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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF THE AK PARTY IN TURKEY

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CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Department of Journalism

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Declaration

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Abstract

Despite the rise of Islamist parties and movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, there is a dearth of studies addressing their political communication strategies and approaches. In consideration of this fact, this doctoral thesis examines the political communication strategies of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, henceforth the AKP), from 2002 to 2017. Drawing on social movement theory and approaches to political communication, it analyses the transformations that have taken place within the AKP and Turkey and how these have been informed by religion, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership.

The thesis describes how the author carried out ethnographic research during the 2014 presidential election; interviewing key personalities from politics, the media, academia and think tanks, and conducting observations at AKP headquarters and campaign rallies. A quantitative content analysis of Erdoğan's speeches was then performed to triangulate the findings from the qualitative data, ensuring effective coverage of the entire period under consideration, and to provide continuity.

The research reveals how the effective communication of a party's message is fundamental to its political success. Furthermore, in relation to the AKP it clearly identifies two distinct policy periods: 2002 to 2009, when the party promoted a liberal political ideology and pro-Western foreign policy; and 2010 to 2017, when a pro-Muslim agenda emerged. It also highlights the significance of Erdoğan's dominance of the AKP, and the consequent lack of institutionalisation within the party, before discussing the implications of the study findings for the AKP, Turkey and the wider MENA region.

Of particular interest is how the changes in the AKP's policy appear to have been reinforced by Erdoğan, who has consistently made effective use of a variety of political communication strategies, including Americanisation, and references to pertinent local images and symbols, to create a sense of collective identity amongst the AKP's supporters.

Chapter 1. Introduction

In 1996 Necmettin Erbakan became the first elected Islamist Prime Minister in Turkey; however, he ruled for less than twelve months, because the government's anti-Kemalist¹ agenda resulted in a 'postmodern coup'² in 1997. Four years later, the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States (US) brought Islam and the dangers of radicalism to the forefront of the mainstream media (Sayyid, 2003). Although both events occurred in different contexts and independently of one another, the perceived threat from 'Islamist ideology' connected them, uniting concerns in Turkey with the global outlook (ibid.). In both contexts the opposition to political Islam in the public sphere, and more widely towards Islamic ideology, proved pervasive in the first decade of the twenty first century (Bleich, 2010).

The 'postmodern coup' in Turkey led to pressure being placed on conservatives³ in Turkey; this took the form of the closure of *İmam Hatip* (religious) secondary schools, as Kemalists believed that it "bred Islamism in society" (Yavuz, 2003, p.127), and headscarf bans for university students (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). After 9/11, events on the international stage led to the declaration of a 'war against terrorism'; part of the mandate of which was to discipline exponents of radical ideologies in the Middle East, specifically challenging countries associated with fundamentalist groups, most notably al-Qaeda (Kepel, 2010).

¹ Kemalism emerged after the "overthrow of the Ottoman regime" and refers to Mustafa 'Kemal's surname; he was the founding father of the Turkish Republic (Sayyid, 2003, p.52). Kemalism is a top-down imposed modernisation program (ibid.).

² On February 28 1997, when Erbakan's Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) and the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP) joined the government, and the pressure of military and secular institutions in Turkey led to the collapse of the government (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.4). The main theme in this case was the anti-Kemalist politics of the government (ibid.). This is termed a 'postmodern coup' as it involved secular-minded representatives of the military, the media and state institutions (ibid.).

³ References to 'conservatives' indicate those "faithful to Islamic religious and moral traditions" (Ramadan, 2012 p.101).

Against this backdrop, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, henceforth the AKP) came into being. Following unsuccessful attempts to reform Erbakan's Milli Görüş movement,⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and some of his colleagues decided to form the new party in 2001. They aimed to increase the diversity of their support base, by focusing on Turkish people's needs rather than on Islamist ideology (explained in Section 3.5.2). They studied the political landscape carefully; presenting themselves as a party willing to embrace democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). The discourse and political agenda of the new party differed significantly from Milli Görüş, as it set as its objectives, the pursuit of European Union membership, neoliberal economics, and pro-Western foreign policy (Ismael and Perry, 2014). More importantly, it appealed to both Turkey and the international community as the new moderate face of Islam in the Middle East (Bayat, 2013).

In the first election that AKP contested, a mere 15 months after its establishment, the party received 34 per cent of the vote, allowing it to occupy two thirds of the seats in parliament and to form the government (Cizre, 2008). Erdoğan's successful Mayorship in Istanbul from 1994 to 1998, during which he delivered crucial services to the public, e.g. "installing new water lines, cleaning up the streets, planting trees and improving transportation" for Istanbulites (*The New York Times*, 2003), had already created an image of him in the minds of the people as a charismatic leader capable of getting things done. Therefore, his achievements as a member of Milli Görüş, were clearly a major factor in the AKP's success story.

⁴ Milli Görüş literally translates as 'National Outlook'. However, although the name 'Milli' literally means 'national', in this context it is better understood in terms of Islamic values (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.5). From here on I will use only 'Milli Görüş'.

The support for the ‘conservative democrats’, as the AKP described themselves, grew from one election to another, as the party “expanded freedom of expression” (Cizre, 2008), implemented a foreign policy based on the concept of ‘zero-problem’, and forged positive relationships with neighbours such as Syria, Armenia, and Israel (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). The AKP appealed so effectively to the international community, that the Bush administration referred to it as a role model for other Islamist parties and movements in the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region in particular (Eligür, 2010).

The positive coverage of the AKP in the “international media”, which continued up until 2010, was the result of this narrative (Akyol, 2015). However, a turning point occurred around this time, resulting from a heated exchange at a debate in the World Economic Forum in Davos⁵ in 2009 and the role of Turkey in the Mavi Marmara⁶ aid flotilla incident in 2010 (more details in Section 3.6.5). This marked a shift in the political message and discourse of the AKP (ibid.). By standing up to Israel, Erdoğan repositioned himself relative to the West and the Muslim world. He became perceived on ‘Arab street’⁷ as a principled and charismatic leader (*Pew Research*, 2017), and his apparent repositioning relative to Israel gave rise to questions over whether ‘Turkey is moving away from its Western political hemisphere’ (*Spiegel Online*, 2009). As the evidence collected for this thesis will demonstrate, after 2010 the agenda of the AKP started to become more openly pro-Muslim, and in terms of

⁵ The panel discussion at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos turned into a diplomatic crisis between former Israeli President Shimon Peres (1923-2016) and Erdoğan, when Turkey’s then Prime Minister “harshly criticised the Israeli President over the fighting in Gaza” (Aviv, 2017, p.78)

⁶ Mavi Marmara flotilla, in other words Gaza flotilla aid, happened 16 months after the Davos spat in 2010 (Aviv, 2017). It was on its way to take aid to Palestinian people in Gaza on 30th May 2010 and was attacked by Israeli soldiers (Rumford, 2013). Nine activists, including one US citizen, were killed during this offensive (ibid.).

⁷ According to Pew Research Center’s spring 2017 survey, whereas the leadership of Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, Iran’s Hassan Rouhani or Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu was classified as poor, Erdoğan’s rating increased positively in particular in the eyes of Jordanians and Tunisians (*Pew Research*, 2017).

foreign policy Erdoğan became less willing to align with the West (Andoni, 2010). This repositioning became increasingly apparent in the rhetoric employed by the AKP and Erdoğan after the Gezi Park protests in 2013 (which were partially provoked by the enforcement of new conservative policies and a harking back to the country's Ottoman heritage, in Erdoğan's speeches during the 2014 presidential election campaign, and in policy changes following the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 (Hamid, 2017).

Research Aim, Approach and Research Questions

In consideration of the above, the aim of this doctoral thesis is to understand the transformation that has taken place within the AKP and Turkey during the party's fifteen year rule, from 2002 and 2017. It will do this by examining the AKP's political communication strategies, to unpick the development of its political message and the significance of the role played by its charismatic leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

In order to approach the period systematically, the discussion in this thesis divides the period of AKP rule into two eras; distinguishing between 2002 to 2009, which was characterised by a liberal political ideology (Yavuz, 2009); and 2010 to 2017, which witnessed a shift towards religious discourse, pro-Muslim policies and the questioning of the objectives of the democratisation and liberalisation process. In reference to the first period Bayat (2013) described the AKP as the first post-Islamist party in Turkey, willing to embrace democracy and moderate Islam. However, recent changes in direction suggest a commonality between Erbakan's RP (Turkey's first Islamist party) (Kara, 2013) and the AKP. The suggestion that the AKP is no longer

embracing the idea of post-Islamism, is borne out by Erdoğan's criticism of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's appeal to return Saudi Arabia to "moderate Islam" (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2017; Mandaville, 2014). The new intention of Erdoğan's AKP appears to be to "rescue the Islamic world from Western colonization to once again dominate life" (Kara, 2014, p.17). Thus, the development of the AKP's political communication can be seen to convey a message of transition from post-Islamism to Islamism.

To investigate the course of Turkey's governing party over the last fifteen years by evaluating developments in the AKP's political communication between 2002 and 2017, the following research questions are asked:

- RQ1. What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ2. How did the AKP's political message evolve between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ3. What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP?
- RQ4. What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

This thesis contends that effective communication of a party's message is fundamental to its political success. These same communications can therefore also serve as the basis for the evaluation of a party's political message, as will be the case herein relative to the AKP, Turkey's so called 'conservative democrats'. Of

particular interest will be how changes in policy have been reinforced by Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style. He has effectively used a variety of political communication strategies, including images and symbols, to create a collective identity amongst the AKP's supporters, which has kept the social movement alive' as will be elaborated on further when discussing the AKP's second term in particular.

Research Contributions

It is anticipated that the focus of these research questions will ensure this work dramatically bolsters the literature concerning the AKP and Turkey; however, it will also be relevant in the context of other Islamist parties and movements in the MENA region, as it aims to explicate the role of political communication in upholding religiosity in the political sphere.

A key contribution of this research will be its exploration of the Americanisation of political communication in a non-Western context, where it manifests specifically in emphasis on the leader's "family portrayal" (Langer, 2007), use of symbolism, and "candidate-centred" electioneering (Foster and Muste, 1992). Additionally, by gaining a deeper understanding of the part played by Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style in the AKP's success it may well also offer insights that could benefit other Islamist leaders and parties.

Structure of the Thesis

Having considered the process and focal points of the research, this section briefly summarises the key points covered in each chapter, thereby concluding this introductory chapter.

Chapter two details the analytical framework for the research and reviews relevant literature. It concentrates on political public relations (Bernays, 1952), political communication (McNair, 2003), and crucially explains the Americanisation of political communication (Negrine, 2008), which is associated with personalisation (Aelst, Shaefer and Stanyer, 2012), image (McNair, 2003), and charisma (Weber, 1968), and will play a key role in answering the first and third research questions. By referencing social movement theory and collective identity it also introduces key data for answering the second and fourth research question. The second part of the literature review discusses evidence collected by scholars concerning other Islamist parties and movements, to differentiate this research from previous similar studies. It considers Lebanon's Hezbollah and its leader (Harb, 2011; Khatib, 2013; Matar, 2008; Khatib, Matar and Alshaer, 2014); Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini (Charteris-Black, 2007); Morocco's Justice and Development Party's political communication strategies (Bouyahya, 2015); the Muslim Brotherhood's digital activism (D'Urbano, 2011); and Tunisia's Ennahda's transition from social movement to political party (Wolf, 2017). After elaborating on these cases, the chapter concludes by summarising the available literature regarding the AKP, including two studies of the 2007 elections (Arsan and Can, 2008; Dinç, 2008) and a discourse analysis of three of Erdoğan's speeches (Göksu and Aslan, 2011).

Chapter three covers the historical background to the rise of the AKP, including the development of modern Turkey from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and the development of Islamism. It begins by defining the concept of Islamism to be used in reference to the AKP in the study. It then discusses the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire, which began in the 18th century, explaining the politics and individual

lifestyles of some of its Sultans. Furthermore, the role of Sultan Abdulhamid II and his Islamist policies will be elaborated upon, as he has been suggested as a role model for Erdoğan (Cagaptay, 2017). Moreover, the challenges Abdulhamid II faced during his reign will be introduced as bearing relevance to the internal challenges faced by Erdoğan during the Gezi Park protests in particular. Islamism in Modern Turkey in the 20th century is then detailed in connection with the Islamist poets Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Sezai Karakoç to whom Erdoğan refers in his speeches. In section 3.5, Necmettin Erbakan and the Milli Görüş movement are described and evaluated as they are key to understanding Erdoğan and the AKP's current Islamist politics. This leads to a discussion of the details surrounding the emergence of the AKP and the influences on its politics, including consideration of different facts and events. Finally Erdoğan's Islamist ideology will be explained, by reflecting on his activities as a youth and his early political career within the Milli Görüş movement.

Chapter four summarises the methodology applied in this research. It elaborates on the research design, explaining the qualitative and quantitative research instruments developed to answer the four research questions. The qualitative research involved a four month ethnographic study in Turkey, including non-participant observation during the 2014 Turkish Presidential Elections, some of which was spent at AKP headquarters. Formal in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve personalities from politics, media, academia and government think tanks. The quantitative research took the form of a content analysis of Erdoğan's speeches; 30 speeches from the first period (2002 to 2009) and 30 speeches from the second period (2010 to 2017).

The results of the qualitative findings from the twelve in-depth interviews are presented in chapter five. It begins by analysing the roots of the AKP's victory, depicting the party's remarkable historic successes. This chapter investigates the evolution of the party's political message, highlighting critical turning points and events. By exploring the opinions of the interviewees, it formulates an understanding of the shifts that occurred since 2002 in reference to the research questions. To answer the third question it addresses Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, by asking the interviewees to evaluate his personal impact on the AKP's communications. It further reveals the chief aspects of the AKP's political communication strategies, before expounding the role of religion in the leader's and the party's political communications strategy in answer to question four. When analysing the interview data, the concept of social movement theory will be applied, and the influences of collective identity, and political communication will be assessed. In addition, the data collected for the literature review, relating to other Islamist parties', movements', and their leaders' political communication models will be presented to investigate any similarities and discrepancies from Erdoğan's AKP.

Chapter six focuses on fieldwork conducted in Turkey over a four-month period (from 3 August till 5 December 2014). This fieldwork study provides a unique view of the AKP's election campaign, and offers a crucial insight into the internal mechanisms of the party. This extended time frame involves the observation of different departments within the AKP and the 2014 Presidential Election campaign of Erdoğan. Yet the latter was a historical moment for Erdoğan as he attained the peak of his political career by becoming Turkey's first directly elected President. By

reporting on the period surrounding the presidential election and its aftermath, through the lens of non-participant observation, the intention of this phase of the research was to provide an ethnographic insight into the accomplishments of the AKP and its leader.

Chapter seven presents the findings from the quantitative content analysis of 60 speeches given by President Erdoğan over a period of 15 years. The analysis evaluates a sample of speeches given each year, up to and including 2017; the year of one of the most significant referendums in Turkish history, the results of which increased Erdoğan's power, and made it possible for him to rule until 2029 (Hamid, 2017). This means the content analysis encompasses the process of the AKP's transition from a post-Islamist to an Islamist party, clarifying this quantitatively in reference to ten main themes: (1) European Union, (2) Cultural Dialogue, (3) Human rights/Freedom of Speech, (4) Atatürk/Secularisation, (5) Religious discourse, (6) Economic Development, (7) Anti-Israel, (8) Anti-Establishment, (9) Ottoman Empire, and (10) Gülenists. Thus, the chapter covers the AKP's EU dream, Erdoğan's appeal to secularists, Human rights and Freedom of speech, and cultural dialogue by comparing the 'Alliance of Civilisation' project, initiated by the UN secretary general and co-sponsored by the then Turkish and Spanish Prime Ministers, with the Clash of Civilisation (Huntington, 1993).

Triangulating the insights from the qualitative and quantitative data is the objective of Chapter eight. It begins by identifying the political communication strategies implemented by the AKP. In reference to this, the modernisation process is also explained briefly, as it is fundamental to understanding the role of Americanisation

in the party's political communication. The focus then shifts to Americanisation (Negrine, 2008), explaining Erdoğan's use of local symbols and giving interpretations associated with them. The role of Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, as emphasised by the research question, is also explained in conjunction with a portrayal of the evolution of the party's political message. Furthermore, the AKP's political communication map is drawn in this chapter to clarify important mechanisms.

Finally, Chapter nine frames the outcomes of this doctoral thesis, by reviewing the findings concerning the transformation that took place within the AKP and Turkey from 2002 and 2017, according to five novel contributions it makes to the literature in terms of explicating the political communication and successes of the AKP and Erdoğan, and the associated implications for other Islamist parties in the MENA region. Furthermore it briefly looks at the research limitations, and, as this is the first study of the AKP's political communication in the form of doctoral study, offers recommendations for future research. Finally, future projections concerning the AKP and Erdoğan are made based on information acquired when conducting this research

Chapter 2. Analytical Framework and Literature

Our society is constructed around flows: Flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols. Flows are not just one element of the social organization: they are the expression of processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life.

-Castells⁸

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's analytical framework and discusses existing literature associated with the research questions, which interrogate the communication strategies of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) from multiple perspectives. To ensure a targeted analysis, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1. What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ2. How did the AKP's political message evolve between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ3. What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP?
- RQ4. What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

To answer the above, a focal point of this chapter will be to outline the concepts of political public relations, political communication, Americanisation, charisma, image, symbolism, and personalisation. Additionally, social movement theory will

⁸ 1996, p.412

be utilised to investigate the role played by collective identity. The concepts discussed in this chapter will provide the study's theoretical foundation.

This doctoral research aims to develop previous research concerning non-violent Islamist parties, movements and their leaders, and to introduce and evaluate the AKP's unique communication strategies in this context. Specifically, it will contribute to previous literature by mapping the field of political communications in an environment where there are religiously affiliated parties and groups.

2.2 Political Public Relations

The three main elements of public relations are practically as old as society: informing people, persuading people, or integrating people with people.

(Bernays, 1952, p.12)

This section evaluates existing definitions of political public relations, seeking to understand the formal role the media plays, while also providing an entry point to further our understanding of the dynamics of the AKP's political communications. Whereas political communication concept is the main analytical framework of this research, political public relations is decisive to develop a deeper understanding of political communication.

Public relations is a management function, responsible for connecting an organisation with its target audience:

Public relations [...] helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; [...] and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.

(Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1992, p.7)

The definition above is applied principally in relation to political parties, highlighting the importance of influencing public opinion and public interest. Greater precision is provided by the definition given by the World Assembly of Public Relations Associations', published in 1978, which emphasises the relationship between organisations and public interest:

Public relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest.

(Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1992, p.6)

The use of the word 'serve' is indicative of the aim of public relations in general. Furthermore, as the phrase 'public interest' indicates, building awareness is an important aspect of public relations, while the reference to the 'public' evokes the critical political dimension of public relations.

When political actors, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, who held leading positions within former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's (1926-2011) Milli Görüş movement⁹ (more details in Section 3.5), decided to form a new party in

⁹ This research will mostly use the term, the 'Milli Görüş' rather than any party name given to Erbakan's parties, in order to clarify Erdoğan's previous affiliations. Although officially a political party, the founder of this movement, Necmettin Erbakan, termed his ideology Milli Görüş (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). He founded five parties in total, under different names, as each of them were shut down for engaging in "anti-secular activities" (ibid., p.4). Erbakan's Milli Görüş parties were named the following: Milli Nizam Party (National Order Party; 1970-1971), Milli Selamet Party (National

2001 (the AKP), they distanced themselves from the Turkish Islamist stance, with its “anti-Western and anti-secular” approach, focusing primarily on meeting the public’s chief economic demands (Cagaptay, 2017, p.3). At this time there was a need for the government to promote economic development, as there was then a financial crisis underway in Turkey (Sen, 2011, p.57). Thus, the AKP chose the slogan “Everything is for Turkey” for its 2002 election campaign, concentrating not only on a specific audience composed of a single group of their own supporters, but on the whole of society as Turkey specialists Professor William Hale and Professor Ergun Özbudun explain (2010, p.21).

Political public relations are currently characterised by news management, agenda building, public relations and election campaigns, political marketing and public diplomacy strategies (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011). According to Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011), there is a lack of theory and research bridging the spheres of public relations, political communications and political science theory.

Here, the following definition of political public relations is proposed:

Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.

(Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011, p.8)

This definition of political public relations emphasises coherence; granting each party political agency as it seeks to influence the public by communicating its objectives. Public relations performs the role of a management function, that is, the

Salvation Party; 1972-1980), Refah Party (Welfare Party; 1983-1998), Fazilet Party (Virtue Party; 1997-2001) and the Saadet Party (Felicity Party; 2001-) (Altun, 2016, p.172).

“management of communication between an organization and its public” (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p.6). This idea of a management function in public relations is a common element present in the definitions given in the literature. Thus, it is significant that public relations mediates dialogue between institutions and the public, establishing a relationship between an organisation and its audience, underlining the mutual benefits arising from interaction (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011).

In contemporary political parties, the management of communications between individual organisations and the public is the responsibility of parties’ public relations departments¹⁰. Hence, throughout, this research will examine how the AKP professionally utilises public relations opportunities when campaigning, in order to influence their target audience. The data collected will also reveal whether the AKP has institutionalised its political public relations strategies, or whether it has a different structure.

This research will also examine how public relations campaigns can damage political parties and their leaders by reducing their credibility internationally (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011), by looking at the coverage of the Gezi Park protests that took place in 2013. The protest occurred when what began as a plan by Istanbul municipality to destroy Istanbul’s Taksim Square and build a shopping mall sparked a series of nationwide protests (Altun, 2016). Initially, the protestors alluded to an environmental agenda, but the demonstration became the catalyst for an ‘anti-government protest’ that received extensive international media coverage (ibid). In

¹⁰ Name of the department can differ from one party to another. AKP uses ‘Publicity and Media’ department.

truth, the main intention of the protesters was not only to draw attention to Taksim Square's destruction, but, more importantly, to highlight other "urban development projects" in Istanbul (ibid., p.167). These included the creation of Turkey's largest mosque, Çamlıca Mosque, and the naming of the third bridge linking the European and Asian parts of Istanbul, after Yavuz Sultan Selim, who is claimed to have led "history's greatest massacre of Alawis" (ibid.), and other religious motivated developments, alleged to have been "executed top-down" in an "undemocratic way" (ibid., p.168). Considering the role of the Gezi Park protests, this study will investigate how this incident effected the AKP's political message and Erdoğan's discourse.

The main function of political public relations is that it can be used by political actors to "influence the media, their agenda, and how they frame events, issues, and processes" (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2011, p. 7). Influencing and persuading the public, or the audience of a particular viewpoint, is another dimension of political public relations (McNair, 2003). By examining 60 speeches given by Erdoğan, the AKP's and Erdoğan's influence on the public will be examined to expose the dynamics of persuasion. As part of the portrayal of influential discourse, the use of religion as a persuasive component of political communication will be addressed, to answer the fourth research question.

2.3 Political Communication

Political communication is an integral aspect of political public relations, and as such plays a central role in the analysis undertaken in this thesis. Yet this research centralises political communication as the main concept because of its relevance to

the research questions. The topics most frequently studied by researchers interested in political communications are election campaigns (Lilleker, 2014). Political communications involve different actors, ranging from the non-political (e.g. journalists), to influential decision makers responsible for moulding public opinion (McNair, 2003). It is a direct method of communication with the public, in which the message conveyed plays a crucial role in strengthening the impact of a campaign (ibid.). The focus of political communications is on the quality of the message, in particular its capacity to prompt the receiver to develop a certain ideological viewpoint regarding specific events. As a result, this research will centralise political communication when conceptualising communication.

The scope of political communication has been illustrated as encompassing three different groups: political organisations, media and citizens (McNair, 2003). Political parties, lobby groups, pressure groups and consumer groups can all be categorised under the umbrella of political organisations (ibid.).

One of the goals of political communication is “receiving maximum favourable publicity and the minimum of negativity” (ibid., p.6), as illustrated in the diagram below:

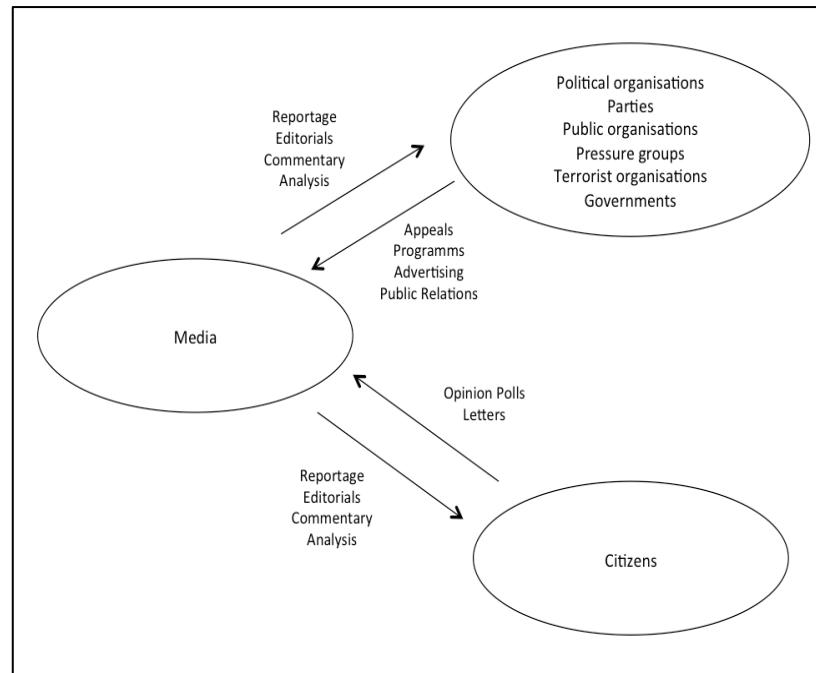


Figure 1. Elements of political communication (Source: McNair, 2003, p.6)

The reactions in Figure 1 are two-way, meaning that political organisations operate symbiotically with the media, since advertising and public relations need to be transferred to media outlet, who in turn conduct analysis and report to the general public (McNair, 2003). Conversely, political communication also rises from the bottom up, beginning with citizens who respond in the form of opinion polls, which are subsequently reported to and analysed by political organisations (ibid.). Thus, the media serves as a bridge between politicians and citizens (ibid.). Both the politicians and their audience members are key constituents of the political communication process, as set out by McNair (2003). Although both sides are influenced via the media, audiences are the principal target of politicians, as they pursue particular objectives, and take key decisions to gain public support (ibid.).

Although this model appears complicated it broadly summarises the process of political communication. This diagram will be referenced in this thesis when

analysing the AKP's political communication activities. Additionally, the AKP's media advertisements during the election period and the impact of these on 'citizens', in other words their supporters, were also a key focus when conducting the ethnographic interviews as part of the fieldwork in Turkey. Similarly, the importance of opinion polls, conducted through research and development companies, will be evaluated to ascertain whether the AKP is reconsidering its policies according to the outcome of polls, and if so, what kind of impact this has on its message.

Symbols play a crucial role in political communication (Perloff, 2014). They are an additional communication tool, conveying shared ideas and concepts and disseminating political beliefs in a manner that is culturally meaningful (ibid.). Political communication recognises cultural norms and values, as well as laws and constitutions, as forming the basis of a healthy relationship between political actors and the public (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011). Cultural, social, political, institutional and systemic context provided a basis for the AKP to communicate with the public. As an "Islam-sensitive" political party as Turkish academic Professor Ümit Cizre emphasises (2016, p.2), their shared background enabled them to communicate readily with the "authentic, humble, and uncorrupted Turkish-Muslim people who were dominated and oppressed by secular and modernist elites" (Sen, 2011, p.57).

When analysing the role of the AKP's political communication in Turkey, it is impossible to overlook the incidents that occurred between the AKP and the Fethullah Gülen movement¹¹ from 2012 onwards. This movement has no official

¹¹ While the movement's leader Fethullah Gülen has been living in self-imposed exile in the US since 1999, the movement also runs a huge business network comprising private schools, factories, think-tanks and media outlets, reaching millions of people worldwide (*BBC*, 2013). Although it presents itself as a religious movement, it is well known that part of Gülen's strategy is to mobilize state

name but its members refer to themselves as ‘Hizmet’ (the Service), and are widely known as ‘Cemaat’ (the Community), the ‘Gülen Movement’ or the ‘Gülenists’ in Turkey¹² (Amsterdam & Partners LLP, 2017, p.26). The struggle between the two groups in terms of symbols and messages is important to recollect when investigating the role of communication based on religious values.

A new public relations era began in December 2013, following a corruption scandal that revealed a deep power struggle between the two parties. However the climax of the struggle took place on July 15 2016 when a coup attempt was orchestrated by the Gülenists (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). By evaluating a combination of cultural, social, political and institutional factors, this thesis will consider how the movement might have influenced AKP’s communication strategies in the presidential elections of 2014, given the adversarial dynamics underlying its rhetoric. Gülen personally sought to convince his grassroots supporters not to support the AKP during his weekly sermons from Pennsylvania in the United States of America (US), which went viral via social media (*Sosyal Pencere*, 2013). Meanwhile, Erdoğan pursued a smear campaign against Gülen and the Gülenists while on the campaign trail. Content analysis of Erdoğan’s speeches provides precise indicators of the intention and power behind his use of symbols and images, as will be seen later in the thesis.

employees, especially the police force and judiciary, to exert control over parts of the country’s institutions (*BBC*, 2013). However, up until 2013, there was a “honeymoon period” between the AKP and Gülenists, during which the Gülenists proved an influential supporter of the AKP, in particular helping them to gain control of the judiciary, military and police, developing “a more tolerant and normative framework in terms of their Islamist ideas” (Yilmaz, 2013, p.67).

¹² The term ‘Gülenists’ is used in this thesis.

2.4 Americanisation of Political Communication

[The] Western model of modernisation, exhibits certain components and sequences whose relevance is global. Everywhere for example increasing urbanisation has tended to raise literacy; rising literacy has tended to increase media exposure; increasing media exposure has 'gone with' wider economic participation (per capita income) and political participation.

(Lerner, 1958, p.46)

This section of the discussion explains that the American style of political communication has become the modern and professional mode of campaigning in democratic countries (Negrine, 2008). It is a personalised and candidate-centred mode of electioneering that centralises the politician's image and portrays their approachability at a personal level by actively including their family members in the campaign process (Scammell, 2007). Before elaborating on the Americanisation of political communication in detail, I will briefly explain the emergence of the term Americanisation within the field of communications, to clarify its relationship to modernisation.

During World War I, US President Woodrow Wilson established a Committee on Public Information to manage public opinion about the war (McNair, 2003). This marked the beginning of political public relations, and was followed by the establishment of public relations offices to manage party political issues, first by the Democratic Party in 1928, then in 1932 by the Republicans (ibid). Once reputed as an effective tool, the number of political public relations consultants increased rapidly, especially during the second half of the 20th century. Thus, the field of public relations and communications, including infotainment, is considered intrinsically American (Negrine and Papathanassopoulus, 1995); the US has been described as the so-called "Mecca of political campaigning" (Scammell, 1997, p.1). The rapid

expansion of this field is attributed to America's dominance after the Cold War and increasing reliance on soft power (Thussu, 2009). Simultaneous with the greater cultural and ideological appeal of America, the significance of a popular culture in general was also strengthened (Bell and Bell, 1993).

Jean Baudrillard, (1986, p.76) states, "America is the original version of modernity", with other countries being merely imitators. In particular, after World War II, America's domination was manipulated to amplify the "homogeneity and interdependence of cultures" (Bell and Bell, 1993). The homogenisation process was either termed "modernisation or Americanisation" (Thussu, 2009, p.68), and was recognised as a means to "transform traditional societies" (Thussu, 2006, p.43). In fact, Americanisation can be considered the "younger brother of globalisation", as it was the initial force responsible for creating a global economy and global culture, leading to the "globalisation of everything" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001, p.380), and in the case of this research, also political communication.

Furthermore, it is interesting to consider the suggestion that Americanisation is itself dependent on modernisation, as it is modernisation that underpins expectations of long-term societal change (Negrine, 2008). Indeed, Negrine (2008) claims that it was modernisation that first weakened political parties and facilitated the rise of modern campaign practices; a view that is closely examined in this thesis. Undoubtedly, typically the modernisation of a society leads to greater individualisation, thereby reducing the impact of the collective identity of a political party or movement (Mandaville, 2017).

In 'The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East', Lerner (1958) identifies the role of modernisation relative to industrialisation, secularisation, democratisation, education, and media participation. Additionally, he underlines that the West is the driving force of modernisation in the Middle East, generating organic societal change (Lerner, 1958). Change begins at the level of the individual and continues with exposure to media, finally reaching into the domains of "economic as well as political participation" (ibid., p.46).

Due to its economic growth and development, and the resultant rise in socio-economic conditions, the US became a leading actor in designing political communication strategies for use during election campaigns (Scammell, 2007). Therefore, not only did the Americanisation of political communication effect "changes in communication practices" (Negrine, 2008, p.152) and the social structure generally, as discussed in this thesis, it also triggered widespread changes to electioneering practices (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996). The Americanisation of political communication demanded technical expertise and "professional advisers, growing detachment of political parties from citizens, development of autonomous structures of communication" and the personalisation of politics (Negrine and Stanyer, 2007, p.106). Some critics suggest it is inaccurate to refer to these changes as Americanisation, because other modernised countries (such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom) also export campaign experts and international advisers (Swanson and Mancini, 1996, p.106). However, as the election techniques originated from the US, and Swanson and Mancini (ibid.) favour the use of this word, it is adopted herein.

The US as a pioneer of modernisation, founded a political public relations model comprising “public and private opinion polls, telephone canvassing, computers, direct mail, fax machine, campaign consultants, market research, television saturation” among other techniques (Butler and Ranney, 1992, pp.7-8). Many democratic countries imitated the US model (ibid.). However, evidence suggests “what works in one country may not work in another”, and that “what works in one election may not work in the next”, and this also needs to be considered when discussing multiple examples of election campaigns (Wring et al., 2007, p.17). Increasingly, election campaigns are becoming more Americanised in the Western world, as reflected in the strategies and actions of “candidates, political parties and news media” (ibid., p.48). Nevertheless, although other nations have borrowed press and media models from the US, this does not necessarily mean they also have American-style media machines (ibid., p.48). The fact that Bill Clinton relied on advisers from the British Labour Party demonstrate that in some cases US politicians benefit from adopting practices from abroad, and that progress is not just achieved a “one-way flow of influence” (ibid., p.49).

By conducting in-depth interviews in Turkey, I establish whether or not the AKP applied an Americanised form of political communication between 2002 and 2014. Comments by personalities close to Erdoğan, such as Erol Olçok, who was in charge of Erdoğan’s public relations for 25 years and was Erdoğan’s spin-doctor, provide an important source for evaluation. The role of independent, professional consultants is also relevant to the AKP’s political communication model. Since Olçok had forged no direct ties with the party, he was empowered to act independently. The in-depth interview I conducted with him provides a valuable contribution to this research, as it

helps clarify the functioning of the AKP's campaigning model. Although Olcok was tragically shot dead during the attempted military coup on July 15, 2016, he had previously answered my questions concerning how far the AKP had adopted American campaigning techniques, citing different examples from the presidential election in 2014.

2.4.1 Personalisation

The personalisation of political communication is an additional aspect of Americanisation (Negrine et al., 2007), one that is closely related to 'candidate-centred politics'. This is a phenomenon that is on the rise globally, and appears to have emerged alongside notions of globalisation and the free market (Dalton, 2000; Bennett, 2012). Arguably, personalisation has led to a diminishment of the "traditional affective ties between voters and parties" (Dalton, 2000, p.60).

Two different forms of personalisation can be identified from the literature (Aelst, Shaefer and Stanyer, 2012). The first form is 'individualisation', which concentrates on central actors, highlighting their ideals, capacities, and political policies (ibid.). The second is 'privatisation', which relates to the "public role of the politician as a private individual" (ibid., 205). The latter arises from interest in and "media focus on the personal characteristics and personal life of individual candidates" (Rahat and Shaefer, 2007, p.68). Both forms are becoming increasingly important aspects of political communication, as the personal influence of political candidates on voters is growing, and the personalities of "individual politicians are becoming more central in media coverage" (ibid.). This process is described as the "politicisation of the private persona" (Langer, 2010, p.61). Consequently, in an era when parties and government institutions are losing their appeal, elements such as "family, personal

appearance, life-style, upbringing and religion” are intruding into the political arena, through the depiction of the personal lives of politicians (Langer, 2007, p.381). As election campaigns become progressively personalised through the use of social media, politicians’ private lives, philosophies and beliefs are increasingly becoming topics of interest among voters. This growth in personalisation has impacted the efficacy of traditional election campaigning, consisting of party programs and promises (Aelst, Shaefer and Stanyer, 2012). Hence, the shift from “political to personal characteristics, and from the politician’s public life in office to their private life” is discussed herein in reference to the personalisation of politics (ibid.).

Personalisation plays a key role within the context of this study, in particular in reference to the 2014 Turkish presidential elections. This election was the first time a president could be directly elected by the Turkish people (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). In addition, Erdoğan’s chief election promise was the introduction of a new presidential system with the ambition of remaining in power until 2029 (Kirişci, 2017). The mechanism for ensuring this can now be implemented in 2019, after majority support was received in 2017 for constitutional change in a referendum (Kirişci, 2017). If everything takes place as planned, Erdoğan could be elected for two further terms, meaning he will have spent 26 years in governance (from 2003 to 2029) (ibid.). Even as a member of the Milli Görüş, Erdoğan was determined he would one day assume a leadership role. This created tension with its leader, Erbakan, who viewed the emerging younger generation as inexperienced (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). In this thesis, Erdoğan’s desire for dominance, his character, and his personal impact on the AKP’s political communication strategies, which have never been studied previously, will be closely examined.

The professionalisation of political communication is another aspect of Americanisation that also links to personalisation (Negrine, 2008). The use of spin-doctors, technical experts and professional advisors characterises the “modern model of campaigning” (Negrine, 2008, p.1). This professionalisation process can be summarised in three steps, “Changing organizational structures of political parties, the changing nature of technologies of communication, and the place of spin in modern politics” (Negrine, 2008, p.6).

Through in-depth interviews, I will examine the roles of the professional spin-doctors and public relations experts used by the AKP and Erdoğan. This will reveal whether the governing party created professional public relations structures over the last 15 years [2002-2017]. It is important to note, however, that this investigation will address the personalisation of Erdoğan as a “one-man leader”, who is solidifying his “authoritarian” attitude daily (Cizre, 2016, p.12).

2.4.2 Image

The objectives of personalisation and the Americanisation of political communication are to manage a party’s or a politician’s public image and control the dissemination of information (Cottle, 2003). Two categories of public image are relevant here; the personal identity of the political actor and the corporate image of the party (McNair, 2003). The portrayal of Erdoğan as a charismatic leader and symbol of the party is linked to the third research question. His personality is given as evidence of his credibility (Bruce, 1992). Factors ranging from personal appearance to logo design, and even the use of Teleprompters to enable politicians to address their audiences naturally, are among the many components of image building, designed to construct a positive identity for a political leader (McNair,

2003). Indeed, Erdoğan's popularity as a member of the Milli Görüş rose notably after the election period for the mayoralty of Istanbul in 1994 (Besli and Özbay, 2010). Therefore, the significance and creation of Erdoğan's personal image will be stressed when presenting the fieldwork conducted during the 2014 presidential elections at the AKP's headquarters. To gain a clear understanding, the role of "political consultants, image-managers, spin doctors and gurus" will be examined, in reference to the image created of the AKP's leader (McNair, 2003, p.8).

It will be interesting to establish if there is a unique image of Erdoğan upheld by his supporters and beloved followers, similar to the symbolic portrayal of Margaret Thatcher as the "Iron Lady", which became lodged in the minds of British citizens (McNair, 2003, p.148).

2.4.3 Charisma

When focusing on the Americanisation of political communication and personalisation, it is essential to contemplate charisma as an essential aspect of leadership. The leading study on charisma is Max Weber's "On Charisma and Institution Building" (1968), which characterises the quality from a sociological perspective. Weber (1968) explains that the rise of charismatic leaders was not from among former bureaucrats or officeholders (so-called experts), but from the heart of the people, the crowd. Weber emphasises the appeal of those who are marginalised and living in the social context they wish to ascend from (ibid.). Innate charismatic leadership skills are another significant factor contributing to the perception of charisma in leaders (ibid.). A charismatic leader arises not from "appointment or dismissal" (ibid., p.20); i.e. there is no "regulated career" or "salary" that will satisfy the most charismatic individuals (ibid.). Rather, charisma arises from "inner

determination” according to the German sociologist (ibid.). If a charismatic person is recognised by the community he leads, then, “he is their master” and can continue to be so while attaining “recognition through proving himself” (ibid.). Fulfilling the expectations of one’s supporters and followers is a critical factor in maintaining an aura of leadership (Hunt, 1984, p.162). The expectations here depend on the specific role taken up by the charismatic leader:

If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles; if he wants to be a war lord, he must perform heroic deeds. Above all, however, his divine mission must ‘prove’ itself [...]

(Weber, 1968, p.22)

In accordance with this view, the expectations of a political leader, such as Erdoğan, are necessarily part of the analysis to be engaged in when assessing the qualitative research data. The question: “What are the demands of the “faithfully surrendered” people, and Erdoğan’s approach to meeting them?” will deliver important answers. However, more significant for this research, is Erdoğan’s journey from a member of the ‘crowd’ to charismatic leader. His successes as a leader began in 1994, when he became Mayor of Istanbul, and peaked in August 2014 when he was chosen as Turkey’s first directly elected President. The dynamics that inform his charismatic leadership style will be investigated to assess the significance of his charismatic leadership to the political communications produced by the AKP.

2.5 Social Movement Theory

Power...is no longer concentrated in institutions, organisations or symbolic controllers. It is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, information, and images. In the Information Age power is at the same time identifiable and diffused because it lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organise their institutions and people build their lives and decide their behaviour.

(Castells, 1997, pp.359-360)

The role of political communication, which has been explained at length, is discussed in this thesis in relation with social movement theory. By linking both political communication and social movement theory the study will frame the AKP's communication model between 2002 and 2017. This research will examine different frameworks pertaining to social movements when analysing the AKP, and when addressing how far and in what ways religion influenced the party's political communication from 2002 to 2017. Consequently, it will prove fundamental when answering the fourth research question.

Social movements seek to "correct, supplement, overthrow, or in some fashion influence the social order" (Toch, 1965, p.5). Put another way, it is "the expression of the collective will", lying at the "heart of social life" (Touraine, 1981, p.29). Social movements can be divided into four categories: "transformative, reformative, redemptive and alternative" (Cohen and Rai, 2000, p.2). Whereas the aim of transformative movements, including many leftist movements, is to alter the entire social structure, the aim of reformative movements is simply "partial change" (ibid.). Nuclear armament and the position of women in society are examples of focal issues for this second group (ibid.). Given that the AKP's originated from an Islamist movement, Milli Görüş, an interesting question to consider here is whether it can be

said to have transformed itself from a transformative social movement to a reformatory one. Redemptive movements, meanwhile, perceive “the total change of an individual whose problems are divorced from their social context” (Cohen and Rai, 2000, p.2). Alternative movements, the final category, are founded on the “rejection of materialism and the development of unconventional lifestyle characteristic of some Western youth” (ibid., p.3). Environmental social movements fall into this category, as they seek to “develop viable, sustainable alternative lifestyles such as conserving of energy” (ibid.).

Zirakzadeh (1997, pp.4-5) takes an alternative approach to defining social movements to that proposed by Wilson (1973). He highlights three elements as crucial to understanding contemporary social movements:

- (1) Comprise a group of people who consciously attempt to build a radically new social order.
- (2) Involve people of a broad range of social backgrounds and provide an outlet for political expressions by the non-powerful, non-wealthy and non-famous.
- (3) Deploy confrontational and socially disruptive tactics involving a style of politics that supplements or replaces conventional political activities like lobbying or working for a political party.

(Zirakzadeh, 1997, pp.4-5)

Zirakzadeh’s first point aligns with Cameron’s definition, stating that “a social movement occurs when a fairly large number of people band together in order to alter or supplant some portion of the existing culture or social order” (Cameron, 1966, pp.7). Cameron continues as follows:

To understand a movement, it is often desirable to classify its purposes relative to those of the rest of society. Such a classification also provides an initial thumbnail description of the purposes. For this classification four familiar concepts are suggested: reactionary, conservative, revisionary, and revolutionary.

(ibid., p.22)

Similarly American sociologist Herber Blumer (2008, p.64) states that the main objective of social movements is to “establish a new order of life”. In contrast, Moghadam (2009, p.4) distinguishes between three kinds of social movement; those after “capitalism and neoliberal globalisation: the women’s movement, political Islam, and the global justice movement.” Social movements are frequently associated with the rise of capitalism and modernity, whereas the emergence of Islamist movements dates to the end of 1970s with the Iranian revolution (Moghadam, 2009). Islamist movements can be divided into two categories: moderate and extremist (ibid.). Whilst moderate movements engage in non-violence, such as politics and civil society, extremist groups prefer to use violence and illegal means when they consider the political system “anti-Islamic, westernized and dictatorial” (ibid., pp.37-38). The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) of Egypt, AKP in Turkey, Islah Party of Yemen and Morocco’s Justice and Development Party (PJD) are among some of the movements and parties that fall within the moderate category (ibid., p.38). When considering the mobilisation of a moderate social movement, as in the case of this study, the 1979 Iranian revolution is deemed an important paradigmatic example (ibid.). During the revolution, mosques were perceived as a crucial conduit for distributing messages and organising people (ibid.). Bayat (2005, p.904) supports this view, arguing, “Islamist movements have utilised mosques to assemble and communicate, cassettes to get messages across and agitate, and Islamic symbols to frame their ideas.” A similar case applied to the MB, in particular during and after the Egyptian revolution in 2011 (Zahid, 2012). It would certainly not be possible to categorise the AKP by mentioning their former affiliation with the Milli Görüş, as the separation of state and religion is constitutionally forbidden in Turkey and mosques are not empowered to politicise people (Mardin, 2006). Notwithstanding, I

consider Bayat's "Islamic symbol" when referring to Erdoğan's personal religiosity and his ideological motivation, by investigating whether in this sense Erdoğan's charisma played (third research question) a key role in mobilising potential voters to support him during the 2014 presidential election. This will make it possible to determine whether Erdoğan's role in voter mobilisation is more significant than the AKP's political program. However, the use of 'Islamic symbols' will also be relevant when evaluating AKP's political communication campaigning; this is because, in order to answer the fourth research question it was important to discover if the AKP is using religious motifs to mobilise support.

Pakulski (1991, xiv) defines social movements as "recurrent patterns of collective activities which are partially institutionalized, value oriented and anti-systemic in their form and symbolism." In another definition, social movements are described as "value-oriented, power-oriented, and participation-oriented" (Wilson, 1973, p.16). Whereas, "anti-systemic" and "power oriented" appear to be at opposite poles, one can be an extension of the other, meaning that being first anti-systemic can inform one's power-orientation after challenging and succeeding the former system. In this sense, Ernest Gellner (1995, p.40) refers to Islamist movements as "irrational responses to the breakdown of traditional society," in other words, they are "revivalist" or "anti-colonial" (Povey, 2015, p.15). Initially this definition sounds insignificant when considering Turkey as a Muslim nation, but the notion of an "irrational response" and "anti-colonial" sentiment can be interpreted in the case of the AKP as a challenge to the "Kemalist elite" (Mardin, 2006).

Kemalism is another name for 'nationalism', 'secularism' or 'modernising' (Sayyid,

2003, p.52). However it is a uniquely Turkish term, as it refers to the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa ‘Kemal’, which emerged after the “overthrow of the Ottoman regime” (Sayyid, 2003, p.52). The Kemalist elites were the founders of modern Turkey in 1923 (Keyman and İçduygu, 2005, p.4). Mustafa Kemal, who initiated the “modernisation program” in Turkey, created the Republican People’s Party (CHP), modern Turkey’s first political party, which remains the main opposition party today (Sayyid, 2003, p.52). Before the AKP, Kemalism was the main political ideology in Turkey, established bureaucratically (Sayyid, 2003). When discussed as a social movement, the AKP can be portrayed as anti-Kemalist, making it also anti-Westernisation, anti-establishment, and anti-elite, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter three and Chapter six.

2.6 Collective Identity

Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place.

(Johnston and Klandermans, 1995, p.44)

The fundamental concept in social movement theory is collective identity (Melucci, 1996, p.4). This is a process of “constructing an action system”, which emerges through “exchanges, negotiations, decisions, and conflicts” (ibid., p.70). Melucci observes that “collective identity is a product of conscious action and the outcome of self-reflection more than a set of given or ‘structural’ characteristics” (Larana, Johnston and Gusfield, 1994, p.17). It is the first step taken by social movements in the formation and maintenance of collective action. With regard to collective action, there are five vital components to note: “interest, organization, mobilization,

opportunity, and collective action itself” (Tilly, 1978, p.7), and it is important to understand the collective identity of the AKP according to these five principles.

The parties that arose out of Erbakan’s movement were challenged by the secularist elites, from the formation of the first in 1970 (Eligür, 2010) (discussed in section 3.5.2). Thus, Erbakan had to form new parties successively (ibid.). When it became clear that the Refah Party (RP) would soon be banned, Erbakan ordered the creation of a fourth party, the Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, FP) in December 1997. Subsequently, two groups emerged within the FP: traditionalists and reformists (ibid., p.198). The de facto leader of the latter was Erdoğan, whilst the traditionalists were overseen by Erbakan (ibid.) (discussed in Section 3.5.2). With regard to Tilly’s (1978, p.7) approach, ‘interest’ was deemed the first step in the collective action of reformists; they challenged the traditionalists, who were responsible for controlling the party, to introduce reform and increase the variety of supporters (ibid.). However, Erbakan was not enthusiastic about changing the ideological approach of the movement (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). This led Erdoğan to ‘organise’ the younger generation within the FP to ‘mobilise’ against the traditionalists in 2000 at the FP congress (ibid., p.5).

At that time, former President (2007-2014) Abdullah Gül was the candidate for the reformists, because Erdoğan had been “banned from political activities for five years and spent four months in prison for reciting a religious charged poem during a speech” in the city of Siirt (Hamid, 2016, p.153) (explained in Section 3.5.2). Gül received 521 votes compared to Recai Kutan (1930-), the candidate for the traditionalists, also known as the “Politburo”, who received 633 votes (ibid. and

Sontag, 2003). Although the reformists failed to gain control of the party, this represented an ‘opportunity’ and led them towards ‘collective action’, final point of Tilly, (1978); ultimately to leave the FP and form the AKP in 2001 (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.5). The courage of the reformists rested on successful political communication and campaigning during the 1994 municipal elections, which revealed the RP could succeed in major cities such as Istanbul and Ankara (Çakır, 1994). The “soft language” of Erdoğan, and the involvement of women for the first time in election campaigns in the 1994 election made it clear that there was potential for the ‘conservative’¹³ majority in Turkey to prevail (Eligür, 2010, p.199).

Collective identity can function as a means of unifying “social, political, and economic conditions and action orientations” (Crane, 1994, pp.395-396). It answers the question of who key actors are as a social movement (ibid.). Social movements, which have become a major area of sociological analysis, are the basis for creating “ideas, identities and ideals” for society (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991, p.4). These fundamental aspects come together as ‘collectiveness’ (ibid.). In this manner, “common interest” turns to “common identity” (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.2). The literature raises questions concerning whether the role of social movements is to “change or defend society” (ibid.). Lindberg and Sverrisson (1997) also highlight the role of organisation in social movements as follows:

¹³ References to ‘conservatives’ indicate those “faithful to Islamic religious and moral traditions” (Ramadan, 2012 p.101).

Social movements can be defined as collective action with some stability over time and some degree of organization, oriented towards change or conservation of society [...] The idea of social movements tends to move between two poles in social theory. One is the vision of social movements as collective action responding to specific tensions or a contradiction in society [...] The other is social movement as bearers of the meaning of history [...] and the main agent of global social change.

(Garretton, 1997, p.67)

On the basis of Lindberg and Sverrisson's (1997) approach, it seems fair to surmise that the AKP sought 'collective change' in society, placing key issues such as "development, democracy, human rights, pluralism, freedom and the rule of law" at the epicentre of its party program in 2002 (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.21). The main incentive was to deliver change by creating a conservative and also a modern society (ibid.). By exploring two different periods of the AKP's development, 2002-2009 and 2010-2017 (discussed in Section 3.6.5), this study will analyse how the party altered its understanding of 'societal change' as characterised by Lindberg and Sverrisson (1997). In particular, the concepts of human rights, pluralism and freedom are critical issues when looking at both periods, as Erdoğan "increased the concentration of power in the executive" enhancing "one-man rule" (Cizre, 2016, p.7). Another important angle to explore will be the factors in play during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, which represented a massive resistance to "Erdoğan's personality" and his politics rather than the views of the party (ibid.). This will facilitate discussion of how the collective identity of the AKP in the early days, mutated into an ideologically motivated interest in Erdoğan's personal identity (Hamid, 2016). According to Tarrow (2008, p.147), ideology is the main dynamic that "moves people to action". Another key aspect to question is the aim of collective change in society, which targeted human rights, freedom, and pluralism, and turned to an "authoritarian" and "Islam-sensitive political position" (Cizre, 2016, p.3).

2.7 Communication Strategies of Islamist Parties/Movements and their Leaders

Having explained political communication and social movement theory from multiple viewpoints, I will move on to look specifically at the communication strategies utilised by other Islamist movements, parties and their leaders. Researchers in this area have already afforded an overview of the communication strategies of other Islamist movements and parties, which can be compared with the communications of the AKP from a number of perspectives. However, close investigation highlighted a lack of studies in this specific context. Existing studies primarily focus on Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Khomeini (1902-1989) in Iran. Those of major relevance to this research include: *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon* (Harb, 2011), which examined Hezbollah's propaganda model; *Image Politics in the Middle East* (Khatib, 2013), which established an understanding of Hezbollah's image management strategies; *The Power of Conviction: Nasrallah's Rhetoric and Mediated Charisma in the Context of the 2006 July War* (Matar, 2008), illustrating the role of Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah's charisma and rhetoric; *The Hizbullah Phenomenon* by Khatib, Matar and Alshaer (2014) is a study that covers Nasrallah's use of poetry; *The Communication of Leadership* (Charteris-Black, 2007), which focused on a deeper exploration of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic leadership; and *The Americanisation process of the Party of Justice and Development* (Hizbo al-adala wa-Tamnia, PJD, 2015), which is a PhD thesis focused on the political communication strategies of the Moroccan Islamist party (Bouyahya, 2015). *Ikhwan Web: Digital Activism and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood* (D'Urbano, 2011) is also a PhD study, examining the use of new media by one of the oldest Islamist movements in the Islamic world (Rubin, 2010). While focusing on Islamist movements and parties it is essential to consider Ennahda in Tunisia. Wolf's

(2017) *Political Islam in Tunisia* covers Ennahda's history from the 1960s to the present. It is relevant to this doctoral thesis, in that it reveals the process of transition from social movement (*haraka*) to a political party (*hizb*).

Three studies focussing on the AKP are crucial to this research in terms of comprehending AKP's communication strategies: (1) *AKP's communications during the 2007 elections* (Arsan and Can, 2008); (2) *Discourse Analysis Related to Balcony Speeches* (Göksu and Aslan, 2011), an examination of Erdoğan's three balcony speeches following the AKP's victory in the 2007, 2010 and 2011 elections, and (3) *A Close Look at AKP's Election Success in 2007 elections* by Güliz Dinç (2008). The focal points of the above studies afford beneficial data concerning the AKP and its leader, Erdoğan. The principal findings from these studies will be explained in the following section.

In this section, the research focuses on parties and movements seeking power in a political context. Only democratic and moderate movements and parties will be examined in this doctoral thesis, and therefore extremist groups such as Al-Qaida and DAESH (aka ISIS or Islamic State) will not be included.

2.7.1 Hezbollah Propaganda Model

Channels of Resistance in Lebanon (Harb, 2011) covers Hezbollah's media relations, contextualising 'Liberation Media' as presented by the Al Manar news channel and Hezbollah's propaganda during the Lebanese-Israeli conflict.

Hezbollah, the Lebanese 'Party of God', was officially founded in 1985, and has implemented a functioning media strategy since the early 1990s (Harb, 2011, p.176).

When Israel launched its war on Lebanon in 1996, lasting 16 days, and aiming to uproot Hezbollah, Nasrallah's movement enhanced its media strategy (ibid., p.174). The war in 1996 was a crucial turning point for Hezbollah, as it recognised the importance of the media, in particular in reaching a new audience (Harb, 2011). This led to a shift in moderate discourse, welcoming individuals with different tendencies or religious viewpoints (ibid.). Hezbollah's use of media strategies peaked following Israel's defeat in Lebanon and its subsequent withdrawal (ibid.). I will consider the first strategic period, which will later be deemed relevant in comparison with the AKP. The first period, between 1982 and 1986, employed standard media tools, based on traditional communication methods (ibid); i.e. face-to-face, direct communication, such as handing out flyers and leaflets, using banners, and organising political and religious festivals (Harb, 2011). After the completion of four distinct phases of political communications, the support for Hezbollah increased, and they became more organised and exacting, enabling the party to achieve liberation in 2000 (Harb, 2011, p.178). During my fieldwork, undertaken at election booths and AKP rallies, I will explore the role of the 'old school advertising model' from the perspective in the party today.

A further influential media strategy, which involved observation of the Israelis, was Hezbollah's monitoring of Hebrew networks (Harb, 2011). Lebanon's most influential Islamist party, whose success is closely related to its propaganda, created clips and films of operations, to be re-broadcast on Israeli TV in Hebrew, with Arabic subtitles (ibid.). Hezbollah's propaganda gained a different meaning as Al Manar targeted Israeli soldiers' mothers, to deliver the emotional enquiry, "why let your son die in south Lebanon" (ibid., p.187). While the emotional message touched

the hearts of Israeli mothers, of even greater significant was the broadcast of the clips by Israeli TV, which confirmed that Hezbollah's communication strategies were developing (Harb, 2011).

2.7.2 Image Management Strategies of Hezbollah

In contrast to Harb's (2011) study, which focussed predominantly on Hezbollah's propaganda perspective, Khatib's (2013) *Image Politics in the Middle East* inspected the visual elements of political communications. Image can relate to states, politicians, and non-state actors. Khatib's (2013) work was organised into two parts: (1) Revolutionary Illusions, and (2) Revolutionary Images. Image arise from a number of different forms; i.e. "mass media image, digital image, cartoon, art, physical space or object, an ephemeral image on paper, a wall or another physical medium" (Khatib, 2013, p.1). Visual concepts can also take the form of symbolic images (ibid.). By examining images produced concurrently with recent events, it emerges that images are frequently replaced, although the most impressive endure. Three different events that have occurred in the Middle East can be cited to elucidate the features of a "lasting image" (ibid., p.2). It is important to acknowledge three of these

The lasting image of bin Laden is not the video image of him giving speeches defying the West, but the mental image of him sitting in a house in Pakistan, smoking marijuana and watching pornography. The lasting image of the United States' war on Iraq is not the televised, staged image of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, but the photographs of tortured prisoners in Abu Ghraib. The lasting image of Saddam Hussein is not that of the public monuments in Iraq which embedded his likeness, handwritings, and even blood, but the mobile phone video of his hanging.

(Khatib, 2013, p.2)

These examples clearly demonstrate how social and political reality influence image perception. This kind of political act (i.e. physical presence) relates to the "art of

presence” and the “active use of public space” (Bayat, 2010, p.11).

As in the case of Hezbollah and Nasrallah, Erdoğan’s image has proven instrumental in influencing voters and gaining support (White, 2002). This study examines this issue from two different perspectives: firstly, the image presented of Erdoğan following the Davos crisis¹⁴ in 2009, and that of the Mavi Marmara flotilla¹⁵ in 2010 (discussed in Section 3.6.5). Here, it will be important to establish how his image developed among Muslims, as both events related to the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians; a sensitive topic for Muslims globally. Secondly, I will consider the Gezi Park protest in 2013, exploring whether events influenced the image of Erdoğan in the international arena and how he dealt with the challenges that arose subsequently. This will make it possible to establish whether Mavi Marmara represents the peak of Erdoğan’s positive image in the Middle East, and whether the Gezi Park protests were the beginning of a negative portrayal of his leadership. Both these aspects will be investigated during the fieldwork through in-depth interviews.

Hezbollah’s image management strategy is also multilateral, operating through multiple communication channels:

The group has its own newspaper, al-Intiqad (formerly, al-Ahd), its own satellite television station (al-Manar), several websites, including one for al-Manar offered in multiple languages (Arabic, English, French) and its own radio station (al Nour). It also produces children’s games, merchandise, books, computer games, and uses posters and billboards, in addition to the organisation of mass rallies, as methods of communicating with its multiple audiences.

(Khatib, 2012, p.9)

¹⁴ The panel discussion at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos turned into a diplomatic crisis between former Israeli President Shimon Peres (1923-2016) and Erdoğan when Turkey’s then Prime Minister “harshly criticised Israeli President over the fighting in Gaza” (Aviv, 2017, p.78)

¹⁵ Mavi Marmara flotilla, in other words Gaza flotilla aid, happened 16 months after the Davos spat in 2010 (Aviv, 2017). It was on its way to take aid to Palestinian people in Gaza on 30th May 2010 which was attacked by Israeli soldiers (Rumfold, 2013). Nine activist, including one US citizen, were killed during this offensive (ibid.).

This multidimensional network indicates the broad impact from Hezbollah on members of the population of all ages, in relation to their communication strategies. Moreover, it demonstrates Hezbollah's depth of engagement in various fields of interest to society to better project their message.

Hezbollah was one of the first Islamist movements to use video to record anti-Israeli operations (Khatib, 2012). Videos of 'martyrdom operations' against Israel were produced by younger members, to establish credibility and popularity, and generate a lasting legacy among Hezbollah's followers (ibid., p.12). In addition, posters, rhetoric, and public rallies also increased the movement's popularity. The image management strategies of Hezbollah, in particular, following the thirty-four day war and victory against Israel in 2006 were conspicuous due to their professionally designed 'Divine Victory' campaign (ibid., p.22). Nearly 600 billboards were positioned along the main roads of Beirut, and around its international airport (ibid.). This action aroused interest among the international media, as the message was written in Arabic, French and English (ibid.). Furthermore, as in Harb's (2011) example of Al Manar's Hebrew coverage, Hezbollah positioned billboards with messages in Hebrew at the Israeli border (Khatib, 2012). Thus, for the first time, an Islamist movement chose to utilise a foreign language to disseminate its message (ibid.). When Newsweek (2006) interviewed Mohammad Kawtharani, the creative brain behind the campaign, he emphasised that the language of contemporary media consists of a simple and catchy message, which led the campaign to use the phrase 'Divine Victory', which is also the literal translation of Nasrallah's last name (Khatib, 2012, p.22).

Undoubtedly, it will be important to ascertain the role of foreign languages in AKP's communications when talking to AKP officials, in order to establish what strategies it has employed to improve its image internationally.

2.7.3 Charisma and Rhetoric of Hasan Nasrallah

The Power of Conviction: Nasrallah's Rhetoric and Mediated Charisma in the Context of the 2006 July War (Matar, 2008) studied Hezbollah and Hasan Nasrallah; considering the communication of Nasrallah's charisma and the role of political discourse, taking July 2006 as the main reference point. The author was able to examine the political communication strategies of both Hezbollah and Nasrallah, whilst directing attention principally to the leader rather than the movement (ibid.). A movement or party cannot be separated from its leader, and therefore, choosing to focus on a specific movement and party makes it possible to also focus on its leader, which is an important factor in agenda setting and awareness raising. Matar's (2008) study is significant to this research on the AKP, as Erdoğan's charismatic leadership is appraised in order to understand its bearing on the AKP's political communication strategies.

Hezbollah's emergence into the public arena did not begin until the twenty-first century, in particular following the 2005 elections, in which they increased their number of seats to fourteen (Matar, 2008, pp.124-127). The primary factor in their increasingly public stance was their transformation from a radical Islamist group to a moderate mainstream political party. A number of factors then led to the growing popularity of Hezbollah, including the Iranian revolution, and the rise of other Islamist movements in the region (ibid.). However, it was its ability to garner support from those with different ideological backgrounds (e.g. leftist and nationalist), and its

resistance to Israeli forces (ibid.), that transformed it into a group able to usher in a new “phase of political jihad”, rather than one castigated as fundamentalist or terrorist in orientation (Harb and Leenders, 2005, p.183).

Nasrallah’s appearances on television enhanced his popularity, both among the Lebanese population and in the wider Arab world (Matar, 2008). An increase in Hezbollah’s media channels also had a significant impact on this issue, while his modest lifestyle affirmed his followers, including their traditional way of dressing, promoting an image of asceticism (ibid.). In this thesis’ discussions about Turkey, it will be essential to establish if Erdoğan’s popularity in Turkey relates to his image as one of the “victims of the past system”, as his experiences after the ‘postmodern coup’¹⁶ in February 1997 effected his political career (Cizre, 2016, p.3).

The second focus of the article is on the use of language, in particular as it relates to political discourse. Nasrallah employed two key notions relative to his religious-political discourse: “*jihad* and *muqawama* (resistance), and identity” (Matar, 2008, p.132). His use of the term ‘jihad’ differed from its portrayal by other Islamist movements’, as it is used to refer to resistance. This is a crucial aspect of his discourse, designed to “mobilise Lebanese people as a ‘national collective’” (Matar, 2008, p.133). His speech on July 14, 2006 is an important example of how rhetoric can be used to mobilise the population:

¹⁶ On February 28 1997, when Erbakan’s RP and DYP (Doğru Yol Partisi, True Path Party) had a joined government, the pressure of the military and secular institutions in Turkey led the government fall down (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.4). The main argument was the anti-Kemalist politics of the government (ibid.)

I say to you that we in this battle are faced with two choices – not ‘we’ as in Hezbollah, or as in the resistance, the Hezbollah resistance – but Lebanon as a state, a people, an army, a resistance and a political power – we are faced with two choices: either to submit today to the conditions that the Zionist enemy wants to dictate to us all [...] or we stand steadfast. All we need is to preserve, stand steadfast and confront them united, and I know, and I will bet, that the majority of our people are a people of steadfastness, a *mujahid* people, who can sacrifice, who have no need for pep talks.

(Matar, 2008, p.133)

His appeal was strengthened by involving the entire population, by establishing Zionists¹⁷ as the enemy, and by defining himself as belonging to Lebanon and not Hezbollah. Narrowing rhetoric to focus on a specific identity or political ideology shrinks the audience unambiguously, while also describing the objective as a national one to increase support, as in the case of Nasrallah. Here, it is important to underline that participation leads to moderation; whereas absence leads to radicalisation (Hamid, 2014, p.40).

As in the case of Hezbollah, this research will focus on the role of Erdoğan’s nationalist rhetoric specifically, referring to his use of the of the MB’s Rabia salute, which symbolised the crackdown at Rabia Square by the Egyptian army in 2013 (Börzel, Dandashly and Risse, 2016). After this coup in Egypt, Erdoğan started using the sign to demonstrate his support for the MB. He transformed this sign by employing a national and local focus. For him, that means “One homeland, one state, one flag, one nation” (*Hürriyet*, 2017). I will address this aspect when recounting my non-participant observation of the 2014 presidential election rallies.

¹⁷ According to Avi Shlaim (2000, p.2) Zionism was a national liberation movement seeking to end the Jewish dispersion and “return to Zion,” holy land. However Shlaim (2005) argues that the occupation of Palestine by the Zionist movement transformed them “from a legitimate national liberation movement for the Jews into a colonial power and an oppressor of the Palestinians”.

2.7.4 The Hezbollah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication

The Hizbullah Phenomenon by Khatib, Matar and Alshaer (2014) is a study that covers Hezbollah and its leader Nasrallah; describing it from the communication perspective, while also considering its political evolution. Unquestionably, Hezbollah's influence over the public in Lebanon has partly resulted from its "sophisticated political communication" as attested to in previous studies (Khatib and Matar, 2014, p.1). The change in Hezbollah's public image transformed the 'Party of God' "from an Islamist movement into a mainstream political party" (ibid., p.3). Hezbollah became the image of a nationalist group, rather than an Islamist movement, strengthening its representation of "Arab national force" (ibid., p.4). Indeed, this study argues that the use of political communication strategies was the main driver behind Hezbollah's transformation and success (ibid., p.5).

Unlike previous researches, this study examines the poetry of Hezbollah. Alshaer (2014) argues that poetry has long been an important tool, allowing the movement to reach out to potential voters. Choosing from Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian poets, Hezbollah has predominantly cited Palestinian authors, because their works are important sources of motivation, encouraging resistance against Israel (ibid.). Critical themes such as the "connectedness and continuity of past glories, heroism, certainty of (ibid., p.120) victory, defiance and patience" have also played a central role in the selection of poems (ibid., p.121). This political poetry also highlights the solidarity of pan-Arabs with Hezbollah (ibid.). Clearly poetry functions as a "historical and authentic form of expression", in other words, it is part of "the socio-political fabric of the Arab world" (ibid., p.122). However, poetry does not only play an important role in the Arab world, but is influential in the occident in general (Jankowski, 1991).

Alshaer (2014, p.122) argues that hailing “leaders, heroes, community and values are part of Islamic and Arabic tradition”, as poets aim to create emotional engagement among the public¹⁸. Some of the poems used by Hezbollah have been turned into songs to use on the TV, or as video clips during rallies (ibid.). The videos are designed to portray Hezbollah and the retreat of Israeli soldiers (ibid.).

Undeniably poetry uniquely conveys both identity and tradition, and can inform and bolster the ideological framework of political movements (ibid.). Since Erdoğan’s governance, poetry has played a key role in political discourse (Besli and Özbay, 2010). Erdoğan reads poems occasionally, and the songs the AKP uses are typically derived from the poems or words of significant figures, and are intended to convey an ideological perspective. Erdoğan’s principal inspiration has been the Turkish poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. I will study how the poetry of the latter, and all the poems used by Erdoğan or the AKP have impacted the mobilisation of their constituents. Furthermore reviewing the language of poets will illuminate the ideology contained therein, clarifying the AKP’s message.

2.7.5 Charisma of Imam Khomeini

Having reviewed literature relating to Hezbollah and Nasrallah, this section focusses on Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini. *The Communication of Leadership* (Charteris-Black, 2007) describes Khomeini as one of the most important symbolic figures of the twentieth century. Charteris-Black (2007) argued that the messianic discourse of Khomeini placed him at the epicentre of his context, as a charismatic leader (ibid.,

¹⁸ This oath is still in use by Hezbollah’s members; in particular during public rallies and gatherings (Alshaer, 2014, p.124):

In the name of the blood of the stolen Jerusalem,
We have kept dignity, and we will not forget,
Khyber and the grand battle of *Badr*,
We will remain faithful to the oath, O Nasrallah!

p.137). Recourse to courage and heroism were the two main ideals with which Khomeini sought to inspire his followers. In tandem with this, emphasis on exile is also highly significant, as it represents an opportunity to develop a compelling symbolic figure; i.e. Castro, Mandela and Ghandi (ibid.).

This thesis analyses the importance of the imprisonment of Erdoğan for a period of four months in 1997. He was incarcerated following his reading of a religious poem in the city of Siirt, Turkey. The intention here is to establish whether this event had a similar impact on his image to that of being in exile. There has been a considerable reaction in Turkey to the ‘politics of victimisation’, in particular among the more conservative, and therefore this current research seeks to establish whether this event increased Erdoğan’s popularity, as will be discussed during the in-depth interview process.

On the topic of the charismatic leader, Wright (1990) summarised Khomeini’s charismatic leadership style as follows:

Khomeini represented the strong and charismatic leadership that Iranians have looked to since the day of Cyrus the Great and Darius in the 6th century B.C. His mass appeal stemmed from his impassioned eloquence and an absolute sense of righteousness... In public addresses and taped messages, he could speak as one of the people, not above them, and he used the familiar and comforting idiom of a religion that offered answers to questions of theology as well as of daily life.

(Wright, 1990, p. 59)

Khomeini’s style of leadership has overlapped the profile of the traditional Islamist leader, and, despite Shia ideology, has assisted his advancement in the Islamic world (Charteris-Black, 2007, p.137). One of factors challenging ‘modernity’, and supporting the ‘traditional path’ is the Islamist dress code, particularly comparative

to the Shah, who wore stylish Western clothes. This visual image has enabled Khomeini to reach and inspire many different groups of Muslims all over the world (Charteris-Black, 2007). Khomeini was a critic of Turkey under Atatürk's modernisation, as Iran had formerly imitated Turkey in relation to its Westernisation (ibid.). This comparison, accompanied by his stance against Turkey, also heightened his impact on Muslims in the Middle East.

Khomeini has negotiated a sophisticated relationship with the media, utilising technology, following domestic and international news, and ensuring the live broadcast of his speeches (ibid.). Like Nasrallah, Khomeini's use of visual media tools was enhanced by his understanding of their impact (e.g. flyers, posters, videos and pictures) (ibid.). A further characteristic that increased support for Khomeini was that he was seen to speak as one of the people, rather than placing himself above them, an impact that can also be seen in Turkey (ibid., p.160). Whereas formerly, the average Turkish citizen was unable to find anything in common with condescending politicians, Erdoğan's appeal was that he seemed to be at the head of a new wave spreading through the country, as attested to by his 52 per cent support in the 2014 presidential election (*Hürriyet*, 2014). This encouraged further exploration during my fieldwork of how identification with a politician can affect not only the results of an election, but also the general support for a party or leader.

2.7.6 Muslim Brotherhood's Digital Activism

When focussing on Islamist movements and parties, it is also essential to consider the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the Sunni Islamist movement, founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1926. The text discussed here is particularly relevant to this thesis as it also introduces the role of the digital media. *Ikhwan Web: Digital Activism and*

the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (D'Urbano, 2011) is a PhD research study examining the use of new media by one of the oldest Islamist movements in the Islamic world (Rubin, 2010).

Under Egypt's former dictator, Hosni Mubarak, "access to the mainstream media" was impossible, and it therefore became necessary for the MB to establish its own media channels (D'Urbano, 2011, p.79). The MB's experience with the media dates to the mid-1970s, with its newspaper *Al Da'wa* (ibid., p.80). However, all MB media outlets were closed down by the government between 1984 and 2000 (ibid.). With the rise of digital technologies, Egyptian Islamists began to participate more widely in the online media domain (ibid., p.81). In 2003, MB launched a website in Arabic, and this was later followed by an English version in 2005 (ibid., p.78). The launch of the Arabic website led to the arrest the Editor-in-Chief by government officials in 2004 (ibid., p.81). Following the launch of the English site a further arrest took place; in 2007, the website's supporter, Khairat el-Shater, a senior member of the MB, was imprisoned by the Mubarak regime (ibid.). This led the MB to relocate the website outside of Egypt, to be hosted in the US (ibid.).

The approach in this research clearly demonstrates how representation through the new media can develop a positive impact (ibid., p.83), as demonstrated by the examples of a number of several press releases and articles published on the MB website. For example, when Al-Zawahiri (1951-), the leader of Al-Qaida, accused the MB of accepting democracy, immediately after the 2005 elections in Egypt, a senior MB member stated: "The MB has long stated its acceptance of democracy and political pluralism, as well as a peaceful transfer of power through ballot boxes"

(ibid., p.84). Furthermore, the MB's use of the Internet resulted in greater engagement with the West (ibid., p.88). El-Shatir portrayed this in the following statement:

We believe that the dialogue with the West is the ideal method to bridge the dividing gaps and resolve all grievances. In this regard, we welcome a constructive dialogue that promotes rapprochement among civilizations [...] The ultimate humane interest necessitates that we reinforce dialogue and promote peaceful coexistence amongst people of different races, cultures, and origins on the bases of mutual respect and equality [...]

(Ikhwanweb, 14.03.2006 in D'Urbano, 2011, p.89)

The MB's approach impacted the actions of the US administration, which advocated opening diplomatic channels with the MB, calling on the Egyptian government to extend its ties with the organisation (ibid.). However, the Egyptian revolution in 2011 and the military coup d'état in 2013 changed the dynamics in Egypt, as well as the perspective of the MB (Wickham, 2015). However although it is one of the most up to date studies on the MB, it only considers the time frame up to the so-called Arab uprising in 2011.

Nevertheless, this study will be relevant to consider when conducting in-depth interviews concerning the AKP's social media use, and its impact on the party's political communication stance.

2.7.7 Ennahda: From Islamist Social Movement to Muslim Democratic Political Party

Sharing a similar ideological background with the MB in Egypt, Tunisian Ennahda (Renaissance) is the most influential Islamist party in the country; it has played a more dynamic role since the Tunisian revolution in 2010/2011 (Wolf, 2017). Despite Ennahda's influence there are no ample studies in the literature regarding the political communications or general media use by the movement/party. Wolf's

(2017) *Political Islam in Tunisia* covers Ennahda's history from the 1960s to the present. This is relevant to this doctoral thesis, in that it reveals the process of transition from being a social movement (*haraka*) to a political party (*hizb*). In particular, it considers its leader, Rashed Ghannouchi, from a pragmatic perspective, analysing his impact on the party's transition. The close relationship between Erdoğan and Ghannouchi is another reason for considering the Sunni Islamist party, as it will prove interesting should it emerge that Ennahda is following the model provided by the AKP (Akyol, 2016).

Ghannouchi's support for resistance against "the Western military presence", and thereby of the former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein during the 1990-1991 Iraq war, brought him to prominence as a "leader of an Islamic nation" according to Wolf (ibid., p.95). However, he relatively quickly realised that hard power would not bring peace to the region (ibid.). Being an exile in London proved a turning point in this regard, helping "him to deprovincialise" in terms of diverse Islamic discourse and analysis (ibid., p.97). In summary, living in the West for 27 years, and his "embrace of the Code", assisted him in reconsidering Ennahda and its political motives (ibid., p.98). Ghannouchi started suggesting it adopt a discourse of "Islamic democracy" as a foundation and advocate "Western-style rights for women" (ibid.). The "political strategist", as Wolf (2017, p.95) characterises the Islamist leader, became pragmatically oriented, which encouraged European countries to collaborate with him after the revolution in 2010/11. Furthermore, Ennahda's 10th congress in May 2016 proved to be a milestone; he declared the end of 'Political Islam' by separating the movement from the party, and embracing 'Muslim democracy'.

Sayida Ounissi, Ennahda's International Spokesperson explains this move as follows:

We can no longer use a term [Islamist] so charged with negative connotations... It would be a waste of quite a lot of time and energy for us to take up the task of constantly distancing ourselves from a violent and dangerous ideology which is precisely the sort of model we are fighting against [...] We... [must] make our differences with [the Islamic State] and other extremists clear to all. In a nutshell, Muslim Democrat is the most accurate term to describe what Ennahda is trying to accomplish since the beginning: reconciling Islam and democracy in the Arab World.

(Wolf, 2017, p.160)

Ennahda distancing of itself from the term Islamist can be attributed to the rise of terrorist groups such as DAESH, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram (ibid., p.161). Although Wolf's study does not address this from an 'image-making' perspective, the transition from Islamist social movement to a 'Muslim democratic' political party was a clear signal that the leadership's focus would be less attached to "da'wa¹⁹, education and cultural work" as Marks emphasises in her analysis of *Brookings Institute* (2014). Her research was published in 2014, suggesting that the transition was planned in advance, although it was not declared until 2016, as a means to connect the leadership and Ennahda's base (ibid.). Later, Marks (2016) underlines that this change can be compared to the AKP's pluralistic adaptations in the early years of the party, which led it to concentrate on the economic needs of the people, rather than on ideological differences. Indeed this proved to be another step forward towards professionalization according to Marks (2016), which is part of the process of the Americanisation of political communication, although this is not specifically identified in the article (Negrine, 2008, p.152).

¹⁹ Or 'dawah' as it will be called in this thesis is "the act of inviting a person to the faith (Esposito and Voll, 1996 p.131).

As this thesis takes social movement theory as its analytical framework, Ennahda's transition from a social movement to political party will be compared to the transition undergone by AKP during 2001, as it evolved out of Erbakan's Milli Görüş, changing from an Islamist party to a 'conservative democratic' party (see 3.5.2 for additional details).

2.7.8 Political Communication of the Justice and Development Party in Morocco

The most recent doctoral thesis focussing on the strongest Islamist party in Morocco, the PJD, is the *Islam-Oriented Parties' Ideologies and Political Communication in the Quest for Power in Morocco* (Bouyahya, 2015). The research investigated the PJD's ideological orientation, along with their political communications and their use of communications technology, described as a process of professionalisation. In comparison with D'Urbano's (2011) approach, Bouyahya (2015) delineated between ideology and its professional expression. Bouyahya's research differentiates between radical, reformist and synthetically-created movements. The PJD has been labelled as a reformist party, which, in contrast to radical parties, wishes to transform the nature of power through the use of democratic procedures (Bouyahya, 2015, pp.20-21). The PJD was included in this research, as the intention of the study is to examine the political communications of non-violent Islamist movements.

The professionalisation of the PJD's political communication includes: "opinion polls, the use of political consultants, the creation of a war room, the use of focus groups" (ibid., p.77). The study observes a close relationship between professionalisation and modernisation; claiming that modernisation has changed the election process constructing a new political landscape (ibid.). Americanisation, a

crucial area that will be addressed later in this thesis, is integrated as a component of professionalisation, whereby the process of Americanisation is described as implementing best practices, while transforming society (ibid, p.80). The first visible examples of Americanisation in the PJD were the inclusion of external professionals, advertisers, political trainers and academics in the communication process (ibid., p.77). Thus, as American campaigns are guided by opinion polls and market research, rather than ideology (which had formerly played a crucial role in PJD campaigns), the PJD now engages in a process that is more Americanised in style than ideological (ibid, p.83).

The example of the PJD contributes an approach to Americanisation otherwise not present in the literature concerning the context of Islamist movements and parties. Consequently, this case will be important when evaluating the role of Americanisation in the AKP's communications. The similarities and differences between the PJD's and the AKP's strategies will be highlighted in reference to Americanised campaigning.

2.7.9 Literature on AKP's Political Communication

A journal article, a book chapter, and a think tank analysis were found relating directly to the AKP's political communications. All discuss the practices engaged in by the AKP in relation to political communication theories. Whereas the first two studies are in Turkish, the final one is in English. The studies will be discussed in the following section in order to contrast them with the content of this doctoral thesis.

AKP's 2007 Election Campaign

The War Arena of Political Communication: A Study on AKP's 2007 Election Campaign (Arsan and Can, 2008) is a book chapter, which analysed the political communications of the AKP during the 2007 elections. The value of this work arises from its inclusion of details of interviews undertaken with three representatives from three different agencies (i.e. *Ideha Reklam*, *Konsensus Halkla Iliskiler & Reklam* and *Devr-i Alem*) involved in the AKP election campaigns, all of whom emphasised the importance of the AKP's organisational structure as a determiner of its success (ibid., p.10). A further factor of significance was the use of volunteers, who received an initial fifteen-day training (ibid.). The manager of *Ideha* noted that volunteers travelled from door to door while campaigning for the election of Erdoğan, discussing projects, in order to influence voters through one-to-one contact (ibid., p.13). Talking personally to voters, and shaking their hands, left a positive image of the party and proved more influential and informative than large-scale events (ibid.). The AKP's organisational structure was instrumental in the success of this strategy (ibid., p.14).

Ideha's manager emphasised that they worked with candidates to overcome deficiencies in their rhetoric, body language and general image (ibid., p.11). The manager of *Devr-i Alem* highlighted that their primary focus was on the transference of their message (ibid.). A further key strategy of the AKP was to deliver messages through slogans and speeches (ibid., p.15), with the chief slogan used to refer to projects that started with AKP governance being "No stopping, keep on going" (*Durmak yok, yola devam*) (ibid., p.16). This encouraged voters to support the AKP towards completing its projects (ibid.). Furthermore, the AKP's success in the 2007

elections was assisted by the following: (1) the distribution of coal to 1.2 million families; (2) provision of financial support to families in need; (3) the postponement of agricultural credits; and (4) the creation of 230,000 jobs (ibid.).

Erdoğan's 2007, 2010 and 2011 Balcony Speeches

The article *Discourse Analysis Related to Balcony Speeches* (Göksu and Aslan, 2011) was written by two academics from Istanbul University, after they examined Erdoğan's speeches following the 2007, 2010 and 2011 elections. Although the concept of the balcony speech was introduced to Turkey by Erdoğan, it has been used to great effect worldwide, including by Roosevelt (1882-1945), Mussolini (1883-1945), Lenin (1870-1924), and Chavez (1954-2013) (Göksu and Aslan, 2011, p.2). The authors employed *Power and Discourse* analysis (Van Jisk, 2008) to analyse the selected speeches (Göksu and Aslan, 2011, p.6). The words and notions chosen are crucial in effectively transferring a message to a target group, and when determining the ideological background of a message (ibid, p.8). Although addressing crowds primarily comprising AKP voters, Erdoğan ensured that in all three balcony speeches he crafted his words as the Prime Minister of all Turkish citizens, protecting the rights of his opponents, as well as those of his supporters (ibid). Moreover, to unify his audience Erdoğan used mentions of Atatürk and the modern Turkish Republic to appeal to secular and Kemalist supporters (ibid, p.11). However, in his speech from 2011, Erdoğan emphasised that not only had Istanbul and Ankara won, but also Sarajevo, Ramallah, Damascus, Gaza and Jerusalem (ibid, p.16). This is highly significant, and will be analysed further in this thesis, to quantify the shift in Erdoğan's message between 2002 and 2017, highlighting when precisely he started using an Islam-friendly discourse as highlighted above.

AKP's 2007 Election Success

A Close Look at AKP's Election Success by Güliz Dinç (2008) is an analysis of the election results produced for the German think tank *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*. In her unravelling of the factors informing the AKP's election success, Dinç (2008) focused on the 2007 general election in Turkey. She finds three important to be crucial considerations: (1) Erdoğan's charismatic leadership, as he uses interpersonal and mass communication techniques during the election; (2) the acknowledgement and emphasis on people's economic and social problems; (3) and the use of polarisation and crisis events as a positive, to assert that the only option available is the AKP (ibid., p. 1).

These 16-page research findings relied on ethnographic research data collected in July and August 2007 (ibid.). Dinç discussed the different strategies employed by the AKP, starting with the "Election Guide" handbook outlining recommendations for the propaganda activities of the volunteers (ibid., p.6). While the guide did explain how to campaign, it is perhaps more important to consider the number of volunteers attracted to the party; a staggering total of 1.6 million (ibid., p.6). The researcher explained that the majority of this number were younger voters and that they were instrumental in viral campaigning, sharing the AKP's message with their close friends, relatives and family members (ibid.).

Dinç (ibid., p.9) characterised the AKP's face-to-face and one-on-one field strategy, which included visiting shops, restaurants, talking directly to the people, "distributing clothes and food for the needy", was a continuation of RP practices. Another important fact was the inclusion of women in campaigning. In particular the

members of the party, and the wives of MP's were placed in the foreground to reach out to this large swathe of the population (ibid., p.10). Moreover, Dinç (ibid.) recalled witnessing some moments that motivated people to lend their support to the party. In particular noting the emotional relationship between Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, founder of the AKP and former President, as inspirational for her personally.

Undoubtedly, the economic crisis that preceded the AKP's election in 2002, was another important factor in its swift growth, as was the trust it was able to engender in the electorate (Dinç, 2008). Certainly, disillusionment with alternative parties was one of the main success stories behind AKP's victory in 2007 elections (ibid.). Another important factor mentioned in the article was the e-memorandum from the military underscoring the importance of democracy in Turkey. In opposition to the election of Gül as President, the military published an e-memorandum, which had a positive impact on the AKP's election results. Dinç (2008) claimed it is part of AKP's strategy to polarise society before every election with a specific event to justify its own position. This claim will be discussed in this thesis to understand how and if divisiveness and polarisation functions as a political communication strategy.

Relations between the AKP's political PR machine and mainstream journalists

When discussing the literature related to the AKP's political communications, it is important to highlight the relationship between the AKP's political PR machine, mainstream journalists, and the media. The news information flow in Turkey is very high in terms of transmission to the public (Yesil, 2016). 98 per cent of the population have access to televisions (ibid., p.4). "25 national, 210 local, close to 400 cable and satellite channels", and there are more than one thousand radio stations, as

well as “36 national and hundreds of local newspapers”²⁰ (ibid., p.5). Although the media scene was more Kemalist and centre-oriented in the AKP’s first two terms, as the ruling government increased its dominance media ownership changed hands, in particular between 2008 and 2011 when “AKP-friendly media companies” entered the media landscape (ibid., p.88). This process peaked when the Dogan Media Company, which owned Turkey’s largest media outlets, such as Hürriyet Newspaper, CNN Türk, Kanal D, was sold to Erdoğan Demirören, a pro-government businessman, in March 2018 (*VOA News*, 2018). Since 2011, the mainstream media has become a key PR tool for the AKP, disseminating its message. In particular, Erdoğan appointed “managers, editors, and columnists in various outlets” to readily control the mainstream media (Yesil, 2016, p.91). Yalçın Akdoğan, Erdoğan’s former Chief Advisor, writes for pro-government Daily Star²¹ (ibid.). Similarly, Yiğit Bulut, Erdoğan’s Advisor of Economic Affairs, has a column at the Star (ibid.), whereas Ibrahim Kalın, Erdoğan’s Presidential Spokesperson and Ambassador, writes for the Daily Sabah, the first pro-government English language newspaper (Stein, 2014). Through this and many other outlets, Erdoğan is able to deliver his message to a wider audience (ibid.).

(Appendix I illustrates Turkey’s key agenda-setting news media players)

Differences in the literature about the AKP

The studies detailed above clarify that despite the AKP having been in power since 2002, there is a serious lack of research specifically concerning the party’s communications and its leader. The principal deficiency noted in the literature is the

²⁰ These numbers are based on Bilge’s (2016) *Media in New Turkey*, which was published in 2016. After the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, nearly 130 media outlets were shut down (*BBC*, 2016).

²¹ Before *Star* he wrote for the pro-government *Yeni Şafak* (Bilge, 2016, p.91).

lack of criticism of the party which threatens the studies' academic credibility. All the studies concentrate on the positive features of the AKP's communications. In contrast, this research aims to investigate how an Islamist party, which diverged from type by considering sensitive issues such as human rights and freedom of speech in its early days, resulting in international approval, later developed an "Islam-sensitive" discourse by shifting its stance (Cizre, 2016, p.3).

The main differences between this research and the studies summarised above are: (1) time frame, (2) analytical framework, and (3) the research angle. Whereas two of the studies concerning the AKP focused on a single election, only one compared three elections by looking at Erdoğan's speeches. Furthermore, none of them scrutinised a time frame of 15 years [2002-2017]. Aside from the time frame and focus, it will be the comprehensiveness and methodological aims that make this thesis unique. In concert with political communication and social movement theory, the ethnographic research includes in-depth interviews conducted in Turkey, and references 60 of Erdoğan's speeches (all subjected to quantitative content analysis), to guarantee careful consideration of the research question. Importantly, the research will take the reader back to 2002, and provide a narrative of events up to 2017, concentrating specifically on the evolution of the AKP's political message to answer the second research question, as well as on Erdoğan's charismatic leadership role (third research question), which is especially significant to investigate in terms of the development of anti-Israel discourse from 2009/2010 onwards (Aviv, 2017). Furthermore, there is currently no single study focussing on the AKP's communication strategies in English that can be compared to similar studies of Hezbollah, and thus this research aims to fill an important gap in the English

language literature on this subject also.

2.8 Conclusion

The former studies investigating Islamist movements and parties, and the three researches about the AKP presented in this chapter clearly revealed there is a dearth of literature concerning Islamist political parties, related movements, and their communication strategies. This study will play a key role in addressing this gap by providing evidence from a broad perspective over a longer time frame than has previously been attempted. It will highlight, as the most critical period, the aftermath of events in Davos in 2009 and Mavi Marmara in 2010, and 2014, the year of the first presidential election in Turkey's history, which represents the apex of Erdoğan's dominance (Cizre, 2016). While considering the analytical framework, and the literature about other Islamist parties and movements outlined in this chapter, the aim is to produce a unique study model for use by researchers conducting other case studies in the future. Undoubtedly Erdoğan is the "most influential statesmen of our time", and his party, a unique model in the Middle East, will continue to play a key role in the wider region (at least in Muslim populated countries), despite his increasingly negative policies regarding the development of human rights and freedom of speech (Cagaptay, 2017, p.3).

The following chapter considers the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire and historical development of Islamism from the days of the Ottoman Empire to the rise of the AKP. This historical account provides valuable background information and context to frame the analysis of the contemporary AKP and its Islamist perspective.

Chapter 3. Modernisation of the Ottoman Empire and the Development of Islamism

I am an AKP supporter since Erbakan's Refah Party. I am supporting these guys because they have to be democratic in order to welcome democracy in Turkey. I cannot imagine an AKP without Erdoğan. He has experience. But the case is that AKP had a collective mind which disappeared after 2010.

-JO2²²

3.1 Introduction

The leader of the *Ennahda* (Renaissance) movement in Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi, stated at Ennahda's congress in May 2016, that following the 2011 revolution "Political Islam has lost its justification in Tunisia" (*Le Monde*, 2016). In an interview with *Le Monde* (2016), Ghannouchi described Ennahda as a political, democratic and civil party, capable of embracing the values of modern civilised nations. When Erdoğan created the AKP in 2001, he claimed his followers had "removed the shirt of Milli Görüş" (*Milliyet*, 2003), emphasising the party had renounced "the traditional aims and discourses of political Islamism and embraced secular democracy" (Başer and Öztürk, 2017, p.107). In an interview for *The New York Times* in 2003, he explained the shift in his political ideology as follows:

A political party cannot have a religion. Only individuals can. Otherwise, you'd be exploiting religion, and religion is so supreme that it cannot be exploited or taken advantage of.

(*The New York Times*, 2003)

The above views consider the role of Islam within political frameworks, and choose to emphasise 'change' and 'reform' as guiding their political governance. Whereas the former statement was taken from a discussion in 2016, the second example dates

²² Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014. As addressed in Chapter 4.5, confidentiality coding is applied in this research (JO stands for Journalist, PO for Politician, AC for Academic and TT for Think Tank).

to the early days of the AKP. Nevertheless, both were uttered as the parties in question sought to open up internally to win over a non-conservative audience, and globally to align more with the West, with the aim of becoming “mainstream Islamist” (Hamid and McCants, 2017, p.1). Although the statements distance the parties from a sense of embodied religious ideology, Islamism is the principal “source of their popular support” (ibid., p.3). Certainly this reality not only affects the AKP and Ennahda, it is a phenomenon affecting other parties and movements in the region, such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt and Jordan, and the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco (Hamid and McCants, 2017).

The aim of this research is to evaluate the changes in the AKP’s Islamist approach and ideology over time, carefully observing shifts resulting from relevant milestones. Consequently, the current chapter will point to Islamism and its impact, first in Ottoman Empire, and then in the modern Turkish Republic. That the focus of the study is on a party that was established from the ashes of an Islamist movement increases the importance of conceptualising Islamism and framing the party’s position relative to critical turning points. This will assist our understanding of the political identity of today’s AKP and its leader, and answer the research question regarding the role of religion in the political communication of the party.

The next section continues by offering a definition of Islamism, to explain how it will be framed in this doctoral thesis. Later, the period of modernisation of the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will be examined, to advance understanding of the emergence of Islamism, and to illuminate Erdoğan’s previous affiliation to the Milli Görüş. This will lead to a greater appreciation of

what the AKP represents; a party which was once “presented by the United States as a model for the Muslim world” (Eligür, 2010, p.249).

3.2 Concept of Islamism

The political aspect of Islam, variously known as ‘Islamism’, ‘Political Islam’, or ‘Post-Islamism’, describes the instrumentalisation of Islam by an institution, group, organisation, or political party (Denoeux, 2002, p.61). Bobby Sayyid (2014, p.9), Professor of Social Theory, describes the aim of Islamism as to establish “a political order centred on the name of Islam”, locating religion centrally in the political sphere. Denoeux (2011, p.60) sees this as a “political response to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future”. This is on the one hand a reaction to specific policies (Esposito, 1997), and on the other a response to “secular modernity” (Bokhari and Senzai, 2013, p.6). Ismail Kara, a prominent scholar of Islamism in Turkey, offers a broader description of Islamism:

Islamism is an activist and modernist movement which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries methodologically and cleverly rescued the Islamic world from Western colonisation, tyrannical administrators, slavery, mimicry and superstitions by causing Islam as a whole (faith, worship, morality, philosophy, politics, education etc.) to “once again” civilise and dominate life.

(Kara, 2014, p.17)

For Kara (ibid.), the function of Islamism is to counter ‘Western colonisation’. In his comprehensive description he analyses this from a wider vantage point than previously mentioned scholars. Similarly, in his *Making Islam Democratic*, Bayat (2007, p.6) argues that Islamism emerged to mobilise the middle-class to resist established economy, politics and culture. Whereas both scholars centralise ‘the other’ as the main aim, there is a significant difference between them. Bayat (2013, p.x) asserts that Islamists’ principal aim is to form “an Islamic state”, as in the case

of Iran (ibid.). The failures in Iran and Turkey in the late 1990s led Bayat (2013) to advance a new term, post-Islamism, to define the process of embracing democracy and combining faith and freedom, and the objectives of a “secular democratic state with a religious society”. Whereas Erbakan’s Refah Party (RP) represented Islamism for Bayat (2013, p.85), the AKP is the first post-Islamist party in Turkey. In contrast, Kara (2013) never discusses the idea of an Islamic state, instead framing an Islamist struggle within the secular order. He argues that there is no marked difference between the RP and AKP (Kara, 2017), as both Milli Görüş and the AKP are modernist movements (Kara, 2013). Erbakan never challenged the established system, and yet his harsh criticism of it led Erbakan to appear to be an anti-establishment politician (Kara, 2013). A closer examination of Bayat, Kara and Sayyid lend support to the claim that Kara (2013) and Sayyid’s (2014) description is more adequate than Bayat’s considering the different political dynamics in Turkey, relative to those in Iran. In this regard, I prefer to use the frame of ‘Islamism’ for the AKP, in the way Kara (2013) and Sayyid (2014) do.

3.3 Modernisation in the Ottoman Empire

Eric Jan Zürcher (1993, p.18) noted, “Turkey cannot be understood without reference to its Ottoman past”. Therefore, to effectively assess the impact of Islamism in Turkey and the birth of the AKP I turn now to Turkey’s Ottoman past. Turkey has often been presented as the successor state to the Ottoman State, and so, to understand modern Turkey, it is useful to review the process of modernisation that characterised the Ottoman Empire of the eighteenth century, as it had a considerable impact on politics and society.

The signing of the *Treaty of Karlowitz* in 1699 was a significant event for the

Ottoman Empire, as it ended its uninterrupted expansion and led to its first significant loss of territory (Berkes, 1998). This turning point caused considerable introspection and the beginning of an interregnum period, which saw the start of a steady decline during the reign of Abdulhamid I (1774 to 1789), which was followed by the rule of Sultan Selim III (1789 to 1807) (Berkes, 1998, p.76). Following a number of defeats, Selim III modernised the Ottoman army, opening new military schools inspired by European models (ibid.). Hanioglu (1995, p.8) noted that the “adoption of western technology” proved a further means of attaining superiority over the West.

The steps taken also included some political modernisation, as apparent in the form of a number of social reforms. A significant step towards modernisation, which had a lasting impact on Ottoman society, consisted of the introduction of a new education system. Throughout the Ottoman Empire, the schools had always been *madrasas* (i.e. religious schools), in which children were primarily taught an Islamic curriculum. However, alongside these *madrasas*, Sultan Selim III introduced a new type of educational system, based on European schooling, and including subjects including medicine and engineering (Karpas, 2001). The primary influence behind this new Western-oriented education system and political renewal was revealed in reports by European-educated bureaucrats (ibid.). These intellectuals had returned home having been captivated by Europe’s development, and were convinced that the only way to halt the decline of the Empire would be to imitate the strategies of Western countries, France in particular (ibid.). During this period, the palace in consultation with high-ranking bureaucrats, agreed that only through modernisation would the Empire’s fortunes be resurrected (ibid.).

3.3.1 Sultan Selim III: Symbol of Modernisation

The modernisation of the Ottoman Empire was first embodied in the private lives of its Sultans. Selim III, following the example of Louis XVI (who reigned between 1774 and 1792), even ensured his children were taught French from an early age (Zürcher, 1993, p.25). He established embassies in London (1793), Vienna (1794), Berlin (1795), and Paris (1796), which then became further significant means for Ottoman bureaucrats to acquire knowledge of Western diplomacy, allowing the Sultan to build strong relationships with European countries and politicians (ibid.). This process was continued by Selim's successor, Sultan Mahmud II (1807 to 1839) whose reforms effected all aspects of the Empire, from politics to education and even social life (ibid.). Although the changes undertaken were portrayed as actions proceeding from new progressive policies by the Caliphate, and characterised as part of a process of renewal and development, they ultimately heralded a long period of decline (Berkes, 1998).

Following Mahmud II, was Sultan Abdulmecid I (1839 to 1861); he was responsible for introducing a crucial reform process in 1839, called the *Tanzimat* (Karpas, 2001). Under this reform, the education system became more coherent and was institutionalised through the establishment of a new Ministry of Education, which became an important arm of the state (Zürcher, 1993). Moreover, changes were made to the mechanisms of bureaucracy, including provincial administration, taxation and communication (ibid.). A significant example of this was the adoption of printing, which was recognised as a useful European invention and introduced in 1727, attracting a *fatwa* (religious opinion) from the *ulama* (religious scholars), the strongest religious and most respected authority in the Ottoman Empire (Hourani,

Khoury and Wilson, 1993, p.23). Thus, the *ulama* were instrumental in the process of modernisation. The reforms made by Selim III and Mahmud II were characterised at the time as undertaken “for the sake of religion and State” (ibid., p.53). Although the *Tanzimat* period witnessed the institution of reforms throughout the Empire, they were arguably too late, as it was already faltering approaching an accentuated decline. The Empire’s difficulties proved to be an important opportunity for the British Empire, when it sought concessions from it, both economically and politically (Zürcher, 1993).

3.3.2 Abdulhamid II and Islamism

If we want to rejuvenate, find our previous force, and reach our old greatness, we ought to remember the fountainhead of our strength. What is beneficial to us is not to imitate the so-called European civilization, but to the Sharia, the source of our strength ... Mighty God, I can be your slave only and ask only your help. Lead us on the right path.

-Abdulhamid II (in Karpat, 2001)

The reform and modernisation process continued until Abdulhamid II’s reign (1876 to 1909) (Karpat, 2001). Reflecting upon Abdulhamid II’s reign is important here, as there has been some discussion in Turkey in recent years that Erdoğan is following in the footsteps of Abdulhamid II, as I will explore later (Kırmızı, 2016).

Abdulhamid II received a traditional education “from private religious scholars who were known for their erudition and knowledge of state affairs” (Karpat, 2001, p.160). His education resulted in him taking an Islamist stance throughout his life (ibid, p.158). In fact, ‘the Hamidian period’, named after Abdulhamid II, included opposition to some facets of Western civilisation as he sought to establish a political

means of uniting Muslims around the world under his Caliphate²³, leading to criticisms of his reign from both orientalist and Turkish secularists alike (ibid., p.158). However, it is interesting to note that Karpas (ibid., p.155) characterises Abdulhamid II as the most Europeanised Sultan, describing him as listening to European music, having a passion for theatre, speaking French, drinking wine occasionally, and demonstrating a preference for European amenities (ibid., p.162). Although Western countries and their leaders regarded him as a religious caliph²⁴, and an enemy of civilisation and enlightenment, his admiration for Western developments led him to continue with reforms to both the government and education, transforming Ottoman society during his reign (Karpas, 2001, p.4). There were clearly disparities between Abdulhamid II's political stance and his personal lifestyle. During the in-depth interviews in Turkey, I will be considering Abdulhamid II's political stance, investigating any parallels with Erdoğan that might lead the interviewees to think of Erdoğan as continuing the vision of Abdulhamid II. This will be relevant to building understanding of the charismatic features of Erdoğan, which is one of the research questions, as Abdulhamid II's Islamist ideology popularised him, adding to his charismatic image among the people, both during and after his reign (Sirma, 2000).

The Empire had entered a period of ideological and physical fragmentation as a result of previous Sultan's modernisation policies, and a series of battlefield defeats, and it was continuing to decline relatively on the international stage (Karpas, 2001). Against this backdrop, Abdulhamid II set about forging a new policy of Islamism to counteract European encroachment on his lands (ibid., p.12). His Islamist policy was

²³ "The rule or reign of a caliph or chief Muslim ruler" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

²⁴ "The chief Muslim civil and religious ruler, regarded as the successor of Muhammad" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

based on *Ümmet*, derived from the Arabic word ‘Ummah’²⁵, and aimed to create a universal religious community among Muslims (ibid., p.12). This political reinvention of the Empire’s position established a new political foundation with which to bind Muslims together (ibid.).

Abdulhamid II’s policy came to be known as ‘Pan-Islamic’ in Western world, and was widely regarded as modern Islam (Landau, 1990). French journalist Gabriel Charmes was one of the first to use the term ‘Pan Islam’ in his article *La Situation de la Turquie*, published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in Paris during the 1880s (ibid., p.1). The term Pan-Islam became rapidly popularised in mainstream discourse, and was discussed in the British media, as well as the domains of academia and politics, subsequently reaching the international arena (ibid., p.2). Landau (1990) argued that Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism and Pan-Hellenism shared similarities with the political steps taken during the reign of Abdulhamid II. During the same era, the writings and meetings held by Young Ottomans, and groups of intellectuals employed the term *Ittihad-ı Islam* (Union of Islam) (ibid., p.2). In the Arab world, the *al-Urwa al-wuthqa* journal, published by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, the founder of Islamism in Egypt, used the term *Ittihad-ı Islam* for the first time in 1884 (Landau, 1990, p.3). These examples indicate that, by the end of the nineteenth century, Muslim intellectuals and politicians were making frequent use of the terms *Pan-Islam* and *Ittihad-ı Islam*, in particular to describe their political project to unite all Muslims. The terms *Ittihad-ı Islam*²⁶ was used within the Ottoman Empire, and *Pan-Islam* was the interpretation of it as understood in Europe (ibid.).

²⁵ “The world community of Muslims” (Mandaville, 2004, p.2).

²⁶ By considering Kara’s (2015) definition of Islamism, I will use Islamism instead of *Ittihad-ı Islam* during the discussion of Abdulhamid II’s Islamist policies.

Intellectuals under Abdulhamid II's rule followed three steps to support the policy of *Ittihad-ı Islam* (Bulac, 2005, p.59). Firstly, they shared the common aim of returning to the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah (i.e. the sayings and traditions of the Prophet), freeing religion from those aspects they viewed as arising from superstition, and which had infiltrated the religion, contributing novel ideas (Bulac, 2005, p.59). Secondly, they believed the door to *Ijtihad* (i.e. independent reasoning) should be open, to establish solutions to current social, political, economic and religious issues (Bulac, 2005: 59). Finally, they considered the 'soul of Jihad' should be awoken, in order to battle in unity against the enemy, leading to a popular social awakening (Bulac, 2005, p.60). These steps arose because the Ottoman Empire was seeking to combat its disintegration in parallel with modernisation. It is therefore impossible to compare these policies with those of Erdoğan, because the Islamism process referred to here took place under a Muslim caliphate when the Ottoman Empire was still intact. In this manner, theologian Taftazani defines the fundamental responsibilities of a caliph as follows:

The Caliph is the representative of the Prophet, on the one hand, and of the nation, on the other... [He] is the representative and leader of the Islamic nation in administering the affairs to the state and observing the interests of the nation. The power and authority that he possesses are directly derived from the nation.

(Taftazani, 1917, p.447 in Ardiç, 2012, p.167)

Despite the differences in legal framework, as one leader is a Caliph and considered holder of the Islamic law, and the other governs a modern secularist state, I will contrast the steps taken by Abdulhamid II with Erdoğan's pursuit of Islamisation of the country as evidenced in his messages and discourse (Cizre, 2016). More importantly, I will discover whether Erdoğan's Islamist approach elicits memories of that of Abdulhamid II, one of the Sultans most highly-reputed by the conservative

majority in Turkey (Kırmızı, 2016).

Modernist Movements Challenging Islamist Policies

During the reign of Abdulhamid II, a number of forces, foreign as well as domestic, attempted to prevent the spread of Islamist policies (Hanioğlu, 1995, p.17). In 1889, four students²⁷ from a military medical college in Istanbul founded the Ottoman Unity Society (Turkish: *İttihadi Osmani Cemiyeti*) (Zürcher, 2010, p.97), which seven years later, was renamed after *İttihat ve Terakki* (i.e. the Committee of Union and Progress, CUP) (ibid., p.98). During the Armenian crisis (1894-96), when Abdulhamid II was experiencing considerable difficulties and the influence of the CUP was increasing in the Empire (Zürcher, 1993, p.87), Abdulhamid II's Islamist policies, in particular his unification project, were criticised by CUP members, representing the modernist wing of the Ottoman intelligentsia and bureaucracy (Hanioğlu, 1995, p.7). However, the CUP's ideology of modernisation along Western lines garnered no influence within the Ottoman Empire until 1908 (ibid, p.10). By 1908, however, they had begun to exert greater influence, resulting in the birth of the Turkish Republic (Gencer, 2008). In 1908, when the *Second Constitutional Period* was announced, new reforms transformed the Caliphate into a more secular institution (ibid.).

A further significant opposition movement that emerged in addition to the CUP during the final days of the Ottoman period, was an organisation known as the 'Young Turks' (Turkish: *Jön Türkler*, originally from French: *Les Jeunes Turcs*), which had a branch in Paris promoting modernisation of "Ottoman intelligentsia and bureaucracy" (Hanioğlu, 1995, p.7). The Young Turks were sent from the Ottoman

²⁷ Ibrahim Temo, Abdullah Cevdet, Ishak Sücuti and Ali Hüseyinzade (Zürcher, 2010, p.97).

Empire to France to study scientific advances and experience Western progress, with the aim of implementing developments in the Ottoman Empire, thus enabling it to regain its place in history (Zürcher, 2010, p.107). However, this movement proved to be a threat to the Ottoman Empire in particular, due to Abdulhamid II's Islamism policies (Gencer, 2008). Although Abdulhamid II favoured modernisation (Karpas, 2001), it was sufficient for these movements to rescue the Empire from recession (ibid.)

Erdoğan is facing similar challenges today. Occasionally, he is the target of criticism from his own party members due to his harsh political stance (Cagaptay, 2017). In particular, it was during the Gezi Park protests²⁸ in 2013 that the first disagreements inside the party emerged (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). To that end, it was interesting to explore, during the in-depth interviews with party members, to what extent conflict is present and how tolerant Erdoğan is when dealing with challengers.

3.4 Islamism in Modern Turkey

The period from the end of the Ottoman Empire to the years following World War I witnessed the nascence of various Islamist movements and parties (Karpas, 2001). The birth of the Turkish Republic created new political paradigms, with the traditional autocratic governance model adhered to under the Ottoman Empire replaced by a modern, Western style approach, focussed on secularism (ibid.). Samuel Huntington (1993, p.42) described Turkey as a “torn society”, divided between a political elite, which considered itself a part of the West, and a larger, more religious grouping, that viewed itself as part of the Muslim Middle East.

²⁸ The Gezi Park protests started on 28th May 2013 when the AKP announced that it would rebuild Taksim square removing trees and green areas. Within a very short period of time, the dispute transformed into a nationwide massive protests against the AKP and its policies (Cizre, 2016).

The new social circumstances and the emergent one-party state²⁹ produced a number of difficulties in terms of institutionalising Islam in politics, as was apparent by the end of the 1960s. Previously, the role of Islam had been highlighted by publications by poets and Islamist activists such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873-1936), Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) and Sezai Karakoç (1933-) (Bora and Gültenkingil, 2005). However, immediately following the establishment of the Republic, Islamic activities were banned in Turkey (Kara, 2014). At this time, the *Nakşibendi*³⁰ Sufi orders organised themselves into an underground movement, with the intention of spreading the word of Islam throughout Turkish households (Kara, 2014). Although they were not wholly successful in implementing an Islamic identity, they provided a fertile foundation for the intellectual classes, who used poetry, plays, and novels to focus on ideological Islam (ibid.). These groups included Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topcu (1909-1975), and Sezai Karakoç, all of whom published literary journals after the 1930s (IDP, 2016). This was also the first use of the media in modern Turkish history (ibid.).

The following section focuses on these three intellectuals and their ideologies, as they proved highly influential at creating a new Islamist narrative. Hakan Yavuz (2003), a Professor of Political Science, also explains that it was these thinkers who inspired Erdoğan in his youth. Indeed, it is well known that Erdoğan enjoys reading poems (Besli and Özbay, 2010). The poems he most prefers are those by Kısakürek and Karakoç (ibid.). Consequently to understand Erdoğan's Islamist stance, it is necessary to understand the ideological messages conveyed by these individuals.

²⁹ When the Turkish Republic was founded Mustafa Kemal, first President of Turkey, introduced the one-party rule in 1923 which lasted until 1946 (Özbudun, 1976).

³⁰ Nakşibendi is a Sufi order created in 14th century to spread the word of Islam, first in Asia, then in the Middle East (Mardin, 1993).

3.4.1 Necip Fazıl Kısakürek

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, was a prominent Turkish poet, who attempted to Islamise the Turkish people using the medium of literature (Yavuz, 2003, p.116). His ideology can be summarised by reflecting on the following three beliefs:

(1) Turkish-Muslim society had lost its ties with the past by losing its ties with the language, morality and historical memory as a result of Westernisation policies. (2) The Kemalist reforms deliberately sought to ‘destroy’ the inner spiritual power of the Turkish nation. (3) This project of de-Islamization could be reversed with the rise of new ‘ruling elite’ who shared a Turkish Islamic cognitive map of revival. In other words, by giving the youth a mission to restore memory and an Islamo-Turkish identity, Kısakürek mixed nationalism with Islam and offered an emotional attachment to political activity.

(Yavuz, 2009, p.138)

Kısakürek’s approach directly relates to Kemalism and references Mustafa Kemal, because loss of the Ottoman language was one aspect of the top-down imposed modernisation program introduced by Mustafa Kemal (Sayyid, 2003). The process of modernisation under Mustafa Kemal created many enduring problems according to the Islamist ideologue, who characterises his leadership as overseeing a process of deliberate “de-Islamisation” (Yavuz, 2003, p.138). In order to redress the damage done, Kısakürek emphasised the value of poems and ideological publications. In 1943, Kısakürek published the *Büyük Doğu* (*Great East*) journal, which focused on Islamic ideology, criticising the modernisation of Turkey (Duran, 2005, p.132). The primary aim of his books, poems, and journal was to encourage the Turkish population to regenerate an Islamic consciousness for itself, practicing religion based on the Quran and Sunnah (Özdenören, 2005, p.136). Moreover, *Büyük Doğu* did not simply focus on Turkey, it also underlined the importance of eradicating the borders between Muslim nations, to facilitate the building of an ‘Ummah’, delivering Islamic unity (ibid, p.143). In addition to *Büyük Doğu*, Kısakürek founded the *Büyük Doğu Cemiyeti* in 1949 (*Great East Community*), the purpose of which was to organise

conferences in Anatolia to spread his ideology (ibid, p.142).

In 2014, in one of his speeches, Erdoğan explained that Kısakürek had made a valuable contribution to the self-confidence of the people (*Hürriyet*, 2014). He even attributed the expanding Turkish film industry to Kısakürek (ibid.). Kısakürek's activism was highly significant for Erdoğan, and it is referenced occasionally in his speeches, in particular when addressing younger audiences, as mentioned later in this thesis.

3.4.2 Sezai Karakoç

A further influential figure in Turkish history was Sezai Karakoç; he was arguably the most important figure when considering the *Medeniyet* (civilization in English) project, which was discussed during the final third of the twentieth century (Yavuz, 2003). This project relates to physical, metaphysical, moral and cultural norms (ibid.). Karakoç published the *Diriliş* (resurrection in English) journal to circulate his ideas regarding Islamic thought, culture and art (Karatas 2005, p.979); it proved an important tool in bringing young people together. Prior to publishing this journal, he contributed to Kısakürek's *Büyük Doğu* between 1950 and 1955 (ibid, p.980), revealing that both poets share a common ideological background. The *Diriliş* journal served to foster a Muslim renaissance in literature, art, culture and Islamic thought in general (ibid, 2005).

We need to reconsider ourselves in terms of civilisation and ideals. We need to start our own renaissance to view the world from our own spirit. In short, we need to revive!

-Sezai Karakoç (cited in Karataş, 2005, p.984)

Karakoç summarised the three responsibilities of Muslims as: (1) to know oneself; (2) to know the East; and (3) to have a deep knowledge of Western philosophy and

literature (Karataş, 2005, p.981). By emphasising the ‘East’ he was referring to the oriental world (ibid.). He further classified the three different political forms of the nation and state: (1) great nations and states (i.e. planning for over 100 years); (2) those aiming to maintain the status-quo in the international arena; and (3) small nations and states, which lack vision and message (ibid: 983). He was convinced that it was vital for Turkey to become a ‘great nation’ and a great power, able to influence world politics (ibid.). For this reason European Union (EU) membership was an important opportunity for Turkey to position itself against Russia (ibid.). However, he viewed an Islamic Union as the ideal guarantee for ‘liberation’, as, without this, no safety could be guaranteed, neither for Turkey nor for any other Muslim country (ibid, p.984). For Karakoç, the Middle East was not only a geographical region, but also a representation of both civilisation and culture, and the ideal region in which to implement Islamic Unity and the concept of *Medeniyet* (ibid.).

Following the failed coup in 2016, Erdoğan explained that there was no longer any need for the EU (*BBC Türkçe*, 2017). By contrast, he has emphasised on many occasions that Turkey could rise to become one of the world’s ten best performing economies (*Yeni Şafak*, 2017). This reflects Karakoç’s political views, in particular concerning the dream of creating a *Medeniyet*, a new civilisation. Erdoğan’s political message will be analysed in view of Karakoç’s ideological stance, to identify any similarities of relevance to Erdoğan’s approach.

3.5 Necmettin Erbakan and the Milli Görüş

As summarised above, after the demise of the Ottoman Empire it was individual

thinkers and activists, rather than institutions, that attempted to raise awareness of Islamic ideology among the younger generation in the years to 1969 (Yavuz, 2003). This year marked a critical turning point, in terms of institutionalisation of Islamic views, with the entrance of Necmettin Erbakan into the political arena (Uçar, 2000). The engineering professor, who had been educated in Turkey and Germany, swiftly rose to become the most important figure representing political Islam in Turkey (Uçar, 2000). He led the Milli Görüş, the ideology of which is explained in Section 3.5.1 below.

In terms of the origins of the AKP, Erbakan's movement played a key role, as the founders of the AKP (Erdoğan and Gül) were members of his movement from a young age (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). Hence, the role of Erbakan, the history of the parties he founded, and his political approach will be outlined in Section 3.5.2, to provide the backdrop against which the formation of Erdoğan's views took place during his youth, and early political career. I will investigate the significance of links between Erbakan and Erdoğan, despite the fact that he stepped away from the Milli Görüş position when founding the AKP (*Milliyet*, 2003).

3.5.1 Milli Görüş Ideology

Zionists are seeking to assimilate Turkey and pull us from our historical Islamic roots through integrating Turkey with the European Economic Community. Since the European Community is a single state, Turkey's membership means being a single state with Israel. The goal is to create a Greater Israel by integrating Turkey into the Community.

-Necmettin Erbakan (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.6)

Erbakan's ideology describes the movement he founded; *Milli Görüş* literally translates as 'National Outlook'. However, although the name 'Milli' literally means 'national', in this context it is better understood in terms of Islamic values (Hale and

Özbudun, 2010, p.5). Erbakan summarises the ideal behind Milli Görüş in the following sentences:

Milli Görüş is the outlook of our people. Milli Görüş is identical with Sultan Fatih's ideology when he conquered Istanbul in 1453. Today the only solution for the problems is Milli Görüş.

(Uçar, 2000, p.77)

Sultan Fatih is also known as 'Mehmed the Conquerer', as he conquered Constantinople in 1453, wresting it from the Byzantine Empire (Somel, 2005, p.260). In the quotation, Erbakan does not only reference to the Ottoman Empire, he also ratifies its policies, drawing parallels between his movement and the objectives of the Ottoman Empire (Uçar, 2000).

During the latter half of the twentieth century in particular, Islamists were impressed by socialist discourse. The policy of Milli Görüş was referred to as *Adil Düzen* (Just Order in English), and presented as a third way, an alternative to capitalism and socialism (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.8). *Adil Düzen* describes the global system as a 'slave system', supported by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other organisations, with the sole aim of developing a 'true private enterprise regime' (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.8).

In contrast Erbakan's policy drew on *Othering*, approaching politics from an ideological vantage point, describing a "fundamental conflict between the Western and Islamic civilisation" (ibid, p.6). This led to foreign policies based on an anti-Western paradigm (ibid); he opposed the EU, calling it a "Christian Club", and predicting that Turkey's membership would adversely impact its cultural identity and

sovereignty (ibid). He was convinced that if it joined the EU Turkey would be paving the way for Israel to do the same (ibid). This was crucial, as at the crux of his anti-Western policy was anti-Zionism, characterising Israel as an “illegitimate and expansionist state whose ultimate aim is to create a greater Israel by occupying Syria, Egypt and Turkey” (ibid). His beliefs were strongly expressed, and also incorporated the conviction convinced that the United Nations had only been established in order to create an Israeli state (ibid).

3.5.2 History of the Milli Görüş

Erbakan was first encouraged to engage in politics by Mehmet Zahit Kotku (1897-1980), cleric and sheikh of the İskender Paşa community of the *Nakşibendi* order (Hale and Özbudun 2010: 3). Lütfi Dogan was head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs between 1968 and 1971, and Erdoğan’s companion for an extended period of time. Yavuz notes that:

Mehmet Zahid Kotku was the brainchild of the party. He wanted to have a party where Muslims could feel at home. We were, in fact, tired of being used by other centre-right parties. I became involved in this party because of Zahid Efendi. I remember that evening when Zahid Efendi invited five people and told us that “you are all men dedicated to the cause of protecting and advancing this nation. The core identity and character of this wounded nation is Islam. Your main heritage is Islam and Muslims. You can heal this wound by listening to what our Turkish Muslim people want. What they want is an Islamic sense of justice and the restoration of their Ottoman-Islamic identity.

(Yavuz, 2003, p.207)

According to Kotku, the Kemalist regime’s modernisation policies were responsible for creating a wound that affected the identity of Muslims in Turkey (ibid.). Kotku’s anti-modernisation and anti-Kemalist approach distinguished him from other politicians in Turkey (Uçar, 2000). In conjunction with the writings of Kısakürek and Karakoç, Kotku’s ideology effects Erdoğan’s political stance today. The content analysis chapter will clarify this in detail.

Erbakan originally aimed to be elected as part of Süleyman Demirel's Democrat Party, but following opposition from Demirel, he ran in 1969 as an independent candidate from Konya (Çakır, 2005, p.545). Following his election, on the 26th January 1970 he founded the *Milli Nizam Partisi* (National Order Party, MNP), along with eighteen colleagues (Çakır, 2005, p.545). The MNP sympathisers were typically: (1) religious recipients of a modern republican education; (2) religious middle class tradesmen; and (3) Sunni Muslims living in Turkey's metropolitan and provincial regions (Çakır, 2005). However, the MNP only survived sixteen months before being disbanded on 20th May 1971 by the Constitutional Court, "on account of its alleged anti-secular activities" (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.3). This was the first example in what became a long history in Turkey of the banning and closing down of religiously inspired parties.

However, the successor to the MNP was founded seventeen months later, under the name *Milli Selamet Partisi* (National Salvation Party, MSP) (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.3). The MSP participated in the 1973 elections, receiving 11.8 per cent of the votes and forty-eight assembly seats (Çakır, 2005, p.547). This election marked the party's first entry into parliament, and led to the participation of the MSP in two coalitions (ibid.). In 1981, the MSP were closed down for similar reasons to those given when banning the MNP, i.e. alleged anti-secular activities (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.4).

Erbakan subsequently founded a new party, the *Refah Partisi* ('Welfare Party', RP) in 1983. The closure of each party was followed by Erbakan and the members of their main governing bodies being banned from politics for several months or years

(Yavuz, 2003, p.215). The RP was the only one of Erbakan's parties that rapidly increased in strength, polling 4.4 per cent in the 1984 elections (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.4). Erbakan was permitted to engage in politics during the 1987 elections, when the party's share of the vote increased to 7.2 per cent (ibid.). However, due to the national threshold of 10 per cent, the party were unable to send a representative to parliament (ibid., p.4). The party's share of the vote increased to 9.8 per cent in the local elections held in 1989, followed by 16.9 per cent in parliamentary elections in 1991 (ibid., p.4). This rapid rise of the party continued in the local elections in 1994, with RP receiving 19.1 per cent of the votes and capturing the mayoralities of twenty-nine provincial centres, including the two most important: Istanbul and Ankara (ibid.). Following this election, Erdoğan was elected mayor of Istanbul, after challenging a number of important candidates and utilising effective political communication strategies during his campaign (Besli and Özbay, 2010). He drew on universal values to attract the necessary additional liberal and secular-minded voters (ibid.). Erdoğan's campaign included visits to pubs to reassure voters that, should his party prove successful, they would continue to be permitted to drink alcohol (Çakır, 2005, p.549).

Members of the Milli Görüş invited the population to follow Islamic principles in the guises of the MNP and MSP. However, the new RP instead, omitted references to religion, i.e. branding competitors as 'bad politicians' rather than 'bad Muslims' (ibid.). This change in rhetoric created a vital shift during the local elections, which had a considerable influence on the 1995 parliamentary elections, during which the party gained every fifth vote (i.e. 21.4 per cent), to emerge as the strongest party, winning 158 of the 550 parliamentary seats (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.4). They

were also able to attract a far greater diversity of supporters than any Islam-inspired party in the Middle East had done previously (White, 2002), with Erbakan reportedly receiving support from “conservative townspeople, poor urban migrants, professionals, intellectuals, and wealthy industrialists” (ibid, p.3). Furthermore, it was the first time that working-class conservative women became active in an election campaign, representing a distinct advantage for conservatives (ibid).

However, the RP was unable to rule alone, which forced it to be pragmatic and form a coalition with the centre-right *Doğru Yol Partisi* (True Path Party, DYP) (ibid).

The electoral success of political Islam resulted from four factors:

First, there has been the state policy of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis introduced by the leaders of the 1980 military coup. Secondly, there has been the political and economic liberalisation accompanied by the emergence of the new conservative Anatolian bourgeoisie, represented by such organisations as MÜSIAD (The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association). The third factor has been the prominence of a new class of Islamist intellectuals based in print and electronic media. The final factor has been the internal organisational flexibility of the RP and its ideological presentation of the Just Order (*Adil Düzen*) platform.

(Yavuz, 2003, p.215)

Notwithstanding, secular minded individuals and institutions opposed the formation of a RP-DYP government, with the result that the coalition lasted twelve months (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.4). In 1997. Erbakan was forced to resign, in response to pressure from the military and the National Security Council, in conjunction with the media and other leading civil society organisations (ibid). This was termed ‘the 28th February process’, as this was the date that the National Security Council met. It has been presented as a ‘postmodern coup’ by the coalition, working alongside the secular-minded military, the media and state institutions (ibid). The overthrow and subsequent banning of the RP was (as in previous cases) attributed to its ‘anti-secular activities’. Erbakan, and six other leading party members, were banned from entering

politics for a period of five years (ibid).

Following this ban, the fourth party to emerge out of the Milli Görüş was formed, Fazilet Party (Virtue Party, FP). The coup marked the beginning of a long decline for Erbakan and his movement; one from which they were unable to recover. The party lost voters at every election (ibid) despite nearly thirty years of effort, a reality that triggered a process of self-criticism and reflection among its younger cadre of activist members (Yavuz, 2003). This introspection negated the previously ‘unconditional obedience’ that had been practiced towards its senior members, as in the days of the Ottoman Empire. A new group arose, known as the *Yenilikçiler* (reformists in English), in contrast to the *Gelenekçiler* (traditionalists in English) (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.5).

The reformists were led by Erdoğan, former President Abdullah Gül and the 22nd Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Bülent Arınç, all of whom were convinced that the RP needed to reform its policies, communicating with a more moderate and universal discourse (Çakır, 2005, p.549). Both wings were challenged during the FP’s Congress in 2000 (Yavuz, 2003), and Gül was the reformist candidate because Erdoğan was “banned from political activities for five years and spent four months in prison for reciting a religious charged poem during a speech” in the city of Siirt³¹ (Hamid, 2016, p.153). Gül lost the vote by a small margin to Recai Kutan from the traditional wing (521 votes to 633) (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.5).

³¹ In 1997, when Erdoğan was the mayor of Istanbul, he read a poem by Ziya Gökalp, a political activist and poet from the city of Siirt, Turkey:

*The mosques are our barracks,
The domes our helmets,
The minarets our bayonets,
And the believers our soldiers. (The Atlantic, 2016)*

However, this was a success for the reformists, leading to subsequent opportunities when the Constitutional Court chose to ban FP, when its actions were judged incompatible with the secular character of the state. The party closure led the Islamists to split into two parties (Eligür, 2010, p.243) in 2001, with the traditional wing being established as the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party, SP), and the reformists forming the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) under the leadership of Erdoğan (ibid).

It is significant that in July 2000, one year prior to the foundation of the AKP, ANAR (Ankara Social Research Centre) conducted a poll which found “that if a general election were held on the day, 30.8 per cent of the people surveyed would vote for the party to (Aydin and Dalmis, 2008, p.201) be founded by Tayyip Erdoğan and his associates” (ibid., p.202). This poll reveals that even before its foundation it was apparent that the AKP would become a popular party in Turkey (ibid.). This was attributed by Aydin and Dalmis (ibid.) to Erdoğan’s charismatic leadership style. When Erdoğan read a poem in 1997 and was jailed for four months for “publicly provoking people to animosity and enmity based on religion and race” (ibid.), he also “lost his political right to stand for office” (ibid.). This demonstrates the desire on the part of the Kemalist elites to ban him from politics (ibid.). However, this made him more popular among conservatives, who perceived his treatment as unreasonable and his punishment “unfair” (ibid.). The potential popularity of Erdoğan and the AKP was also apparent from another poll conducted in June 2001, two months before the foundation of the AKP (ibid.). On this occasion, respondents were asked who should be selected as chairman if Erbakan’s fourth party, FP were banned (ibid.). Of the respondents, 40.8 per cent answered Erdoğan (ibid.). Erdoğan appears to have

experienced a surge in popularity because he was seen as having been victimised by the courts (ibid.). This experience also endowed him with an image of courage and heroism, similar to that which had made Khomeini popular among his followers (Charteris-Black, 2007, p.137). Erdoğan's image inside the party is important to consider in this thesis also, as it helps to explain the success of his one-man leadership approach.

3.6 Rise of the AKP and its Political Message

My reference is to Islam; democracy is not an aim, but a means; the system we want to introduce cannot be contrary to God's commands; human beings cannot be secular; I banned alcohol, because I believe I am the doctor of this community; in view of the future of our nation, I am against birth control; we always say that we are not Atatürkists, but we approve of his principles; one cannot be both secular and Muslim; they claim that secularism is being destroyed; of course, it will be destroyed if the nation so wishes; you cannot prevent it.

-Erdoğan (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p. 9)

Erbakan's creative strategizing played a key role in Erdoğan's new party (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). The AKP attached considerable importance to the reinterpretation of Islam under the umbrella of democracy, while simultaneously embracing assorted political and social groups (Dagi, 2013, p.73). Diverse identity, lifestyles and ideology convened under a pluralist banner; one that was designed not to take Islamist transformation forward (ibid.), but rather to focus on "participation, inclusion, tolerance, emancipation, and human rights and liberties blended with Islamic morality, brotherhood and solidarity" (ibid, p.74). Erbakan's bitter experience during the 'postmodern coup' that took place in 1997 encouraged Erdoğan to move forward by allowing political expediency to win out over religious objectives (Roy, 2004, p.61).

The principal difference between the new party and Milli Görüş is apparent from their discourse (Ismael and Perry, 2014). As Erdoğan veered away from the Islamist discourse and policy that had coloured his time in RP (Boubekeur and Roy, 2012), he emphasised global values, i.e. democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law (Axiarlis, 2014). Moreover, Erdoğan and Gül positioned the AKP as a “moderate, reformist, business-oriented party of the centre-right” that supported “secularism, democracy and Turkey’s traditional pro-Western foreign policy, particularly the goal of EU membership” (Ismael and Perry, 2014, p.203). Consequently, the 2002 elections were an opportune time for the party to redesign the political landscape in Turkey, expanding its public sphere (Tittensor, 2014, p.256). The AKP’s support of the Anglo-American definition of secularism included an equal approach towards all faiths and religions, as emphasised by Ibrahim Kalın (2013, p.426), Presidential Spokesperson and Ambassador:

AKP founders have sought to create a political identity wide enough to embrace different segments of Turkish society from the religious and conservative to the urban and the liberal”.

(Kalın, 2013, p.425).

This approach contributed to meteoric rise and successes of the party in 2002 (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). However, arguably more important was the economic situation in Turkey (ibid.). In 2001, Turkey was facing an economic crisis, which increased the need for perceived social and political ‘justice’, and ‘development’ of the national economy to raise standards of living overall (Nasr, 2009, p.238). Both these needs are recognised and articulated in the official name given to the party; i.e. the Justice and Development party (ibid.). Furthermore Kalın outlined the aims of the AKP as follows:

On the one hand, they have dealt with issues of ‘high politics’, such as democratisation, minority rights, secularism, and civilian-military relations and broken many taboos in the country’s recent history. On the other hand, they have implemented effective policies to fix the economy, establish a sound financial system, increase trade and foreign direct investment, and inject a new energy into foreign policy-areas in which they have been extremely successful.

(Kalin, 2013, p.424)

During the 2002 parliamentary elections, the AKP’s slogan “Everything is for Turkey” (*Herşey Türkiye için* in Turkish) exemplified the universality of the new party’s role in Turkish politics (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.21). Hale and Özbudun (ibid) argued that this slogan caused voters to contemplate issues such as the “universality of human rights, the Copenhagen criteria, freedom of thought and expression and freedom to economic enterprise.” Alongside its pragmatic policies, the AKP can be characterised as having a national and spiritual agenda culturally, a pluralist democrat attitude regarding politics, and a liberal approach to economics (Yavuz, 2005, p.602). Kalin (2013, p.427) emphasised that the party acted as “a voice for the silent majority and bringing the periphery to the centre”.

3.6.1 AKP Sympathisers Identify with the Muslim Brotherhood

The apparent inclusive and moderate position of the AKP did not prevent the Western media from portraying it as an Islamist party, even though the AKP’s spokespersons branded themselves as ‘conservative democrats’ rejecting any affiliation with Islamism (Kalin, 2013). The AKP’s understanding of secularism was predicated on the “separation of religion and politics”; it did however emphasise the government’s role in the “protection of religious beliefs”, stressing the importance of “giving more freedom and visibility to religious identities in the public sphere” (Kalin, 2013, p.428). This position was witnessed during Erdoğan’s visit to Egypt in September 2011, following the fall of Hosni Mubarak, when he sought to persuade

the MB to recognise secularism, leading to a ‘lively debate’ among Egyptian Islamists (ibid., p.426). Here, it is important to briefly elaborate on the relationship between the AKP and MB. Kalın (ibid, p.429) asserts that AKP sympathisers identify themselves with Islamist movements, such as the “Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-i Islami, the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation, the Afghan war against the Soviets, or the Chechen wars of independence in the 1990s”. This a critical allegation as regards the party’s Islamism, and so will be discussed later in this thesis when presenting the ethnographic findings. Undoubtedly, the role of religion in AKP’s communication is a decisive aspect that is part of the research question and will be elaborated.

3.6.2 AKP’s Silent Revolution: Reforms

The most significant reforms inside the AKP occurred between 2002 and 2004 (Marcou 2014, p.66), when a number of issues impacted Turkey’s progress towards membership of the EU, including the “demilitarisation of civilian public institutions, progress on the rule of law, minority rights, decentralisation” (ibid.). Furthermore, the improving economic status of Turkey and the AKP’s fundamental policy solutions increased its popularity within the region (ibid., p.63). Membership of the EU was held to be a priority for the AKP (Eligür, 2010). Erdoğan even described the process of democratisation in Turkey as akin to “a silent revolution,” as “a result of the EU reform packages” (ibid, p.249). Between 2002 and 2004 the AKP focussed on the “demilitarisation of civilian public institutions, progress on the rule of law, minority rights and decentralisation”, in order to haste the application for EU membership (Boubekeur and Roy, 2012, p.66). The AKP’s democratisation process led the US, in particular, to pronounce the AKP “a model for the Muslim world” (Eligür, 2010, p.249). In addition, a further aim of the AKP was to support the

Greater Middle East Initiative, set out by the Bush administration in 2004, which supported “democracy and open market economics in the Muslim world” (ibid.). This proved a further factor effecting US opinion of Turkey as a role model, with the US approach to the AKP in relation to the Greater Middle East Initiative being interpreted as White House support for ‘moderate Islamism’ (ibid., p.250).

3.6.3 AKP’s Neoliberal Economy: Islam and Capitalism under one Umbrella

In domestic terms of politics, AKP undertook to end “corruption, unemployment, the unequal distribution of wealth, and decay in moral values” and invested in infrastructure, particularly health and transportation, sharing the benefits of their success at the local level (ibid., p.254). However, the AKP’s accomplishments attracted the attention of a new Islamic bourgeoisie with roots in Anatolia (Yavuz, 2006, p.38); they became the driving force behind the AKP’s silent revolution (ibid., p.4). At this time, two crucial Orientalist themes were challenged by the AKP: (1) Islam and democracy, and (2) capitalism and Islam (ibid., p.4). This highlighted the fact that the AKP’s economic policies, in particular, were capitalist-oriented (ibid., p.4). Consequently, Yavuz (ibid, p.7) assessed the policies of the AKP as being pragmatic rather than ideological.

3.6.4 AKP’s Foreign Policy: Zero-Problems with Neighbours

When the former Chief Advisor to Erdoğan, Ahmet Davutoğlu became Foreign Minister in 2009, the AKP began implementing his ‘theory’ as foreign policy (Boubekeur and Roy, 2012, p.77). Turkey began forging good relations with its neighbours based on Davutoğlu’s initiation of a ‘zero problems’ policy (ibid). The priority was to extend Turkey’s hinterland “from the Balkans to the Middle East” (Kalin 2013, p.433). However, external actors characterised this development as the

beginning of an Islamist style government, pursuing ‘neo-Ottomanism’ (Boubekeur and Roy, 2012, p.77). Conversely, the Davos debate in 2009, and Mavi Marmara aid ship crisis in 2010, which will be elaborated on in the next section, resulted in the worsening of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel, lending weight to the arguments of those with ‘pro-Islamic’ foreign policy tendencies within the AKP (Axiarlis, 2014, p.155-58). Further challenges to the AKP resulted from the Arab uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (Bokhari and Senzai, 2013, p.180). In particular, the Syrian conflict was viewed as partly resulting from a miscalculation by Erdoğan’s administration, and the ‘zero problems’ strategy pursued by the AKP up to that point (ibid.). A further policy challenge that brought an end to the party’s geo-strategic approach was the Egyptian military coup d’état against elected President and MB member Mohamed Morsi (ibid.). While the AKP struggled with its foreign policy, a new challenge arose for Erdoğan in the form of the Gezi Park protests in 2013 (ibid.). This was followed by the corruption scandal of 17/25 December 2013, while Erdoğan was preparing for the local elections of March 2014, and the forthcoming presidential elections in August 2014 (Cizre, 2016). All these critical shifts will be discussed herein in reference to the research questions posed in this doctoral thesis concerning attaining a broader understanding of the movement from a communications perspective.

3.6.5 Evolution of the AKP’s Political Message

As Section 2.7.9 highlights, no single study has yet explained how the AKP’s political message evolved between 2002 and 2017. When studying the post-2010 literature, it emerges that two important events proved to be critical turning points in terms of the development of the party’s principal message. The first took place at the 2009 World Economic Forum. The panel discussion in Davos led to a diplomatic

crisis between former Israeli President Shimon Peres (1923-2016) and Erdoğan when Turkey's then Prime Minister "harshly criticised the Israeli President over the fighting in Gaza" (Aviv, 2017, p.78):

Mr Peres, you are older than me. Your voice comes out in a very loud tone. And the loudness of your voice has to do with a guilty conscience. My voice, however, will not come out in the same tone... You [Peres] know very well how to kill. I remember the children who died in beaches. Two former Prime Ministers in your country who said they felt very happy when they were able to enter Palestine on tanks... I find it very sad that people applaud what you said. There have been many people killed. And I think that it is very wrong and it is not humanitarian [...]

(Aviv, 2017, p.78)

After uttering these words, "Erdoğan walked off the stage, vowing never to return" to the World Economic Forum (ibid.). The Davos debate in 2009 was the first time Erdoğan raised his voice against the country; until that time he had always shown respect and had successfully developed good political and economic relations with Israel (Nasr, 2009). The volume of trade between both countries had increased after the AKP came to power in Turkey, and Erdoğan himself, as well as some other ministers and officials, had visited Israel (ibid.). In particular after the second half of 2000, Erdoğan intervened in the Arab-Israel conflict (Aviv, 2017). He prioritised solving problems in the region and promoted cooperation with Israel up to 2008 (ibid.). However after "Operation Cast Lead", also known as the "Gaza War" (27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009), Erdoğan felt Israel had "ruined Turkey's peace efforts" (Aviv, 2017, p.77).

The second event related to the Mavi Marmara flotilla; the Gaza flotilla raid happened in 2010, 16 months after the Davos spat, and also affected the outlook of the AKP. The Mavi Marmara flotilla was on its way to deliver aid to the Palestinian

people in Gaza on 30th May 2010, when it was attacked by Israeli soldiers. Nine activists, including one US citizen, were killed during this offensive (Rumford, 2013). Following the event, the Western media's coverage of Turkey, and in particular Erdoğan began to change (Hamid, 2014). The then Turkish PM Davutoğlu, speaking in 2015, summarises this process thus:

There is an international media network in the world. We are doing our best, but this network made a decision to finish off Turkey's success story and demonize President Erdoğan. That's their objective. They have moved against Turkey as if a button was pressed after 2010, that is, after the 'one-minute' incident in Davos.

(Akyol, 2015)

Davutoğlu's remarks encapsulate the AKP's evaluation of the Western media's biased coverage of the President after 2010. According to Akyol (2015), Davutoğlu blamed the "pro-Israeli" lobby in the media for this shift, claiming Turkey had alienated them by supporting the Palestinian people. However, Davutoğlu never mentioned a specific lobby, and it is unclear why Akyol refers to the media as a "pro-Israel" lobby, and what he means to imply when doing so. Nevertheless, the 'demonising of Erdoğan' is a key concern that appears to relate closely to the evolution of the party's message, and as such it will be part of the subsequent discussion. Having considered former PM Davutoğlu's opinion, it is also significant to look at Turkey's Jewish community representative, Utku Çakırözer, who "saw Davos as the turning point" for Erdoğan's approach towards the Jews:

I think that day [Davos] was Erdoğan's strategic decision to take a separate path from the Jews.

(Çakırözer, 2014)

In his column, Çakırözer summarises Erdoğan's policies starting from early 2000 how Erdoğan followed a moderate and soft image, and convinced critical voices of

the Jewish lobby in Washington before creating the AKP (Çakırözer, 2014). In addition, he points out that Erdoğan's 'soft-Muslim democracy' messages were interpreted very positively in the US as it was shown as the right model for the Middle Eastern countries (Demir, 2017, p.28). This can also be analysed as an improvement of the 'Islamist' image of the previous movement [Milli Görüş] to gain credibility and support in the West. Another anonymous Jew, living in Istanbul, emphasises during a conversation to Çakırözer that Erdoğan decided to raise his voice against Israel and "part ways with the Jews" (Çakırözer, 2014).

3.6.6 Erbakan's Student: Erdoğan

In 1969, at just 15, Erdoğan joined the *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği* (MTTB, the National Turkish Student Union) (Yavuz, 2009, p.125). During that time the MTTB was playing an important role educating young people according to an Islamic agenda (ibid.). This played an important role in developing the young Erdoğan's political views (ibid.). Poets such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, as explained in 3.4.1, and intellectuals such as Nurettin Topçu, were pioneers of the school, referred to as "anti-communist, anti-Kemalist and anti-elite" (ibid.). The MTTB proved to be an opportunity for Erdoğan to create a network that has sustained him throughout his career, first as mayor of Istanbul and later as founder of the AKP (ibid.). Erdoğan's relationships with the MTTB enabled him to join Milli Görüş's Youth branch, where he became directly involved in politics.

Erdoğan's popularity resulted from his political success as mayor of Istanbul (Besli and Özbay, 2010). However during the early years of the AKP, his personal success story advanced rapidly alongside economic and political achievements realised over a short period of time. Thus, he became a symbol to other marginalised and middle-

class conservatives (Yavuz, 2003, p.259), while “Turkey became a model of democratic governance in the Middle East” (Bayat, 2013, p.12). Clearly, the story of a man who sold “lemonade as a boy to support his family” resonated, he was thought of as an average Turk (Yavuz, 2003, p.259). Meanwhile, Erdoğan’s “personal characteristics as a leader, [and his] lifestyle and position towards daily issues” have had a crucial impact on party ideology and the decisions made by the electorate (Yavuz, 2009, p.32).

The role of Erdoğan as party leader is one of the main areas of consideration in this thesis, in particular it focuses on his charisma in reference to the third research question, to more fully appreciate his role in the political communication strategies of the AKP (ibid.). Furthermore, Erdoğan’s approach to politics has been largely perceived as pragmatist, emphasising the available opportunities to improve living conditions for the population, rather than imposing a specific lifestyle or ideology (ibid.). However, Erdoğan’s accumulation of power has isolated him somewhat, eroding his identity as part of a collective, a role once promoted as one of the fundamental aspects of the party (Cizre, 2016). How this process of transformation started, and what factors brought about this ‘change’ will be included in the discussion section of this thesis. However, it is perhaps more crucial, in view of the research questions, to investigate how Erdoğan’s growing “authoritarianism” resulted in the AKP’s Islam-friendly policies (Başer and Öztürk, 2017), with consequences for human rights as well as freedom of speech in Turkey.³²

³² According to Freedom House’s 2017 report, Turkey is now ranked 66th out of 100 in the World Freedom index, with figures being collated after the July 2017 coup attempt (Freedom House, 2017).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter concentrated first on describing the significance of the concept of Islamism, examining the AKP's official stance towards religion. The modernisation process embarked upon by the Ottoman Empire was discussed in connection with the fall of the Empire following Abdulhamid II's rule. The significance of Islamism policies as hurdles was clarified, a concern at the epicentre of ongoing debates about the AKP and Erdoğan (Kırmızı, 2016). Furthermore, Abdulhamid II's challenges with modernist movements, as explained in Section 3.3.2, were considered as important historical events to contrast with the challenges encountered by Erdoğan and the AKP (Cizre, 2016). In particular the developing role of Islamism in modern Turkey after 1923 and the rise of Islamist intellectuals (see Section 3.4), were also outlined in view of Erdoğan's ideological position and his respect for these individuals (Yavuz, 2003). Then the ideological stance and history of the Milli Görüş and its leader Erbakan were presented, both as an influence on Erdoğan, and as the launch pad for the formation of a new party in 2001. In the final part of the chapter information regarding the origins and development of the AKP are provided, briefly touching on how its political message evolved between 2002 and 2017 in answer to the second research question. In summary, this chapter delivered the necessary foundation upon which to construct a greater understanding of how the aspect of religion has informed AKP's political communications and why.

The following chapter considers the methodology of this research. By applying qualitative and quantitative research, this study is unique in presenting an evaluation of the AKP from multiple angles.

Chapter 4. Methodology

The real world is much smaller than the imaginary.

-Nietzsche³³

4.1 Introduction

This thesis uses both qualitative and quantitative research instruments to examine the evolution of the AKP's political and party messages between 2002 and 2017, i.e. its communication strategies. It also considers the roles played by religion and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style in shaping the communication strategies of Turkey's ruling party. In this research the communication strategies of the AKP are considered in two distinct periods: from 2002 to 2009, and from 2010 to 2017 (explained in Section 3.6.5).

Specifically, the thesis employs three research methods: non-participant observations, in-depth interviews, and quantitative content analysis. The qualitative research included four months (between 3rd August and 5th December 2014) of fieldwork, which was conducted at the 2014 Turkish presidential election rallies and events of the AKP in different cities, and at their headquarters in Ankara. In total, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted in Turkey during the fieldwork period. The quantitative aspect of the study involved content analysis of 60 of Erdoğan's speeches, given between 2002 and 2017.

³³ 1973, p.411

This chapter begins by introducing quantitative and qualitative methodology, before continuing by discussing the strengths and limitations of these approaches, in order to outline the specific application of these methods in the current research project.

4.2 Research Approaches

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are frequently used in the social sciences domain. The role of qualitative research is to examine questions such as what, how, when and where, concentrating on “meaning, concept, definition, characteristic, metaphor, symbol and description of things”, thereby highlighting core features and ambience (Dabbs, 1982, p.32; Berg, 2007, p.2). Meanwhile, quantitative research focuses on “counts and measures of things” (Berg, 2007, p. 2).

Qualitative research is thought of as providing more subjective findings, whereas quantitative methods are claimed to be objective (González López and Hernández, 2011). The approaches employed by qualitative researchers deliver an in-depth understanding of issues and events, while quantitative research focuses on producing solid and repeatable data (Berg, 2007; González López and Hernández, 2011). The findings from the former are thus considered able to closely convey the “nature of reality”, whereas the latter delivers information that can be discussed “in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 10). The qualitative researcher can attain the ‘actor’s perspective’, through interviews and observations; whereas, the quantitative researcher considers empirical methods and materials (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.12). The distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research are set out in Table 1, to reveal the benefits of each to the various fields of social sciences.

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Concerned with:	Number	Meaning
Roots in:	Social science	Humanities
Epistemology:	Positivist	Humanist
	Empirical	Interpretive
Most typical of:	Mass communication	Cultural studies
The archetypal method:	Survey	Hermeneutics

Table 1. The Two General Research Paradigms. (Source: Stokes, 2003, p.3)

Despite their differences the two methods can be utilised in a complementary manner (Burgess, 1984, p.143). For example, where the qualitative method makes it possible to analyse reality at the micro level, the quantitative method offers a macro perspective (Cicourel, 1981). Undeniably, each method has unique strengths and weaknesses, so by using them in combination it is possible to approach a research question from multiple angles (Burgess, 1984, p.143), thereby strengthening the outcome of the study.

“Collecting, analysing, and mixing” both methods in a single study is described as triangulation (Denzin, 2012, p.82). Denzin (1970) summarises four options for triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. This study will apply methodological triangulation, as the study design blends both qualitative and quantitative methods to attain the necessary information to answer the research questions.³⁴ Methodological

³⁴ (1) What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017? (2) How did the AKP’s political message evolve between 2002 and 2017? (3) What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP? (4) What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

triangulation will ensure sufficient data is collected to allow appropriate cross-checking (Burgess, 1984, p. 145), which will make it possible to effectively map the AKP's political communication model, focusing specifically on religion and charismatic leadership style. In order to triangulate qualitative and quantitative data, the results from the instruments employing each methodology need to be linked and referred to one another (Flick, 2009, p.27). By applying multiple methods, the research questions will be answered in Chapters five, six and seven, and analysed in Chapter eight.

4.3 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research plays a crucial role in the humanities (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 1). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Chicago school established qualitative research methods to investigate "human group life" (ibid.). One of the principal starting points of this research method was to focus on the life and culture of local groups (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). It informs "cultural and interpretive studies" that inherit both positivism and post-structuralism (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.1).

Qualitative research includes the use of empirical materials to examine an individual's life, or the background and politics of an institution; i.e. it concentrates on "case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts" (ibid., p.3). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002, p. 8) explain qualitative research thus:

Living, working, laughing, and crying with the people whom one is trying to understand provides a sense of the self and the other that is not easily put into words. It is a tacit understanding that informs the form of research, the specific techniques of data collection, the recording of information, and the subsequent interpretation of materials collected.

(DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, p.8)

Qualitative methods are applied in media studies, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism and cultural studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg 1992). They intersect a number of different sectors and disciplines within the realms of sociology and anthropology, connecting “terms, concepts, and assumptions” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.2; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.9).

By collecting qualitative data to conceptualise a personalised viewpoint concerning a specific life, event or institution the researcher can develop a healthy understanding and perception of the processes and meanings present in everyday life (Berg, 2007, pp.8-9). Indeed qualitative data collection facilitates a “naturalistic approach”, permitting the interpretation of the meaning associated with issues, events and individuals (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

Qualitative research methods were increasingly adopted during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the emergence of new challenges increased willingness to adopt new methods of exploration (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Qualitative research methods were found to be capable of resolving unknown variables arising from positivist and postmodern critique (ibid.). A further illustration of the value of qualitative research concerns its capacity to represent the nature of the ‘other’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). An example of this is the representation of those who are ‘dark-skinned’ to the ‘white world’, as discussed in Edward Said’s (1978)

Orientalism, which portrays perceptions of the ‘other’. Said (1978) cautioned that when a white settler studies the culture and habits of an indigenous group, the outcome primarily serves a strategy of colonisation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). However the “interacting system” that characterises the postmodern world, as Appadurai (1996, p.27) highlights, has led to a novel understanding of academic approaches, which will inform this research. As I am a researcher born and raised in Germany, who has studied in the UK, but has Turkish roots and is studying a Turkish political party with the advantage of both the mother tongue and cultural knowledge, this thesis is the outcome of cultural heterogenisation and so avoids orientalist bias.

4.3.1 Ethnography

Ethnography describes a symbolic interaction with the social world constructed to reveal ‘the multiple truth in others’ lives’ (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p.2). It is an efficient way of working with unstructured data (Flick, 2009). Investigating a small number of cases enables the researcher to focus on a specific area, and the findings are directly related to the research question (ibid.). Ethnography as a research strategy originally was applied in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and education (ibid.). The approach was initially designed to focus on remote and unfamiliar cultures (ibid.). However, contemporary ethnographic research often takes place in cultures, and concerning issues, with which the research community is already familiar (ibid.). It is the “art and science of describing a group or culture” by watching, listening and asking questions about people’s or organisation’s daily experiences to collect diverse material related to a precise research objective (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.1). Ethnography also recognises anecdotal information as valuable, as ethnographers’ findings reflect private observations; however, this has led some commentators to suggest that this reduces the credibility

of their work (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p. 40). Thus, ethnographic research needs to be supported as much as possible with triangulated data, interviews, first-hand experience, and detailed impressions (ibid.).

4.3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation was originally used by anthropologists and ethnologists (DeWalt and Dewalt, 2002) in the 1920s; in the work of Lindeman, it is described as a way of “standardizing and making more scientific conduction of social research” (ibid., p.7). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002, p.1) define participant observation as a method whereby one takes part in the “daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events” of a specific group to ascertain their culture and routines and to understand their lifestyles, work and thought processes. It is another name given to “field research” or “fieldwork” in the field of anthropology (ibid.). Today it is considered one of the main research techniques in qualitative research, building on “engaging in everyday activities” (Bryman, 2001, p.143) and “recording and analysing” them (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p.69). This makes it possible to understand what kind of situations the observed community is encountering and how its members behave in response (Becker, 1958, p.652). It is a way of entering into conversation with and monitoring data to ascertain how people are interpreting the events and developments observed by ethnographers (ibid.). At this stage, the field researcher is referred to as “methodological pragmatist” responsible for capturing data concerning relevant events related to their stated research interest (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p.7).

The method of participant observation can be summarised according to three steps: (1) observations; (2) collecting information through participation; and (3)

interviewing (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, p.2). These three aspects are the basis of interactions between the research question, researcher and the observed community” (Burgess, 1984, p.6). In fact the researcher decides what to observe according to his research questions, determining how to collect information and whom to interview (Burgess, 1984, p.6).

Arguably, social research of all kinds is “a form of participant observation as it is not possible to study the world without being part of it” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.249). From this perspective, participant observation is not only a research technique, but also “a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of research” (ibid.), another way of representing a humanistic and interpretive approach (ibid.). The ethnographer becomes part insider and part outsider during the observation process (Bryman, 2001: X). Indeed observation is an important tool to witness and earn “first-hand knowledge of the situation” (Singleton et al., 1988, p.11). The reality according to books, articles and in particular in the media can differ completely from what is directly experienced. Through participant observation, the researcher witnesses the “unseen” world, implying “a commitment to field activities” (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p.10).

Data collection is an important aspect of the participant observation process; one that emerges when capturing the social environment and ordinary activities associated with a target group or event (Brewer, 2000). The terms “participant observation, ethnography and fieldwork are all used interchangeably” to describe research methods that involve observing people, speaking with them and understanding their worldview (Delamont, 2004, p.218). These are all processes that enable exploration

of social phenomena as manifest in ‘unstructured data’, meaning that the data collection phase, and the approach to that collection rely on the observer (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). The crucial issue for those engaged in such research is that they must clearly define the research problem under investigation. In the case of this study, that is the development of the AKP’s message between 2002 and 2017 (second research question). To investigate this it was necessary to properly identify the AKP’s social base in depth prior to commencing the fieldwork to ensure it could be conducted effectively (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994).

Participant observation can involve conducting ethnographic interviews (Bryman, 2001, p.XI) in the field to access “people’s narratives, representations of their social worlds, including beliefs, ideologies and motivations (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p.92). Ethnographic interviews mostly arise with field contacts “spontaneously”, and can unfold “surprisingly” (Flick, 2009, p.169). Therefore, ethnographic interviews are typically unscripted, and so characterised as “informal conversations” (Spradley, 1979, pp.58-59). During my fieldwork in Turkey I had 56 informal interviews with people from the Publicity and Media, Election Affairs, Social Affairs, and Public Relations departments of the AKP, and also spoke informally with volunteer activists at rallies and events. When I engaged with the advisers or secretaries of politicians in particular, I carefully developed a good rapport with them, which encouraged them to share useful information related to their responsibilities to inform my research. The interviewee in the context of an ethnographic interview is referred to as an “informant” (Flick, 2009, p.169). When informants are drawn from those positioned in the background of organisations, their comments concerning specific issues are often more forthright than those with more prominent or leadership roles.

Advantages of Participant Observation

Participant observation enables researchers to interact with individuals and groups, to gain new perspectives, and interpretations of events (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, p.9). This method allows witnesses an opportunity to communicate their lived experience in a context to the researcher, who in turn can consider their use of language and facial expressions. This affords the research a wealth of primary data (ibid., p.8), and provides a window into how people actually live, behave, and more importantly, think (ibid.). The process of seeing, experiencing and learning undertaken by the ethnographic researcher produces thick data, findings and facts (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995).

In addition, due to the opportunities for direct communication with relevant parties, the ethnographic researcher also builds a network of contacts, which could prove useful in future studies (Gobo, 2008). Moreover, interacting with a specific group or party closely can grant the researcher access to participate in ceremonies and rituals, and learn about codes explicitly, receiving key information (ibid.).

Challenges of Participant Observation

As with other research methods, participant observation is known to have several disadvantages. Being in the field and having the opportunity to closely survey politicians can lead to the researcher being labelled ideologically as ‘one of them’ by outside parties, which can subsequently devalue the credibility of the research as the participant observer’s objectivity is questioned (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p.3). Hence maintaining a critical distance while conducting this type of research is vital. In order to minimise the risk of bias arising, I reflected on the observation process in detail, took critical notes and ensured that I kept distance between myself

and the people already interviewed. I explained this to participants clearly, communicating that my interest is purely for the purposes of the current research, and that I had no intention of using my links with the interviewees to gain advantage later in the form of employment in academia or at think tanks in Turkey. Furthermore, I rejected all private invitations that I believed would not align with the aims of my fieldwork.

The process of conducting participant observations can cause sensitivities to emerge from among the members of the observed group (Crang and Cook, 2007). Thus, it is crucial to build a bridge to the observed community to gain their trust and confidence, before the researcher can gain appropriate access to be able to observe the inner circle (*ibid.*). People frequently behave differently in private and when they are being observed; especially when they are concerned that information could be misused, or inaccurately presented (Davies, 1999). Meanwhile, the information available to the ethnographer is entirely “dependent on the people who granted him access” (Silverman, 1985, p.22). Such access can in some circumstances be granted with the aim of communicating a false image, such as to deliberately create a positive impression of the observed environment (*ibid.*). Such obfuscation can potentially threaten the credibility of a research (*ibid.*), and was occasionally in evidence during the collection of data for my ethnographic study. In order to address this, I underlined to the informants in every situation that my aim was to cover the political communications of the AKP impartially from an academic perspective. The members of the observed community viewed this aim positively. Furthermore, as I have a Turkish background and am familiar with the discourse and rhetoric of the

observed community, I feel this limited the risk that I would encounter manipulation, propaganda and unnatural interaction.

Undeniably, however, an important challenge during ethnographic research is the free access to valuable data (Poteete, Janssen and Ostrom, 2010). As noted by Rubinstein (2016), the risk and possibility of facing problems during ethnographic research is quite high. Even when planned and confirmed, admittance to the field of research can be interrupted (Rubinstein, 2016). My initial research plan was to conduct observations at AKP headquarters for a total of six months. However, the Publicity and Media department did not permit me to do so, despite my having attained written approval. The rationale given was that they are only active during an election period. Although this argument is somewhat tenuous considering the party's responsibility for government since 2002, it might be true; more likely there were concerns that the research might misrepresent the work of the department and the party at large.

Non-Participant Observation in Turkey

As observations, such as those included in this research result in a number of challenges, as described previously, the 'non-participant observation' style of the participant observation was chosen. Although the above mentioned advantages and challenges are similar to those reported with participant observation, there is a key difference, as the researcher maintains 'distance' and objectivity (Stommel and Wills, 2004, p.260). This is significant here, as it enabled the researcher to be recognised as an 'outsider' when interacting with informants (Hall, 2008, p.205). Simply put, non-participant observation can be understood as a "controlled" version of participant observation (Sharma, 2008, p.163).

Four months of non-participant observation in Turkey permitted the researcher to acquire a wealth of knowledge of the daily activities of the AKP. The three-stage participant observation process described by DeWalt and DeWalt (2002, p.2) was used: (1) observing the AKP and its community; (2) collecting information from Erdoğan's strategy team and at the AKP's Publicity and Media department; and (3) interviewing relevant personalities from politics, academia, the media, and think tanks in Turkey.

The data collection for this research by non-participant observation took place from August 2014 to December 2014 at AKP rallies and AKP headquarters. Prior to the ethnographic research, I contacted one of the advisors to the PM who was an existing contact of mine. After informing this individual about my research in detail, I requested an opportunity to undertake fieldwork at AKP headquarters and at AKP rallies during the Turkish presidential election in 2014. However, access was not granted to me until early August 2014, four weeks later than I had originally planned. My intention was to arrive one month prior to the elections in order to follow up on the activities of the governing party across Turkey. However, because the bureaucratic process took longer than I anticipated I started following the AKP's political activities in Istanbul on 3rd of August 2014. I spent my first three days in Istanbul.

On my first day (3rd August 2014), I observed the AKP's election booths in Istanbul's Eyüp Sultan district, a conservative district where there is significant support for the AKP. I spent my second day (4th August 2014) in Fatih, another Istanbul district known to support the AKP. This area is also known as the 'historic

city', and while there I visited one of the most historic mosques in Turkey, the Fatih Mosque, constructed after the conquering of Istanbul in 1463, and spoke to people sitting in the backyard of the mosque. I also observed that the AKP's booth was located adjacent to the mosque. On my last day (5th August 2014) in Istanbul I spent my time in the Asian district, Üsküdar. While there, I visited the local AKP centre and spoke to volunteers working for the Turkish presidential election campaign. These three districts are quite important in terms of their populations and AKP support. Traditionally, if all three of these districts are won in an election, then Istanbul is won.

During the period from the 6th to 10th August 2014, I attended AKP rallies across Turkey. The first (6th August 2014) rally was in Aydın, a province on western Turkey's Aegean coast. The second (7th August 2014) rally was in Malatya, Eastern Anatolia. The third (8th August 2014) presidential rally for Erdoğan was in the capital city of Ankara, and there was a final mass rally on 9th of August 2014 in Konya. Konya was known to have bestowed significant support on the AKP in previous elections³⁵. Before the AKP's establishment, Konya had been the stronghold of former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's Milli Görüş.³⁶ During the first two rally, I spent my time in the protocol zone in the bus and behind the stage where Erdoğan was speaking. The protocol zone was accessible to Erdoğan, his family, some key advisors and ministers. When attending the last two rallies, I was in

³⁵ 54.9 per cent support for the AKP in 2002 general elections (*Habertürk*, 2002), 84.3 per cent support for the constitution referendum in 2007 (*Yeni Şafak*, 2007), and 69.7 per cent for the AKP in 2011 general elections (*Hurriyet*, 2011)

³⁶ In the 1991 general election, Erbakan's Welfare Party (Refah Party, RP) achieved 33.03 per cent in Konya (*Habertürk*, 1991). In the 1995 general election, RP increased its vote in Konya to 41.7 per cent (*Habertürk*, 1995).

the public space where the public were gathering, as Erdoğan's security team did not allow access backstage for security reasons.

After the election rallies, the day of Turkish presidential election arrived (10th August 2014). It was unclear if the outcome of the first round of the election would be sufficient for Erdoğan to pass the 50 per cent + 1 threshold he needed to announce victory. The presidential election system in Turkey is based on two-rounds. If none of the candidates wins 50 per cent + 1 of the popular vote, the top two candidates then enter a run-off, which usually taking place two weeks after the day of the initial election. Hence, it was uncertain if Erdoğan would announce his victory and deliver his famous 'balcony speech'³⁷ after this round at AKP headquarters. Uncertain of whether this event would take place, I followed the election results at AKP headquarters so I would be ready should Erdoğan give the balcony speech.

I attended AKP headquarters to follow the election results from there, observing the reactions of the people working in the Publicity and Media department. On the election night, one of Erdoğan's advisors shared a tweet, saying that Erdoğan was en route from Istanbul to Ankara to make his victory speech at AKP headquarters. As I had my permission in place to attend the event, I went straight to Ankara Airport, to observe the events unfold from a unique perspective. One of Erdoğan's advisors arranged a seat for me in his car to the airport. During the short drive, I spoke with the advisor about the election results and their expected aftermath. After Erdoğan's arrival, I was offered a seat on Erdoğan's election bus, which again, was only reserved for him, his family and some of his advisors and cabinet members. After

³⁷ It is Erdoğan's tradition to give a victory speech after every election result from the balcony at AKP headquarters', which is called "balcony speech" (Turkish: *Balkon konuşması*).

reaching AKP headquarters, I continued observing, first on the 8th floor of the AKP headquarters where Erdoğan's and some of the AKP Deputy Chairman's and advisors' offices are based, and then from the entrance to the famous balcony where Erdoğan gave the victory speech. After the presidential election my fieldwork continued for sixteen weeks (till 5th December 2014), which I spent at the headquarters of the AKP. During these weeks I observed the Publicity and Media department observing the team, and their post-election activities. Furthermore I had access to the Youth branch, library, and could conduct ethnographic interviews with members from these departments.

The field notes were taken Turkish and later translated into English.

4.3.3 In-depth Interviews

The second qualitative method used in this project is in-depth interviews, a common technique employed by qualitative researchers to explore the inner perceptions of interviewees (Atkinson et al., 2001). This research method has been employed increasingly since the early 1990s, due to the limitations identified with existing quantitative research methodologies (ibid.). It was subsequently employed in fields including sociology, criminology, education and medicine (ibid.). In-depth interviews and focus groups provide key sources of information for the fieldwork researcher (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). 'Personal history and experience' form the data, with each individual's perspective contributing a deeper understanding of the research topic (ibid., p.58).

The in-depth interview is also broadly referred to as a "conversation with purpose" (Webb and Webb, 1932). Conversation is a natural act "combining structure with

flexibility”, which provides an opportunity for “hearing nuances in the participant’s account” (ibid., p.130; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.156). The result is a detailed means of acquiring knowledge pertaining to the personal circumstances and views of an individual (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Hence, listening and attempting to perceive diverse viewpoints leads the researcher to an understanding of what aspects need to be explored (ibid., p.156).

Another significant element that comprises in-depth interview data is narrative. An interviewee will only begin narrating anecdotes when they feel comfortable and trust the interviewer (Blommaert and Jie, 2010). Encouraging the interviewee to share illustrative examples in the form of stories, whatever their length and significance, helps to establish an expansive picture of “complex sociocultural meanings” (ibid., p.52). In-depth interviews can also help researchers to understand people’s behaviour; something not generally possible when consulting written documents (Stacey, 1969).

Cannel and Kahn (1968) spoke about the three conditions for a successful interview. First, that it is necessary to attain access to relevant personalities, and to a breadth of information; second, sufficient cognition to allow the interviewee to give the right answer to the research question; and third is the motivation to extract accurate answers (ibid.). After fulfilling these three requirements, experiences can be explored through research, to ‘uncover the hidden from ordinary view’ (Johnson, 2002, p.106).

In terms of the challenges and opportunities, it is important to be flexible, as in-depth interviews in conjunction with fieldwork can suggest a re-design of research questions posed (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p.94). The approach to research questions and topics in general prior to in-depth interviews can vary during and after the process, as prior knowledge usually relies on readings, which can vary in response to the reality on the ground. In fact, ethnography represents an opportunity to generate a study narrative (Lunn, 2014, p.43). Discussing the research questions in detail, “gaining trust and gathering basic information” can shape subsequent stages of the research, and help the researcher to prioritise topics for analysis (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p.94).

Elite Interviews and the Challenges

When interviews are conducted with important personalities from the worlds of politics, media and academia, they are termed “elite interviews” or “expert interviews” referring to the “highly skilled, professionally competent, and class-specific” nature of these people (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009, p.99; McDowell, 1998, p.2135). Their social status usually means that they are playing a key role in the study context, possibly at the top of the organisational hierarchy (Harvey, 2011, p.433).

Elite interviews can help researchers to more fully appreciate different worlds, circumstances, “secret histories, internal power struggles” (Boellstorff et. al., p.93). Sometimes those in senior positions are best able to speak eloquently about their cultures, activities and relationships with others and key events (ibid.). However, individuals with high status might be more prone to dissembling and misleading the researcher, because their personal interest and benefits might be closely intertwined

with the affiliated group or institution (ibid.). In order to limit the possibility of collecting erroneous data, the interviewees were selected from various fields and backgrounds.

Another issue with elite interviews is the question style. It can be risky to ask closed-ended questions to those in senior positions as this can restrict the answers (Harvey, 2011) due the limitations of the researcher's knowledge. Moreover, elite interviewees are frequently keen to control the interview (Harvey, 2011). In relation to 'control', a further issue can be attaining permission to record an elite interview. This is because the interviewee might prefer to talk 'off the record' (Byron, 1993). However, for this research, as with the normal interviews, I asked the elite interviewee if they would approve the use of a recording device. At the end of the interviews, I switched off the recording device in full view of the interviewee before asking if they had anything to say 'off the record.' The 'off the record' parts were not used in the research.

Approaching elite personalities to participate is a major challenge of elite interviews, and I encountered this difficulty while in Turkey. Some of the interviewees initially confirmed a willingness to participate in an interview but later cancelled' this was something I had expected as the same problem arose when I was conducting my previous research in 2012. Other possible interviewees could not be reached by email, social media or in person when the time came. The remaining planned elite interviews all took place face-to-face, either in the interviewees' own offices or in public places, such as cafés in Istanbul and Ankara.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish and translated into English.

(Questions directed to interviewees are listed in Appendix II)

Selection of Interviewees

I conducted in-depth interviews with people from the worlds of politics, academia, the media and think tanks. Each interviewee was selected because of their specific expertise. The intention was to include experts who were critical as well as approving of the AKP, to canvas a wide spectrum of opinions. When identifying party members to participate, their positions were considered in reference to the research question.

During the interview process, I attached particular importance to reaching and interviewing the PR guru and Erdoğan's spin doctor Erol Olçok (1963-2016), known for providing the impetus behind Erdoğan's success. He was the owner of the Arter Advertising Agency, and served as Erdoğan's PR advisor for over twenty-three years. He was tragically shot during the attempted coup in July 2016. Another important personality was Erdoğan's former speechwriter, who served him for more than eight years. Although most of the names on my initial list were contacted and interviewed, some AKP politicians were not; either because of their schedules or due to a lack of willingness.

To explore the AKP's ideology and the psychology, I interviewed two academics. One focussed on Islamism, the role of the sociological dynamics of Turkish society and the AKP's transformation of the country. The second approached these aspects from a psychological perspective, outlining the motivations of AKP supporters.

Here, the main question which I asked concerned the existence of an emotional relationship between AKP supporters and Erdoğan, or whether it is just politics that matters. In particular in this case it was considered important to explore if people feel fear or experience social pressure if they do not vote for Erdoğan.

The role of the media is also considered in relation to the AKP; interviews took place with four journalists, two of whom worked for the Turkuaz Media Group³⁸, one for the Albayrak group, an AKP-supporter network, and one was a freelance journalist.

The think tank perspective was also included to describe the hegemony of the AKP clearly. The chairmen of two different think tanks close to the AKP were chosen, one focussing on politics, and one on polls and research.

Undoubtedly, in addition to their professional fields and positions, the age and demography of the interviewees were considered, to ensure the sample included representatives from across generations and social groups.

Ethnographic Interviews

To complement the in-depth interviews, I conducted 56 ethnographic interviews during my fieldwork observations at the 2014 presidential election rallies, events, AKP headquarters, but also in daily life while on the route to the AKP headquarters, events or in free time. Most of these interviewees were affiliated with the AKP at the district or municipal level, which affords the research a unique perspective from a ‘middle-class’ of the party.

³⁸ *Sabah* is one of Turkey’s most written newspapers, purchased for \$1.5bn (by way of a \$750m loan from a state-run bank) by Turkuaz Media, and is led to by Serhat Albayrak, brother of Erdoğan’s son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, who is the Minister for Energy and Natural Sources (2015-) (*Financial Times*, 2016).

4.4 Quantitative Research

In addition to the qualitative methods employed, this research also used quantitative research methods to examine the content of speeches. Quantitative content analysis was specifically developed for use in natural and social sciences research (Stokes, 2003). The role of quantitative analysis is to “produce counts of key categories, and measurements of the amounts of the other variables” (Neuendorf, 2002, p.14). Quantitative and qualitative research provides two different methods of approaching an identical issue, quantitative research focuses primarily on empirical methods and materials (Gray and Densten, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It is “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods” (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 2008, p.3). Notably, “Survey research, network analysis and mathematical modelling’ thus forms an aspect of the quantitative research method criticised as being ‘untheoretical and uncritical” (Stokes, 2003, p.3). Quantitative methods tend to attract greater respect from the scientific research community, as the public views “science as referring to numbers and implying precision” (Berg, 2007, p.2). The quantitative research method used in this study is content analysis.

4.4.1 Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis, which was first proposed by Max Weber in Germany in 1910 as a method for studying newspapers, is a popular method of quantitative research. It requires the systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of a core message, highlighting key characteristics of the examined text (Kerlinger, 1973; Berelson, 1952; Neuman, 2011). The primary characteristics of content analysis comprise focusing on word and language use, determined by systematic reading, counting and recording key words, symbols and images to identify the objectives of the message

correctly (Krippendorff, 2013; Holsti, 1969). The connecting of words and terms establishes a general overview of both content and representation; however, the presence of an ideology represents important background information when examining language use (Neuendorf, 2002). The aim of content analysis is to describe “with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time” (Laswell, Lerner and De Sola Pool, 1952, p.32). Usually, the outcome of this process is the illumination of the specific influential content within a communication source; i.e. political speeches in this research (Neuman, 2011).

The current research focuses on the AKP’s communication strategies, as expressed in political speeches. It analyses Erdoğan’s speeches between 2002 and 2017, after first separating the data into two terms: from 2002 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2017, the reasons for which are explained below.

Coding

Quantitative data analysis requires the use of coding to measure a subject systematically by focusing on a word or phrase with a language-based meaning (Johnny, 2009, p.3). It is called systematic because it provides a structure to apply to “observe and record content” (Neuman, 2011, p.363). Behaviours, activities, relationships and meanings are some of the aspects that can be coded through sources, such as interview transcripts, field notes, journals, documents and videos (Lewins, Taylor and Gibbs, 2005; Johnny, 2009, p.3).

In this research, selected speeches by Erdoğan from 2002 to 2017 were coded with specific labels to answer the research question. Through the process of coding different sources will be linked together (Johnny, 2009).

Selection of Speeches

A speech can function as a tool to understand both an individual's and any affiliated party's or institution's ideology and opinions (Finlayson and Martin, 2008). Studying speeches enables identification of any premeditated dimensions designed to communicate the philosophy of a political movement (ibid.). Speeches play a key role in motivating people, building relationships, and encouraging them to think about things, in this case, political issues, in a particular way (ibid.). Political speeches can afford a sense of "connection between political institutions, citizens and politicians" (ibid., p.452).

In view of the above, Erdoğan's speeches were examined and some selected for analysis using content analysis part to provide quantitative data. Between 2002 and 2014, Erdoğan made more than ten thousand speeches (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014), including public announcements, rally speeches, press conferences, official statements, weekly parliamentary speeches and more. That is an average of at least two public speeches every day. From among these speeches, 60 were selected for content analysis. This sample was drawn from across a 15 year time frame (2002-2017) to capture any changes to have occurred in communication strategies. To provide balance, 30 speeches were drawn from the first period (2002-2009), and 30 speeches from the second (2010-2017). Three to four speeches (except 2002) were randomly chosen from each year; those selected were judged to have addressed important political topics related to the research questions. This purposeful

sample also included speeches pertaining to momentous pivotal events for the party, as such speeches are the most likely to be planned carefully in advance, and hence will reflect communication strategies. They were also more likely to be watched and reported on by commentators in the media, making them more significant.

The selection process targeted the two terms of the AKP, a decision which was made based on prior academic and research literature, which has suggested that the ideological stance of the AKP can be divided readily in this way (explained in Section 3.6.5). The first term reflects a so-called ‘silent revolution’ within the Islamist party, as it turned its attention to advancing pluralism, human rights, freedom and economic development (Cagaptay, 2017). Additionally, the period was characterised by the ‘zero problem policy’, a time when the party embraced Turkey’s neighbours and enemies (ibid.). The historical problems encountered by Erbakan’s Refah Party explain why Erdoğan cut his teeth while building a more Western-values oriented political party, adopting secularism and vowing “a firm commitment to Atatürk’s legacy of modernisation” (Nasr, 2009, p.240). In this manner, alliance with the US and Israel topped the party’s agenda (ibid., p.241). On the other hand, the second term, the period from 2010 till 2017, is described as one in which Erdoğan adopted “Islam-sensitive political positions”, leading to a “polarisation in Turkish politics”, and “one-man leadership” (Cizre, 2016, p.2; Altun, 2016, p.181).

Although Erdoğan was the Chairman of the AKP when it was founded on 14th August 2001, he could not be elected as a Prime Minister after the AKP’s first victory in 2002 as he was banned from holding political office at that time (see Section 3.5.2). Hence, Abdullah Gül was elected as Prime Minister until Erdoğan’s

political ban was removed in March 2003 allowing him to become the new Prime Minister. Consequently, Erdoğan's speeches in 2002 are made in his capacity as Chairman of the AKP, whereas in the speeches after 14th March 2003 he is speaking as both Prime Minister and Chairman of the AKP. After the 10th August 2014 he is speaking as the President of Turkey.

The process of determining which speeches to analyse was twofold. The first stage took place at AKP headquarters in Ankara. The AKP's library contains most of the speeches made by the AKP's Chairman from 2002 until 2011, and each year is printed in booklet format in Turkish. I went through all the speeches in the library at the AKP and determined the content of each speech to be able to pinpoint the speech that would be most relevant to answering the research questions. The years after 2011 had not been printed. When I attended the AKP headquarters on 26th May 2016, I again checked the booklets but newer versions were still not available. To find speeches from the post-2011 period, I next examined the AKP's official websites and those of the Prime Ministry. However, none of the speeches were available. Thus, two sources were ultimately found to complete the data set for the period from 2011 till 2017. Turkey's international news agency, *Anadolu Agency*, publishes the most important speeches made by Presidents (*tccb.gov.tr*) and Prime Minister's on their webpage (*aa.com.tr*). Therefore I was able to find the Turkish scripts. Furthermore, using YouTube (*youtube.com*), I could find those speeches given by Erdoğan between 2011 and 2017 and not on the *Anadolu Agency*'s website.

(In Appendix III and IV, the speeches, are detailed between 2002 and 2017.)

Coding of Selected Speeches

To code Erdoğan's speeches from 2002 to 2017 I identified ten different categories deemed relevant to the research questions. I was interested in whether there was a change in the content of the communications across this time period. In this way, the first term reflects an era of reform, democratisation, pursuit of EU membership, economic development, embracing secularism, positive relations with the neighbours, the zero-problem policy (Cagaptay, 2017). The second period from 2010 till 2017, is described as a more introvert term; it witnessed critical events such as Davos meeting, Mavi Marmara, Gezi Park, corruption accusations, and a military coup attempt by the Gülenists (Cagaptay, 2017). Former Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009–2014) and Prime Minister (2014-2016) Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero-problems with neighbours" turned to "precious loneliness" in the second term, which also initiated an anti-Israel and anti-Establishment discourse (Hamid, 2016. p.166). This term is also known for Erdoğan's 'othering' policies, which led to the use of religious rhetoric (Hamid, 2016). Nevertheless, in-depth interviews played a key role in strengthening the imaginaries of two different AKP's, as led by Erdoğan.

As explained in Section 3.6.5, in particular academics and analysts believe that there has been a major shift in the way and content of the message the political party is disseminating. I developed a list of categories to encapsulate the main themes.

Themes	Categories
European Union	EU membership, Reform, Democratisation
Cultural Dialogue	Alliance of Civilization, Interfaith dialogue, Cultural dialogue
Human Rights/Freedom of speech	Human rights, Freedom of speech, liberal values
Atatürk/Secularisation	Atatürk, secularisation, modernisation
Religious Discourse	Verses from the Quran, Citations from Prophet Muhammad's Hadith
Economic Development	Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Investment
Anti-Israel	Israeli settlement, Gaza, Jerusalem, Occupation, Zionism
Anti-Establishment	United Nations, World Bank, Capitalism, International Monetary Fund
Ottoman Empire	Ottoman Empire, Tradition, Ottoman Sultan's, Glorious history
Gülenists	Gülenists, Fethullah Gülen, Terrorism under religious coverage, Gülenists' schools

Table 2. Coding themes and categories of Erdogan's 60 speeches between 2002 and 2017

I have looked at each speech as a whole and ticked the box if, for example, an anti-Israeli policy was mentioned once. And then I counted up the number of speeches that mentioned that idea. In some cases related terms were also counted.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability is a positivist tradition in social-scientific studies, where it is used to demonstrate the “reliability and validity of the research findings” (Jensen, 2012, p.240). Reliability is applied in a research study, in order to ensure consistency and dependability in the data, to ensure the answers to the research question proceed from a study that has emphasised “stability, replicability, and accuracy” (Krippendorff, 2013, p.267; Neuman, 2011, p.208). Furthermore, it is used to suggest that an identical result could be attained by other researchers examining the same

information under similar conditions (Neuman, 2011, p.208). If the measurements and judgments of the coders are not identical, this results in a questioning of the reliability of the process and the suggestion that the data is “erratic, unstable, or inconsistent” (ibid.).

Neuman discusses three kind of reliability: stability reliability, representative reliability and equivalence reliability (ibid.). Whereas stability reliability focuses on whether the results of a measure would be the same if the time period differed, representative reliability, as the name reveals, examines whether it could be applied to a different group to represent the same results (ibid.). Equivalence reliability handles the question of whether the measure is “consistent across different indicators” (ibid.). By applying reliability tests, the research is self-regulating, and can reasonably be used as a pilot study and replicated in examination of similar phenomena in the future (ibid., p.211). An intercoder reliability test involves one or more other individuals examining and coding the same data as that coded by researcher (Krippendorff, 2013, p.268). The main challenge with reliability is that the codes used in studies can become sidelined over time, which can then devalue the research (Neuman, 2011).

Intercoder reliability checks were applied in this research on Erdoğan’s speeches. The coder looked at 10 per cent of the sample of speeches and she achieved an intercoder reliability of over 80 per cent in every category, except for ‘Anti-Establishment’, which was found to be not due to content but terminology. The coder recommended using another word or term to frame this aspect. The total agreement of inter-coder reliability for Erdoğan’s speeches was 85.2 per cent.

(Intercoder reliability for Erdoğan's speeches is listed in Appendix V)

4.5 Ethics

This thesis was approved by the Ethics Research Committee and University Senate Research Committee. Before each interview a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix V) and Consent Form (see Appendix VII) were signed by the interviewees. The sheets informed them about the research content; providing a short summary of the thesis, the research questions, details about why they had been invited, the possible benefits, disadvantages and risks of participation, and the procedures for safeguarding the confidentiality of the material.

The Consent Form represents an agreement between the interviewee and myself, to allow me to record, save and use all recorded material from the in-depth interviews. Four of my interviewees wanted to preserve their anonymity in the finished research. Therefore, I proposed using confidentiality coding when presenting the data, which was acceptable to these interviewees (Kaiser 2009). As I wanted to have a consistent style in my research, I addressed this issue by applying confidentiality protocols to all in-depth interviews except Erol Olçok as he agreed to use his name. Furthermore as he is a critical person in terms of AKP's political communication, I have decided that his distinction is important for the research. I have separated the interviewees into four categories: Politics [PO], Journalism [JO], Academia [AC] and Think tank [TT] and gave each interviewee a code [e.g. Politician 1 means PO1]. If I had not guaranteed that the data shared would be confidential, then data collected would have been less rich (Kaiser 2009). The final research were shown to the interviewee

to check that they are happy their anonymity has been protected. This will strengthen the validity of the research, as the interviewee could reflect and comment on their role in the study (Maxwell, 2013).

4.6 Conclusion

By applying qualitative and quantitative research, this study is unique in presenting an evaluation of the AKP from multiple angles. These methods included observing the 2014 presidential election campaign and the daily routine of the AKP as a non-participant observer, and conducting in-depth interviews with politicians, academics, journalists and think tank members. These methods will result in rich data to answer the research question: “how did the AKP’s political message evolve from 2002 to 2017” through the lens of its multiple political communication strategies. The roles played by religion during this period, and that of Erdoğan’s charismatic leadership style within the communication strategy will also be discussed. Consequently, it will become apparent how the rise and dominance of the AKP was contingent on reformist politics in its first term (2002-2009), but that in its second term (2010-2017), ‘success’ proceeded from a religious discourse, marred by serious internal and external introspection and discussion (Hamid, 2016).

Nonetheless, the impact and success story of this “conservative democratic” party, which has won “five parliamentary elections, three sets of nationwide local elections, one presidential election by popular vote, and three referenda” (Cagaptay, 2017, p.3) continues. Indeed, this research inevitably tells the story of Turkey’s Erdoğan, who “is one of the most influential statesmen of our time”; meaning it is highly significant to study his charismatic leadership style and its impact on the AKP’s success and

communications strategies (Cagaptay, 2017, p.3). His pragmatic policies are revealed by examining how the party message evolved from 2002 to 2017. Due to its diverse approaches, and its development of a triangulated method, as described in this chapter, the methodologies used in this research could usefully be replicated in studies focusing on other Islamist and non-Islamist political parties and social movements in the future. The finished thesis is intended to be a unique example in the field of social and political sciences and journalism, as this is the first time the AKP's political communication strategies, and its leaders' charismatic approach to governance has been studied in this way (see Section 2.7.9).

The next chapter will present the results of the in-depth interviews conducted in Turkey. Specifically it will consider how the AKP's political message evolved, and what role Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style and religion play within the context of the AKP's political communication.

Chapter 5. Erdoğan's Charismatic Leadership Style

'Natural' leaders -in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress- have been neither officeholders nor incumbents of an 'occupation' in the present sense of the word, that is, men who have acquired expert knowledge and who serve for remuneration. The natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody.

-Weber³⁹

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative findings from the twelve in-depth interviews conducted in Turkey during the four-month fieldwork period, undertaken to answer the research questions posed in this study:

- RQ1. What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ2. How did the AKP's political message evolve between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ3. What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP?
- RQ4. What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

It also serves to present data that effectively and honestly portrays the "meanings, experiences and views of the participants" (Mays and Pope, 1995, pp.42-45). First, it investigates the evolution of the party's political message, by highlighting critical turning points and events. To answer the third research question it focusses on

³⁹ 1968, pp.18-19

Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, by evaluating his personal impact on the AKP's communications. Finally, key aspects of the AKP's political communication will be examined, before the role of religion in the leader's and the party's political communications strategy is expounded.

When analysing the interview data, the concept of social movement theory will be applied, and the influences from collective identity, and political communication will be assessed. In addition, contrasting data relating to other Islamist parties', movements' and leaders' political communication models will be presented to investigate their similarities with and discrepancies from Erdoğan's AKP. This information will assist the author in locating the AKP's political communications within the global landscape of Islamism.

This thesis argues that the intentions of the AKP's political communications have changed over time; specifically, that religious discourse has replaced the emphasis on liberal political ideology, i.e. democratisation and expansion of freedom of speech (Yavuz, 2009). Thus, this chapter seeks to explore the opinion of the interviewees, to develop an understanding of this shift in reference to the research questions. It will begin by analysing the roots of the victory achieved by the 'conservative democrats' (as the AKP call themselves), depicting the party's remarkable historical successes. A vitally important aspect to note in this study of the AKP, is that the party has sustained its capacity to achieve victory from one election to another consecutively (Cizre, 2016). This is an accomplishment that is unique in modern Turkey's history (Cagaptay, 2017). In order to understand how the AKP accomplished this remarkable feat, the next section of this chapter will advance different perspectives from

interviewees drawn from both inside and outside the AKP. It will explore the historical and sociological background of the ruling party, to delineate and interpret its dramatic development. To understand the progression of the AKP, it is significant to study its chief characteristics and the wider perceptions of the party. An introduction to the party and the views it generates will be instrumental in our later analysis of the AKP and its leader when directly answering the research questions.

5.2 Classification of the AKP

In addition to presenting definitions of the AKP (stated in Section 3.6) provided by scholars, such as Yavuz (2003), Cakir (2005), Hale and Özbudun (2010), Besli and Özbay (2010), Kalın (2013), Boubekour and Roy (2012), Ismael and Perry (2014) and Hamid (2014), it is essential to view Erdoğan's party through the eyes of serving and former AKP officials. Frequently, academic texts convey views that are biased or partial, depending on their authors, and similarly the opinions of politicians affiliated with the AKP could be coloured by their loyalty or dependence on the party. Thus, by considering both sources; i.e. literature and interviews with party faithful, a breadth of perspective will be delivered to clarify this thesis' portrayal of the AKP.

In this section, details about the AKP's background are provided to contextualise the role of religion in this research, explaining how it is intertwined with communication, the principal focus of the study. This depiction of the AKP's history will form the basis for later discussion, which will review many different facets. Furthermore, before developing an understanding of the communication strategies

employed by the party, we need to understand how the party sees itself. After this we then clarify the role played by religion.

In our interview data, PO3 (a political speechwriter and linguistic expert) explains the establishment of the AKP, by recollecting the situation in Turkish politics at the end of the 1990s when three parties governed Turkey together; a situation which seriously impeded national development (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). As PO3 underlines: “corruption, unemployment, the unequal distribution of wealth, and decay in moral values” were the main obstacles faced by Turkey at this time. PO3 further notes that the ‘postmodern coup’ (see Section 3.5) of 1997, which targeted former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and his Refah Party (RP), created a psychological wound in the hearts of the people of Turkey (ibid.). For him, the birth of the AKP, which he describes as a “conservative” and “traditionalist”, was in large part a reaction to this ‘postmodern coup’ (ibid.).

Nonetheless, JO1 refutes this suggestion; separating out the identity and wishes of Turkish society from the ambitions of the AKP (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). JO1 characterises the AKP as “conservative, proud of the nation’s history, having nationalist reactions, but also open to developments in the modern world” when describing the stance of the AKP and its supporters (ibid.). By contrast, AC1, focuses on criticising the party’s adoption of ‘conservative democracy’, taking the characteristics of European conservative parties into consideration (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). He underlines that, while the AKP might have been inspired to draw some ‘conservative’ elements from contemporary political parties in Europe, there is no single centre-right democratic party in Europe that classifies itself

in this way (ibid.). The suggestion made by AC1, is that the adoption of the term ‘conservative’ was intended by the AKP as part of an image-making strategy, the objective being to receive recognition from the Western world. However, he clarifies that this does not change the fact that the notion ‘conservative’ is akin to religious in the context of culture in Turkey (ibid.). Meanwhile, the Presidential Spokesperson and Ambassador, who also holds an academic title, Ibrahim Kalın (2013, p.425) argues that the AKP united “different segments of Turkish society from the religious and conservative to the urban and the liberal”.

5.2.1 A Party of the Periphery

Here it is useful to analyse the pre-AKP landscape, to more fully appreciate the relationship between Islamism, Erbakan’s Milli Görüş movement and the foundation of the AKP. Erbakan’s stance during the ‘postmodern coup’ in 1997, which received no popular backing, caused the RP to split (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). The fact that it was in a position to draw on the political and historical heritage of the RP was a significant advantage for the AKP (ibid.). However, conversely, the past failures of centre-right parties suggested it was unlikely that the AKP would benefit from its connection with such political circumstances (ibid.).

As summarised in Section 3.3, according to PO3 (ibid.), the modernisation process in the Ottoman Empire, which enabled the emergence of the AKP, dates back hundreds of years. He argues that as a result of the Turkey’s 200-year-old Westernisation process, the AKP drew on “nativism, conservatism and Muslimness” (ibid.). In this case ‘Muslimness’ is used to reflect indications of Islamic activism. Zürcher (1993) argues that the Westernisation process in the Ottoman Empire was triggered by

recognition of the Empire's decline. The development of education, the military and diplomacy were three important areas imitated from the West (ibid.).

In the interview with PO1, the emphasis is instead on the AKP as a local party, reflecting its emphasis on local social values (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). Similarly, TT1 states the AKP embodies the energy present in the local environment, a fact that enabled it to move from the periphery to become the hub of the political landscape (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). The AKP broke down perceptions about what constitutes the centre; eroding social class differentiation to become a governing party characterised by “the energy of the periphery” (ibid.). TT1's description highlights the significance of the party's appeal to lower and middle class Turkish people (ibid.). TT1's final definition coincides with the objective set by Erdoğan at the AKP's inception; i.e. it is “the party of the people who are dreaming a new Turkey” (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). Finally, he views the AKP as a party of “transformation and innovation” (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). Reflecting the assertions made by TT1; JO2, who is a journalist but one that has also been a chief political advisor, uses the word “periphery” when describing the party too (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). However, he continues by noting that after a specific point, the AKP transformed itself into a postmodern movement with a place in the global community (ibid.). TT2 indicates that the AKP began with the aim of serving as a melting pot, open to communications with the world; simultaneously pragmatist and realist (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014), able to motivate people from different ethnic and ideological backgrounds to support them (Nasr, 2009).



Figure 2. Classification of the AKP by the interviewee.

Figure 2 affords an overview of the different classifications of the AKP. This research found people drew on a rich variety of definitions to understand the AKP, according to their interpretations of the party's stance. Whereas the party uses the term "conservative democrat" to position itself at the centre of the political landscape in Turkey, the interpretations provided by the interviewees classify it across a range from traditionalist to innovative, from Muslimness to postmodern, suggesting that it is a party that embraces contradictions (Cizre, 2016). Evidently, the changing politics of the AKP contributed to this diversity of perceptions, leading interpretations of the party to change over time. Another explanation is provided by JO2, who emphasises that the party has not yet defined itself, suggesting it is in fact lost from a sociological perspective, with no vision of where Turkey will be in the next 100

years (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). He argues that the AKP's followers to some extent determine its direction, but the party itself needs to be responsible for its re-positioning (ibid.). Moreover, JO2 implies the AKP's primary policy is to survive, as it is a pragmatic and realistic party, as its leader (ibid.). This results in the lack of a strong political identity able to endure and advance the governing process.

It is traditionally expected that a social movement will embrace the notion of collective identity to inspire change in society (Melucci, 1996). However, in the case of the AKP, JO2 argues the party's lack of identity renders this impossible. It is important to note however, that in social movements "common interest turns to common identity" (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.2), which is arguably the case with the AKP. For its part, as JO3 underlines, the AKP has pragmatically identified itself as the party of 'conservative democracy' because there are more conservatives in Turkey than Islamists (Interview with JO3, 28 November 2014). Consequently the government's definition of the party indicates that it has an identity, even though, as JO2's point implies, the leadership does not adhere to it (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). Moreover, their name 'Justice and Development' is another indicator that Turkey's turmoil, created by the 'postmodern coup' in 1997 and the economic crisis of 2001 increased the need for political justice, and the improvement of infrastructure and living standards (Nasr, 2009, p.238). In this manner, while considering the different approaches defining the AKP, it is essential to investigate how AKP officials explain political Islam, Islamism or Post-Islamism (as scholars such as Bayat (2010) term it).

5.2.2 Islamism and the AKP

PO1 indicates that Political Islam is a term used to define a political position. For him, the word ‘Muslim’ is a more neutral term, and so he states, “obviously the identity of those who created the AKP can be explained better with the word Muslim” (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). He continues by underlining that the founders of the party did not aim to establish a political party with a religious foundation (ibid.). Indeed, this was one of the ways in which the AKP sought to differentiate itself from Erbakan’s movement (see Section 3.5). Due to their bitter experiences as members of Erbakan’s parties, the AKP party elite adopted a strategy of political expediency, avoiding religious discourse (Roy, 2004, p.61).

The attitude of the AKP after separating from Erbakan’s party can be likened to the emergence of the Ennahda Party in Tunisia. Tunisia’s most influential Sunni Islamist movement, Ennahda, is a unique example that reflects the relationship between the Milli Görüş and the AKP. Ennahda’s leader, Rashed Ghannouchi, who was in exile in the United Kingdom for 22 years before the Arab uprising began in 2011, announced at the 10th Congress of the Tunisian Ennahda Party in May 2016 that he distinguished between the party and the movement from which it developed by using the term “Muslim democratic party” for Ennahda instead of an “Islamist label” (Marks, 2017). This was interpreted as a reimagining process for Ennahda, targeting first their credibility and then evoking more widespread support from Tunisian society (Wolf, 2017). In other words, it marked the transition from a social movement (*haraka*) to a political party (*hizb*) (ibid.). Unlike Erdoğan, Ennahda achieved reforms within the original party. Erdoğan’s AKP instead adopted a new politics, distancing itself from the older generation of the Milli Görüş (White, 2002).

Consequently the stance of the AKP was similar to that of Ennahda. However, the upcoming parts of this research will examine whether Erdoğan's ultimate goal is to return to the Islamist roots of his former affiliation, while using religion as a fundamental base, as highlighted in the fourth research question.

The 'postmodern coup' in 1997 led to suppression of Islam and practicing Muslims in Turkey, but taking racism, nationalism and regionalism as a red line, the founding members of the AKP, chose in 2001, to define the party as "conservative democrat" (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). By conservative, the political cognoscente understood it to be 'upholding local social values', in other words attaching importance to religion, tradition and history (ibid.). PO1 admits that "Westerners define the AKP as an Islamist party, or a party which comes from an Islamist background," (ibid.) but underlines that this was never mentioned in the party's program or statements. Rather they preferred the term 'conservatism', which encompasses social and religious values.

The references to "Westerners" when describing the stance of the international media clearly reveal how "we and others," in other words, "othering" is perceived within the mindset of AKP officials, recalling Erbakan's othering policies, based on the "conflict between the Western and Islamic civilisation" (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.6). Noting the compelling nature of this evidence, JO3 observes that it is not reasonable to label a party that received more than 20 million votes, as 'Islamist' or designate it 'Political Islam' (Interview with JO3, 28 November 2014). Indeed JO3 (ibid.) underlines that Islamism in Morocco differs from Islamism in Egypt or Turkey. For him, the AKP is a "class-rooted" party rather than an ideological one.

Moreover, he underlines that the same people who support the AKP today, supported the Motherland Party (ANAP, Anavatan Partisi) during the 1980s (ibid.). ANAP, whose leader was Turgut Özal⁴⁰ (1927-1993) received 45.1 per cent (Ciddi, 2009) support in the 1983 elections, equating to 7.8 million votes. When compared with the results of the AKP in the November 2015 elections, this equates to 15.8 million (*Milliyet*, 2015) fewer votes, which strengthens the interpretation of journalists. However the diversity of voters, and more importantly, the ideology of the party aligned more with ANAP than any other party in Turkey, particularly during the AKP's first term (2002-2009). This is illustrated by the fact that during that time many key names from different parties and backgrounds joined the AKP (Cagaptay 2017). It is for this reason that Erdoğan remembers Turgut Özal occasionally in his speeches (Yavuz, 2009, p.90), and why he positioned himself closer to Özal than to Erbakan between 2002 and 2009, as discussed with TT2:

The AKP never defined themselves as part of Political Islam. On the contrary, it generated more support when it distanced itself from Islamism and Political Islam. This is the reason why they underlined in the early years that they had changed. The AKP identified itself so that the West could understand it. Consequently, they used the term 'conservative democrats' referring to the 'Christian democrats' in the West. But personally, they did not deny that they were respecting Islamic references. This was an appropriate idea in terms of taking liberal steps. On the other hand, Erdoğan and his team knew that it was not possible to go any further, if they were following in the steps of Erbakan's. They changed their discourse, but they changed themselves too.

(Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014)

⁴⁰ Turgut Özal was a technocrat who served as Prime Minister (1983-1989) and President (1989-1993) of Turkey (Eligür, 2010). His policies were based on "Materialism (industrialisation) and moral responsibilities" (protection of the cultural heritage) (Nasr, 2010: 236) with the aim of creating a stronger Turkish society (ibid., 122). He was right-of-centre politically, economically liberal and united Muslim piety and business-friendliness, which made him a relevant figure for the AKP and Erdoğan (Nasr, 2010: 237).

The discourse used by the party is crucial, as it accentuates the AKP's ideological transformation, and Erdoğan's intention to position the AKP as a "moderate, reformist, business-oriented party of the centre-right" (ibid.).

Furthermore, the stated objective of the AKP was "to embrace different segments of Turkish society from the religious and conservative to the urban and the liberal", as Kalın (2013, p.425) emphasises. An equally significant point to make here, is that, as AC1 claims, it does not matter if the AKP viewed itself as the party of Islamism or not, rather it is important how it was perceived both outside and inside the country (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). For him, the AKP genuinely positioned itself to appear positive in terms of the political tableau, and this marked a dramatic decline in Islamism relative to Erbakan's movement. The use of decline by AC1 is intended to denote the lack of a political culture reflecting Turkey's intellectual geography (ibid.). Certainly, the aims of the party were best served by bringing together a deliberate "set of beliefs, symbols, and values" (Tourine and Eyerman, 1992, p.17).

When asked about the use of the term Islamism, PO3 explained that it means merging Islam with nativism, conservatism and 'Anatolianism'⁴¹ (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Interestingly this leads him to describe the audience of the RP, which he claimed was generally comprised of "people who pray, attach importance to hijab, distance from alcohol, and criticise the West and westernisation" (ibid.). According to him, the "AKP has adopted this heritage from the Refah Party" (ibid.). Despite offering examples to explain the AKP as a

⁴¹ 'Anatolianism' refers to the middle and working-class families in Turkish (Lockman, 1994).

continuation of the Milli Görüş tradition, his views are more pertinent when linked to the politics of today's AKP, rather than those it espoused in its early years (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). According to Bokhari and Senzai (2013, p.173), in the first election period [2002-2007], the AKP's political conduct was one of "transformation that has seen it jettison its Islamist roots and thus it can no longer be considered part of Islamism." However, Erdoğan's political discourse today recalls Erbakan's position, which was once harshly criticised by Erdoğan and his followers, in particular during the separation process that led to the establishment of the AKP (Cagaptay, 2017).

When evaluating the qualitative data collected regarding relations between Political Islam and the AKP, it emerges that while political officials frequently seek to apply an authoritative definition, non-affiliated individuals take a more flexible approach. In fact characterising a party's identity can benefit non-affiliated people, but understanding reality is more beneficial. This is because Islamism is at the epicentre of the debate concerning the AKP; especially since the Davos crisis in 2009 and the Mavi Marmara aid flotilla, organised by the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief⁴² (İnsani Yardım Vakfı; IHH) in 2010 (elaborated on in Section 5.3.1).

The next section will look at how the evolution of the party message (second research question) changed over the course of the period under review, in particular in terms of how the AKP positioned itself relative to Islamism. Here it is vital to identify the events and timing of any shift in position, and to explain how the party's

⁴² According to the official website of IHH, the organisation was found by "a handful of volunteers" during the Bosnian War in 1992 to provide humanitarian aid (IHH.org.tr).

views developed. Specifically, it will discuss the emergence of anti-Western discourse after 2009, linking this to the presentation of the AKP as a felicitous model to other Middle Eastern countries by Western countries, in particular the USA (Eligür, 2010, p.249).

5.3 Evolution of the AKP's Political Message

The evolution of the AKP's political message from 2002 to 2017 provides the conceptual framework for this thesis. The changes to the AKP's political communications, as discussed in Section 3.5.1, suggest an apparent process of transformation over time within the AKP. However, in this section it is important to first establish whether party members acknowledge that a change has occurred, to determine if it is reasonable to differentiate between 'two eras', or whether the notion of a shift is merely a 'myth' proceeding from a biased approach to the party and its leader.

5.3.1 Critical Turning Points: Davos and Mavi Marmara

The interviewees were asked if changes to the AKP's political message date to the post-2010 era, and are connected with the Davos crisis and the Mavi Marmara aid flotilla (as explained in Section 3.6.5), as portrayals in the literature and Western media coverage would suggest.

JO2 observes the process of the development of the AKP's point of view more broadly, first analysing the worldviews of AKP members (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014):

We need to look at the Middle East, before explaining the reality. It would be too easy to explain this reality by saying that AKP was passive and there was a turning point for Erdoğan which changed his career and made him Islamist.

(Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014)

He identifies an “Ottoman-style communication” that intensifies the relationship between political parties and the society (ibid.). The result of this is that Erdoğan holds himself responsible as a Turkish Muslim, and is willing to serve as the voice of the oppressed (ibid.). This is part of AKP’s vision, according to its former political chief advisor:

When something like Gaza happens, it is not possible to be silent. If you do not react, and observe only, people will ask where all the vision has gone. Because Erdoğan convinced people after the Davos debate with Israeli President Peres that he is the ‘patron’ of the Muslim world.

(Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014)

JO2 adds that mainstream media explains Erdoğan’s responsibility to society by likening him to a ‘new Sultan’ (ibid.). These comments call to mind Abdulhamid II’s ‘İttihad-ı İslam’ (Union of Islam), or ‘pan-Islam’, as it was referred to by the West (Landau, 1990). Abdulhamid II was enthusiastic about creating a universal religious community of Muslims, in which all Muslims would be bound together (Karpas, 2001). Thus, JO2 argues that it is changes elsewhere in the Middle East that altered Erdoğan’s political outlook (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

PO4 questions the significance of the Davos crisis and Mavi Marmara for the AKP’s identity (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). He underlines that Mavi Marmara was not an AKP sponsored initiative or a project associated with the Turkish government or state:

It was organised by international and Turkish civil society. Obviously, Turkish people joined Mavi Marmara because some saw themselves ideologically close to IHH. Although, we did not create the organisation, as soon as we heard about it, it became our responsibility to take up the burden.

(Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014)

Although PO4 clearly states there was no relationship between the AKP and IHH, in reality both institutions were very closely aligned (ibid.). IHH was an offshoot of Milli Görüş (Yesilada, 2013, p.136), and its board included “AKP members of parliament and people affiliated with the party” (Stein, 2014, p.20). Furthermore, after the Mavi Marmara crisis the AKP started supporting the IHH publicly (Yesilada, 2013). The IHH’s relationship with Erdogan connects it with the AKP’s stance towards Israel, which Erdogan saw as a ‘threat to the region’, as explained in Section 3.5.1 (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.6).

To establish whether the party’s involvement in the incident represented a shift in position, I asked PO4 if he believed Erdoğan would have supported such an initiative had it taken place in 2002 or 2003; he immediately and unequivocally responded with a clear “yes” (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). However, we should remember that Erdoğan publicly criticised the organisers of the Mavi Marmara flotilla in 2016 for their “objection to an agreement⁴³ between Turkey and Israel” (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2016). This criticism was covered by media sources close to the AKP, but it was interpreted elsewhere, that despite Erdoğan’s criticisms of the IHH he had benefitted from the Mavi Marmara event during the elections of 2010, as it had enabled him to “play the victim and gain more votes” (*Milli Gazete*, 2016).

⁴³ In June 2016, Ankara and Tel Aviv signed a deal to normalise the relations between both countries after six years of “strained relations” (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2016).

PO4 adds that Mavi Marmara's timing coincided with the expansion of economic relations with Israel (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014).

In contrast with PO4, PO1 explains how commentators, in particular politicians and think tanks in the West, underlined how the AKP was democratising Turkey whenever possible (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). However, he cited a turning point in the party's approach following Mavi Marmara and the Gezi Park protests⁴⁴ in 2013. Rather than accusing the "pro-Israeli lobby" for the shift in perception as Davutoğlu did (Akyol, 2015), claiming that it had "made a decision to finish off Turkey's success story and demonise President Erdoğan after the Davos incident" (ibid.), PO1 alleges the self-exiled Fethullah Gülen and his movement, the Gülenists, were responsible (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). PO1 further suggests the Gülenists used their immense network of diaspora to influence the Western media to attack the AKP and in particular Erdoğan (ibid.). In addition to the cases of Mavi Marmara and the Gezi Park protests, PO1 suggests that Turkey's policies towards Egypt and Palestine have created an image of the AKP as an Islamist party:

We are the same. There is no change in us. Our politics are the same. If you look at our official documents (government programs etc.) you will see this. Our discourse is the same. Moreover, now we are looking at our election program from 2002 to 2011, a plan to work on issues we promised but could not execute before today. The AKP is a broad umbrella at the centre, which means it is a party that is organised in every township and receives support from all over Turkey.

(Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014)

⁴⁴ The Gezi Park protests started on 28th May 2013 when the AKP announced to rebuild Taksim square and remove the trees and green areas. In a very short period of time, massive nationwide protests erupted challenging the AKP and its policies (Cizre, 2016).

Here, PO1 refutes the suggestion that the AKP has changed its communications, discourse, or politics. Although he holds similar views regarding Erdoğan, he admits that Erdoğan has cited religious references more in recent years (ibid.).

The interviews conducted with the two interviewees (PO1 and PO3) reveal a difference of opinion. PO3 affirms the suggestion that the AKP changed its message after 2009, “replacing conservatism with Islamism”, referencing Erdoğan’s post-2009 speeches:

If you look at the speeches between 2002 and 2009, you will consider that some notions are used less frequently. After 2009, these notions have increased. However it has peaked this year [2014].

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014)

Although PO3 was reluctant to go into more detail, he recommends that academics should study this change in the party and the direction of in which it is evolving (ibid.). He notes that the change in rhetoric started with the defeat of threats formerly faced by the AKP, as a result of changes in military and bureaucratic instruction and the reduced impact of Western finance (ibid.). Regional instability also affected Turkey’s development, and PO3 opines that the economic growth and development in Turkey, increased the AKP’s self-confidence, resulting in it becoming less cautious and controlled, and willing to more freely express a liberated discourse (ibid.). By “liberated discourse”, PO3 means, expressing a position independent from Western expectations (ibid.); he underlines that Erdoğan was the leader who announced this new objectivity.

Similar to PO1, PO3 recognises Davos as a turning point. However, he identifies the so-called “7 February MIT (National Intelligence Organisation) crisis”⁴⁵ as the beginning of the AKP’s conflict with the Gülenists:

The message of this operation was clear: “if you do not follow our steps, we will remove you [Erdoğan]”.

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014).

The significance of this watershed is exemplified by the content of political communications during the 2014 presidential election campaign.

5.3.2 Discrepancy of Collective Identity Between Erdoğan and Gül

Another important point made by PO3 was that after the overthrow of Muhammad Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the next target of Western countries who supported the coup in Egypt was Turkey and the AKP government (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Erdoğan clearly announced that his government would not accept the presidency of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi when the Egyptian military ousted “Erdoğan’s close ally Mohammed Morsi” in 2013 (*Al Monitor*, 2016). However, the then Turkish President Abdullah Gül congratulated al-Sisi on attaining the presidency (*Anadolu Agency*, 2014). Erdoğan criticised this statement, emphasising that congratulations could not be extended, as he would not tolerate a difference of opinion of this nature being publically expressed (*T24*, 2014). PO3 argues that Erdoğan automatically responded harshly to these events, seeing them as a personal threat (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Yet, it is also important to note that doing so reduces the significance of the sense of a collective identity created within

⁴⁵ Istanbul special-authority prosecutor issued summonses for National Intelligence Organisation (*Milli İstihbarat* Teşkilatı, MIT) Chief Hakan Fidan to question him in a probe regarding Kurdistan Communities Union. Later it emerged that it was an allegation organised by the Gülenists (Soyler, 2015, p. 181).

the AKP, which is the basis of any social movement according to Melucci (1996, p.4). Although both Erdoğan and Gül were founding members of the AKP in 2001, and acted collectively to move on from Milli Görüş (explained in Section 3.5), over time discrepancies emerged and the sense of an agreed collective identity diminished. In fact, Gül had congratulated al-Sisi two months prior to the 2014 presidential elections.

This example illustrates that Erdoğan was personalising the party's communications and differentiating himself from the former President, othering him as part of his strategy to achieve victory in the election. Thus, the case of Gül is an interesting one when scrutinising the AKP's leadership. Differences in political actions between the former close friends and allies brought discussions to the fore that resulted in Erdoğan instructing AKP's lawyers not to allow Gül to run for the presidency again in 2014 (*Al Jazeera Turk*, 2014). Gül did not address this issue publicly but TT1 highlighted that as a consequence of political disagreements, Erdoğan did not favour Gül running for either President or Prime Minister or Chairman of the AKP. This move was clearly a sign that Erdoğan was solidifying his power base by eliminating potential challengers. On these grounds, it can be argued that Erdoğan's support of Morsi was merely a product of his policy stressing collective identity (Melucci, 1996, p.4). In an academic article, Kalın (2013, p.429) emphasised that some AKP sympathisers identify themselves with Islamist movements, such as the MB. Sympathy for the MB means that supporters of the AKP, at least those known to be religiously motivated, share a "common interest" which then becomes a "common identity" with Islamist groups (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.2). In fact, from an

Islamist perspective there are a number of similarities between the MB and the AKP (Filiu and Khalaji, 2011).

5.3.3 Erdoğan's Intention: Independence

According to AC2, an academic at a university in Istanbul (and a political advisor), it is important to not only consider the One-minute crisis in Davos, but also the Kurdish issue as a turning point for the AKP (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). His approach is broader than that of the previous interviewee, namely he conceives of the change as a 'power struggle,' more precisely the question of "who will reign Turkey and establish the New Turkey" (ibid.). The term "New Turkey" was used by the AKP repeatedly during the 2014 Turkish Presidential Election campaign. It was intended to indicate a new constitution and presidential system (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016, p.79). The phrase was also included in the election manifesto for the AKP in the 2017 referendum, which aimed to increase the executive power of the President. The referendum was nothing less than a turning point for Erdoğan, as he was able to close the chapter on Atatürk's⁴⁶ (1881-1938) modern and westernised Turkey (Cook, 2017). The idea of a "New Turkey" relates to the third research question, which relates to the role of Erdoğan's charismatic style of leadership, as will be discussed later. AC2 underlines that due to the power struggle in which he was engaged, Erdoğan's "national reflexes" were sensitised. He did not mention with whom the 'power struggle' was taking place (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). However, Erdoğan's aim was made clear; i.e. to become an actor, first in the region, and then globally. In other words, AC2 pays attention to the struggle for independence:

⁴⁶ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the founder of Modern Turkey and is seen as the man who opened Turkey up to the modern western world (Mango, 1999). However, the modernisation of Mustafa Kemal was a key problem for religiously motivated people in Turkey according to poet Necip Fazil Kısakürek (Sayyid, 2003) (as explained in Section 3.4.1).

The international arena did not welcome Turkey reaching for independence. The reactions to Erdoğan's politics cannot be assessed from the perspective of human rights or freedom. It is wholly an issue of power struggle and benefit. The discourse of authoritarianism is only rhetoric [...] If Erdoğan were to follow the same discourse as the West, he would have to be the most "easy-going politician" in the world.

(Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014)

It is interesting that AC2 classifies Erdoğan's speeches as "authoritarian" (ibid.). This signifies that even in academic circles close to the AKP there are criticisms of Erdoğan's discourse. This is notable, because an indictment such as that implied by the word "authoritarian" used in reference to Erdoğan is unexpected, as it is a term used rarely in an academic context. Thus, the significance of reaching for independence needs to be discussed in reference to both Turkey overall and Erdoğan's role in the global hegemony. Clearly before striving for international independence, the attainment of internal independence is essential; this will be discussed further subsequently in relation to Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style. His increasing domination and boundless hegemony within the AKP as well as nationwide, will be part of the discussion (Yavuz, 2009).

TT1's arguments do not contradict those of the previous interviewee, despite his claim that the AKP is the same party, as is its leader, Erdoğan (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). Nevertheless, TT1 notes that the AKP is devising new responses to internal and external developments, with the aim of strengthening its links with Islamic civilisation by exploring its quintessential roots (ibid.). Consequently, social, cultural and political discourse is being used by the AKP and its leader to realise this "dream" (ibid.). Clearly, although TT1 contends that the AKP and Erdoğan are pursuing the same goals they held at the party's inception, he admits that a new approach to achieving them is increasingly dominant (ibid.). In

contrast, another AKP think tank chairman, TT2, commented on a policy shift by remarking on the relations between the AKP government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). Until 2008 the AKP steered the national economy congruent with IMF politics (ibid.), but since this time a more independent set of policies has emerged.

5.3.4 Erdoğan's Consolidation of his Power

Based on the information provided by TT2 (ibid.), the struggle for independence was first economic, before it became political, as mentioned by AC2 (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). Another terms to describe this process would be “real politics,” which has represented a hindrance for more than six years [2002-2008] to the “conservative democrats”, as AC2 underlines:

I can remember in 2006, when members of the MUSIAD⁴⁷ (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) exerted pressure on Erdoğan to reopen *Imam Hatip* schools⁴⁸ (Religious Secondary Education Institution), he emphasised that the world and himself are not ready yet, and so he did not take the risk over. Today, the landscape looks different. He could not convince Turkey before making progress... I think that 2007 was a turning point. Up to 2007 the AKP followed a liberal discourse. Despite their liberal steps, the AKP faced a party closure trial in 2008.

(Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014)

Here the interviewee is disclosing the content of an internal meeting with Erdoğan, which clearly demonstrates his [Erdoğan] views when marked a critical turning point. The opening of Imam Hatip schools in Turkey was a highly controversial issue, in particular from 1983 until 1997, in part due to the rise of Erbakan's Milli Görüş parties (Yavuz, 2003, p.127). Secularists “believed that these schools bred

⁴⁷ MUSIAD was found in 1990 with the support of former Prime Minister Erbakan in order to mobilise the “conservative oriented businessmen” against the secular TUSIAD (Turkish Industry and Business Association), found in 1971 (Atasoy, 2009, p.114).

⁴⁸ An Imam Hatip School provides Islamic education and knowledge unlike a normal high school (Eligür, 2010).

Islamism in society” (ibid.). In conjunction with the ‘postmodern coup’ in 1997, compulsory eight-year education was introduced to limit the expansion of religious schools (ibid.). The AKP’s conservative supporters had expected the reopening of these schools when Erdoğan came to power.

However, TT2’s comments above explain the situation very clearly (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). Although Erdoğan had graduated from an Imam Hatip school himself, he knew how these schools were perceived (Besli and Ozbay, 2010). Thus, he was reluctant to reopen them in 2006. In fact it took 10 years of AKP rule before, in 2012/2013, a fully functioning Imam Hatip school was opened.

The interest in Imam Hatip schools is high because it meets the demands and values of the students, their parents and the whole of society [...] We have never intervened in others’ lives. We never force people how to dress and behave [...] An Imam Hatip student is someone who protects his/her own country, flag, azan⁴⁹, and leads the struggle for independence and futurity. An Imam Hatip student can never come side by side with terror organisations [meaning in particular FETO], injustice, violence and illegal things.

Erdoğan explaining the importance of Imam Hatip schools (*Haber*, 2017)

This example from Erdoğan demonstrates the importance he places on *Imam Hatip* (religious) schools, in order to have a young generation representing “[Islamic] consciousness” (*Reuters*, 2018). Imam Hatip schools will be discussed in the section of this thesis answering question four, on the subject of “use of religious rhetoric”.

The information presented suggests that the first period (2002-2009) under the AKP was one that emphasised transition and gaining trust, to rightly earn credibility and power. When TT2 states that “today, the landscape looks different” (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014), he means the AKP has now transformed and developed the

⁴⁹ Azan is the Arabic word for the call to prayer.

country and received the support of the people, which has enabled it to implement more sensitive and critical policies, that might conflict with the aims of Kemalists.⁵⁰ However, Erdoğan's stance towards religious issues when he and his reformist crew were challenging Erbakan should be remembered; he acknowledged the need to adopt a different tone and party line after the 'postmodern coup' of 1997 (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). As observed by TT1, the Erdoğan has always held the same ideological aims, but he consistently chooses to act strategically (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014).

5.3.5 West's anti-AKP Sentiment Affects Erdoğan's Discourse

TT2 notes that Mavi Marmara marked a turning point in terms of the AKP's negative portrayal in the West (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). However he underlines that it is not entirely apparent if this was due to the AKP itself, or to other external factors (ibid.). He sees the shift as possibly part of the discussion concerning democracy and Islam in the West, claiming that Western country's orientalist perspective resulted in its anti-AKP sentiment: "For them [West] the only thing was that Turkey is ruled with democracy and free market economy" (ibid.). In support of this interpretation, AC2 argues that Erdoğan was expected to be an easy-going leader adhering to the same discourse as that used in the Western world (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). Should he deviate from this, TT2 expressed confidently, the "West" would then seek to remove the AKP by manipulating the Turkish military from within (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). TT2's comments might appear absurd at first glance; however, on July 15, 2016 a faction of the Turkish military

⁵⁰ Kemalism emerged after the "overthrow of the Ottoman regime" and refers to Mustafa 'Kemal's surname who is the founding father of the Turkish Republic (Sayyid, 2003, p.52). Basically Kemalism is a top-down imposed modernisation program (Sayyid, 2003).

attempted a coup.⁵¹ This leads us to ask if the Gülenists were cooperating with some Western countries in order to remove Erdoğan, redesign Turkey, and bring “democracy”, as suggested by the interviewee (ibid.). Historian Halil Berktaş (2017) is clear when answering the question: “what would a possible win have meant were the July 15 coup to have succeeded”:

What kind of military regime might have taken over – something like Myanmar, perhaps? What sort of Kemalist-Gülenist coalition would it have entailed? After a time, would the Gülenists have started moving just as insidiously as ever to eliminate their partners? Meanwhile, how many tens of thousands would have been arrested, jailed, perhaps tortured, perhaps killed by their martial law authorities? [...] What if the country had lapsed into a state of civil war?

(Berktaş, 2017)

Berktaş’s (2017) questions are timely as regards democratic concerns, but the post-coup crackdown should not be forgotten, as Erdoğan used the opportunity to arrest innocent people accusing them of posing a danger to the Turkish Republic (Cagaptay 2017).

This leads us to consider the opinion of JO4; a journalist and former candidate for nomination to the AKP who was not selected by the governing board (Interview with JO4, 22 November 2014). He questions events by recalling the time of Sultan Abdulhamid II, observing that Abdulhamid II was a reactive then as Erdoğan is today. According to the journalist, Erdoğan takes the same approach as Abdulhamid II when responding to internal and external threats. Abdulhamid II, who ruled for 33 years, from 1876 till 1909, favoured Muslim unity during his reign, because the

⁵¹ According to Erdoğan, the Gülenists organised a coup attempt against the governing AKP (*The Guardian*, 2016). It was a tragic night for the Turkish people, as guns, tanks, helicopters and F16 fighter jets were used against civilians, ending up with the loss of 248 lives and dozens injuries (ibid.). After this event, the government detained “tens of thousands of people with alleged links” to the Gülenists, which sparked serious concerns in the media (*Al Jazeera*, 2017).

Ottoman Empire was in decline (Karpas, 2001). This raised criticism at that time, because elites, such as the CUP⁵² and Young Turks⁵³ (explained in 3.3.2) inside of the caliphate⁵⁴ favoured modernisation, not just militarily, but also ideologically (ibid.). The similarities between Erdoğan's and Abdulhamid II use of political discourse encourages a comparison between the leaders, as Erdoğan is placing less importance on collective identity over time (Karpas, 2001; Kırmızı, 2016).

The change in political discourse is dependent on political survival as stated by JO4 (Interview with JO4, 22 November 2014). Given that 90 per cent of the country is Muslim, the needs of this majority need to be addressed. Although this might be called "Islamism" in the West, he personally views it as a feature of "national struggle" (ibid.). Moreover, JO4 claims it is only "rhetoric" that associates what is a national struggle with "Islamic concepts" (ibid.). This view is mirrored by that of AC2 who summarised Erdoğan's approach as a "national reflex" (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). In other words, many of the interviewees agreed that Erdoğan's discourse arises from political clashes, both internal and external, rather than from the desire to develop a unique ideology.

The foregoing discussion implies that a shift in the AKP's political messages is apparent when comparing both periods, 2002-2009 and 2010-2017. However, when discussing this, the majority of the interviewees focused on Erdoğan's discourse rather than on that of the AKP. However, to argue that Erdoğan determines the AKP's discourse, and that what he believes automatically becomes the official discourse of the party is in no way controversial. Moreover, the data suggests that a

⁵² According to Hanioglu (1995, p.3) the CUP is "an outgrowth of the Young Turk movement".

⁵³ "A group of anti-Ottoman officers and students" (Pappe, 2004, p.56).

⁵⁴ "The rule or reign of a caliph or chief Muslim ruler" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

combination of internal and external struggles led Erdoğan to develop the party's message.

5.4 Erdoğan's Charismatic Leadership Style

The third research question seeks to address the issue of Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, while simultaneously considering the political communications aspect of the party.

According to JO1, Western countries are deeply institutionalised, whereas Eastern societies rely on a strong leader (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). Despite his critical role as head of an important newspaper backing the AKP, he did not hesitate to criticise the lack of institutionalisation within Erdoğan's party. When doing so he also observed that Turkish society is known to prefer a charismatic leader and always seeks out a hero. There is little doubt that this is a desire inherited from Ottoman Empire, and it is one that is respected among the 'conservative' majority in Turkey (ibid.). Strong and charismatic leadership requires 'self-confidence,' and he notes that Erdoğan's initiative has enabled him to change the political landscape in Turkey.

There is no other charismatic leader who can challenge him. Hence Turkish society is following Erdoğan. If another leader would appear, we could maybe see a challenger. If you look at the political arena in Turkey, you cannot see another leader who has the same charisma and power to influence.

(Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014)

The latter has been the reality in Turkey for the last 15 years (Cagaptay, 2017).

The lack of an opposition in Turkey has been an important advantage for Erdoğan, who distinguishes himself from other leaders. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to

explain his appeal by charisma alone, overlooking the reality of religion and ideology. Weber (1967, p.18) claims that those perceived as charismatic leaders are not bureaucrats or officeholders, but members of the crowd. The natural leader who emerges from among the masses is often the most effective (ibid.). Therefore, Erdoğan's past needs to be examined carefully to understand how his appeal became consolidated. When he was 15, he joined a religiously and activism motivated youth movement called the *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği* (MTTB, English: National Turkish Student Union), which played a key role in forming his Islamist ideology (Yavuz, 2009, p.125). By joining Erbakan's party at a young age, he strengthened his Islamist foundations, and was influenced by poets and the philosophies of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu and Sezai Karakoç (explained in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2). His political ambitions resulted in his rise to prominence within the ranks of the Milli Görüş, and he assumed critical positions, including the Mayorship of Istanbul. TT1 argues that Erdoğan became enshrined in people's hearts as a consequence of his religious sensibility and his passion for serving the people of Istanbul (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). Both things added to perceptions of him as a charismatic leader. Despite confirming the importance of leadership in Turkey, JO2 argues that strong leadership is less important now than it was 10 years ago, as the level of education within society is changing as Turkey becomes more integrated into the global economy (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). As a consequence threats are fewer and so the perception that a strong leader is essential is diminishing (ibid.).

Another journalist, JO1, claims that charisma is still an important fact in Turkey, possibly being the most crucial attribute behind Erdoğan's success:

You can plan election songs, arrange the TV, mass and social media coverage; however, this does not mean achieving success. Erdoğan's message is hitting its target, because he knows his audience very well. If another politician were to give the same message, the language and discourse would not fit. Why? Because he is a tough guy. Turkish people love this kind of character.

(Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014)

JO1 analyses Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, referring to his "message", analysing his audience very well and citing his brave political programme, adding that "Turkish people do not like cowardly politicians who always step back" (ibid.). Aside from the message put forward, PO1 emphasises strategy and politics. For him, charisma is only of value when combined with a desire to provide "multi-lane highways, health service, schools and improved living standards" (ibid.).

5.4.1 Personalisation of Erdoğan

The AKP's post-Erdoğan term is expected to be fragile according to JO1 (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). He insists that the ruling party must urgently begin institutionalising its processes, to prevent difficulties arising following the departure of Erdoğan. Institutionalisation is a crucial step in order to establish an agreed party discourse and aligned political strategies. JO1 stresses that Erdoğan embodies "personal institutionalisation", in that he has learned how to govern and lead, and created a system based on his management style, which only functions with him at the head of the party (ibid.). Certainly then, if Erdoğan takes responsibility for determining the institutionalisation process, whoever follows him must continue with the same discourse, which will create much needed continuity according to JO1 (ibid.). When asked whether any party in Turkey is adequately institutionalised the interviewee mentions the Republican People's Party (CHP), founded in 1919 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. From his perspective, the CHP is a natural institution (ibid.). When questioned whether corporate institutionalisation could be effective during

Erdoğan's tenure, AC2 suggests it might not be, as Erdoğan's leadership and character is so strong that it cannot be controlled (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). Moreover, a new institutionalised mechanism would be unlikely to satisfy Erdoğan, as its remit of responsibilities might curtail his freedom to manage the AKP without hindrance (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). This lack of checks on Erdoğan was mentioned by AC2, when he was questioned about civil and military mechanisms are unable to control his leadership; a new first in Turkey's history (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014).

Portrayed from this perspective, the lack of institutionalisation is an advantage for Erdoğan, who, according to JO1 (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014), prefers individualisation (an important aspect of personalisation) (Aelst, Shaefer and Stanyer, 2012). The significance of political parties appears to be reducing, in part due to their lack of distinctiveness, which accentuates the role of personalisation. Langer (2010, p.61) calls this the "politicisation of the private persona", a phenomenon which has played a central role in politics since the Americanisation of political communications in democratic countries (Negrine, 2008). Arguably, the 'democratic' description is not wholly applicable to Erdoğan, because for him, the lack of institutionalisation provides an opportunity to create a personal political landscape reliant upon "one-man rule style" leadership (Cizre, 2016, p.7). According to JO2, Erdoğan's aim of "one-man leadership" is the principle cause of the limited freedom of speech in the country (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). This is because "authoritarian leaders do not want to be challenged" and freedom of speech for journalists in particular means some criticism of the government (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). The report of Freedom House in 2017 supports with JO2's

opinion, as the country was ranked 66th out of 100 (*Freedom House*, 2017). However, the majority of the party members were uncomfortable when I asked them about freedom of speech issues affecting journalists in Turkey; JO2 was the most open in interview.

TT1 emphasises Erdoğan's management capabilities as well as communication abilities, using the phrase "communications guru" (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). Erdoğan's competencies were developed in Erbakan's political movement (ibid.):

When the jewel [Erdoğan] met the master [Erbakan], the most beautiful diamond [Erdoğan] in the world emerged.

(Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014)

TT1 envisions the relationship between Erdoğan and Erbakan above, likening the two men to student and master (ibid.). However, it is important to note, that Erbakan emphasises that Erdoğan shed his Milli Görüş credentials when he "collaborated with [Former US President] George Bush and the Zionist lobby in the USA" and became "Bush's assistant in charge of the Middle East" (*Saadet Partisi*, 2014). Erdoğan explains the relationship similarly to my interviewee; noting that the early days of the AKP marked a significant adjustment for Erdoğan and his 'reformist crew' (ibid.). They had been keen to reform the movement from within but had not been permitted to do so by Erbakan and his traditionalists (Eligür, 2010). In fact, despite their political differences, Erdoğan remained a student of Erbakan for 32 years (ibid.), a reality that has surely informed his response to the national and international environments in which he operates.

5.4.2 Eradication of Internal Opposition to Strengthen Erdoğan

When I asked TT1 if the Gezi Park protests in 2013 were a failure of Erdoğan's management and communication, in particular when he referred to the protesters as *Çapulcu* (which means marauders in English), he defended Erdoğan's successful management of the public's perception:

If someone like Abdullah Gül [former President] or Bülent Arınç [former Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and Deputy Prime Minister] had been the leader during the Gezi Park protests, we might have faced civil war in Turkey.

(Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014)

Here he distinguishes between Erdoğan and his former colleagues. Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç were key personalities within the AKP whose prominence was ultimately cast into shadow by Erdoğan. As explained in reference to Gül, in Section 5.3.2, as potential challengers of Erdoğan in the long term their removal was necessary (Phillip, 2017). Their different approaches to critical issues, such as the Gezi Park protests or the 17/25 December 2014 corruption scandal (TT1) revealed the more tolerant and moderate voice within the ruling party, a voice which considers the entire population (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). TT1 emphasises that had either the Gezi Park protests or the 17/25 December 2014 corruption scandal been managed by someone other than Erdoğan, many high-ranked AKP supporters, including himself, would be in prison now (ibid.). Interestingly, JO2 thinks that those within the AKP who disapproved of Erdoğan's dismissive language is in the majority, but had felt unable to speak out (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

This situation began to change when Ahmet Davutoğlu became Chairman of the AKP and Prime Minister of Turkey in 2014. Indeed, the AKP is split according to

JO2, while one group operates along the same political lines as Erdoğan, the other is willing to engage in a more moderate form of governance (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). These words have more relevance today than during the interview [December 2014]. When Erdoğan became President of Turkey in August 2014, he was required to resign from the AKP and the role of Prime Minister. Consequently after long discussions and in consultation, he appointed Ahmet Davutoğlu, his former Foreign Minister and advisor as Prime Minister. Certainly initially there was no sign of a distinction between the thoughts and actions of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, but during crisis periods, the two have been seen to collide (Cagaptay, 2017).

Criticism of Gül and Davutoğlu Linking Them to the West

When considering the above connections, it is useful to look at the allegations made by social media trolls close to the AKP who take responsibility for posting provocative messages on social media sites to cause disruption. JO2 claims that these trolls are paid by the AKP through unofficial channels (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). In one ‘troll campaign’, they claimed that Davutoğlu was associated with a ‘German school of thought’⁵⁵ and had signed a secret agreement with Germany to overthrow Erdoğan (Albayrak, 2017). In addition, both Davutoğlu and former President Abdullah Gül were accused of being ‘controlled by the Queen’, because they had studied in the United Kingdom in their youth (Albayrak, 2017). PO4 argues that the campaign to cast other individuals into shadow is a crucial aspect of maintaining the perception of Erdoğan as the only plausible wholly charismatic leader (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014).

⁵⁵ Stigmatising Davutoğlu as associated to the ‘German school of thought’ is possible because he studied at Istanbul High School, which is based on the German education system, *Abitur*.

5.4.3 Erdoğan's Charisma and the AKP's Popularity

Despite the above, JO2 accentuates that patriarchy in politics is old school and not sufficient to convince the upcoming generations (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). Thus, even the children of AKP supporters are not impressed by Erdoğan's discourse (ibid.). The charismatic leadership style exhibited by Erdoğan lacks appeal for the younger generation, a fact that became apparent in the June 2015 general elections. The most preferred party among youths was the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), followed by Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the Republican People's Party (CHP), and finally the AKP (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). This finding was reportedly an outcome of a poll prepared by TT1 for the AKP, which was not released into the public domain (ibid.).

However, PO3 does not agree that the significance of Erdoğan's charisma is decreasing (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). On the contrary he stresses that Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style is a principal tool in the AKP's political communications armoury (ibid.). He reveals the findings of a poll that examined the role of propaganda during the 2014 Turkish Presidential Election, which found that just "three per cent of Erdoğan's supporters were influenced by the propaganda" (ibid.), the key consideration was economic development; although, he adds that the success of the economy partly depends on the presence of a charismatic leader. Despite the limited appeal of Erdoğan according to JO2, he acknowledges his charismatic leadership style as highly influential:

15 per cent of the 50 per cent [of voters] who support the AKP, only do so because of Erdoğan's charisma, not because of AKP's politics.

(Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014)

To some extent then, personality is the path to credibility, as Bruce (1992, p.95) summarises. The credibility conferred on Erdoğan and the AKP by their supporters fuelled economic prosperity, as JO3 notes (Interview with JO3, 28 November 2014). Moreover, there was a need for a strong leader to manage economic development in 2002, stating that at the time Erdoğan was the main symbol of hope: “if you take Erdoğan away, there is no hope in Turkey” (ibid.). When I asked JO3 about the lack of institutionalisation in Turkey, and within the AKP, his view echoes that of JO1 given above:

There is definitely a lack of institutionalisation. That is the reason why there is an incredible support for a charismatic leader such as Erdoğan. Because people say “if Erdoğan goes, everything will end”. This is also the reason why Erdoğan has won so many elections in a row, despite the military, judiciary, Gülenists etc. Turkish society knows that Erdoğan is a human and has faults. However, they think that he needs to stay. Society sees that there is no institutionalisation. This is the reason why they are supporting [Erdoğan].

(Interview with JO3, 28 November 2014)

This statement questions whether Erdoğan’s charisma is really the reason he was able to prevent the military and judiciary from intervening to oust the AKP from government. Furthermore, not only the 17/25 December 2014 corruption scandal, but also the July 15 2016 coup attempt, represents another important turning point when assessing the achievements of Erdoğan’s leadership. Indeed the example of Hezbollah’s Hasan Nasrallah illuminates the significance of the situation in which Erdoğan found himself (Matar, 2008). Every single confrontation and challenge that concludes with successful resistance is an opportunity to strengthen a leader who relies on charisma to maintain appeal (ibid.). In fact, just as Nasrallah’s confrontation with Israeli forces enhanced his popularity in the Arab world (ibid.), the internal challenges Erdoğan has overcome have increased his popularity, and reinforced his hold on power (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016).

Furthermore, PO1 argues that Erdoğan's charisma is a feature that results from his activist roots as a member of Erbakan's movement (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). PO1 asserts that his political approach as an academic differs from that of Erdoğan, whose knowledge is practical rather than theoretical (ibid.). In order to succeed in the political landscape, a leader's advisors need theoretical knowledge, whereas a leader needs know-how and relevant management skills (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014).

The information collected implies that perceptions of Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style in the early years were mainly linked to recognition of his activities as the mayor of Istanbul (1994-1998). His Islamist background and his ambitious of being a servant to the population of Istanbul amplified his popularity. Indeed if we view the development of Erdoğan's charisma as progressive, we can cite a clear transformation after 2009, as confirmed by the majority of the interviewees. The significance of this date reminds us of the importance of Hasan Nasrallah's resistance to Israeli forces (Matar, 2008), which heralded a new "phase of political jihad" in the region (Harb and Leenders, 2005, p.183), and boosted Nasrallah's popularity in Lebanon and the wider Arab world (Matar, 2008, p.130). Similarly the events of Davos and Mavi Marmara can be viewed as critical moments in Erdoğan's political career, as they led to his being widely regarded as "the charismatic leader of the Muslim world". Thus, 2009 marks the date from which the popularity of the Turkish leader was deemed influential in 'Arab streets' and beyond (*Pew Research*, 2017).

5.5 AKP's Political Communication

“Persuading people” is fundamental to public relations, as Bernays (1952, p.12) observes. In the domain of politics, truth is communicated to the public within a strategic “political” framework (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011, p.8), intended to produce “influence” and benefit “reputations” (ibid.). This section describes key aspects of the AKP’s political communication, as portrayed by experts and party officials working in this area. As the interviews were conducted following the presidential election in 2014, the focus of the examples given was specifically on the presidential election, but the interviewees also provided general information concerning the party’s communication process.

Olçok, Erdoğan’s spin-doctor, campaign manager and owner of Arter media advertising agency, worked for both the AKP and Erdoğan; he underlines that the AKP follows a policy of constant communication, a strategy which distinguishes it from other parties, and Erdoğan from other political leaders (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). He explains that “constant communication” refers to “uninterrupted” communication (ibid.); i.e. the party not only communicates during elections or crisis periods but continuously (ibid.). When the in-depth interview with Olçok took place, it was December 2014 and so there were seven months to go before the general election [June 2015]. At this time, Olçok commented on the fact that nobody was questioning who would win (ibid.), he said: “The only question people and media ask is ‘how many votes will the AKP get?’” (ibid.).

He explains that he uses the brand ‘Erdoğan’ as evidence upon which to base communication strategies designed to increase the party’s impact (ibid.). He explains

modestly that while 50 people comprise Erdoğan's strategy team, "success belongs to the leader" (ibid). He asserts that Erdoğan has conquered the hearts of the people during his 40 years in the political spotlight, through his discourse, actions and attitudes (ibid.). To explain the longevity of Erdoğan's charisma, Olçok refers to the time the leader spent working for Erbakan's party and then as mayor of Istanbul, where he achieved remarkable success as an energetic mayor delivering services to every household, an efficiency never before witnessed in Istanbul (Besli and Özbay, 2010). As an example, he solved the water crisis in Istanbul; overcoming this major challenge won him the support of many, who were then willing to overlook any ideological differences (ibid.).

In the 1994 elections, 4.08 million people voted, and Erdoğan received 973,704 votes, a quarter of the vote (*IHA*, 1994). At this time Erdoğan emerged as a natural leader, standing up from the centre of "the silent majority"; a man who sold "lemonade as a boy to support his family" (Yavuz, 2003, p.259), Erdoğan overcame 'hardship' in his youth to become a figurehead, an inspiration for others like him. This history explains why Erdoğan's personal success has been at the crux of the AKP's political communication (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). Olçok continues that Erdoğan's presence at the head of the party is sufficient in itself to persuade the public to vote for it (ibid.).

When I ask Olçok about the three different agencies (*Ideha Reklam*, *Konsensus Halkla İlişkiler & Reklam* and *Devr-i Alem*) (which are mentioned in research on the AKP (Arşan and Can, 2008)), in particular, if the AKP works with these agencies, he explains the party works with different advertising and marketing agencies, but

underlines that he cannot mention names (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). Olçok emphasises the central role of his own agency, which has served the AKP since its establishment, seeking to convey the impression that all important work is based on the outcomes of his agency, Arter (ibid.).

TT1 explains how Erdoğan's strategy team works below:

Immediately after the presidential elections, I was invited for a meeting in October 2014 about the elections in June 2015. This was a strategy meeting. This is one example that shows how professional and determined Erdoğan is. In this meeting we discussed what discourse and terms should be deployed for the election. Collecting, discussing and analysing are the jobs in the beginning preparatory phase. We look at previous elections in terms of discourse, slogan, election promises, etc., and work on new strategies and ideas. By the time the main opposition party starts preparing their election campaign, the AKP has already decided everything, such as slogans, music, election manifesto, etc. in draft form. We then send the plans to a smaller team to revise and decide on the details. When they finished their work, we come together for a two-day camp, at which the chairman and all the other party members are present. This meeting means "we are ready", and covers "who is doing what?" The party has been victorious in all of the elections to date. This is the difference between the AKP and the opposition parties.

(Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014)

TT1's foremost emphasis is on the party's professionalism, and the significance of its adaption to the "changing nature of technologies of communication" (Negrine, 2008, p.6). TT1 explains that after the 2007 general election, things became more professional and digital technology was more fully incorporated into the party's communication strategies (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014).

5.5.1 Civil Initiatives in Communication

During the interview, I asked Olçok if the party uses their status in government to assist with campaigning, because during the 2014 presidential elections I saw many more campaign posters for Erdoğan on the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, than for either Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu or Selahattin Demirtaş. Olçok explains the regulations

forbid this, and emphasises that they are adhered to (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). However, he explains they employ a clever promotional technique:

During the election period, we received hundreds of phone calls from people who are interested in hanging up a poster of Erdoğan in their own homes, shops, offices etc. This is a civil initiative. That is the reason why people feel that Erdoğan is using the power of government. Additionally, I must say that İhsanoğlu received support from 13 different parties. These seven have approximately 6000 offices in Turkey. If they were clever, they would use this opportunity, and use their office spaces to campaign for free.

(Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014)

This recalls evidence presented in the study by Arsan and Can (2008) (explained in Section 2.7.9). For the 2007 general elections volunteers were trained for fifteen days by the party, to prepare them for successful political communication campaigning (ibid.). Both examples show that the AKP is using its support base when campaigning.

PO1, who is also part of the AKP's strategy team, claims the party's political communication strategy is to focus solely on the leader (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). Unlike Olçok, who did not share the details of the members of the strategy team, PO1 disclosed that ministers, MP's, research centres, think tanks, political scientists, and advertising agencies are all part of the team; highlighting the fact that the communications produced are the product of a "collective mind": "Despite differences in ideas and strategies related to our communication, we act with a collective mind" (ibid.). Undoubtedly, "exchanges, negotiations, decisions, and conflicts" take place from within this collective whole (Melucci, 1996, p.70), but ultimately, according to AC2, it is Erdoğan that sets the agenda, not the strategy team (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). To this end, the role of a social movement is crucial (Moghadam, 2009). Whereas Erdoğan sets the agenda, he also wants to act in

a way that consolidates collective identity, as AC2 highlights (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). This approach forms the basis of the “establishment of a new order” (Moghadam, 2009) and the forging of a new national identity (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) as will be elaborated on in upcoming chapters.

When the AKP officials interviewed spoke about political communication they only mentioned Erdoğan, not the party. This provides further evidence of the institutionalisation problem previously explained in Section 5.4.1. It also promotes “authoritarian” governance (Altun, 2016) as pluralism disappears systematically, when replacing collective party identity (Melucci, 1996) with one-man leadership. It is important to mention here, that in order to have a successful social movement, it is necessary that Tilly’s (1978, p.7) five components are met: “interest, organization, mobilization, opportunity, and collective action itself”.

5.5.2 Americanisation of the AKP’s Political Communication

As set out earlier in the thesis, the Americanisation of political communications is an important lens through which to observe the AKP’s communications. When I consulted political communication advisor, Olçok, about whether the AKP utilises American style campaign strategies, he admitted that the team responsible for managing public relations, media and communication affairs, closely observes the conduct of election campaigns in the US (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014):

The US is the centre of marketing, advertising and public relations. Furthermore it is one of the most important countries where political communication’s principles, theories and practices are applied.

(ibid.)

However different dynamics, and historical as well as sociological frameworks, prevent wholesale imitation of the US model in Turkey (ibid.). According to the communications guru, the problems effecting Turkey and the US differ, necessitating the development of a unique political communication campaign for Erdoğan, which is only “inspired” by techniques used in the US (ibid.). Here it is important to point out that, due to his position, Olçok was naturally unwilling to suggest replication of US strategies as this might risk damaging the party’s or Erdoğan’s image. Moreover, chastening the approach of Western nations, specifically America, is a common approach in Turkey among conservatives, as I observed during my fieldwork. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11 poured oil on flames, magnifying the negative image of the US in the eyes of Turkish society; as illustrated by *GlobeScan*’s (2017) report. Yet US-Turkey relations and the US’ relationship with Israel might have an impact also have a negative outcome.

AC2 (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014) notes that the AKP started the process of Americanisation in Turkey using professional spin doctors, advisors, advertising agencies and research centres, as well as think tanks. He refers to Erdoğan’s strategy team as adopting “Americanised processes of political communication” (ibid.). Although the AKP was not professional in its campaigns during its early years, over time it has invested more money in political communication (ibid.). However AC2 states that this funding is not yet enough on its own:

Turkey will focus more on Americanisation which focusses more on the media, indoor meetings, soft advertisings, virtual media, and manipulation in order to persuade with different techniques. We do not have specialists who know this process very well. When the country is developed and normalised, this will have an impact on the political communication too.

(ibid.)

AC2 refers to professionalisation as a sub area of Americanisation. Negrine (2008, p.6) summarises professionalisation as taking place in three phases: “Changing organizational structures of political parties, the changing nature of technologies of communication, and the place of spin in modern politics”. According to Olçok, the AKP is currently implementing all three aspects (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). Whereas organisational change is based on the work with advertising agencies and think tanks, he explains that changes to communication technologies involve the “implementation of Americanisation model” (ibid.). Finally, when discussing spin, he does not mention names, but tries to emphasise again that he is the longest serving person within the AKP in the area of political communication (ibid.).

AC2 underscores that development and normalisation are central to the introduction of Americanisation, as a model for political communication (Interview with AC2, 10 October). In fact, the way ‘Americanisation’ developed relates directly to AC2’s comments. That is, after the Cold War, the impact of popular culture became amplified and America’s domination beyond its borders increased (Thussu, 2009), leading to the transformation of many societies (Thussu, 2006, p.43). This process is closely related to the intensification of capital expenditure, according to Farrell (1996), as it leads to economic growth and fuels development (Scammell, 2007) in the form of improved socio-economic conditions (ibid.). This development then enables a country to adopt modern and current strategies and tools and use them proactively.

In addition, for AC2, there is something which is “more effective than Americanisation”, a tool not widely used in the West: outdoor campaigning:

No other leader in the West in the 21st Century has been able to bring 1 million people together for a rally as Erdoğan does. This is more important than Americanisation. It is the reality of Erdoğan.

(Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014)

AC2 points out that direct communication is crucial to Erdoğan's success (ibid.); as McNair (2003, p.32) explains, the message plays a crucial role in direct communication, strengthening the impact on the electorate. Whereas indoor meetings with small numbers of people is standard practice in American contexts (Kubicek, 2017), the aspect of rallying does not need to be excluded. It can be recognised as a local factor within the context of the AKP's use of Americanisation.

Contradicting the view espoused by AC2 (Interview with AC2, 10 October) that the AKP's communications were not professional in the early years, JO4 states that its communication strategy has deteriorated since the Gezi Park protests 2013 (Interview with JO4, 22 November 2014). He claims the AKP's political communication strategies were very effective until that time, as they were systematic, disciplined, and conceptualised clearly, resulting in strong slogans (ibid.). In this regard, Arsan and Can's (2008) study of the AKP's 2007 election campaign confirms the comments made by AC2, as both writers explain how professionally the AKP prepared for the general elections by working with three different agencies, coaching volunteers for effective campaigning as highlighted earlier, and coaching MPs in terms of body language, image and rhetoric, working on slogans and speeches to help them to address the public effectively. However, coaching was never mentioned during the in-depth interviews, possibly because after more than a decade of experience the party and its campaigners might not need any coaching.

Furthermore, JO4 cautions that Americanisation is not necessary in Turkey, as Erdoğan's place at the epicentre of the political landscape says more than any campaign strategy ever could (ibid.). However, these remarks themselves reveal JO4 lacks adequate knowledge of the features that the Americanisation of political communications encompasses.

Erdoğan's Emotional Appeal

Another aspect of Erdoğan's charisma is his capacity to forge an emotional bond with his audience, according to JO1 (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). Here, the interviewee focuses on Erdoğan's use of language and poetry, observing that whether Erdoğan is speaking about highways, hospitals or Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the audience listens and responds with great emotion. This interviewee, an experienced journalist, comments that some people even shed tears when Erdoğan is addressing the crowds. In fact, I personally witnessed this during my fieldwork at AKP rallies in August 2014. This level of emotion discloses the strong relationship between the leader and his supporters. It is the result of years of employing a "candidate-centred campaign" policy, which can be described here as personalisation (Foster and Muste, 1992, p.16).

Anti-Erdoğan campaigns never succeed because the people who love Erdoğan are loyal to him. There is an emotional relationship. Consequently as long as this relationship endures, all anti-Erdoğan campaigns will fail. Erdoğan is successful despite media bias, because he is a direct communicator and reaches society directly. Even if you create an anti-campaign using mass media tools, you cannot touch these supporters. Therefore, emotional loyalty can be seen to be very important in political communication.

(Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014)

JO1's approach summarises the relationship between Erdoğan and his followers, within the framework of personalisation and models of charismatic leadership which is addressed in the third research question.

5.5.3 Role of the Opinion Polls in the AKP's Political Communication

Opinion poll, another Americanisation aspect (Butler and Ranney, 1992), is an important tool when designing a communication strategy (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). Political communications professor, McNair (2003, p.6) summarises this relationship in Figure 1, including it in his “elements of political communication”. Typically, opinion polls collating the views of citizens are conducted by research centres; however, the results of these polls are fed back through the media to political organisations (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014), as is the case for the AKP. Olçok explains, “Opinion polls are an important part of our success. Through measuring the pulse of the public, we see how the land lies and develop our strategy” (ibid.). He also explains how the process works, as follows (ibid.). First, the strategy team determines the focus of the polls and their target audience, and then the research centre defines the questions including details relevant to the chosen audience (ibid.). After the poll has been conducted the results are delivered to the research centre, where they are analysed by specialists and the findings presented to the strategy team, which sets the election agenda accordingly. Opinion polls are an important aspect of political communication for the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD), as is highlighted in Bouyahya's (2015) research. The most effective Islamist party in Morocco is implementing professionalisation strategies in its election campaigns, i.e. utilising opinion polls and market research to focus on the needs of the society rather than on ideology (ibid.).

5.5.4 AKP's Political Communication Inspires Islamist Parties

Regarding the Americanisation process, Olçok highlights that Erdoğan's strategy team is in the process of transferring its experiences of this ‘new’ kind of political campaigning to other Islamist parties and movements in the region (Interview with

Olçok, 3 December 2014). When asked which parties these are, Olçok mentions the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2012, and Ennahda in Tunisia (ibid.). Olçok went to Egypt and Tunisia personally to work with these parties as he explains. More importantly, later on, when our conversation overran, Olçok disclosed that Erdoğan had assigned this job directly to him (ibid.), which means there is direct connection in terms of campaigning between the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda. Thus, while the political communication strategies of the US offer inspiration for the AKP, the AKP's communication strategies inspire other Islamist parties in the region. Indeed the relationship between religion and communication style is critical when preparing a unique model that reflects local dynamics. For example, in contrast to the AKP, the Americanisation of Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD), according to Bouyahya (2015, p.77) concentrates on professionalism, such as "political consultancy and spin-doctors". Thus, "American electioneering" (Negrine, 2008, p.154) coincides with the realities of society, as illustrated by the fact that while appearing with family members is a sensitive issue in Morocco, it is viewed as a positive move in Turkey.

Thus, the reality that "what works in one country may not work in another" and "what works in one election may not work in the next" should not be ignored (Wring et al., 2007, p.17). In addition, Americanisation can be viewed as a form of cultural homogenisation, which "transforms traditional societies" (Thussu, 2006, p.43), assimilating them with others, and standardising the campaign strategies of different countries and parties. That the AKP is assisting other Islamist parties clarifies that the Americanisation process is now entrenched within the AKP, with the result that it now has its own "technical experts and professional advisers" (Negrine and Stanyer,

2007, p.106). JO2 explains that Erdoğan's willingness to innovate in the area of communications makes the job of the strategy team easier when drawing on models from Western countries (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

5.5.5 Emphasis on Family

JO1 explains that part of the Americanisation process of the AKP is the emphasis placed on introducing key "family figures" to the electorate (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). By inviting his wife on stage during rallies, Erdoğan conveys the message that all his supporters, regardless of their hierarchy, are part of one big family (ibid.). Clearly the practice of appearing with a partner is not widespread in Turkey. JO1 argues that it symbolises confidence when a leader appears with his family, which is the tradition in the US; this is how we "know Michelle Obama, Laura Bush, Hillary Clinton" (ibid.). This will be elaborated on in the presentation of the fieldwork data.

5.6 Erdoğan's Polarising Discourse

The previous two sections touched on the fact that after the economic success and reform process of the AKP's early years in office [2002-2009], additional factors, both internal and external, came to influence its discourse and use of language. This section of the chapter will discuss the key role played by religion, and its part in the AKP's political communications to answer the fourth research question.

AC1, a scholar of Islamic science at Marmara University in Istanbul, explains that the AKP makes Islamic references in its political activities, which to him reflects its confidence as an established party (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). He states that this move does not then represent a shift in the main direction of the party

and that the approach of the international mainstream media is not logical (ibid.). Erdoğan's discourse is undoubtedly the discourse of the AKP, and this is an important point for my interviewee (ibid.). Erdoğan controls the AKP, and so sets the discourse and its agenda. Although he criticises this, he underlines that it is a successful strategy and to the credit of Erdoğan, as it is not easy to manage such a large party, with nearly 10 million members (ibid.). Nevertheless as discussed previously, he admits that it is in part a consequence of the expectation in Turkey that the leader chooses the direction of the national political discourse.

AC1 believes that Erdoğan's discourse has served to polarise Turkey increasingly since 2011 (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). This has generated uncertainty, and is risking a division between the different social groups in Turkey (ibid.). That is to say that the interests of parties, secularists, and conservatives are increasingly polarised.

Actually this is one of the main problems related to the Westernisation in the Islamic world. Two things which are philosophically opposite are expected to function together. If you conduct a philosophical analysis both push each other away. The AKP has increased this parallel position. So the answer to the question, "is Turkey is becoming more secularised", is "yes." But to the question, "is Turkey becoming more religious", it is also "yes."

(ibid.)

Apparently AC1 analyses the processes in Turkey by examining the nature of change in society. Erdoğan uses inflammatory rhetoric, not only regarding issues related to politics but also when passing judgement on the lives of people; such as by introducing new regulations on alcohol and issuing abortion restrictions (ibid.). On May 24, 2013, the Turkish Parliament approved a bill which "banned the sale of alcohol between 22.00-6.00" (Altun, 2016). Erdoğan explained these steps by giving

examples from European countries (*CNN Türk*, 2013), but AC1 thinks that his limiting of the availability of alcohol is driven by his Islamist ideology (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). In fact, as Erdoğan emphasises, the alcohol ban is similar to that in the West, and he cautions against allowing the emergence of a drunken generation, referencing Turkish youth (*Milliyet*, 2013).

According to PO1, this is an obvious introduction of religious prescriptions into politics (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). However he adds that the AKP's policies to date have made Turkey more democratic, expanded freedoms, and developed the country economically. When PO1 comments on these issues he does so to emphasise that he himself is working towards achieving modernisation (*ibid.*). What is more, his tone suggests there is a conflict within the AKP, and that he disapproves of Erdoğan's policies. Similarly, he argues that universal values were at the epicentre of the AKP's policies in the first two election periods, meaning 2002-2007 and 2007-2011, revealing a contradiction with the views of the other AKP officials I interviewed. In fact the AKP used the slogan "Everything is for Turkey" in the 2002 parliamentary elections, with the aim of uplifting the living standards of people in Turkey, but also to alter negative perceptions of the country globally (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.21). Henceforth, economic as well as social steps were included on their agenda (*ibid.*). Intending to join the EU, the AKP introduced the Copenhagen criteria, which emphasise "freedom of thought and expression, and freedom of economic enterprise" (*ibid.*). This brought average working class conservative men and women to the epicentre of the political agenda, introducing a politics focused on them rather than on the elite, whom previous governments in Turkey had targeted (Kalin, 2013, p.427).

5.6.1 AKP's Identity Struggle

Despite his closeness to Erdoğan, PO3 on the other hand, confesses there is an element of chaos concerning the AKP's identity, which is apparent in the party's rhetoric and discourse (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Analysing this internal conflict from a broader perspective, he likens it to Turkey's 200 year long struggle with the Westernisation process. Mehmet Akif Ersoy, author of the Turkish National Anthem, stated, after visiting Germany in 1914, that Turks should "compete with the science of the West", adopting the necessary tools to do so (Bilgin, 2017, 164). However, he discerns that not Western science, but its "immoralities" were adopted (ibid.).

According to the data presented in the literature review, and that provided by PO3, the modernisation process begun by Sultan Selim III marked the commencement of an era of retrogression in the Ottoman Empire, which led to the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Both Sultan Selim III and his successor Sultan Mahmud II introduced new policies in the fields of military, education, and social life (Zürcher, 1993), to benefit "religion and State", hinder their fall and modernise the Empire (Hourani, Khoury and Wilson, 1993, p.53). These motivations caused the identity of society to become fractured, according to the former Milli Görüş member. PO3 states that Erdoğan is trying to set a new agenda to advance Turkish society, but due to the turbulent past, many questions remain unanswered:

Where do we live? What kind of Muslims are we? What kind of democracy do we defend?
What form of government do we desire?

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014)

Answering these questions is fundamental, according to PO3, in order to establish a consistent discourse that will endure regardless of single events or changes of leader (ibid.). It is the lack of identity that is causing the people in Turkey to be confused politically. On the topic of Erdoğan's rhetoric, PO3 does believe that it has changed since 2009, as summarised below:

Erdoğan is dreaming now for a young generation, which holds the Quran in one hand, and a computer in the other.

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014)

This sentence alludes to Ersoy's words, as mentioned previously. The inclusion in the metaphor of the Quran, is a clear sign that Erdoğan is confident about discussing religion, but it also suggests that his vision is one that can embrace and combine both faith and technology (ibid.). This is a recent vision, as expressed here:

When Abdullah Gül become President in 2007, and when the AKP survived the closure trial in 2008, this was the time for Erdoğan to begin challenging the secular establishment.

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014)

PO3 purports that the confusion surrounding the language and discourse used by the AKP and its supporters relates to the party's failure to institutionalise its position (ibid.). More importantly, PO3 does not accuse Erdoğan, his advisors or AKP officials of creating this situation, but rather academics and social scientists; saying that it is studying with an "Anglo-American syllabus" based on the West prevents the development of unique Turkish theories and discourses in politics, sociology and science, because it offers a "different paradigm" (ibid.). He further explains that these problems proceed from the alternative education systems employed in Saudi Arabia, and Egypt and others. He considers the emergence of DAESH (aka ISIS or

Islamic State) and al-Qaeda as part of this problem, adding that he cannot see any solution in the near future. Whether the education system in Turkey offers an alternative to the “West” is a reasonable question to ask but it is not the focus of this research.

For his part, when JO1 appraises Erdoğan’s use of religious discourse, he takes a position in the middle-ground, explaining that Erdoğan does not offer an Islamic discourse but a universal one. In particular, he claims that his response to Mavi Marmara and the Davos crisis, represent “an upheaval against injustice”:

At the Davos Forum in 2009, Erdoğan said to Peres, “I know very well how you killed children on beaches.” This is not Islamic discourse. This could have been a sentence uttered by the Prime Minister of India or Papua New Guinea too.

(Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014)

His approach to highlighting injustice aroused the sympathy of others who were repressed, in particular those who had long had a problem with Israel’s politics (ibid.). In other words, it “satisfied Muslims in the world who felt sorry for repressed Palestinians” (ibid.). Immediately, after the event, the mainstream media started highlighting “Erdoğan’s Islamisation” groundlessly to damage his image (ibid.).

5.6.2 Neo-Ottoman Identity

PO3 clearly underlines that AKP does not have a unique discourse, but that Erdoğan is seeking to introduce a local and native discourse that references history and literature, and encompasses the intentions of great political and religious leaders:

Erdoğan is a leader who quotes from Ahmedî Hani, Kurdish poet and historian who lived in the 17th century, whose name was unknown until 2009 as nobody was brave enough to mention him in speeches. Furthermore, he refers to Yunus Emre, a Turkish poet and Sufi mystic who lived in the 13th century. He reads poems by Mehmet Akif Ersoy courageously.

He talks about Abdulhamid II, one of the most important figures in the Ottoman Empire, who is known as an “Islamist Sultan,” Fatih Sultan Mehmet, Ottoman Sultan who conquered Constantinople, and Alp Arslan, Second Sultan of the Seljuk Empire. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to point to Saladin’s Kurdish Identity.

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014)

PO3 acknowledges that Erdoğan draws on concepts introduced by certain key figures, but states that it is his reflection on history that is significant (ibid.). The extract above portrays how Erdoğan associated his ideology with the Ottoman and the Seljuk Empire.

Referencing both empires and relating to sentiments expressed by key Islamist thinkers is a sign that he is pursuing a sense of collective identity, which “is a product of conscious action” (Larana, Hohnston and Gusfield, 1994, p.17). The idea of collective action in the context of Erdoğan’s relationship with the Ottoman or Seljuk Empire is one that communicates a “local and native” vision, as elucidated by PO3 earlier, and can be interpreted as an interest in recalling the lessons of history from a modern viewpoint. This explains why the term “neo-Ottoman” is sometimes used to characterise the position of the AKP in academia and the media (Hale, 2013, p.254).

Collective identity is an essential aspect of social movement theory, one that focuses on the unification of “social, political and economic conditions” (Crane, 1994, pp. 395-396). According to AC1, Erdoğan’s references to history suggest he is trying to develop a social movement (*hareket* in Turkish), similar to the Milli Görüş movement, in to ensure he “leaves a legacy behind” (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). Social movements mobilise the masses and bring about change in

society (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.67). Arguably, without any clear identity, discourse or political institutionalisation, as highlighted earlier, the AKP's message is not sufficiently meaningful to establish a 'de facto collective identity'. Thus, as power "lies in the images of representation" as Castell's (1997, p.359) highlights; maintaining a legacy after the death is achievable only by forging an enduring image based on a legacy of power. When delivering his final speech at the AKP group meeting before becoming President in 2014, Erdoğan asserted that his aim was "to leave a nice trace behind" (*Euronews*, 2014). According to AC1, this refers to his intent to make a positive contribution to the country, so guarantee that it will endure once his political career is over (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014). However, AC1 thinks that this might also reflect Erdoğan's Islamist ideology, because the meaning of 'Jihad' is to fight and die for the sake of God: "A true Muslim believes in Jihad and desires to change the society when necessary" (*ibid.*). Hence, Erdoğan's main aim as a leader is "to fulfil his duties as a "real Muslim" (*ibid.*).

Despite the comments made by AC1 (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014), Erdoğan recommended the MB follow a secularist line when he visited Egypt immediately after the Egyptian revolution in 2011, which created a solemn reaction (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). This exemplifies his pragmatic side according to JO1. Moreover, JO2 argues that his pragmatic approach encourages the people around Erdoğan to be more liberal themselves; thus, claiming the "AKP is an Islamic or Islamist party" is wrong (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). The reverse is true according to JO2; the AKP is integrated into the "modern world system" yet retains an Islamic sensitivity (*ibid.*). Being part of a system does necessarily mean one must not challenge or change the system itself (Wilson, 1973,

pp.14-29), but nor does it preclude the possibility of future transformation or reform of the system or structure (ibid.).

PO4 analyses the use of religion as a political communication tool, viewing it as a commonplace practice “in politics” (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). When there is a shared base and common identity among an audience in terms of religious affairs and values, it is logical “to use this opportunity”:

If you see a benefit you can reference religious things. This is also said in the Quran. Erdoğan is not addressing everybody. He is focussing on the members of his audience who believe this. He is not saying anything to those who do not believe him.

(ibid.).

Certainly this approach contributes and element of othering to society, also clarifying how interpretations of religion can be easily legitimised. On the other hand, despite my asking for examples of Erdoğan making references from the Quran, the interviewee could not provide any.

5.6.3 Islamised Discourse after the Egyptian Coup

TT2 (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014) has a different reading of the process than PO4 (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). He claims that Erdoğan’s discourse and that of the AKP’s political communication team, relates to the demands of society. Whereas the need in 2002 was more economy and development oriented because of the economic crisis in 2001. After the AKP’s economic success and prosperity, the demands imposed on it by society started changing (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). Hence Erdoğan started to include references to religion to fulfil a sociological and psychological need within Turkish society (ibid.). TT2 adds that while lack of self-confidence led him to avoid using religious

vocabulary in the early days over time, and after losing faith in the West he altered his narrative:

In particular after the military coup in Egypt in 2013 Erdoğan's discourse became more Islamised. Erdoğan saw clearly that Western countries are not sincere in their support of the Islamic World's democratisation process [meaning Egypt]. He considered the coup d'état in Egypt as a threat to himself.

(ibid.)

According to the interviews conducted with TT2 (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014), JO2 (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014), and PO3 (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014), Erdoğan's reactions to domestic and international issues started changing after the West's reaction to the military coup in Egypt in 2013, and the Gezi Park protests in Turkey in the same year. TT2 (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014) states that neither of the events were condemned properly, or in a timely manner, which "aroused Erdoğan's suspicion" of the West. What these suspicions are is unclear, but he did cite a biased attitude in terms of the case of the EU (Yesilada, 2013). After the Egyptian coup, Erdoğan perhaps began to suspect that a similar coup might happen in Turkey, according to JO2 (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). The July 15 2016 coup appears to justify this fear (Berktaş, 2017) (see Section 5.3.5).

The above interviewees all agreed that the West's main problem with Erdoğan has been what it characterises as his so-called "Islamist" ideology, which it suggests developed after the above-mentioned events took place. Chapter seven will consider whether Erdoğan's political views on certain issues started changing in response to the "Western world's hypocrisy," or if he, having believed in a more liberal and

moderate religious ideology in the early days as party leader, had never forgotten his Milli Görüş roots and felt empowered to reclaim them after his 2007 election victory. Nonetheless, the evidence presented clearly indicates that mutual interactions led Erdoğan and the West, to a profound revision of their political messages.

5.7 Conclusion

A closer examination of the data indicates that Erdoğan's primary aim when his party was first elected as the main party in 2002, was to focus on the economy and its development in order to strengthen Turkey's image internally and globally. At this time Erdoğan never associated himself with an Islamist ideology, message or discourse. As a result he was viewed as a moderate in his religious affairs, and was characterised as pursuing a liberal approach, supporting the free market, and political democracy. Consequently, reversing the headscarf ban in universities and 'Imam Hatips' (religious) schools were not on the agenda of the self-governing party in the first period (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). In other words, the development process enabled the AKP to realise a "silent revolution" in Turkey, which influenced Erdoğan's discourse and the AKP's political communication strategy (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014).

There is little doubt that the development process meant the AKP could control every institution in Turkey, which led Erdoğan to become more self-confident as a leader. In fact, the crisis at the Davos World Economy Forum in 2009, and his support of the civil initiative Mavi Marmara, reflected his growing self-assurance (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). The majority of my interviewees from the domains of politics, media, academia, and government think tanks, opine that the Davos and

Mavi Marmara events repositioned Turkey in the region, as Turkey distanced “itself from Israel with a turn on Islamist agenda” (Gerges, 2013, p.199). The available evidence seems to suggest that, Erdoğan’s “authoritarian” style of governance developed from self-confidence, which grew after his first period in office (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

The results of the in-depth interviews provide confirmatory evidence that the use of religion as a key political communication tool (highlighted in fourth research question) started for some of the interviewees in 2009, and for others in 2010. In fact, the lack of institutionalisation and a control mechanism, as well as the elimination of opposition voices within enabled Erdoğan to create his own style of discourse, which had a moderate and secular tone in the early days but evolved to a rigid, more religious one over time as noted in this chapter. The “successful management of international political communications” led the AKP to negotiate to good effect with the EU in the early days, according to PO1 (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). However AKP affiliated interviewees agreed that subsequent actions by the West, in particular the stance of the EU towards AKP’s governance, influenced Erdoğan, who then had no other choice than to develop a reactive stance. In 80 per cent of cases, the AKP is, reactionary according to JO2 (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). This is a clear sign that Erdoğan has now adopted a similar approach to that of Erbakan, regarding the West in general and Israel in particular, despite having once criticised his former mentor’s tone (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). Furthermore featuring religious values and referencing them is seen as a feature of Erdoğan’s natural character, one that reflects his “Muslimness” (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014).

Finally, the findings presented in this chapter lend strong support to the view that Erdoğan's discourse automatically becomes that of the AKP and not vice versa. It is important to note, however, that as the main opposition party, the CHP is rooted in the old secular order, this represents an opportunity for Erdoğan to develop a new narrative for Turkey, which integrates religious discourse into a secular framework.

The following chapter presents the fieldwork findings. Whereas the role of religion and Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style plays an important role, this chapter also presents the non-participant observations during the historic night of Erdoğan's first presidential election.

Chapter 6. The AKP's Political Communication Strategies

Power is the most fundamental process in society, since society is defined around values and institutions, and what is valued and institutionalized is defined by power relationships. Power is the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interests, and values.

-Castells⁵⁶

6.1 Introduction

Following on from the findings from the in-depth interviews detailed in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on fieldwork conducted in Turkey over a four-month period. The fieldwork was carried out between the 3rd August 2014 (during the Turkish presidential election campaign period), and the 5th December 2014. This fieldwork study provides a unique view of the AKP's election campaign, and offers a crucial insight into the internal mechanisms of the party. Following the presidential vote, fieldwork continued at the AKP headquarters for four months. The fieldwork attempted to address three important areas of this research: in answer to the following three research questions:

- RQ1. What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ3. What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP?
- RQ4. What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

⁵⁶ 2009, p.10

As the study took place over an extended time frame, and involved the observation of different departments within the AKP and diverse activities, in this chapter the data pertaining to the three research questions is presented in the chronological order in which it was collected. This approach is logical, as there are some occasions on which research questions overlap, and doing so still allows categorisation of the data broadly by research area. The data gathered during the fieldwork is original and has never before been seen, as evaluation of the AKP's communication strategies has never been attempted before, as explained in the literature review chapter. The historical successes of the AKP and Erdoğan since 2002 make it especially beneficial to examine the party's methods from different angles, to comprehend the dynamics informing their enduring success since 2002. Significantly, this fieldwork will investigate the survival of the AKP, discussing how it overcame challenges such as the events surrounding the Gezi Park protests and corruption allegations in 2013, which damaged the party and Erdoğan (Cizre, 2016).

2014 was a critical turning point in Turkey's history, as it was the first time that a President could directly be elected by the people (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). Additionally, Turkish citizens in diaspora were permitted to vote in these elections for the first time, by attending Turkish consulates in their place of residence (ibid). This enabled the AKP to mobilise all its sympathisers in diaspora, particularly in Europe, to expand its influence. Similarly, it was a historical moment for Erdoğan as he attained the peak of his political career by becoming Turkey's first directly elected President. Formerly both the founding chairman of the AKP, and Prime Minister since 2003, election to the presidency represents the apex of his achievements to date.

By witnessing this critical turning point in Turkish history, and covering the presidential election period and its aftermath through the lens of non-participant observation, my intention was to provide an ethnographic insight into the accomplishments of the AKP and its leader. Investigating the realities behind the ascendancy of one of most criticised leaders in the mainstream media (since the Gezi Park protests in 2013) (Altun, 2016), required a comprehensive appreciation of the AKP's extensive communications network. Cognisant of Erdoğan's increasingly "authoritarian policies" (Altun, 2016, p.166), this chapter envisions how Americanisation informs the discussions that took place when preparing the party's political communications. As a result, the shift to candidate-centred campaigning by personalising Erdoğan's public image and emphasising his charismatic leadership style and appeal as a man of the people will form a significant focal point of this research. The perceptions of activists working at AKP headquarters, voluntary members working on the ground, Erdoğan's Strategy team, the AKP's Publicity and Media department, Youth branch, and also Erdoğan's former and current advisors will prove significant for conducting a healthy analysis of the political communications perspective.

6.2 Political Communication by the AKP

Today, direct, or face-to-face communication, remains one of the most effective modes of political communication (Dalton, 2000). Outdoor election campaigns, whereby a party sets up a stand at a well-known central point, and organising rallies in different cities and districts are influential ways to achieve direct communication in Turkey (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). From East to West, and from North to South, every rally provokes a different dynamic and response, reflecting the

specific local political atmosphere. The 2014 Turkish presidential elections were covered with the intention to observe this in mind, and so I conducted observations at AKP rallies in different cities across the country. The following sections will examine the communication strategies used by the AKP; evaluating the party's three important election stands in Istanbul, the views espoused at the four 2014 presidential election rallies across the country, and data collected at AKP headquarters during and after the election campaign, in particular to answer the first research question.

6.2.1 Campaigning beside Mosques

The presence of election booths is a long held tradition in Turkey (Karpas, 1959). Each political party installs booths in significant and crowded city districts throughout the country, and campaigns from them in the 45 days running up to the election (ibid, p.389). The use of booths cannot be classified as an example of the Americanisation of political communication, as gatherings take place principally in indoor halls and in front of small groups of people, with parties attracting attendees via the Internet and social media (Kubicek, 2017, p.248). Nevertheless, it is still an important communication tool, renowned for its effectiveness in Middle Eastern countries and societies like Lebanon (Harb, 2011) and Egypt, where I personally witnessed the method used during the 2012 Presidential Election campaign in Cairo.

During the research I observed the outdoor campaigns conducted by the AKP, visiting three election booths in Istanbul's Eyüp Sultan, Fatih and Üsküdar districts. As explained in Section 4.3.2, these three districts have the highest proportion of religious individuals in the population, and can be considered AKP hubs, providing them with key resources and support. In Eyüp Sultan district, the election booth was

located next to the Eyüp Sultan Mosque, where Ayyub Al-Ansari's tomb is located. Al-Ansari, a companion of Prophet Muhammad, is one of the religious figures associated with the history of Istanbul. He fought during the second siege of Constantinople in 669CE and died during this battle (Mansel 1995). Hence, the Eyüp Sultan Mosque is one of the most popular places for tourists and locals to visit at weekends; visitors come to pray in the mosque and visit the tomb of Al-Ansar, which is located inside the mosque yard (a traditional mode of burial in the Ottoman tradition) (Freely, 2009).

It is logical that the AKP would locate its campaign booths close to mosques, where the conservative⁵⁷ community spend much of their time. Doing so enables the party to draw on the notion that it is part of a 'social movement', emphasising that it prioritises developing Turkey's 'collective identity'. This approach to political campaigning will assist me in answering the fourth research question. Although the AKP is not an Islamist movement, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Al-Anani, 2016), many of the AKP's members are former supporters of Erbakan's movement, and as such are personally religiously oriented like Erdoğan (Cagaptay, 2017). This explains their relationship with mosques and holy places, such as tombs. Notably the AKP uses its background as a social movement to influence people and their collective identity (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). It is important to note here that the role of a social movement is to act in a manner that is conscious, collective and well-organised (Wilson, 1973, p.8), as that is the impression given by the election booths run by the AKP.

⁵⁷ When I refer to 'conservative' I mean "faithful to Islamic religious and moral traditions" (Ramadan, 2012 p.101).

The AKP's strategy is also intergenerational; whilst middle-aged party representatives and volunteers were handing out leaflets and flyers, and campaigning with banners and large screens in Eyüp Sultan, young party members were recording interactions on the streets and conducting short interviews to boost their social media presence. The majority of the representatives of the AKP were noted to be religious in appearance, men with beards⁵⁸ and women wearing headscarves. Despite the religious attire of the women representatives, they were still observing stylish trends, wearing colourful headscarves, carrying designer handbags, and wearing heavy makeup. Unveiled women also participated, but they were dressed more modestly, with covered arms and long skirts. Having representatives with different levels of attention to religious customs conveys an impression of "diversity and openness", as one of the organisers explained (Ethnographic Interview, 3 August 2014). It was nevertheless apparent that the definition "conservative democratic" was visible in the party's image; one third of the party represented conservatives, whereas the remainder the democrats. Usually a political party is unable to use religious motifs in their official booths or materials in Turkey because of the separation of religion and state in the Turkish Republic's constitution. However, when visiting the AKP's booths, their location and the appearance of the local representatives make it clear that the party appeals to religious people.

The election booth in Fatih, another 'conservative' district where thousands of Syrian refugees are based, was also located beside a famous mosque, the 'Fatih', which was constructed after the conquering of Istanbul (Freedman, Kivilcim and Baklacioğlu, 2017). Free tea was offered to those who had finished their prayers as they left the

⁵⁸ Prophet Muhammad grew a beard and to do so is considered Sunnah (Esposito, 2002, 101).

mosque, and AKP representatives explained their projects and goals to those who accepted. Most of the questions asked by voters related to the presidential system itself, as this created a dilemma for the potential voters with whom I spoke. One of the main promises by Erdoğan in 2014, was that he would aim to increase the executive power of the presidential office (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016, p.79).

On some occasions I witnessed MP's visiting the election booths to speak with visitors. Some of the visitors took selfies with the MPs to share on social media. Some MPs also asked their advisors to take pictures while they were speaking to the people, to share. When I asked one of the advisors why the AKP members used social media to share every single activity, he replied that it is important for them to show Erdoğan and the party officials how hard they work, as it is a way they can show loyalty and earn credibility. One member of the AKP's social media team explained that every single MP is required to have a social media account and a presence online (Ethnographic Interview, 12 August 2014). She explained that social media is an important tool that enables the party to interact directly with the public (ibid.). This reminded me that the Muslim Brotherhood, as highlighted in Section 2.7.6, also engaged in digital activism in their "dialogue with the West", to remove prejudices against them (D'Urbano, 2011, p.89). The use of digital media by AKP members is based on the same principle, but is directed towards a domestic audience rather than a foreign one. "Their use of social media is not just election based", says the same source, but rather a long-term goal. She underlines that the use of social media is important from the point of view of psychology. "The more we tweet, the more control we have" (Ethnographic Interview, 12 August 2014).

Many Erdoğan flags, banners and posters were displayed at the election booths in Istanbul. The presidential election and candidate-centred campaign was nearing its peak at this time. It was the first political communications feature that appeared to imitate American styles of campaigning that I encountered during the fieldwork. I asked one of the volunteers at the booth in Istanbul's Fatih district, why the leader was foregrounded rather than the projects and policies he was promising to enact. I was prompted to do so because the printed materials and conversations at the AKP's booth concentrated on messages relating to Erdoğan personally and the proper leadership of Turkey. I was told that people want to see Erdoğan, because they "associate confidence" with him (Ethnographic Interview, 4 August 2014). This suggests that "traditional affective ties between voters and parties" (Dalton, 2000, p.60) are weakening in Turkey, in favour of interest in personalities.

6.2.2 Politics in the Name of God

The AKP's election booth in Üsküdar was positioned centrally, at one of the main transit centres of buses, trains and boats, but also next to two historic mosques. As it was a central location, the main opposition parties were present too. From a professional perspective, the AKP stood out from the other parties as it had larger screens, and a modern vehicle instead of a traditional booth stand. The impression created by the party of "active use of public space," drawing on the "art of presence" consolidated the image that the AKP's was the leading campaign (Bayat, 2010, p.11).

Interestingly, when I asked a 68-year old woman about her motivation for becoming involved in the campaign, and why she was working to convince her peers to support the ruling party, she explained in one sentence: "For the sake of God" (Ethnographic

Interview, 5 August 2014). This was not the first response of this type I received. While talking to volunteers, it was a common reply. This is an important indicator that people who are religiously adherent are attracted by the collective identity of the party. These individuals are mostly volunteers, working at the bottom of the party hierarchy, and religion is the main factor motivating their involvement on behalf of the party. This situation differs from that during the 2002 and 2007 elections, as one of AKP's Üsküdar branch members emphasises:

Erdoğan's emphasis on Islam, in particular his Middle East politics after the Mavi Marmara flotilla, was a turning point, encouraging me to support the AKP. Personally I think that being involved in AKP is a must because it is a *dawah*.

(Ethnographic Interview, 5 August, 2014)

The word 'dawah' is best described as "the act of inviting a person to the faith" (Esposito and Voll, 1996, p.131); it is Erbakan's legacy that political parties are being described in this way (Yavuz, 2003, p.207). Specifically; in the early days of the Milli Görüş, Mehmed Zahid Kotku, an Islamic scholar, advised Erbakan and his friends to found a party in the end of 1960s to "protect" society to retain the "core identity and character of Islam", as the "main heritage of Islam and Muslims" (ibid.). Hence Erbakan's entrance to politics was based on an indirect description of 'dawah' as noted by Esposito and Voll (1996, p.131), intended to restore the "Ottoman-Islamic identity" (Yavuz, 2003, p.207). In fact, that is the main reason why scholars such as Brown (2012, p.49) claim the AKP "relies on an Islamic social movement". The understanding expressed in the above quotation, is that the party defends Islamic ideology. Furthermore, it suggests an evolution has taken place in the party politics and messages of the AKP, as discussed in the previous chapter. When asked what he understands by the word 'dawah', the informant replies as follows:

I was a staunch supporter of Erbakan. His Milli Görüş ideology taught us that we need to stand for something, otherwise the world is meaningless. We need to find a solution for injustice, oppression, and spread peace. This is called dawah for me as Erbakan hoca⁵⁹ (Stands for ‘master’, ‘teacher’ or ‘preacher’ in English) taught us.

(Ethnographic Interview, 5 August, 2014)

This motivation of party members is a clear indication that religion is playing a significant role in the AKP’s political communication, as highlighted in the fourth research question.

6.2.3 Americanisation of Erdoğan’s Communication

The AKP organised a presidential election rally in Aydın, and received massive attendance. Thus was despite the fact that the majority of Turkey’s cities that are located in the Aegean Region of Western Turkey are thought to be more secular, and so the CHP’s influence and success rate is usually greater than that of the AKP (*Hürriyet*, 2015). The euphoria started from the moment the AKP’s presidential election song was played. The song hails Erdoğan, his politics and his mode of leadership:

He is the voice of the oppressed,
He is the voice of the silent world,
He is the one, who is as he believes,
He is the one, who gets his support from his people,
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

(Continuation in Appendix VIII)

During the riotous song, people murmured along, suggesting most had memorised it; either because they liked it as it was a catchy song, or because it was being

⁵⁹ Erbakan was termed ‘hoca’ by his friends at the university, because of his Islamist ideology (Uçar, 2000), and he retained this label was retained when he entered politics in 1969.

continuously played everywhere; i.e. on the TV and Radio, on the streets broadcast by campaign cars, and on social media etc. The lyrics communicate their message by summarising perceptions of Erdoğan through the eyes of his supporters. He is seen as a hero and the voice of the voiceless, creating the sentiment that “he is the last hope of Muslims”, as one of the participants told me when I asked what Erdoğan means to her. She explains it is necessary for the Muslim world to have a leader like Erdoğan, because “the world approaching a dead-end”:

He is the only leader who raises his voice against injustice and oppression in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.

(Ethnographic Interview, 6 August 2014)

Considering the situations in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan collectively is widespread in Turkey, in particular during prayers. When I attended Friday prayers at different mosques in Istanbul and Ankara, I witnessed many times Imams⁶⁰ asking for peace and prosperity for the people in those countries. Returning to Erdoğan’s song, the messages it espouses strengthen the impact of the party’s communications (McNair, 2003). As in Americanised media campaigns, the lyrics place the personal image of the political leader in the foreground rather than the corporate image of the party (McNair, 2003, p.147).

When the presenter announced Erdoğan on stage with an excited, enthused and strong voice at the Malatya rally, the audience began shouting slogans such as “the leader, the commander” and Erdoğan’s full name, “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”, rhythmically. When Erdoğan stepped on stage, I observed some people crying, showing great emotion and loyalty to their leader. This reminded me of Khomeini’s

⁶⁰ “The person who leads prayers in a mosque” (Oxford Dictionary English, 2010).

impact and popularity during his public appearances and meetings (Charteris-Black, 2007, p.160). Both Erdoğan and Khomeini are viewed by their supporters as pious, humble, and modest, which increases their popularity, as one participant summarises: “He [Erdoğan] is one of us” (Ethnographic Interview, 6 August 2014). Erdoğan’s main difference from other political figures is that he is an “average person” (ibid.), someone from a working-class family (Besli and Özbay 2010). His outfit on stage was modest; black trousers and a white shirt, no jacket or tie. This modesty is symbolic and important to voters (Matar, 2008, p.131). In fact, in Summer 2015, after the June 2015 elections when former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was running for Prime Minister, as one of his advisors recollects, it was impossible to convince Davutoğlu to take off his cufflinks for speeches, despite telling him that wearing them “created a wall between the politician and public” as they are not usually worn by working middle-class people in Turkey (Ethnographic Interview, 17 September 2015).

Family Portrayal

An obvious candidate-centred election strategy at all rallies was the appearance of Erdoğan’s wife. When Erdoğan arrived on stage he would appear with his wife, Emine Erdoğan, who would also greet and wave at the crowd. Likewise, when he finished his speech, his wife joined him on stage for a final ceremonious waving of hands. This strategy portrays the leader as a family man, and is one commonly used in American style campaigns (Rahat and Scheafer, 2007). At the end of the rally, Erdoğan and his wife threw white flowers and T-shirt’s bearing Erdoğan’s presidential logo to the crowds. When I asked a member of AKP’s Publicity and Media Department about the meaning of the t-shirts later, he explained that people attach importance to gifts from political leaders, and they will long be retained as

souvenirs (Ethnographic Interview, 19 August 2014). According to my source, Erdoğan and his wife threw flowers to the crowds in previous elections as a gesture of peace (Ethnographic Interview, 19 August 2014). In this manner, even the election gift itself symbolises personalisation of the AKP's political communication (McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod, 1994, p.125). Gift giving also suggests a healthy relationship between a political actor and the public (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011). My source also explains that it is not uncommon in Turkish politics for the wife of a politician to appear with him on stage (Ethnographic Interview, 19 August 2014). This was highlighted by Olçok too (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). In our interview, discussing the Americanisation process of the AKP, one of the examples he gave was family portrayal: "Family, personal appearance, lifestyle and religion" are more important in the personalisation of political communication (ibid.; Langer, 2007, p.381).

The desire to show a personal side to Erdoğan is also one reason the mass media close to the AKP and its social media trolls generate PR opportunities based on Erdoğan's personal life, as a committed PR expert for the Publicity and Media department explains:

Nowadays people are more focused on the personal lives of other people, but more importantly, politicians. People do not feel themselves affiliated to a party but to a person. As we have observed this for a long time, we have started using our voluntary supporters on the ground to share details about Erdoğan on social media. These can include recitations of the Quran in mosques, or visits to a martyr's family, or an emotional moment when he is attending a special event.

(Ethnographic Interview, 19 August 2014)

As far as I understand, videos of Erdoğan are deliberately very widespread among the AKP's root support on social media. This reflects Erdoğan's personal side and

presents him as someone with a strong faith. It is an “impressive way of communication” in particular when appealing to the conservative roots of the AKP, as the PR expert revealed (ibid.). From a public relations perspective, this type of action can help to “persuade people” and “integrate” them with the party (Bernays, 1952, p.12), as they share the same conservative concerns. Additionally, this method of communication allows people to feel that Erdoğan is ‘one of them’ (Ethnographic Interview, 19 August 2014).

In this regard, one of Erdoğan’s advisors explained that he had witnessed Erdoğan during a trip during Ramadan reading the Quran with his family members in the private cabin of the plane, while fasting despite the long journey (Ethnographic Interview, 16 September 2014). The advisor told me this story with a thrilled tone, emphasising that he had never seen a person as committed to religion as Erdoğan is (ibid.). This story shows that aside from the impression of Erdoğan on the ground, his actions also fascinate the people around him, motivating them to support the “most important man” in the world as the advisor states (ibid.) (as highlighted in reference to the fourth research question). He underlines that he sees it is an honour to serve Erdoğan (ibid.). During my fieldwork at AKP headquarters I heard similar stories through the grapevine. It is not difficult to imagine these anecdotes reaching the public and influencing members on the ground. For example, I met a 41-year old taxi driver who only votes for the AKP because of “Erdoğan’s personality, his Islamist ideology and political stance against Israel” (Ethnographic Interview, 19 September 2014). This shows that the personalisation of the AKP’s political communication has a considerable influence in terms of attracting voters.

Reflections on Erdoğan's Outdoor Meetings

After the Konya rally, one of the organisers explained that other parties had begun organising outdoor election rallies because of Erdoğan's impact (Ethnographic Interview, 9 August, 2014). They noted that if the AKP had not organised such "massive rallies", the opposition parties would have conducted theirs indoors with fewer attendees "as in European countries" (ibid.). However, Erdoğan's popularity flourishes after these rallies, because he is skilled at communicating directly, just as former US President Barack Obama (2008 and 2012 US elections), and current President Donald Trump (2016 US election) proved to be during their campaigns (Baumgartner and Towner, 2017).

Commenting on this amazing talent, Erdoğan's advisors told me that during a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany, Merkel asked Erdoğan how he managed to bring more than one million people together for a rally, as it would be impossible in Germany (Ethnographic Interview, 16 August 2014). Erdoğan's advisor does not say what the then Prime Minister replied, but he explains with great enthusiasm that even "foreign leaders are impressed by Erdoğan's charismatic leadership" (ibid.). According to this passionate advisor, no other leader would be able to bring such a crowd together, regardless of whether in pouring rain or scorching heat (ibid.). During the rallies in Turkey, I myself witnessed how people lovingly participated in the rallies, despite the searing conditions. Undoubtedly, Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style makes a strong impression. When I spoke informally with attendees at rallies and events, and with AKP supporters on the streets of Istanbul, Ankara, Malatya, Konya and Aydın, I learned the majority are delighted to have such a leader. For them, strong leadership had been lacking in

Turkey for too long, and “it is the first time that the conservative majority feels themselves part of society” as a middle-aged Anatolian man⁶¹ in Konya explains (Ethnographic Interview, 9 August 2014). Not only in reference to the 2014 election, Dinç’s (2008) study (presented in Section 2.7.9) shows that during the 2007 general election campaign, Erdoğan’s charismatic leadership style, and his public appearance played a key role in his ability to achieve success. However she underlines that the economic and social problems of people at that time were foregrounded while Erdoğan was addressing the people (Dinç, 2008). This distinguishes between the elections in 2014 and earlier, as Erdoğan’s charisma dominated the most recent election campaign rather than projects and policies.

Similarly as in the case of Iran’s Khomeini, “a strong and charismatic leader” had been expected since the 6th century B.C. as Wright (1990, p.59) explains. In fact, Khomeini’s “eloquence” in public appearances was the main driving force behind the impression he had on the people (ibid.). Based on the fieldwork I conducted, I surmise the impression of Erdoğan’s eloquence is bolstered by his Islamist ideology and his approach as a man of the people during rallies; it is also partly due to his use of poetry, as explained in the next section in reference to Nasrallah.

Poetry as a Symbol: Erdoğan vs. Nasrallah

In one of his speeches Erdoğan cited the lyrics of the Turkish singer Muazzez Abacı, “We walked together”⁶², which has been known as Erdoğan’s song since he was

⁶¹ Anatolia is another name for Turkey.

⁶² ‘We walked together’ by Muazzez Abacı:

Memories wrapped up all around me
Wherever I look it has your trace
Everything reminds me of you
We walked together this road
Together we got wet from the falling rain
Now all the songs I’m hearing

jailed in 1999 (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 1999) (explained in Section 3.5.2). Thousands of supporters gathered outside the prison in Istanbul and escorted him (ibid.), and when he arrived there he recited the lyrics of Abacı together with the crowd. This song signifies that he considers his path to be an extraordinary one, which embraces all his supporters. As ‘collectiveness’ is a key theme of social movement theory, it is important to note that a crowd singing a song in unison in this way symbolises togetherness and the collective identity of the party, as the lyrics unite people under the same umbrella (McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod, 1994).

Poetry has held a special meaning for Erdoğan since his youth, because of his fascination with Turkish poets, such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Sezai Karakoç (Yavuz, 2009). For this reason, Erdoğan has read poems and songs from these two poets and others frequently during rallies or crowded meetings.

He told *The New York Times* (2003) that he uses poem as an “attention-getter to make the people spirited”. This is also something Hezbollah’s Hasan Nasrallah does, as Alshaer (2014) examines. Nasrallah recites the work of Palestinian poets in order to motivate his supporters in their resistance against Israel (ibid., p.120). Some of these poems have even been turned into songs and prepared as video clips, portraying images of Nasrallah and other “historic Shiite figures” (ibid., p.122). Erdoğan does something similar according to my source at the Youth branch (Ethnographic Interview, 21 August 2014). He explains that they cut the poetry excerpts from Erdoğan’s rallies and prepare short clips with songs in the background that are then uploaded to Youtube and other social media platforms, largely

Everything reminds me of you. (Lyrictranslate, 2012)

unofficially, in order to raise awareness (ibid.). Clearly both leaders use poetry to represent identity, tradition and beliefs.

Erdoğan's Logo

In addition to Erdoğan's election song, his election logo has played an important role in representing an image (McNair, 2003). As the significance of the role of religion in political communications is one of the research questions examined in this doctoral thesis, it is important to cover occurrences of the use of religion as a political communication tool. When Erdoğan's logo was first announced, Turkish newspapers enthusiastically discussed it, likening it to Obama's 2008 campaign logo. However, later, the former Minister of Finance, Mehmet Şimşek clarified from his private Twitter account that Prophet Muhammad's name was included in Erdoğan's logo in Arabic calligraphic style (*Radikal*, 2014). An official announcement from either the AKP or Erdoğan's office was never made regarding the logo. However, the logo appears to be an example of the use of religion as a symbol in the form of "art" (Khatib, 2013, p.1) (calligraphy specifically). Meanwhile it was also a clear example of Americanisation guiding the AKP's political communication strategy, because it was designed to focus on the candidate directly (Negrine et al., 2007), as the central actor in the election campaign (Aelst, Shaefer and Stanyer, 2012). To that end, it reflects Erdoğan's "personal characteristics and personal life" (Rahat and Shaefer, 2007, p.68), including his religious life. When I asked during my fieldwork about reactions to the logo, I learned that most people were unaware that the name of the Prophet Muhammad was included in calligraphy form. When I consulted Erdoğan's Strategy Team regarding what motivation drove them to allude to a religious figure in the logo, a high-ranking member of the Strategy Team denied the use of the word

Muhammad and claimed that the logo depicts “a route to the sun, in other words to the future” (Ethnographic Interview, 13 October 2014).



Figure 3. Erdoğan's 2014 Presidential Election Logo



Figure 4. Former US President Barack Obama's 2008 Election Logo

6.2.4 Erdoğan's Pragmatist Rhetoric

When Erdoğan began his speech in Malatya by commemorating Battal Gazi⁶³, Hamido⁶⁴, and Turgut Özal⁶⁵, the crowd responded with cheers, because these three important figures heralded from Malatya. Erdoğan used his speech in Malatya to celebrate these personalities, which motivated the people of the city to vote for him. In this way he used loyalty to these symbolic figures to win the hearts of supporters, regardless of their ideological background, as a member of the strategy team noted (Ethnographic Interview, 2 September 2014). Significantly, he was also making a reference to the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, drawing on a sense of collective national identity to unite a “set of beliefs, symbols, and values” (Yavuz, 2003, p.23). Battal Gazi is a mythical Muslim from the Umayyad, whose family ties date to the time of Prophet Muhammad (Demir and Erdem, 2006, p.119). Whereas, Hamido was an independent Turkish politician and Mayor of Malatya who received support from Erbakan's Milli Görüş movement.⁶⁶ Recollecting Turkey's more recent history, he recalls Turgut Özal⁶⁷, who was responsible for employing a liberal economic model and opening up Turkey to the world (Cevik and Seib, 2015). By singling out these individuals, Erdoğan positions himself as like them, a former victim who overcame the elite on the one hand and terrorists such as the Kurdish Workers Party⁶⁸ (PKK) (Ciddi, 2016) and the Gülenists on the other (Shively, 2016).

⁶³ Saintly figure and warrior.

⁶⁴ Politician who was assassinated in 1978.

⁶⁵ 8th President of Turkey

⁶⁶ Hamido was assassinated by Ergenekon, an alleged clandestine, secularist ultra-nationalist organisation (*Radikal*, 2010 and *Milliyet*, 2014).

⁶⁷ Özal died in 1993 but due to an earlier assassination attempt in 1989, there remains serious question about whether he might have been poisoned (McDowall, 2007).

⁶⁸ The Kurdish Workers party “is a violent Marxist organisation” (Shively, 2016, 197).

Erdoğan's Speech in Malatya

Another important example of Erdoğan referencing symbolism was his mention of the AKP's 2014 presidential election commercial. Erdoğan asked the public if they had already seen the new commercial for the AKP. The crowd answered with a decisive "yes". This led him to attack Turkey's second opposition party, the MHP⁶⁹, who had filed a petition with the Supreme Electoral Council in order to ban it. Erdoğan underlined that the reason for this ban was the inclusion of the azan,⁷⁰ a prayer rug and an Anatolian aunt⁷¹:

This commercial continues without the azan. However, nobody can prevent the call to prayer in our land.

(Erdoğan, 2014 Presidential Election rally, Malatya, 7 August 2014)

Upon hearing his words, the crowd booed the MHP. The Presidential candidate then went on, linking this ban with the ban by the main opposition party, the People's Republican Party's (CHP) on the call to prayer in Arabic between 1932 and 1950.⁷²

They have banned the call to prayer in Arabic, they have destroyed mosques, they feared to teach the Quran, and they were worried about the headscarf.

(Erdoğan, 2014 Presidential Election rally, Malatya, 7 August 2014)

Here, Erdoğan lists religious symbols in a portrayal of the "old Turkey". The call to prayer, the Mosque, the Quran, and headscarves are more important to people in Malatya, due to the region's demographic structure, than they are in Aydın.

⁶⁹ Nationalist Movement Party.

⁷⁰ "The Muslim call to ritual prayer made by a muezzin from the minaret of a mosque" (Oxford Dictionary English, 2010).

⁷¹ An average traditional woman.

⁷² In 1932 CHP government banned the call to prayer. During that time, the call to prayer was delivered in the Turkish language. In 1950, when the Democrat Party (DP) came to government, they lifted the ban on call to prayer in Arabic (Hürriyet, 2006)

Similarly, Erdoğan raised the issue of Israel's policies to the crowd, in connection with Gülenists' leader Fethullah Gülen. He underlined that Gülen is not empowered to raise his voice against Israel's crime in Gaza, claiming "If he says something, his lords will be disturbed" (Erdoğan, 2014 Presidential Election rally, Malatya, 7 August 2014). Gaza is a sensitive subject for conservative people such as the inhabitants of Malatya. Therefore, he presents the Gülenists as a pro-Israel organisation, in order to raise an awareness that they are not a religious and spiritual movement as they typically portray themselves (Michel 2014). Erdoğan draws on religious motifs here to show awareness of how they "dominate political and symbolic life" (Castells, 1996). When the Mavi Marmara aid ship flotilla was attacked by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in 2010 (explained in Section 3.6.5), the self-exiled Gülen, who was once a prominent preacher in Izmir, Turkey, gave an interview to the Wall Street Journal on June 4, 2014, stating that the organisers of the flotilla should have expressly requested permission from Israel before delivering aid (Lauria, 2010). As the attack happened in international waters, this reaction by Gülen sparked debate in Turkey. This meant that later, when the Gülenists and AKP became foes, Erdoğan was able to allude to the events to suggest Gülen has no religious sensitivity and is following a secret agenda (Shively, 2016).

The above mentioned dispute between the AKP and the Gülenists was not the first. Mavi Marmara had been a critical turning point for both organisations, as until then they had always had a reasonable relationship. The self-exiled Fethullah Gülen had mobilised his base of support to Erdoğan's advantage, in particular human resources such as the judiciary and the police; this had enabled the AKP to change the political landscape in Turkey swiftly (Shively, 2016). However, during the Gezi Park protests

in 2013, the Gülenists' supported the uprising against the government and started openly issuing anti-AKP propaganda via their media channels (ibid.). They suggested that Erdoğan's political decisions in 2012 and 2013 had sparked the Gezi Park protests, fuelling an anti-AKP reaction (Altun, 2016). Urban development projects such as naming Istanbul's third bridge after Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Sultan Selim, planning to remove the Atatürk Culture Centre at Taksim square, restricting alcohol use, abortion, and building the largest mosque in Turkey in Istanbul were some of the projects that were cited "as serious threats to symbolic cultural codes of modern secular lifestyle" (Altun, 2016, p.168). Undoubtedly, the fact that Gezi was indeed a reaction to these political decisions sharpened Erdoğan's rhetoric on the campaign trail (ibid.).

Identity Dilemma of the AKP

As in Malatya, the greeting extended to Erdoğan at the Ankara rally, which took place on the 8th of August 2014, was highly emotive. He described Ankara as the capital of the oppressed people of the world, the capital of peace, brotherhood, justice and solidarity.

I greet youths from Afghanistan to Algeria, from Azerbaijan to Sudan, who have come to Ankara for the presidential elections.

(Erdoğan, 2014 Presidential Election rally, Malatya, 8 August 2014)

This greeting summarise the significance of a welcoming and shared political ideology, as well as "common interest" with the mentioned land (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.2). After this greeting, he listed following figures: Haji Bektashi Veli⁷³, Seyyid Hüseyin Gazi⁷⁴, Abdulkakim Arvasi⁷⁵, Bünyamin Ayaşi⁷⁶, Sheikh Ali

⁷³ Alevi mystic who taught in Anatolia in the 13th century

Semerikandi⁷⁷, and Taceddin-i Veli⁷⁸, and the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He also spoke of Mehmet Akif Ersoy, the author of the national anthem. These individuals, while unrelated, convey a message of kinship to Alevis, Sunnis and Kemalists; an approach used for the first time by a Turkish leader, according to my source from Erdoğan's strategy team (Ethnographic Interview, 2 September 2014). It is a way of, "embracing and respecting all important personalities from the same soil, despite ideological differences", an intention contained in Erdoğan's manifesto (ibid.). Erdoğan's style, which was apparent at other rallies, is to emphasise key images that play a significant role in representation (Castells, 1997). This also is a means to reflect collective identity (Melucci, 1996), which Erdoğan is aiming to create and keep alive, as will be discussed in Chapter eight.

In Ankara, Erdoğan communicated his message by referring to tradition, identity and ethnicity, encouraging a coming together to overcome differences. However, this stance highlights an identity dilemma within the ruling party. As mentioned in Section 5.4.1, the AKP's lack of institutionalisation was criticised by some interviewee, such as JO1, who mentioned the need for a solid identity to emerge in preparation for a post-Erdoğan AKP (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). Whereas, it might be suggested that a sense of shared collective identity helps a leader activate a large share of the electorate (Melucci, 1996, p.4), combining religious figures with a non-religious ones is nothing more than "vote chasing" according to one interviewee:

⁷⁴ Scholar lived in the 6th century

⁷⁵ Scholar lived in the times of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic of Turkey

⁷⁶ Saint lived in Ankara

⁷⁷ Scholar lived in the 12th century

⁷⁸ Sheikh lived in the 16th century

This type of approach seems positive at first glance. But after a while, meaning in the long-term, it damages many things, not only the identity but also the socio-psychological perspective of future generations.

(Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014)

Despite the huge differences in the figures mentioned, it was interesting to witness the crowd was cheering and appeared thrilled by Erdoğan's references. Although, even when Erdoğan spoke about developing the health service and the national infrastructure, people were reacting passionately. I observed that when speaking Erdoğan uses his voice poetically. Through fluctuations in his voice, he creates an evocative atmosphere, which in some cases even leads people to cry.

AKP Mobilises non-Turkish Muslims

Compared to attendees in Malatya, the participants at the Ankara rally were notably more cosmopolitan. A young man from Bosnia-Herzegovina attended the rally and spoke with me, explaining his pride at being able to see Erdoğan live. When I asked him why he is so pleased to be there, he explained it was due to Turkey's support for Bosnia during and since the war that took place from 1992 to 1995:

When someone asked my grandparents which religion they belong, they used to say that they are Turks. In other words, being a Turk was the equivalent of being Muslim. [...] Hence our relationship goes back to the Ottoman era. In the last 10 years, the AKP government has invested to Bosnia in order to develop our country. Hence, I love Erdoğan and the AKP.

(Ethnographic Interview, 8 August 2014)

This shows how grassroots activism aligned with the concept of a social movement plays an important role in the AKP's appeal to non-Turkish Muslim's from other countries (Zirakzadeh, 1997). In this manner, "common interest" turns to "common identity" within the frame of the 'Muslim world' (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997). Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman side which will become more apparent when discussing the

Konya rally, when he refers to Alija Izetbegovic's⁷⁹ (1925-2003) son Bakir Izetbegovic (1956-), a member of the tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and President of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) who delivers unity messages (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.2). As mentioned by my informant above, the emotional relationship between Turkish and Bosnian people dates back to the Bosnian War in 1992 when millions of Bosnians suffered and Turkey offered help (Carmichael, 2015). Izetbegovic called to express gratitude to Turkish society for their support during the War:

As Turkey supported Bosnian people during and after the war, Bosnian people are supporting Turkey and in particular Erdoğan for his efforts.

(Ethnographic Interview, 8 August 2014)

Here the AKP uses a foreign leader as a propaganda tool, to deliver a message of unity among Muslim nations, and persuade potential voters to join his party, which addresses the fourth research question. Izetbegovic's hailing of Erdoğan is another aspect of personalisation, but in this case it is provided by another and not himself or his party. This notion of unity bring to mind Abdulhamid II's 'Ummah' presentation of the Islamic world as one body under the Ottoman authority, even as the Empire entered decline (Karpas, 2001).

Involvement of Women

At the Malatya rally, the participation of women was significantly higher than in Aydın. Undoubtedly, the dynamics of the city played a key role in this. The AKP received 68.5 per cent support in the 2011 elections (*Hürriyet*, 2011), possibly illustrating the religious stance of the people in Malatya (*ibid.*). Interestingly, the role of women as participants in elections in conservatively motivated cities is higher

⁷⁹ Alija was the leader of Mladi Muslimani in Bosnia and former President of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Binder, 2003).

than in secularly oriented ones (Terkan, 2010). In particular with the establishment of the AKP, conservative women were encouraged to raise their voices in a way never seen before in Turkey, which also had an impact on the election rallies themselves (ibid.). However, the involvement of women did not start with the AKP. In fact, during Erdoğan's mayoral campaign as the Refah Party's (RP) candidate in the 1994 elections, women were involved for the first time in an election campaign and had an impact on the outcome (Dinç, 2008, p.10). By visiting conversation circles at the RP's Woman Branch, direct communication with this group was initiated (ibid.).

Erdoğan's political life, which has seen struggles, deadlocks and crises, encourages people to believe in a future under his guidance, according to a student who was present at the rally to support Erdoğan (Ethnographic Interview, 7 August 2014). When I asked her the reason for her support, she explained to me that her sister could not go and study wearing her headscarf in 2000 (ibid.), but Erdoğan's government removed the "pejorative ban" giving freedom to women to wear headscarves, and so she can now study wearing a headscarf (ibid.). She also informs me that previous parties could not find solutions to problems, but the AKP is "making life easier" by providing "freedom of education and civil rights" (ibid.). It is frequently the case that young university students attend AKP rallies, but there is a difference between rallies in Eastern part of Turkey and the West. The support of young people in Eastern Turkey is considerable higher than in the West based on what I witnessed.

Praising Oppressed Muslim Nations

Ankara is a politically important city because it is the capital of Turkey; however, Konya, a city in central Turkey, is strategically significant as it is the capital of the Seljuk Empire and home of Sufi mystic Mevlana (Finkel, 2012). It is also known to

be one of the most conservative cities in Turkey⁸⁰ (Finkel, 2012). Erdoğan increased his religious tone at the rally their accordingly. He started by praising God and the crowd replied “Amen”.⁸¹ Again, he listed the names of honoured people from the region, citing those who had developed a spiritual relationship to Konya during the Seljuk and Ottoman period.⁸² He then continued by remembering Atatürk, Adnan Menderes, and Necmettin Erbakan. The latter was elected for the first time to the National Assembly from Konya in 1969 (Uçar, 2000). Erbakan was also a crucial figure in Konya. People loved him and supported his party up until the foundation of the AKP (ibid.); thus. Showing respect for Erbakan is crucial for Erdoğan as it enables him to gain votes from the Saadet Partisi (SP), a continuation of the RP, which also gives him access to the votes of more religiously oriented people. Erdoğan continued with a prayer for other parts of the Muslim world:

Oh Allah! Protect Gaza, protect Syria, protect Iraq, Egypt and Libya. Help people in Somalia and Myanmar.

Later, he also made mention of Gaza, Baghdad, Damascus, Basra, Mosul, Erbil, Kirkuk, Baku and Skopje, which he had not mentioned in previous rallies. Therefore, it is strikingly apparent that Erdoğan moulds his message for the city he is speaking in. Furthermore, after he finished his speech in Konya, he prayed for several minutes, which was not something he had done previously. As well as using religion and religious figures to get a positive response at rallies, he also tries to carefully balance the demographics, in other words the audience. Nevertheless, for me the Konya rally

⁸⁰ In the 2011 parliamentary elections, the AKP received 69.6 per cent, the MHP 13.2 per cent and the CHP 10.3 per cent of the votes in Konya (Hürriyet, 2011)

⁸¹ “Uttered at the end of the prayer or hymn, meaning ‘so be it’” (Oxford Dictionary).

⁸² Erdoğan listed the following names: Kilij Arslan I, Seljuq Sultan of Rum from 1092 until 1107, Alp Arslan, Second Sultan of Seljuk Empire, Saladin, the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, Kayqubad I, Seljuk Sultan of Rum from 1220 to 1237, Mevlana, poet and Sufi mystic, and Konevi, Islamic scholar who lived there in the 13th century.

was climactic compared to the previous rallies I had attended; not only in terms of excited atmosphere, but also regarding the extent to which Erdoğan used religion to communicate. In fact Erdoğan ended the rally by reciting the first chapter of the Quran, the Surah al-Fatiha⁸³.

6.3 Erdoğan's Victory Night

Reflecting on the data collected at the AKP's three election booths in Istanbul and four rallies in different parts of Turkey, this section will examine the historic day of the 2014 Presidential Election, which I spent at the AKP headquarters in Ankara, and in Ankara Esenboğa Airport's VIP Lounge. It will highlight significant aspects of the research question, such as the communication strategies of the AKP, the use of religion and Erdoğan's charismatic style of leadership. Furthermore, I will portray the attitudes and behaviours of those people close to Erdoğan.

It is Erdoğan's tradition to give a victory speech after every election result from the balcony at AKP headquarters, and this is called the "Balcony speech" (Turkish: *Balkon konuşması*). Although initially it was unclear whether he would win the presidential election in the first round as a 50 per cent + 1 threshold applies to avoid a run-off, or if he would give the 'balcony speech' from AKP headquarters, because of his new independent role as President. Although in Turkey the President can be nominated from a political party, after the nomination has been approved, the candidate's relationship to the party must be severed (Mis et al., 2015).⁸⁴

⁸³ "[...] You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help. Guide us on the straight path, the path of those who have received your grace; not the path of those who have brought down wrath, nor of those who wander astray" (Quran, 2016).

⁸⁴ The referendum on constitutional change in 2017 was Erdoğan's aim to allow to become "the head of state, the head of government and the head of the party" (*Independent*, 2017).

Regardless of these unknown factors, I chose to observe the reactions of the members of the AKP, and in particular the reactions of the Publicity and Media department's team as the results arrived, so I spent my evening at the AKP headquarters. The Publicity and Media department team was primarily responsible for the PR, media and communications during the election and so their reactions were viewed as important for answering the research questions posed in this research. When I arrived at the headquarters it was midday and Turkish citizens and the diaspora were still voting in polling stations all over the country. The majority of the attendees at headquarters at this time were members of the Youth branch.

Dawah Understanding is Engraved at a Young Age

At AKP headquarters I spoke with two young party members, one 25, and the other 28. These two Youth Branch members had grown up under the rule of Erdoğan, as he has been in power since 2002. Therefore, for me it was fascinating to understand how this new generation, in some ways a product of the AKP's policies, think. In particular my interest relates to their approach to politics, their views on Erdoğan's leadership, and more importantly freedom of speech in Turkey, one of the main topics I regularly saw raised as a concern by young people during my fieldwork.

First I asked the informants I spoke to what they anticipated the election result would be. Both were convinced by the election campaign and believed that the election would be over in the first round with victory for Erdoğan. I felt it was important to learn about the engagement of young voters with Erdoğan and his party, because my in-depth interview with think tank chairman, TT1, suggested the party most favoured by the young is the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) and its co-leader

Selahattin Demirtas⁸⁵ (TT1, 2014), and the AKP is the least preferred. The young activist members of the AKP I spoke with, confirmed that the AKP struggles to find common ground with the younger generation, as “young people do not feel comfortable with the language used by Erdoğan”, because he is focusing on issues associated with the “old Turkey” (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). Speaking of infrastructure, health and economic policies is insufficient to inspire the younger generation, as one suited young man told me:

[The] younger generation wants to see themselves in politics. They want to be represented with new projects related to technology, education, culture and innovation.

(Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014)

Nevertheless, one of the interviewees passionately stated that this will happen under the presidency of Erdoğan.

When continued by asking why they had volunteered to work at the AKP, they said that there is no other party that is close to their “political ideology” (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014); i.e. “Islamic dawah” as one of the members of AKP Istanbul’s Üsküdar branch had explained earlier (Ethnographic Interview, 5 August 2014). The support of these two university students is based on their recognition of the significance of the economic and political stability of the country, in order not to appear weak in the eyes of the “enemy” (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). They opined that the “Interest rate lobby”, which is manipulated “through the “global Israeli lobby”, is for them the biggest threat to Erdoğan, and thereby Turkey (ibid). This shows how the importance of ‘dawah’ is engraved in the minds of AKP

⁸⁵ On 4th November 2016, Demirtas was jailed along with co-leader Figen Yüksekdağ due to “spreading propaganda for militants fighting the Turkish state” (BBC, 2016).

supporters from the youth generation. More important is their perception of the relationship between ‘dawah’ and the ‘Interest rate lobby’, which has been characterised by Erdoğan as the “struggle for right, good and justice”; a struggle that has endured for “200 years”, since the Ottoman Empire started to fall (*TCCB*, 2014).

Religious People’s Only Choice: AKP

When members of the Publicity and Media department arrived at AKP headquarters, they were very cheerful, as first results started emerging at around 4.30 pm. The election committee, consisting of representatives from every party at each local polling station started counting the votes from 5pm (*Turkey Labor Laws*, 2015). However, as party members were present at every single polling station, headquarters could access figures regarding turnout and so predict the outcome. Actual figures were notably positive as they were released, although, the first results were from the eastern part of Turkey where support for Erdoğan was strongest, according to one of the members of the department:

We always receive more support from the Eastern part of Turkey than the West. It is part of the demographic structure. People in the East are more conservative, in other words, religious. This is a presidential election and the possibility is high that we will get more support from the East than ever before.

(Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014)

My interviewee admitted that religious oriented people in Turkey only have one option to vote for, i.e. the AKP. This is also commented on by Joppien (2018), although the rise of the HDP and its leader Demirtas, especially in Kurdish majority cities such as Diyarbakir, undermined this to some extent. In particular, Demirtas’s “soft style and rhetoric” won him 9.76 per cent in the 2014 Turkish Presidential Election (*Cizre*, 2016, p.14 and *Turkey Labor Laws*, 2015). This support was made

more apparent in the June 2015 General Election when the HDP passed the electoral threshold of 10 per cent, for the first time in Turkey (Cizre, 2016, p.14).

Voluntary vs. Professional Party Members

When I asked another member of the same department to compare the campaigns of Erdoğan and Demirtas from the perspective of their use of media and PR, he deliberately ignored the question, mentioning only that Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, the projects he has overseen, and his politics since 2002 should be enough to convince people to choose him as their next President. It is unsurprising that people might feel antagonised when a "foreigner" asks them questions about another party. However, unfortunately this was not only the case with members of the Publicity and Media department; whenever I asked a question related to another party, I felt that party members started regarding me suspiciously. This shows a lack of tolerance, and a refusal to address criticism, on a broader scale.

Here, however, I should distinguish between the two kinds of party members: voluntary and professional members. During the observations at AKP headquarters, I recognised that voluntary members embraced the understanding of 'dawah', in other words Islamic activism, and seemed very enthusiastic. They worked "for the sake of God" as the 68-year old woman in Istanbul's Üsküdar district stressed to me (Ethnographic Interview, 5 August 2014). Furthermore volunteers "sacrifice" long hours, including their precious weekends. In contrast, professionals working on a full-time basis are getting paid to be there, and they seemed less enthusiastic. They generally adhered to a working day, and gave a general impression that their main concern was their job not the success of the AKP's politics or ideology. Interestingly, during a tea break, one member of the Publicity and Media department admitted that

she supports the main opposition party, the CHP, although she supported Erdoğan in the presidential election in 2014 as the candidate for the CHP offered no vision for the future (Ethnographic Interview, 25 September 2014). Economic stability was important for this team member, and she observed that this is heavily reliant “successful agreement between the President and government” (ibid).

Mobilising People to Attend Erdoğan’s ‘Balcony Speech’

When the first 10 per cent of official results were announced by news agencies’ websites on television at 7 pm, as expected, Erdoğan was leading the race due to the votes from the cities of Eastern Turkey. An hour later, it was clarified that the outcome of the election was a success story for Erdoğan; he would become the 12th President of the Turkish Republic. An advisor to Erdoğan shared a tweet; saying that Erdoğan would leave Istanbul and head to Ankara to give his victory speech. Immediately preparations got underway at AKP headquarters. This was the first definitive indication that the speech would take place at AKP headquarters in Ankara. In order to begin preparations, one of the members of the Publicity and Media department called their chairman and asked for updates.

When the confirmation arrived that Erdoğan would give a ‘balcony speech’, the department prepared to display AKP and Erdoğan flags, a portable wall for the balcony, and digital billboards. Whilst the Publicity and Media department started making preparations for the visual display, the Organisation department and Youth Branch started mobilising people to attend the victory speech. A member of the Organisation department called Ankara province members and requested that they organise around 1000 people to attend Erdoğan’s speech. Youth department used the social media to mobilise young AKP members and sympathisers. By sharing tweets

and Facebook posts, AKP's Youth branch utilised the technical infrastructure available on social media to mobilise around 1000 people from the local branches of AKP's Ankara province. One of the Youth branch members emphasised in a phone call that "they need an energetic audience to cheer when Erdoğan enters the stage" (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). In another call to an AKP Youth branch in Ankara, the same person asked the branch to organise at least 300 young men and women to attend the 'balcony speech'.

"The Youth branch is seen as an engine" as one of young members, describes:

We support the party with our young and dynamic members. Because we have the enthusiasm, the energy, and we work passionately. As Erdoğan came from the ground, he attaches importance to the Youth branch.

(Ethnographic Interview, 30 September 2014)

The emphasis on Erdoğan's appreciation for his youth supporters is important to elaborate on here. Erdoğan joined Erbakan's party when he was just 16 years old (Besli and Özbay, 2010). Being involved at such a young age had enormous ideological impact on him (Yavuz, 2009). Through reading about Turkey's intellectual pioneers, such as Nurettin Topçu, he became aware of Kemalism and modernisation, and what motivated people to become involved in politics (ibid.). The Youth branch member highlights that there is a "mission is to create a generation with a specific mission of dawah" (Ethnographic Interview, 30 September 2014). This overlaps with the approach taken by the previous Youth branch (Ethnographic Interview, 10 September 2014) and Istanbul's Üsküdar district members (Ethnographic Interview, 5 September 2014).

To ensure the attention that had gone into building an image for the new Turkish President was not wasted, emphasis was on the technical preparations put in place: “Erdoğan attaches importance to professionalism,” the person responsible for the technical part of the Publicity and Media department explained to me (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). Beside the billboard and portable wall, it was important to arrange a teleprompter for Erdoğan, as he uses one at every speech. The primary objective of the leading member of the Strategy Team was successful image management (McNair, 2003) on this important evening. He gave instructions to the members of the Publicity and Media Department, concerning every aspect that might have a negative impact on Erdoğan’s image. It is important to note here, that relations between the Strategy Team and Publicity and Media Department were most readily assessed on the day of the election. This was useful, as the head of the latter emphasised in interview that they have the upper hand concerning issues related to PR, yet the head of Strategy Team claimed the opposite. In fact, when observing the relations between both teams it was apparent that the Strategy Team has the upper hand, although the head of the Publicity and Media Department never admitted this, so this was a useful insight for me.

Erdoğan’s Revenge on the Kemalist Elite

On election night, the Publicity and Media department were busy preparing for the balcony speech, whereas the Organisation department and the Youth branch were working on gathering supporters to locate at headquarters. It was important to observe these departments, in order to formulate a better understanding of the political communication strategies of the AKP to answer the first research question. As the time of Erdoğan’s arrival drew close, I relocated my observations to Ankara Esenboğa Airport’s VIP lounge, as one of Erdoğan’s advisors offered me a seat in

his car. During the short drive, I had the opportunity to speak with him about the election results and Turkey's future prospects. As might be expected, euphoria at the result made him proud to have a role as advisor to an "exclusive leader who succeeds in every single election" (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). It was clear to him that this election was a turning point not just for Turkey, but for the wider "Islamic world":

We have never had a leader such as Erdoğan since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. His charisma is indisputable. But more important is his way of governing. He wrestles with elites, in other words the Kemalists. He is the right person, whom people can trust because he has the same religious orientation as the majority of this country.

(Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014)

Indeed, the oppression of conservative oriented people by the Kemalist elite has a long history in Turkey. Kemalism drove the creation of modern Turkey in 1923 (Yavuz, 2009, p.268), and the 'postmodern coup' in 1997 was an achievement for the "Kemalist bloc" who successfully "intervened in the democratic process" (Colak, 2005, p.255). Under the Kemalist elite religious education at Imam Hatip schools as restricted, headscarves were banned for female university students, and Quranic instruction courses where pupils could memorise the Quran were shut down (Kavakci Islam, 2010, p.73). Thus, for Erdoğan much of his political life has been spent wrestling with the Kemalist elites, which Erdoğan's young advisor summarises as "bringing Kemalist elites to account" (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2017).

Established cultural and religious norms provide an important foundation enabling a healthy relationship between the public and political actors (Strömbäck and Kiouisis, 2011). For Erdoğan it was easier to find a common cause with the religiously oriented conservative majority, with whom he could communicate; i.e. "authentic,

humble, and uncorrupted Turkish people who were dominated and oppressed by secular and modernist elites” (Sen, 2011, p.57). Yet the comments of the interviewee above reveal how Erdoğan’s charisma has been identified as the main engine of his success in his struggle with the Kemalist regime (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2017). In this manner, the 2014 presidential election was seen as a “normalisation process,” in which the barriers between “state and society” were removed (ibid).

Politics and P(owe)R

When I arrived at Ankara Esenboğa Airport’s VIP lounge, the majority of the ministers and some parliamentarians and advisors were already there, although some arrived later. In every corner of the hall, conversations were taking place.

In one of these conversations, a parliamentarian and former mayor of a large city was discussing the AKP, in particular, the appointment of a new Prime Minister and party Chairman. A certainty emerged that the man selected would be Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was at that time the Foreign Minister. An advisor who joined the discussion later said it mattered little, suggesting that in reality, Erdoğan would be the *de facto* Prime Minister and Chairman of the AKP. When these discussions were taking place, Davutoğlu entered the lounge with his advisors. Some eyes in the hall turned towards him, whereas others welcomed him by shaking hands. The attitudes of the people in the hall, reflected the expectation that he would become appointed as the new Prime Minister. However, it was too early to make a prediction at that time, because Abdullah Gül’s handover of the presidency to Erdoğan would take several days, and the appointment of the Prime Minister and Chairman would follow afterwards.

In another group, three party members were discussing a poll conducted at AKP headquarters and in key districts to discover the party's preference for Prime Minister. Three names had emerged: Binali Yıldırım, Abdullah Gül, and Ahmet Davutoğlu. When I joined the discussion and asked who had emerged as the first preference, one of the MP's responded that it was someone not present in the lounge. This meant it was either Gül or Yıldırım. When I continued this conversation later with the interviewee with whom I had travelled to the airport, he informed me that the first choice was Yıldırım (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). However, although Yıldırım was the first choice Erdoğan chose Davutoğlu. This was a decision he came to regret, and Davutoğlu was replaced 33 months later by Yıldırım (Grigoriadis, 2018, p.63). Differences between Erdoğan's political style and Davutoğlu's led to several significant clashes (Cagaptay, 2017), but their relationship is not the focus of this research so will not be discussed further.

Due to my presence at the airport, a key moment I was present for was the welcoming ceremony for Erdoğan when his plane landed. A long line of people stood outside the lounge to welcome the new President-elect. It was fascinating to watch the ministers arranging themselves in this line. Some of the ministers pushed ahead of others to get closer to the head of the line to be among the earliest to congratulate Erdoğan. This was an awkward moment to observe as it is unusual to see politicians behave in such a manner. Based on the order of the queue I intuited that Davutoğlu would indeed be appointed as the next Prime Minister and Chairman of the AKP; he at the head of the line, and his posture and gestures were poised and confident. Erdoğan also greeted and shook hands with high profile personalities from the capital upon his arrival, and they expressed their gratitude for his victory.

Erdoğan arrived in Ankara with his family members, wife, son, daughter, and grandchildren, with the intention of including his family members on the balcony. As mentioned previously, in candidate-centred campaigns (a component of Americanisation), portrayal of key family members is central (Foster and Muste, 1992, p.16). The personal politics surrounding the 2014 presidential election was far reaching for the political party system in Turkey, as it was the first time the President was elected directly through popular vote (Turkey Research and Development Policy, 2015, p.25). Moreover, Erdoğan had been elected on a campaign that pledged to change the constitution in the new term, replacing the parliamentary system with a new presidential system. Thus, the expectation going forward was that political parties would become less relevant and candidates more so (Yılmaz, Özipek and Coşkun, 2014).

When Erdoğan made his way to the AKP headquarters, all the ministers and MPs got into their cars and followed Erdoğan in convoy. Interestingly, the chauffeurs for each minister harried one another, jostling and hooting their horns, aiming to position themselves immediately behind Erdoğan's escort. This was a continuation of the scene at the welcoming ceremony. The advisor to Erdoğan with whom I returned to AKP headquarters, explained that this was a power struggle revealing the true face of all politicians (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). After a 10 minute drive, Erdoğan's escort stopped on the motorway and Erdoğan got out and got on to one of the official AKP election buses, which had been used during the election period when travelling to different cities and districts. Some of the ministers and Erdoğan's advisors joined him on the bus, and so did I. When I took my place on the election

bus, I realised that Erdoğan's family members were already on it. In total there were 30 people on the bus. The chauffeur started playing the election song loudly, so could be heard over a long distance. As the bus passed through Ankara's different districts, a corridor of people assembled along the route. This was a "natural mobilisation" according to one of Erdoğan's security guards; meaning that AKP officials had not arranged for local residents to line Erdoğan's route, in the way they had mobilised attendees for the 'balcony speech' (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014).

The people of Ankara love their leader and they want to celebrate their success by waving flags and hands.

(Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014)

When Erdoğan saw these people had come to see him pass by, he stood and went to the front of the bus to respond accordingly. The rhythm of the music encouraged people to wave their hands, reflecting a tide of emotion. The use of sound in this way is an aspect of political public relations, as it can be used to raise awareness and strengthen communication (Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1992). At some point, Erdoğan gave an order to stop the bus. He took the megaphone and thanked the people of Ankara for their support, promising that this would be the beginning of the new Turkey. His wife was next to him; this was important as more than 50 per cent of the people on the streets were women. Then Erdoğan and his wife distributed chess sets and t-shirts bearing the Erdoğan logo to young children who were awake despite the late hour. This act was one of "purposeful communication and action" to "influence and establish a beneficial relationship" with the public (Strömbäck and Kiouisis, 2011, p.8). This did not only appeal to the elderly, or even those old enough to vote, it created a memorable moment that young people will never to forget. During the

half hour journey, Erdoğan received calls from his counterparts which he answered joyfully. He was in a good mood, and it was clear that he was relieved to have achieved success in the first round of voting. Despite his cheerfulness, he adhered seriously to the arranged schedule and worked on updating the upcoming programme with his chief of staff.

Balcony Speech: First Step to a “New Turkey”

When Erdoğan arrived at AKP headquarters, ministers, MP’s, and party officials welcomed him. He went straight to his office on the 8th floor. His office door was left open and so I could follow Erdoğan’s preparations. He checked his victory speech, and welcomed special guests from other countries having photographs taken with them. One of the guests was the President of Kyrgyzstan Almasbek Atambajew. When I asked an advisor for Erdoğan about the reason behind this visit he stated that the personal relationship between the two leaders and countries is good (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014).⁸⁶ Meanwhile, ministers and MP’s were following news updates and watching political shows on TV and receiving calls.

Before the victory speech was delivered, Erdoğan’s PR advisor Erol Olçok organised who would join Erdoğan on the balcony. Although some ministers, more than 15 MP’s, and nearly all the deputy chairmen were present and ready to appear, Olçok decided that only Erdoğan’s family should be present with him at the beginning of the speech. He announced this decision in an aggressive tone, emphasising that it should not be questioned. Certainly it was not very welcome, and some of the ministers and MP’s were clearly disappointed. Olçok’s decision suggests an

⁸⁶ Beyond this individual relationship, there is a political relationship: the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States includes Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey (German, 2016, p.111). This council was founded in 2009 and reflects Ankara’s interest in creating a good relationship with its eastern neighbours (ibid.).

Americanised communication strategy, mirroring traditional practices in the US presidential elections (Negrine, 2008, p.152). It also reveals the importance of ‘individualisation’ (Aelst, Shaefer and Stanyer, 2012), and ‘candidate-centred politics’ (Dalton, 2000), presenting Erdoğan as a “family figure” (Langer, 2007, p.381). When I spoke to Olçok about this decision, he emphasised that his aim was to personalise the elections, as this was a new period for Turkey (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). Olçok’s decision was a clear sign he had the last word on Erdoğan’s PR. Nevertheless, after Erdoğan’s speech, selected high profile personalities from the party were encouraged to appear and participate in welcoming guests. But before they turned up, Erdoğan greeted the crowd with the new first lady once again. Olçok revealed also that the AKP was keen to personalise its political communications, and the presidential elections was an ideal opportunity to do so (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014).

Before Erdoğan was announced, the election song was played to enthuse the crowd. When Erdoğan appeared, as in other rallies, there were cheers, in particular from young party members; some were also shouting slogans. Later in the thesis a detailed content analysis of Erdoğan’s balcony speech is presented, so I do not want to go into detail here. However, I do want to stress that his speech conveyed Erdoğan’s message of unity, representing a continuation of his election campaign. Erdoğan’s unity approach involves building mutual relationships between his party, himself and the Turkish public, as well as the wider Islamic world (Cutlip, Centre and Broom, 2000, p.6). In his speech he remembered critical cities in the Islamic world and underlined that this victory is also a victory for:

Baghdad, Islamabad, Kabul, Beirut, Sarajevo, Skopje, Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Ramallah, Nablus, Ariha, Gaza and Jerusalem.

(Erdoğan, 2014)

One of the key advisors to the Prime Minister explained that this sentence is historic, because the “Muslim world is witnessing this historic moment in Turkey and supporting Erdoğan with their prayers” (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). When I asked if he used the same jargon in 2002 or 2007 balcony speeches, he informed me that previously he was “more balanced”, whereas on this occasion he clearly was taking the “Islamic world into consideration” (ibid.). Yet Göksu and Aslan’s (2011) article confirms this approach. When they compare the balcony speeches of Erdoğan from the 2007, 2010 and 2011 elections, they stress that his primary aim was unity (ibid.) rather than to include religious rhetoric as in the 2014 presidential election night speech. This provides further evidence of how the AKP’s message evolved between 2002 and 2014, as highlighted in the second research question. However, it would be wrong to ignore that the reality was that the crowd wanted to hear a speech that emphasised ‘unity of Ummah’, as when Erdoğan spoke about the significance of his victory for Muslim societies the enthusiasm of the audience significantly increased. Accordingly, it can be argued that the direction of Erdoğan after 2010 influenced his supporters’ willingness to embrace a religious rhetoric, as he appeared to turn away from a discourse mollifying the West and reduced efforts towards joining the European Union.

Rabaa Sign: Erdoğan’s New Symbol

Before Erdoğan finished his speech from the AKP headquarters’ balcony, he asked the crowd if they are ready for what is to come. When the audience replied with a resounding ‘yes’, Erdoğan made the four-fingered Rabaa sign, which became the

symbol of the MB in Egypt during their protests against the military crackdown, which ended with a coup against the democratically elected President of Egypt, Muhammad Morsi (Danahar, 2013). Rabaa means four in Arabic, and is associated with Cairo's Rabaa Square where the protests took place (ibid.). Erdoğan started using this sign after the military coup in Egypt in 2013. Initially, he only used the Rabaa salute when he was greeting people before and after his public speeches, remembering the MB in support of former President Mursi (*Radikal*, 2014). But eventually he began to associate with Turkish nationalism: one homeland, one state, one flag and one nation (*Türkiye*, 2014). Consequently it is understood in Turkey as a local and international symbol. Castells (2009, p.442) argues that society is influenced by images and symbols, which can be instrumental in promoting political viewpoints and have a symbolic meaning. Thus, the use of the Rabaa sign by Erdoğan, during the presidential campaign at every single public speech, symbolises the political stance of Erdoğan with regard to Egypt. When Mursi became the President of Egypt, two state visits took place between the two countries (Kazamias, 2015, p.124). Erdoğan's support of Morsi was obvious, and for his part Morsi sought to implement the methods modelled by the AKP model to benefit the MB (ibid.). Since the military coup in Egypt, Erdoğan has not acknowledged the presidency of the current Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and has on occasion raised his voice in favour of Morsi.

Erbakan used the raised thumb's up as a political symbol, denoting success and progress (*Radikal*, 2014). When Erdoğan created the AKP in 2001, they had no specific sign associated with the party. The coup in Egypt was an opportunity for Erdoğan to show solidarity and associate himself with a specific sign. In an informal

conversation, one of Erdoğan's advisors tells me that this "sign is not only in support of the MB but is also used by oppressed people worldwide from Palestine to Iraq, from Myanmar to Sudan" (Ethnographic Interview, 16 September 2014). This is known at grassroots level; according to my source, "AKP supporters are doing this sign in respect to the MB in particular" (ibid.). I observed the latter during public rallies in observed cities.

6.4 Erdoğan's Charismatic Image

As the influence of Erdoğan's charisma is the topic of the third research question:

RQ3. What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP?

I intended that by spending more time at AKP headquarters and on the ground, I would get a clearer impression of how Erdoğan is perceived within the AKP. I found that he is typically reference to as 'Reis' (denoting "leader, chief, guide" in English), and that whenever AKP members, in particular youth members, discuss Erdoğan, they use the word 'Reis'. Kirişci (2017) observes that one of the main inspirations for Erdoğan is the work of poet and ideologue Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, who uses the word 'Reis' in some of his poems. This could not be confirmed by my ethnographic sources but is an interesting point that could incentivise its use among Erdoğan's followers. However, the higher the position of a party member, such as a minister, MP, or deputy chairman, the greater the likelihood that they might use 'Tayyip bey', which is the formal way of addressing someone in Turkish (this would be 'Mr Erdoğan' in English). People around Erdoğan, such as his advisors and chief of staff

etc. use the word ‘Beyefendi’, in other words ‘gentlemen’ or ‘sir’, as one of Erdoğan’s advisors explain (Ethnographic Interview, 16 September 2014). Titles used in political communication can convey a message about the style of political actors, or institutions, to the general public (McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod, 1994, p.125). In this case, the word ‘Reis’ suggests the importance of one-man style leadership, as one of Erdoğan’s advisors explains:

Turkey is becoming more and more dependent on its leader [Erdoğan]. Every single decision is taken by him. We opened a new airport somewhere in Anatolia. But the problem was that Turkish Airlines had not arranged a flight to that city at that time. When *beyefendi* [Erdoğan] heard that the airport is still not in use although it is ready, he gave me directions to call the CEO of Turkish Airlines to give him an order to arrange flights from Istanbul. This is a level of micromanagement that would not be possible for any other leader in Turkey. This level of involvement in daily politics contributes to his [Erdoğan] being referred to as ‘Reis’.

(Ethnographic Interview, 15 August 2014)

Another example of Erdoğan’s micromanagement relates to foreign students studying in Turkey. According to the same source, Erdoğan once called the Editor-in-Chief of the English language newspaper *Daily Sabah*, to ask if they post copies to dormitories where foreign students (mostly from Africa) are living (ibid.). When he learned that they do not, he instructed them to start sending copies of the *Daily Sabah* to every single dormitory immediately (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). This type of micromanagement (Resnik, 2009) could be perceived of as an attempt to “undermine freedom” (Resnik, 2009, p.85), because too much control over every single aspect of politics and the media can result in “authoritarian” governance, as is the case in Turkey (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). This is an example that shows how Erdoğan organises local news outlets to influence non-Turkish people; viewing them as potential ambassadors when they finish their studies and move back to their home countries. In fact this strategy was used by

Hezbollah to reach new audiences after they adopted modern media strategies in 1996 (Harb 2011, p.174).

6.4.1 Erdoğan's Authority

Certainly images and symbols play a key role in “communicating narratives, themes, and messages” (Farwell, 2012, p.79). Erdoğan's image as ‘Reis’ characterises Turkish society's need for a strong leader, a tradition inherited from the Ottoman Empire era (Mardin, 2006). Turkey is a patriarchal society (ibid.), and some of Erdoğan's supporters link him to Sultan Abdulhamid II (explained in Section 3.3.2), due to his leadership style, and Islamist ideology. This was mentioned by an AKP affiliated lawyer with whom I spoke at AKP headquarters:

Abdulhamid II and Reis [Erdoğan] have similarities; first of all their Islamist ideology, which seeks to build a strong ‘Ummah’. Abdullhamid II was keen to govern not only the Ottoman Empire's territory, but also the Islamic world at large. Obviously Reis is imagining this in a democratic framework by mobilising neighbouring Islamic countries. In terms of development, both leaders were interested in introducing technology to the military in particular. Abdulhamid II was criticised by *The New York Times* during his reign, just as Erdoğan is today.

(Ethnographic Interview, 7 October 2014)

When I asked my interviewee about how Erdoğan envisions achieving unity with “neighbouring Islamic countries”, he gives the example of Erbakan, who established an initiative called D-8⁸⁷ in 1997, imitating the G-7⁸⁸ (comprising the world's most powerful industrial nations), by bringing together the “eight most developed Islamic countries” to cooperate specifically on economic and military issues, with the possibility of a shared currency in the future (Hafez, 2000, p.172). Another AKP affiliated interviewee, whom I met during lunch at AKP headquarters, suggested that

⁸⁷ Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey (Hafez, 2000).

⁸⁸ Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom and United States (Hafez, 2000).

Erdoğan is waiting for the right time to either create a different institution by bringing together countries such as Qatar, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, or to revive the D-8 idea (Interview, 3 September 2014).

The same interviewee criticised the West for not its attitude towards Erdoğan and the Gezi Park protests and the events that followed (ibid.). The interviewee also mentioned this in reference to the attitude towards “Egypt’s democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi” in 2013 (ibid.). Initially I gave little credence to these views, as they seemed to be conspiracy theories; but after a while I realised they are not only widespread but also believed within AKP circles. Erdoğan’s ‘Reis’ image and the ‘Ummah’ belief, are closely related to “identity politics”, which then has an impact on “political activity”, as Farwell (2012, p.79) demonstrates. Moreover, symbols matter in terms of “common values” (ibid.), and it is argued that symbols can play a key role in expressing and developing identity (ibid.). The latter is an important case which applies to Erdoğan. When I scrutinised how the ‘Reis’ image developed when I was conducting the fieldwork, it was apparent that it had emerged from Erdoğan’s strategy of excluding rivals, which started in particular after 2013, with the Gezi Park protests and corruption scandal. One of my informants, who works with the Justice Ministry, explains that whenever Erdoğan learns that colleagues, or high ranking party members disagree with him and have a secret agenda, he jettisons them (Ethnographic Interview, 20 November 2014). When I asked for examples, he only pointed to former President Abdullah Gül and former speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, but he stressed that others would follow (ibid.). He attributed these actions to Erdoğan’s “power struggle” within the party:

Basically Erdoğan does not want to share his power because he thinks that he is on track and any other idea or political approach would damage his movement and all the efforts which he has built since 2002.

(Ethnographic Interview, 20 November 2014)

Interestingly this meeting was at the end of November 2014, and this issue was not in the foreground of debate as it is today [end of January 2018]. By eliminating critical voices, in particular starting with Davutoğlu, as explained in Section 5.4.2, Erdoğan eroded the collective identity of his party, thereby strengthening his personal identity and power at the party's expense (Farwell, 2012). This contributed to the shift in the identity of the party to a more "one-man style" politics, away from collectivist principles (Cizre, 2016, p.7). Undoubtedly, this process is mutual.

When Erdoğan decries any divergence from his message within the party, this creates, within the public mindset, the view that he is an impeccable and untouchable leader. "In fact, this changes his perception of his role", so a journalist (editor-in-chief for a small independent in-depth news website in Istanbul) informed me (Ethnographic Interview, 16 November 2014). It increases his self-confidence and the journalist asserts that Erdoğan's ego is fuelled daily by the people surrounding him, "such as his advisors, ministers and MP's" (ibid.). He emphasises that Erdoğan's advisors frequently also fail to share the truth of situations with him, "which leads Erdoğan to make mistakes, naturally". He encapsulates the problem with the following expression: "they are more royalist than the king" (ibid.). This was not the first time that I was told Erdoğan's advisors are 'silent' and fail to challenge him in the way an advisor normally would (Negrine et al., 2007).

6.4.2 Erdoğan's use of Colour

Another, significant factor relating to the image of the President is his use of colour (Farwell, 2012). There has been a substantial change in Erdoğan's style from 1994 to 2017 as can be seen from reviewing what he has chosen to wear throughout this period. His suits have changed in type, his ties have changed in colour, and his overall appearance has become more refined. This section concerns the role of colour and symbols in creating Erdoğan's image and so I will take his ties and waistcoats as an example.

Following the Gezi Park protests in 2013 Erdoğan started wearing green ties. This seemed in some way to evoke the protests, and when during an interview after the Gezi Park protests, a journalist asked him about the meaning of the colours of his ties, Erdoğan replied saying that the colour green shows his concern for nature and environment, whereas blue represents the sea, and red the colour of the Turkish flag (Haberler, 2013). His green ties intended to reassure those concerned about the Gezi Park that his party is environmentally friendly, despite the illusion propagated during the protests (Ethnographic Interview, 4 November 2014). He added that when engaged in critical meetings, visiting foreign countries, or welcoming an important foreign leader, he chooses the colour red, "because it is a national" symbol (ibid.). "On Sundays or 'balcony speeches', he only wears a navy blue jacket without a tie which symbolises his accessibility" (ibid.).

In reference to the choice of the green tie, it was not the intention of this study to look at how environmentally the AKP is; however, I was interested in whether green was being used as a religious symbol, as it is by the Green Movement in Iran

(Farwell, 2012). When I asked the advisor about this, he refuted the possibility. But when I had an opportunity to ask this question of a journalist who travels with Erdoğan frequently on foreign visits, he explained that it is related to both religion and the environment (Ethnographic Interview, 27 November 2014). He noted that awareness of this connection was widespread among other journalists too.

6.4.3 Erdoğan's Waistcoat: The "new Atatürk"?

Another example of media interest in whether Erdoğan's fashion choices are symbolic relates to his wearing of waistcoats since winter 2017. This addition to Erdoğan's style was evidenced when one journalist asked during a live TV interview, "if this is his new style", because despite the warmer weather, in spring 2017 he was still wearing a waistcoat (*Hürriyet*, 2017). Erdoğan replied by saying that he recommends that he [the journalist who asked the question] wears one too [laughing], because it protects one from the cold (ibid.). However, it has since become apparent that this is a style statement, because even during the summer months Erdoğan still wore waistcoats, even mixing up the styles and colours.

Although this is an innovation since I concluded my fieldwork in 2014, it was important for me to include it, as it relates to the President's personal image. I was also interested in whether Erdoğan has taken to wearing a waistcoat in imitation of Atatürk's style, as the founding father of the modern republic wore waistcoats regularly (Sezer Arıç, 2007). This might then signify his aim to be seen as the second father of the Turkish Republic, or even the first founding father of the "New Turkey" which he often makes reference to (Cagaptay, 2017). Clothing in Turkey is also an important indicator of the nation's modernisation (Özüdoğru, 2016). Atatürk, the founding father of Turkey, described the modern Turkish costume as follows:

Low-cut shoe, pants, waistcoat, shirt, tie, jacket and, of course, as a supplement to these, a European style headdress.

(Sezer Arıĝ, 2007, p.38)

As after the 2014 presidential elections, Erdoğan became “the most influential statesmen of our time” (Cagaptay, 2017, p.3), and so I asked someone working as a counsellor in a ministry⁸⁹ in summer 2017 if Erdoğan was adopting the modern style of Atatürk to give a message to both the Kemalists and the conservatives. The message to the former is that he is becoming a leader who knows how to dress in a modern fashionable style, whereas to the latter that he is a new leader marking the end of the Atatürk era. My source in Ankara agreed that Erdoğan’s new mode of dress was a symbolic act. He stated that he sees “himself as the new Atatürk in particular after the referendum in 2017, which was an approval of the new presidential system, as the prime ministry was abolished and the power of the President increased” (Ethnographic Interview, 4 July 2017). This was based on information he had received from his sources at Beştepe, where the Presidential Complex of Turkey is based. In addition, it was underlined that some AKP members in Ankara had started wearing waistcoats too, imitating Erdoğan’s style. The contradiction between the green tie reflecting Islam and the environment, and the adoption of fashionable modern dress is a reflection of the AKP’s identity (Özüdoğru, 2016). It is a paradox regarding to Kara (2017), which demands or presents religiosity, alongside modern Western methods and styles. In fact this mode of dress can be seen as emphasising secularism, which will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

⁸⁹ This informant did not want to get himself into trouble, and so asked that I do not disclose the name of the ministry.

6.4.4 Moustache: Symbol of Virility

Erdoğan's moustache is another symbol to consider as part of the discussion concerning his image, although it was not at the fore during my ethnographic research in 2014. Whereas clean-shaven politicians have been favoured by the AKP, in order to distinguish the party members' appearance from the members of the Milli Görüş (most of whom had moustaches or beards, symbolising their stance against Kemalism in Turkey), after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt Erdoğan started instructing his family members, advisors, ministers, MP's, and even security services to grow moustaches (*Yeni Şafak*, 2017).

This change in etiquette became an important matter of debate; indeed a columnist from the *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, one of the most popular conservative newspapers in Turkey, wrote that moustaches had started to be worn by members of the party; at this time no mention was made of Erdoğan's intention behind encouraging this. However, Professor Mesut Tan, from Istanbul Marmara University described the move as signifying a "strong and stern image" during war time; highlighting the ongoing wars being fought by Turkey, i.e. domestically against the PKK and Gülenists, and internationally against DAESH (aka ISIS or Islamic State) (*ABC News*, 2017). Perhaps more important than this were Tan's comments linking the wearing of a moustache to the traditions of the Ottoman Empire. Yanıkdağ (2013, p.66) explains that the moustache was a symbol of virility in Ottoman Empire, in other words a "proper way of looking and behaving like a Turk or Ottoman".

This then leads to consideration of the wearing of a moustache as two-fold; first as a symbol, and second as creating a sense of collective identity. Symbolically, by

recalling this practice from the time of the Ottoman Empire Erdoğan is acknowledging the significant role of appearance in image building (McNair, 2003). In this manner, PO3's comment that Erdoğan wants to build a strong "New Turkey" with a key role in global and regional politics coincides with this symbolic act (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). In fact, in his speech at the Necip Fazıl Kısakürek awards in December 2017, he stressed that "for the last 15 years," the AKP have been "striving to build a Turkey, a strong Turkey, a country which is a source of confidence for its friends, its kins and its Muslim brothers and sisters as well as for the oppressed and the victims" (Erdoğan, *TCCB*, 2017). Furthermore, the notion of "collective identity is a product of conscious action" (Larana, Johnston and Gusfield, 1994, p.17), which in this case demonstrates Erdoğan's relationship with the Ottoman Empire. The same source in Ankara with whom I discussed Erdoğan's decision to wear a waistcoat, explains that ministers, MP's and bureaucrats feel compelled to grow moustaches (Ethnographic Interview, 4 July 2017). The only alternative to show independence is to grow beard, according to my interviewee (ibid.), which was also a practice Prophet Muhammad⁹⁰ recommended to his companions (Al-Qaradawi, 2013).

6.4.5 Presidential Palace: Symbol of Vanity

Since Erdoğan attained the presidency, two symbolic steps have been taken to reinforce his authority; both are important to mention in relation to his image. The first is the building of the presidential palace in 2014 (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2014), and the second is the presidential plane, an Airbus 330, bought in 2014 (*CNN Türk*, 2014). When Erdoğan became President it was unclear whether he would move to

⁹⁰ "The stated reason for growing a beard is to be different from the [...] Jews and Christians" (Al-Qaradawi, 2013, p.99).

the Köşk in Ankara's Çankaya district, the presidential mansion since Atatürk's time, or to a new palace, the "Ak Saray" (White Palace or White House in English) as it was originally called before it became known as the "Presidential Complex" (Hamid, 2016, p.148). There was some uncertainty at first regarding whether Erdoğan would live there, because the building was planned for the Prime Ministry when Erdoğan was Prime Minister. However, after it was announced that he would run for the presidency, plans changed, and Erdoğan decided to move in to the new palace. Hamid (ibid.) describes the "\$600 million" palace as more of "an Ottoman Versailles than the residence of a leader who came of age in Turkey's working-class heartland and who has often marketed himself as a man of the people". The building was built inside Atatürk's Forestland in Ankara (*The Guardian*, 2014). He has received criticism from the national and international media (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2014), and commentators have variously criticised the cost of development, the palace's location, and others its architecture (because it blended modern, Ottoman and Seljuk art) (*The Guardian*, 2014). Nevertheless, it was a historical and symbolic break to leave the Köşk, which was inherited from Atatürk (*The Guardian*, 2014).

The issue of where Erdoğan should live created a heated debate at AKP headquarters. The coverage by the media was criticised, and one of the AKP's Publicity and Media department members hailed the decision by Erdoğan to take up a new residence as significant, as "this building will represent Turkey to the global world" (Ethnographic Interview, 23 October 2014). It was purely seen by the party as an important milestone in the development of "Turkey's image". In addition, there is no doubt that most of the AKP's members were happy that Erdoğan would not

govern from Çankaya, and so would establish a new legacy for the new Turkey distinct from the old Kemalist regime (ibid.).

As mentioned above, another important step was to commission an Airbus 330-200 as the presidential plane, at a cost of \$185 million (*The Telegraph*, 2014). A senior member commented on both decisions positively, emphasising how important such moves are to show the capacity and strength of a country (Ethnographic Interview, 13.10.2014). One Youth branch member was proud that the new presidential residence was bigger than France's Versailles Palace, Washington's White House and Moscow's Kremlin (Ethnographic Interview, 21 October 2014). Thus, status symbols clearly play an important role within AKP circles. A brief note here is relevant concerning attitudes towards the Americanisation of the President's image. When it was announced that the name of the new building would be the "Ak Saray", as the AKP's Turkish abbreviation to AK, it was thought to also be a reference to the White House in the US. Later its name was changed to 'Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi' (Presidential Complex). Külliye is an Arabic word used during the time of the Ottoman Empire, and is used to refer to a complex including a mosque, religious madrasa (school), 'waqf' (charitable foundation), 'dar al-shifa' (clinic) and other buildings (Çiçek, 2014). This allusion to history, in conjunction with the complexes architecture sparked a debate about Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman policies (*The Telegraph*, 2014). This type of reminiscing also reinforces Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, as discussed elsewhere in reference to the third research question.

Personalisation is an important aspect of Americanisation, and it ensures "individual politicians become more central in media coverage" (Negrine et al., 2007).

Consequently the way Erdoğan communicated during the process and later delivered the message of Americanisation is a way of “changing communication practices” (Negrine, 2008, p.152). While changes to the image of the country and its leader were attempted through these symbolic steps, the message referred to Erdoğan’s promised “new Turkey”. Due to the uniqueness and controversy around the Presidential Complex, there is no doubt that the building will long be remembered as the opus of Erdoğan (Ethnographic Interview, 14 October 2014).

6.5 Conclusion

When Khatib (2013, p.2) discusses the significance of image-making for a leader, she highlights that a “lasting image” of a leader always becomes etched on the minds of the people. Having observed Erdoğan as well as his supporters, colleagues, advisors, ministers and MP’s, and AKP supportive journalists for a four-month period, I can confidently state that the lasting image of Erdoğan, also known as *Reis*, will be as “the leader of the Muslim world” and “the last hope of Muslims” among the vast majority of the observed community. He will not be remembered as someone who once aimed to join the EU and advocated human rights, freedom of speech and tolerance (Hale, 2013). Moreover, as has been demonstrated in this chapter reviewing my fieldwork findings, the AKP’s communication strategies during the 2014 election campaign centred on Erdoğan’s personality. The increasing “one-man leadership” (Cizre, 2016) buttresses this image also.

Despite evidence of professionally prepared party election booths, party-run rallies and digital and printed artwork, I learned that what excites the supporters of the AKP is Erdoğan’s presence. This phenomenon is arguably partly due to the AKP’s use of

Americanised political communication as a public relations strategy. The 2014 presidential election in Turkey signified a new era for the AKP's political communication, as it transitioned from "party-centred campaigning to candidate-centred campaigning" (Plasser and Plasser, 2002, p.2) with considerable professionalism. Yet symbolic concerns that arose during and after the election demonstrate clearly that the AKP's political communication strategies are becoming increasingly personalised as well as individualised. The new presidential system, which was approved in a referendum in spring 2017 is a further indication that Americanised electioneering will be at the epicentre of the Turkish political landscape in upcoming years, with a reduced role for the parliamentary party system (*The Independent*, 2017). Nonetheless, it must be noted that the Americanisation of the AKP's political communication is carefully styled to meet the needs of the local culture and audience, as will be discussed in Chapter eight.

With regard to the message communicated, Erdoğan's Islamist rhetoric appears to be the primary reason for his success. There appears to be ample support for the claim that Erdoğan's message developed in response to several events. The most crucial of these were the international Mavi Marmara flotilla in 2010, the military coup in Egypt, and the nationwide Gezi Park protests in 2013, which revealed the 'hypocritical face of the West' according to most of the interviewees consulted at the AKP headquarters. For many AKP supporters, because Western leaders did not condemn these and other critical events in support of the democratically elected government in Turkey, Erdoğan had no other choice but to develop a new narrative directed towards the 'Muslim world'. However, this approach is effecting the breadth of his support. As Erdoğan's message becomes more "Islam sensitive" oriented, the

diversity of his supporters reduces (Cizre, 2016). Another phenomenon appears to be that those with a higher level of education are less likely to support Erdoğan (*Aktif Haberci*, 2013). This means the AKP is mainly addressing the working middle class, in other words “peripheral Muslim-conservatives” (Kentel, 2016, 141). Notably, the presence of youngsters at Erdoğan’s rallies was proportionally very low, an important consideration for upcoming elections for the AKP, as the nation is becoming younger (Wiarda, 2013). Despite those, the young members of the AKP were eager, diligent and significantly involved in politicisation; some aiming to become MPs themselves one day, holding serving ministers and MP’s as their role models. Importantly, for the AKP’s youth supporters the main motivation appears to be religious, as they volunteer for the party “for the sake of God”; a clear sign that the party is being viewed inside Turkey as Islamist, based on the understanding that it arose from the ashes of an Islamist movement (Yavuz, 2009). This further underscores that religion is an important tool in AKP’s political communication.

The next chapter illustrates the results of the quantitative content analysis of Erdoğan’s between 2002 and 2017. Significantly it summarises how the political message (second research question) of the AKP underwent a transition during this period.

Chapter 7. Transformation from a Pro-EU to a Pro-Muslim Party

Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

-Orwell⁹¹

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative content analysis of 60 speeches given by President Erdoğan over a period of 15 years. The first speeches date to 2002, when the AKP, a mere 15 months after its formation, received 34 per cent of the vote in the first election in which it participated, becoming Turkey's governing party (Yavuz, 2009, p.79). The analysis evaluates speeches given each year, up to and including 2017; the year of one of the most significant referendums in Turkish history, the results of which increased Erdoğan's power, and made it possible for him to rule until 2029⁹² (Hamid, 2017). This period has witnessed many ups and downs for the AKP and its leader.

Indeed, it has been a long journey, in which a party, born out of the ashes of an Islamist movement, emphasising a pro-European Union (EU) and pluralistic outlook (Yavuz, 2009, p.79), came to be associated with one of the most tragic coup attempts in Turkish history (in 2016), resulting in the deaths of 249 people (Eren, 2017). Thus, party has transitioned from one that respects human rights, freedom of speech, and diversity (Yavuz, 2009) to one that now restricts all these rights, and is renowned for

⁹¹ 1946, p.157

⁹² In case of snap elections in 2018, Erdogan will have the opportunity to govern till 2028.

having the highest number of jailed journalists in the world (as per December 2017 (CPJ, 2017)). An indictment of the party's current position is the report by Freedom House in 2017, which ranks Turkey 66th out of 100 (*Freedom House*, 2017). Meanwhile, Erdoğan's approach to governance has developed to imitate that of a "spiritual leader"; his government interferes in the private lives of its people, restricting alcohol use, abortion, and limiting financial support for couples with more than three children. There are now commentators that view Erdoğan's Turkey as subject to "soft Islamisation" (Hamid, 2017).

The available evidence drawn from the literature post-2010 (see Section 3.6.5), and the data from the interviews and fieldwork undertaken in Turkey for this study, suggests that the AKP has witnessed two distinct periods in terms of its policies and approach. The first period will be discussed in this chapter in reference to 30 speeches given from 2002 to 2009, and the latter period will be reviewed in reference to 30 speeches given between 2010 and 2017. Significant moments will be explained throughout this chapter, with reference to historical facts where relevant. This chapter provides raw data for evaluation in the following chapter, which will analyse the findings by triangulating the interviews, fieldwork notes, and content analysis to reach conclusions.

7.2 Coding of Speeches

Speeches play a significant role in understanding the ideology and worldview of an institution or individual (Finlayson and Martin, 2008). Political speeches by political leaders serve an additional purpose, as they are key to motivating electorates, building relationships on the ground, and persuading people of the value of political

ideologies (ibid.). They also offer a means of unifying the aims of “political institutions, citizens and politicians” (ibid., p.452).

Herein, the primary aim of quantitative content analysis is to focus on words and language use systematically; by first reading, counting, and recording numbers of repeated words, to identify the message(s) conveyed by Erdoğan’s speeches (Krippendorff, 2013; Holsti, 1969). Linking frequent words and terms establishes a general overview of both textual content and ideological representation (Neuendorf, 2002). To reveal key themes and shifts in ideology, I will code the speeches systematically across the two periods according to key recurrent themes (explained in Section 4.4.1). In order to perform a comprehensive, fair and rational analysis I randomly selected four speeches from each year, given on different occasions, i.e. at rallies, party meetings, in response to the need for official statements, at universities, to think tanks, and meetings of the parliamentary group. Speeches given on international platforms were also included, to ensure a broad spectrum approach. I coded every speech according to themes (see Table 2). These topics were initially identified from secondary sources, books, journals, and newspaper articles about the AKP and Erdoğan’s speeches. In 2014, while conducting in-depth interviews and fieldwork in Turkey, I reconsidered these themes, and added “Anti-Establishment” and “Gülenists” to the list. Overall, the themes cover issues from domestic to foreign affairs, from ideological politics to religious messages, allowing a broader perspective.

The speeches were taken from four sources (explained in Section 4.4.1). Except for the speeches provided on the website for the Turkish Presidency, all the speeches

were in Turkish. The counting for the content analysis was done in the original language; however, the terms and segments referred to in this thesis have been translated into English.

Themes of Speeches
European Union
Cultural Dialogue
Human Rights/Freedom of Speech
Atatürk/Secularisation
Religious Discourse
Economic Development
Anti-Israel
Anti-Establishment
Ottoman Empire
Gülenists

Table 3. Themes of Erdoğan's speeches from 2002 to 2017

7.3 Evolution of the AKP's Political Message

When studying the speeches, I learned that the dominant topics varied significantly between two periods. Initially, as seen in Figure 5, Erdoğan focused principally on discussing EU membership, cultural dialogue, human rights and freedom of speech, Atatürk and secularisation. Themes such as religious discourse, and anti-Israel or anti-establishment sentiments were also present, but did not account for a significant proportion of the whole.

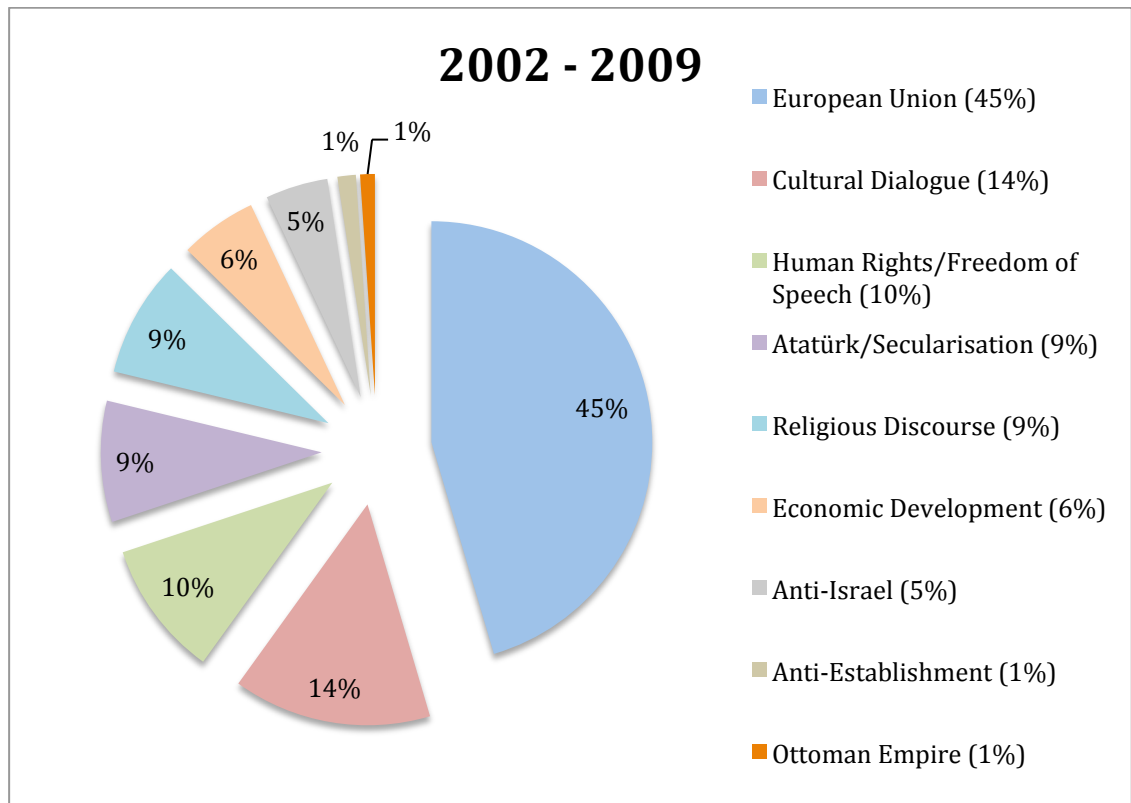


Figure 5. Themes of Erdoğan's speeches from 2002 to 2009

By comparison, in the second period, prominent themes discussed by Erdoğan were religion, anti-establishment sentiment, the Ottoman Empire, anti-Israel discourse, and opposition to the Gülenists (see Figure 6). The focus on Atatürk and secularisation, cultural dialogue, the European Union, human rights and freedom of speech significantly decreased in this era. The differences between both eras and the reasons behind the decrease and increase will be answered comprehensively in the next chapter.

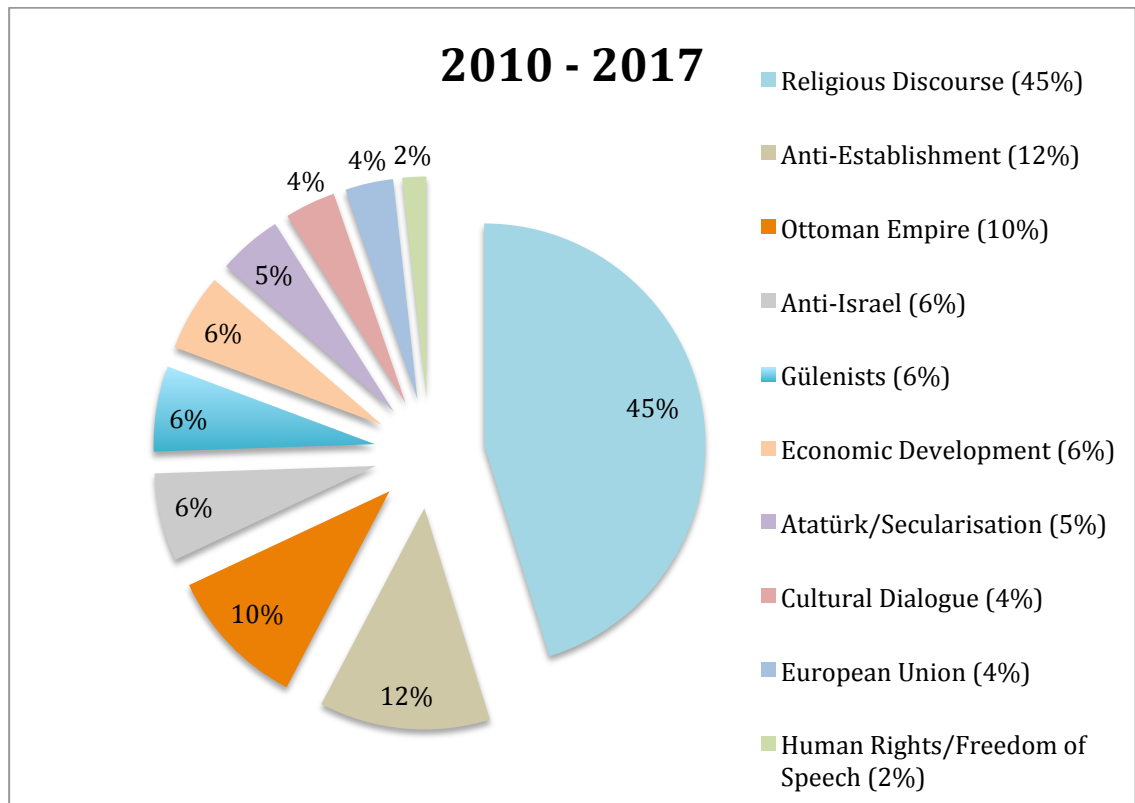


Figure 6. Themes of Erdoğan's speeches from 2010 to 2017

According to the data in Figure 6, religious discourse dominated the coding during this period. Moreover, although the European Union and cultural dialogue are still discussed, they are far from dominant.

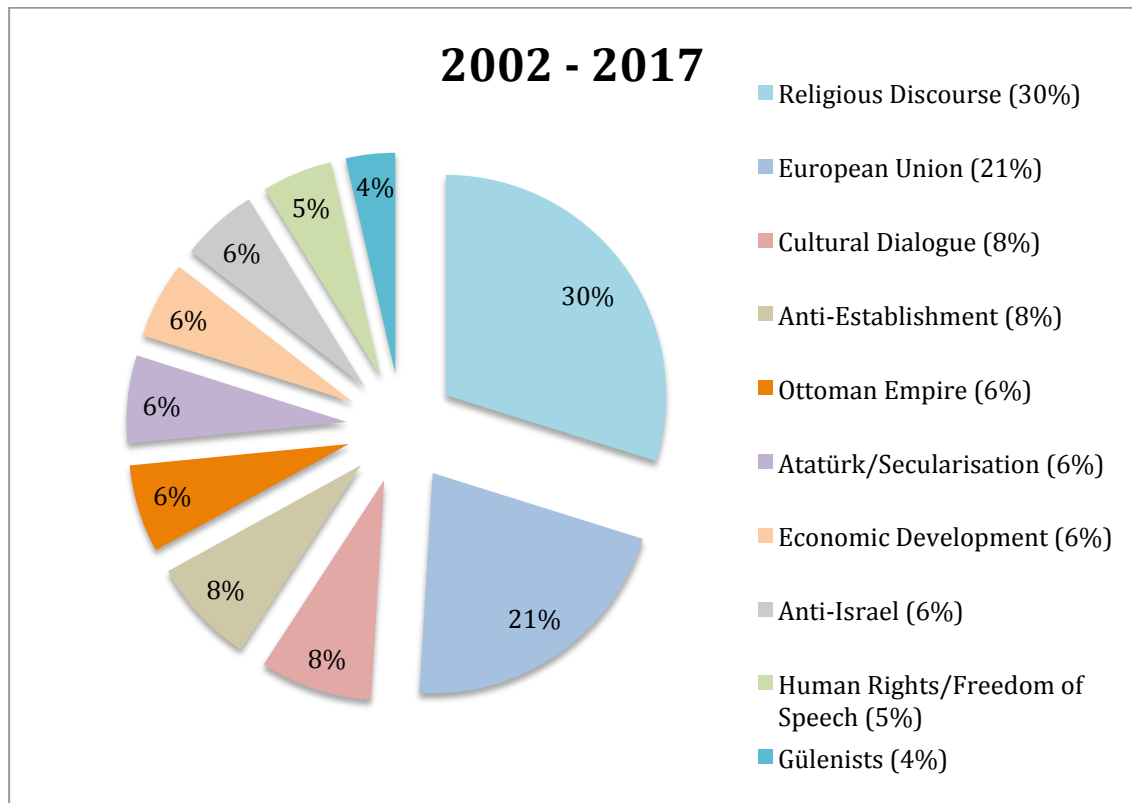


Figure 7. Themes of Erdoğan's speeches from 2002 to 2017

Figure 7, shows both periods, contrasting all ten coded themes by frequency of use of words and percentages of the whole. The most important information given, is the percentage change; presented in the last column of the table. This column depicts the alteration of Erdoğan's ideological position across the two periods. In the upcoming sections, I will highlight the significance of this in reference to Table 4.

Themes	2002-2009		2010-2017		Change in %
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
European Union	169	45.4%	18	3.5%	-89.4%
Cultural Dialogue	54	14.5%	19	3.7%	-64.8%
Human Rights/Freedom of Speech	37	9.9%	9	1.8%	-75.7%
Atatürk/Secularisation	33	8.9%	24	4.7%	-24.3%
Religious Discourse	32	8.6%	232	45.2%	625.0%
Economic Development	21	5.7%	29	5.7%	38.1%
Anti-Israel	17	4.8%	33	6.4%	94.1%
Anti-Establishment	5	1.3%	64	12.5%	1180.0%
Ottoman Empire	4	1.1%	53	10.3%	1225.0%
Gülenists	0	0.0%	32	6.2%	3200.0%

Table 4. Themes, frequency and percentage of Erdoğan's speeches from 2002 to 2017

7.3.1 AKP's European Union dream

The rise of the AKP, which emerged following a parting of the ways with Erbakan's Milli Görüş in 2001 (Axiallis, 2014), necessitated a strong and forward looking approach (see Section 3.6). This meant a new agenda, distinct from that of Milli Görüş emerged (Hale and Özbudun, 2010). Whereas Erbakan described the EU as a "Christian Club" (ibid., p.6), the AKP appeared were presented as a pro-EU party, desirous of swift acceptance into the EU (Ismael and Perry, 2014). With this goal in mind, Erdoğan highlighted the issue of Turkey's EU membership 169 times in the speeches assessed from 2002 to 2009. This theme was present in 45.4 per cent of all coded speeches from that period. By contrast, in the period from 2010 to 2017 there

was a serious reduction in the frequency of references to the EU. Erdoğan mentions it only 18 times, representing a drop of 89.4 per cent in frequency. Not only the political landscape, but also the approach of Turkish society towards the EU has changed over time. According to research by the TAVAK Foundation in 2011, 60.1 per cent of society were positive about the EU, whereas this percentage had fallen to 48.8 per cent by 2017 (*Habertürk*, 2017).

The goal of EU membership was a priority for the party at the start of the period (Ismael and Perry, 2014), as Turkey had already waited for more than 50 years to become part of the EU (Hale, 2013). At the close of the Cold War the European countries began to consider Turkey as a future member, but “political economic and cultural obstacles” remained a hindrance (*ibid.*, p.174). That it would prepare the country for full EU membership was one of the promises made by the AKP in 2002, and the focus on this objective in Erdoğan’s speeches peaked in 2005 “when the accession negotiations were officially inaugurated” (*ibid.*, p.175). The AKP’s emphasis on this process was interpreted by the party’s pragmatic side, because it had accelerated the reform process in Turkey. The government had to fulfil the EU’s ‘Copenhagen criteria’ for EU membership (Yesilada, 2013, p.24), and these criteria required “stable democratic institutions, a viable market economy, rule of law and civil rights for everyone” (*ibid.*, p.25). This meant targeting economic development, and the institutionalisation of government institutions and the military (*ibid.*). This process allowed the AKP to turn look towards the West and EU membership while simultaneously fulfilling Turkey’s domestic needs, with a resulting positive impact on the economic development. Turkey’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) increased “as a whole and per capita”, which made a significant difference to Turkish people’s

lives (Ciddi, 2016, p.27). Macro-economic policies boosted the private sector influencing the economy beneficially short term (ibid.). This also developed the AKP's image at the domestic and international level (ibid.). Furthermore, a "series of laws" passed in parliament to support EU candidacy impressed the Kemalist secularists, who saw them as proof that the AKP was serious about implementing democratic values (ibid., p.28).

7.3.2 Erdoğan's Secularism tool

Alongside pursuit of EU membership, Erdoğan emphasised the importance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic, to underline his modern and secular identity between 2002 and 2009. In fact Erdoğan mentioned Atatürk and secularism 33 times in the speeches gathered from this period, representing a total of 8.9 per cent of coded speeches. These speeches clearly portray that Atatürk and his secularist modernisation project were viewed as important to the AKP at this time (Landau, 1997). However, mention of secularism fell to 4.7 per cent in the second period, representing a fall of 24.3 per cent.

Despite the views he expressed between 2002 and 2009, Erdoğan had previously given anti-secular speeches when he was part of the Milli Görüş (Yavuz, 2009). In one such speech, delivered in 1990, he states "one cannot be secular and Muslim at the same time" (Yavuz, 2009, p.4). He adds that one is "either Muslim or a secularist" (ibid.), suggesting that secularism is ideologically opposed to Islam. Later, the bitter realities of Erbakan's political existence led Erdoğan to embrace pragmatism, adopting the modern and secular values espoused by Atatürk. Notably, not only Erbakan, but also the religious leader and politician Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran were critical of Turkey's modernisation under Atatürk (Charteris-Black, 2007,

p.140). After the abolition of the Ottoman Empire, Atatürk was recognised as an anti-religious symbol, when he replaced the traditional style of governance of the Ottoman Empire with Western style democracy in 1923 (Karpas, 2001). The similarities between the Iranian leader Reza Shah Pahlavi and Turkey's Atatürk, who ruled during a similar time period, the first from 1925 till 1941 and the latter from 1923 to 1938, shaped Khomeini's approach significantly (Atabaki and Zürcher, 2004). In particular before the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Shah followed in the footsteps of Atatürk regarding the modernisation process (ibid.). Indeed, Atatürk "replaced Arabic script with Roman", and the Shah excluded "words of Arabic or non-Iranian origin" (Axworthy, 2013, p.39). These steps in what were both Muslim majority countries led some to develop prejudices against both the leaders themselves and the modernisation process (Atabaki and Zürcher, 2004).

Significantly, Erdoğan's discourse regarding Atatürk varies between the two eras of AKP leadership. Atatürk, which means "the father of the Turks", was the adopted surname of Mustafa Kemal in 1934, 10 years after the foundation of the Turkish Republic (Mango, 1999). His original name was Mustafa and his Surname Kemal (ibid.). Whilst in the first period Erdoğan uses the titles 'Atatürk' or 'Mustafa Kemal Atatürk' to refer to him, after 2010 he refers to Atatürk as either 'Mustafa Kemal' or 'Gazi', meaning "Muslim warrior who had engaged in jihad" (Feroz, 1993, p.63). According to the head of research centre in Istanbul, this change in Erdoğan's approach to Atatürk marks an improvement in his own self-confidence (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). TT2 argues that it was necessary for Erdoğan to tread gently regarding secularist issues and national perceptions of Atatürk in particular (ibid.). However, once the AKP nominated Abdullah Gül became the new president,

Erdoğan was able to relax, as the two men “were close friends and had the same ideology” (ibid.). Until this time the AKP’s future had seemed insecure, as apparent from the closure trial in 2008. Despite Erdoğan’s secular approach up to 2009 (see Figure 5), the AKP failed to prevent the secular elites in the judiciary from deciding to “file a case against the AKP, requesting the closure of the party and the ban of the leadership” (Grigoriadis, 2009, p.182). Having passed both “trials successfully” Erdoğan started to alter his discourse away from secularism (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014).

7.3.3 Human Rights and Freedom of Speech

When the AKP came to power there was high demand publically for human rights and freedom of speech (ibid.). The AKP started the process of the “normalisation of relations” in society, by placing these topics at the top of their agenda (Hale, 2013). Similarly, as discussed in reference to secularism in the previous section, we see human rights and freedom of speech prioritised by the AKP before 2009. The AKP leader refers 37 times to both issues in the first period, which is a total of 9.9 per cent, later reducing mentions to just 1.8 per cent, a total decrease of 75.7 per cent, making it the greatest shift in position after that pertaining to the EU. In this regard, Erdoğan’s personal struggle with freedom of speech is an important aspect to consider. After reading a poem in the city of Siirt in 1997, as Mayor of Istanbul, he was imprisoned for four months accused of “reciting a religious charged poem” (Hamid, 2016, p.153). This hindered his later selection as an MP in the 2002 elections and opportunity to hold a political position in the party which he founded (Tepe, 2006, 107). He was therefore the Chairman of the AKP but not the Prime Minister of the country, despite the AKP’s victory (ibid.). It was the AKP government that removed the ban on Erdoğan paving the way for his election in

March 2003 as MP and Prime Minister (ibid.). In a speech at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Berlin in 2003, he defended Freedom of speech, underlining that he was imprisoned merely for citing a poem (*Spiegel Online*, 2003). That this was a violation of human rights and freedom of speech was mentioned by the AKP favourable media and the party's PR machine abroad (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

Notwithstanding the above, imposing restrictions against the public in a manner restrictive of human rights has been a relevant issue throughout the period of AKP rule. The political and social landscape prior to their ascendancy was considered hopeless for conservative people in Turkey after the 'postmodern coup' in 1997 (Yavuz, 2003, p.255). The so-called Imam Hatip schools, which provide Islamic education and knowledge, were banned and constraints on religious expression in public were imposed, such as the headscarf ban for women attending universities (Eligür, 2010). The emergence of the AKP in this political landscape reflected the dreams of those who had been "victims of the past system" (Cizre, 2016, p.3). Hence, the speeches analysed reveal that the AKP leader recollects these limitations at every opportunity. Yet, despite pressure from AKP supporters on the ground to remove the embargo on Imam Hatip schools and lift the headscarf ban, the AKP did not act for a long time. This was because they believed it to be essential to convince the secular bloc within society that conservative people and their values are a part of Turkish society (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). The prevalent concern among the Kemalist elites, was that re-introducing Imam Hatip schools would Islamise Turkey (Yavuz, 2003, p.127). However, after 2012, and the passing of ten vigilant years following the AKP's rise to power, Erdoğan finally removed both

prohibitions (Nielsen et al., 2014, p.603). Even at this stage some perceived it as risky for the AKP to alter laws that had been implemented first to limit Erbakan (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). However, Erdoğan was able to cite the AKP's non-Islamist narrative to suggest the novel idea of "an ideological balance of Islam and secularism" (Mardin, 2006, p.289).

Enthusiasm for joining the EU, and a willingness to embrace human rights and freedom of speech, while on the other hand respecting Atatürk's secularist project as a conservative party, supported a new interpretation of politics in Turkey's landscape that assisted the ruling party in creating a positive image in its early days (Tittensor, 2014, p.256). As Presidential Spokesperson and Ambassador Ibrahim Kalın (2013, p.426) elaborated, "AKP founders created a political identity to embrace different segments of Turkish society from the religious and conservatives to the urban and the liberal". This approach in general proved to be an opportunity for Erdoğan to renegotiate the position of Muslims in politics in Turkey (Mardin, 2006). This process was termed 'regulating', as AC2 highlighted during the interview (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014).

Islamists parties' principal aim is to transform the societies from which they arise (Mecham, 2014). For this reason, they pursue the eradication of obstacles to support the development of a fundamental incentive for change (ibid.). In this respect, the AKP first regulated the circumstances that arose by dealing with sensitive issues, as explained above, before moving on to adopt a transformational process. To this end, the regulations not only effected society; the party itself also passed through a similar process (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). Dealing with power brokers,

forging diplomatic ties to other governments and states, and being a member of the government itself creates new challenges that automatically lead to a re-evaluation of the political frame (Mecham, 2014). This enabled the AKP to attract new voters with no history of ever voting for an Islamist party before to participate in the election (ibid.).

7.3.4 Alliance vs. Clash of Civilisations

Policies and new interpretations of the AKP related to religion, found common ground in the ‘Alliance of Civilizations’ project (Esposito and Shahin, 2013, p.434). This initiative, overseen by the UN secretary general was co-sponsored by the then Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (ibid.). It was a new foreign policy vision designed to bring Muslim countries together with the West, and overcome “historical differences and reject calls for clash and confrontation” as Samuel Huntington (1993) emphasised in his theory. Huntington’s (1993) theory portrays a Post-Cold War world order in which the conflicts of the 21st century will not be primarily economic. Rather they will represent struggles between different cultures and civilizations, with a far reaching impact on global politics (Huntington, 1993, p.22). He categorises civilizations into eight different categories: “Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African civilization”, although he suggests that it may be inaccurate to classify the final example as a civilization (ibid., p.25). However, the main prediction he made was that the next clash would occur between the Western and Islamic civilizations, because according to him the modernization process increases the similarities across cultures, with the result that religious belief then becomes the main distinction, leading to a clash at this level (Huntington, 1996).

The Alliance of Civilization project on the other hand, as the name suggests, defends the notion that “mutual respect between cultures can prevent the deterioration of mutual suspicion, fear and polarization between the Muslim countries and Western societies (MFA, n.d.). This is a counter argument to Huntington’s (1993) thesis. This project developed as a UN initiative to create the necessary apparatus for the ‘recognition’ of Turkey in the global sphere to promote peace; when examining Erdoğan’s speeches we can see that he takes this issue very seriously. Between 2002 and 2009, he mentions cultural dialogue between Muslim countries and the West 54 times, accounting for 14.5 per cent of the coded speeches. When he uses Islamic references in this period, he generally focuses on the ‘Alliance of Civilization’, with the intention that it be understood that Islam is the religion of peace, and that all three Abrahamic religions⁹³ should come together for interfaith dialogue to build peace (Esposito and Shahin, 2013). However, Erdoğan’s speeches post-2010 show a decline in references to cultural and religious diversity of 3.7 per cent (a total mention of 19 times), an overall fall of 64.8 per cent.

The ‘Alliance of Civilizations’ project revealed that the AKP’s religious identity has changed dramatically since 2001. The Milli Görüş’s leader Erbakan opposed interfaith dialogue by labelling it a facet of “Moderate Islam”, which was “initiated in 1897 to annihilate Islam” (*TV5 Haber*, 2014). For Erbakan, it signifies the encroaching project of “Global Imperialism” in other words “World Zionism”, that intends to either annihilate Islam or alter its core meaning (ibid). In addition he argues that “Global Imperialism” will make Muslim politicians “slaves of Zionism” (ibid.). He underlines that “Zionism does not care if someone is religious, prays five

⁹³ Judaism, Christianity and Islam

times a day, or if his wife is wearing hijab, because the main thing is that you do not criticise their system” (ibid.). These sentences were directed towards Erdoğan and his reformist friends responsible for creating the AKP (ibid.). However, Erdoğan had been Erbakan’s loyal student for 31 years (1970-2001), and had engaged in Islamic activities, such as MTTB (see Section 3.6.6) since he was 15, it is to be supposed that he shared the ideology of the Milli Görüş.

Nevertheless, despite his roots and connections during his youth, Erdoğan did engage in interfaith dialogue. This resulted in harsh criticism from Erbakan, who even went so far as to suggest “Erdoğan became the slave of Zionism to protect the State of Israel in the Middle East” (*Milli Haber*, 2013). Every single action by Erdoğan was censured by Erbakan until his death in 2011; he saw it as his right to caution “his former students” (ibid.). Erdoğan’s participation in the opening ceremony of the “Garden of Religions” in Istanbul in December 2004 is one example of his support for interfaith dialogue (EU Ministry, 2004). JO2 explains that Erdoğan believed in his first seven years of leadership that a close relationship with the Western world was necessary to grow the nation (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). This situation has now changed, as is not only apparent in the speeches he makes, and from the stories of the people working closely with him, but also because people on the ground have observed it, as witnessed by myself in Turkey. In Istanbul’s Üsküdar districts’ branch, a member emphasized during an informal interview that Erdoğan’s change and his “emphasis on Islam, in particular Middle East politics after the Mavi Marmara incident was a turning point”, encouraging him to support the AKP (Ethnographic Interview, 5 August 2014). Whereas Erdoğan formerly strived to eliminate fundamental divisions between different civilisations, cultures and

religions, the in-depth interviews I conducted reveal that several events that happened successively reversed his support of the interfaith dialogue project. PO4 argues that after the ineffective role of the United Nations (UN) after the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, Erdoğan started labelling the UN as incompetent and riddled with prejudices (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). He says that Erdoğan did not openly criticise the UN in the early 2010s but that he did so in internal meetings. PO4 also claims the Mavi Marmara incident and the military coup in Egypt led Erdoğan to despair of the Alliance of Civilizations project as “both incidents were related to the Muslim nations but the UN did not take them seriously” (ibid.).

7.3.5 Gülenists: Former Ally, New Enemy

The AKP discussed human rights and freedom of speech, as explained in Section 7.3.3. However, this would not have happened with the cooperation of the Gülenists (Waldman and Caliskan, 2016). In the first period, until the Mavi Marmara crisis, there was “the sharpest public split” between both groups (Shively, 2016). The AKP supported the Gülenists politically, because they were the only ‘religious group’ in Turkey who had an institutionalised base with human resources (ibid.). We see this when reviewing Erdoğan’s speeches. Between 2002 and 2009 there is no mention of the Gülenists in his speeches, as Gülen’s movement was seen as a moderate religious one in Turkey (Shively, 2016). Interestingly, an AKP-close journalist asserts that the Gülenists and the AKP were part of a US-led plan to modernise Islam in the Middle East (Ethnographic Interview, 29 August 2014): “Whereas Gülen adopted the Non-governmental organisation and in particular education part, Erdoğan focused on politics” (ibid.). In fact, Gülen mobilised people via non-governmental institutions, such as “schools, study centres, student dormitories” and through NGO activities

such as charity work, as he had access to a large database in different fields (Shively, 2016, p.186). The network was not only active in Turkey but also in 150 other countries, providing schools for elite children (ibid.). Hence, the AKP “turned a blind eye to the rise of the Gülenists” benefitting from their influence (ibid., p.11). TT1 explains that both Erdoğan and Gülen supported one another, because they had no other choice than to overcome the Kemalist establishment (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). As a result Erdoğan saved the judiciary, the military and the police in particular from the Kemalist establishment, controlling these institutions through the Gülenists (ibid.). However, when the Gülenists became arrogant about their power, seeking to appoint their own candidate to Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MIT), and then the Ministry of the Interior and Justice, Erdoğan recognised that Gülen’s mission intention was to control Turkey through the AKP government (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Immediately Erdoğan started to detach the Gulenists from all state institutions (ibid.).

If we review their jargon we can observe similarities in the religious issues mentioned by the Gulenists and the AKP, as TT1 highlights (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). The ‘interfaith dialogue’ described as part of the ‘Alliance of Civilizations project’ is one of main projects they agreed upon (Yavuz, 2013). However, when the split began with the Mavi Marmara incident, huge conflict arose between both groups. Erdoğan’s speeches after 2010 show clearly how the attitude of the AKP had changed, referring with anger and disappointment to the movement and its leader a total of 32 times, an increase of 3200 per cent compared to the first period.

Discussion of the use of symbols in the struggle between the Gülenists and the AKP is important. In particular, after the struggle began between the parties, they began to use religious symbols to smear one another. For example, when the AKP started to accuse the Gülenists, they responded with corruption allegations against ministers, business-men close to the AKP, and even Erdoğan's son. Then in December 2013, the AKP passed a law to shut down all Gülen affiliated schools and education institutions (*Hürriyet*, 2015). In response, Gülen attacked Erdoğan in one of his weekly sermons from Pennsylvania with these words:

Dear God incinerate their houses! Demolish their homes! Ruin their unity! May their hopes never see the light of day! Obstruct their path ahead! [...] O God defeat them! And make them quake! And break their unity! And split their congregations! And break them into a thousand pieces! And inflict them with evil against one another! And grant us victory over them! [...]

Fethullah Gülen (*TRT Kurdi*, 2016)

This message, full of religious symbolism, not only addressed the AKP and Erdoğan, but also Gülen's base, urging them not to support the AKP in the local elections in Spring 2014. The symbols served as a public relations tool (McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod, 1994), helping to convince Gülen to reconsider his relationship with the AKP. Erdoğan on the other hand accused Gülen of aiming to create a parallel state, using his religious support base (*Al Jazeera*, 2014). It is important to note here that "power is diffused in images and information" as Castells (1997, p.359) explains. Gülen's social movement was widespread in Turkey (*Al Jazeera*, 2014), and acted with a "collective will" (Touraine, 1981, p.29). Erdoğan himself aimed to convince the Gülenists by "using religious symbols"; accusing Gülen of being a "fraud" and a "fake Imam" to avoid losing ground, first in the local and then in the presidential elections in 2014 (*Gerçek Gündem*, 2015).

7.3.6 Erdoğan's Islamist Narrative

The data gathered provides strong evidence that a new Islamist narrative emerged in the second period of Erdoğan's leadership. These changes appear to link to key events, such as the Davos debate⁹⁴ in 2009, the Mavi Marmara aid flotilla⁹⁵ in 2010, the Gezi Park protests⁹⁶ in 2013, and corruption allegations against the government at the end of 2013. Consequently, domestic and international threats altered Erdoğan's narrative (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). After 2009 there appears to have been considerable re-evaluation in three important areas.

The first concerns the use of religious discourse. Between 2002 and 2009 Erdoğan uses words such as Allah, Islam, Prophet Muhammad, Hadith⁹⁷ Islamic civilisation, Martyrdom, death, after life, and refers to cities and countries with an important meaning for Muslim's such as Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem 32 times in the first period, he increases makes 232 mentions of these terms after 2010, a rise of 625 per cent. At the same time, there is a change in the use of anti-establishment language. He criticises the UN, the World Bank, and international news agencies, such as *The New York Times* and the *BBC*. In the first period he makes five criticisms in the coded speeches, a figure that rose to 64, a tremendous 1180 per cent difference between the periods. The third area relates to Erdoğan's anti-Israel position;

⁹⁴ The panel discussion at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos turned into a diplomatic crisis between former Israeli President Shimon Peres (1923-2016) and Erdoğan, when Turkey's then Prime Minister "harshly criticised the Israeli President over the fighting in Gaza" (Aviv, 2017, p.78)

⁹⁵ Mavi Marmara flotilla, in other words Gaza flotilla aid, happened 16 months after the Davos spat in 2010 (Aviv, 2017). The flotilla was on its way to take aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza on 30th May 2010 when it was attacked by Israeli soldiers (Rumford, 2013). Nine activists, including one US citizen were killed during this offensive (ibid.).

⁹⁶ A plan by the Istanbul municipality to destroy Istanbul's Taksim Square and build a shopping mall sparked a national wide series of protests (Altun, 2016, p.167). It started with the issue of the protection of green spaces and developed into an "anti-government protest" with a huge international media coverage (ibid.).

⁹⁷ "A collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

mentions rose from 17 to 33 times when contrasting the periods, a change of 94.1 per cent.

An additional change was the more frequent referencing of the Ottoman Empire in the second period, which was dramatic. Out of 30 speeches, there were only four mentions of the ‘Ottoman Empire’ before 2009, whereas after 2010, the AKP leader refers to the Ottoman Empire 53 times, a notable rise of 1225 per cent. This transformation in particular will be discussed in the next chapter.

7.4 Conclusion

The findings of the quantitative content analysis illustrated in this chapter suggest that as Erdoğan’s power and dominance increased between 2002 and 2017, the message of the AKP underwent a transition. What was once a pro-EU party, emphasising respect for human rights, freedom of speech, tolerance and cultural diversity as well as interfaith dialogue, has become a pro-Muslim party, that has progressively narrowed its focus towards the Muslim world since 2010, developing an anti-establishment and anti-Israel discourse, questioning international organisations such as the UN and EU for not being functional or supportive, and censuring mainstream media outlets for covering the AKP as an Islamist party and its leader as an “authoritarian” (Başer and Öztürk, 2017). The evolution of the AKP’s message displays Erdoğan’s desire to protect oppressed Muslims globally, by making Turkey an influential nation much as it was in the glory days of the Ottoman Empire. More importantly, it can be seen that Erdoğan has stepped away from a willingness to dialogue with the West.

The findings in this chapter will be central to the next chapter which will triangulate the data from, the interviews, fieldwork and speeches to answer the research questions, thereby making a unique contribution to the literature.

Chapter 8. Discussion

Suddenly, there is a curve in the road, a turning point. Somewhere, the real scene has been lost, the scene where you had rules for the game and some solid stakes that everybody could rely on.

-Baudrillard⁹⁸

For the last 15 years, we have been striving to build a Turkey, a strong Turkey, a country which is a source of confidence for its friends, its kin and its Muslim brothers and sisters as well as for the oppressed and the victims.[...] If we are constantly being subjected to attacks at home and abroad, if we are being slandered, if attempts are being made on our lives which we dedicated to our cause, it is because we do not give up on this struggle. Believe me, if we sat down, remained silent, looked when ordered as we did in the past, we would not face any of these attacks. But we do not care what (world) powers say. We only care what Allah says.

-Erdoğan⁹⁹

8.1 Introduction

This chapter triangulates the insights from the qualitative and quantitative data sets to answer the research questions¹⁰⁰ (Flick, 2009). It evaluates and synthesises the evidence provided by the twelve in-depth interviews, the ethnographic observations, and the content analysis of 60 speeches given by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan between 2002 and 2017. It begins by identifying the political communication strategies implemented by the AKP. In reference to this the modernisation process will be explained briefly, as it is fundamental to understanding the role of Americanisation in the party's political communication. The focus will then shift to Americanisation (Negrine, 2008), bringing together local symbols and interpretations. The role of Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style, as emphasised by the research question, will

⁹⁸ 1987, p.69

⁹⁹ *TCCB*, 2017

¹⁰⁰ (1) What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017? (2) How did the AKP's political message evolve between 2002 and 2017? (3) What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style played in the communication strategies of the AKP? (4) What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

be explained in conjunction with the changes in the party's political message over time. The central finding of this chapter, and indeed this entire thesis, is that Erdoğan is at the epicentre of the AKP's political communications. Similarly the evolution of the AKP's political message from 2002 to 2017 can be directly correlated with Erdoğan's discourse. In addition to highlighting the significance of Erdoğan, the results indicate that the AKP's political message has evolved to become increasingly pro-Muslim, since 2010. The use of religion as a political communication tool is not discussed in a separate section here, as it relates directly to political communication and the evolution of the AKP's policy message.

Undoubtedly the time frame covered in this thesis encompassed many significant historical events, both domestically and internationally; all of which unsurprisingly shaped the focus of the AKP and its leader, as explained in Chapter seven. The transformation of Erdoğan from one of the most liberal thinking leaders in the Middle East (Yavuz, 2009), to a leader renowned both for showing less tolerance for freedom of speech and his "authoritarian" stance, is dramatic, and so of great interest (Başer and Öztürk, 2017). By referencing key moments marking this transformation, and the course of that change, as evidenced by fieldwork, interviews, and in speeches, I will suggest that the AKP can now best be defined as an 'Islamist party'.

8.2 AKP's Communication Strategy: Erdoğan

This chapter examines the political communication strategies of the AKP to answer the first research question: What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017? In answering the question the focus will be primarily on Americanisation; this is because the data collected suggests the AKP is applying

Americanised political communication strategies using local symbols. Hence in order to understand the Americanisation process, it is significant to first analyse the impact of modernisation (Bischof and Pelinka 2017). The research findings also revealed that the AKP's communication strategy is centred on Erdoğan, and not on an independent institutionalised political communication framework, and this will be discussed.

8.2.1 Modernisation

In mapping the Americanisation of political communication within the framework of Turkey's AKP, modernisation emerges as central to understanding the process. The extensive acceptance of modernisation in Turkey also explains why the AKP is willing to apply Americanisation theory to its political communications (Butler and Ranney, 1992; Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Swanson and Mancini, 1996; Negrine and Stanyer, 2007; Wring et al., 2007; Negrine, 2008) according to JO1 (Interview with TT1, 19 October 2014). Certainly, economic development during the AKP era increased the standard of living in the country; in particular, the conservatively oriented working middle class adapted its lifestyle, turning its eyes towards the West, as many were suddenly in a position to send their children abroad to study, to wear expensive brands from the fashion capitals of Europe, and to spend their honeymoons in the Maldives (ibid). Lerner (1958, p.46) explains that the change in terms of society starts with the individual and continues till reaching "economic and political participation". Whereas these changes arose as a result of the improvement in the economic status of individuals, they were a direct consequence of the AKP's economic success.

Olçok explains the AKP's successes were an essential first step preceding investment in political communication (ibid.), because when they were first elected they had to deal with "corruption, unemployment, the unequal distribution of wealth, and decay in moral values" (Eligür, 2010, p.254). However, once the AKP was able to "take a breath" after securing economic and political success, during the 2002 and 2007 general elections, it started exploring new communication strategies (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). The initial changes it made, as outlined by the PR guru Erol Olçok, reflected a growing emphasis on institutionalisation within the party. Olçok then explains that Americanisation was recognised as a key strategy in the Western world, because the "American style of political communication has become the modern and professional mode of campaigning in Western democratic countries" (ibid.), in other words, the pragmatic approach of the AKP encouraged it to learn from the Western world (Nasr, 2009).

It is useful to compare events at the close of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century (discussed in Section 3.3) with the modernisation process today, because in both eras, emphasis was placed on forging strong relationships with other European countries and politicians and on renewing the military, bureaucracy and education (Zürcher, 1993). The Ottoman Empire framed the period internally as one of reform, but it also marked the start of the process of Westernisation in the Ottoman lands (Hourani, Khoury and Wilson, 1993). However, whereas the Ottoman Empire modernised by looking to the European countries, in particular France, today, the AKP is seeking inspiration, especially for its political communication tools, from the US. This is elaborated on in the following which explains key aspects of the Americanisation model as applied by the AKP and Erdoğan.

8.2.2 Americanisation

The transformation of the AKP's political communication along the lines of Americanisation began with the professionalisation of its political communication mechanisms. My research during the four months I spent at AKP headquarters (in the Publicity and Media department), clarified that the AKP has no specific communication strategy independent of its leader. Specifically, Erdoğan's passion for "one-man leadership" (Cizre, 2016) correlates with the Americanisation model. To understand this more fully, I asked my informants 'How it started?', 'What dynamics are behind it?', and 'What are the local aspects?' to provide a clearer picture of the current situation and how it developed.

A significant interviewee when answering the first research question was, Olçok; he studied Americanisation theory and was involved in applying it (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014); he had served as Erdoğan's spin-doctor for 25 years, from 1991 until his death.¹⁰¹ Olçok was undeniably called upon to be creative, as he shared with me when I interviewed him. He commented that as societies' historical and sociological frameworks differ (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014), and America's and Turkey's problems and expectations are dissimilar, Americanisation did not mean simply copying political communication strategies directly from the US (ibid.). For him, the strategies applied by the AKP were necessarily unique. Thus, because of their uniqueness in the Eastern context, they have been imitated by other

¹⁰¹ On the night of the coup attempt, on the 15th of July 2016, he was shot with his son on the Bosphorus Bridge¹⁰¹ by the coup plotters. His wife explained later in an interview that "he believed in his own power of persuasion" (*Hürriyet*, 2017). Although he was unable to convince the coup plotters on the bridge to surrender, as they were heavily armed, had tanks, and F-16 fighter jet's supporting them flying over Istanbul (*Reuters*, 2016), his bravery and determination probably explains why he was so effective at developing Erdoğan's PR. Indeed, this was acknowledged by TT1 who referred to Olçok as "the creative brain behind Erdoğan's success" (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014).

parties in the region, such as the Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt (up until the military coup in 2013) (ibid.). He adds that Erdoğan's leadership style, discourse and the AKP's political style have also been copied by their opponents (ibid.). Although accepting the US to be a source of examples of effective political communication strategies, Olçok notes that the political communication team follows world news and examines campaigns elsewhere, to ensure an effective, targeted, unique, innovative, and crucially, local campaign (ibid.).

After the death of Olçok, his brother, Cevat Olçok, who had previously worked with him, took over the agency (*Anadolu Agency*, 2017). However, when I asked one of Erdoğan's advisors if Erol Olçok's brother serves as Erdoğan's new spin-doctor, he told me that while he is "maintaining the legacy" of Erol, he does not have the creative brain his brother did (Interview, 6 August 2017). According to the advisor (who preferred not to be named), since Olçok's death a collective team comprising creative thinkers have been responsible for Erdoğan's political communication, but the outcomes have not been as imaginative as Erol Olçok's were (ibid.). This once more highlights the relevance of the lack of institutionalisation in the organisation of the AKP's political communication. Not only after Olçok's death, but also during the time I spent at the headquarters, I received the impression, as discussed in Section 6.2.4, that the AKP has an identity dilemma proceeding from this lack of institutionalisation, and that this will undoubtedly be a hindrance to the party in the future.

Similarly the lack of institutionalisation of political communication is a clear sign that there is no unified policy regarding strategic direction. Here it is important to recall that JO1 mentioned that lack of institutionalisation benefits Erdoğan, as it provides a space for him at the epicentre of the AKP's communications (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). Undoubtedly, because of the "companionship" between Erdoğan and Olçok, as Erdoğan underlined at the former's funeral (*Sabah*, 2016), he worked with him quite naturally, as he had become familiar with his character and style over a period of 25 years. Thus, it is possible to argue that this relationship hindered the institutionalisation process, as undoubtedly, setting up a system of political communication that runs independently of an individual would have reduced the importance of Olçok's PR agency.

Before continuing, it is necessary to describe the AKP's political communication model as I encountered it. It comprises three main structures: the Strategy team (as discussed in Section 5.5); Olçok's PR agency, Arter; and the AKP's Publicity and Media department. The chairman of the latter is also vice chairman of the AKP. As I spent most of my time in the Publicity and Media department, I learned that it produces an official monthly review of the AKP, *Türkiye Bülteni* (Turkey Bulletin in English), a party website, press releases and internal media. Interestingly when MP's or board members from the AKP are invited to attend TV talk shows as commentators or spokespersons, they first need to attain the approval of the Publicity and Media department. PO1, who was previously a chairman in this department explains that this requirement started after the Gezi Park protests, as before that "there was freedom within the party and politician could act easily in such matters" (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014). I will discuss this issue later when

addressing the issue of freedom of speech. Olçok and his team guide the PR of the party and Erdoğan domestically (ibid.). They also organise the AKP's rallies and events in Turkey. Although hierarchically, the chairman of the Publicity and Media department should have the upper hand, it was Olçok that Erdoğan trusted up until 2016. Meanwhile, I observed that the Chairman of the Publicity and Media department changes comparatively frequently; i.e. every couple of years during the last five years.

Overseeing both structures, is the Strategy Team, composed of 50 people, including the chairman of the Publicity and Media department and members of Olçok's agency. Some of Erdoğan's advisors, ministers, MP's, representations of research centres, think tanks and journalists, skilled in strategic thinking are also on the team. They emphasised using young people and women to represent the community, to raise ideas and expectations from the ground. The most important strategic decisions concern political message and political communication, and are somewhat based on evaluations of the polls. In other words, the team ensures a general direction of progress, whereas Olçok implemented key ideas related to political communication. Despite this structure, there is little doubt that Erdoğan makes the final decision.

8.2.3 Professionalisation

During the interview, Olçok's explanations showed how the AKP became professionalised in its political communications after 2007. Negrine's (2008) three-step model for the professionalisation of political communication appears to have been followed by the AKP. First, the AKP "changed organisational structures" (ibid., p.6), by creating a dynamic team of people from multiple backgrounds. Compared to the party's Publicity and Media department, which is toneless and too formal, the

Strategy Team, functions effectively (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). Secondly, the AKP reconsidered the “use of technologies in communication” (Negrine, 2008, p.6). From campaign music to the use of billboards, or social media, every possible modernisation opportunity has been considered (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). However, the AKP continues to also utilise conventional media outlets; e.g. Erdoğan’s appearances on TV for political news shows (ibid.). Undeniably, the TV is a useful way to address middle aged and older people, but the medium, according to Olçok, is not so popular among young people (ibid.) Finally, the AKP utilises “spin-doctors” (Negrine, 2008, p.6), such as Olçok and others from the Strategy Team whom Erdoğan trusts.

This all leads to a capacity to effect personalisation, another important aspect of Americanisation (Negrine et al., 2007). In particular during the 2014 Presidential Elections, Erdoğan was seen on the streets of Istanbul, Ankara, Konya and Aydın. Using such “candidate-centred politics” (ibid.) diminishes the “traditional affective ties between voters and parties” (Dalton, 2000, p.60). The relationship between Erdoğan and his supporters and beloved ones is critical. As a member of the Publicity and Media department explained, the people love Erdoğan because they see him as “one of them and not like previous politicians who were elitists” (Ethnographic Interview, 19 August 2014). Equally importantly, Erdoğan’s former speechwriter explains that in the past he has brought together teams of people from across society, mostly youngsters who do not support the AKP, to understand what the public desires:

Our creative team members consisted of people who had a relationship on the ground. They used public transport when they came to the Presidential Complex. Thereby a conversation between two old women about health care, or an anti-government discussion between two university students would be on our table the next morning. That is the reason why Erdoğan is an ‘up to date leader’ who knows exactly what those on the ground need. We write his speeches considering these dynamics.

(Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014)

According to PO3, the evolution of a role for anti-government people is a novel way of approaching secular Kemalist people or Kurdish people (who favour the Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP)) (ibid.). By communicating with the public, the AKP can develop politics that respond to contemporary concerns, and Erdoğan can introduce new policies on the ground, with the result that mutually beneficial communication is established (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011). PO3’s work can be viewed as a component of public relations, as it is a means of managing “communication between an organization and its public” (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p.6), wherein the main aim is the “persuasion of people” (Bernays, 1952, p.12).

Highlighting the benefits of attending to the needs and lived experiences of the people, a 52-year old taxi driver in the Fatih district of Istanbul explained to me that Erdoğan once visited the cab centre where he works, sat with the drivers, drank a glass of tea and asked about their needs, their families, and their opinions about the general politics of the AKP (Ethnographic Interview, 25 August 2014). Despite not supporting the AKP in the 2011 elections, Erdoğan, whom he framed as “modest”, led him to reconsider his vote in the 2014 Presidential Elections (ibid.).

In Turkey, cultural norms and values play a central and significant role (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011). Thus, Erdoğan’s relationship with the public draws on his

awareness of the expectations associated with cultural norms, such as regularly visiting people in need randomly, entering their homes shoeless when visiting them, and sitting with the family on the floor when meeting poor families with no chairs, as well as kissing the hands of elderly family members present (*Ensonhaber*, 2011). Erdoğan's "common touch" is associated with his image as the man who "sold lemonade as a boy" on the streets of Istanbul "to support his family" (Yavuz, 2003, p.259). There are many other stories depicting the relationship between Erdoğan and his people; he enjoys direct contact with voters, and always emphasises that "nobody can intervene between him and his people" (*Yeni Şafak*, 2015). This relationship with the electorate has generated positive responses in elections according to TT1, who conducts polls in his think tank regularly to follow updates on the ground (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). He claims that no other leader has such a relationship with their support base (*ibid.*).

Opinion polls play an important role in the AKP's political communication strategies, and are a recognisable component of the professionalisation of electioneering in the US, as Butler and Ranney (1992) explain. The willingness to conduct and listen to the findings of polls is "one of the main reasons behind the AKP's sustainable success" according to JO3. Polls not only evaluate the current opinions of the electorate, but also provide information concerning their future expectations, which is useful in shaping the political agenda (Interview with JO3, 28 November 2014). The results of polls conducted for the AKP are discussed and analysed by the Strategy Team, which considers them when developing political communication strategies. Opinion polls are central to the success of Morocco's Justice and Development Party's (PJD) political communication also (Bouyahya,

2015). Bouyahya (2015, p.77) explains that it was the Americanisation of electioneering that led to the use of “opinion polls” and “political consultants” for the first time by an Islamist party in Morocco. Rather than indoctrinating the public with a specific ideology, opinion polls allow Islamist parties the opportunity to engage in a dialogue, and to respond to people’s demands. Thus JO4 explains that dialogue and openness with the public has made Erdoğan stronger than his opponents (Interview JO4, 22 November 2014). He observes “When he criticises something that he does not like, he says this openly, although some people do not agree, they at least appreciate his frankness and honesty” (ibid.). Whilst positive on the surface, this approach also reflects Erdoğan’s growing intolerance (Hamid, 2017).

The outdoor rallies held by the AKP are another example of Erdoğan’s willingness to communicate directly with the people. This is necessarily an example of Americanisation; as I highlighted in the beginning of Section 8.2. AC2 explains that “no other leader in the West in the 21st century would be able to bring one million people together for a rally as Erdoğan does” (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). Nevertheless, it is important to recall here that Hezbollah used outdoor rallies effectively as part of its face-to-face communication strategy (Harb, 2011). The MB also did something similar during and after the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (Milton-Edwards, 2016). These examples indicate that mass rallies remain popular among Islamist movements in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, AC2 explains “interest in indoor meetings is increasing” due to Turkey’s socio-economic transformation (ibid.). Meetings with fewer people are associated with Americanised campaigns (Scammell, 2007) (as the results in

Sections 5.5.2 and 6.2.3 show), and this may inform the AKP's future election campaigns. Smaller gatherings are also a consequence of the modernisation process, as when a country begins applying neoliberal economic policies the likely result is greater individualisation (Mandaville, 2017). Mandaville (*ibid.*, p.288), as emphasis is placed on individual practices "as a means of finding jobs, money, respect and self-esteem". This self-centric approach to life, and also politics, is a shift away from collectiveness (*ibid.*). According to the psychology professor I interviewed, this individualisation of the public is a concern to Erdoğan, because, while a social movement is comprised of individual members (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014), "ideas, identities and ideals" can only be realised when a group of people come together to take "collective action" (Garreton, 1997, p.67). It is also the essence of an Islamic community to act collectively (Sayyid, 2014), which is Erdoğan's main intention (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014), as he is interested in promoting Islamic consciousness based on the Quran and Sunnah, as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek describes in his poems (Özdenören, 2005).

Furthermore, JO2 notes that the society is becoming younger, and young people have a different worldview that will transform the dynamic of politics, and the direction of political communications (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). JO2's principal argument here is that the younger generations are more educated, and therefore less interested in attending outdoor meetings (*ibid.*). Moreover, that it is likely that they would prefer to attend gatherings with a smaller number of people, so as to benefit from networking (*ibid.*). Olçok agrees that young people participate less at the AKP's outdoor rallies than they did 10 years previously (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). This coincides with the reality on the ground; at the four different rallies I

attended there were more middle-aged and elderly people than young people. However it is also important to note that “young people do not find themselves comfortable with the focus and style of Erdoğan”, as a young AKP member anxiously explained. According to him, Erdoğan is focusing on issues that are relevant to “old Turkey” such as the infrastructure and healthcare (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). JO2 acknowledges this, stating that the patriarchal approach is perceived as old-fashioned politics and will not convince younger people (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

Reportedly, Erdoğan “dreams of a young generation which holds the Quran on the one hand, and the computer on the other” (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). The reality on the ground is somewhat different, and this could well upset the outcome of the 2019 elections, as 50+1 per cent of the vote is required under the new presidential system in order for a leader to be elected. This explains why the AKP is organising mass rallies at present, appealing to the working-middle-classes, who are mutually dependent upon one another. However changes to the socio-economy (i.e. the modernisation of society) is predicted to impact on the communication style of the AKP longer term. One aspect of this is that it is anticipated that there will be a greater preference for American style meetings (Esser and Pfetsch, 2004). Furthermore, the digital media will be an increasingly relevant tool to reach educated youths; it has already proven significant in 2008 and 2012 and in the 2016 presidential elections in the US (Baumgartner and Towner, 2017).

8.2.4 Family Portrayal

Sections 5.5.5 and 6.2.3 demonstrate that “family, personal appearance, lifestyle and religion” (Langer, 2007, p.381) are important aspects of personalisation, and all these

aspects are considered in the portrayal of Erdoğan as leader of the AKP. During the 2014 presidential election, I observed that Olçok was emphasising the role of Erdoğan as a family man in formal political communications. Examples include the inclusion of Erdoğan's family members in the greeting ceremonies held at rallies, before and after his speeches, and significantly, the family unity portrayed on the victory night of the presidential election on August 10, 2014, where Erdoğan greeted the flag waving crowd with his children and in-law's before speaking. These practices are an important signal that Americanised policies are being adopted. The health of the party leader's personal relationships, are increasingly of interest, as it is deemed important that "he is not only able to manage his own home but his country too" (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014).

As AC2 explains, the electorate are arguably more interested in the personal character and life of politicians than ever before (Rahat and Shaefer, 2007, p.68), because they can identify with someone who shares their values and lifestyle (Interview with AC2, 10 October 2014). By appearing with his wife, Erdoğan is signifying to the public that family is important to him. Symbolically, he is placing a value on marriage and family life. This is clearly important to him, as when Erdoğan attends wedding ceremonies he encourages couples to have at least three children (NTV, 2012), because "children are a blessing" (Brennan and Herzog, 2014, p.130). One of his former advisors also emphasised the benefits of having more children, stating that it is the "essence of his Islamist ideology to have a healthy society" (Ethnographic Interview, 10 August 2014). This is implied when Erdoğan describes abortion as an "airstrike on civilians" (*Independent*, 2012), and indicated by the fact

that the AKP government supports couples with more than three children (Hamid, 2017).

8.2.5 Image

At the beginning of this section, I identified Erdoğan's passion for one-man leadership and his desire to wield power as aligned with an Americanised political framework. However, Erdoğan's approach is also akin to that of past leaders of the Ottoman Empire, who also placed great importance on image building (Cottle, 2003). An examination of Erdoğan's speeches from 2010 to 2017 reveals a significant increase in references to the Ottoman Empire, highlighting Erdoğan's depth of feeling for the past. Comparisons between Abdulhamid II and Erdoğan have been widespread among conservatives in Turkey, because both set as objectives "Islamising society and leading the Muslim world" (Interview with JO4, 22 November 2014). Significant here, is that Erdoğan sees himself as equivalent to an Ottoman Sultan, and that he is desirous of developing a similarly legendary image (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). This impression is supported by the fact that the AKP government built a new bridge and then called it after Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Sultan Selim (Altun, 2016), and by Erdoğan's instruction to build Turkey's largest mosque in Istanbul (historically such projects have symbolised the strength and vanity of the Ottoman Sultans) (Altun, 2016). Undoubtedly, then, Erdoğan wants to leave a legacy; something he also admits in his speeches (*NTV*, 2017).

Having considered the evidence from the fieldwork, interviews and speeches, it is apparent that religious and nationalist symbols from the days of the Ottoman Empire play an important role in the AKP's political communications, reflecting Erdoğan's reactionary political stance. From wearing green ties after the Gezi Park protests in

2013, to suggesting that he and his party care about the environment (explained in Section 6.4.2), to using the Rabaa sign after the military coup in Egypt, to showing support for the MB (explained in Section 6.3), and giving directions to his staff, ministers, MPs, and security service personnel to grow moustaches after the coup attempt in 2016, to representing a “strong and stern image” (*ABC News*, 2017) (explained in Section 6.4.4), to creating a presidential logo using the name of Prophet Muhammad, to developing a campaign advert including the *azan*, to dressing in a waistcoat imitating Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to positioning himself as founder of a “New Turkey”, he is engaged in a reactionary style of politics that prioritises “constructing a positive identity” (McNair, 2003, p.4).

PO3 explains the above further, claiming “Erdoğan creates an image based on symbols that are conducive to the creation of an Islamic identity in young people in particular” (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Although at present the responsiveness of the younger Turkish generation to Erdoğan’s charismatic leadership style is relatively muted, his image building is principally religiously motivated. It is designed to position him as “the leader of the Muslim world” and “the last hope of Muslims”, inspiring the vast majority of the religiously observant community, with a unique style of leadership. This approach fits with Erdoğan’s aim to transform society through “cultural domination” (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), framed by his Islamist ideology. Consequently, Erdoğan’s spin-doctor described him as a “conservative revolutionist”, admitting that “his main aim is to change society” (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014).

Additionally, as discussed previously in this thesis, Erdoğan's *Reis* image, stands for 'leader', 'chief' and 'guide' in English and strengthens the impression that he prefers one-man leadership (Tilly, 1978) over collective action. Certainly, his purging of possible opponents, such as former President Abdullah Gül, and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, whom he had himself appointed, is a clear signal that he does not want to share power (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

8.3 Evolution of AKP's Message and use of Religious Discourse

Erdoğan's image not only relates to key symbols integrated into his political communications, but also informs the message of the AKP; understanding this is crucial to answering the second research questions posed herein. During the last 15 years (to 2017), Turkey has faced diverse difficult domestic and geopolitical challenges. The AKP's reputation in Western mainstream media was once positive, especially in the days immediately following its foundation, when Western leaders welcomed Erdoğan with great respect, affording the country recognition "as a model for the Muslim world" (Eligür, 2010, p.249). Nevertheless, even then, domestically, the party was struggling with the "secular blocs" in the country; i.e. the Kemalists, the judiciary, and the military (Cizre, 2016, p.2).

Initially, perceptions of the AKP were based on its parting of ways with Erbakan in 2001 (Eligür, 2010); at this time Hamid (2014) argues, repression "forced the moderation of Islamist parties". This moderation resulted in the democratisation of internal organisations, cooperative relationships, and restrained policies (ibid., p.5). The AKP's early years, from 2002 to 2009, can be categorised within this framework. Consequently, the "conservative democrats", as they referred to

themselves, were advocating “development, democracy, human rights, pluralism, freedom and the rule of law”, which was a positive sign from a Western perspective (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.21). On the other hand, there were some fears over the religious background of the founding members of the party, even as they strived to convince the elites (ibid., p.68) they had changed and were willing to uphold the secular constitution (ibid., p.3). Thus, the AKP’s journey in 2001 started with an identity dilemma.

The data collected for this study shows the party message evolved in five key ways between 2002 and 2017. Firstly, the foremost change was that after 2010, the AKP adopted a pro-Muslim stance, as reflected in Erdoğan’s increasingly religious discourse. Secondly, the leader’s relationship with Israel changed the party’s rhetoric at the international level, marking the adoption of an anti-Israel discourse. This change began an era in which the influence of Erdoğan’s charismatic leadership style was felt more widely throughout the Middle East. Thirdly, the Gezi Park protests in 2013 simultaneously increased Erdoğan’s willingness to act in an “authoritarian” manner (Altun, 2016), and led him to adopt a more heavily religious discourse, as shown by the content analysis (Figure 6). Fourthly, the military coup against Egypt’s MB and his support for the MB triggered the inclusion of a more anti-establishment rhetoric. Finally, and fifthly, the coup attempt on July 15 2016 motivated Erdoğan to more frequently espouse religious, nationalist and anti-Gülenist messages.

8.3.1 Identity

The interviews conducted, the fieldwork and the content analysis of the speeches demonstrate that there are two types of party representation. One is the official representation, which is based on the term “conservative democracy”, respecting

“fundamental human rights and freedoms”, and this coincides with the period 2002 to 2009. This has been part of the official party programme since 2001, according to PO1 (Interview with PO1, 11 November 2014).

After 2010, references to ‘Atatürk and his principles’ such as ‘secularism’ ‘modernisation’ in Erdoğan’s speeches, are far fewer in number (see Figure 6). In this respect, the tendency increased tremendously towards a religious and anti-establishment and anti-Israel discourse in the second term (*ibid.*). This was supported by the people on the ground, as was apparent during many of the informal conversations I had while conducting my fieldwork. Apparently the AKP is now seen as a party with an ‘Islamic mission’, in other words a pro-Muslim party, serving to protect society by retaining the “core identity and character of Islam” (Yavuz, 2003, p.207), actively defending the rights of oppressed Muslims globally (Cizre, 2016). Whether or not this is an unofficial position is unclear, but the research evidence suggests that at least in the mind of the AKP’s leader and party members, this has been a policy objective since 2010. This approach suggests the importance of ‘collective identity’ as driver mobilising the party and its members “towards change” (Lindberg and Sverrisson, 1997, p.101).

The identity dilemma within the AKP centres on the concepts of “Muslimness” and “nationalist”, for which more than ten different definitions were offered by participants during the in-depth interviews (see Section 5.2). This also raises the fact that the AKP is negotiating an institutionalisation problem, which relates to the pragmatism of Erdoğan in the face of domestic and international challenges (Shively, 2016).

8.3.2 Davos and Mavi Marmara: Prefacing an Anti-Israel Discourse

A key factor observed in this research is that a political shift occurred in the AKP and Erdoğan's political communication after encounters with Israel. The content analysis of the speeches, conducted for this study, showed clearly that a change took hold after 2010, following the Mavi Marmara incident (see Figure 6). However, during the interviews most interviewees mentioned both incidents together when explaining the change, despite the 15 months' time lapse between them. Thus, examining the content of the speeches proved important for assessing this (Neuendorf, 2002, p.14). Content analysis is an "objective" and "precise" way to portray "what is said on a given subject" (Laswell, Lerner and De Sola Pool, 1952, p.32). From 2002 to 2009, we encounter Anti-Israel sentiment only 17 times, which is 4.8 per cent of the overall texts (see Table 4). However, when reviewing the second period, from 2010 to 2017, the number increases to 33, a rise of 94.1 per cent of all mentions. Nevertheless we need to consider that counting Anti-Israel discourse only is not sufficient to demonstrate the authenticity of a shift. Thus, perhaps more significantly is the massive increase of 1180 per cent in anti-Establishment discourse after 2010 (see Table 4). This is critical, because informal conversations with 56 people ideologically close to the AKP aligned Erdoğan's anti-Establishment discourse with Anti-Zionism¹⁰². For example, this was confirmed by TT1, the director of a research centre (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). He explained that as each day passes, Turkish people believe progressively more that "there is a secret power in the world which is leading the money, and thereby mainstream media and politics", which is based on Zionism (ibid.). Aviv (2017, p.84) elucidates this,

¹⁰² According to Avi Shlaim (2000, p.2) Zionism was a national liberation movement seeking to end the Jewish dispersion and "return to Zion," holy land. However Shlaim argues that the occupation of Palestine by the Zionist movement transformed them "from a legitimate national liberation movement for the Jews into a colonial power and an oppressor of the Palestinians" (Shlaim, 2005).

mentioning that “international organisations such as the UN (United Nations), IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank, and big international firms” are part of this West versus East imaginary. During an informal conversation an 18-year old university student claimed the aim of the “imperialist powers” is to control world politics, and more importantly the Muslim world, through the UN and other international organisations and governments (Ethnographic Interview, 2 October 2014). He continues by explaining that Erdoğan is the only leader actively challenging this aim (ibid.).

8.3.3 Erdoğan’s Charismatic Rise

In contrast to the Davos debate, which was between Erdoğan and the former Israeli President Shimon Peres, and featured Erdoğan’s personal reaction to events during a panel discussion, the Mavi Marmara incident was a civilian initiative organised by the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH). Although neither events reflected the AKP’s official foreign policy, both shaped the government’s relationship with Israel and marked the start of a new era. In addition, the events significantly influenced Erdoğan’s appeal as a figurehead for the Muslim world, and to conservative people in Turkey.

Typically, social and political realities effect how a leader’s image is perceived, a phenomenon related to the “art of presence” (Bayat, 2010, p.11). This aspect of charismatic leadership is important to highlight, as it helps answer the research question concerning the impact of Erdoğan’s leadership style on the AKP’s political communication. In fact, when Erdoğan returned home from Davos, he was welcomed as a hero in Turkey (Bishara, 2012). Moreover, subsequently, Erdoğan’s popularity peaked in the Arab world after the Mavi Marmara incident (*Pew*

Research, 2017). Both events had an associative impact on Erdoğan's and his party's image among Muslims worldwide.

In the case of Erdoğan, the position he took in the Davos debate and during the Mavi Marmara incident identified him not only as a conservative party leader in Turkey, but as a leader of the Muslim world (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). Indeed, the communication and engagement of the Muslim world with the AKP improved after these two incidents (ibid.). Both events can be viewed as a distinct image transformation for Erdoğan, who had placed only limited emphasis on the Palestinian struggle prior to 2010 (PO4). This 'courage' on the part of Erdoğan was viewed as "a new stand against injustice" in the region as PO3 stated in interview (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). It should not be forgotten that Palestine has long been a sensitive issue not only for Muslims in Turkey but also in "Arab street" and the "Muslim world" in general (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). Thus, as a former political chief advisor told me, it was hugely important that the "Davos debate with the Israeli President convinced people that Erdoğan is a patron of the Muslim world" (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014).

Not only the personalities that I interviewed, but also people on the ground, agreed that Erdoğan started emphasising Muslim values after the crisis with Israel; declaring there is still an ideological division, such as that Erbakan emphasised as the "fundamental conflict between the Western and Islamic civilisation" (Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p.6). Thus, despite having initially created a new political party in 2001, because of ideological differences and a worldview (ibid.) that conflicted with Erbakan, the speeches, interviews and fieldwork results clearly indicate that after

eight years of governance, he reached the same conclusion as his former mentor regarding the global political struggle between the West and Islam. Erdoğan was in part also motivated by his “personal religious belief” (Sharma, 2017), and the desire to revisit the glorious days of the Ottoman Empire as the second founder of a “New Turkey” (Hamid, 2017), as I will elaborate on in the conclusion.

Before concluding this section, it is vital to observe that the AKP not only shrank back from its relationship with Israel, but perhaps more importantly, it furthered its engagement with the Middle East, Africa and other Muslim majority and minority countries such as Myanmar (Langan, 2018). Engagement with Somalia, and Turkey’s investment to eliminate famine (ibid.), and the relationship with the Palestinian organisation Hamas, whose leadership Erdoğan welcomed to Ankara and supported openly to bestow upon them legitimacy and international recognition (Nerantzaki, 2012), were only some of the steps taken after the shift in political orientation occurred. Therefore, undoubtedly, as Erdoğan’s message shifted, the AKP’s political standpoint and actions followed suit.

8.3.4 Gezi Park Protests

Whilst the tension in the relationship between Israel and Turkey escalated the pace of change internationally after 2010, it was the Gezi Park protests of 2013 at Istanbul’s famous Taksim Square that resulted in policy transformation domestically. The protests prompted the beginning of a new era in Turkey, one in which the divergence between the supporters of the AKP and its opponents is increasingly apparent (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014). The protests were against Erdoğan’s “Islam-sensitive political position” (Cizre, 2016, p.3), after he ordered the building of Turkey’s largest mosque in Istanbul, named the third bridge after a Sultan, and

restricted alcohol sales after 10 pm (Altun, 2016). In other words, the protestors viewed Erdoğan and his government as increasingly overtly religious in their actions.

This demonstration against Erdoğan's government, which met with serious coverage in the national and international media, encouraged Erdoğan to adopt a more "authoritarian" approach to governance (Altun, 2016). Commentators have claimed this represents his stubbornness and refusal to tolerate those with alternative religious or cultural views (ibid.). Undoubtedly, he increased his religious discourse after the protests in 2013, and referred more often to the Ottoman Empire, as apparent from the content analysis conducted for this study (see Figure 6). Meanwhile, there was a parallel decline in his emphasis on human rights and freedom of speech as he became distinctly less tolerant after the Gezi Park protests (Cagaptay, 2017). The transformation that occurred affected more than Erdoğan's political stance, it also altered the amount of emphasis placed on collective identity within the AKP (Interview with JO2, 8 November 2014). Erdoğan was even unwilling to hear calls of the former President Abdullah Gül, who favoured some measure of reform and reconsideration of the politics of the AKP after the Gezi Park protests (ibid.). In addition, after they ended, Erdoğan openly attacked *CNN International*, *Reuters* and *BBC* for their coverage of the protests (*CNN Türk*, 2013).

8.3.5 Military Coup in Egypt and July 15 coup Attempt in Turkey

Another, significant factor contributing to the AKP's policy developments after 2010 was the military coup in Egypt, which occurred immediately after the Gezi Park protests in 2013. When the Egyptian military ousted "Erdoğan's close ally Mohammed Morsi" in 2013 (*Al Monitor*, 2016), he saw this as a threat to Turkey (Interview with PO3, 29 September 2014). Consequently, as the results of the

qualitative and quantitative analysis show, the silence on the part of international organisations and Western countries, increased Erdoğan's criticism of the so-called Establishment (Interview with TT2, 5 September 2014). His speeches clearly display an anti-Establishment strand; in total, 12.5 per cent of the codes identified in the second term referred to this theme. Indeed, it is critical to remember that Erdoğan employed the slogan "the World is bigger than five" in 2013 for the first time (*Milliyet*, 2013), in order to criticise not only the Western countries' attitude towards Egypt, but also the deadlock in the ongoing war in Syria. The permanent five members of the UN Security Council, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States had found no solution to end the crisis (*ibid.*). JO1 argues that this slogan not only questioned the functionality of the UN, but also other international organisations (Interview with JO1, 19 October 2014). He underlines also, that after Erdoğan's use of it at the 69th UN General Assembly, this slogan became popular throughout the Muslim world, as Erdoğan became "the voice of the voiceless and oppressed people" (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, according to TT2, Erdoğan's discourse became Islamised after the military coup (*ibid.*). His emphasis on Islamic values, but more importantly, on the unity of Muslims peaked after this incident (*ibid.*). At the rallies I attended, I witnessed that Erdoğan emphasised Egypt during his greetings, stating that he greets "the people of Egypt" and is praying for Egypt. More important is his use of the Rabaa sign (explained in Section 6.3) during every single election campaign meeting which I witnessed in 2014; this clearly shows his support for raising awareness of an image and symbol that could come to dominate politics, as Castells (2009, p.442) interprets. Here it is important to underline that this support of Morsi is connected

with the notion of a collective Muslim identity (Melucci, 1996, p.4). This was highlighted by Kalın (2013, p.429), who explained that AKP sympathisers identify themselves with Islamist movements, such as the MB. This was borne out when I was conducting interviews with AKP affiliated individuals, and by my observations on the ground. Despite differences in terms of style, organisational model and party programme, the AKP is viewed as sharing key similarities with the MB in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia. Moreover, Olçok revealed that he worked for Ennahda and the MB after the Arab uprising in the Middle East “because of an ideological affinity”, demonstrating clearly that there is also a commonality in terms of political communication (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014).

The so-called July 15 coup attempt in 2016 was a major hurdle for Erdoğan, and it resulted in a noticeable increase in his “authoritarianism” in terms of domestic messages (Hansen, 2017). The orchestration of the coup attempt by the Gülenists followed an earlier corruption scandal implicating businessmen and politicians close to the AKP in 2013. Led by Fethullah Gülen’s supporters in the military, the coup enabled Erdoğan to declare war against a religious movement for the first time in Turkey’s history (ibid.). After the coup attempt Erdoğan’s punitive actions against the coup plotters, and those journalists, academics, and civil servants who criticised the post-coup actions by the AKP were relentless. Many were jailed or suspended from their posts, and Erdoğan’s nationalistic and Islamic discourse became hugely amplified (see Figure 6). The fieldwork portion of this research covered the period in-between the coup in Egypt and the coup attempt in Turkey, and it was interesting in retrospect to observe that some of the interviewees (Olçok, PO3 and JO1) I spoke with had vocalised to me their fears that the coup in Egypt would serve to trigger a

possible attempt in Turkey. This further consolidates the impression that the association between the MB and the AKP, in terms of ideology and political attitude, was apparent to people close to the AKP.

8.3.6 Characterising AKP as an ‘Islamist Party’

The findings presented above lend support to the claim that since its political message has changed, the AKP can now be categorised as an Islamist party. The principal aim of Islamism, in political terms, is to establish “a political order centred on the name of Islam”, locating religion centrally in the political realm (Sayyid, 2014, p.9). In the context of Turkey, Islamism is a response to Kemalism and Westernisation, as PO4 explains (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014). Whereas Roy (2004) and Mandaville (2007) argue that the AKP can better be described as an organisation representing post-Islamism. Here, I am inclined to use the word ‘Islamism’, as defined by Kara (2014), because when comparing both Erbakan and Erdoğan, it is apparent that there are no material differences today in terms of political approach as both advocated the same politics (this view was supported by TT1, TT2, JO2 and PO3).

Rather, I would contend that the first period of the AKP, from 2002 to 2009, could be termed post-Islamism, as post-Islamist wave marries Islam and democracy, modernity and liberty, acknowledging the values of tolerance, freedom of speech, and human rights (Bayat, 2010). Today’s AKP does not promote the latter three values, instead preferring to implement its own agenda in pursuit of a religious society, an agenda that is less tolerant of human rights and freedom of speech, as seen in the content analysis portion of this thesis (Cizre, 2016) (see Figure 6). Therefore, this research accepts the definition proffered by Sayyid (2003, p.17),

stating that an ‘Islamist’ is “someone who places her or his Muslim identity at the centre of her or his political practice”. It can be argued that Erdoğan can properly be described as an ‘Islamist’ in this case.

Another important fact to consider, is that “Islamists are people who use the language of Islamic metaphors” (ibid.). The speeches given by Erdoğan, in particular after 2010, broadly concentrate on conveying a religious discourse (a 625 per cent increase on the period 2010 to 2017) (see Table 4). By contrast, when Erdoğan demands a generation that has an Islamic consciousness (Ak Parti, 2017), he does so in opposition to “Muslim societies integration into the world capitalist system”, which he suggests is responsible for the “weakening of Muslim identities” (Sayyid, 2003, p.22). For him, Muslim nations should operate independently, or with one another under one umbrella not regulated by Western countries (Interview with PO4, 23 October 2014).

The evidence collected for this ethnographic study, therefore concludes that at present, Erdoğan’s religious discourse reflects an enthusiasm to imbue the AKP with a specific ideology, similar to that of the Milli Görüş. Certainly, as I highlighted in Chapter six, people in the country generally believe the AKP has an Islamic vision. There is an engraved understanding that Erdoğan’s politics is ‘dawah’, in other words, an ‘Islamic mission’. However, whereas Erbakan manifested his political ideology clearly, through projects such as *Adil Düzen* (Justice order in English; explained in Section 3.5.1) or D-8¹⁰³, the evolution of Erdoğan’s message after each

¹⁰³ Erbakan brought the “eight most developed Islamic countries” together to cooperate specifically on economic and military issues, and to consider sharing a currency in the future (Hafez, 2000, p.172). These countries are Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey (ibid.).

event discussed in this thesis reveals him to be a pragmatic man, suggesting that while he remains leader it is unreasonable to make assumptions about the party's direction based on its past.

It is further, interesting to note that Erdoğan's Islamist discourse is not based on a specific project, politics or diplomatic relationship, rather, it is a rhetorical approach, adopted as Turkey's earlier conciliatory foreign policy posturing "lost credibility" domestically (Kirişci, 2017, p.10). Erdoğan was able to become "the Muslim and Arab world's champion", because of his rhetorical reinterpretation of regional politics (Sharma, 2017). This has doubtless led Erdoğan to compare himself to Sultan Abdulhamid II, as one of his advisors explained to me (Ethnographic Interview, 16 September 2014); the Sultan pursued an Islamist agenda and sought to unite the Muslim World (Landau, 1990). The shared world views of the two leaders perhaps originate from their similar educational background. Abdulhamid was educated by "private religious scholars" (Karpas, 2001, p.160) and Erdoğan attended an Imam Hatip school, which provided him with a religious education (Besli and Özbay, 2010). Certainly, Erdoğan's speeches, and the comments of the key figures close to him whom I interviewed, clearly demonstrate that he is committed to bringing Muslims together under one umbrella "a body similar to the EU" as TT1 underlines (Interview with TT1, 12 November 2014).

Additional support was lent to the above argument in December 2017; when US President Donald Trump declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel (*The Guardian*, 2017), Turkey's President did not shirk from voicing his opinion. He intensified his hostile rhetoric against Israel just as he did during the Davos and Mavi Marmara

incidents (*TCCB*, 2017). In one of his speeches, he underlined the importance of Al Quds (Jerusalem in Arabic), with the following words:

If Al Quds is gone, we cannot protect Medina, if Media is gone, we cannot protect Mecca, if Mecca is gone, we would lose Kaaba. Brothers and sisters, the world has a twisted order. One day, this twisted order manifests itself in the body of an innocent Syrian washed ashore. One day, this twisted order manifests itself in a Palestinian whose house is razed to the ground and whose rights are all seized. One day, this twisted order manifests itself in Rohingya Muslims gasping their lives out in swamps and rivers as they are being banished from their own lands. But we do not remain silent.

Erdoğan (*TCCB*, 2017)

In the statement above, Erdoğan takes different examples from different Muslim nations to emphasise the oppression of Muslims globally and the skewed representations of Muslims by the media. He delineates between each incident mapping out a broad canvas, conveying the message that he cares about the events in all the countries where Muslims live, and he is willing to act as their patron, as “no other politician from the region cares about injustice” (Interview with JO4, 22 November 2014). When I asked AC1, if Erdoğan would accept the term ‘Islamist’ if applied to himself, he agreed that he would indeed, but only off-the-record, never not in front of cameras as it would be too risky in terms of the potential loss of support from his non-religious base (Interview with AC1, 13 September 2014).

8.4 Conclusion

The process of triangulating the data highlighted three main points in relation to the AKP’s political communication, and the evolution of its political message: (1) the importance of Islam, (2) criticisms of the West, in particular in relation to Israel and anti-Establishment discourse, and (3) the importance that Muslim’s retain independence from the West.

In terms of political communication strategies, the main point is that Erdoğan is central to the AKP's political communications, and there is a lack of institutionalisation in terms of communications within the party. The increasingly "authoritarian" attitude of Erdoğan since the Gezi Park protests (Waldmand and Caliskan, 2016), and his one-man leadership style since the presidential elections of 2014, have clearly been supported by the Americanisation of the AKP's political communication model, as acknowledged by Erdoğan's spin-doctor himself (Interview with Olçok, 3 December 2014). The use of the family to portray a more human side to Erdoğan not only reflects the centralisation of the party's leadership, but also the importance he attributes to Islamic values. Erdoğan's personalisation of politics has also been supported by symbols (the use of Rabaa sign and the 'Muhammad' in his logo), slogans (e.g. "the world is bigger than five"), and recollections of the past (the use of Islamist poetry to motivate the crowds). This chapter further discussed that as the AKP's political message developed from 2002 to 2017, both domestic and international incidents played a key role (e.g. the Davos and Mavi Marmara incidents, the Gezi Park protests and the July 15 coup attempt).

The consequence is that today, the right-left division in Turkey is polarising the country in a way that has never been seen before (Hansen, 2017). This polarisation allowed Erdoğan to further strengthen his power with a referendum in 2017. He now has the right to govern until 2029¹⁰⁴ if he so chooses (Hamid, 2017); with the result that respect for human rights, freedom of speech, tolerance and cultural dialogue are now in question. At present, Erdoğan's position is unrivalled, as he faces no worthwhile challenger; he has used this advantage to gain complete control of his

¹⁰⁴ If the presidential elections will take place in 2019.

government and country (Hamid, 2017). Equally important is that Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style has increased his prominence in Turkey and in the Muslim world, in particular since the incidents with Israel allowed him to take on the role of 'leader of the Muslim world' increasing his credibility in "Arab street" (*Pew Research*, 2017), with implications for the institutionalisation of the AKP.

Here I should stress that the AKP's centralisation of Islam within its political message since 2010 in particular is not necessarily a rejection of the West (Sayyid, 2003). The question that arises from the research conducted here concerns whether or not the AKP can be part of the system, if Erdoğan wishes to govern a religious society, in other words to lead a "pious generation" as revealed in Reuters' (2018) latest investigation. In pursuit of this goal he is openly using Islamic symbols in his political communication, has opened new religious schools across the country, and has built Turkey's largest mosque in Istanbul in imitation of the greatest Sultan's from history. Indisputably, these steps are intended to frame a "New Turkey", as promised by his 2014 election campaign; a Turkey that brings prosperity and wellbeing to the religious practicing majority, creating a legacy to rival the Kemalists.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Muslims are never desperate or weak. Where there is faith, there is a way. Those kids, who walk tall among Israeli soldiers, are our source of inspiration. We salute them. Those Palestinian women, mothers, who never given up their freedom despite this much pressure, violence and state terror, are our biggest source of confidence. We salute them. With the help of our Lord, with the support of our brothers and sisters, and with the prayers of the innocent and the oppressed, we will hopefully become successful in this struggle.

-Erdoğan¹⁰⁵

9.1 Introduction

To investigate the development of political communications in Turkey, in reference to the AKP and President Erdoğan between 2002 and 2017, this thesis posed the following research questions:

- RQ1. What were the political communication strategies of the AKP between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ2. How did the AKP's political message evolve between 2002 and 2017?
- RQ3. What role has President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's charismatic leadership played in the communication strategies of the AKP?
- RQ4. What role did religion play in the political communication process between 2002 and 2017?

In answering question two, the outcomes from all the research instruments revealed a clear distinction between the period 2002 to 2009, when a “liberal economic and political agenda” and democratic reforms dominated (Mandaville, 2017), and 2010 to 2017, when a discourse of “Islamism” increasingly took hold within the

¹⁰⁵ TBMM, 2017

communications produced by the AKP and Erdoğan. The two periods, referred to as the first and second eras, throughout this research, were also characterised by distinct rhetorical stances internationally, reflecting an undeniable shift in attitude. It also emerged from the data that Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style informs the AKP's approach to political communication, and that he, and his close advisers, have guided the development of the party's political message since its inception in 2002.

From the start of his political career, Erdoğan's charismatic leadership style was apparent and this informed the formulation of research question three. As a member of the Milli Görüş, Erdoğan was admired among religiously conservative people, and this popularity gave him and his reformist supporters (explained in section 3.5.2) the confidence to form a new party in 2002. Once the party came to power its economic successes, and pursuit of a neoliberal economic model (particularly between 2002-2007 and 2007-2011) attracted the votes of the "lower social class" (Kentel, 2016, p.134), as accessibility to economic and social prosperity improved. The results of economic successes and spending on infrastructure, have fuelled a steady surge in Erdoğan's and the AKP's popularity. The AKP have experienced success in every vote (general and local elections, and the referendum) from 2002 until 2017. Erdoğan himself was Turkey's longest serving Prime Minister, holding office following consecutive elections from 2003 to 2014, and became the first President directly elected through the popular vote in 2014. At the present time, having overcome attempts to unseat them legislatively (a challenge to the party on the grounds that it undermined the principles of secularism set out in the Turkish constitution in 2008) and by force (the July 15 2016 coup attempt), the AKP and Erdoğan appear unassailable in Turkey.

9.2 Contribution of the Research

The dramatic successes and shifts in message espoused by the AKP and Erdoğan reflect the paradoxes at the heart of the Turkish constitution concerning secularism and religiosity, and demonstrate that effective political communication is critical to enduring success as times, modes of communication, and attitudes change (Çarkoğlu, 2006). Thus, by considering the political communication of the AKP this research aimed not only to chart the rise of an Islamist party and its charismatic leader, but also to explain how the emergence and enduring appeal of the AKP might serve as an inspirational model to other Islamist movements and parties in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the wider Muslim world, thereby expanding its significance. The literature review conducted for this study clearly demonstrated a lack of studies focusing on the AKP from a communication perspective, and so this research fills a gap in the field of political communication in Turkey, and in regard to Islamist parties throughout MENA. Indeed, there is a notable void from a political communication perspective in terms of the coverage of other Islamist movements and parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt and the Ennahda movement in Tunisia. Therefore, where possible, this study described and evaluated the AKP's political communication model in reference to the political communication of other Islamist parties and movements.

In summary, I believe this thesis makes five contributions to the literature in this area as detailed below.

Firstly, the use of Americanisation in political communication (which first emerged when answering the first research question), proved a significant theme throughout

the thesis. As the working middle-class moves from the periphery to the centre of the political sphere, it is necessary for the parties they support to adapt their communication styles and strategies. The fieldwork and in-depth interview findings indicated that AKP employs strategies that can be classified as American in origin to frame their message. They combine these with symbols and features that are significant locally. The use of the Americanised model of political communication was found to interact with two significant aspects, both of which are significant in respect of question three: (i) the “personalisation” of communications (Negrine et al., 2007), as evidenced by candidate-centred and family portrayal, which upholds Erdoğan’s authority, by emphasising one-man leadership; and (ii) the neoliberal economic policies of the party led to an increase in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita, altering the socio-economic conditions of the working middle-class and leading them to embrace a secular lifestyle focused on individualisation (Mandaville, 2017). This individualisation unbinds the “traditional affective ties between voters and parties” (Dalton, 2000, p.60) causing individual candidates to expand in importance. However, in the context of Turkey there is a contradiction, in that the latter does not align with the former; while individualisation suggests ‘freedom’ (Schorlemmer, 1993), ‘freedom of choice’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘liberalism’ (Welzel, 2013), Erdoğan’s leadership style seeks to limit these characteristics in favour of ‘collective identity’ (Melucci, 1996) corresponding to an Islamist ideology establishing “a political order centred on the name of Islam” (Sayyid, 2014, p.9) (which relates to question four).

The clash between collective identity and “self-identity” as Giddens (1991, p.14) suggests, is likely to pose a significant problem for the AKP in the near future. The

individualisation of society, which enables social mobility and improves quality of life (Sayyid, 2003), is expected to heighten the use of Americanisation in political communication, potentially eroding the effectiveness of regional strategies; i.e. mass rallies, and use of religious symbols and cultural codes. Rather, the desire is likely to be increasingly for a charismatic leader, willing to welcome liberal values and promote freedom of speech, championing the rights of minorities and promoting pluralism. Thus, arguably, the Americanisation of political communication in Turkey is contributing a further paradox to the research context. There is a clash between the global, national and local, which produces “heterogeneous disjunctures” (Appadurai, 1990) “rather than a globally homogenised culture” (Thussu, 2007, p.20). This will undoubtedly prove to be a rich vein of study for future researchers.

The second major contribution of this research is that it reveals a tension between the apparent Islamist objectives of Erdoğan at the present time and the stance of the AKP as a once moderate post-Islamist party. The growing significance of this internal contradiction variously informs the answers to all four research questions. Throughout both the eras examined in this study, there is evidence of a swing from moderation towards isolation, which generates a reactionary attitude (Hamid, 2014). Notably the quantitative content analysis of Erdoğan’s 60 speeches indicates how the AKP engages in both processes: speeches from 2002 to 2009 are largely moderate, whereas those from 2010 to 2017, are more isolationist. The lack of a unified and consistent party message is a consequence of the lack of institutionalisation of the party, the dominance of its leader, and its history. Although moderate in tone, the first period was nevertheless also reactionary, as the newly formed AKP was setting

itself apart from Necmettin Erbakan's¹⁰⁶ Islamist approach. This resulted in the integration of a pro-European Union (EU) policy (Cizre, 2016) and the adoption of liberal economics and widely conciliatory foreign policies. In the second period the reaction is against the Kemalist¹⁰⁷ bloc domestically, and Western countries internationally; Erdoğan now declares Turkey's independence and its willingness to become a beacon among the Muslim nations, opposing the integration of Muslim societies' "into the world capitalist system" (Sayyid, 2003, p.22). The content analysis performed for this study shows that Erdoğan first embraced an anti-Israel, then an anti-Establishment discourse with regard to the United Nations (UN) and the EU in particular (see Figure 6). The data collected for this study revealed that this stance was in part driven by the perceived marginalising of the AKP by some Western countries, during key events in the post-2010 era (the Mavi Marmara incident, the Gezi Park protests, the military coup in Egypt, and the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016). Evidence provided elsewhere suggests that it was Erdoğan's "one-man leadership" (Altun, 2016) and increasing grievances at established institutions and the mainstream media (*Foreign Policy*, 2015), as well as the Western countries in particular (*Independent*, 2017), that reduced their willingness to cooperate against terrorism (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2017), to pursue Turkey's EU membership (*Al Jazeera*, 2018), or support the migration deal regarding the Syrian civil war (*The Guardian*, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Former Prime Minister (1996-1997) and leader of the Milli Görüş movement.

¹⁰⁷ Kemalism is used in the context of Turkey as another name for 'nationalism', 'secularism' or 'modernising' (Sayyid, 2003, p.52). It is a uniquely Turkish term, referring to the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa 'Kemal', which emerged after the "overthrow of the Ottoman regime" (Sayyid, 2003, p.52). The Kemalist elites were the founders of modern Turkey in 1923 (Keyman and Icduygu, 2005, p.4).

The third point raised in this thesis, and highlighted in this chapter, concerns how Erdoğan's anti-Israel posturing fuelled perceptions of his charismatic leadership style among conservative people in Turkey and in the wider Muslim world. After the Davos incident, Erdoğan viewed the reaction in the Islamic media to his position and began to behave as a leader of the Muslim world. The flexibility Erdoğan felt to take on this role appears to have been a direct consequence of the AKP's electoral successes and growing power and influence at home. Economic success, and greater control of the judiciary, with the support of Fethullah Gülen's movement,¹⁰⁸ had strengthened Erdoğan's hand nationally, affording him greater freedom over his actions internationally. The AKP's hold on power palpably increased after their second general election victory in 2007, when the AKP gained the presidency from the secular bloc, allowing Erdoğan's close colleague Abdullah Gül to serve for seven years.

The significance of this empowerment of Erdoğan in the second era mentioned in the data (2010-2017), was very apparent when answering research questions one, three and four. Recognition of the ramifications of Erdoğan's greater authority to act can be considered the fourth significant contribution made to the literature, as 2010 witnessed a turning point in the AKP's political message. The principle change highlighted in the data (see Section 7.3) is that his discourse became religiously motivated, and an example of this is the quotation that opens this chapter, taken from a speech in late 2017. Simultaneously, rhetoric concerning human rights and freedom of speech, as well as cultural dialogue fell dramatically.

¹⁰⁸ I use the word 'Gülenists' to refer to Fethullah Gülen's movement

Importantly (and relating to question four) the transformation of Erdoğan's political message, not only suggests a lack of institutionalisation or consistency in the AKP's political message, but also the President's willingness to introduce religious discourse to create a religious society with a strong Islamic identity, which brings us to the fifth key point revealed in this study. Inevitably, we can conclude that the AKP is facing an identity crisis, one that reflects the paradoxes mentioned above regarding secularism versus religiosity, and individualism versus collectivism. The different characterisations of the party to surface in the fieldwork data show the dispute over the party's identity. Conversely, Erdoğan's message has never been clearer; his desire is for a Turkey that serves as a model of Islamic "collective identity" (Melucci, 1996); as evidenced by his religious messages, symbolic transformations, and political communication during the 2014 presidential elections which I observed and later evaluated. Erdoğan's stated aim is to build a strong nation, to safeguard Muslims globally, and make history as the leader of the Muslim world. Meanwhile, domestically it is, and has always been important for Erdoğan to intensify his relationship to tradition, culture, and the Ottoman Empire, to consolidate his position as the leader of a 'new' Turkey. However, as touched on in this thesis, despite his popularity, the country is more polarised now than at any time since 2002.

9.3 Research Limitations

Various limitations effected the material contained in this thesis as discussed in this section.

- My intention was to arrive one month prior to the elections (in July 2014), in order to follow the activities of the governing party across Turkey. However, because the bureaucratic process, on the part of the party took longer than I

anticipated I had to wait until 3rd August 2014 to follow the AKP's political activities in Istanbul.

- Similarly, after the presidential campaign, the initial research plan was to conduct observations at the AKP's headquarters for a period of five months. However, the Publicity and Media department at the AKP did not permit me to do so; despite my having previously attained written approval they limited the observation term to four months. The rationale given was that they [Publicity and Media department] are only active during an election period.
- Approaching elite personalities to participate was a major challenge when arranging the elite interviews, and I encountered difficulties with this while in Turkey. Some of the interviewees initially confirmed a willingness to participate in an interview but later cancelled.

9.4 Recommendations for Future Studies

This is the first study of the AKP's political communication in the form of doctoral research, and it is anticipated that while it is more comprehensive than earlier studies, it will encourage a wealth of research from other researches. Future research might usefully involve a systematic analysis of the AKP's political communication strategies from 2002 to 2017, focusing on each election and referendum. Furthermore Erdoğan's speeches could be studied in greater number and detail, as this research was limited by time. In addition, other researchers might choose to explore additional significant markers that define the different eras of the AKP's communications, to either support the divisions suggested here, or suggest additional ones. Finally, future researchers might choose to focus on the AKP's influence over the local media in recent years; specifically, by examining how the government is

selling its actions to the public, as it cracks down on freedom of speech following the July 15 2016 coup attempt.

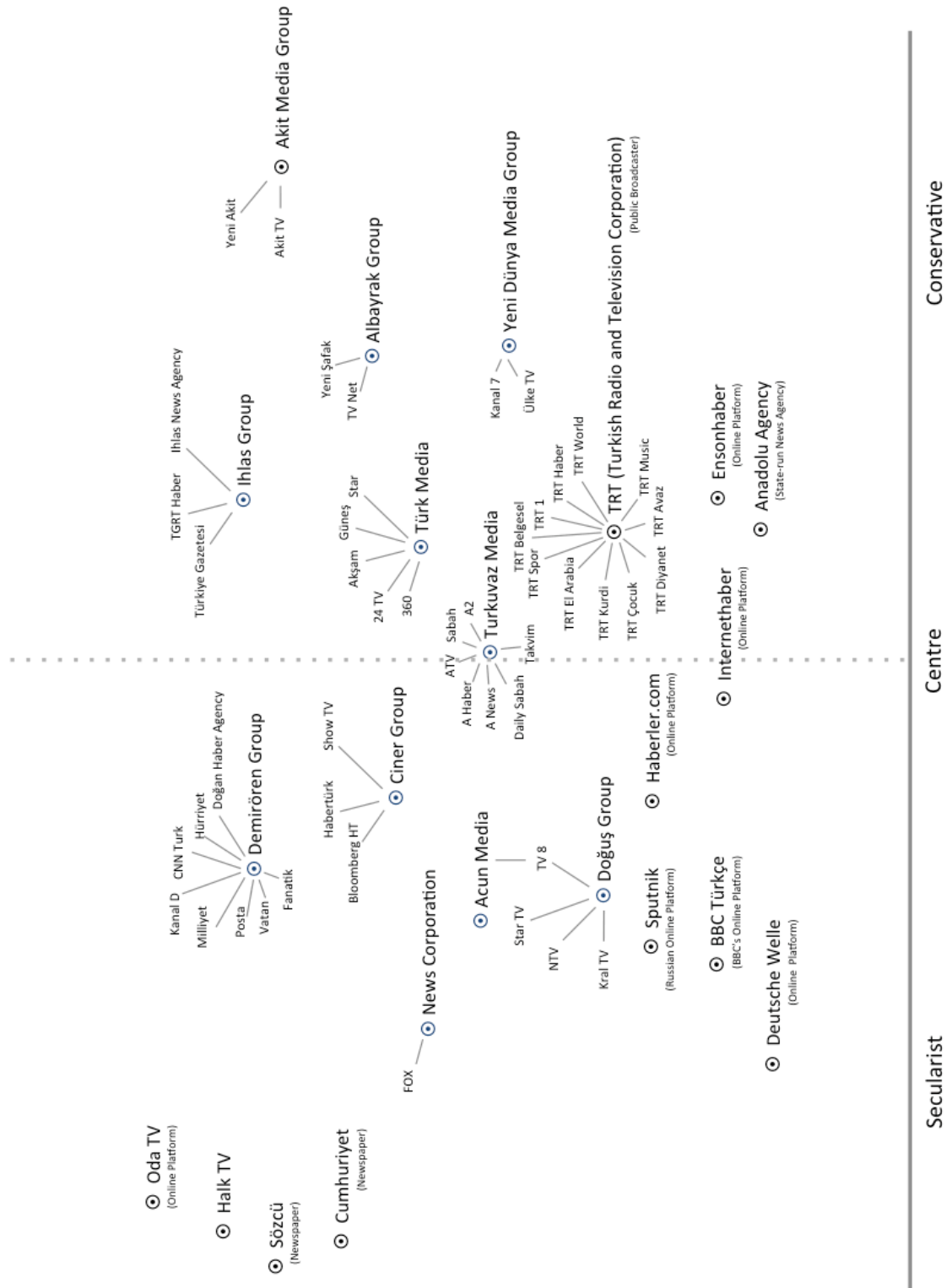
In future research, I am planning to extend the academic contribution made in the field of political communication by considering Islamist parties and movements. In this manner, comprehensive comparisons between the political communication strategies of the AKP, Tunisian Ennahda, and the Egyptian MB will be achievable. This will ensure greater understanding of the use of religion as a political communication tool. Furthermore, the differences between the charismatic leadership styles of Erdoğan and Ennahda's leader Rashed Ghannouchi could be explored as another research focus.

9.5 Final comment

In concluding this ethnographic study, I wish to make some future projections concerning the AKP and Erdoğan, based on what I learned when conducting this research. At the present time, the principal advantages for the AKP in electioneering terms are its experience and its charismatic leader. Meanwhile, from a political communication perspective, its main challenge in the upcoming elections will be the polarisation of society, in other words the paradoxes and divisions between the different social groups in Turkey. Under the new presidential system, which was approved by a referendum in spring 2017, a candidate must obtain 50+1 per cent of the vote in order to be elected President. It is probable that this will be viewed as a test for the AKP, as the party's vote was slightly under 50 per cent in the November 2015 general elections. To address this challenge, it is likely that from a political communication perspective, in the upcoming elections the AKP will increase its

implementation of Americanised strategies, as the personalities of the presidential candidates will be at the forefront of the campaigning. Although this might seem likely to reap positive rewards for the AKP, the individualisation process discussed above would be expected to reduce the attendance of young and educated people at mass rallies, possibly making it difficult for Erdoğan to attain sufficient support to stay in power until 2029 unless the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) chooses to support Erdoğan as suggested in early January 2018 by the leader of the MHP, Devlet Bahçeli (*Hürriyet*, 2018).

APPENDIX I: TURKEY'S AGENDA-SETTING NEWS MEDIA PLAYERS¹⁰⁹



¹⁰⁹ Yesil, B. (2016)

APPENDIX II: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions directed to the interviewee. The direction of each question varied regarding interviewee's area of specialisation

1. How do you define the AKP?
2. How do you define Islamism? Do you consider AKP as an Islamist party?
3. What were the turning points of the AKP from 2002 to 2014?
4. When we consider western media, we assert that especially after Davos crisis and Mavi Marmara, AKP has evolved from being conservative to Islamist. Do you agree?
5. When we look at the period after 2009 –Davos crisis and Mavi Marmara– there is a negative portrayal of Erdoğan himself and the AKP. Are there specific campaigns to influence this image?
6. Would you say Erdoğan became an Islamist politician after Davos and Mavi Marmara, and an “authoritarian“ leader after the Gezi Park protests?
7. What does Gezi Park protests mean for you? Was it an upheaval against Erdoğan's “Islam and Ottoman friendly” policies?
8. Do you think that Erdoğan's polarising and harsh approach to plenty of issues is changing or should change after being elected as a president?
9. Do you think that Erdoğan's discourse is AKP's discourse?
10. What kind of political communication strategy is AKP applying?
11. How is the general communication between domestic and international media, as well as agencies?
12. Which mechanism do you have with regard to AKP's political communication?
13. What is the role of research centres and opinion polls in AKP's success?
14. Due to the contradiction in discourse and actions, can we claim that Turkish society is becoming more religious whereas on the other hand more secularised?
15. Do you think that Erdoğan's charismatic leadership has played an important role in the AKP's success? What is the role of charisma in general?

16. Is it not possible to say that after the increase of self-confidence and strength of the AKP, the rhetoric became more Islamised?
17. How is the AKP controlling local media and journalists?
18. Why is the Turkish government loosing credibility in terms of freedom of speech?
19. How do you create a positive image of Erdoğan globally as well as domestically?
20. Is it difficult to work with Erdoğan together?
21. Does Erdoğan accept criticism?
22. Is it possible do say that working middle class changed their lifestyle and thereby ideology?
23. Is there an emergence of individualism in the younger generation?
24. How do you get the intention of younger people?
25. Is it true that when education level increase, the support for the AKP decrease?
26. How do you think Erdoğan would answer if he was asked whether he is an Islamist or not?
27. How did you interpret the military coup in Egypt?
31. How does it feel to be Erdoğan's spin-doctor?
32. What is your job specifically?
33. Who is part of Erdoğan's communication team?
34. Who is responsible for what?
35. In political communication there is the notion and concept of "Americanisation". Do you apply this concept?
36. What was the main political communication concept you applied in campaigns from 2002 to 2014?
37. Let us talk about your last campaign, the presidential elections. Why could we see more Erdoğan advertisings on streets during the presidential campaign than Ekmelettin Ihsanoglu¹¹⁰ or Selahattin Demirtas¹¹¹? Have you used the power of your government?

¹¹⁰ 2014 Presidential Candidate of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP)

¹¹¹ 2014 Presidential Candidate of the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP)

38. How do you decide on which channels, newspapers etc. you will publish your advertisements?
39. How many commercials did you produce for the 2014 Presidential campaign?
40. Why did the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey ban your latest commercial with the Turkish flag as in the previous election? Could you not forecast it?
41. From the communication strategy perspective, is the ban of your election commercial an advantage or disadvantage?
42. You have so many advertisements, commercials, rally speeches etc. How did you decide on what your emphasis will be? What was your main focus in the latest election? What was your message?
43. How is your relationship to research agencies?
44. How many voluntary people support your campaign?
45. What kind of jobs did they carry out?
46. During my participant observation, I determined that election songs were very influential. Even outside of rallies, I have heard people mumbling the melody. Can you explain how you compose them? Do you have a special team responsible just for campaign songs?
47. What are the future projections regarding the AKP's political communication? Do you plan to implement new strategies?

APPENDIX III: SPEECHES OF ERDOĞAN BETWEEN 2002 AND 2009

Nr	Date		Speech Titel
1	n.d.	2002	Kayseri Meeting
2	03-Nov		2002 General Election Victory Speech
3	03-Sep	2003	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
4	12-Oct		AKP's 1st Ordinary Congress
5	17-Oct		Formenter Forum
6	10-Nov		Atatürk Congress
7	10-Jan	2004	International Conservatism and Democracy Feast
8	26-Apr		European Union Meeting Istanbul
9	18-May		Youth Gathering
10	09-Dec		Garden of Religions
11	14-Aug	2005	AKP's 4th Commemoration
12	05-Sep		Euro-Asia Islam Shura
13	23-Sep		Bahçeşehir University
14	27-Oct		Alliance of Civilizations
15	16-Feb	2006	Ankara Politics Academy
16	08-Jun		Whartoon School
17	16-Sep		Euro-Asia Film Festival
18	16-Dec		733th Remembrance day of Mevlana
19	19-Apr	2007	"Last Prophet" Website Launch
20	24-Mar		MUSIAD Opening Ceremony
21	17-Sep		Council on Foreign Affairs
22	22-Oct		Oxford Union
23	07-Feb	2008	Grand National Assembly of Turkey
24	13-Nov		Columbia University
25	14-Nov		Brookings Institute
26	18-Dec		Directory of Religious Affairs
27	29-Jan	2009	Davos World Economic Forum
28	20-Aug		AKP Weekly Group Meeting
29	23-Sep		Princeton University
30	18-Dec		Directory of Religious Affairs School Opening Ceremony

APPENDIX IV: SPEECHES OF ERDOĞAN BETWEEN 2010 AND 2017

Nr	Date		Speech Titel
1	11-Jul	2010	Commemoration of Srebrenica
2	16-Apr		Gaza University
3	12-Sep		Referendum Victory Speech
4	14-Apr	2011	Commemoration of the birth of Muhammad
5	17-Aug		Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
6	13-Sep		Arab League
7	12-Oct		Sebahattin Zaim University
8	31-Mar	2012	TUSKON Speech
9	29-Apr		Youth Branch Meeting
10	31-Mar		TUSKON Speech
11	01-Jun	2013	Gezi Park protests
12	22-Aug		Egypt Military coup
13	18-Sep		TÜSİAD Meeting
14	16-Nov		Diyarbakır Meeting
15	24-May	2014	Cologne Meeting with Turks in Diaspora
16	10-Aug		Victory Speech, Presidential Election
17	24-Sep		United Nations
18	24-Nov		International Women and Justice Summit
19	07-Jan	2015	Yıldırım Beyazıt University
20	15-Mar		Press Conference with President of Hungary
21	30-May		Celebration of Conquest of Istanbul
22	11-Jun		Turkey Scholarships
23	13-Mar	2016	International Awards for Kindness, Diyanet
24	07-Aug		Post-Coup Rally
25	21-Nov		NATO Parliamentary Assembly
26	10-Dec		Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Awards
27	12-Apr	2017	Referendum Meeting Erzurum
28	20-Oct		D-8 Summit
29	14-Dec		Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
30	20-Dec		42th Mukhtars Meeting

APPENDIX V: INTERCODER RELIABILITY OF ERDOĞAN’S SPEECHES

Unit	Intercoder Agreement
European Union	95%
Cultural Dialogue	85%
Human Rights/Freedom of speech	89%
Atatürk/Secularisation	83%
Religious Discourse	91%
Economic Development	85%
Anti-Israel	95%
Anti-Establishment	45%
Ottoman Empire	95%
Gülenists	89%
TOTAL	85.2%

APPENDIX VI: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Taner Dogan
PhD, Journalism Department
Titel of the study: "Communication
Strategies of the Ak Party in Turkey"

We would like to invite you to take part in a PhD research study entitled "Communication Strategies of the Turkish Ak Party." Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the communication strategies and approaches of AKP since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took over as leader. In order to find out how the communication strategies of the AKP evolved between 2002 and 2014, I will do participant observation with to be able to examine the development from different perspectives.

Why have I been invited?

As part of a PhD research project, it is highly important to observe people who are in a crucial position in politics, media or academy. Hence, I will observe you and other academics, politicians and media personnel to take part in my research. The main reason for your invitation is experience, reliability and confidence.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in part or the entire project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

What will happen if I take part?

- *You will be involved as participant in my research for the time of my fieldwork mentioned above.*
- *Normally, you will meet me once. If I need a further meeting, I will kindly ask again.*
- *The observation will take place during a meeting, conference etc. you take part in.*

What do I have to do?

You will need to sign a consent form.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

If observation notes are stolen, there is the risk that your identity would be disclosed. However, I will be very careful in protecting the data by encrypting my devices.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This research will have a wider influence on the field of communication and politics in the region given that it will be the first study to be conducted on the topic.

What will happen when the research study stops?

Observations may be used in other studies such as in post-doc project, papers to present in conferences or journal articles. It will be kept for up to 10 years, after which they will be destroyed.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

- *Yes, if you request confidentiality*
- *My supervisors and me will be the only people to access the information.*
- *My observation will be stored in locked hard disc at my own home computer.*

What will happen to results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be published in my PhD thesis. However, when the participant asks for anonymity, a code will be used. If required, the participant can receive a copy of the publication of the results.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You are free to withdraw from the study without an explanation or penalty at any time.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 0044 20 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is:

Communication Strategies of the Turkish AK Party.

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
Research Office, E214
City University London
Northampton Square

London
EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City University London REC [Research Ethics Committee] Senate

Further information and contact details

Zahera Harb
City University London
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB
Email: Zahera.Harb.1@city.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

APPENDIX VII: CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM

PhD Research Title

“Communication Strategies of the Ak Party in Turkey”

Taner Dogan

Department of Journalism
School of Arts and Social Sciences
City University London, United Kingdom

Student number: 110037263

Please initial box

1.	I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve: • be interviewed by the researcher • allow the interview to be videotaped/audiotaped • make myself available for a further interview should that be required	
2.	This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s): I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation. I understand that I have given approval for my name and/or the name of my village/community, and/or the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project, and future publications. I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for information which I might disclose in the focus group(s)/group interviews(s). I consent to the use of sections of the videotapes in publications.	
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.	
4.	I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

APPENDIX VIII: AKP’S 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SONG LYRICS

He is the hero of the people, who loves the creator (God),

He is the hope of millions,

He is the confidant to the oppressed,

He is the companion to the helpless,

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. (2x)

He was always loyal to his words,

He never stepped back from his road,

He is determined to his path,

He is in the prayers of the mothers,

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. (2x)

His words are straightforward,

He has no exaggeration,

He is the nightmare of the evil,

He is the one who follows the way he believes,

He is the leader who is expected for years,

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. (3x)

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