Nationalism, Politics, and Museums in Turkey under the Justice and Development Party (AKP): The Case of the Panorama Museum 1453

Research Article

Lorenzo Posocco
Visiting Fellow, CSEES, University of Graz
lorenzo.posocco@ehess.fr

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Museums are institutions dedicated to the collection and preservation of artefacts, but they are also sites of national production that contribute to shaping the nation's collective memory. Sometimes, history exhibited in museums becomes the centre of cultural wars that are not fought on battlefields, but on information panels and showcases: devices where the national past is contested, rewritten, and exhibited. With the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the institutional representation of Turkish national history was subject to significant changes. Conforming with the national ideology of the AKP, recently built museums focus more on Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic heritage, and less on similarly important ones such as the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and the more recent Kemalist traditions. Investigating the case study of the Panorama Museum 1453 – one of the most popular attractions for domestic and foreign tourists in Istanbul – this paper examines the way in which politics influences collective remembrance of the past. Its goal is to trace the material links between the government, artists and historians, supporting the spread of Islamic and Ottoman history, and the new museums which exhibit it.

Keywords: Turkey, Nationalism, Museums

Introduction: new museums for a new Turkey

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power in 2002 and has ruled Turkey uninterruptedly since then. The AKP presented itself as a new political force that aimed to set a divide between pre-AKP and post-AKP eras. Around 2014, its promise of change materialised in a captivating slogan – *Yeni Türkiye Yolunda* (Towards a New Turkey) – although many were left with questions regarding the nature of the new Turkey advertised by the government.

In fact, the meaning of "New Turkey" has changed in the last sixteen years, passing through diverse stages. The first was the time of democratic reforms, required to make the New Turkey a potential member of the European Union (2002-2007). The second stage coincided with the end of the European dream and Turkey slowly turning towards the Middle East (2007-2013). The third

stage sees an increasingly authoritarian, nationalist, and religious Turkey (2013-present).[1] Especially since 2009, when negotiations for EU membership came to a halt, the government was keen on emphasising Turkey as a Middle Eastern country.[2] This included an emphasis on the Ottoman, Turkish, and Islamic heritage rather than other similarly important heritages in the country, such as the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and the more recent Kemalist past.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, first Turkish president (1923-1936) and evergreen icon of Turkish secularism, looked much to the West. His (and his legacy's) ideal Turkish nation was based on Western models, albeit Turkified ones. Under Atatürk, national discourses were cleansed of Ottoman and Islamic elements, which became a matter of the past.[3] The creation of a distinctive Turkish language that made use of a Western alphabet and avoided Arabic and Persian words (1928) may be seen as a step towards the West (one among many). Sixteen years of Erdoğan government reversed this model. Erdoğan's speeches often make use of a combination of Arabic and Persian words, he vowed to impose Ottoman-Arabic in schools,[4] and stated clearly that Turkey doesn't "need the European Union."[5] That said, although the reintegration of the Ottoman and Islamic past officially started in the 1980s and 1990s with Özal's[6] Motherland Party,[7] under Erdoğan this process sped up and affected society at large.[8]

Jenny White was one of the scholars who broadened our consideration of this political and cultural shift, which involved the making of a new Turkish identity. She wrote:

> "*The identity of the new Turk is that of a pious Muslim Turk whose subjectivity and vision of the future is shaped by an imperial Ottoman past overlaid onto a republican framework, but divorced from the Kemalist state project. In other words, everything from lifestyle to public and foreign policy are up for reinterpretation [...] according to a distinctively Turkish post imperial sensibility.*"[9]

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[1] Esen, Berk and Sebnem Gumuscu. 2016. Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly* 37(9), 1581-606.

[2] Oğuzlu, Tarik. 2008. Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West? *Turkish Studies* 8(1), 3-20.

[3] Bakan, Selahddin and Fikret Birdişli. 2010. The Analysis of Nationalism, Statism, State Nationalism and State Economy in Turkey's Modernisation Process: Comparing the Nation State of Europe to The State Nationalism in Turkey. *The Journal of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences* 15(1), 357-76.

[4] N.N. 2014. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Vows to Impose 'Arabic' Ottoman Lessons in Schools. *The Telegraph*, 08. December 2014 (accessed: 15. April 2019).

[5] N.N. 2017. Turkey's Erdoğan: We don't need European Union. *SCF*, 13. October 2018 (accessed: 15. April 2019).

[6] Prime Minister 1987-1989.

[7] Çetinsaya, Gokhan. 1999. Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of Turkish Political Thought "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" in Modern Turkish Political Thought. *The Muslim World* 89(3-4), 350-76.

[8] Eligür, Banu. 2010. *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey*. Cambridge University Press.
 Tuğal, Cihan. 2009. *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*. Stanford University Press.

[9] White, Jenny. 2009. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Culturally speaking, the AKP seemed to function as a revolutionary movement for the Turkish society at large. Slowly but resolutely, more public shows, speeches from state officials, TV programmes, and also new museums, advertised a new Turkey that built upon the Ottoman past, Turkic ethnic elements, and Islam. The debate on new museums – usually a secondary subject – filled the pages of the most renowned daily media in Turkey and beyond. The Economist,[10] Der Spiegel,[11] and Al-Monitor[12] have all reported about new museums in Turkey as a result of the political changes. For them, new museums functioned as performative cabinets exhibiting the national ideology of the ruling party. Museums mirrored the AKP's dream of a new Turkey.

Image 1: AKP's motto, which reads "on the way to a new Turkey"

Source: webpage of the AK Party

These newspaper reports implied that there was an interference of the political at the expense of the cultural and the submission of the cultural for the profit of the political. However, their claims were not supported by any evidence that AKP's officials were involved in the making of the museum. A museum is a very complex institution at the crossroads of the cultural, economic, and political sectors.[13] Numerous social agents from diverse social and professional groups take part in its making, and to state, without strong evidence, that museums are the outcome of politics, and politics only, is a rather feeble statement. An in-depth qualitative analysis of the museum, supported by the literature on museum and nationalism studies, could help to make sense of, or definitely turn down, the assumption of the museum as a nation-making device in the hands of political actors. The investigation of the Panorama 1453 serves this purpose.

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[10] N. N. 2016. A War to Remember. Turkey's Shallow Ottomania. *The* Economist, 04. August 2016 (accessed: 04. March 2019).
[11] Steinvorth, Daniel. 2009. Nostalgia for the Ottomans. Disillusioned with Europe, Turkey Looks East. *Der Spiegel*, 12. November 2009 (accessed: 14. April 2019).
[12] Akyol Asimovic, Riada. 2014. Turkey's Rapid Museum Expansion. *Al-Monitor*, 24. July 2014 (accessed: 14. April 2019).
[13] Fyfe, Gordon. 2011. *Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums,* in *A Companion to Museum Studies,* edited by Macdonald, Sharon. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 33-49.

This museum was inaugurated on 31. January 2009 by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Mayor of Istanbul Kadir Topbaş. It is better known as "the museum of the conquest," because it displays the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman armies of Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror (*Fatih Mehmed*), in 1453. The conquest of Constantinople marks the victory of the Ottomans over the Byzantines (portrayed as the victory of the East over the West), the growing expansion of Islam in the Middle East and the Balkans, and the birth of a strong Turkic nation: the Ottomans. What better narrative to support the political changes occurring in Turkey?

For many years, this conquest represented nothing more than one among many national celebrations. This started to change when the Islamist *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) won the elections for mayor of Istanbul: its candidate was a young politician called Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On 26. December 1993 Erdoğan was still the head of the Istanbul branch of the RP when he talked with a journalist of the daily newspaper *Hürriyet* about "the second taking of Istanbul, in the sense of bringing light into darkness."[14] The city passed from the hands of Erdoğan (1994-1998) to Ali Müfit Gürtuna, another ex-candidate of the RP (1998-2004), to today's mayor Kadir Topbaş, an AKP candidate (2002-2014). As a matter of evidence, Istanbul – the largest and most populated area of Turkey – has been under the rule of pro-Islamist parties for more than twenty years.[15]

It is in this period that the celebrations of the conquest have grown to such an extent that the head of the state, ministries, generals, etc. pay tribute, every year, to their Ottoman ancestor. Thousands of people gather in Istanbul every 29. May to follow the celebrations, which are broadcast on the national channels in the form of a great national show. In this context, the foundation of the Panorama may be seen in the light of a broader national programme, conceived among the highest ranks of the AKP and advertised simultaneously as a sign of progress and modernisation and a cry for traditional values.

Image 2: 562nd anniversary of Istanbul's Ottoman conquest

Source: Youtube.[16]

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[14] Bora, Tanil. 1999. *Istanbul of the Conqueror. The "Alternative Global City," Dreams of Political Islam,* in *Istanbul, Between the Local and the Global,* edited by Keyder, Cagler. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 47-45.

[15] This trend was broken by the recent elections of March 2019.

[16] According to Youtube's Fair Use Rules, this material can be published for research purposes.

Image 3: exterior of the museum. Notice the circular building and the dome.

Source: 'Panorama 1453 History Museum', marked as public domain.

Image 4: Interior of the Museum. Point of view of the visitor

Source and copyright: Vivaystn, marked as public domain.

Image 5: Inside the museum.

Source and copyright: Vivaystn.

Image 6. Inside the museum. Information Panels. On the left, the model of the Panorama, with the dome surrounding the visitor.

Source and copyright: Website of the Panorama Museum 1453.

Theoretical Framework

As state-sponsored institutions, museums have been seen as tools that make national symbols and values, as mechanisms to revive traditions and myths of origin, and sometimes to invent them. By paraphrasing Crooke,[17] we might say that politics filters into our everyday lives. It shapes the institutions we visit, and the cultural life we embrace. It influences our hold on the past, and as citizens of a nation-state, it influences the relationship we entertain with other fellow citizens and foreigners. State-centric theories of nationalism[18] help to make sense of the influence of politics over rituals of collective remembering such as anniversaries, monuments, and museums. Museums are the temples of the harnessed past, places beyond time, heterotopias – as Foucault has called them[19] – and have strict relationships with politics. As Benedict Anderson put it: "museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political."[20] They contribute to creating, and sometimes inventing, national traditions.[21]

Hobsbawm and Ranger's work on *The Invention of Traditions*, and its legacy,[22] have played an important role in guiding this study's theoretical and methodological approach. They suggested that although the state plays a central role in making nations, there are other social agents that play an

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[17] Crooke, Elizabeth. 2019. Artefacts as Agents for Change: Commemoration and Exchange via Material Culture. *Irish Political Studies* 31(1), 86-100.

[18] Breuilly, John.1982. *Nationalism and the State*. Manchester: University Press; Mann, Michael. 1995. *A Political Theory of Nationalism and its Excesses*. Budapest, London, New York: Central European University Press; Brubaker, Rogers. 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Harvard: Harvard University Press; Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Bourdieu, Pierre. 2014. *Sur l'état*. Paris: Seuil.

[19] Foucault, Michel. 1967. Des espaces autres. *Dits et écrits*: *1954-1988*. Paris: Gallimard.

[20] Anderson, Benedict. (ed.). 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

[21] Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger. (eds.). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.

[22] Briggs, L. Charles. 1996. The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the "Invention of Tradition*." Cultural Anthropology* 11(4), 435-69; Ranger, Terence. 1993. *The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa*, in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa*, edited by Ranger, Terence and Olufemi Vaughan. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Babadzan, Alain. 2000. Anthropology, Nationalism and 'The Invention of Tradition.' *Anthropological Forum: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Comparative Sociology* 10(2), 131-55; Jeffery, Renée. 2005. Tradition as Invention: The 'Traditions Tradition' and the History of Ideas in International Relations. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34(1), 57-84; Todorova, Maria. 2009. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press.

equally important role. Historians, artists, and other cultural agents have played, and keep on playing, key roles in creating national traditions. States hire them to receive their professional advice on the construction of the museum. This makes cultural agents an important part of the museum.

The literature on museums that contribute to nation-making is also relevant to this article, including studies on identity negotiation and construction in heritage, and museums as institutions created to celebrate the nation.[23] Defining the top-down imposition of national identity narratives, Elgenius said:

> *"As part of a nexus of symbolism, [museums] raise awareness of and help claim and construct national identities. National museums are uniquely placed to tell us something about the process of nation-building and its imaginations; illuminated through the museum institution itself its collections and displays, for Anderson, "imagined" and Hobsbawm "invented". Museums as institutions, buildings and collections highlight further the crucial role of high culture in nation-building as central for the "politics of home."*[24]

A similar line of thinking, including postnational and transcultural dynamics, has been followed by Macdonald.[25] For Macdonald, Museums "were capable of articulating two temporal narratives: one, a distinctive national trajectory and, two, the nation as final triumphant stage of successive progression. That museums could present both of these simultaneously, through specific artefacts and the sequences into which they were arranged, was part of their technological magic."[26] Both of these elements – the museum as an interpreter of (and a window for) national trajectories and its ability to function as a time-machine that binds past and present – are fundamental for this investigation. In particular, a number of social agents, including politicians, artists, historians, etc. use them (consciously or unconsciously) for their profit.

That said, museums represent one of many factors that, like national anthems, national flags, national schools, national orchestras, national Olympics, etc., contribute to what Bourdieu called the (state-sponsored) factory of national emotions.[27] Bennett[28] first, and Macdonald[29] later, implicitly confirmed this thesis when they defined museums as nation-making devices and pointed to the educational function of the museum as one of its primary functions. The

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[23] Elgenious, Gabriella. 2015. *National Museums as National Symbols, A Survey of Strategic Nation-Building and Identity Politics; Nations as Symbolic Regimes,* in *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe 1750-2010, Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change*, edited by Aronsson, Peter and Gabriella Elgenius. London: Routledge; Mclean, Fiona. 2005. Museums and National Identity. *Museum and Society* 3(1), 1-4; Newman, Andrew and Fiona McLean. 2006. The Impact of Museums upon Identity. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12(1), 49-68; Macdonald, J. Sharon. 2003. Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities. *Museum and Society* 1(1), 1-16; Gordon, *Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums*; Fladmark, J. Magnus. 2000. *Heritage and Museums. Shaping National Identity*. Shaftesbury: Donhead Publisher; Gillis, R. John. (ed.). 1996. *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
[24] Elgenius, *National Museums*.
[25] Macdonald, *Museums, National, Postnational*.
[26] Macdonald, *Museums, National, Postnational*, 3.
[27] Bourdieu, *Sur l'état*.
[28] Tony, Bennett. 1995. *The Birth of the Museum, History, Theory, Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.
[29] Macdonald, *Museums, National, Postnational*.

birth of the museum was a moment for "culturing" the public, for bringing "culture," which Macdonald provocatively called "high culture,"[30] to the masses. In this view, national museums were born mainly as institutions "for" the people, certainly not "of" the people in the sense of exhibiting popular culture.[31] This trend continues in the present. Scholars have attempted to outline a series of guidelines towards a more inclusive, democratic, and less centralised museum institution,[32] yet the participatory museum[33] remains theory rather than practice. National museums are sponsored by governmental elites and built by cultural elites, contributing to shaping what Maurice Halbwachs called *Collective Memory*.[34] Collective memory is constructed by large and small social groups, including governments, through state-sponsored institutions such as public museums. The same is true for Turkish museums.

There is a small but solid body of studies on national museums in Turkey. Wendy Shaw's article on *National Museums in the Republic of Turkey*[35] is one of these studies. Shaw has shown that from the time of Kemal Atatürk, the first President of Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, governmental changes have led to changes in the way collective memory has been constructed in museums. She confirms that, like in Europe, politics played a pivotal role in shaping collective memory.

Under Atatürk and his legacy, museums in the 1920s-1960s had a specific focus on ethnicity and emphasised the Turkic origins of the nation, evading emphasis on the Ottoman and Islamic past. In the 1950s, Turkey opened to a multi-party system, but Kemalism kept a strong hold on national museums. In the 1960s and 1970s, the national model of museum proliferated in Turkey, whereas more important changes occurred in the 1980s, 1990s, and especially in the 2000s. The 1980s and 1990s, according to Shaw[36] mark an era of the privatisation of national ideology in Turkey, and an era of liberalisation and democratisation that led to the opening of a number of private museums built by wealthy Turkish families. Other changes occurred in the 2000s, with the rise of pro-Islamic governments. During this period, state initiatives focused largely on strengthening exhibitions that emphasise Islamic and Ottoman heritage.[37] The works of Göktürk,[38] Bozkuş,[39] Türeli,[40] Öncü,[41] and Shaw[42] help

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[30] Macdonald, *Museums, National, Postnational*, 2.

[31] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum, History, Theory, Politics*.

[32] Grewcock, Duncan. 2013. *Doing Museology Differently*. New York: Routledge; Coffee, Kevin. 2008. Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23(3), 261-79.

[33] Simon, Nina. 2010. *The Participatory Museum*. La Vergne, UK: Lightning Source Inc.

[34] Halbwachs, Maurice. 1950. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[35] Shaw, Wendy. 2011. *National Museums in the Republic of Turkey: Palimpsests within a Centralized State*. Paper at Conference EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen Conference, Bologna, 28-30. April 2011; Aronsson, Peter and Gabriella Elgenius. (eds.). 2011. *EuNaMus Report No 1*. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press.

[36] Shaw, *National Museums in the Republic of Turkey,* 935.

[37] Shaw, *National Museums in the Republic of Turkey,* 937.

[38] Göktürk, Deniz. 2010. *Practices of Neo-Ottomanism: Making Space and Place Virtuous in Istanbul*, in *Orienting Istanbul, Cultural Capital of Europe*, edited by Göktürk, Deniz / Soysal, Lovent and Ipek Tureli. London and New York: Routledge.

[39] Bozku, Barlas Şeida. 2014. Rethinking Nationalism in the Case of 1453 Conquest Museum in Istanbul. *Global Media Journal* 4(8), 710-28.

to make sense of this assumption. These studies, which focus on recent museums and/or exhibitions in Turkey, emphasise the revival of Ottomanism and Islamism in Turkey and link it implicitly to the political change.

That said, the museum institution in Turkey mirrors a complex scenario, with museums constructed in the Kemalist period, small institutions, private museums built in the 1980s and 1990s, and recently built museums that reflect the AKP's vision of the Turkish past, present, and future. Ergo, Turkey experiences the overlapping of diverse types of museums and museum narratives. As Shaw has stated, the variety of museums "reinforce various narratives of state ideology, heritage, and identity construction as these narratives have changed over the course of time."[43]

Little or nothing has been done to deepen the understanding of these mechanisms. Scholars and the media point to the political abuse of culture, yet not much is known about the dynamics of this abuse, in particular the relationship that, in the museum world, seems to bind politics and culture. This article attempts to shorten – at least partially – this gap. Rather than focusing on material culture, artefacts, curatorial choices, and architecture, I have used a qualitative method to investigate the links between government and museum-making.

Methodology

A case-study method has been used for this study.[44] Among the many variants of case study, I have utilised the *descriptive case study* (also called atheoretical), which aims to "describe, explain, or interpret a particular 'case' and which can be either inductive or theory-guided."[45] Although the conclusions seem to cross the border into the *theory-testing case study*, which tests a proposition, and in case of a positive result strengthens it,[46] I will not engage with theory testing. Instead, the article's goal is to add sensitive information about a specific museum, the Panorama Museum 1453, which has been overlooked by previous studies.[47] Considering new data, future studies may

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[40] Türeli, Ipek. 2006. Modelling Citizenship in Turkey's Miniature Park. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 17(2), 55-69.

[41] Öncü, Aişe. 2007. *The Politics of Istanbul's Ottoman Heritage in the Era of Globalism: Refractions through the Prism of a Theme Park*, in *Cities of the South: Citizenship and Exclusion in the 21st Century*, edited by Drieskens, Barbara / Mermier, Franck and Heiko Wimmen. London, Beirut: Saqi Books, 233-64.

[42] Shaw, Wendy. 2007. Museums and Narratives of Display from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. *Muqarnas Online* 24(1), 253-79.

[43] Shaw, *National Museums in the Republic of Turkey*, 942.

[44] Lijphart, Arendt. 1971. Comparative Politics and the Comparative Methods. *The American Political Science Review* 65(3), 682-93.

[45] Levy, S. Jack. 2008. Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, 1-18.

[46] Lijphart, *Comparative Politics and the Comparative Methods*, 692.

[47] Bozkuş, *Rethinking Nationalism*; Kern, Patrizia. 2002. *Framing the Military-Nation: New War Museums and Changing Representational Practices in Turkey since 2002*, in *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*, edited by Muchitsch, Wolfgang. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag; Bozoglu, Gonul. 2018. *'A Great Bliss to Keep the Sensation of Conquest Alive!' The Emotional Politics of the Panorama 1453 Museum in Istanbul*, in *European Heritage, Memory and Populism*, edited by Kaya, Ayhan and Chiara De Cesari. New York: Routledge.

well perform comparative investigations and head towards theory-building and/or theory testing. This is not the case here.

The above-mentioned works of Bozkuş, Kern, and Bozoglu have focused, some partly, others entirely, on the Panorama Museum, mainly on visuality thus on exhibitions and architectures and how these combine to form the nationalist narrative of the museum. Instead, I use these elements for illustration purposes only, as my focus is rather on the connections between museum commissioners and museum makers. My goal is to add information on the origins of this museum and its purposes in the minds of those who planned and constructed it. The methodology, which involves one-to-one, in-depth interviews with individuals from specialised groups, direct observation, and analyses of transcripts, aims to fill a gap left by the above-mentioned studies and shed more light on micro-dynamics.

The study consisted of 26 interviews with historians, visual artists, bureaucrats, politicians, and art historians who worked not only in the Panorama but also in other museums. Although, for reasons of space, I will not quote directly all interviewees, their information is the crucial ingredient for the basis of this work and led the thinking process behind it.

The length of each interview varied from thirty minutes to one hour. Interviewees were given a leaflet that informed them about the research and were asked to sign an informed consent that granted them anonymity. The identity of the interviewees is therefore concealed, except in those cases when the interviewee expressly requested his/her name to be mentioned.

As I aimed to collect data about the construction of a new national narrative in a national museum, the diverse groups which play a role in this construction, and the way national narratives contribute to produce and reproduce the nation, a qualitative methodology that combines in-depth interview transcripts and direct observation of the museum seemed the best method.

In combining different data sources, I have learnt about the backgrounds, the roles, and interdependences of the social agents at play in the museum. The Panorama was built as recently as 2009, and its opening was accompanied by speeches from the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and other public figures which are freely available on the web in the form of online journals. Those speeches represented a data source of discourses that combined to form my view on this museum. Interviews with a variety of people who work(ed) at/for the Panorama provided multiple data sources granting a multi-perspective view, which displayed diverse sides of the museum. In particular, I have highlighted the points of view of those who commissioned it and those who materially made it.

Finally, the choice of museum fell on the Panorama for a number of reasons. First, it was constructed when Turkey saw the European gates closing, which convinced Turkish governments to steer towards the Middle East. As mentioned in the introduction, what better chance for the political establishment to reaffirm the view that Turkey is, above all, a Middle Eastern country? Second, it displays Ottoman history. Hence the question: is the

emphasis on Ottoman history and culture an answer by the political elites to provide a Turkish identity that matches with the sentiments of the political class?

That said, the Panorama is not the only museum that served the political change in Turkey well. In my recent works,[48] I have pointed to a number of these museums that, added to this one, may well serve for future comparative analysis.

The politics of the Panorama: interview with the creator of the museum
Whenever I asked "whose idea is this museum?," interviewees did not know how to answer. Even the museum director, the vice-director, the artistic director, and diverse external consultants did not know who decided to make a museum about the conquest. Interviewees guessed that "the Mayor Kadir Topbaş" or "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in person" commissioned the building of the Panorama. I called the mayor's office for months. I spoke to his secretary who repeated each time that he was busy and I should call back the week after. Many weeks passed, then months, and I never saw Topbaş. I had almost given up the idea of talking to him when, in March 2015, an interviewee suggested I talk to Cengiz Özdemir, ex-President of Kültür A.Ş. (one of the main Turkish companies whose business is culture).

Özdemir was born in 1961, in Hereke, a town in the Kocaeli province, close to the Gulf of Izmit. Hereke is known for the manufacturing of carpets. He grew up far from the big cultural centres of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, but things changed when his parents immigrated to the Netherlands. Özdemir was eighteen years old at the time. As a young man, he benefitted from one of the best education systems in Europe and enrolled at the University of Leiden, where he studied Middle Eastern Culture and Language with Barbara Flemming and Erik Zürcher: two well-known experts of Turkish and Ottoman history. There, he completed a master's thesis on the *Yüzellilikler*: 150 high ranking officers of the Ottoman Empire who were exiled after the Lausanne Treaty in 1924. In the Netherlands, Özdemir worked as an editor at the Dutch Ministry of Culture and as president of a political association that represented the Turkish community. In this role, in 1993, he met Erdoğan. Both were invited to the opening of the shop of a mutual friend who lived in Germany. At the time Erdoğan was at the beginning of his political career and worked as President of the Istanbul branch of the Islamist Welfare Party (WP). The then ruler of the WP, Necmettin Erbakan, stipulated an alliance between the Nationalist Movement Party and the Reformist Democracy Party, and eventually led the WP to power in 1995; the same year Erdoğan, supported by Erbakan, became mayor of Istanbul.

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[48] Posocco, Lorenzo. 2019. Museum Politics in Turkey under the Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP): The Case of the Istanbul Museum of the History of Science and Technology in Islam. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 32 (1), 83-103; Posocco, Lorenzo. 2018. The Politics of Nationalism in Recently Built Turkish Museums: the Case of the Kabatepe Simulation Centre and Museum. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 1-21.

Upon returning to Turkey in 1994, Özdemir was asked by the newly elected Erdoğan to become his consultant in matters of culture and the vice-president of Kültür A.Ş. The company did not then have a position of president, reported Özdemir, which was created in 1999. In his role as president of Kültür A.Ş., Özdemir wanted to develop a theme park like the Madurodam in The Hague, Netherlands. This park inspired him to make the Miniatürk: the main theme park of Istanbul. The second project was the Panorama Museum, and the third was a 3D cinema. Özdemir completed the Miniatürk and started the Panorama. He stated that the Panorama was his idea, but the construction began when he had already left Kültür A.Ş. This is why nobody seemed to know that he was the mind behind the museum.

When asked, "Why did you want to build a theme park or a panorama museum?," Özdemir answered that when guests from Turkey visited him in the Netherlands, he invited them to visit the park in Madurodam."It was my dream to make these new cultural places also in Turkey."[49] "Miniatürk," said Özdemir, "was my big project":

> *"The problem is that Tayyip (Erdoğan) could not visualise it when I first presented it to him. It was just theory for him […] However, […] After some time, Tayyip Bey called me and asked […] "what are we going to do with this Miniatürk?" […] He had been in Zurich and had seen the Mini Swiss theme park. Suddenly he was convinced it could be done. He was impressed and decided to go on with the project, which I followed from the beginning to the end."[50]*

This extract sheds some light on power dynamics and decision-making in centralised states. The approval of the political administration was essential to start Özdemir's project. This seems to corroborate the notion that the Panorama was politically determined. To be politically determined is, for a museum, to be dominated by external forces:[51] its construction depended on the degree to which it matched with and/or served the plans of the Turkish political administration. This data seems to match with those state-centric theories that the emphasise top-down dynamics of nation-building.[52]

The social agents who have played a significant role, from Özdemir to Erdoğan, passing through a series of relatively secondary figures – such as the mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbaş – belong to the Turkish ruling class and were all linked to the AKP. Hence, politicians played a dominant role in the making of the museum. However, two more groups were involved: the artists and the historians. Investigating their role will help revise the assumption that politics is the main and only agent dominating the process of museum building.

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[49] Interview with Özdemir.

[50] Interview with Özdemir.

[51] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[52] Breuilly. *Nationalism and the State;* Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*; Mann. 1995. *A Political Theory of Nationalism;* Gellner.1983. *Nations and Nationalism*; Bourdieu. *Sur l'état;* Tilly, Charles. 1994. States and Nationalism in Europe 1492-1992. *Theory and Society* 23(1), 131-46.

The art of the Panorama: interviews with painters

The Panorama is a national museum: a state-sponsored institution that I define, following Elgenius,[53] as both a national symbol and the creator of symbols of the nation. National museums function as a resource and a host of national symbols in the form of national narratives which set myths, traditions, and historical events with heroes, wars and discourses of the "great men" to be supplied to the masses. Historians and artistic producers were the professionals behind the creation of these symbols. Wacquant called them "specialists in representations": professionals who monopolise the manipulation of the symbols at the basis of any group, therefore also nations.[54]

I have identified two main groups of specialists in representation who worked on the Panorama: the first included at least eight artists and one historian who functioned as a consultant to the artists. This group worked on the visual part of the museum: they designed and painted the history of the conquest on the museum dome. The second group included the historians, on whom I concentrate later. The two groups worked independently, but in both cases their network of relations and their authority were an asset to them. Thanks to these elements, both artists and historians were granted the job. X., one of the artists, reported:

> "A big and circular building was being built up in Topkapı. We asked them, "what is it?" and they replied, "We are building a Panorama". We asked, "who are the painters?" They said that was to be decided [...] We said we could do it and […] and showed them the works we had made."[55]

When X. used the word "them", he was referring to his network of relations. "They" were the people he could contact and ask "what is this circular building?" This seems like a minor detail, but it is not. The power to reach powerful people such as the mayor or the Directorate for Construction Affairs is a relevant power that grants the key to enter the circles of influential people in society. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called it social capital.[56] It was through his social capital that X.'s group was able to acquire the work at the Panorama. However, X. mentioned another group of academicians and students from Mimar Sinan University, the oldest academy of fine arts in Turkey, founded by Osman Hamdi in 1882. He said:

> "(Mimar Sinan) made an offer for painting the Panorama. The municipality told us "you can take over the job if you offer half of this price" […] Mimar Sinan's offer had been made before the public call. I don't remember exactly, but as far as I know, Mimar Sinan did not participate in the public call because they thought that given the prestige of the academy, they would have got the job."[57]

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[53] Elgenius, *National Museums as National Symbols.*
[54] Wacquant, Loic. 2013. Symbolic Power and Group-Making: on Pierre Bourdieu's Reframing of Class. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 13(2), 274-91.
[55] Interview with X.
[56] Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 119.
[57] Interview with X.

This extract points out an interesting agreement between X. and the municipality, through which X.'s team got the job. Mimar Sinan is a public university, and P., who works at the Painting Department, said that by law it cannot participate in public calls. Therefore, X. was wrong when he thought that the reason for Mimar Sinan's missed participation in the public call was its prestige. In fact, Mimar Sinan, as a public institution, could not have participated in a public call. However, X. was right when he said that prestige matters. Mimar Sinan was the first to be contacted. It seems that no public call was needed for them. I spoke with a few people from Mimar Sinan, and Y. said that he had been informed about the opportunity to work in the making of the Panorama Museum. He reported that the municipality did not contact painters directly but that the political administration spoke with the rector and the rector made an informal arrangement with the painting department. The department had started to organize a team but "things never went beyond that" (Interview with Y.). Y. also said that he was never formally involved in the project. We know why: at that point the job had been taken over by the other group.

The cultural platform of the Panorama Museum was set by X. for half the price initially proposed by Mimar Sinan. The artists had been given a script written by Ilber Ortaylı, a well-known Turkish intellectual. X. reported that this first script focused more on Fatih Sultan's life than the war itself: "So we did not use it. We found out that one of the best experts on Ottoman history was E., and we contacted him" (Interview with X.). Both the artists and the historian rewrote the scenario. The aim was "to show our talent as good painters […] We wanted to paint the most impressive scene. We thought that it should be the scene of the siege."[58] To show their talent meant to impress the visitor: to paint the most impressive scene. To achieve this goal the artists recreated the siege of Constantinople just before its fall and attempted to stage it as in a movie: "The Panorama is like a movie. We thought, let's tell this story realistically, whatever people may feel […] this is what happened in history," said X. "We wanted to make people feel like they are living the conquest."[59] Visitors were considered as movie spectators, although the artists also had a focus on impartiality in the matter of history: "We wanted to paint impartially, therefore we were advised by E."

> "*We looked for a historian who is an expert on this age, and people recommended E. […] he provided us with the necessary historical documents: how the guns and the clothes were etc. […] But the most important contribution of E. was to find the historical document describing the holes created by the cannons on the city wall of Constantinople. This document is in Topkapı Palace's archive. He found it and we painted the holes according to this information.*"[60]

As this extract confirms, the artists conceived impartiality as a matter of detailed visuality, not of content. This is not surprising. X. did not study museology or history, but TV and Cinema, and the museum reflected this in its narrative.

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[58] Interview with X.
[59] Interview with X.
[60] Interview with X.

Image 7: Inside the museum. Detail of the cannons.

Source and copyright: Website of the Panorama Museum 1453.

Image 8: Inside the museum.

Source and copyright: Website of the Panorama Museum 1453.

As X. himself has stated, he was very much affected by Metin Erksan, Refik Halit and Rıfkı Akatlar, all important film directors and art historians who lectured in his department. The specialisation in TV and cinema obtained from an important institution granted him the tools to work on a museum such as the Panorama. First of all, it provided him with the lenses through which he imagined the conquest. All the painters' careers were linked to cartoon and filmmaking, and this is clearly visible in the Panorama which aims to be, as they said, as realistic as a movie.

Focusing on museum-makers helps to broaden our consideration of the complexity of elements and dynamics underpinning the creation of national museums. Politics dominated the museum, and the artists and historians were subject to the politicians and bureaucrats who granted them the job and

provided them with economic remuneration, yet they exercised a power over the museum. They were free to develop the narrative of the museum, which modelled as a national narrative. The knowledge, the feelings and attitudes toward the conquest, as well as the national values of the artists and historians who made the museum were reflected in it.

In this view, artists and historians functioned as "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs." For Brubaker,[61] ethnopolitical entrepreneurs are social agents that reify groups, treat them as substantial, and contribute to producing what they apparently describe or designate. The quality of the painting, historical references and realism were combined to achieve the aim of the artists: to paint an impressive scene, that is, to elicit an emotional response which involved national feelings that contribute to homogenising the nation.

The nation is, according to Benedict Anderson,[62] an imagined community insofar as most of its members will never know each other face to face. The Panorama represents one of the tools that creates the sense of brotherhood and commonality at the basis of this community. It contributes to constructing a Turkish imagined community rooted in the Ottoman Empire, neglecting to mention the Roman, Byzantine, and Greek past of the present land of the Turks. Elizabeth Crooke[63] stated that museums are formed by what is displayed, but also by what is excluded; and much is excluded here. In this view, rather than a museum the Panorama can be viewed as a "simulator"[64] which creates a reality that never existed, as a "utopia"[65] that spreads invented traditions.[66]

Image 9. Detail of the dome, Panorama Museum 1453

Source and copyright: Website of the Panorama Museum 1453.

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[61] Brubaker, Rogers. 2002. Ethnicity without Groups. *European Journal of Sociology. Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43(2), 163-189.

[62] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[63] Crooke, Elizabeth. 2008. *Putting Contested History on Display: The Uses of the Past in Northern Ireland*, in *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, edited by Ostow, Robin. University of Toronto Press, 90-106.

[64] Baudrillard, Jean. 1988. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan, United States: Michigan University Press.

[65] Foucault, *Des espaces autres*.

[66] Hobsbawm, *Invented Traditions*.

This leads to the conclusion that politicians were not alone in playing a key role in building the Panorama. The artists and historians played an equally important role, which suggests scaling down the centrality of the top-down dynamics of nation-building. The Panorama Museum seems to add another piece to the body of studies that, besides politics, stresses the role of cultural agents in inventing traditions. I refer here to Hobsbawm and his wide legacy.[67]

Finally, before drawing some conclusions, I want to emphasise here that the collected data are in line with the evidence brought by the most recent literature on museums and nation-making, which helps to avoid seeing the Panorama as something unique to Turkey. It is important to shun any form of ethnocentrism[68] and not fall into the trap of cultural relativism. Even a superficial look at this literature shows that museums, in Turkey and beyond, have also functioned, sometimes primarily, as rituals of the nation.[69] Among many works, which for reasons of space I cannot possibly include, the recent *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*[70] includes an exhaustive number of case studies that show how generalised the phenomenon of museums involved in nationalist practices is. From the Museum of French Monuments in Paris, through the Dutch National Historical Museum in the Netherlands, to the Keasong Koryo Museum in North Korea and the National Museum of Colombia, this volume confirms that, rather than being a Turkish exception, the Panorama Museum represents an international norm.

Conclusions
Investigating the political-sociological side of the Panorama brings new elements to previous analyses, both academic and non-academic. First, it shows that the museum cannot be seen only as the product of politics, although politics played a major role in the making of it. The government (especially several important members of the AKP) shaped the museum by dominating the processes of decision-making behind it, and the resources at its basis.

The Panorama was designed by the cultural counsellor of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His idea was supported by the local political administration, in particular the municipality ruled by the (then) mayor Kadir Topbaş (member of the AKP) and by the Directorate of Construction Affairs (*Imar Daire Başkanlığı*). That is to say, the role of the government, in particular the role of some important members of the ruling party, was not secondary, but primary, and interviews have shown that without the approval of the AKP the Panorama would not exist. However, this article's focus has shed light on other secondary figures, such as historians and artists, who played an equally

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[67] Briggs, *The Politics of Discursive*; Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition Revisited*; Babadzan, *Anthropology*; Jeffery, *Tradition as Invention*; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Said, Edward. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Ed.
[68] Edward, *Orientalism*.
[69] Elgenious, *National*; Mclean, *Museums and National Identity*; McLean, *The Impact of Museums*; Macdonald, *Museums, National, Postnational*; Fyfe, *Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums*; Fladmark, *Heritage and Museums*; Gillis. (ed.)., *Commemorations*.
[70] Knell, Simon / Aronsson, Peter and Arne Bugge Amundsen. 2011. *National Museums. New Studies from Around the World*. London and New York: Routledge.

important role. These social agents were the minds and the hands behind the museum narrative. The historians and artists made the symbols, the paintings, and the history; in brief, the whole exhibition of the conquest.

They did not decide whether or not to make the museum – this decision was taken by the government – but they exercised an influence over the museum exhibition. The project manager reported that they were free to develop their own ideas. Although the fact that the appointment of the team seemed driven by clientelistic logics may suggest the opposite, I do not have any material to prove this. In any case, it is unquestionable that the elements that emerged during the investigation are food for thought. In particular they question the "conspiracy theory" that both media and academics accepted, perhaps too readily, and suggest that the museum may not reflect only the national ideology of the ruling class but that of a variety of social agents. Each of these agents had his/her own agency. Advocates of structuralism would object (and I would agree with them) that one should acknowledge the role of the social structure, including the nation-state structure, imposing over them. Unfortunately, this is not the place where one could weigh structural constrictions, although future investigations may well cover this exciting aspect of social research.

What remains unquestionable is that the role of the artist was as important as that of the politician. Those who made the Panorama had a background in cinema studies and projected the museum as they wanted: as a movie, by making great use of visual elements and sound effects. The Panorama was thought of as a national spectacle-space where the protagonist is the visitor. The colossal 360-degree painting of the conquest is an impressive artistic effort, the goal of which was to impress the visitor. In this view, I suggested that, rather than a museum, the Panorama functions as a fair and a simulator. I have pointed out that the Panorama is a simulator because it imagines and reproduces a romanticised glorious national past. In this view, history in the Panorama seems to have the role of the servant of nationalism, an ideology espoused by both politicians and artists, historians, etc.

Rather than a Turkish specificity, studies suggest that this is the norm beyond Turkey. Museum-making and nation-making, the literature suggests, are often interrelated processes. By focusing on the Panorama, perhaps I have added further evidence to this theory, while at the same time trying to add some elements to our understanding of the potential dynamics at the base of this interrelation.

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