# WHITENESS AS AN ACT OF BELONGING: WHITE TURKS PHENOMENON IN THE POST 9/11 WORLD

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*Abstract*: Turks, along with other people of the Middle East, retain a claim to being "Caucasian". Technically white, Turks do not fit neatly into Western racial categories especially after 9/11, and with the increasing normalization of racist discourses in Western politics, their assumed religious and geographical identities categorise "secular" Turks along with their Muslim "others" and, crucially, suggest a "non-white" status. In this context, for Turks who explicitly refuse to be presented along with "Islamists", "whiteness" becomes an act of belonging to "the West" (instead of the East, to "the civilised world" instead of the world of terrorism). The White Turks phenomenon does not only reveal the fluidity of racial categories, it also helps question the meaning of resistance and racial identification "from below". In dealing with their insecurities with their place in the world, White Turks fall short of leading towards a radical democratic politics.

*Keywords*: Whiteness, White Turks, Race, Turkish Culture, Post 9/11.

## INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY WHITE TURKISHNESS

Until recently, sociologists and social scientists have had very little to say about Whiteness as a distinct socio-cultural racial identity, typically problematizing only non-white status. The more recent studies of whiteness in the literature on race and ethnicity have moved us beyond a focus on racialised bodies to a broader understanding of the active role played by claims to whiteness in sustaining racism. Thanks to this literature, we know that white identity has not been stable, and its definitions have changed over time, in interaction with the institutions of slavery, colonial settlement, citizenship, industrial labour and so on.

The existing literature on Whiteness, however, has been dominated by a focus on black-white dynamics (Alcoff 2015; Williamson 1984), how certain ethnic minorities in the US became white (Jacobson 1998; Brodkin 2002; Ignatiev 1996), and dynamics of Western colonialism (López 2002; McClintock 1995), giving little

attention to whiteness outside of a Western context. The role played by claims to whiteness by non-Western populations such as the Turks has been relatively ignored, for instance (notable exception is Arat-Koc 2012). This is so despite the fact that culturally mediated discourses on integration to "Western Civilization" often takes the form of a racial hierarchization. "White Turkishness" has gained additional meaning in current Turkish politics, especially after September 11 and in the context of the turn towards authoritarianism in a nation situated on the margins of Europe, and pulled apart by the conflict between East and West, radical Islam and the American and Russian-led war against terror.

The pro-"Western" orientation, or, Orientalism, in what is now knows as Turkey dates back to the Ottoman era. For almost one hundred years, Ottoman Turks paid the Western press to promote a positive image, first, of their empire, and, then, of their republic (Ozyurek 2004). Then, this attitude continues strong during the early Republican period. Sources tell us of the few Turkish anthropologists, including Kemal Atatürk's (the founder of the modern Turkish Republic) adopted daughter, Afet Inan, who were traveling throughout Anatolia, taking skull measurements to prove that the Turkish race was the ancestor of all civilizations. It is intriguing to think about the aim to make Turkish identity almost "more Western" than "the West" itself[1]. Orhan Pamuk, the well-known Turkish novelist, describes the sociopsychological stance of the people of the early Republic as such: "Ours was the guilt, the loss, and jealousy felt at the sudden destruction of the last traces of a great culture and a great civilization that were unfit or unprepared to inherit […] in our frenzy to turn Istanbul into a pale, poor, second-class imitation of a Western city" (Pamuk 2004: 211). So, there is a history of orientalism in the country- which is simultaneously a history of shame, pride, and resentment. However, the old element of Orientalism has gained new meanings and interpretations in the post-9/11 World. In this new world, it is not enough to "prove" connections to "the West" – Turkishness also needs to be differentiated and distanced from the Eastern "others". However, these "others" are so close to "us", the Turks, both socio-historically and geographically, that they stand in our way of connecting with the West (Arat-Koc 2007: 40).

Although the term of "White Turks" has started to be in circulation since the 1990s, it gained more popularity since the current religious government came to power in 2002. The new prominence and visibility of "White Turks" has been created by the influence of mainstream and populist discourses on race, religion, and terrorism in the post 9/11 world. The discourse about "White Turks" started as a topic of cynical humour and class-based critique before it came to be claimed and appropriated by secular urbanites. The reason for this appropriation is the socio-political, cultural and economic changes in Turkey since the 1980s which I detail below – such as the neo-liberal economic policies which divided cities as winners and losers; Kurdish nationalism and a harsh militaristic response by the state and years of civil war; the growth and the visibility in the daily life of "political Islam". However, the terrorist acts both in Turkey and in Europe, and the global war on terror which resulted with the increasing racialization and criminalization of Muslims exacerbated the us versus them mentality. In this context, "whiteness" has become a claim to being part of the West, instead of the East, to "the civilised world" instead of the world of "terrorists".

## WHITENESS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

As Linda Martin Alcoff suggests in *The Future of Whiteness* (2015), the everyday way of using race-terms in relation to visibly demarcated and socially significant characteristics can merge into ethnic differentiations. "The efforts of governments, social scientists and political philosophers to keep these categories neatly distinguishable is no doubt useless" (Alcoff 2015: 21). In the US context, some studies follow whiteness in general, while others consider the history of specific groups in relation to white identity. There is significant and expansive work on the "whitening" and the "assimilation" of Jewish (Brodkin 2002; Hattam 2007; Goldstein 2008) and Southern European (Jacobson 1998; Guglielmo 2003; Roediger 2006) communities as well as the Irish (Roediger 2006; Ignatiev 1996) and the Latinos (Martinez 1997; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Alcoff 2009). Socially, the Irish and southern Europeans are still marked as different by the phrase "white ethnics", a term never used for whites with an English, French or German

lineage (Alcoff 2015: 14). Legally, also, their relationship to whiteness has been unstable. Whiteness has at times, and in some states, included Latinos, while in others it has not. What is more, these historical shifts do not always suggest a progress. In Texas, Latinos were classified as white so that the courts would not have to appoint Latinos to juries with Latino defendants. If the defendant is considered to be white, then an all-Anglo jury would be deemed "a jury of peers" (Alcoff 2015:22).

Similarly, people from the Middle East, from Syrians and Turks to Armenians, have found their status contested. In "Compulsory Whiteness" (2007) John Tehranian lists a series of reported cases of individuals of Middle Eastern descent who sued the US government, petitioning to obtain naturalization on the grounds that they were white by law. When their naturalization claims were rejected, it was not biology or any exogenous notion of race that settled the matter; it was assimilability, more specifically, religious differences. In 1942, the US District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan rejected an Arab man's claim to citizenship on the grounds that he did not qualify as white. By contrast, two years after the Michigan decision, a federal court in Massachusetts held that an Arab man qualified as white. The decision pointed at "the action and interaction of Arabic and non-Arabic elements of our culture" (Tehranian 2007: 15). What is more, similar to their Latino counterparts, for people with Middle Eastern background, being legally considered as white does not necessarily mean improvement in their political and economic condition. Today, legally, the people from the Middle East are not different from a blue-eyed blonde migrant from a Northern European country. The Code of Federal Regulations defines someone who is "White, not of Hispanic origin" as a "person having origins in any of the original people of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East" (Tehranian 2010: 37). This makes Middle-Easterners ineligible for affirmative action policies and other benefit systems, despite the intense levels of vilification and discrimination in recent years, especially in the wake of the war on terrorism after September 11, 2001. Therefore, although the official government position on racial categorization is clear and seemingly uncomplicated, the actually existing racial status of Middle Eastern individuals is unclear. As John Tehranian (2007: 4) suggests, reified as the other, individuals of Middle Eastern descent

are "white before the law but not on the street". On the street, at the airport, as a job applicant, they do not enjoy the benefits of white privilege. Yet, as white under the law, they are denied the consequences of remedial action. Muslim community leaders and social workers have been noting that they increasingly work with refugees from countries such as Iraq, Sudan and Somalia. However, social service agencies cannot demonstrate the communities' needs for social services without the requisite demographic data. This is also why activists have been lobbying the US Census Bureau to grant minority status to Americans with roots in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The campaign began in 1980s, but grew stronger in the last decade in response to government policies in the "war on terror". In the 2010 census, many Middle Easterners skipped the question entirely as a form of silent protest[2]. Finally, in 2015, the Census Bureau started to test different ways to allow people to identify as being from the MENA region.

Middle Eastern-Americans are one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse panethnic groups, yet they share cultural, linguistic and religious identities that cut across national boundaries. Generally, they identify themselves along national (e.g. Iranian, Israeli, Turkish), supranational or ethnic (e.g. Arab), or ethnoreligious (e.g. Armenian, Jewish) categories (Bozorgmehr and Bakalian 2013). There are scholars, such as John Tehranian (2010), Amaney et.al (2008), Sarah Gualtieri (2009) and Helen Samhan (1999), Bozorgmehr et. al (1996) who expose the ambiguous racial status and categorizations on Middle Eastern and Arab Americans. These scholars have rightly pointed at the invisibility problem born out of an instance of arbitrary classification of these populations as white. They document the legal and political practices which enable discriminatory conduct against individuals of Middle Eastern descent Americans. They follow how Middle Easterners have faced rising degrees of violence over time, as we can see with recent targeted immigration policies, racial profiling, the war on terrorism, and growing rates of job discrimination and hate crime. They also look at racial identification "from below". Tehranian shows how many Middle Eastern Americans can opt out of their racial categorization in the daily life in order to "pass" as white. This is easier for those who naturally possess lighter skin, hair and eyes, of course. But Tehranian also notes the Middle Eastern women dying their hair blonde, or wearing contact lenses

to downplay their more "ethnic" features. Middle Eastern men, on the other hand will go by the name "Mike" for Mansour, "Mory" for Morteza, "Al" for Ali, and "Moe" for Mohammed. What is more, many Iranians identify as "Jewish" "to avoid any further questions about their ethnicity, as people assume their ethnicity is Jewish and that they are, therefore, white" (Tehrani 2007: 19).

Besides these limited number of works, however, there is very little critical analysis of whiteness in non-Western, non-European contexts. The interaction between racial and ethnic or national identification and categorizations of people from the Middle East is still understudied. Sedef Arat-Koc (2012) studies "transnational whiteness" as a category of distinction within as well as between nations and regions. The "White Turks" in her study claim power and superiority over others in the same society. Mucahit Bilici, on the other hand, seems even more critical of the White Turks who he claims "are ideal Turkish citizens not by any virtue of their own, but be- cause they belong to the cultural milieu and the constitutive elite that initially defined the notion of Turkishness" A White Turk is "[a]n ideal citizen [who] tends to subsume all ethnic identities – including his own, which is most likely non-Turkish – under the banner of Turkishness" (Bilici 2009: 34). Ten years ago I would have agreed with Bilici. However, as we see below, Erdogan's identifying himself as a "Black Turk" matters. It matters because as the prime minister, and probably one of the most charismatic and influential leaders for his tens of millions of supporters, he was producing what Brubaker and Cooper (2000) would refer to as "identification". Clarifying the difference between identity and identification, Brubaker and Cooper suggest that identification is a process whereby a person is identified or categorised, and the state has both material and symbolic resources to impose these categories, to identify persons as a member of a racial group, and a classificatory scheme. With identifying himself and therefore his followers as black Turks, Erdogan did not leave much choice for his opposes to be identified as "white". White Turks today are not only the elites, any more. It is possible to have meet religious cab drivers, students, and unemployed musicians (aggressively) owning the title, complaining about the status quo. What is more, not only the government, but the Turkish State has changed its traditionally secular character which used to bring reservations about all groups except the White Turks.

Therefore, I suggest that the recent developments in Turkey and the Middle East, the increasing authoritarianism and the power of the religious government in Turkey as well as the effects of the post 9/11 racial configurations in the region call for further analyses. This paper will help fill this gap.


## THE TURKISH CASE: BLACK TURK / WHITE TURK AS RACIALISED NOTIONS OF A WAY OF LIFE

By geographically and culturally belonging both to the "East" and the "West", Turkey has always struggled with a national identity and its international status. It has been described as a country with "ambivalent ties to Europe" (Müftüler Baç 2004: 31), as an "in-between" (Robins 1996: 65-66), and a "hybrid" (Diez 2005: 633) place, which is "impossible to categorize" (Müftüler Baç 1998: 248). Tassinari (2008) defined Turkey as a "peculiarly marginal" country, as it is not fully "marginal", i.e. not a full EU member, but part of the Customs Union, partly within the EU's power structure, and partly modern but not fully European according to many.

This in-betweenness can be a gift unless a nation yields to "ontological insecurity". Anthony Giddens defined ontological security as "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" – so the relational aspect, how one stands in relation to and/or among others, is crucial. In international relations, although there is a conflict between a psychological versus relational stance, the concept means that states perform actions in order to underwrite their notions of "who they are" (Ayse Zarakol 2010). Turkey joined the European international society in the 19th century as a stigmatised outsider. The *insecurity* created by that international environment has been built into the identity of the Turkish state. It is not only the state, however, but also its people that have struggled with an "us versus them" phenomenon both within and outside of state borders.

Emre Uslu (2013), writing for the *Taraf* daily newspaper, talks about "White Turks" as owners of companies with mutual funds, stocks, and bonds, as well as the banks. Black Turks own small

businesses and corner stores. White Turks own ships and planes, while black Turks drive cabs and busses to make ends meet. Writing on a popular TV drama for another daily, *Radikal*, Tayfun Atay differentiates the White Turks from the black Turks as such: The whites are urban, Western, bourgeois, modern and secular; the black Turks are a part of the rural, Eastern, feudal, traditional and conservative. Besides this dichotomy, however, there's the "Whitened Black Turkish" group, whose feudal background comes to the surface when they are "pissed off".

When the concept of white Turks emerged in the 1990s, it emerged from cynical humor and a class-based critique by leftist writers and journalists. The target population was first the old bureaucrat-minded state elites, and then the new urban classes who seemingly benefited from the new market ideology of the post 1980s Turkey. Only in the 2000s, I suggest that, with the increasing power and the authoritarianism of the religious government, the concept has become an identity which is (proudly) claimed and appropriated not only by the middle and upper-middle classes, but by more diverse groups of secularists in reaction to the changes in the socio-political structure and hierarchy in the Republic of Turkey. These changes can be symbolised with the current head of state Tayyip Erdogan who was a prime minister and the leader of the religious AK Party when he called himself a black Turk in 2003 in a report published by *The New York Times*. He said: "In this country, there is a segregation of Black Turks and White Turks… Your brother Tayyip belongs to the Black Turks" (Brennan and Herzog 2014: xvi).

To see what is both specific and potentially generalizable in the Turkish case requires going back to a set of recent events that help to explain why and how whiteness came to be valued in this particular context. During the 1980s and especially the 90s, Turkey experienced the rise of Kurdish nationalism, and a militaristic response by the Turkish state. The devastating consequences of this civil war and years of unrest increased chauvinistic Turkish nationalism and racism. The same period also witnessed the growth of "Islamic" movement in Turkish politics. Terms such as "the other Turkey" were used to refer to the lower class people, many of them being Kurds seeking refuge from the civil war, or migrating to cities in search of employment. With the rise of Islam in the political arena, however, another term, "the dark crowds"

started to be used to signify the religious sectors of the society, regardless of their economic condition, referring to the women's black religious attire, chador, or kara carsaf[3].

During this time, cities were almost literally divided into two sections as "the winners" and "the losers" (Arat-Koç 2007: 44). Consumption became a need to be considered civilised. Journalists like Mehmet Barlas and Çetin Altan praised the better life conditions in the West, arguing that Turkish people deserved much better conditions and the luxury like they see in the Western world (Bali 2002: 307). Although their reader was the educated urbanites, most of these journalists wrote in a way as if they were talking to these rural migrants in their columns. Güneri Civaoğlu was giving advice on how to appropriately approach young women. Serdar Turgut was demanding from migrants to pay attention to body odor issues (Bali 2002: 309). Hadi Uluengin was differentiating living in a city and being urbanised (Bali 2002: 310).

The most infamous case, however, was the highly sensational column written for Radikal Daily by Turkish writer and columnist Mine Kirikkanat. Her article can be an example to what Tanil Bora claims: that the difference was not only a matter of cultural capital, but it was also seen as a matter of physical capital. The following extract fully reveals a stereotype about Black Turks:

[After the Ataturk Airport] Alongside the sea begin the territories of – not even Arabia – but a version of Ethiopia […] or we may as well call it, the "Carnivore Islamistan". Anything non-Istanbul, anyone not from Istanbul is here. Three million people […] move to Istanbul (every year) to graze on meat on the grass on Sundays […] As cars pass by the green space […] the only thing that is at eye level is the barbecue grills. Men in their undergarments lie down and chew like cows, women either wearing black chadors or a headscarf – but covered without exception – fan the grill, prepare tea and cradle their babies or push them on the swing […] Our inlander people turn their behinds to the sea, grill, and eat meat with no exception. You can never see a single family among them who cook fish! Perhaps, if they liked fish, if they knew how to cook fish, they would not lie down with their dirty white tank tops and long underwear, perhaps they would not scratch themselves continuously, would not chew like cows, would not be so thick, so short-legged, so long-armed, and so hairy (Mine Kirikkanat on 27 July 2005, *Radikal*, cited in Demiralp 2012: 516).

In this author's post 9/11 article, categorical differences come in the form of physical appearance, nutrition habits, etiquette, and dress code. Fundamentally, secular Istanbul is invaded and polluted by the provincial "Islamistan" whose members are demarcated on the basis of not only a self of values and practices but also some visible phenotypic features. Today, we have a Turkey which has tried to maintain its geopolitical identity as a "bridge" between the allies in the West and its "rogue" Middle Eastern neighbours. And central to this "bridge" role is the image of Turkey as a "good Muslim" or "model Muslim" country which attributes to itself what are otherwise thought to be the incompatible combinations of democracy, secularism, and Islam" (Arat-Koc: 46), even if this image has been severely wounded recently. The "Islamist" government has managed the elimination of the old aggressive secularism that effectively excluded whole segments of the population, especially devout Muslims, from access to political and economic power. On the other hand, the government has also seized the traditional articulation of secularism in Turkey, namely state control and regulation of religion, to impose its own vision of religious orthodoxy. Especially since the failed coup d'état on 15 July 2016, and the state of emergency declared on 20 July, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has led a massive purge within the Turkish state and society. From the military, the judiciary, the police, and the academy, tens of thousands of civil servants have been sacked. Universities and schools, nongovernmental organizations and newspapers have been shut down, and many rightly talk about the increasing power of the governing classes in a country which is the proof when governing does not mean democracy. The Turkish state has since been labelled by European commentators as "the sick man of Europe, once again"[4], or, not even *of* Europe, but "the sick man of Middle East"[5], and "the lonely man of Middle East"[6]. Western media is full of commentaries of a Turkey "moving toward authoritarianism". The European Union's progress reports warn of "regression" on democratic norms, and the United States officials often voice "concern" over the state of freedoms in Turkey[7]. These narratives have triggered a reflexive attitude, a reaction among the educated, secular urbanites in Turkey. These groups have found themselves ashamed of their country, as Turkey seems to be falling short, both economically[8] and socio-culturally. These are the people who have

come to identify with "white Turkishness" as a way of being part of the West.


## WHITE TURKISHNESS IN PRACTICE

We focus too often on the gap between the West and the East and miss the gap among those *in* either of these categories. Just like there is no one, single, coherent "West", in practice, the "White Turks" also have differing takes, propositions and discourses-they are not one concrete mass. Secular, orientalist, nationalist, even racist, neoliberal, or liberal-leftist, social democrat, and different combinations of these stances can be found among these groups. What had indeed started to be a middle and upper-middle class orientation now involves various classes and groups, as a reaction to a repressive and authoritarian government. What seems to be a common characteristic is an "imagined shared orientation" (Alcoff 2015: 79). A certain set of practices (of consumption and a sense of a "lifestyle") act as affective elements to signify one's belonging to this group. That is, white identity has become manifest in how one conducts one's life. The maintenance of a certain lifestyle is so important that one of the major journalists, the editor of a daily newspaper, *Hürriyet* (which means Liberty/Freedom), and the author of "the Diary of a White Turk", Ertugrul Ozkok, defines White Turks as those who identify with Western lifestyle and perspective. The way through which these groups fight against their current weak status (as opposition not only to the religious government but also the intelligentsia) is through "advocating their lifestyle"[9]. Below, I give a few examples to how these groups define and maintain their "whiteness" through symbols, and a lifestyle.


### *The headscarf*

The headscarf is one of the most loaded signifiers of religious and social identification. Therefore for a woman to not cover herself or, if covered, *aestheticizing* the headscarf may act as symbols of "whiteness".
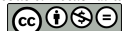
Mucahit Bilici (2009), with old reason, finds it peculiar that "some White Turks feel offended when they see a religious woman or man […]. This would be a non-issue if it were only a matter of taste, but it is not". Bilici claims that for the Turkish State, there are only two modes of wearing a headscarf that are considered legitimate: grandma's and the servant's. Religious women, he writes, who wear the headscarf often hear the argument "my grandma also wears a headscarf but yours is different […] The young women's choice to wear the headscarf is seen as offensive and antithetical to enlightenment and modernity" (Bilici 2009: 33). I believe this was to true for decades, especially with the socio-political visibility and power of Islam. During my years in Istanbul, I used to overhear middle aged women complain about "those covered women having moved all the way to [insert the name of any upper middle class, secular neighbourhood]". However, I also believe that things have changed since then. The meanings attributed to the headscarf, or, rather, the affective power of the headscarf, started to change first with the initially hopeful years of the religious government – The Kurdish initiative, the women initiative, the Cyprus initiative and so on, as well as the economic growth of the early 2000s. As a matter of fact, the religious first lady herself ended up being labelled as a White Turk, *because of* her headscarf. Ertugrul Ozkok, the self-identified *White Turkish* editor I mentioned before, claims that the religious first lady (Erdogan's wife) fits into the category of "the White Turk" even though she wears the headscarf:

I had seen her in one of her pictures. She was very stylish. I had thought that her clothing looked aesthetically wonderfully pleasant with her headscarf. This is how you bring the headscarf to its normal place in society instead of keeping it as a disruptive factor. About this issue, what I especially want the most is that the headscarf becomes just a symbol of a belief. Not a requirement for belonging somewhere. It is of course very good if you add some aesthetics to this […] White Turks have an understanding of aesthetics"[10].

Not everyone agrees with Ozkok, however. For some, it is not that easy to become a White Turk. One of the nationalist/ conservative authors, Lütfü Şahsuvaroğlu criticises "the new bourgeoisie" of the rural sections of Anatolia: "[…] when they found

the money, they thought of themselves as White Turks. They think that one could be a White Turk by wearing ties and foreign brand headscarves. They are our new bourgeoisie. Long live [kutlu olsun]"[11].

The secularist media in Turkey widely heralded the French ban on religious symbols in schools as a welcome validation of Turkish secularism. And Turkish secularists publicised favorably the French government's decision to exclude the then Turkish prime minister's wife, who wears a headscarf, from an official EU-related visit (Gökarıksel and Mitchell 2005: 148). These Turkish secularists see covering women's head or the body altogether, and particularly their new urban style, as a threat to the republic, its ideal citizen and the modern way of life (Göle 1996 cited in Gökarıksel and Mitchell 2005). For them, veiling is a practice not only of "dark and distant lands" but also of the "dark and distant (Ottoman) past", when Muslim women's veiling was the norm.

*The facial hair problem*

Arus Yumul, in "Fashioning the Turkish Body Politic" (2010: 363), talks about well-known member of Istanbul high society, who expressed her views about "Black Turks" in the following way:

My humble opinion is that we should provide those of our citizens, one-half of whose face is covered with black hair and the other with a black mustache, with job opportunities in those regions where they were born and grew up. If our businessmen from the eastern, southeastern and Black Sea regions, in spite of investing in Istanbul and its surroundings, turned towards their own hometowns, neither the mustached would conquer Istanbul […] nor would the "black-mustached" image remain.

From this perspective, a civilised body cannot allow a black mustache. Ozkok, the editor of *Hurriyet* daily resented the stereotypical visual representation of the Turks in the European media always with a black moustache in the following way: "Even if we get rid of our mustache the mustache does not abandon us. It sounds as if the black tassel be it in our heads [referring to the fez] or on our lips, has clung to us like a bur, as if it is our destiny" (Özkök 1998, cited in Yumul 2010). The mustache became

the most important obstacle for those who desired to project a modern Turkish image to the West. For this reason, physical appearance gained importance in the eyes of the Westernised elites. The primary aim of this operation of what Rıfat Bali (2002: 185) refers to as "image renovation" in the early years of the Republic was to substitute the black-moustached image of the Turks in Western public opinion with a new one: an image that would not differentiate Turkish men from European men. One journalist urged the then minister of foreign affairs to get rid of his mustache as soon as possible since in international forums the mustache was associated with the Middle East and as such did not befit the modern image of Turkey (Bali 2002: 182).

We should not think that this is a concern shared only by the "elite". Over the past two decades, as images of the bearded Al-Qaeda or Isis militants have flooded the airwaves, facial hair and radical Islam have grown intertwined in the social imagery in general. Almost each time I fly back to the USA from visiting family and friends in Turkey, I overhear men joke about how they "had to" shave before coming to the airport so that they "will not look like a terrorist". In this sense, shaving becomes a survival strategy (Tehrani 2007: 20). Right after the botched coup on 15 July 2016, while waiting on the line to check-in at Istanbul Ataturk Airport, I heard a young man who was right in front of me tell his friend about how he always shaves. He said that since he does not have facial hair, now he was not so concerned about the Americans being suspicious of him, but, referring to the Turkish government, "that these people will realize that I'm one of those hot [cillop gibi] White Turks".

*Ataturk paraphernalia*

Another symbol is the image of Atatürk, the secularist founder of the republic. Quite tellingly, an important factor that led to the commercialization and privatization of Ataturk imagery in the 1990s was the emergence of Islamic symbols in the public political market. Women with headscarves or veils crowding the secularist institutions of the modern republic were the first signs of the public visibility of Islam (Gole 1996). These new religious crowds could swim in sex-segregated pools (Bilici 2000), go to restaurants

that did not serve alcohol (Houston 2001), listen to Islamic radio stations (Azak 2000), and attend fashion shows featuring the new designs in head scarves and overcoats (Navaro-Yashin 2002; White 2002). As kind of a fight back, the images of Atatürk displayed as photographs or pins do not only express one's secular identity (as opposed to Islamist) but they also "prove" Atatürk's "Western" characteristics: "his blond hair, blue eyes, very stylish Western attire, and "modern acts"- such as dancing with beautiful women at balls" (Arat-Koc 2007: 48). This Atatürk is not a larger-than-life figure of a soldier, with his omnipotent authority of the state. Rather, he is a man who drinks alcohol, enjoys activities like playing golf, and is in the company of unveiled, stylish women.

The newly popular and commercialised Ataturk paraphernalia usually take the form of pins, crystal ornaments, and small pictures. These miniature representations are displayed in private businesses, in homes, and, more importantly, as Esra Ozyurek shows (2004), on the bodies of private citizens. Although the actual complex experiences of those marked as white are varied, and many do not have economic privileges, Ozyurek found that most of the Kemalists in Istanbul who eagerly purchased pictures of the leader to display in their homes and businesses are middle- and upper-middle-class, Turkish (not Kurdish) secular urbanites. They have been living in a major city for two generations, do not necessarily position themselves on either the right or the left end of the political spectrum, but are adamantly opposed to the emergent Islamist movement. One of these White Turks is a middle-aged woman who lives in the predominantly secular, upscale neighborhood in Istanbul. She says that she started wearing an Ataturk pin after Islamists gained power in the 1994 local elections: "I have my Ataturk against their veils" (Ozyurek 2004: 378).

*Social media campaigns*

As an alternative to state-controlled media, the people of Turkey frequently turn to social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. These media do not only serve as a way of information exchange but are also spaces of protest. One example of this is secular Turkish Facebook users adding "TC" to their names. This social media backlash against the Islamist government

was a result of the removal of the Turkish Republic's (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti – TC) initials from the Ministry of Health's logo. Some secularists saw this move as another step to undermine the Turkish state's national and secular character. For these social media users, TC symbolises a preference for a secular society against the inordinate influence of religion which, they claim, is creeping back in.

*Aristocracy discussion*

It is obvious that different individuals will interpret the same incident in different ways, and there will be arguments over the practices and characteristics which mark identities. Similarly, there are cracks between those who identify with White Turkishness. In other words, symbols and rituals are not only used to differentiate the White Turks from the Black Turks, but also the "real white Turks" from the so-called pretenders. For instance, according to a well-known author, Alev Alatli, Ertugrul Ozkok who is mentioned above, is not a "real White Turk". On the contrary, the actual White Turks have constantly been disappointed by the *paçozluk-* the rough, unpolished, unkempt, ragged style of columnists like Ozkok, along with other media pundits and celebrities in the cultural realm[12].

Ilber Ortayli, a leading historian and a well-known public figure, says that the educated, upper middle class, secular groups who identify with white Turkishness are not, in fact, "so white". White Turkishness, according to Ortayli, should represent an aristocracy that is transferred "from father to son", a quality which is lacking in modern Turkey. Those who are labelled as *white* "do not hold enough qualities […] they have such clayish sides to them! We are talking about a group with extremely low standards". The aristocracy which he refers to here, he claims, is not a European style aristocracy, as "the Ottoman was a socialist structure. Regardless of how much you have, you could lose your head. The property had no owner". Today's so-called white Turks, says Ortayli, appeared when this socialist system dissolved. They are the "new money" – those who cannot be an aristocracy, nor a bourgeoisie assume themselves to be white Turks even though they are not[13].

## CONCLUSION: AIMING FOR MORE THAN A LIFESTYLE

In *Uprooting Racism* Paul Kivel (1995) talks about a workshop on racism he was conducting where he attempted to divide the group into a caucus of people of colour and a caucus of white people so each group could have a more in-depth discussion. A white, Christian woman stands up and says: "I'm not really white because I'm not part of the white male power structure that perpetuates racism". Next a white gay man stands up claims his sexual orientation prevents him from benefiting from the privileges of being white. Then a poor, working class white man claims he has got it "just as hard as any person of color". Finally, a straight white middle class man says: "I'm not white, I'm Italian". Kivel's African American co-worker turns to him and asks, "Where are all the white people who were here just a minute ago?". Kivel replies, "Don't ask me. I'm not white, I'm Jewish!" (Kivel 1995: 10)

It might be understandable why white people do not want to be perceived as white when the subject is racism, because the exchange might bring up feelings of guilt, embarrassment or hopelessness (Kivel 1995). But these definitions, categorizations and the relationship between ethnic and racial identities are vague at best. Although Turks are not necessarily familiar with American-style racial categories, the terms "black" and "white" have been used to refer to inequalities and now they expose the recent shift in power dynamics. Turkish whiteness, in the sense of Westernised, secular, educated, upper class individuals, has a long history and, I would argue, was rarely rejected by the owners of this title. However, it is not only the old constitutive elite of the early Republic and their descendants who claim whiteness anymore. The formation of white Turkishness filled a void created by the history of the politics of westernization, the growing socio-cultural and political presence of Islam, the global discourse on "the war on terror", as well as the terrorist attacks in Turkey and Europe. Since 9/11 these issues have entered political discourse in disturbing new ways. The old "guestworkers" of Europe, for instance, are now defined first and foremost as "Muslim", regardless of their religious affiliation. And post 9/11 governing in the West through religious lines and differentiations has further racialised a people who have always been at the ambiguous border between the East and the West. Turkey, on the other hand, has always been author-

itarian towards its minorities- be them ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities. But for the last two decades or so the repressive and undemocratic implementations, as well as the physical violence (which used to be largely limited to the Kurdish-majority southeast), are affecting Turks and minorities alike. When a white man bombs an abortion clinic the western media will not demand whites denounce violent extremism. But any terror attack deemed "Islamic" remind Turks of histories, identities, categories many want to distance themselves from. The grass is definitely greener in the garden of Whiteness. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Turkish secularists, and not only the upper-class elites, end up finding themselves against the "other" category, the Black Turks. In this sense, whiteness gains a meaning by its differentiation from blackness. If Black Turks are backward, White Turks are progressive. If Black Turks are religious and Muslim, White Turks are spiritual. If Black Turks follow the cultural practices of the (Middle) East, White Turks are Western, and so on.

Although the Turkish case is in some ways uniquely depressing, it is part of a much larger trend. In the context of globalization, every society has been affected by "global white supremacy" (Mills 1997: 3). Throughout Europe and the United States, right-wing politicians are abusing the terrorist attacks to voice and justify their closed borders demands. Universally, white privilege still reigns supreme and wave after wave of nationalism, isolationism, and racism are being normalised. However, White Turkishness helps us look at racial categories from a different perspective. Studying contemporary examples of colorisms which do not involve the biological conceptualization of race does not only help us expose the arbitrariness of Western racial categories, expose heterogeneity within every group as well as the similarities across groups. This study also helps "to displace the normativity of the white position by seeing it as a strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential 'identity'" (Bhabha 1998: 21).

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) have produced a concept of "racial formation" as a way to talk about racial formation as a bottom-up/top-down dialectic. They rightly suggest that social movements of resistance, and not just state institutions, play a role in this formation (Alcoff 2015: 63). In this vein, White Turkishness reminds us that social categories of identity are not merely imposed upon us from above, but they are produced,

shifted, bended out of socio-historical events. Yet, resistance must not end up reproducing a "clash of cultures", as there is difference between conflict and resistance. Conflict can be good, can benefit us, rejuvenate us, give us a purpose. But it is limiting as long as it does not lead us anywhere except holding on to a lifestyle. Turkey was never an example of freedom and democracy, even in years of stability. However, in the past, disaffection and discontent would have led to some political action, an emphasis on production, a demand, a claim. Today all sides are expressing their grievances through a crude identity politics. In their own ways, racist populism, secular white Turkishness, liberal-leftist white Turkishness and radical Islamism are each illustration of a socio-political blockage. Perhaps resistance starts with rejecting the political commodification of September 11. With constantly demanding to see the "non-white" faces of the victims of 9/11 as well as violence in general, both in the Middle East and abroad. Instead of trying to be accepted through the gates of White Europeanness, it is our responsibility to reveal whiteness as a tool of authority, victimizing those who cannot "pass" both within and outside of our country's borders.

NOTES

[1] It might be worthwhile to include here another moment in history as it is common to hear Turks using this narrative to justify their Orientalism against a specific population in the Middle East, namely, the Arabs. During the First World War, which ushered in the end of multinational empires and the rise of nation-states, Ottomans sided with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Some of the Arab territories which then belonged to the Ottoman Empire, however, joined the Allies, as they hoped for self-determination. Ottomans neither understood not forgave this "betrayal".

[2] This might be the only way of silent protest as any time someone chooses "some other race" on the census, then writes in an ethnicity or nationality from the Middle East or North Africa, they are re-coded as white.

[3] There are various ways of covering of women according to religious and cultural identifications and/or habits. The veil or *kara carsaf (*or *chador)* covers all of the body, except for the face, and sometimes only the eyes, and is usually black in color. The headscarf can cover the head and sometimes the neck and the shoulders, and come in various colors. These are usually cultural signifiers of differing class and social status, as well as religiosity.

[4] http://atimes.com/2016/07/the-sick-man-of-europe-once-again/

[5] http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MID-01-050214.html.

[6] http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/07/turkey-lonely-man-of-the-middle- east.html.

[7] http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/turkey-erdogan-anti-west.html.

[8] The domestic saving rate declining, productivity having been stagnant, the US dollar spiking against the Turkish lira after the botched coup.

⁹ http://www.posta.com.tr/turkiyenin-yeni-ezilen-kesimi-beyaz-turkler-haberi-223176   access date August 1, 2016.

¹⁰ http://www.dha.com.tr/beyaz-turkler-daga-mi-ciksin_640780.html access date August 1, 2016.

¹¹ http://www.gazete5.com/haber/sehsuvarogludan-ilginc-aciklamalar-59704  access  date August 1, 2016.

¹² http://www.aksam.com.tr/roportaj/beyaz-turkleri-pacozluk-kusturdu--66691h/haber- 66691.

¹³ http://www.gazetevatan.com/marka-basortusu-takinca----341397-gundem.

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