Making the *Millet* Common: Rethinking Authoritarian Politics Through Commemoration Following Turkey's July 2016 Coup Attempt

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Abstract

In July 2016, a coup attempt in Turkey helped to precipitate a series of far-reaching transformations. Government officials claimed that these transformations both represented the will of and were justified by the heroism of the 'nation' (*millet*), an ostensibly self-evident and pre-given political actor. Rightly criticized as symptomatic of an authoritarian politics in contemporary Turkey, these celebrations of the 'nation' raise an urgent question: How and where is the nation made 'common' (*ortak*) in the first place? To answer this question, this paper examines the forging of a new memorial public in relation to the events of July 2016. I make two connected arguments. First, this new memorial public involves not just the claiming of public space but the circulation of images and tropes between many sites of memory. Second, focusing on this memorial public helps us understand how commemoration operates in authoritarian contexts. Instead of being simply a top-down imposition, memorial publics – and the 'nation' they underpin – are formed through uneven linkages and affiliations. Drawing on both discourse analysis and landscape observations, this article enriches our analysis of politics in Turkey today and sketches out one approach for an expanded interchange between geographies of memory and geographies of populism and authoritarianism.

Keywords

Authoritarianism, commemoration, memorial public, memory, national identity, Turkey

Introduction

On the night of July 15, 2016, a coup attempt played out across Turkey. In dramatic fashion, military units seized key sites and used state television to demand that the country's elected government step down. However, government officials refused to concede and instead called on the public at large to confront those military units. Following a massive and highly visible civilian response, the coup attempt was defeated, marking the first failed military intervention in the country's history.

The coup attempt of July 15 (*15 Temmuz*), as it has come to be known, also marked the first time that a coup attempt played out live via a highly mediated infrastructure of social media, cell phones, and private television stations. Even for those who never left their home during the initial fighting, the events of July 15 became an indelible part of the country's visual iconography. Precisely because July 15 was so mediated, its commemorations have come to underpin a potent political syllogism: *Everyone can see we lived through the coup attempt; the legal and political changes of the past four years respond to the coup attempt; therefore, these changes should be supported by everybody.* In short, the hypervisibility of the coup attempt's commemoration has helped to justify far-reaching changes to the country's legal, political, and social institutions.

This paper provides a critical analysis of that commemorative project. It focuses on the key relationship between that project's principal actor – the *millet* (people, nation) – and its seemingly self-evident *ortak* (shared, common) geography. While some might analyze this commemorative project as a straightforward claiming of public space or the public sphere, I argue that making the *millet* common involves a more complex mode of indexical designation, mediation, and linkage that forges a memorial public (Hammond 2020). While the territorial nation continues to be a central form for politics (e.g., Batuman 2010), this paper follows recent scholarship that deploys 'entanglement' as an analytical lens (Çaylı 2020; Oguz 2021) to understand other political topologies.

Scholars have correctly used rubrics of authoritarianism and populism to make sense of Turkey's recent transformations. However, much of this analysis has tended to focus on President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the elite actors surrounding him. This leaves the question of how and why "individuals are simultaneously governed and govern themselves" (Koch 2013a, 392) relatively underexplored. Analyzing how, why, and where memorial publics emerge thus provides an alternative approach for understanding the contemporary politics of memory in Turkey and 'soft' authoritarian contexts (Koch 2013b) more generally.

The paper begins by showing how our understanding authoritarian and populist politics can be enriched through a focus on commemorative practices. After briefly addressing the methods and sources that underpin this paper, I identify and analyze the key strategy through which the *millet* has been made common: The material and discursive reconfiguration of four paired subject-positions. These subject-positions – civilian/soldier; citizen/model family members; citizen/pious Muslim; and Muslim/worker – each have deep histories in Turkey, but it is their reworking that has made this memorial public so effective. In the process, commemorations of resistance to the coup attempt have defined a new political subject woven into a specific – and highly partisan – vision of justice and responsibility.

Authoritarian Politics, Populism, and the Geographies of Memory

There has been a massive concentration of power and authority in Turkey since the coup attempt. These changes include the ongoing consolidation of media outlets (Bianet 2019; Yesil 2018), a constitutional referendum that shifted executive authority from Parliament and the Prime Minister to the Office of the Presidency (Esen & Gümüşçü 2017a), and the expropriation of assets of those deemed 'threats' to national security (Teoman 2020). The government has silenced or marginalized political opponents by leveraging the linkage between economic and political interests, conflating state authority

with party identity, and deploying a variety of legal mechanisms (Baser, Akgönül & Öztürk 2017; Sertdemir Özdemir & Özyürek 2019; Sertdemir Özdemir, Mutluer, & Özyürek 2019). Critical analyses of these transformations have generally framed them as products of an 'authoritarian turn,' although scholars debate the extent to which this authoritarian turn is specific to the present moment or symptomatic of deeper trends (Erensü & Alemdaroğlu 2018; S. Gökarıksel & Türem 2019; Tansel 2018; Karaveli 2018). Indeed, while some of these changes were made possible by the State of Emergency that followed the coup attempt, other trends were already present and emerging well before 2016 (Esen & Gümüşçü 2016; Yeşil 2018). However, one challenge for this scholarship remains its primary focus on President Erdoğan, one that can draw upon and reproduce problematic tropes of the 'autocratic sultan' (e.g., Cagaptay (2017)).

Focusing on President Erdoğan and the elite actors surrounding him also limits our ability to fully understand the geography of populist politics in Turkey today. Notwithstanding a growing literature on populism in Turkey (e.g., Özpek & Tanriverdi Yaşar 2017; Sözen 2019; Sözen 2020; Yabanci 2020; Zengin & Ongur 2019), much of the analytical focus remains on President Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party. Instead of focusing solely on President Erdoğan, this paper suggests that we focus on the *millet*, a term that can designate both a 'nation' and its 'people.' The slippage between those terms prompts us to ask: What is the relationship between people and nation? And – more specifically – what is the geographical expression of that relationship?

One approach, often mobilized by populist politicians, takes the territorial nation as the necessary expression of a pregiven people. More nuanced approaches focus instead on how political elites define the 'nation' to shape a people. This approach is better able to historicize the deployments of *millet*, but it still risks treating the term as only a cynical fiction imposed from above. As others have noted, understanding the political geographies of populism (Lizotte 2019) requires greater attention to the "opportunistic, networked, and individualized" dimensions (Koch 2019, 919) of political life. A critical analysis of commemoration shows how "people come to interpret their own actions as supporting some broader, moral order… regardless of the fact that this frequently entails supporting their own subordination" (Koch 2013b, 43; Schatz 2009). Making the *millet* common through acts of commemoration is not simply the 'discovery' of an objective reality or the 'imposition' of a cynical tool but a project of linkage, connection, and articulation that brings together multiple objects, peoples, sites, and temporalities. Crucially, this project of making the 'nation' common involves both the creation of physical monuments and the circulation of discourses, images, and media. To understand this project, we need to focus not only on tangible 'places of memory' (Till 2003) but also on the practices and texts through which individual places are woven into a broader memorial public (Hammond 2020).

As with struggles over the past, debates over making the nation common are not arguments between "already constituted interests but [the constitution of] those interests in the first place" (Olick 2003, 8). Like the commemoration of September 11, 2001 or July 7, 2005, the commemoration of July 15 created a particular political geography, one in which remembering bodies (in some places) enabled – and even required – the erasure of others in other places (Rose 2009). Neither spontaneous nor simply imposed, this project drew upon and reconfigured existing tropes, discourses, imagery, objects, and sites together in a new way. Positioned in relation to an expansive body of scholarship examining the geographies of memory (e.g., Hoelscher & Alderman 2004; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu 2008; Till 2003), my argument builds upon two specific conversations: theorizations of the publicness of memory and memory's material dimensions.

'Public memory,' as John Bodnar has argued, provides a conceptual alternative to the binary opposition between "official and vernacular cultural expressions," (Bodnar 1992, 13). Located at "the interface where the past is represented in the present by means of shared cultural productions and reproductions" (Foote & Azaryahu 2007, 126), the concept of public memory calls our attention to

geographically and temporally specific engagements with the past. Necessarily partial, these engagements create a sense of communal belonging (Blair, Dickinson, & Ott 2010, 6). The geographies of public memory intersect with space, place, landscape, and territory in a variety of ways (Dickinson et al. 2010; Foote & Azaryahu 2007). Most often, examinations of public memory serve as a productive point of entry into a broader analysis of national identities, often by analyzing the relationship between public memory and narratives, monuments, and museums (e.g., Drozdzewski 2012; Forest & Johnson 2011; Karacas 2010). This scholarship calls our attention both to the geographies imagined by means of monuments and memorials but also these monuments and memorials' embeddedness in their own material environs (Johnson 2004; Till 1999).

In Turkey, struggles over highly visible forms of 'public memory' have a long history (Çınar 2001; Özyürek 2007). The case of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey's first president, provides one paradigmatic example. Following his death in 1938, Atatürk's sarcophagus was first displayed in the Ethnography Museum of Ankara before being moved and reinstalled in Anıtkabir in 1953 (Wilson 2016). Yet Atatürk is commemorated in a vast range of ways, including statues, souvenirs, newspapers, photographs, fliers, and more (Denny 1982; Gencer 2012). These objects range from the monumental to the intimate, the durable to the ephemeral, the powerfully inert to the highly mobile. Far from existing at a single center, the geographies of commemorating Atatürk have in fact shifted in relation to changing social and political conditions (Özyürek 2004). As contemporary scholars of memory in Turkey remind us, there is an urgent need to focus not only on highly visible forms of 'public memory' but also on the mobilizations of memory that play out in everyday landscapes (Altınay et al. 2019; Mills 2010; Neyzi 2011).

Others complicate the deployment of 'public memory' by making a productive distinction between "the memory of publics" and the "publicness of memory" (Phillips 2004) or proposing alternative concepts like 'collective memory' (Olick 2008) and 'memorial publics' (Hammond 2020). In various ways, these interventions all challenge the assumption that memory is necessarily 'in public' or part of the (national) 'public sphere.' Instead, they focus on the linkage of imaginaries, symbols, discourses, media, sites, and objects that build upon and help to reproduce political and social relationships (Adams 2010).

As geographers and others have shown, these linkages are both imagined *and* material. Indeed, remembering is not simply as an abstract, symbolic, or imagined practice but a material one. In Gareth Hoskin's succinct formulation, this challenges scholars to "[pay] attention to texture as well as text" (Hoskins 2007, 452). This conceptual shift helps us better analyze the "traffic between memories, meanings and things" (Zhang & Crang 2016, 435), a traffic that is multivalent and can often operate in unexpected ways (DeSilvey 2006; Freeman, Nienass, & Daniell 2015; Hamilakis & Labanyi 2008; Sumartojo & Graves 2018; Sumartojo & Graves 2021). Although varied in its theoretical genealogies and its empirical focus, this scholarship asks us to consider how the materiality of objects – qualities including their substance, tactility, dimensions, sensuality, durability – both constrains and enables forms of commemoration that link time, place, and persons (Casey 2004). In many cases, the materiality of memory helps to produce an indexical experience of authenticity: The past happened not anywhere but *here* (Azaryahu 1993; DeLyser 1999). At the same time, objects do not simply exist in a stable geography but help to constitute new, folded topologies defined by connections that link temporalities, people, objects, and places in complex and unpredictable ways (Hetherington 1997; Zhang & Crang 2016).

The *millet* does not map neatly onto the territorial nation; similarly, its shared character is neither self-evident nor simply a result of its hypervisibility. Instead, actors make the *millet* common through the articulation of a specific memorial public (Hammond 2020). This project depends on practices of circulation, reproduction, and connection that take multiple material forms: monuments, digital images, print books, statues on temporal display, the personal belongings of the dead displayed in new museums.

Layered over older networks, discourses, and commemorative traditions, the project of making a new memorial public reconfigures the past to serve the needs of the present (see Rigney 2018, 247).

Contexts of Research: The Coup Attempt, Its Commemoration, and Challenges for Fieldwork

Between 249 and 251 people died resisting the coup attempt; 2,193 people were declared injured veterans.[1] In the prosecutions that followed, more than 96,000 people were arrested, 150,000 people were dismissed from their jobs, and over 500,000 people investigated.[2] Many of the soldiers who were deployed to enforce the declaration of martial law on behalf of the coup plotters were conscripted recruits; it is not clear how many of them were arrested or how many continue to be in government custody. While the specific chain of events that led to the coup attempt is still uncertain, most reasonable research and analysis has placed blame on members aligned with the religious leader Fethullah Gülen (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017b; Yavuz and Balcı 2018). Although Gülen's movement had worked in partnership with key figures in the Justice and Development Party for most of the past two decades, these two groups' rivalry ultimately precipitated the coup attempt of July 2016 (Tee 2018). In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the government expanded its campaign against what it termed the 'parallel structure' of Gülen's movement. But the struggle between the government and Gülen's movement has also become a convenient excuse to vilify and marginalize any potential source of political opposition.[3]

While mourning and loss have complex histories in Turkey – as they do in any context – the highly visible official commemorations that have played out since July 2016 are noteworthy for being at once hyper-specific, mobilized for an instrumental collective politics, and highly mediated (Carney 2018; Bulut & Can 2019, 2020). The mythologization of the resistance to the coup attempt began as soon as it became clear that the coup attempt had failed (Özyürek 2016), and has come to involve the designation of a new holiday, the production of video games, the circulation of clips on YouTube, the dissemination of newspapers, books, magazines, and fliers, the renaming of streets, schools, universities, the rewriting of school curricula, and the establishment of small memorial shrines, known as Martyrs' Corners (*Şehitler Köşeleri*), in every school (Hammond 2019; Carney 2019; Solomonovich 2021). Many of these commemorative practices rework older traditions, such as the practice of placing Atatürk Corners in every school to link commemoration to the state (Kansu-Yetkiner 2019).

Conducting research on the politics of commemoration following July 2016 is fraught for several reasons, chief among them a legal environment in which even idle criticism of President Erdoğan can leave one subject to government prosecution (Soylu 2019). This has helped to create a context of self-censorship (Altınay 2018) in which many interlocutors are reluctant to speak, and researchers write with the awareness that their research may be targeted by authorities.

This paper thus draws strategically on two methods: ongoing analysis of media and official discourses disseminated in print and online and landscape observations carried out during fieldwork in July 2018 and September 2019. My discourse analysis focuses on what might be termed 'official' discourses, whose relative permanence and visibility result from authorities' ability to build and maintain certain epistemological frames (Dittmer 2010). However, 'official' can be a misleading adjective because it masks the role of different institutions and actors, including individual authors, municipalities, civil society organizations, and the Office of the Presidency. While these actors and institutions often work in concert to articulate and reproduce a hegemonic narrative about the coup attempt, simply labeling them 'official' obscures the coordination between the multiple institutions, sites, and media that disseminate

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[1] These numbers continue to shift. News articles published in 2020 placed the numbers at 251 killed and 2,196 injured. ("15 Temmuz Şehitleri - Gazileri kimler? 15 Temmuz şehit ve gazi sayısı kaç kişi, isimleri neler?" 2020)

[2] Statistics on arrests, dismissals, and investigations are from TurkeyPurge.com, last updated March 4, 2019

[3] The imprisonment of Osman Kavala (Insel & Hibou 2018) and ongoing government targeting of Boğaziçi University (Jadaliyya Reports 2021) are two especially important examples.

these discourses in the first place. It also obscures the circulation of discourses and imagery between "entertainment, official (state sanctioned) history, and policy" (Carney 2018, 94). Finally, these discourses always travel by means of material vehicles, objects, and infrastructures (Ogborn 2002).

The book at the center of this paper's analysis helps us see those linkages. *The Martyrs of July 15* (*15 Temmuz Şehitleri*) (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017) was first published in 2017 by the Culture Corporation (*Kültür A.Ş.*), a semi-independent institution that works under the auspices of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The work of the Culture Corporation has often overlapped with networks of patronage and support associated with the Justice and Development Party. I encountered the book during fieldwork in September 2019 while speaking with a staff member at the Memory of July 15 Museum (*Hafiza 15 Temmuz Müzesi*), when he highlighted it as an accurate account of the coup attempt. The museum, built on municipal property but run by a civil society organization linked to the political elite of the ruling Justice and Development Party, was, like the book, also made possible by both informal and formal networks of patronage. Using the book as a methodological and conceptual point of departure shows us how 'accuracy' is assembled through linkages between multiple institutions, discourses, and sites.

My approach to landscape draws upon a tradition of critical 'reading' of the landscape (Duncan & Duncan 2010) with particular attention to the design and discourses of monuments (Atkinson & Cosgrove 1998) and museums (Smith & Foote 2016). However, the paper does not examine individual encounters with or experiences of these sites or texts, research that would be a crucial complement to the observations I develop below. Instead, the paper focuses on four paired tropes that have become central to this commemorative project. Following these tropes as they appear both in *The Martyrs of July 15* and a variety of museums and monuments around the country helps us better understand how this memorial public has been articulated not just discursively (i.e., in *The Martyrs of July 15*) or materially (i.e., in monuments and museums) but through the circulation of discourses, objects, and images between the discursive and the material.

Making Memorial Publics is Making the Nation Common

The Martyrs of July 15 opens with an explicit statement about the political value of commemoration: "In short, it is only [nations'] common past and future (*ortak geçmiş ve gelecekleri*) that keep [them] together" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 17). However, this ostensibly self-evident 'common' quality is in fact accomplished through the making of a memorial public. As with any nation, Turkey's 20th century history has involved many memorial publics. What makes the July 15 memorial public distinct, however, is its reconfiguration of four paired tropes: the civilian and the soldier, the citizen and the model family member, the citizen and the visibly pious Muslim, and the Muslim and the class-based person. In doing so, the memorial public of July 15 has helped to constitute a political geography of memory that brings the *millet* into new domestic, intimate, and personal relations. Participating in the commemorations of July 15, individuals are thus encouraged to see themselves as history-making actors alongside the state, thus helping to reproduce a particular authoritarian politics

Civilian/Soldier

One of Turkey's central national myths involves its (male) citizens' ostensible 'military' character (Açıksöz 2012; Altınay 2004). While this myth has been premised upon the capacity of 'civilian' to become 'soldier,' this linkage has taken on a new – and greatly expanded – character in the aftermath of July 2016. One of the most notable ways that this happened was the designation of those who died resisting the coup as *şehit* (martyr) and those wounded as *gazi* (wounded veteran). This designation both guarantees a set of public benefits and links the fighting that took place on July 15 to a specific history, particularly the Ottoman victory at Çanakkale/Gallipoli during World War I and the war that led to the establishment of Turkey in 1923. However, the designation also generated controversy,

especially among veterans of Turkey's long-running war against the PKK in southeast Anatolia who have often struggled to achieve the same designation (Şünbüloğlu 2019). The designations of martyr and wounded veteran thus help to map out a shared terrain, one that flattens differences in motivation, experience, and circumstance while simultaneously drawing a stark moral boundary between 'plotters' and 'martyrs' (Houston 2018).

Commemorating citizens as soldiers is a key strategy for making this memorial public. Numerous entries in *The Martyrs of July 15* emphasize that citizens' capacity to be soldiers is not just a matter of choice but one of blood. For example, Muhammet Ali Aksu's narrative began by describing his grandfather who had been wounded during the Korean War. From there, the frame broadened: "Some of our grandfathers were martyred as Çanakkale, some during the War of Independence. Muhammet drew his blood from them" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 198). By highlighting the shared visceral substances of the body – above all its blood – civilians have been recast as always potentially soldiers. Commemorating July 15 has thus helped to underpin a militaristic logic in which civilian subjects are "condition[ed]… to believe that death should be the appropriate response if/when the state is under attack" (Yanık & Hisarlıoğlu 2019, 46).

The blurring of the civilian and the soldier also appears in monumental landscapes. In Ankara, for example, government authorities erected a monument to commemorate the defeat of the coup attempt immediately opposite the Presidential Complex (Batuman 2018). The four-sided monument links four key ideas inscribed at its top: One People, One Flag, One Nation, One State (*Tek Millet, Tek Bayrak, Tek Vatan, Tek Devlet*). The side of the 'People' is filled with the bodies of a crowd descending to the level of visitors. The capacity of the 'One People' to be both civilian and martial makes them one of the four pillars. This monument also directly echoes the phrase used to support the 2017 Constitutional Referendum that consolidated political authority in the Presidency ("Tek Millet" 2017), showing how this commemorative project has helped to justify the recent consolidation of power.

Although 'martyr' is ostensibly a shared identity, one individual has become the most important martyr of all: Ömer Halisdemir, the Special Forces officer whose killing of General Semih Terzi during the coup attempt helped to disrupt the coup's execution. His statue – clothed in his soldier's uniform – has become a highly visible part of these commemorations (Hammond 2019). Yet just as civilians who took the streets on July 15 have been recast as 'martyrs,' a close reading of Halisdemir's story in *The Martyrs of July 15* shows that soldiers have also been redefined as exemplary citizens. As Halisdemir's entry in *The Martyrs of July 15* explains, he worked as a shepherd in his free time while completing his education, a fact that highlights his relative poverty and his connection to the land. That connection to the land is further emphasized by describing him as "Anatolia's brave lion (*yiğit arslan*)" and "native child (*öz çocuk*)" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 465). His dreams were typical civilian aspirations, such as his dream to apply for credit from the bank to build a house in his home village of Çukurkuyu (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 464). His story thus signals one way that soldiers have been transformed into model citizens, thus helping to reproduce the military nation.

Citizen/Family Member

These commemorative practices have done more than blur the line between civilian and military life. They have also drawn on and helped to consolidate a specific model of patriarchal family relations (B Gökarıksel et al. 2017; Kocamaner 2019). By making family relations highly visible parts of the commemorative project, domestic lives have been brought into new kinds of relationship with formerly distinct and separate realms.
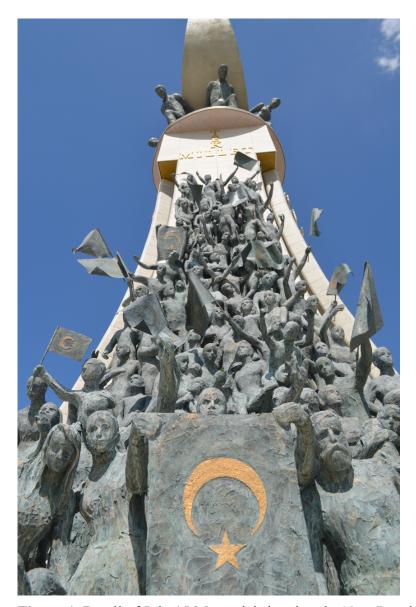
Figure 1. Detail of July 15 Memorial showing the 'One People'. Beştepe, Ankara, Turkey. Photograph by the author, September 2019.

The recently opened Museum of Democracy in the town of Kahramankazan exemplifies this.[4] The town sits adjacent to the Akıncı Airbase, which became one of the key command centers for coup plotters on the night of July 15 and was the site of clashes between military units and town residents. The central section of the museum memorializes the 9 martyrs – all men – who lived in Kahramankazan. Each of the 9 displays presents information and objects in the same fashion: There is a portrait of the person, a freestanding display exhibiting some of their personal effects, and a panel that provides their date of birth, date of death, homeland (*memleket*), spouse, number of children, occupation, and place of martyrdom (*şehadet yeri*). Beyond closely following the organization of a government-issued ID card and thus reproducing a logic of governmentality, the presence of spouse and number of children defines

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[4] The town is located on the outskirts of Ankara. On September 25, 2016, the town's name was changed from Kazan to Kahramankazan (*kahraman* means hero), a deliberate echo of three cities in southeast Turkey whose names were changed following the establishment of Turkey in 1923.

these individuals in terms of their relationship to their family. These objects in the Museum of Democracy thus have a dual role: They both point to an indexical relationship (this was *his* prayer rug and not anybody else's) and highlight an ideal type, one in which families exist within the biopolitical relationships defined by the state.

Figure 2. Exhibits for the 9 'martyrs' of Kahramankazan, Turkey in the Museum of Democracy. The panel on the right lists information about each figure, while the display on the left contains personal effects. Museum of Democracy, Kahramankazan, Turkey. Photograph by author, September 2019.

Like the memorial landscape of the museum, the narratives of *The Martyrs of July 15* emphasize the central role that family played in the lives of those who died. Ayşe Aykaç, for example, was "a mother of four" and "in every moment of her 27-year marriage a self-sacrificing woman (*27 yıllık evliliğin her anında fedakâr bir kadın*)" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 114). Onur Kılıç – had he not been killed during the fighting – would have traveled from Istanbul to Rize to meet the woman that his family was encouraging him to marry (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 224). Ömer Takdemir, 20 years old, was "the apple of his family's eye. Whatever his father said, that was it" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 468). These seemingly innocuous details signal the crucial role that family plays in making the *millet* common.

Echoing the discursive framing of the family, the book's design further emphasizes the central place of the family in this project. Nearly every story is presented on a two-page spread. Each entry begins with a portrait of the individual; on the facing page, readers find a photograph of the individual's family. The families are usually seated in what appears to be their homes. Cabinets, credenzas, closets, and bookshelves are visible at the margins of many images. They are always holding a photo of the martyr. The book's readers are asked to see these individuals both as heroes of the nation and as members of families, further blurring the line between the exceptional and the everyday.

Linking the events of July 15 to the family serves three linked functions. First, it creates an affective relationship between those who died and the public addressed through these commemorative media. This public is encouraged not just to know the names of those who died but to *feel* their loss.

Figure 3. Entry for Ayşe Aykaç in *The Martyrs of July 15* (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017). The page design - portrait, text, family portrait, often holding a photograph of the deceased - is repeated throughout most of the book.

Second, it naturalizes a particular model of the family: A husband whose only desires are to provide for the needs and wishes of his wife and children; mothers who are self-sacrificing and child-rearing; and children who are respectful and dutiful. While this model of the family is neither unique to Turkey nor limited to the contemporary moment, this is a model that has become increasingly visible under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (Kocamaner 2019).[5] Third, this form of commemoration serves to blur the boundaries between the domestic and the public. While these two fields have never been distinct, it is nevertheless striking that *The Martyrs of July 15* chooses to include photographs in each martyrs' home. Their deaths are framed not solely as a national loss but an intimate and domestic one.

Citizen/Muslim

In addition to reconfiguring the relationship between civilian/soldier and citizen/family member, the commemorations of July 15 have also remapped the place of piety. Commemorative practices frequently emphasize the piety of the people who took the streets to challenge the coup attempt. These forms of commemoration participate in the politics of public Islam that have characterized much of the past two decades (Göle 2002). Struggles over how Islam should be made public have played out in

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[5] However, there are other instances in which 'motherhood' has been mobilized not to confirm the biopolitical power of the state but precisely to challenge it and demand justice (Karaman 2016).

multiple arenas and media, ranging from bodies and the politics of consumption (Alimen 2018; Atalan-Helicke 2015; B. Gökarıksel 2012; Houston 2001; Shively 2005) to the design and use of urban landscapes (Batuman 2018; Çınar 2005; Henkel 2007; Walton 2010).

There was no necessary reason that the events of July 15 be framed in religious terms. Even without reference to Islam, the events of the night were dramatic, spectacular, and rich in social and political meaning. The inclusion of pious acts and objects in this commemorative project is thus a strategy that reorients the terms upon which subjects ought to participate in public life. We see this most clearly in the repeated and widespread reference to the performance of ritual ablutions and prayer before challenging the coup attempt.

Performing one's ablutions is, of course, is key to entering a state of ritual purity before prayer. In this case, it also signals one's piety in the face of death. Collectively participating in the performance of ablutions becomes a way to link very different positions and experiences of July 15, ranging from President Erdoğan ("15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi: 2 - Darbe Planın Safhaları" 2016) to the figures whose ablutions were memorialized in a moment installed in front of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in July 2018 (Figure 4). The monument took that image as the basis for the composition of a sequence of 8 male figures arrayed about the pool and depicted performing their ablutions. As the accompanying plaque explained: "They… were not scared of dying but of dying without their ablutions." Memorialized in this monument, these men thus became representative figures of the Muslim nation. Crucially, references to performing ablutions are always gendered, reminding us of the gendered hierarchies that intersect with a shared Muslim identity (cf. McDowell 2008).

Like this memorial landscape that brought Islam into view, *The Martyrs of July 15* located Islam not solely as a practice within the space of the home but also as one that should Muslims into the streets and into relation with a broader transnational and historical field. For example, the book's story about Muhammet Ali Aksu foregrounded the place of prayer in his experience. On learning of the coup attempt, Aksu first prayed before rushing back into the streets, calling out, "As a Muslim, it's now time to examine our faith (*iman*)" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 199). The book's story about Muhammet Fazlı Demir insisted that his greatest love – more than even his family – was martyrdom: "As he saw the blood spilled in Muslim geographies, he wanted to go to war to stop the oppression that was done there. Ömer İpek would frequently tell his family and friends that he desired "to be a martyr like Hz. Hamza" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 466), the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad who died in 624 at the Battle of Uhud. That reference is not explained within the book itself, indicating the broader implicit religious literacy that underpins this book's commemorations.

The effect of this project is three-fold. First, it extends a project of making Islam public that has taken shape over the past two decades. Second, it speaks to the continued challenge of conflating religion, citizenship, and political affiliation (Yılmaz 2018). What are we to make of the people who didn't head out to the streets to protest? Are they bad Muslims? Are they bad citizens? Finally, it raises a question about how Islam is used to justify violence, militarism, and martyrdom. As Pınar Kemerli (2019, 143-44) has recently shown, that linkage has a specific genealogy in contemporary Turkey. The blurring of citizen and pious Muslim in these commemorations demonstrates how that linkage has been further strengthened since 2016.

Muslim/Worker

I turn now to a fourth reconfiguration, one that involves the replacement of a class-based solidarity with a solidarity based on Islam. Throughout *The Martyrs of July 15*, descriptions of the individuals' optimism and generosity in the face of economic realities – poverty, debt, underpaid temporary labor – are used to obscure the political economic conditions that produced those economic realities in the first place.

Figure 4. Statue erected in front of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in July 2018. The arrangement of the figures (all performing their ablutions) duplicates security camera footage from the night of July 15. Saraçhane, Istanbul, Turkey. Photograph by author, July 2018.

Several factors have driven Turkey's economic growth over the past two decades, but two stand out: The massive expansion of the country's construction and real estate sector and the rise in consumer debt (Waldman and Caliskan 2017). Since July 2016, the dollar-Turkish lira exchange rate has worsened considerably, setting in motion a series of cascading economic effects including high inflation and rising unemployment. The Turkish-language news media now regularly carries stories about people who kill themselves over the inability to pay their debates and the generosity of 'Robin Hood' figures who pay the outstanding balance on people's grocery bills. In this context, the decision to frame the economic struggles of those who died as a marker of their individual virtue and piety is telling. It disables political claims based on economic inequality by asking individuals to see themselves as individual subjects, a strategy central to the neoliberal governance of the Justice and Development Party (Tuğal 2012).

For example, readers learn about Muhammet Fazlı Demir, a father who worked for "a just wage" (*helalinden bir geçim*) and whose greatest wish was to own a home, to see the lives that his children achieved and that they lived in a "moral" (*ahlaklı*) fashion (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 202). Likewise, Murat Demirci's "only dream was to provide a good life for his wife and children. He knew well what a family meant. He had learned what poverty was. He worked hard to earn money, he worked day and night" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 206). Mustafa Kaymakçı "was in the midst of financial difficulties. He worked as a security personnel at a housing complex. Around this time, he couldn't pay his rent, his electricity was even cut. It was for this reason that he shut his phone." Despite those limited means, the narrative stresses his generosity in inviting people during Ramadan (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 218). Ömer İpek worked installing outdoor signs but also used to help the poor and the orphans. Even though he grew up in poverty, "He was so charitable (*yardımsever*) he sent the money he borrowed from his older sister to Gaza" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 466). Özgür Gençer worked every day until late in the evening as an electric technician because his only wish was "purchasing a house with a garden to carry on a happy life with his wife and children" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 472).

In contrast, the wealthiest and most privileged are described as modest and not bothering with the social respect accorded to them. The story of İlhan Varank, a well-known academic and brother to Mustafa Varank, Turkey's Minister of Industry and Technology, provides the clearest example of this. "He didn't put stock in the world, if it wasn't required, he didn't even use the title Professor." In fact, he behaved not like a professor but "more like a father, an older brother" (Göksu & Yıldırım 2017, 168). Rendering socio-economic relations as family relations has two linked effects. It naturalizes the forms of respect and affection ostensibly located in the family and it obscures the very real social hierarchies that define Turkey today.

However, this genre of presenting 'economic hardships' has consequences for the memorial public that has emerged in relation to the coup attempt. In contrast to past struggles over commemoration that positioned labor (Ahıska 2011; Houston 2015) against the 'national subject,' we find a different situation today: Remembering these individuals as exemplary entrepreneurial Muslim subjects operates within and helps to reproduce a broader neoliberal narrative.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the project of making the *millet* common through the commemoration of July 15. In doing so, it has sought to show how the Justice and Development Party has achieved success not solely through a top-down exercise of punitive power but also through a project of recruiting individuals to align themselves with the moral geography of the state. For a variety of reasons, describing political, cultural, and economic life in Turkey today under the rubric of the 'authoritarian' is both apt and useful. However, it also demands an analysis that moves beyond simple tropes of autocratic 'sultans' to an engagement with the projects of linkage through which people associate themselves with the state. Commemorative projects are always engaged in that productive work.

More broadly, this paper expands how geographers of memory conceptualize their objects of study in two ways. First, despite a rich tradition of scholarship on commemorative landscapes, many geographers tend to focus either on specific sites (e.g., a particular monument) or on a single genre (e.g., novels, films, etc.). There is less attention to the ways that objects, images, and discourses circulate between many different sites and media. This paper's conceptualization and analysis of a 'memorial public' has sought to provide one such approach for moving between these different sites and media. This helps us understand that the 'common' nature of collective memory is never self-evident but depends upon shifting forms of linkage and affiliation.

Second, critical analyses of monuments often highlight how these monuments 'invent' the past. While such accounts are obviously important, they can also be limited by an assumption that the past is *only* invented. The memorial public of July 15 is new, but it is simultaneously entangled with commemorative traditions that have deep roots in and beyond Turkey. Understanding these traditions and the memorial publics that they shape requires greater attention both to how memorial publics link past, present, and future (Asad 1986) and to other models of temporality (Çaylı 2015).

The coup attempt of July 15 continues to dominate political and social life in Turkey, making it almost impossible to articulate a different memorial public. Although this paper did not offer an alternative, it holds out the hope for a memorial public that embraces rather than refuses its own contingency, recognizing "that what has come together, in this place, now, is a conjunction of many histories and many spaces" (Massey 1995, 191).

Acknowledgments

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