage.

2 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

3 Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

lated economic policies in terms of their benefits to the nation. In this sense, the article is in dialogue with an emerging literature on economic nationalism, which disputes the classical definition, pitted in contrast to economic liberalism.⁴ Second, I aim to look at public representations of economic success from the perspective of banal nationalism.⁵ Nationalist discourses work in struggles about meanings of economic performance, precisely because they are a terrain with which everyone is familiar. This means that, for the specific case of Turkey, we can map the relevance of concepts such as service to and benefit for the nation, which have significant historical continuity, onto contemporary ideologies of neo-liberal individualism.⁶ Third, I propose that we can see in these public articulations attempts to shape the boundaries of desirable citizenship and hierarchies of political belonging. In these representations, economic rationality is associated with patriotism. Such associations with nationalist discourses produce differentiated types of political belonging and rights. Yet, at the same time, these links are never truly consolidated, and contests over them continue on a daily basis.

In what follows, I will first discuss studies of nationalism that debate its fate in an era of globalization. I will focus on studies, which argue for the concept's continued relevance, by examining the ways in which nations and nationalisms are reproduced in the everyday. Second, I will look at the republican history of Turkey, focusing on two issues: shifts in economic structures and associated power relations between business and labor; and continuities in interrelated discourses of service to, utility for, and threat to the nation. This section will provide the anchor for contemporary representations that link economic performance with service to the nation. Third, I will turn my attention to two individual cases of elite success, which received extensive media coverage between 2006 and 2008. The first concerns the ascendance of a businessman of Turkish origin to the top of the Coca Cola Company. The second concerns a company with conservative leanings, which in 2003 launched a local soft-drink called Cola Turka. The public portrayals of these two cases illustrate some of the existing ideological divisions in Turkey over religion, tradition, and modernity. Nevertheless, the stories reveal a common emphasis: the actors allege to fulfill their national duties by portraying themselves as economically rational entrepreneurs and de-

4 Eric Helleiner and Andreas Pickel, eds., *Economic Nationalism in a Globalising World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

5 Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

6 Füsün Üstel, *Makbul Vatandaş'ın Peşinde: II. Meşrutiyet'ten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004).

sirable representatives of Turkey in the international arena. Finally, I will extend the discourses emerging from these cases to the struggles between organized labor and the business elite during the same period. I will show how, during strikes, business actors use the same nationalist framing for neo-liberal market rationalities, constructing a paradoxical continuity with the previous periods. Yet, the workers also deploy discourses of nationalism, with different meanings attached to service to the nation and citizenship. The results are ambiguous: on the one hand, the fact that everyone uses the same discourses of service contributes to the pervasiveness of banal nationalism. On the other hand, to the extent that workers emphasize citizenship dignity and social rights, the business elite's claims to service to and utility for the country falls flat.

Nations and nationalisms in the neo-liberal age

Studies of nationalism in the 1980s, engaging with the increasing interconnectedness of cultures have raised questions about the future relevance of national cultures. The idea of national culture, after all, depended on the perseverance of demarcated boundaries, and it seemed less possible to achieve this in an age of movement of images, people, and objects.⁷ However, other, more recent studies have rejected such predictions for a variety of reasons, including the resilience of nations as historic cultural formations; transformations in state power rather than an absolute decline; the rise of nationalist movements after the 1990s; and the myriad ways in which nationalism continues to be reproduced internationally.⁸ The rest of this section engages with these latter arguments and situates this article in relation to them.

Smith, for instance, has argued that nations are still relevant, because economic globalization may have transformed state power, but it has not necessarily weakened it in absolute terms.⁹ He has further posited that the recent wave of nationalist movements is a testament to the resilience of "the national idea."¹⁰ Kaldor has argued that new nationalisms can be read as modern-day responses to the challenges of globalization. In other words, she has placed the cause of the resilience not in nationalism's

7 For a review of this literature, see Robert Foster, "Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20 (1991).

8 Katherine Verdery, "Whither 'Nation' and 'Nationalism'?", in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balarishnan (London: Verso, 1996); Michael Mann, "Has Globalization Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?," *Review of International Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (1997); Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mary Kaldor, "Nationalism and Globalisation," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1-2 (2004): 161.

9 Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*.

10 Kaldor, "Nationalism and Globalisation," 161.

transcendence, but rather in its ability as a political ideology to mobilize people in the face of increasing insecurity and inequality.¹¹ Scholars conceptualizing nationalism as a discourse have studied how it is reproduced in the everyday. Billig has mapped out the link between seemingly non-politicized aspects of everyday life and assumptions about nationhood, national identity, and boundaries.¹² His concept of banal nationalism has inspired a vast array of studies focusing on, among others, three issues: First, nationalism as a central discursive formation involves continual production and reproduction, with the effect of safeguarding existing political arrangements. Second, this reproduction consists of active projects of eliciting citizenship allegiance, such as national holidays and ceremonies, but it is even more powerful in instances and places in which nationalism is not overt. The latter include the visual presence of national symbols,¹³ the public education system,¹⁴ corporate advertising,¹⁵ and so on. Third, the relationship between globalization and nationalism needs a thorough rethinking. Accordingly, nationalism as a discourse is powerful, not only because of an ongoing domestic reproduction, but also because of its international availability and prominence.¹⁶

Instances of banal nationalism can also be found in public discussions of economic rationality, profitability, and economic liberalization. In recent years, critical scholars of economic nationalism have argued that the classical definition of the concept has lacked a key emphasis on nationalism, thus mistakenly pitting it as the opposite of economic liberalism.¹⁷ Accordingly, economic nationalism as a discourse can be utilized to support all types of economic policies, as long as these can be defined as being in the interest of the nation. Following these scholars, I aim to study the ways in which nationalism as discourse makes the proliferation of neo-liberal economic ideology possible. In the Turkish case, it does so through public debates regarding what it takes to be an

11 Ibid., 161-177.

12 Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

13 Kathryn Cramer, "Banal Catalanism?," *National Identities* 2, no. 2 (2000).

14 Cf. Hagay Ram, "The Immemorial Iranian Nation? School Textbooks and Historical Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 1 (2000); Sam Kaplan, *The Pedagogical State: Education and the Politics of National Culture in Post-1980 Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

15 Cf. Kimberly Wright, "Advertising National Pride: The Unifying Power of Cricket Fever, Kashmir, and Politics," *Advertising and Society Review* 4, no. 1 (2003); Anne Kelk Mager, "'One Beer, One Goal, One Nation, One Soul:' South African Breweries, Heritage, Masculinity and Nationalism, 1960-1999," *Past and Present* 188, no. 1 (2005).

16 Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

17 Eric Helleiner, "Economic Nationalism as a Challenge to Economic Liberalism? Lessons from the 19th Century," *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2002); Andreas Pickel, "Explaining, and Explaining with, Economic Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 1 (2003).

ideal, desirable Turkish citizen. Representations of economic success in nationalistic rhetoric reproduce historical notions of service to the nation in new ways, linking them to ideas of individual productivity, profitability, and rationality.

Thus, discourses of nationalism, citizenship, and neo-liberal ideology are all related to one another. The self-presentations of the business elite in the media, their internal competitions, as well as disputes with labor draw on nationalist vocabularies, specifically emphasizing rationality, service, and benefit. The attempts of the business elite in monopolizing the definition of service to the nation have an impact on the acceptability of neo-liberal practices. These public debates about service to the nation also point to the proliferation of “differentiated citizenships.”¹⁸ In other words, if we define citizenship in terms of the meanings that people attribute to it in the everyday, we can trace how discourses of desirable national identity construct mechanisms of exclusion and privilege.¹⁹ In the particular case of Turkey, public discussions reveal the production of exclusion and hierarchy at the juncture of neo-liberal moral assumptions about individual rationality, responsibility,²⁰ and representation of individual economic success as service to the nation.

Buğra has shown that, while capitalism and actions of capitalist classes have usually been depicted in terms of a rational and universalist bourgeoisie order, a more grounded approach seeks to study the activities and political claims of the business classes situated in specific social relations. She lays out how, in the case of Turkey, competing definitions of cultural specificity and related discourses of national interest have been integral to business classes’ self-representations as well as their business associations’ strategies.²¹ Here, I am interested in the everyday public discourses through which such developments in Turkey are debated, questioned, and/or justified. I look at the proliferation of discourses of public interest, service to the nation, and the like in the media, around the names of public corporate figures, as well as around their contestations with the laboring classes.

18 Aihwa Ong, *Neo-liberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 75-118.

19 Engin İşin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

20 Graham Burchell, “Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Barry Hindess, “Neo-liberal Citizenship,” *Citizenship Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002).

21 Ayşe Buğra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey: A Comparative Study* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994); Ayşe Buğra, “Class, Culture, and State: An Analysis of Interest Representation by two Turkish Business Associations,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 4 (1998).

An economic history of (social) citizenship in Turkey

This section documents, for the case of Turkey, the continuities in the discourses of service to the nation and ambivalence regarding the West, through periods of different economic arrangements and ideologies. It also pays attention to citizenship regimes' shifts constructed by economic arrangements.

The early decades of the republic were marked by the state elite's efforts to establish national institutions and define the tenets of nationalism, as well as the relationship between state and citizens. Borrowing from the political discussions of the late Ottoman period, they drew upon binary vocabularies such as modern *versus* backward, Western *versus* Eastern; and "the West" became the model for selective reform attempts.²² Corporatism dominated the founding nationalist ideology,²³ "which negated the existence of class and other sectional interests in the body politic, and saw the party as the representative of the whole nation."²⁴ As a result, public articulations of class interests were shunned and the definition of a Turkish citizen whose *raison d'être* was service to the Turkish state became central.

Economic developments were integral to these ideologies in three ways. First, early efforts of industrialization were led by the state,²⁵ and they were nearly always coded in terms of catching up with the "advanced countries of the West." Thus, economic growth came to be fuelled by a West-looking nationalist fervor. Second, the early republican period gave rise to a generation of urban industrialists, their success often being a result of state support.²⁶ Third, the ideology of classless citizens meant that individuals' public presence could only be justified in terms of their service to the entire nation-state. Ideal citizens were to be modern and fulfilling their national(ist) duties by being industrious, obedient, and grateful.²⁷ The state discourses and practices of nationalism constructed

22 Ironically, these efforts of distancing the new republic from the recent past and the Arab East built upon already ongoing discussions and political projects of the late Ottoman period. For continuities between the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, cf. Şerif Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1997); Taha Parla, *Ziya Gökalp, Kemalizm ve Türkiye'de Korporatizm* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1999); Çağlar Keyder, *Memalik-i Osmaniye'den Avrupa Birliği'ne* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2003).

23 Parla, *Ziya Gökalp, Kemalizm ve Türkiye'de Korporatizm*; Zafer Toprak, "Türkiye'de Korporatizmin Doğuşu," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 12 (1980).

24 Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 41.

25 Korkut Boratav, "Kemalist Economic Policies and Etatism," in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, eds. Ergun Özbudun and Ali Kazancıgil (London: Hurst, 1981).

26 Buğra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey*; Çağlar Keyder, *Türkiye'de Devlet ve Sınıflar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1989).

27 Üstel, *Makbul Vatandaş'ın Peşinde*.

the citizen-subject as such, but the center was always fearful that those who remained outside its gaze could easily challenge these ideals.

With the end of the single-party rule in 1946, the electoral defeat of the Republican People's Party in 1950, and the onset of the Cold War, a new set of ideas became part of the nationalist ideology. The Democrat Party, having won the 1950 elections on a campaign against the elitism of the earlier period, frequently drew on religiosity as part of the Turkish nation.²⁸ At the same time, the new government allied itself with the United States in the Cold War, thereby continuing the practice of defining the Turkish nation as part of the West. It exhibited great suspicion against the state planning of the economy and lent full support to private business. In fact, the 1950s witnessed the birth of many members of contemporary big business in Turkey.²⁹ Yet, by the end of the decade—as a result of the volatility of economic policies, inflationary pressures, and spiraling budget deficits along with the government's increasing authoritarian tendencies—this relationship began to show signs of ambivalence.³⁰ After the 1960 coup, similar to trajectories in the rest of the developing world, import-substituting industrialization (ISI) became central to the economic climate. The government supported the capital accumulation of the emerging business classes by mechanisms such as tariff barriers and overvalued exchange rates. For the rest of society, it utilized semi-formal strategies—such as public employment as a last resort, the absence of agricultural taxes, and tacit consent to migrant settlement on state-owned land—to prevent destitution, in exchange for support for the existing regime.³¹

In this period, discourses of national benefit and duty-bound conceptualizations of citizenship continued. ISI policies, which allowed for the flourishing of a capitalist class, were defended on the basis of their service to national economic growth. Thus, as business classes benefited from the absence of international competition and consolidated their economic power, this was articulated as a policy choice in favor of the nation-state. On the one hand, the new capitalist class was expected to be successful in generating profit and contributing to economic growth, by utilizing ISI. On the other hand, in her study of the autobiographies of businessmen whose emergence dates to this period, Buğra has shown that these actors

28 Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, "Kemalism, Hyper-nationalism and Islam in Turkey," *History of European Ideas* no. 18 (1994): 259-260.

29 Buğra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey: A Comparative Study*, 55.

30 *Ibid.*, 120-130.

31 Ayşe Buğra, "Poverty and Citizenship: An Overview of the Social-Policy Environment in Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 39 (2007), 41-45.

were anxious to make sure that their success be seen in terms of contribution to the national economy's well-being. Profit-making activities had negative connotations in the popular perception: Individual success became palatable only when it was portrayed as in the service of the state and the nation.³² As for the working classes, the structure of the economy in which family-based income retained significance; wages continued to be one source of income among others; and the paternalist state continued to discipline and reward families through semi-formal mechanisms, in return for the practices of loyal citizen-subjects.³³

The ISI model was predicated on the continuity of external funding and borrowing. After the 1974 global financial crisis, the Turkish economy went into a severe and persistent shortage of foreign exchange. With the 1980 military coup, in the absence of elections and due to the brutal repression of resistance, the new government undertook a massive restructuring of the economy, overhauling much of the protectionism of the previous era. This trend was consolidated in the 1990s and 2000s, as a result of the end of the Cold War and the global proliferation of neo-liberal ideology and policies.

The consequences of this transformation were manifold for Turkish citizens. First, poverty and inequality indicators revealed a worsening trend throughout the 1990s, continuing into the twenty-first century. The social exclusion especially of the laboring classes grew visibly.³⁴ Second, authoritarian tendencies persisted. After the coup, leftist activists perished in police stations and prisons, and union mobilization was curbed. Several pieces of legislation have continued to infringe on freedom of speech, sentencing people for "assaulting Turkish nationhood," for instance.³⁵ These processes also held back protests challenging the models adopted for economic restructuring. The third interrelated factor was the domestic ascendancy of a neo-liberal paradigm. Neo-liberal logics—trumped by local and international technocrats and business classes—promoted ideas such as the need for flexibility in the economy, the value of individual entrepreneurial skills, and the inevitable costs of

32 Buğra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey*.

33 Ayşe Buğra, "The Place of the Economy in Turkish Society," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003): 456.

34 Cf. Ayşe Buğra and Sinem Adar, "Social Policy Change in Countries without Mature Welfare States," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 38 (2008): 128, 131; Fatoş Gökşen et al., "Impacts of the Tax System on Poverty and Social Exclusion: A Case Study," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 38 (2008); Çağlar Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 1 (2005).

35 The infamous Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, introduced in 2005 and modified slightly in 2008, continues to be invoked in order to take to court intellectuals, journalists, and publishers, especially those who voice opinions challenging official views and practices regarding the minorities.

restructuring. This era witnessed the growing visibility of new social classes made up of entrepreneurs, who benefited from the new relaxed rules in trade and finance, and export incentives, as well as high-end professionals in the growing sectors of finance, marketing, advertising, and the like. As a result of their growing economic power, these actors became increasingly vocal about their perspective on how the governments should act.³⁶

These economic developments have involved two coeval discourses: First, during the economic restructuring, the capacity of the state for offsetting marginalization and inequality was both reduced and delegitimized. Both international and local technocrats and business classes argued that it was economically necessary and rational to dismantle existing mechanisms of social protection.³⁷ Second, similar to practices elsewhere in the region, segments within the business classes have attempted to reproduce their distinction and legitimacy *vis-à-vis* each other and the laboring classes by culturalizing their privileged position in existing inequalities.³⁸ The more consolidated urban classes especially in İstanbul—famously named “white Turks”³⁹—have identified with a particular image of “the West” and ideologies of Westernization, and they have adopted arrogant attitudes towards those unable to pass as “Western.” Yet, these identifications have also continued to articulate ambivalent relations with “the West.” They have combined discourses of national authenticity, admiration for “the West,” and distrust of anything “foreign.”⁴⁰ There was also another group, emerging from the urban centers of Asia Minor—initially called “Anatolian tigers.”⁴¹ These have defined themselves more conspicuously in terms of religiosity and communitarianism.⁴² They, too, have adopted nationalism, but more strongly emphasized the Islamic difference of Turkish society *vis-à-vis* “the West.”⁴³ Both groups have supported economic liberalization, whether in the name of drawing economically and politically closer to the West,

36 Cf. Ziya Öniş and Umut Türem, “Entrepreneurs, Democracy and Citizenship in Turkey,” *Journal of Comparative Politics* 34, no. 4 (2002).

37 Buğra, “The Place of the Economy in Turkish Society,” 468.

38 Özlem Altan-Olcay, “Defining ‘America’ from a Distance: Local Strategies of the Global in the Middle East,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 1 (2008).

39 Cf. Tanıl Bora, “Beyaz Türkler Tartışması: Kirli Beyaz,” *Birikim*, no. 260 (2010).

40 Sedef Arat-Koç, “(Some) Turkish Transnationalism(s) in an Age of Capitalist Globalization and Empire: ‘White Turk’ Discourse, the New Geopolitics, and Implications for Feminist Transnationalism,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 3, no. 1 (2007): 41.

41 İnsan Tunalı, “Anatolian Tigers: Are They For Real?,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 20 (1999).

42 Buğra, “Class, Culture, and State”; Ziya Öniş and Umut Türem, “Business, Globalization and Democracy: A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Business Associations,” *Turkish Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001).

43 Tanıl Bora, “Nationalist Discourses in Turkey,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, no. 102 (2003).

or because it would empower the “ordinary” people of Turkey, or because this is what Turkish modernization required. Thus, neo-liberal tenets and practices have been attached to very specific, local ideologies and in the process reproduced hierarchical modes of political belonging.

These reproductions are not necessarily confined to the terrain of political actors’ public speeches or discussions on policy-making between technocrats, politicians, and business association representatives. Media coverage of the business elite individually and business-labor conflicts in particular sectors have also become integral to public discussions of political membership and the reproduction of banal nationalism. In fact, because these daily practices are less obviously political, they are more likely to produce the kinds of effects that link neo-liberal thinking with nationalist discourses.

Economic success and the ideal citizen

Literature on consumer nationalism, stemming from Billig’s work, deals with such nationalist discourses in the seemingly non-politicized world of corporate brand positioning. It shows that various channels of marketing and advertising construct consumption as a way of displaying patriotism and performing an individual national(ist) identity.⁴⁴ In the particular case of Turkey, Özyürek has documented how, in the late 1990s, secular-nationalist individuals responded to what they saw as the increasing public visibility of Islamic symbols, by producing, buying, and circulating “miniaturized” images of Atatürk. She has argued that, as these social actors have attempted to reconcile the early republican state nationalism with the contemporary infusion of market-based globalization, they have carried state symbolism into private spheres.⁴⁵ The development of markets for the symbols of Islamic and secular understandings of Turkey has also signified the proliferation of contests over the meaning of Turkish national identity.

Relevantly, when watching commercials on Turkish channels, it is hard to miss the fact that, in many examples, brand positioning speaks through imaginations of the nation. During international soccer tournaments, we watch the mothers of soccer players drinking or eating this or that specific product. Sponsoring banks air commercials that resemble

44 Stacy Mayhall, “Uncle Sam Wants You to Trade, Invest, and Shop! Relocating the Battlefield in the Gendered Discourses of the Pre- and Early Post-9/11 Period,” *Feminist Formations* 21, no. 1 (2009); Jillian Prideaux, “Consuming Icons: Nationalism and Advertising in Australia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15 (2009).

45 Esra Özyürek, “Miniaturizing Atatürk: Privatization of State Imagery and Ideology in Turkey,” *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004).

action-hero cartoons whose protagonists look like the soccer players. Especially when national holidays draw near, advertising companies dig up a few words that Atatürk once uttered and find a way of making it part of the heritage of the particular company advertised. In their discussion of the advertising launch of Cola Turka, Özkan and Foster have framed the prevalence of nationalist themes in terms of both a shift in the construction of citizenship and continuity in the national imagining.⁴⁶ As Turkey's economic policies have moved away from state developmentalism to market-driven economic growth, these campaigns have signaled the transformation of citizens into consumers of globally recognized Turkish products. Despite the increased emphasis on individual consumption as an act of patriotic citizenship, this nationalism continues to draw on vocabularies of competing with the West and becoming part of a global modernity, which are at the core of republican nationalism. In their discussion of Bora's mapping of nationalisms in Turkey,⁴⁷ Özkan and Foster reconceptualize "liberal nationalism" as "neo-liberal nationalism." The concept of "neo-liberal nationalism" draws out the production of nationalist pride in globalized consumption patterns in the local context and the dynamic domestic economy embedded in a neo-liberal world, which makes them possible.⁴⁸

Another approach to the relationship between nationalism, consumer citizenship, and neo-liberal ideologies is to focus not on the products that are being consumed, but on how the business elite, who build these companies, market themselves as signifiers of desirable national citizenship. This perspective pays attention to how associations between neo-liberalism and nationalism produce discourses of hierarchical belonging to the nation. To this end, two cases converge in the themes of nationalism and neo-liberal logic, around an internationally recognized soft drink: the recent upsurge in media reporting on Muhtar Kent, a Turkish citizen who became the president of Coca Cola; and the Ülker family, known for their Islamic conservatism, whose company produces Cola Turka, a local variant of the soft drink. These cases suggest the construction of a desirable Turkish citizen as one whose private success marks their service to the nation. The commonalities in the stories of these seemingly contrasting figures display the transformation of "neo-liberal nationalism" into a condition to be taken for granted, beyond other ideological differences.

46 Derya Özkan and Robert J. Foster, "Consumer Citizenship, Nationalism, and Neoliberal Globalization in Turkey: Advertising Launch of Cola Turka," *Advertising and Society Review* 6, no. 3 (2005).

47 Bora, "Nationalist Discourses in Turkey."

48 Özkan and Foster, "Consumer Citizenship."

Between February 2006 and December 2007, several newspapers in the mainstream media devoted front-page coverage to Muhtar Kent, a Turkish citizen, who had become the CEO of Coca Cola. Kent, who had emigrated to the US and worked at Coca Cola since 1978, returned to the company in 2005, after a six-year period in which he ran one of the best-known beverage companies in Turkey. Upon his return, he worked briefly as chief operating officer of North Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East group and as president of Coca Cola International, until it was announced in 2007 that he would take over as the CEO of the entire company.⁴⁹ When announcements about these consecutive promotions came through, they became popular news items.

In the initial days, many headlines transformed Kent from a successful businessperson into a Turk who had figuratively conquered the world with his ascendancy to the top of the most globalized brand. In 2006, when he first became the head of Coca Cola International, an op-ed described the event and Kent in the following words: “This is the highest rank a Turk has achieved in a multinational company [...] Muhtar Kent is not merely a manager, but a person who spends a lot of effort for this country.”⁵⁰ Kent himself described his success as part of a rising trend of Turkish managers: “This success is not only my own. There are at least ten Turkish managers at Coca Cola. Turks have only just started to show their success.”⁵¹ In another interview, he emphasized that every Turk working in multinational companies should be seen as a representative of Turkey.⁵² *Wall Street Journal's* journalist covering Turkey went even further in describing the event: Accordingly, Western companies saw Turkey's role in the region as the new Ottoman State.⁵³ In almost all of these stories, there was an undertone of admiration and call for pride at the least, and overt attempts to connect this individual's success to collective achievements at the most. The title of a news item summarized it all: “God CEOs are dead; the new trend is Turkish CEOs.”⁵⁴

49 The Coca Cola Company, “Operating Group Leadership,” http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/ourcompany/bios/bio_76.html.

50 Fatih Altaylı, “İyi haberler de var,” *Sabah*, January 18, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/01/18/yazi1437-40-125.html>.

51 Şelale Kadak, “Devler ‘yönetici Türkler’i keşfetti,” *Sabah*, November 11, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/11/25/eko121.html>.

52 “Muhtar Bey Coca-Cola’da ‘Dünya’yı Yönetecek,” *Hürriyet*, December 8, 2006, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=5575734&tarih=2006-12-08>.

53 “Yabancı Yatırımcılar, Genel Seçimi Risk Olarak Görmüyor,” *Zaman*, December 19, 2006, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=474062>.

54 Nurten Erk Tosuner, “Tanrı CEO’lar öldü, yeni trend Türk CEO,” *Hürriyet*, August 25, 2008, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/ShowNew.aspx?id=9738433>.

This emphasis on Kent's Turkishness and his depiction as Turkey's pride and representative had multiple implications: First, the category of the Turk was stabilized; the desirable Turk became one who, so to speak, could conquer the world with his intelligence and success. In fact, there were comments about how skills unique to Turkish professionals played an important role in the increasing number of Turkish citizens in top positions in large companies around the world.⁵⁵ Second, this emphasis on Turkishness as a stable category was connected with how these persons' successful careers also constituted a success *of and for* Turkey. They were depicted as *de facto* representatives of the country and defenders of its national interests.⁵⁶ Even the prime minister publicly announced how pleased he was with Kent's success and that he had personally congratulated him on the phone.⁵⁷

The naturalization of the link between international business success and Turkishness also had the effect of constructing Kent and his likes as role models for the rest of society. His former boss proclaimed: "Kent has become a model for Turkish youth."⁵⁸ His story, published over and over, emphasized his humble beginnings, having immigrated to the United States with USD 1,000 in his pocket. In the interviews, he remembered how he had started as a truck-driver for the company.⁵⁹ There were other details less frequently included: he had been born the son of a Turkish ambassador to New York;⁶⁰ he had spent his childhood in several different countries because of his father's profession; and he had graduated from an American high school in Turkey and then from universities in Great Britain.⁶¹ Instead, the descriptions mostly revolved around how his humility, hard work, and multicultural exposure had made his success possible. Similarly, there were also references to other

55 Nurettin Özdoğan, "Türkler artık dünyaya yönetici ihraç ediyor," *Zaman*, December 8, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=622426&keyfield=6D7568746172206B656E74>; Vahap Muncar, "Muhtar'ı Coca Cola'ya bırakın, o yükselecek," *Hürriyet*, January 20, 2006, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=3814883>.

56 "Muhtar Bey Coca-Cola'da 'Dünya'yı Yönetecek."

57 "Kent'i yatağından kaldırdım," *Zaman*, December 9, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=622804&keyfield=6D7568746172206B656E74>.

58 "Dünya İçecek Devini Muhtar Kent Yönetecek," *Zaman*, December 7, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=622026>.

59 "7 Ay Kamyonla Eyaletleri Dolaştım," *Sabah*, January 18, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/01/18/eko116.html>.

60 Emre Aköz, "Cola'nun Kritik Günü: 13 Ekim," *Sabah*, February 10, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/02/10/yaz13-10-116.html>.

61 "Dünya İçecek Devini Muhtar Kent Yönetecek"; "Coca Cola'ya Türk Başkan," *Sabah*, December 7, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/12/07/ekog0.html>; "Satış Elemanı Olarak Başladı, İçecek Devinin Zirvesine Çıktı," *Zaman*, December 8, 2006, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=468075&keyfield=6D7568746172206B656E74>.

Turkish citizens holding administrative positions in large conglomerates. They also asserted themselves as role models by giving advice to youth. Be well-rounded, work hard, develop leadership skills, pay adequate attention to social life and co-workers, dream big, and situate yourself in and construct environments in which one gains learning experience—these were some of the advice reported in a newspaper interview with several such CEOs.⁶² In these descriptions, other details pertaining to social and economic advantage based on class origin were either invisible or described as part of individual skills and one's multicultural choices.⁶³ The redefinition of the self through advice given to "Turkish youth," therefore, helped define their socio-economically privileged positions in terms of a justifiable consequence of economic success and cultural leadership.

Kent frequently spoke at international venues, gave interviews to journalists, and explained his perspective on public policy-making. These public speeches were predicated on his self-representation as a rational, successful and globalized professional, looking out for the interests of the country. His opinions were widely covered. For him, countries should have visions to achieve growth, just like companies; governments should have long-term relations with corporations in order to create employment; and governments should pay due attention to requirements of transparency, infrastructure, and adequate energy supplies in order to attract investment. He also talked about how there might be a rocky road ahead for Turkey because further growth required tough decisions to be made. He frequently spoke about Turkey's accession process to the EU, describing it as a "win-win" situation for both sides.⁶⁴ His articulations were part of a general trend in which the business elite has become more vocal on government policies, drawing strength also from the increasing global authority of neo-liberal discourses. These actors justified their public speeches with self-identifications of expertise, experience,

62 Nurettin Özdoğan, "'Ofiste Sabahlamayı Göze Al!' CEO'lardan Liderlik Tüyoları...", *Zaman*, December 30, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=630974&keyfield=6D7568746172206B656E74>.

63 Rifat N. Bali, *Tarz-ı Hayattan Life Style'a: Yeni Seçkinler, Yeni Mekanlar, Yeni Yaşamlar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2009), 96-97.

64 Cf. "Kent: Türkiye'nin Çok Uluslu Şirketleri Olmalı," *Sabah*, May 12, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/05/12/ek0126.html>; "Koç: Küresel Değil, Bölgesel 'Birlikte Yaşam'a İnanıyorum," *Hürriyet*, May 12, 2006, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=4401257>; Hanife Baş and Ardiç Aytalar, "5 Milyar Dolar Da Katar'dan Görüldü," *Hürriyet*, June 9, 2006, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=4551137>; Gila Benmayor, "AB Yolunda Kaza Olmaması İçin Dünya Barışı Şart," *Hürriyet*, November 25, 2006, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=5501398>; "Alt Dallardaki Kolay Meyvaları Topladık,sıra 'Zor'lara Geldi," *Hürriyet*, December 4, 2006, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=5548132>.

success, and responsible patriotism. In other words, their economic success both implied that they knew how to run the economy and appeared to be a proof of their willingness to serve the nation. A further implication of such arguments was that because they knew the economy and were patriotic, it was only expected that they would have a privileged voice in economic decision-making at the public level. Thus, their definition of economic rationality was to be accepted not only because it was globally true, but also because these actors voiced them with nationalist sensibilities.

These claims to national representation and ideal citizenship held secular undertones and were uttered by a largely urbanized and Westernized business elite. Their position in society did not go unchallenged.⁶⁵ Yet, even in these challenges there were continuities. To explore this further, I will take up the case of the company Ülker, which, due to the known conservatism of the family owning the company, has been associated with “green capital”—namely, Islamist capital. The allegory “green capital” has inspired fear and protest among secular nationalists, who feel that the increasing power of “Muslim business” threatens the Western modernity of Turkey. In the case of Ülker, this has even led to self-identified secular consumers occasionally boycotting this company’s products.⁶⁶ In 2003, the company launched Cola Turka, which was able to grab a significant market share from Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola in Turkey. Thus, on the one hand, there was the success of a visibly secular, multicultural, “white” Turk ascending to the top position of a global company, while, on the other hand, there was a local company rivaling global brands.

Ülker launched the product with a nation-wide campaign, part of which was a series of TV commercials starring the American actor Chevy Chase. In each of these commercials, Chase found himself in a series of bizarre situations: People around him spoke half-Turkish, half-English. Soccer fans celebrated in Times Square. Women called out to the local grocery store to load their purchases in the baskets which they had let down from their windows on a string, an image which invoked both a common practice in old neighborhoods in Turkey and a nostalgia for a time when people in the same street were closer to one another. Chase’s family sang a famous Turkish march after drinking Cola Turka. His wife cooked Turkish dishes and poured out a bucket of water behind the departing in-laws, a customary gesture that symbolizes one’s

65 Bora, “Beyaz Türkler Tartışması: Kirli Beyaz,” 35-37.

66 Özkan and Foster, “Consumer Citizenship, Nationalism, and Neoliberal Globalization in Turkey: Advertising Launch of Cola Turka.”

wish for the guests to travel safely and return soon. For the Turkish audience, these commercials were entertaining because they depicted a series of extraordinary situations in which American actors spoke Turkish with an American accent, used Turkish aphorisms, and alluded to Turkish traditions. At the same time, they stroked national pride: Instead of Turkish people drinking Coca Cola and becoming Americanized, Americans were drinking Cola Turka and becoming Turkified.

In his discussion of postcolonial nationalisms, Chatterjee has argued that the modern nation is not equivalent to, but rather different from what is seen as Western culture. The nationalist discourse makes a distinction between the material and spiritual, aiming “to adapt itself to the requirements of a modern material world without losing its true identity.”⁶⁷ In the case of Turkey, this ambivalent relationship to the West has historically been very significant in official nationalist discourses also adopted by urban middle-class populations.⁶⁸ The significance of Ülker, in this context, was its ability to position Cola Turka as something that redefines national identity and challenges historical paradigms associated with the ideologies of the “white Turk.” In their version, as the creator of the campaign argued, tradition becomes something in which to take pride without any reservations whatsoever.⁶⁹ Özkan and Foster have argued that this particular advertising campaign can be perceived as representing the proliferation of consumer nationalism in Turkey, whereby a successful merger of market capitalism and existing nationalist ideologies is achieved.⁷⁰ Nationalist discourses around neo-liberal economic tenets are also about the business classes attempting to describe service to the nation in economic terms. In this sense, if the performance of nationalism in consuming Cola Turka becomes a common-sense reference, an implicit element of this reference involves praise for the actors who make this achievement possible. Hence the emphasis a company representative made; “[i]n seven countries and ten factories, the Turkish flag and Ülker’s flag are fluttering.”⁷¹

Another event attests to this interpretation: In 2007, Ülker announced that the company had reached an agreement with Campbell to

67 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 117-120.

68 Özyürek, “Miniaturizing Atatürk.”

69 “Cola Turka 9 Futbolcuyu Transfer Etti,” *Hürriyet*, February 22, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=6001102>.

70 Özkan and Foster, “Consumer Citizenship, Nationalism, and Neoliberal Globalization in Turkey: Advertising Launch of Cola Turka.”

71 “Ülker: Türkiye’de ve Dış yatırımda Gaza Basıyoruz,” *Hürriyet*, April 14, 2007, <http://hursiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=6330523&tarikh=2007-04-14>.

purchase Godiva Chocolate from them. In newspaper reports and interviews about this event, the same two issues frequently came up: the logo of the brand—Lady Godiva, a naked woman, riding on a horse—and the fact that some of their product lines contained liquor or were kosher. Reporters pointed to the contrast between the values of the family who owned the company and these non-Islamic symbols.⁷² In fact, some remembered the overtly religious appearance of the workers that the family had hired for some of their factories in the 1980s.⁷³ Company representatives and family members dismissed such reports, emphasizing that these were probably the only things that had not come up during the negotiations, with the implication that becoming a global competitor had nothing to do with religion.⁷⁴ They also argued that they had to employ the kind of workers who incited accusations of fundamentalism during that period, due to frequent strikes that left them no other choice.⁷⁵ In other words, economic rationality trumped religiosity (and fear of religious fundamentalism). At the same time the purchase was described as “Ülker’s *bayram* gift to Turkey,”⁷⁶ and the company representatives persistently emphasized how they were happy that a Turkish company now owned such a globally recognized brand.⁷⁷ Such public speeches formulated Turkish nationality in terms of a different balance between “tradition” and “modernity.” Newspaper coverage placed religiosity at the core of the identity of the family in question, unlike in the case of Kent.

Despite these differences, there were two similarities in these representations. First, ideas and sentiments of national belonging were never questioned. Second, private business success was described as a

72 Demet Cengiz Bilgin, “Lüks Çikolata Devi Godiva 850 Milyon Dolara Ülker’in,” *Hürriyet*, December 21, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7901998>; Demet Cengiz Bilgin, “Ülker: Godiva Türkiye’ye Bayram Hediyelemiz Olsun,” *Hürriyet*, December 22, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7905880>.

73 Vahap Munyar, “Mortgage Krizi Godiva Pazarlığında Ülker’in İşini Kolaylaştırdı,” *Hürriyet*, December 23, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7908807>.

74 “Godiva Bizim İçin ‘Kaşıkçı Elması’ Gibi, Parlatıp Gerdanlık Yaparız,” *Hürriyet*, December 29, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7938340>.

75 Munyar, “Mortgage Krizi Godiva Pazarlığında Ülker’in İşini Kolaylaştırdı.”

76 Cengiz Bilgin, “Ülker: Godiva Türkiye’ye Bayram Hediyelemiz Olsun.”

77 Eyüp Can, “Sabri Bey’den Murat Bey’e Ülker Murat Ülker’in Geyik Aві,” *Hürriyet*, December 25, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7916210>; “Godiva’yı ‘Kaşıkçı Elması’na Benzettik, Pazarlık Kolaylaştı,” *Hürriyet*, December 28, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7935253>; “Dünya Bu Satış Konuşuyor; Ülker Çikolata Devi Godiva’yı Satın Aldı,” *Zaman*, December 21, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=627792&keyfield=676F64697661>; “Lüks Çikolata Markasını Satın Alan Ülker Artık Devler Liginde,” *Zaman*, December 22, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=627800&keyfield=676F64697661>; Fikri Türköl, “Efsane Güzel Godiva,” *Zaman*, December 26, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=629308&keyfield=676F64697661>.

contribution to the national collective. The one constant was the struggle to consolidate a positive connection between individual rationality, economic savvy, *and* the usefulness of such characteristics for the entire collective. These commonalities are reminiscent of arguments emerging from studies of governmentality, about the discourses, knowledges, and techniques that constitute and govern populations, by determining the meanings of “normal,” “virtuous,” and “desirable,” as well as those who embody these characteristics.⁷⁸ Accordingly, these liberal discourses of citizenship contain moral assumptions about who is responsible and capable of self-governing and who is not. Such logics limit participation to those actors who have internalized circumscribed roles defined in terms of rationality and civility.⁷⁹ Discourses of responsibility and self-governance signal a shift from citizenship narratives of egalitarianism and universal rights to those of market freedom and individualism. In this world of neo-liberal citizenship, social interactions are market-driven and do not involve institutionalized mechanisms of reciprocity and redistribution outside of market exchange, because the latter induce “perverse incentives” against individual effort.⁸⁰

In this particular case, the profound addition is that narratives about individual economic rationality and market-based citizenship worked insofar as they attached themselves to nationalist discourses. There were two interrelated ideas: becoming (or becoming part of) a global brand, thereby representing Turkey; and serving Turkey by producing, selling, and contributing to economic growth. These discourses are representative of a larger shift in the way in which the business classes have defined themselves in the post-1980s context. Increasing emphasis on the rationality of these groups (evidenced by their success) and patriotism (evidenced by the contribution of their success to economic growth) has become part of their demands for more participation in policy-making in Turkey. Yet, at the same time, they have startling continuities with previous periods, in which economic success was also justified through positive links with nationalist ideology requiring citizens to serve the country. Economic “logics” of individual rationality and economic success were not outside the paradigms through which the collectivity has been identified.

78 Nicholas Rose and Peter Miller, “Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (1992); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999).

79 Hindess, “Neo-liberal Citizenship”; Burchell, “Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self.”

80 Margaret Somers, *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Owning the company, owning the country

Around the same time as the success stories of these business elite made headlines in the newspapers, there were also numerous strikes in different sectors. These strikes became the grounds on which business representatives built upon previously discussed logics in order to make their case, while the labor representatives challenged them. In this section, I will focus on struggles over how to define rationality and irrationality, meanings of service and disservice, and national cost and benefit.

When we consider nationalism as a discourse, any proclamation about the characteristics of a nation should be understood as “a conjuncting, conjuncturally fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action.”⁸¹ The ubiquity of nationalism stems not necessarily from universally accepted ideas of who constitutes the nation. Rather, because different groups contest each other with different definitions of nationhood, each contribute to the reproduction of the nation. In these particular cases, when the members of the business elite nationalized their business success and framed their neo-liberal economic ideology as a rationality of ideal Turkish citizens, the laboring classes constructed different meanings for service to the nation, rationality, and citizenship. In some ways, these constructions challenged the attempts to define the desirable citizen in terms of nationalist service performed through individual rationality and economic success. Yet, at the same time, some of the challenges built on and reproduced the nationalist rhetoric.

During the time when the previously discussed media representations offered a connection between neo-liberal productivity and service to the nation, there were also numerous strikes in Turkey, including protests and strikes in the Tuzla shipyards against the skyrocketing fatal accidents; a strike at Türk Telekom, the main telecommunications company that was privatized in 2005; a protest that almost turned into a strike at Turkish Airlines, which had been privatized in 2006; protests and strikes in a number of municipalities; and massive, nation-wide demonstrations against the new Social Security Law.⁸² In these strikes,

81 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

82 The new law was passed in 2008, but the years under discussion here witnessed heated debates about the making of the law. These debates centered on how the proposed law unified the fractured system at the lowest common denominator, increased the retirement age, expanded the premiums individuals had to pay, made access to health services more contractual, and continued to build on and exacerbate gender-based inequalities in care work. Cf. Ayşe Buğra, “AKP Döneminde Sosyal Politika ve Vatandaşlık,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 208 (2007); Berna Yazıcı, “Social Work and Social Exclusion in Turkey: An Overview,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 38 (2008); Aslıhan Aykaç Yanardağ, “Karşılaştırmalı

workers demanded salary raises compensating for real-income erosion; the leveling of differences in the wages of workers who do the same job, but happen to have joined the company at different times; and a safe work environment. They also protested against the shrinking of their existing social rights and social security benefits.

In the face of protests and strikes, the business elite became even more vocal in their vision of the state of affairs. Within and outside these contestations, the business elite constantly emphasized that they were serving the country, by contributing to economic growth and by becoming a global brand. They also asserted that they knew what needed to be done in order to achieve such success, defined in terms of Turkey's triumph, given the existing limitations posed by global economic realities.⁸³ At the end of 2007, an article in the daily *Hürriyet* praised a recent declaration by Türk-İş Union about consuming *all* products produced in Turkey (including Coca Cola, as opposed to only the products of Turkish companies) with the rationale that these provided jobs to Turkish citizens. For the writer, this declaration was similar to the German trade unions' proposal of a zero-percent pay increase in order to prevent the automotive industry production from moving to countries with lower labor costs. He ended his commentary by rhetorically asking whether the same labor union would act in a similar fashion regarding collective bargains with Telekom. In asking this question, he noted the company's mounting operating and financial difficulties, as well as the employer's limited capacities.⁸⁴ Thus, the author wrote from the perspective of the business elite: for him, global competition and economic crises, their local ramifications, and the obligation to navigate these circumstances provided the initial framework within which labor discussions were supposed to take place. In several of the strikes, those sitting at the employer end of the table continuously projected similar discourses of "economic realities." For instance, in response to strikes in the tire industry, the president of Sabancı Holding declared that they might have to move away due to the high labor costs of production: "Other players in the sector have decided to make investments elsewhere, [...] We have doubled the capacity of Brisa in the past five years. But with our Japanese partner [...] we are working on possible investment projects abroad. If we have to leave, we

Bir Bakış Açısından Sosyal Güvenlik Reformunun Emek Piyasasına Etkisi," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 118 (2010).

83 Cf. "THY'de grev açıklaması," *Zaman*, July 21, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=566819&keyfield=7468792067726576>.

84 Eyüp Can, "Türk-İş Coca Cola'ya Sahip Çıktı," *Hürriyet*, November 13, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7678218>.

will go to Egypt.”⁸⁵ Accordingly, this was a period of immense global competition, which required companies to be as efficient and flexible as possible. The implication was that, if workers did not want their jobs to migrate to places where labor costs were less, they would have to accept the existing conditions.⁸⁶

The business elite also argued that the irrational demands and irresponsible protests of workers posed a threat to the nation. In each strike, there were accusations of “outside forces” as well as “bad intentions.”⁸⁷ The president of Turkish Airlines said on several occasions that “a strike will hurt the institution and the country.”⁸⁸ The head of an association of owners of hotels and other touristic enterprises argued that, at a moment in time when Turkey’s biggest problem was unemployment, “people should be thankful to THY [Turkish Airlines] for providing 11,500 jobs instead of thinking about a strike.”⁸⁹ The head of the national tourism association warned that in case of a strike among Turkish Airlines workers, Turkish tourism would lose not only income, but also suffer from an image problem. Furthermore, he called the company a “flag carrier” and a “national company,” for which everyone had to make sacrifices.⁹⁰ These discourses of (in)security and attention to the nation’s well-being were all too familiar. They were possible because they utilized the already established vocabulary of Turkish nationalism.

In response, workers questioned the idea that the business leaders were the architects of growth,⁹¹ and they emphasized that it was their everyday work and sacrifice that had made the nation what it was. Thus, they contended that for the good of the entire country, their work was

85 “Aksigorta’da Ortaklık Olabilir, Lastik Yatırımı Mısır’a Kayar,” *Sabah*, August 28, 2008, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/08/28/haber,6BBCB7B25DF9493181AF07D9C887203F.html>.

86 For the theme of high labor costs, see Ufuk Sandık, “Maliyet Arttı, Goodyear İthalata Kaydı,” *Sabah*, February 16, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/02/16/otm101-20051116.html>; Ufuk Sandık, “Maliyet Arttı, Lastikçilere de Doğu Avrupa Yolu Göründü,” *Sabah*, February 10, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/02/10/otm101-20051226.html>.

87 Cf. Seyfettin Koçak, “THY Çalışanlarından Grev Oylamasına Evet,” *Zaman*, July 14, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=567893&keyfield=7468792067726576>; Faik Kaptan, “Kotil: Sendika THY’yi Grev Süreklüyor,” *Hürriyet*, July 12, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=6874483>.

88 “Olabilecek En İyi Teklifi Yaptık Sendikamızın Cevap Bekliyoruz,” *Zaman*, July 12, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=563024&keyfield=7468792067726576>; “Havada Grev Paniğine Başbakan El Koydu,” *Zaman*, August 1, 2007, <http://alturl.com/8sdv8>.

89 Cf. “Turizm Sektöründen ‘Grev’ Uyarısı,” *Zaman*, July 27, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=569505&keyfield=7468792067726576>; “THY’de Grev Kapıda,” *Hürriyet*, July 6, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=6844117>.

90 Turhan Bozkurt, “Sendika, Havaalanını Dar Edecekmış!,” *Zaman*, July 19, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=565756&keyfield=7468792067726576>.

91 “Hava-İş, THY’ye Grev Kararını Astı,” *Zaman*, July 20, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=566366&keyfield=7468792067726576>.

as central as, if not more important than that of the business classes. These arguments did assume that there was merit to drawing a connection between contribution to economic growth and service to the nation. Yet, they claimed a more significant role in this link. Furthermore, in response to accusations that they were hurting Turkey, in several cases the strikers turned the tables. They acknowledged that the strike might hurt the country, but claimed that the culprit was the business elite who were unwilling to negotiate. For instance, the labor union negotiating with Turkish Airlines announced that going on strike was their constitutional right, but added that they genuinely hoped that Turkey's interests, Turkish tourism, and Turkish Airlines would not be hurt. To that end they were ready to participate in any effort of reconciliation. With this announcement they threw the ball back to the company's management, inviting them to be constructive.⁹² In the Türk Telekom strike decision, the union representative argued: "We are not a terrorist organization, we're a labor union. We're seeking workers' rights." The same union announced that, because they did not want citizens to suffer, they would initiate the strike after the upcoming religious holiday,⁹³ during which the use of phone lines usually increased. In this way, they were able to turn the arguments of the management around and use it to justify their position. Yet, at the same, they consolidated nationalist discourses about threat and insecurity.

Another debate took place around what was rationally possible and what was not. Given the contemporary circumstances, the representative of a business association argued that strikes were "outmoded" acts.⁹⁴ The notion of "outmoded" strikes implied a differentiation between those who were rational and those who remained "stuck in the past." According to this discourse, the business elites knew economic realities better than any other group. Therefore, they also knew what was best for Turkey as a whole, but the "uneducated" workers did not. For them, this lack of awareness of existing limitations caused other labor-business problems as well. For instance, several Tuzla shipyard owners claimed that the reason for fatal work accidents was the workers' lack of educa-

92 "Uzlaşma Çıkmadı THY'de Grev Yakın," *Sabah*, July 18, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/07/18/haber,E17999651D294F1187A9CDA5902FB21E.html>.

93 "Türk Telekom'da Grev Kararı Kesinleşti," *Sabah*, August 25, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/08/25/haber,C6B9F59BC5CD4A2797640F3A20988DD2.html>; "Türk Telekom'da Grev Bayram Sonrası," *Sabah*, September 24, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/09/24/haber,7C4DD36784204FEDAAF43A8E837E6710.html>.

94 "TİM: MB, Yatırım ve Üretimle İlgilenmiyor," *Zaman*, August 1, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=571262&keyfield=7468792067726576>.

tion and unwillingness to be trained.⁹⁵ Accordingly, workers were dying because they were ignorant. During the Türk Telekom strike and the period of privatization, when about 20,000 workers of the company applied to remain state employees, business leaders spoke of “panic” and “ignorance” among the workers. The workers purportedly did not understand (or did not have the capacity to understand) that what was being offered to them was a good deal.⁹⁶ Similarly, in the Turkish Airlines negotiations, the administration representatives repeatedly announced that their offer was much better than that of other corporations. These examples repeated in creative ways notions such as economic necessity and inevitable cost. Those who spoke soberly while using these phrases drew boundaries between actors who were rational and knowledgeable enough to understand this language, and those who reacted to them in “uncivil” and “irrational” ways. These representations of rationality also became part of the articulation of ideal (and therefore deserving) citizens *versus* others.

However, labor union representatives challenged these narratives, also utilizing familiar frames. The workers accused the business leaders of being irrational, giving statistical evidence on mounting poverty and how workers’ real income had eroded over the years.⁹⁷ They asked how rational it was for the business elite to expect workers to survive on their meager salaries, let alone retain their dignity as human beings.⁹⁸ They questioned the logic that linked economic realities to unsafe work environments.⁹⁹ In a particularly striking example, the president of the union representing the shipyard workers in Tuzla, Cem Dinç, said the following at a conference in 2008: “They say that it is the ignorant, uneducated workers that get killed. Recently, one of our friends was crushed to death when a forty-ton block fell on him. Would it have mattered if he had had a PhD?”¹⁰⁰ This evocative intervention into dichotomies of education *versus* lack thereof, and rationality *versus* irrationality revealed the fragility

95 Nevra Akdemir and Aslı Odman, “Tuzla Bölgesi’nde Örülen ve Üstü Örtülen Sınıfsallıklar,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 113 (2008): 58-59.

96 “‘Devlette Kalayım’ Diyen Telekomcu 7 bin 300’e Çıktı,” *Zaman*, January 26, 2006, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=250581>.

97 “‘THY’de Grev Kararı Cuma Günü Asılacak,” *Zaman*, July 18, 2007, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=565536&keyfield=7468792067726576>; “Hava-İş Başkanı Ayçin: Taleplerimizden Vazgeçmeyeceğiz,” *Hürriyet*, July 12, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=6879226>.

98 “Türk-İş: Bu Ücret Sefalet Ücretidir,” *Sabah*, December 27, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/12/27/eko94.html>.

99 Cf. Ardiç Aytalar, “DİSK, Tuzla’da Grev Denedi İşçi Bıçak Sirtında Çalıştı,” *Hürriyet*, June 17, 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/9197480.asp?m=1>.

100 Roundtable: “Tuzla’dan... Tuzla’ya...” in *Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop, Migrations, Connections, and Perspectives: Anatolia and its Neighboring Regions in the 20th Century*, İstanbul, May 31-June 1, 2008.

of the discourses that the business elite adopted. By emphasizing another way of experiencing economic realities, the workers turned the tables.

Workers also responded to accusations of not thinking of national interests and posing a national threat from within the same discourse. For this, they frequently deployed three aspects of the Turkish nationalist rhetoric: what the denial of rights means in terms of Turkey's Western aspirations; multi-faceted suspicions towards the other; and the necessity of contributing to the well-being of the nation. One powerful way of speaking to aspirations of the West was by comparing existing labor rights with examples, not from cheap labor destinations, but from international organizations and the EU. For instance, a labor representative from the Union of Public Workers, citing from one of their reports, emphasized how backward labor rights were in Turkey when compared to both ILO standards and EU requirements.¹⁰¹ Another example came from newspaper headlines reporting Western media coverage of violence and police brutality during the May 1 protests in 2007. One headline was particularly striking: "We have been disgraced before the world."¹⁰² In this sense, the reversal of international comparison made it possible to rethink global aspirations of Turkish nationalism with a focus on pride in Western modernity.

At other times, the focus was on companies from outside the country buying public enterprises in the scramble for privatization. While the business sector welcomed international partnerships as a signal of economic development, labor union representatives argued that national treasures were being sold off. For example, when the public oil refinery's privatization was finalized, the labor union representatives asked, "is this [new] company coming here for petrochemical production, or is their intention, in their own words, 'to take advantage of the docks?' [...] The tender gives us the impression that Turkey is unprotected."¹⁰³ If these companies were a source of national pride (as the business elite was also arguing), so the logic went, why were they being sold off to foreigners? In other cases, it was internal others that the labor unions brought into their protests. In the fall of 2007, when there was an escalation of violence in the Southeast between the army and the PKK, workers during the Türk Telekom strike sang the national anthem and observed a mo-

101 "137 Kamu Emekçisi Tutuklandı, 8'i de Sürgün Edildi," *Hürriyet*, February 7, 2007, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=5908468&tarih=2007-02-07>.

102 "Dünyaya Rezil Olduk," *Sabah*, May 2, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/05/02/haber,883285B72FA644869DF43429CF5F3DD7.html>.

103 "Petkim 2,05 Milyar Dolara Özelleştirildi," *Sabah*, July 5, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/07/05/haber,14A49DE1823143D39E4053156FED9C16.html>.

ment of silence for the dead soldiers, before they went on to protest their employer. A union leader announced:

We are prepared to participate in any action to defend the flag and the indivisibility of the country. This is an open invitation to the Turkish General Staff [...] the 26,000 members of the Turkish Haber-İş Union are ready to march and blow up mines placed by the PKK terror organization in lands where our soldiers are up in arms. We are adamant because we love our nation.¹⁰⁴

These examples drew on other interpretations of national threat, keeping the category, but changing the content. The workers challenged the business elite's formulation of national threat in terms of lack of economic growth. Furthermore, by connecting their struggle to other popular imaginations of national (in)security, they also reproduced nationalist discourses.

Yet, beyond nationalist discourses, these struggles also produced rights-based definitions of citizenship. Whenever union representatives made public statements about their demands, they framed their position overtly in terms of their rights as workers and citizens. First and foremost, they emphasized the increasing poverty among their union members and the erosion of their economic and social rights as citizens. For example, in 2007, during the negotiations between Turkish Airlines and the union representatives, the latter frequently drew attention to how over the past years workers had lost a significant percentage of their real income due to inflation and insufficient wage increases. Since 2006, Limter-İş, the union representing some of the workers in the Tuzla shipyards, has successfully made public the alarming number of fatal accidents as a result of outsourcing, unsafe work environments, and extraordinarily long working hours. These formulations challenged the business portrayals of the relationship between economic success and privileged access to public decision-making. Instead they emphasized an idea of citizenship defined in terms of equality of social rights.

In fact, possibilities for transcending nationalism have become further crystallized in the most significant strike of recent labor history in Turkey, which took place between December 2009 and April 2010. Protesting against the flexibilization and informalization of their work contracts, as well as the loss of their gained rights, the workers of the

¹⁰⁴ "Telekom: Sabotaj Sayısı 400'ü Aştı, Yüz Milyonlarca Zarar Var," *Hürriyet*, October 27, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7587986>.

privatized company Tekel staged a strike in the capital of the country, drawing popular support from all sectors of society. The significance of this strike, from the perspective of nationalist discourses, was that workers were able to challenge successfully the government's attempts to portray their activism in terms of "outside forces," "threats to security," and the like, by building alliances that overcame Turkish and Kurdish nationalist discourses. Studies of this strike suggest that it remains to be seen whether this experience can pave the way for class-based struggles against the advance of neo-liberal agendas.¹⁰⁵ The strike was profoundly successful in dismissing attempts to justify neo-liberal market ideologies in nationalist terms.

These contestations showed that the interpretative links between nationalism, economic performance, and citizenship were not necessarily uniform. The business elite and the workers have attempted to establish different frames of association. What was striking, however, was the overall effect of this contingency. Nationalism as a discourse prevailed for most, and nationalist discourses continued to be a terrain on which economic logics were contested.

Concluding remarks

This paper has explored representations emerging from intra-business and business elite-working class struggles in contemporary Turkey, in an effort to show that neo-liberal logics never work or become commonsensical by themselves. Economic rationalities have to speak through other local discourses. In these particular cases, it was contests over national identity and over who served the nation better that determined the success of neo-liberal agendas. Studying public discourses of economic performance as a terrain of banal nationalism shows how the two are reproduced by drawing support from one another. This approach also reveals how each embodies internal conflicts.

In the contemporary context, among the business elite there seems to be a divergence in terms of life-style choices and identity discourses. However, when we study their self-representations in the media, nationalist discourse emerges as a common frame through which individual economic success is articulated. These are part of the business elite's strategies to legitimize their position in the socio-economic hierarchy,

105 Murat Utku, "Tekel Direnişi Tanıklıkları: Dayanışmayı Hatırlamak," *Birikim*, no. 251-252 (2010); Yalçın Bürkeç, "Tekel Direnişi: Ne Eskinin Basit Devamı Ne Yeninin Kendisi," in *Tekel Direnişinin Işığında Gelenekselden Yeniye İşçi Sınıfı Hareketi*, ed. Gökhan Bulut (Ankara: Nota Bene, 2011); Ferda Koç, "İşçi Sınıfı Hareketi, Yeniden Kardeşleşme Sürecinin Motoru Olabilir mi?," in *Tekel Direnişinin Işığında Gelenekselden Yeniye İşçi Sınıfı Hareketi*, ed. Gökhan Bulut (Ankara: Nota Bene, 2011).

as well as their demands for more significant roles in economic policy-making. Discourses about economic success give us important clues as to how business elites want to define themselves and control the representations that others construct about them. The result is a series of contestations over political belonging and over who constitutes a desirable Turkish citizen. In the process, first, individual business success is coded in terms of the benefit that one's work has for the nation. Second, for the business elite, this benefit also says something about the level of rationality and responsibility that the relevant actors possess. Thus, a normalization of logics based on economic success and privileged access to economic decision-making happens through positive associations with service to and utility for the nation.

However, the working classes constantly challenge these logics, as the discourses that they adopt during strikes make clear. They reveal problems in the economic rationality adopted by the business elite, showing how unrealistic their assumptions about conditions of everyday life are. Nevertheless, the workers also adopt similar frameworks when they confront the business elite's discourses of nationalism. They define national security, service, and threat in different ways, but continue to utilize the concepts. The ways in which they formulate their resistances point to the strength and resilience of nationalist discourses, and the paradoxical processes that make economic logics familiar. Yet, these challenges produce models of citizenship emphasizing social rights rather than nationalist rhetoric, as well. In these moments, the contingencies of both neo-liberal logics and their nationalist counterparts become visible.

These discursive battles are important because they provide us with clues about the ways in which the tenets of market economies work and how they are contested in the everyday. My suggestion is that, despite all the popularized ideas about global capitalism, we do not necessarily see a discursive erosion of nation-state frameworks. Instead, we witness the production of new social and political constellations that borrow from existing discourses in the local context and creatively combine them with discourses of economic performance. Studying these cultural strategies allows us to map the ways in which business elites attempt to and achieve partial success in carving out a privileged socio-economic and political existence for themselves. These combinations attempt to reproduce neo-liberal conceptualizations as inevitable truths, by connecting them to available discourses of nationalism. The challenges to neo-liberal logics can also work in the same way. Thus, a contingent effect is the construction of nationalism as a background, so pervasive that all actors position themselves in relation to it.

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