The Power of Narrative in Erdoğan's Speeches: Syrian Immigrants and the Construction of Collective Identity

MASTER THESIS
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ADVISOR:
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original work. I also declare that I have acted by academic rules and ethical conduct at all stages of the work including preparation, data collection, and analysis. I have cited and referenced all the information that is not original to this work.

Burak ÖZKAN

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ABSTRACT

The Power of Narrative in Erdoğan's Speeches:

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This study examines the political narrative constructed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan between 2011 and 2014 concerning the increasing Syrian immigrant population in Turkey after the Syrian Civil War. The sudden immigration flow has made Turkey the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world. Nonetheless, Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of that period, developed a multi-layered Syrian immigrant narrative. Despite the rising concerns about the "refugee crisis," Erdoğan maintained his power through popular elections and somehow managed to construct an embracing narrative toward Syrian immigrants. In line with this analysis, this thesis study aims to reveal the main themes and meta-narratives behind Erdoğan's Syrian immigrants narrative. The thesis mainly suggests two arguments. First, it argues that Erdoğan has constructed a collective identity of the self, or "us," that leans on highly religious and virtuous themes and meta-narratives, which is utilized in the legitimization of the AK Party's "open-door policy" toward Syrian immigrants. Second, the thesis argues that despite the initial success of the narrative, some of the main elements in the narrative have changed over time, especially in the speeches made by Erdoğan targeting international political actors. The study consists of six chapters. After the introduction, the second part deals with the theoretical framework and literature that has inspired or affected the research process. Narrative analysis as the methodological approach taken and the research materials used in the thesis are discussed in the third chapter. The fourth chapter focuses on the history of migration in Turkey and introduces some basic concepts concerning refugees and immigrants in Turkey to provide a ground for the analysis of Erdoğan's Syrian immigrants narrative. The fifth chapter is dedicated to findings and observations, and the study is then concluded.

ÖZET

Erdoğan'ın Konuşmalarında Anlatının Gücü: Suriyeli Göçmenler ve Kolektif Kimlik İnşası

Bu çalışma, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın 2011-2014 yılları arasında Suriye İç Savaşı sonrasında Türkiye'ye artan Suriyeli göçmen nüfusu ile ilgili olarak oluşturduğu siyasi anlatıyı incelemektedir. Ani göç akışı, Türkiye'yi dünyada en fazla mülteci barındıran ülke haline getirmiştir. Buna rağmen, dönemin Başbakanı Erdoğan, değişken ve çok katmanlı bir Suriyeli göçmen anlatısı kurmuştur. Sonraki dönemdeki seçim başarıları da göz önüne alındığında, Erdoğan'ın anlatısının, başlangıç aşamasındaki "mülteci krizi" ile ilgili artan endişelere rağmen, bu başarılarda önemli bir paya sahip olduğu varsayılmaktadır. Varsayımla uyumlu olarak, bu araştırma Erdoğan'ın Suriyeli göçmenler anlatısının arkasındaki ana temaları ve meta-anlatıları ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tez, esas olarak iki argüman öne sürmektedir. Birincisi, Erdoğan'ın Suriyeli göçmenlere yönelik AK Parti'nin "açık kapı politikasını" meşrulaştırmada kullandığı, dini ve ahlaki temalara ve meta-anlatılara dayanan bir kolektif kimlik ya da "biz" inşa ettiğini savunmaktadır. İkincisi, anlatının başlangıçtaki başarısına rağmen, özellikle Erdoğan'ın uluslararası siyasi aktörleri hedef alan konuşmalarında, anlatıdaki bazı ana unsurların zamanla değiştiğini öne sürmektedir. Çalışma altı bölümden oluşmaktadır. Girişten sonra, ikinci bölüm teorik çerçeve ve araştırma sürecini etkileyen veya ilham veren literatürle ilgilidir. Tezde kullanılan metodolojik yaklaşım ve araştırma materyalleri üçüncü bölümde tartışılmaktadır. Dördüncü bölüm, Türkiye'deki göç tarihine odaklanmakta ve Erdoğan'ın Suriyeli göçmenler anlatısının analizine zemin sağlamak amacıyla mülteciler ve göçmenlerle ilgili

bazı temel kavramları tanıtmaktadır. Beşinci bölüm bulgulara ve gözlemlere ayrılmıştır ve çalışma sonuçlandırılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasi Anlatılar, Anlatı Analizi, Suriyeli Göçmenler, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

ABBREVIATIONS

AK PARTY: Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)

CHP: Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)

EU: European Union

IOM: International Organization for Migration

LFIP: Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu – YUKK)

MHP: Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)

PMM: Presidency of Migration Management

TBMM: The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi)

UDHR: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN: The United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction

In March 2011, the rising public unrest and protests in Syria initiated a chain of events that led to what is called today the Syrian Civil War and it has affected the Syrian population, forcing some millions of people to take refuge in other countries, especially the neighboring countries including Turkey. The massive refugee influx to Turkey continued since then, indicating a rising trend in numbers from time to time due to the severity of the conflicts, coupled with some other factors such as ISIS' (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) rise to power and influence in the region, destabilization of Afghanistan, Taliban's taking control of the government and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. According to UNHCR reports, Turkey has been hosting the largest population of refugees in the world for eight consecutive years as of 2022, including 3,7 million Syrians under temporary protection and approximately 327,000 refugees and asylum seekers under international protection (Türkiye Fact Sheet, 2022). The more recent data from the Presidency of Migration Management shows a slight decrease in the number of Syrians under temporary protection from 3,737,369 in 2021 to 3,112,683 as of July 2024 (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024).

The high numbers of refugees would have led the way for more populist, anti-refugee far-right politicians and discourses to increase their popularity and support from the Turkish citizens. AK Party government, which took the office in 2002 and continued to rule for more than two decades by now, was the sole decision-maker throughout this era. In addition to that, with the millions of immigrants' influx into Turkey mainly from Syria but including some other countries such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and lastly Ukraine and Russia after the breakout of war, the AK Party government not only found itself responsible for developing a legal framework for immigrants, dealing with the new necessities including protection and social integration of the newcomers, assigning new policies both

domestically and cooperating internationally; but also it found itself in a situation to express and explain their (to some extent) welcoming attitude and policies towards immigrants to Turkish citizens, which would decide their fate in Turkish politics. Despite these challenges, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, AK Party has yet managed to dominate popular elections which guaranteed their two-decades-long rule over Turkey. The situation itself, deserves to raise a question; how did AK Party, especially Erdoğan as its leader, could be able to express their immigration policy and convince the voters, or Turkish citizens more broadly to continue their support for the AK Party government?

Narratives in this sense, play a central position in the communication between the electors and the elected, in other words, those who are authorized to make decisions and the rest of the community who will participate in the process of deciding the decision makers. These narratives determine how human beings make sense of their perceived reality and affect their attitudes, individual and collective identities, and behaviors (Şahin-Mencütek, 2020, 2). Other than the practical and strategic functions of narratives, as Groth (2019, 3) offers, a third function embodies an analytical framework for academic research in social sciences, which constitutes a methodological apparatus. Accordingly, narratives have the potential to underly the mechanism that constructs and mediate the political realities. In this thesis study, it is intended to use this function of the narrative to shed some light on the mechanism that allowed Erdoğan to communicate his and the AK Party's stance toward Syrian immigrants.

Since the public unrest in Syria developed into a civil war, leading millions of people to take refuge in other countries, most notably Turkey, the AK Party government employed a series of narratives as a way of communication. In the last decade, through these narratives, the AK Party government revealed its main political approach towards immigrants, competed with other narratives that challenge the government's decisions and policies, and presented the AK Party's political preferences in other fields, such as its foreign affairs policies, especially with the Syrian government, the EU and others. In line

with that, these narratives sometimes involved a rather new Islamic interpretation of identity in the case of "Ansar and Muhajir" (Ansar simply being "the helper" and muhajir meaning those who take refuge) references, sometimes revealing the government's plan to use the refugees as a bargaining tool, especially in the EU-Turkey relations and sometimes used as a tool to reinforce the AK Party's other grand-narratives such as a "strong Turkey" or Turkey as the protector of the Muslims all around the world. Of course, these narratives may help to understand the AK Party's political preferences and attitudes in some policy fields to a certain degree. More importantly, these discourses and narratives are standing as documents that would enable the researchers to investigate how a government in a country that hosts one of the most numerous refugee populations in the world narrates its own political approach towards the refugees and how it defends its narratives against rivaling narratives and challenges that emerge throughout this timeline such as worsening economic conditions in the country, changing dynamics of foreign affairs as well as rising domestic concerns on security matters.

Therefore, one main motivation for this thesis study is to investigate how the AK Party leadership narrated its immigrant policies to the Turkish community between 2011 and 2014. These narratives are dynamic, and reflective of challenging conditions, emerging opportunities, and other alternative narratives, making it even more important to analyze and explain the dynamics in these narratives. This thesis study aims to understand how the AK Party government constructed its narrative on immigrants, and the nature and characteristics of this narrative by focusing on Erdoğan's speeches on immigrants within the timeline that covers between 2011 and 2014. Furthermore, it is aimed to reveal how the main elements in this narrative changed throughout this timeline.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

It is believed that narratives are as old as the history of humanity and they are one of the most important tools for humankind to communicate both with each other and directly with themselves, organizing the events in a story to make them meaningful to each other and within their own minds. However, narratives are invisible, often the narrator himself is unaware while he is using narratives as a method of communication. As Barthes puts it: *"it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative. All classes, all human groups have their narratives"* (as cited in: Czarniawska, 2004: 1). Just as the narratives are present in almost all times and spaces of humanity, they have also been the subject and sometimes the tool of research in various disciplines concerning humanity.

There are slightly varying definitions of the term narrative as each scholar concerns himself/herself with slightly different aspects and thus emphasizes different elements that constitute the narrative in line with the functions they attach to it. In its simplest form, the narrative is described as *"a story or a description of a series of events"* (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2022) or as a *"spoken or written account of connected events"* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010: as cited in Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). Similarly, Le Guin describes narrative as the *"language used to connect events in time,"* emphasizing the inclusive nature of the narrative on past, present, and future (1989, 38). In this interpretation, the narrative is not constructed solely upon chronological events, ordering the events as they occurred in time and presenting them as a chain of happenings. Instead,

each event is re-formed and re-shaped to fit in the narrative, sometimes linked in causal or correlational bounds with an approach to elaborate more on their interactions and influences with each other. As the events are connected through the narrative, one can conclude that the characters and the setting in these events are also connected, whether intendedly or not. The topics like intention, characterization, and setting will be discussed later in this chapter but, it would be useful for now to have a deeper consideration on the possible explanations about connecting the events in time, and how it could be done.

Lexical descriptions, of course, are far from providing the necessary equipment for a deeper intellectual understanding of how the narratives function. Bruner insistently argues that through narratives, humankind constructs and translates the social world surrounding them (1986; 1990). In his own words, narratives are: "*a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness*" (Bruner, 1990: 4). In this sense, Bruner clearly distinguishes between constructing a narrative and constructing a logical or scientific argument. Narratives do not bear the burden of fitting into a logical scheme covering facts or factual events and data. Then, he argues that, unlike the scientific process of falsification and empirical verification, a narrative "can only achieve verisimilitude" (1990: 4). In other words, a narrative can only be probable in accordance with the audience's own logical assumptions and experiences. The narrative in this sense, is only obliged to be representative of the reality, not necessarily obliged to be verified by scientific verification.

So far, at least some implications of the narrative have become more visible; that it is a constructed reality on the connectedness of events through time and space, not essentially obliged with reflecting the facts, but it should represent at least a possibility to be convincing, and it produces the meaning. Considering that narratives don't share the burden of verification contrary to the "scientific process," it should logically follow that narrative communication has a clear advantage over the communication of scientific data. In the example of this case study, Erdoğan narrates the "great" civilizations before Turkey

but the historical accounts he uses are not debated. Instead, the audience has to take what Erdoğan tells them as pre-given, the narrative logic function this way.

A more specific and striking example could be given from his speech given in the AK Party group meeting on the 5ᵗʰ of September, 2012 (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-9, 2019, 114-115). In this speech, Erdoğan narrates a tragic event referred to as Boraltan Bridge Incident. As he narrates, 146 Azerbaijani intellectuals pass Boraltan bridge and fled to Turkey with the fear of execution in the hands of Soviets in 1945. However, the Turkish government of that time, Ismet Inönü and CHP (Republican People's Party) hands over these intellectuals despite their cries for help from the Turkish authorities. In Erdoğan's narration, the hard conditions in the World War II or the stressed relationship between Turkey and the USSR are not mentioned. The logic of the narrative is driven without a contest, thus setting the audience to "remember" how the government of that time failed to protect their "kins" against the violence of the Soviets.

This is simply because narratives construct a much more fluid explanation in a story form at the expense of reflecting the complex events in a much more simplistic way. This might be understood more clearly by imagining yourself telling a story to a child. The process of constructing a narrative for a child necessitates distorting the "true nature" of events and characters, yet it communicates the essence of the message, which could partly be described as the meaning, in a simplistic yet effective way. In other words, *"When we speak to children, we are not just conveying information; we are also shaping their thinking processes"* (Bruner, 1983). The meaning conveyed in these stories, narratives, and speeches told to a child do not only transfer information, and they are definitely not designed to transfer verifiable information. Instead, the process is designed to shape the thinking process of a child, which could be verified in the child's own empirical observations.

It is, therefore, neither a surprise nor unexpected that due to its strategic importance in the construction of meaning, narratives have been an increasingly popular focus of interest among scholars from various fields of research and disciplines. Narrative analysis

roots back to the theological studies in the medieval age, seeking to find the true meanings of the religious texts (Czarniawska, 2004). This assumption, to say the least, does not exclude the possibility of verbal traditions like folktales being considered as a beginning step for narrative analysis; it rather implies the start of a scholarly discipline centered around the interpretation of sacred scriptures. On its long journey, starting with hermeneutics and then spreading into more contemporary academic studies; linguists, literary theorists, psychologists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists showed a growing interest in narratives. Walter R. Fisher (1984) pointed out the central role of narrative in politics and of narrative analysis in political sciences; Jerome Bruner (1986) and Donald E. Polkinghorne (1987) did the same for psychology; Hugh Mehan (1979) and Laurel Richardson (1990) for sociology; Charles Taylor (1989) and Hayden White (1973) in philosophy, while Deirdre McCloskey (1990) scrutinized the narrative of economic expertise (as cited in: Czarniawska, 2004).

Yet the so-called "narrative turn" had to wait until the last decades of the 20th century to make its entry into political science and international relations. Sarbin opened a link between psychology and political science by introducing a notion called *narratory principle* explaining *"that human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures"* (1986, 8). The reasoning that bridges psychology and politics is rather obvious, if the choices are made according to the narratives, then the political choices as one product of the same structure should also follow a similar pattern. In parallel with this, Hammack and Pilecki contributed to this scientific endeavor by suggesting that this notion can also be applied to understand the psychological roots of some political behaviors *"including political cognition, decision making, ideological identification, collective beliefs and emotions…"* (2012: 76). These findings and theoretical assumptions paved the way for a paradigm shift in academic studies, at least in the sense that it encouraged new constructivist approaches in the field. As will be addressed here, some scholars have started to emphasize the intermediary role of narratives between human

action and the mind. After all, if narratives are the way of constructing, storing, analyzing, and transferring the knowledge or "memories" of humankind in a form similar to stories, a simple but effective form of communication, affecting the position of individuals and collective groups towards social events; then it should logically follow an assumption that these narratives should have important impacts on the human action and behavior both at the individual and social level.

In a similar vein, Somers and Gibson theorized how the narratives construct a collective identity of the self and define others (1994). However, the construction of this collective identity, or *ontological narrativity* as they call it, is *"neither a priori nor fixed"*; rather they are constituted in a cyclical relationship between acts that are driven by the ontological narratives and these ontological narratives in turn identified by these acts (Somers & Gibson, 1994: 30-31). This interpretation makes a clearer passage between action and the human mind at the social level. Whether the narrative is given in a text or in a speech, there are always some interactions between the narrator and the audience; a natural aim for the narrator to mobilize the audience, either in the form of influencing them or urging them to take action in the given subject. To elaborate more, an illustration is given below.

Figure 1: Illustration on the Narrative Construction of the Collective Identity
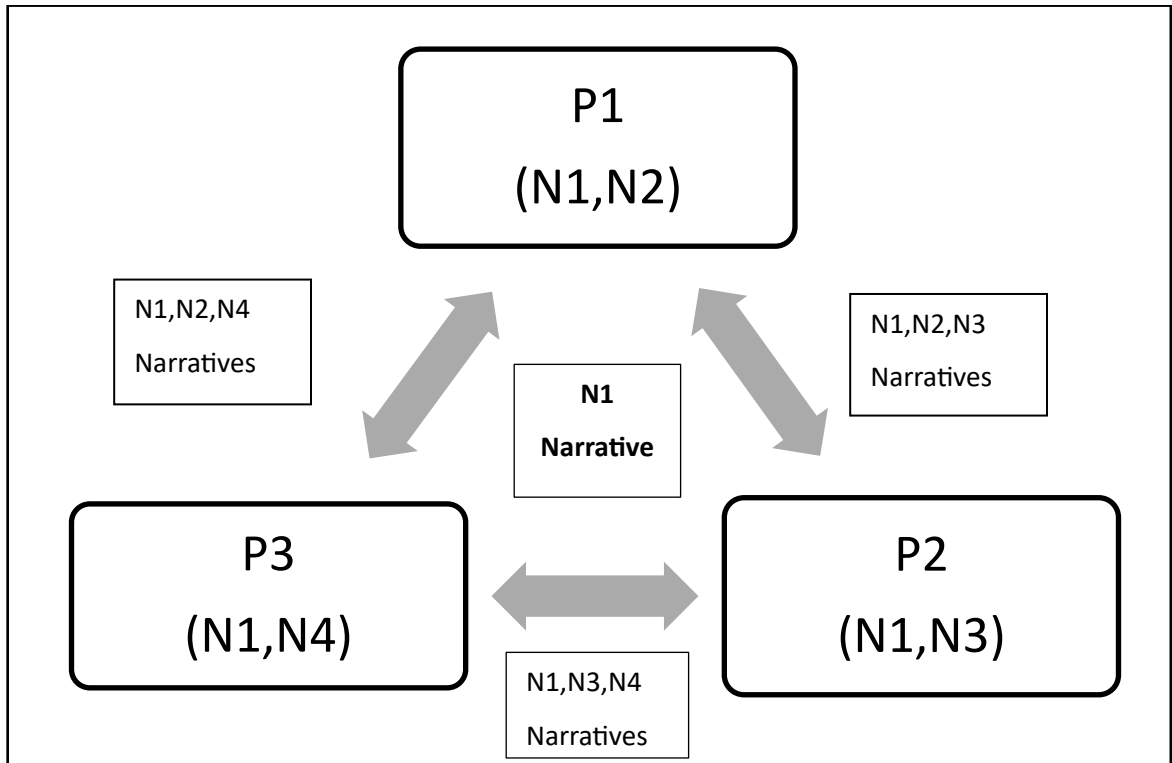
P1, P2, P3 represent the persons in the hypothetical group in Figure 1. For simplification, it is assumed that each person has two narratives constructed in their minds out of four possible narratives: N1, N2, N3, and N4. The figure illustrates the construction of the collective identity, based on an overly simplified model between a collective group that consists of three persons; P1, P2 and P3. The intention of using this simplified model is to give insight about the understanding and the use of the collective identity as far as this study is concerned. Assume simply that each person (P1, P2, and P3) has a narrative in their own minds about the meaning of being together as a group, constructing a collective identity somehow through these narratives. Each person has his-her own narrative about the

collective identity of this group. For P1, for example, these narratives are N1 and N2. For the second person, P2, these are N1 and N3. Through the communication of these narratives about the meaning of this collective identity, the dominant narrative appears to be the N1 narrative, although they do not share ideally a common and equal set of narratives. One could argue that N1 does not have to be the dominant narrative in this collective group, and this argument may be right. After all, the narratives are negotiated within various contexts. However, first reminder would be that this is a simplified model used here to consider the wide variations of possible outcomes, even in a model that might merely caricature the dynamics behind the construction of the collective identity. Second, the features and functions of narratives such as the negotiability of narratives in this argument (Bruner, 1987), will be discussed in the following section. In the case of Erdoğan's narrative, what Erdoğan does could be understood as a construction of a perception of a collective self, he deliberately changes the focus in his narrative of Syrian immigrants and then encode values and norms into this collective identity. This conception of narrative is specifically important to understand the utilization of narratives in the social sphere, especially in the case of constructing a collective identity.

After elaborating, to some degree, the underlying structure and highly sophisticated nature of collective identity, it would be useful to mention some other important concepts related to narratives. Considering the concepts within this framework, although the concept of narrative is widely used both in daily life and in more academic studies, some related concepts are used side by side, whether correctly or not. The main intention in this discussion is not to reconstruct the concepts "correctly" however, not to claim it would be a possible task either.

Following on with this intention, as Sahin-Mencutek (2020: 2) rightfully points out, scholars widely used the term narrative reciprocally with some other terms such as story, frame, and discourse (Bradby, 2017; Rein & Schon, 1991; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010;

Wodak & Meyer, 2009; as cited in: 2020: 2). In a similar approach, it might be useful to re-evaluate other concepts widely used in connection with narratives. The aim here is not to put strong lexical arguments about the borders of these terms of course. The intention is to utilize these analytical tools and make them operational for the use of this thesis study.

The first concept that should be examined in relation to narrative is discourse, as there seems to be an unclear cut between narratives and discourses. Foucault, one of the most prominent figures of discourse analysis, has analyzed how the particular discourses on subjects such as insane people (1965), prisoners (1975), and homosexuals (1978) have been constructed through a particular interest in language in line with its historical progress (as cited in: Hammack and Pilecki, 2012). Discourse analysis, in this sense, becomes a tool for social research aiming to reveal the linguistic means that construct and reshape terms and concepts in a dynamic interrelation. A generally established understanding is that discourse is a broader term than narrative and that the narrative is almost like a sub-category under the broader term of discourse (Bamberg et al., 2007: 5). Similarly, scholars use the term "narrative discourse" in a way that implies narrative as a specific type of discourse, such as Bruner (1987, 2000), White (1987), and Genette (1980) to give some examples. It might be argued then, that the narrative is a particular type of discourse that mainly storifies events and presents the facts, experiences, and actors in a complex system that is constructed by the narrator, even if unconsciously. The focus being narratives in this dissertation, it is important to note that narratives have various specific features distinguishing it from discourses.

So that the narrative is distinguished from the broader concept of discourse through its characteristic tendency for storification, then it becomes more important to investigate the difference between narratives and stories and other related concepts such as events, plots, and frames. Scholars generally tend to link the narrative more with an amalgamation between series of stories, events, and plots with time and space (White, 1980; Mac Intyre, 1981; Bruner, 1987, 2001) to construct a "narrative coherence" as Riceour calls (1982).

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Similarly, plots and frames are addressed as a particular understanding of happenings and events that the narrative is based upon (Castells,2009; Miskimmon et al., 2015), which plausibly puts the narrative in a broader category than the plots (Propp, 1958; Levi-Straus, 1967; Patterson and Monroe, 1997) and frames (Sökefeld, 2006; Collyer, 2008). In the same vein, it would be sensible to assume that the story is the essential description of the events, whether it is chronologically ordered or not. If the events happening outside of the human mind are considered factual happenings, still it is the narrator who processes these events into stories through cognitive tools. One important tool here, appears to be the process of emplotment, in which the narrator organizes the stories in order to achieve meaning. Plots could be understood as the main events given in relation to the actors' positions, goals, and mindsets. Although these are nearly impossible to be thoroughly revealed by an outsider, the narrator fills in the blanks or sometimes passes the duty to the audience after implying the clues. Similarly, another important tool is the process of framing, which allows the narrator to order events by selectively highlighting or de-emphasizing sequences. Through these processes, the narrative is constructed.

Figure 2: Illustration of Narrative's Positioning Comparing Related Concepts
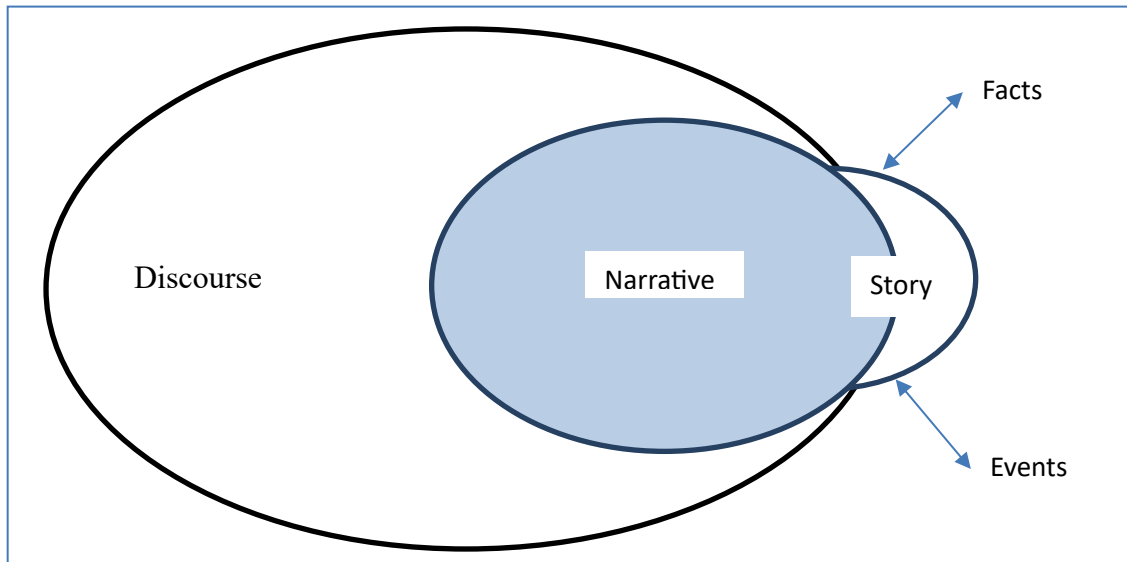
As illustrated in Figure 2, narratives are mainly understood and examined under discourse. Some scholars use the term "narrative discourse" in order to apply this logic and use discourse as an umbrella term. The figure also visualizes the position of the narrative regarding the story. One slight notice here is that stories could possibly exist with or without a narrative or discourse, therefore exceeding the sphere of discourse as well as narrative in this figure. These stories concern the facts and events, sometimes appearing as a diligent translation of the events and sometimes a weak caricature of reality but still making it possible to imagine. On the other hand, it should be reminded that the lines between these concepts are very blurry, making it possible to use them interchangeably. The analysis of a narrative, for example, would involve discourse analysis within the structure of a story. In this case, the importance of constructing a solid conceptual structure is replaced by the consistency in the utilization of these concepts.

To conclude, a general understanding of the narrative appears to be that it is a particular type of discourse that contains and merges with frames, stories, and plots to make a meaningful sense in time and space. Furthermore, these narratives are inter-relational in

the sense that they interact with each other, whether they empower, contest, or make rivalries with one another. Thus, the meaning constructed by a narrative cannot be independent of other related narratives or the context. After all, as Wertsh puts it: the narratives "*are embedded in concrete discourse characterized by dialogic and rhetorical processes and introduce an interested—and constraining—perspective*" (2000; p.516). The narrative naturally takes a position even if it is vague, and it selectively opens the angles assisting to make some particular meanings while constraining others.

In the case of this thesis study, it is argued that through the power of narratives and utilizing the features and functions of narratives, Erdoğan constructs an ontological narrative, or collective identity through his speeches on Syrian immigrants. Erdoğan depicts an imagination of Turkey as the descendant of great civilizations, the leader of the Muslims all around the world, and the oppressed people. This imagination sets the responsibility and legitimacy for inclusive policies toward Syrian immigrants.

2.2. Features and Functions of Narratives

Scholars seem interested in exploring and illustrating the defining principles, functions, and constituting parts of the narrative more than the literal definition of narratives. In an attempt to demonstrate how narratives as a construction of reality operate, Bruner identifies ten features of narrative under the following titles: Narrative diachronicity, particularity, intentional state entailment, hermeneutic composability, canonicity and breach, referentiality, genericness, normativeness, context sensitivity and negotiability, and narrative accrual (Bruner, 1987: 5-20). Among these, "intentional state entailment" as he calls, refers to the natural dependency of narrative onto the intentions which involve the narrator's "beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on" (1987: 7). Accordingly, due to the agency factor in a narrative, there is a "loose link between

intentional state and subsequent action." Thus, the narrative does not necessarily give causal explanations but rather provides reasons (1987: 7). The feature of normativeness tells that the narrative has to depend on some norms and values or, as Bruner puts it: "narrative is necessarily normative" (1987:15). Other scholars have acknowledged the normative nature of narrative as well (see Adelmann and Bennett, 1985; Hodges, 2011). This feature, however, implies a further power that could be utilized. Narratives could set the norms and values, spread the normative hegemony, or challenge hegemonic norms that have been set before. As will be discussed later, the normative nature of narratives makes it a powerful tool in the hands of decision-makers and politicians if it is utilized strategically. Erdoğan use this power of narratives in various occasions, employ several values and norms in his narrative and then comparing the other actors, such as his political opponents or international actors by their weaknesses or lack of such moral values.

In parallel with this, as scholars such as White (1978) and Ricoeur (1982) argue, narratives concern themselves with achieving or referring to cultural legitimacy. However, this legitimacy-seeking process is neither static nor uncompromising as Bruner argues another feature, context sensitivity and negotiability, as a feature that makes "narrative discourse in everyday life such a viable instrument for cultural negotiation" (1987: 17). In turn, the narrative has a natural tendency to open access for interpretation and negotiation, which sets a dynamic process in the making of meaning, sometimes in contestation with other narratives. Touching strongly to some features Bruner describes, Şahin-Mencütek draws attention to the relational nature of narratives, which makes complex interrelational links with actors, agendas, audiences, and other narratives involved (2020: 2).

Internarrativity, as referred to (Hagströmm & Gustaffson, 2019), focuses more on the referential empowerment between narratives, one narrative giving power to or receiving power from other narratives, adding up together in the context of making meaning. On the other hand, scholars also agree that these narratives could well be in competition, offering different emplotments and thus creating different meanings and realities (see Miskimmon et

al, 2013; Ringmar, 2006). In the case of Erdoğan's narrative, as it will be discussed further in the related chapter, his narrative gains power and sometimes leans on other meta-narratives such as Ansar-Muhajir narrative, or solidarity between Muslims. The Islamic duty to help Muslim brothers and sisters who took refuge, as suggested in the narrative of Ansar-Muhajir, becomes a central point in Erdoğan's narrative of Syrian Immigrants. The emotional ties between the members of a similar collective identity, that being Muslim and descendants of a great Islamic civilization, are emphasized through this narrative.

Similarly, the strength of a narrative could be dependent on the specific social environment. No matter how they are viewed as plausible to some, the convenience of the sociocultural environment becomes a factor determining the success of that narrative in the widespread acceptance (Patterson & Monroe, 1998: 320). To summarize the discussion, narratives operate under different social settings, sometimes empower each other, and sometimes compete with others, which is also referred to as "narrative dynamics" by Roy Sommer (2022). The legitimacy of these narratives depends on these social and cultural settings, creating a complex and dynamic ground for the contest. This is not to say that the narratives must be local, not universal. As some narrative emplotments or patterns, such as the "good" fighting or competing with the "evil," could be found anywhere on earth, more specific and full-fledged constructions could be much more local. Cultural heritage, as being the descendants of some "Great Civilizations" in this case study, mainly speaks to Turkish citizens and it could be considered a local one for example, although other similar narratives could be found in various countries as well. Furthermore, it is through these mechanisms of negotiation that a narrative could spread its legitimacy and acceptance.

Another hot debate topic for the narrative turn in social sciences is the controversial nature of narratives in contrast with the traditional interest of modern sciences in exploring causal relations. In an academic endeavor to re-elaborate the concepts of agency, action, and behavior "through a lens that also allows a focus on social ontology and the social constitution of identity" (See also: Collins,1990; Smith, 1990), Somers and Gibson

introduced a comprehensive view of narrative and identity or conceptual narrativity as they refer to (1994: 4-5). The need for such an endeavor indeed lies beneath the plausible assumption that not all the foundational terms and concepts of social research lie under empirical data. Instead, they are irreversibly collided and fused with constructed stories. As they put it in other words: "Not "raw facts" but constructed stories sit in the core of virtually all of our social theories" (Somers & Gibson, 1994: 12). This argument has an essential and inevitable implication in the making of social sciences. Following the logical assumption that social theories are constructed on stories that order and prioritize the "raw facts" in convenience with the story of the theory itself, each social study should be examined within this framework of understanding. To elaborate this further, from this perspective, as the "reality" is seen as the construction of the mind, the constructed realities of each theory should follow its own logical path, from the methods used to the approach towards the research materials. In the case of this thesis study, for example, the perspective changes the research almost completely, from the understanding of the research question, to how to utilize a method to extract findings, and how to analyze these findings. The main question, how Erdoğan narrates his government's policy toward the massive influx of Syrian immigrants, becomes a query to understand the mechanism underneath his narrative. His narrative toward Syrian immigrants, becomes then a narrative mainly about Turkish collective identity. The depicted collective identity is equipped with highly religious motifs such as fraternity and solidarity among Muslims in Erdoğan's narrative.

Through a parallel understanding of narrative with Bruner, Somers and Gibson offer four dimensions to narratives: ontological, public, conceptual, and meta-narratives. The first one, namely the ontological narratives, refers to the narratives of the self, thus making it possible to define self-identity and, in return, interpret the actions and the behaviors of the self. To put it directly in their own words: "People act, or do not act, in part according to how they understand their place in any number of given narratives--however fragmented, contradictory, or partial" (Somers & Gibson, 1994: 30). These narratives depend on one's

place in close relation with time, space, and the social environment, and "like all narratives, ontological narratives are also structured by emplotment, relationality, connectivity, and selective appropriation" (Somers & Gibson, 1994: 30). While this dimension of narrativity clearly touches some of the features Bruner described earlier, the function of the narrative in this dimensional review seems rather comprehensive for this study. The narrator involved can describe his self-identity and place in the social structure which would then define or at least give clues about the ontological others and link the ontological narrative with the public narrative, as the self's "dependence on webs of interlocution" (Taylor, 1989: 39) remains. This is especially useful and functional in order to detect micro or individual narratives that can tell the story in cyclical relation with others, such as "stories about migration both among migrants and among members from various sectors of host societies" (Şahin-Mencütek, 2020: 3). In other words, self-conception is never an isolated process; instead, one can construct his-her identity through ongoing interactions (interlocution) with others. Additionally, as this thesis study presupposes, the constructed narrative cyclically could reveal some meanings that the political actors produce in accordance with their political aims. This is because the narratives have the function of "intentional state entailment" as discussed before, which enables the researchers to understand and evaluate the intentions linked in the narrative. Secondly, public narratives are "attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual" (Somers & Gibson, 1994: 31). These narratives combine a selected group of individuals, whether this collectivity is fictional or not, and fuse them in a narrative that is much different from the sum, ranging from families to societies or even humanity. In the case of this thesis study, as it will be elaborated in the findings chapter, Erdoğan utilizes public narratives by defining what is "us" in order to construct a social identity that operates by taking position regarding other possible positions in response to the influx of Syrian immigrants.

Conceptual narrative, on the other hand, is more related to social researchers. As it is explained, narratives must also include factors as well as ontological and public

dimensions, more or less strengthening the webs with social forces and structures (Sommers & Gibson, 1994: 32). However, Somers and Gibson also warn the social researchers about a serious challenge which is "to devise a conceptual vocabulary that we can use to reconstruct and plot over time and space the ontological narratives and relationships" (1994: 32). This dimension is necessarily related to the research of Erdoğan's narrative concerning Syrian immigrants because the conceptual vocabulary Erdoğan uses is designed to communicate in accordance with the audience he targets.

This simple observation leads to a kind of dilemma in the case of re-narrating a politician's narrative. Fixing this highly fluid and blurry conceptual framework into an academic conceptual framework makes it almost impossible to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the narrative transparently. Transferring the parts of this narrative as they are, the segments of a textual transcription for this case, makes it almost impossible to analyze and re-construct the narrative for scientific purposes. In order to overcome this problem, there needs to be a balance between these two extreme options. The solution operated in this study will be examined in the methodology chapter.

The fourth and last dimension, meta-narrativity, could also be called master narratives. These are the narratives that constitute the structure behind, whether visible or invisible and encode the theories and concepts in their own aspects, such as "Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment, etc." (Sommers & Gibson, 1994: 32). As Somers and Gibson argues, these meta-narratives affect the social theories, construct social dilemmas such as socialism against capitalism, modernism against traditionalism, and shape the understanding of topics such as the rise of Islam or nationalism (1994: 32). In line with the research topic of this thesis, it could be argued that some meta-narratives on Islam and its core values are embedded in Erdoğan's narrative concerning Syrian immigrants. Additionally, this meta-narrative affects the reconstruction of "Muslimhood," the ontological narrative Erdoğan promotes in relation to the Syrian immigrants, encoding or

designing the theories about how to act as a Muslim in response to the issues related to Syrian immigrants.

2.3. Literature Review

"Narrative Turn" is relatively a new emerging phenomenon in social sciences, yet there are numerous studies published from various disciplines in the last few decades. For the purpose of this research, only some of the prior studies are examined here, mainly limited by their focus and method. For this purpose, studies dealing with political narratives in general, and especially studies related to narratives on migration and immigrants, were prioritized. In addition, studies that had an impact on the shaping of this thesis methodologically or in terms of subject matter are also discussed in this section.

There are many studies on the importance of the role that narratives have played and may play in the future as a new tool in international relations. To give some examples, Balzacq (2010), examined how political actors construct security narratives by framing threats in order to justify their policies and mobilize public support, focusing on the securitization theory. Similarly, Phelan and Rabinowitz (2008) analyzed how narratives in diplomatic discourse help shape the global political landscape, emphasizing the power of storytelling in statecraft. These studies, among many others, show that the power of narratives and storytelling is not neglected in recent academic studies. It is acknowledged that narratives, with their power to organize and frame events that are debated in the public sphere, could be used strategically by political actors. Similarly, Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle (2013) introduced the concept of "strategic narratives" emphasizing how states and political actors use narratives to shape global perceptions and influence international policies. Miskimmon and Roselle (2017) argue in another study titled "Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power" that the new media environment has increased the role of narratives in the 21st century. Accordingly, authors argue that strategic narratives, constructing and communicating a coherent story that shapes perceptions in

international affairs, are critical for understanding the complexities of modern power dynamics.

Studies also show special interest in migration, as one of the most debated topic in international affairs, and how the migration issue is narrated by politicians as well as other political actors. Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten (2011) researched on how migration narratives influence political debate and policymaking in Europe, and how these narratives shape public attitudes and identity politics in return. Dennison (2021), on the other hand, focuses on why some migration narratives are more popular. The author suggests three main determinants for narrative popularity; issue complexity and salience, plausibility of the narrative, and the recipient's traits, including the cognitive biases and emotional responses. Dennison (2021) argues that policymakers must construct narratives that would resonate with audience's existing beliefs rather than challenging them, and narratives can be more persuasive when they engage emotions. In parallel with this research, for the purpose of this thesis study, Erdoğan's narrative emphasize some emotional positioning toward Syrian immigrants. Even more importantly, the literature shows the significance of narrating complex issues such as migration and the communication of these issues with the public. Narrative, as a mean of communication, play a crucial role in this mission.

There are several researches focusing on the use of narratives in the public discourse especially concerning populist narratives on migration. An important research exploring how the rise of populism has led to a surge in anti-immigrant narratives that frame migration as a crisis is written by Zeynep Şahin-Mencütek (2020). In this research, Şahin-Mencütek draws attention to main functions of migration narratives such as structuring the knowledge about migration, drawing boundaries between natives and migrants through othering practices, and suggesting policy solutions that might vary through political actors, including restrictive measures like securitization or humanitarian approaches. Additionally focusing on the role of different actors like international organizations, NGOs, and the media; the author concludes that counter-narratives to anti-immigrant narratives could

challenge dominant migration frames (Zeynep Şahin-Mencütek, 2020). Although Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants appears to have some characteristics of a populist discourse, it should be noted that Erdoğan's narratives can not be characterized as an anti-immigrant narrative. Indeed, the case of Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants seperate from anti-immigrant narratives Zeynep Şahin-Mencütek and other scholars describe, in this sense.

M. Erdoğan on the other hand, explores the responses of Turkish society to the influx of Syrian immigrants (2020). The author proposes that concerns about Syrian immigrants stem from the society itself in the case of Turkey, rather than political elites and state institutions as traditional securitization theories emphasize. Accordingly, the concept of "securitization from society" is introduced in order to explore how grassroots fears regarding unemployment, criminality, decrease in the accessibility to public services, and losing national identity in the society influence the framing of immigrants as a security threat (M. Erdoğan, 2020). The author of the article also predicts that securitization of the immigrants issue would potentially lead to the rise of anti-refugee and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

This thesis study differs from the literature covered so far mainly in the sense that it focuses on Erdoğan, a political leader taking the decision to implement an open-door policy toward the influx of immigrants coming from Syria in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War. However, there are some exceptional researches in the literature focusing mainly on Erdoğan's discourses and narratives as well. One example is an article titled "How Erdoğan Rules Through Crisis" (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2023). The article discusses that Turkish President Erdoğan has maintained his political power despite numerous crises and suggests that through manipulating narratives; such as using populist narratives, blame-shifting, and nationalist rhetoric, he was able to manage public opinion. In summary, Erdoğan's political resilience is attributed to his ability to exploit crises, control key economic and media agents, and manipulate public discourse through populism and nationalism in this article (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2023).

As it will also be discussed in the methodology chapter, Oppermann and Spencer's (2019) research provides an inspiration to the course of this study. In this research, the authors examine the main tenets of the two opposing campaigns in the Brexit referendum of 2016. The two opponents in the referendum, the "Leave" campaign, and the "Remain" campaign are compared in relevance to their narrative structure, and the genre consistencies in both structures are tested (Oppermann & Spencer, 2019). The authors argue that the strategic use of the virtues and emotions encoded in the setting of the Leave campaign's narrative contributed significantly to the success in the popular votes. More importantly, the analysis reveals some insights about the structures and elements that utilize the strategic use of the "romantic genre" in political discourse. As the authors suggest, one implication of the research might be to investigate more on the proximity between the populist discourse and the narratives constructed on the romantic setting, and how this proximity "enables populism to tap into the power of romance" (Oppermann & Spencer, 2019, 15).

An article that is more parallel with the research topic of this thesis investigates the sudden and violent change in Turkey's political attitude towards the Assad Regime in Syria (Demirtaş, 2013). Taking the historical background of Turkey's relations with Syria into analysis, Demirtaş analyzes AK Party's main operating framework and principles and sheds light on; first, how these principles were internally contradicting, and second, the limitations to fit capabilities into expectations in foreign policy (2013). Concerned with the over-ambitious goal of changing the regime in Syria, Demirtaş points to the question: "How could Turkey imagine that it could force a change of regime in another country?" (2013, 117). Demirtaş argues here that Turkey's "new civilizational identity" and the "geographical imagination" that is encoded by this collective identity have led to these "over-ambitious goals" (2013, 117). In parallel with this article, it is argued in this thesis study that Erdoğan utilizes a collective identity and encodes religious and cultural values and norms in his narrative of collective identity to legitimize AK Party's open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants.

Another research that should be addressed in this section is published by Kerem Morgül in 2023. In this research, Morgül (2023) analyzes Erdoğan's official discourse on Syrian immigrants via speeches he gave between September 2014 and December 2022. One main contribution of the study is "to the literature on JDP's (AK Party's) discursive governance of the Syrian refugee crisis" (Morgül, 2023, 48). The coincidental harmony of the timeline covered by the research of Morgul related to this thesis study makes it possible to make a comparison between the results of the two studies.

One main finding in Morgul's study concerns the correlation between the "rising public resentment toward migrants" and "the shifts in Erdoğan's refugee discourse." Followingly, Morgul argues that: "even the most authoritarian and powerful populist leaders have to consider popular demands when articulating a particular story of peoplehood and its constitutive "us" versus "them" dichotomies" (2023, 49). Differing from Morgul's research, this thesis study focuses on the initial phase of Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants, covering between 2011 to 2014.

This thesis study intends to make contribution to the existing literature by exploring and explaining what kind of dynamics Erdoğan's unique narrative has which, despite adopting a populist rhetoric and establishing a narrative that is not anti-refugee, according to existing theories and literature on migration narratives.

2.4. Summary of the Chapter

So far, mainly the definitions, defining features, and functions of narratives are covered in this chapter. Firstly, the narrative turn in social sciences was explained. Although the narrative as a concept and narrative analysis, the study of narrative structure, have been the subject of literary studies firsthand, it seems eventually inescapable to link the making of the meaning process for social studies with interest topics such as social action, behavior, agency, and the construction of reality. After all, if human beings structure and comprehend reality in narrative forms as suggested, and if these constructions of the human mind are transferred through these stories of the self and the other, these stories would determine or shape the agent's actions and behaviors at least to some extent.

Another implication is related to the construction of social action vis a vis the narrativity behind it. The argument here is not to claim that all narratives should be sincerely honest about the narrator's true intentional state or not to argue that the study of these narratives would reveal the original intentions of the agent, nor the social action. On the contrary, the true intentions (if there are any) could be easily hidden under a compelling story that convinces the audience how they should interpret events and shape their actions and behaviors. As a matter of fact, it might well be argued that this is the case in most of the events humans are exposed to in everyday life. Political debates surrounding migration and refugees are narrated based on the political stance toward immigration, whether supportive or anti-immigrant positioning. As the literature shows, populist politicians utilize the issue of migration to securitize the policies toward immigration and increase the fear toward immigrants to gain public support. Even the news we are exposed to, which claims to be designed to inform us about real events, are designed and presented as narratives. No matter how they are represented as being "objective" and "unbiased," it becomes a necessity to narrate "factual" events, and the process of narration necessitates perspective. Narratives are inescapably everywhere. However, it seems to be that the power dynamics inherent in

narratives determine the success of the narrators, or the social agents and politicians in this sense. Similar to making a product or a brand more successful in the market through commercial advertisements, these power dynamics enable politicians to rise and fall in relation with their political rivals through political advertising, or in another domain, making it possible for some news channels to attract more audience than the others. It is, therefore the aim of this research to interact with these narratives in an attempt to understand how the agent, the current Turkish President, Mr. Erdoğan in this case, plotted the series of events that are related to current migration issues in Turkey, in time and space in order to construct a successful narrative that would manufacture the public consent for the "open door policy" towards Syrian immigrants, at least to some degree. As the scholars above argue, this process is dynamic, cyclical, and context-sensitive. They are negotiable, normative, and diachronic. The lines are blurry and changeable from one context to another. However, the powerful tool for analyzing this highly complex structure is the same structure that makes it so complex. Through narrative analysis, it becomes much easier to extract meaning from this highly complex structure, and the skills needed to analyze these narratives are inherent in human beings.

3. Methodology

This thesis research aims to focus on and find answers to two main questions. The first question is related to how Erdoğan initially constructed and communicated his narrative regarding mass immigration flows from Syria. The question has significance in the contemporary political issues of Turkey. As it is observed, the massive numbers of international immigrants in Turkey have exacerbated various political issues both at the domestic and international levels. As M. Erdoğan argues (2020), the high number of immigrant influx to Turkey in a relatively short time in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War, necessitate re-considering the securitization theories in the case of Turkish politics. The second question concerns something that is already present in the nature of narratives, and that is how Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants changes. As mentioned in the theoretical and conceptual framework, narratives are flexible and negotiable; thus, aiming to discover changes in a long-term narrative somehow might seem contradictory at first glance. However, the change expressed here concerns some basic elements of the narrative, or the wider changes and evolutions within the constructed narrative. By employing the method used by Oppermann and Spencer (2019) that will be elaborated more here, it is possible to detect main changes in the structure of the narrative. In the case of this study, the main change in Erdoğan's narrative could be summarized as such: after the failure to replace the Assad Regime in Syria by the Syrian opposition, Erdoğan raises his criticism toward international actors, such as the United Nations and the "West," changing the attitude in the characterization of the West. Moreover, the hopeful messages claiming that the Syrian immigrants will return after the Assad Regime's replacement changes and more ambiguous messages regarding the future of Syrian immigrants emerge.

This thesis study mainly relies on narrative analysis as the conceptual framework to explore and understand the meaning constructed and communicated by focusing on the

underlying themes, settings, and values in the textual transformation of Erdoğan's speeches on Syrian immigrants. The aim is to understand how the constructed narrative speaks to its audience, what kinds of political messages are conveyed, and how the political characters are portrayed within Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants. In this sense, narrative analysis offers valuable advantages and insights in the research as a tool and method.

First, it gives deeper insights into how the political discourses and narratives shape public perception and policy (Miskimmon et al., 2014). Following the main questions involved in this research, this feature of narrative analysis makes the necessary links between how a narrative on Syrian immigrants is constructed and how it is narrated to shape public perception. Second, narrative analysis provides a framework for understanding the strategic use of narratives in setting agendas, framing issues, and legitimizing political actions, making it a powerful tool in the analysis of soft power and influence in international relations (Nye, 2011). In line with the scope of this study, it is a side quest for the researcher to reveal and understand the strategic use of narratives to analyze how Erdoğan tries to legitimize the government's political decisions concerning Turkey's policy towards Syrian immigrants seeking asylum in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War.

Finally, narrative analysis can reveal the emotional and moral dimensions of political discourses, highlighting how leaders use stories and discourses to inspire and mobilize followers (Burns, 1978). This feature also becomes prominently important in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants, as this narrative is observed to be highly emotional and attached to strong and wider emotional and moral dimensions that aim to target a large audience both at the domestic and international level.

This thesis study relies mainly on the narrative analysis method used by Oppermann and Spencer in a previous study (2019). In this study, Oppermann and Spencer analyze the Leave Campaign on Brexit referendum under three main categories: Setting,

characterization, and emplotment (2019: 10-14). This simple and effective method enables the researcher to explore and reveal the main elements in the narrative structure, and it provides insight to compare the main changes in the narrative through time. Some slight adaptations have been implemented in this case study due to the highly holistic nature of Erdoğan's narrative. In accordance with his narrative, the category of emplotment has been stretched in order to reveal how the collective identity of the self (or "Us") takes position in regard to the other political characters. In Erdoğan's narrative, the collective identity of the self differs from "others" by the actions, moral values, and norms attached to this identity. While "others" remain indifferent to the Syrian immigrants, the tragedy occurring in Syria in the Civil War; Erdoğan's depiction of "us" follows a much more virtuous path in his narrative. A comparison between actors through his emplotment, therefore, could be utilized to understand this difference in his narrative.

The research material used in this thesis consists of numerous speeches Erdoğan made between 2011 and 2014. The speeches were collected in 23 books by the Turkish Presidential Publications (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Yayınları) published in 2019. The covered books consist of series titled: 2023'e Doğru, Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda, Efendi Değil Hizmetkar Olmak, Canım İstanbul, Ezberleri Bozarken, Hayaldi Gerçek Oldu, Kökü Mazide Olan Ati, Ya Allah Bismillah, and Mazlumların Sığınağı. Erdoğan's numerous speeches between 2011 to 2014 have been collected in these books. Erdoğan's speeches concerning Syrian immigrants have been selected and analyzed for the purpose of this thesis study.

4. Turkey and Migration

4.1. Important Concepts and Legal Framework on Immigrants

In the most basic sense, the term migration implies a relocation, movement from one place to another. As history shows, humans have always been migrating, changing locations for many reasons. Yet, defining migration simply as changing location somehow lacks the capacity to differentiate between the long-term and short-term relocation of people, which has increasingly become more important since modern times. Thus, Clark asserts that "*human migration implies some form of permanent or semi-permanent relocation*" and this is how we differentiate migration from short-term movements such as tourism activities (Clark, 1986, 10).

As the early human migration studies were closely related to demographic studies, another distinction has to be made between in-migration and out-migration. In this sense, in-migration identifies the number of migrants that come to a specifically identified boundary; it might be a city, town, or country, while out-migration identifies the migrants that go out of these boundaries. This way, the population changes could be measured by considering net migration in a specific location (Clark, 1986).

On the other hand, refugees could be understood as a special group of migrants in which the driving factor for migration is to seek protection. During World War II, the wide effects of the war on civilians and massive population movements necessitated the identification of the rights of the refugees. In 1948, The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which recognizes "basic rights and fundamental freedoms" for all human beings. The declaration also identified the right to asylum in article 14: *"Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution"* (United Nations, 2024). Building on Article 14 of UDHR, the United Nations Security Council passed another treaty in 1951. Sometimes referred to as 1951 Refugee Convention or 1951 Geneva Convention, The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees introduced some core principles such as non-refoulment which asserts

that " a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom" (UNHCR). The Convention also defines refugee as a person who:

> "As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (Article 1, A2).

As the statement shows, the 1951 Convention sets a time limitation by referring to "events occurring before 1 January 1951". Furthermore, section B of Article 1 gives the signing states a freedom of choice in defining the words "events occurring before 1 January 1951" either with geographical limitation to Europe (Article 1, B1a) or without geographical limitation at all (Article 1, B1b). The 1967 Protocol removed the time limitation, making the identification more universal. On the geographical implication of the article, however, Turkey preserved its geographical limitation on the definition of refugees, which practically means that Turkey does not recognize asylum seekers coming from other than its European borders as refugees. The geographical limitation has been a significant part of Turkey's asylum policies (Kirisci, 2001: 13-14), while adding up to the complex and vague status of refugees or asylum seekers in Turkey, especially those coming from eastern borders like Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Despite receiving criticism from various international organizations and countries due to the geographical limitation regarding refugees, Turkey has not lifted the geographical limitation, largely due to its role as a transit point in migration flows and concerns that it may become a 'buffer zone' for migrants wishing to migrate to Europe if the geographical limitation is lifted (Erder, Gençkaya and Içduygu, 2014, 237). However, it should be noted that despite the geographical limitation, Turkey has become a country hosting one of the most refugee populations in the world.

Other than defining the terms refugee and asylum seeker on the legal ground and identifying the rights and freedoms attached to them, the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol also set the ground for new institutions and organizations dedicated to the

protection of refugees. In 1950, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the UN General Assembly. Differing from its predecessors, who are mainly concerned with mass displacements caused by wars, UNHCR was designed to respond to individual protection risks of refugees as well (Eminoğlu, 2022, 22). Furthermore, the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol have significantly expanded the UNHCR's operation capabilities and regulated the international law concerning refugees and asylum seekers.

Regarding sovereignty, the international system and international law recognize states' power and authority within their own borders. Within the context of refugees, it is provisioned for states to actively cooperate with UNHCR and international organizations to ensure their response and capacity for the asylum system that corresponds to international law (Eminoğlu, 2022, 30). States, with absolute sovereignty, might take measures concerning asylum and immigration if and when they see it necessary, yet international law sets some standards and regulations in order to protect the rights and freedoms of asylum seekers and facilitate cooperation and burden sharing at the international level. This situation can lead to some problems in practice. On the one hand, the nature of the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol encourages nation-states to cooperate on asylum issues, while on the other hand, they cannot ensure the fair distribution of the burden among nations affected to varying degrees by migration movements. As a natural consequence, each state could determine its policies regarding migration and asylum according to its sovereignty rights to some degree, which aligns with its national security approaches.

4.2. Turkey's Immigration Policies

The Republic of Turkey, established in 1923, faced significant waves of migration and asylum seekers right from its inception. As the following section focuses more on the historical aspect, the demographic structure of the new Turkish state was reshaped by the massive migration waves and bilateral population exchange agreements. As time passed, the direction and the nature of migration flows in and out of Turkey changed, but the country continued to be "the land of diverse migrations."(2009) İçduygu divides Turkish history into three periods regarding Turkey's asylum and immigration policies: the era of negligence covering until 1994, the transition to international norms between 1994 and 2001, and lastly, the era of Europeanization (2004, 90-91). Accordingly, as a part of the process of nation-building policies, the Turkish immigration system privileged the Turks and Muslims. The 1934 Settlement Law identifies "muhacir" as: *"Individuals or groups of Turkish descent, settled or nomadic, who wish to come to Turkey individually or collectively with the intention of settling in Turkey."*

After Turkey's signing of the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, regulations were established regarding the treatment of refugees arriving from Europe. As mentioned earlier, due to the geographical limitation imposed by Turkey on the 1951 Convention and its Protocol of 1967, immigrants coming from outside of Europe could not benefit from these regulations. The regulation introduced in 1994 established principles and procedures regarding individuals seeking asylum in Turkey from outside Europe (Kirişçi, 2001). With the 1994 Regulation, refugees arriving from outside of Europe were treated as a separate category and placed under temporary protection until their asylum applications were evaluated by the UNHCR and they were resettled in third countries (Erder, Gençkaya and İçduygu, 2014, 242). However, Turkey also faced severe criticisms about the 1994 regulation, especially on the grounds that the regulation does not make any reference to the core human rights of the refugees and asylum seekers and does not mention the non-refoulment principle. As a matter of fact, *"the European Court of Human Rights has found*

Turkey in violation of articles 3, 5, and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights in several cases regarding deportation, detention, and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees" (HBS Turkey, 2019, 7).

The late 1990s and the early 2000s have been marked by efforts of integration into international norms and standards regarding Turkey's migration and asylum policies. Especially after 2001, new laws and regulations were introduced, the state's capacities to respond to matters concerning migration and asylum were expanded, and integration into EU acquis accelerated (Erder, Gençkaya and İçduygu, 2014, 242). Regarding Turkey's recognition as a candidate state for EU membership in 1999 at the Helsinki Summit, Turkey's integration into EU acquis gained much importance, affecting the country's migration policies. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) adopted in 2013 was an important milestone in this sense. Aligning itself with the EU acquis, the LFIP established a comprehensive legal framework for international protection. Other than refugees, another status called conditional refugee has been identified by the law for those coming from non-European countries, enabling their stay in Turkey until their resettlement to a third country (Eminoğlu, 2022, 50). Subsidiary protection, on the other hand, covers those who cannot be regarded as refugees or conditional refugees yet could not return to the country of origin due to identified reasons. The law also established the Directorate General of Migration Management in 2013. With a change in its status on 29 October 2019, it became the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM). The PMM has the mandate to monitor and coordinate the implementation of migration policies and carry out actions related to migration, temporary protection, and protection of the victims of human trafficking.

One of the most important regulations introduced by LFIP was the Temporary Protection status. Following the protests that began in Syria in 2011 and escalated into a civil war due to the increasingly harsh interventions by the Assad government, there was a significant increase in the number of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey. Turkey had adopted an open-door policy in response to the influx of Syrian refugees. However, due to geographical limitation, Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey could not be considered under

refugee status. This regulation also determined the legal status of Syrian refugees who have come to Turkey in large groups. The LFIP regulates the temporary protection as:

> "Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection."
> (LFIP Article 91, paragraph 1).

As seen in the article, the law recognizes the immediate nature of the mass influx of forcefully displaced people, making it possible for the state to respond to these influxes. On the other hand, it could be seen as a temporary solution for those who have been forced to leave their country and cannot be considered refugees in Turkey. In the Regulation on Temporary Protection, which was adopted later in 2014 based on article 91 of LFIP, it has been stated that individual applications for international protection will not be processed for those under temporary protection status (Article 16 paragraph 1, Regulation on Temporary Protection). With the same regulation, public services such as health, education, access to the labor market, social services, translation, and customs procedures are identified and regulated for people under temporary protection.

4.3. A Brief History of Immigration in Turkey

Due to its geographical and historical position, Turkey has been familiar with the phenomenon of migration since ancient times. For the purposes of this thesis, it will be useful to divide migration into internal and external migration. Accordingly, internal migration refers to population movements within a country, while external migration refers to migrations coming from outside the country (Kirisci, 1999: 118). It should be noted that external migration would be the main focus for the purpose of this thesis.

As mentioned earlier, the lands we now call Turkey have historically been a region frequently encountered with external migrations. Starting from the last quarter of the 15th century, the Jews who sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire, mainly fleeing from Spain, constitute a historically significant example of external migrations received by the Ottomans. Additionally, during this period, Ashkenazi Jews migrating from countries such

as Germany, France, and Hungary to the Ottoman Empire, as well as Italian Jews from cities like Sicily, Otranto, and Calabria, joined these waves of migration (Kirişçi, 1999, 118). Thanks to these migrations, the Ottomans could meet a portion of their need for skilled manpower in various crafts and even administrative and military structures.

When we look at both the founding stage and the subsequent historical process, the communities within the Ottoman subjects constantly found themselves in migration. From the early stages, the waves of migration from east to west among Muslim Turks played a significant role in the establishment and the rapid rise of the Ottoman state. Mainly aimed at securing borders, raiding neighboring settlements, and expanding the empire, a militarized organization called the "Akinci," which roughly translates to "raider," was established, reforming the previous example of the "uç beyliği" system in the Seljuk Turks (Alkan, 2013, 492-501). Akinci became a significant factor in increasing the operational power and capabilities of the state during the expansion phase of the Ottomans, especially in newly acquired territories where the Christian population was predominant.

On the other hand, there was a tradition known as the "devshirme" system. With this system, some children from Christian families in the newly conquered Balkan territories, deemed suitable for education, were brought to Istanbul and converted to Islam, then evaluated for significant positions in the government and the military. According to the devshirme law, children aged between 8 and 18 deemed suitable would be taken under the state's protection every three to five years. This practice has been implemented throughout history, especially in present-day Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Hungary (Kazıcı, 2018, 494). On the other hand, it has influenced the course of history by facilitating the education of numerous talented individuals among Ottoman state-persons, such as the Sokullu family, Sinan the Architect, and Muhammad Ali of Egypt.

After the halt and reversal of Ottoman expansion, the traditional Turk-Muslim migration waves from east to west were replaced by migrations in the opposite direction. Following the territorial losses suffered by the Ottomans, especially in the Balkans, it is known that Muslim groups from the areas evacuated by the Ottomans migrated towards the remaining Ottoman territories. From the second half of the 19th century until the end of the Ottoman era, it is estimated that over a million Crimean Tatars settled in Ottoman

territories, specifically in Istanbul, Izmir, Kocaeli, and Eskisehir. Similarly, due to Russia's expansionist policies, the Ottoman Empire became a refuge for Circassians who were forced to leave their homeland. During the same period (1860-1922), approximately 2.5 million Circassians were estimated to seek refuge in Ottoman territories from the Caucasus. Additionally, during the same period marked by independence struggles and the 1877-78 Turko-Russian War, it is estimated that around 1.5 million immigrants from Rumelia migrated from the tumultuous Balkans (Özbay and Yücel, 2001, 3). To provide a comparison of the magnitude of this external migration wave, it is worth noting that the Ottoman population was roughly around 18.5 million according to the census conducted in 1914 (Karpat, 1985, 190).

In this regard, it is evident that external migration and asylum phenomena occupy a significant place in Turkey's history and culture establishing the roots in Ottoman era. Throughout Turkey's history, various types of migration waves have occurred. Regarding the state's responses to these migration waves, it could be useful to separate the Turkish history of migration into three periods. First, from the establishment of the new state to the 1950s, when the Democrat Party came to power, the priority of the migration policies seemed to be affected by the efforts to build a nation-state. In the second period, from the 1950s to the end of the 1980s, external migration waves to Turkey decreased relatively to other periods. In contrast, internal migrations through rural to urban migrations and emigration to more developed countries increased. In the last period covering roughly from the end of the 1980s until today, we see that the government is affected by diverse migration waves, both internal and external.

It is worth noting that the migration history of Turkey could not be covered in detail in this study, and it is not the aim. However, Turkey's migration history also sets the stage for Erdoğan's narratives towards immigrants. As we will see again in the narratives created by Erdoğan, the main subject of this study, Erdoğan frequently refers to this historical process and Turkey's colorful history of migration in his narratives about refugees. As explained in the previous chapter, the narrative is not obliged to be accurate or non-biased, as the findings of this research would partly show in the following chapter. The intention of constructing an academic narrative (within the capacity of this research) on Turkey's

history of migration in this chapter, is related to the process of narrative analysis. Constructing a summarized "academic" narrative would enable both the researcher and the reader to have an insight on the differences made in Erdoğan's narrative regarding the history of migration. Thus, it seemed to be useful to make an overview on Turkey's history of migration in this part.

4.3.1. Building a Nation: Migration Movements from 1923 to 1950s

After the First World War and the War of Independence, it is observed that the newly established Republic of Turkey promptly began working towards the construction of a national identity and a Turkish nation-state based on this national identity. Parallel to this, it is undoubtedly clear that in the early period of the Republic, a certain strategy was pursued both in the formation of migration policies and in Turkish citizenship. However, it does not seem possible to claim that the state constructed its migration policies solely based on ethnic identity, especially in light of the developments during and after the First World War. It can be argued, particularly considering the efforts to increase the proportion of the Muslim population in the late Ottoman period, that demographic movements aimed to increase the Muslim population continued.

During the First World War, population movements were already occurring. The tendency of Muslims to migrate from the Balkans to Ottoman territories continued during the First World War and the Greco-Turkish War just as it happened before in the Balkan Wars. The people who migrated to the country through these migrations gained significant weight within the total population. In fact in 1923, the year the Turkish Republic was founded, about 20% of Turkey's population consisted of immigrants (Zürcher, 2003, 6). However, during the process of nation-state building in the region, the "minority" issue was considered a serious matter by the states, and it has resorted to population exchange, which was considered legitimate at the time (İçduygu & Sert, 2015, 10). According to the 'Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations' signed in Lausanne between Turkey and Greece, approximately 1.2 million Orthodox Greeks and around 400,000 Muslim Turks, including those who sought refuge between 1912 and 1923,

were included in the exchange (İçduygu & Sert, 2015, 10). Similarly, population exchanges were also conducted between Bulgaria and Turkey, and between Bulgaria and Greece during the same period. These exchanges are considered important examples in the construction of nation-states and national identities in the Balkans after the First World War.

In this regard, the population exchanges undoubtedly provide significant clues about how the nascent nation-states in the region defined their own national identities. After all, the relevant states had to establish a legal framework and develop practical solutions to decide who would be considered "one of them" among the communities outside their state borders. What is interesting for Turkey here, as the authors also pointed out, is that in the population exchange practices that concerned Turkey, the fundamental criterion considered was not ethnic origin but rather the religious belief to which the individuals belonged (İçduygu & Sert, 2015, 11).

As an example, the Karamanlids, who are ethnically Turk and speak Turkish but practice Christianity, were forced to migrate to Greece, and the Vallahades, who are Greek-speaking Muslims, were accepted in Turkey (İçduygu & Sert, 2015, 11). These practices seem somewhat contrasting to Ziya Gökalp's definition of "Turkishness," who was a prominent figure of Turkish nationalism and considered to be the ideologist of the new Turkish state. His definition of "Turkishness" was based on historical, lingual, and cultural bonds. Although his definition could have been hard -if not impossible- to implement in the practice of mass population exchanges, it could hardly be argued that expelling of the Karamanlids, including the Vallahades, and excluding the Gagauz Turks who are a Turkish-speaking Christian minority in Moldova in the Turkish population exchange would make parallels to his definition. It could rather be argued that in the practice of controlling and implementing the migration through population exchanges, the newly established Turkish state simply continued the existent practices of the Ottomans, and therefore the main criterion for the "Turkishness" in the example of these exchanges resembles the Millet System of the Ottomans in which the societies are defined primarily based on their religion.

Alongside the Muslims coming from the Balkans and accepted into the newly established Republic of Turkey communities forcibly displaced from Turkey due to wars and internal conflicts during the same period also played a significant role in the

demographic changes of the country. Especially during the periods of the First World War and the War of Independence, it is known that many Armenian and Greek families from Anatolia and Istanbul were forced to migrate. Although estimates vary widely regarding the numbers of those who were forcibly displaced and those who died during conflicts or migration, it is believed that, even according to the lowest estimates, around 2.5 million Armenians and Greeks migrated, with approximately 1 million presumed to have died (Özbay and Yücel, 2001, 4). In conclusion, during this period, both the *"muhacirs"* (as the 1934 Settlement Law refers to them) and the non-Muslim ethnic groups who migrated to Turkey laid the foundations of Turkey's demographic structure as we know it today.

As Özbay and Yücel also noted, the international migration policy implemented in the early years of the Republic was a continuation of the Ottoman period's policy regarding migrants (2001: 6). However, this observation does not ignore the multifaceted and layered nature of the implemented policy. On one hand it was aimed to "homogenize" Turkey's demographic structure. On the other hand, however, the economic reforms of the newly established Republic and the country's desire for modernization were also taken into account. With the Settlement Law issued in 1934, land was allocated to migrants, nomadic tribes, and Kurdish tribes subjected to migration, aiming to increase agricultural production as stated in the Economic Program of 1930 to accelerate economic development. Similarly, urbanization was not promoted during this period, and increasing agricultural production was identified as a primary goal in line with Turkey's economic structure at the time. Incentives such as land allocation and tax exemptions were provided to incoming migrants to encourage settlement (Özbay and Yücel, 2001, 7-9, also see Arı, 1932, 132-134). In summary, in the early period of the Republic, as it was the case in the final period of the Ottoman Empire, the policy of "Islamizing" Anatolia largely continued, aiming for the integration of communities belonging to different ethnic groups into the Muslim-Turkish population in Anatolia. Alongside this, efforts toward economic development programs deemed necessary for modernization were also considered, and the waves of migration were directed in regard to these development programs.

4.3.2. Migration Movements from 1950s to 1980s: Internal Migration Waves and Emigration to West

In the 1950s, significant developments occurred in Turkey, changing the political, social, and economic structures of the country. In the context of external migration, however, it could be said that this was a relatively calm period after the population exchanges. Nevertheless, in the 1950s, significant internal migration waves occurred due to various complex reasons. While mechanization of agriculture increased the productivity of the farms, it also caused significant job losses in rural areas (Yıldırmaz, 2009, 87-88). Adding on to this, rapidly developing infrastructures and public services in cities, coupled with more demand for labor, became a pulling factor for the migration from rural to urban areas (Zürcher, 1993, 283). In 1961, as a result of bilateral labor agreements signed with West Germany and later with other developed countries, labor migration occurred from Turkey to foreign countries. These migrations not only impacted the destination countries but also had a significant effect on Turkey as the source country of migration. On the other hand, labor migration from Turkey to foreign countries is quite important as it represents a departure from the general historical migration patterns in Turkey. This trend of labor migration was followed by family reunifications especially after the 1980 coup. Migration in the form of seeking refuge and irregular migrations also continued.

In 1989, following the policies of the Bulgarian regime, Turkey once again hosted a similar wave of migration, with migrants seeking asylum from Bulgaria. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, migration waves, particularly those known as "suitcase trade," which can be positioned as part of the informal trade sector based on economic conditions, also significantly affected Turkey. These migration waves, which will be further detailed, not only demonstrate Turkey's ongoing role as a significant transition and stopover point in migration waves but also indicate how migration movements in Turkey have been influenced by globalization, industrialization, and similar factors, branching out parallel to evolving migration movements.

Following the population exchanges, especially external migrations in Turkey, entered a relatively stable period. However, as with many countries after World War II, the rise of unemployment in rural areas due to modernization and mechanization in agriculture (Kaymal, 2017, 1501), coupled with the increase in economic and social opportunities in cities, led to an increase in rural-to-urban migration. According to the population censuses of 1927 and 1940, the proportion of the rural population to the total population remained constant at 76%, but by 1960, this ratio had decreased to 68%, further dropping to 56% in 1980, and reaching 35% by 2000 (Öztürk et al., 2018, 515). It is important to note that urban-to-urban migrations, such as moving to larger and more industrial cities, are excluded from these data (Öztürk et al.,2018, 515). Additionally, the dissolution of rural settlements and rural-to-urban migrations accelerated further, especially after the 1980s, resulting in a decrease in the total population living in rural areas. For instance, approximately 25 million people lived in rural areas in 1980, decreasing to 24 million in 2000, and rapidly declining to 6.4 million in 2014 (2018: 515).

In addition to these statistics, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) address-based population system, an average of 3.26 percent of Turkey's population migrated across provinces annually between 2007 and 2021 (TÜİK, 2022a). The 2021 population census also indicates that 31.1 percent of Turkey's population were born in provinces different from their current province of residence, and another 3.7 percent were born abroad. This data suggests that more than one-third of the population migrated to their current province of residence within their lifetime (TÜİK, 2022b). Considering all these data, it i's evident that aside from the external migrations, internal migration movements within Turkey's recent history have been quite dynamic.

Although internal migrations in Turkey may not directly fall within the scope of this study, it is important to note at least two factors contributing to the settings of migration narratives in Turkey. The first one is more apparent, that is, in terms of migration, and its impacts on society; Turkish history possesses a rather diverse and powerful legacy. Surely migrating from one country to another is widely different than internal migrations, yet the impacts might vary from individual perspective. The second factor that is largely hidden in these impacts is somewhat unknown to the researcher. People who migrate from their own

villages to cities in the hopes of finding better jobs and living conditions can very well establish a connection between their own experiences and the experiences of refugees migrating to their country. Thus, the social acceptance towards other immigrants or refugees might be much higher for these groups, making them more receptive to social acceptance narratives towards refugees or immigrants.

The relative stagnation experienced in external migrations after the exchange period was disrupted in the 1960s by the migration of "guest workers" from Turkey to Europe, which holds a special place in Turkey's migration history. In this context, a bilateral labor agreement was signed between West Germany and Turkey in 1961. With the construction of the Berlin Wall, West Germany, deprived of cheap labor from Eastern European countries which was vital for its industry, initiated a guest worker program with a series of countries, including Turkey, due to factors such as low birth rates in the country and the lack of demand for certain labor-intensive jobs by German workers (Kesici, 2021). Initially referred to as "Gastarbeiter" (guest workers) and migrating to Germany with two-year contracts, Turkish workers were granted the opportunity for longer stays in Germany and to bring their families along with changes made to the agreement in 1964 (Prevezanos, 2011). Subsequently, significant labor migration from Turkey to Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and Australia occurred following agreements made with these countries. Between 1961 and 1975, approximately 800,000 workers migrated from Turkey, with 81% of them migrating to West Germany (Yiğit, 2011, 33). Additionally, it is claimed that during the same period, over half a million Turkish citizens migrated and settled without work permits (Teitelbaum & Martin, 2003, 104).

In 1973, due to the global crisis and economic downturn, Germany suspended its guest worker program. However, this development did not prevent migrations from Turkey to Germany. Migrations continued through various channels, such as family reunifications, asylum applications, and irregular migrations throughout the 1980s and the '90s. According to Muenz and Ulrich, in 1994, the number of foreigners living in Germany reached 7 million, with Turks constituting 2 million of this population (as cited in Soysal, 2009, 253).

As a result of the internal conflicts in Turkey in the 1970s and the subsequent coup in 1980, there was a significant increase in the number of people seeking asylum in

European countries from Turkey. Especially Kurds and Alevis sought asylum in European countries following increased political pressure in Turkey. Unlike the guest worker migrations that began in the 1960s, the destination of these migrations shifted to the United Kingdom, which did not require visas for entry, instead of West Germany, which implemented visa procedures. From 1989 onwards, Western European countries including the United Kingdom also introduced visa procedures in response to this migration influx yet, migrations from Turkey to countries like Germany and the UK continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s through mechanisms such as irregular migrations, chain migrations, and skilled labor migrations (Kesici, 2021, 178).

In his study, Kesici (2021, 179) also sheds some light on how the asylum system is exploited in some cases by those who are not actually seeking asylum based on his field studies. To sum up, a state level designed temporary mechanism of guest-worker program aiming to attract cheap labor from Turkey to West Europe has developed into multi-dimensional and intricate waves of migration in the following decades. Those migrations have constituted the presence of what is currently referred to as "Turkish diaspora". The reasons and mechanisms used for migrating to these countries differentiate greatly. Some have migrated under guest-worker program and settled there, some have took refuge from the growing political pressures in Turkey and some just migrated through irregular channels for economic reasons. Whatever the reasons and mechanisms, Turkish presence in these countries grew dramatically in the last half-century.

4.3.3. Migration since the 1980s: Turkey as the Land of Even More Diverse Migrations

Like in the early Republican period, even long after the population exchanges, Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria continued to hold an important place in Turkey's migration history. More importantly, Bulgarian migrants from the declaration of the Republic until 1989 enjoyed a privileged status in acquiring Turkish citizenship on the grounds of being of Turkish descent (Kirişçi, 2000). Not limited to only those migrating from Bulgaria, it is understood that the concept of ethnic kinship plays a significant role in

defining and categorizing migrants within the Turkish legal system. As stated in the Settlement Law numbered 5543 dated 2006, those "of Turkish descent and attached to Turkish culture" are considered migrants within the legal framework, while those who do not fit this definition are categorized as "foreigners" (Official Gazette, 26.09.2006). Especially in the early years of the Republic, migrants from the Balkans were in a privileged position in terms of obtaining citizenship (İçduygu, 2003).

During the Cold War era, this privileged status continued, especially for those migrating from Bulgaria within the Soviet bloc. In fact, only in the years 1950-51, around 150 thousand Bulgarian migrants were accepted as Turkish citizens (Eminov, 1997). Similarly, more than 300,000 Turks who sought refuge in Turkey as a result of increased ethnic pressures in Bulgaria in 1989 were welcomed and accepted in Turkish politics with discourses emphasizing solidarity with compatriots fleeing the communist regime (Parla, 2015: 108). Within this context, Parla (2015) also argues that migrant Bulgarian Turks were utilized by the Turkish state in different eras of the republic. Accordingly, as the Balkan and therefore European immigrants from Turkish descent, they have replaced Greeks and Armenians who fled the country and used as human capital which the new nation state needed desperately. Second, the Turkish state utilized the discourse that Turkish people in Bulgaria under an oppressive communist regime flees to Turkey, a country that has sided itself with the Western alliance contrary to Bulgaria in the cold war era.

The position of the migrant Bulgarian Turks would see some fundamental changes after 1990s. Although the migration flows from Bulgaria to Turkey continued in the 1990s after the collapse of the communist bloc and worsening economic conditions in the former Soviet bloc countries, acquiring Turkish citizenship has become much harder in practice. Parla offers some explanations for the question, why the "policy of favoritism" towards migrant Bulgarian Turks have changed considerably after 1990s (Parla, 2015, 109-111). Accordingly, the shift in the symbolic utility might be one reason for that as the ideological rivalry faded away after the 90s with the collapse of the Communist regimes. Furthermore, Danış and Parla (2009) argue that the priority of the Turkish government has shifted from accepting Bulgarian Turks as Turkish citizens, to encouraging them to vote for the Turkish minorities' political representatives in Bulgaria after the regime change. Last but not least,

Parla argues that Turkish immigration policies have shifted accordingly with the demands of the neoliberal labor market, which favors cheap and vulnerable labor, hence having an undocumented labor force at its disposal could be more advantageous than converting them to citizens.

The last factor Parla (2015) mentions is that the neoliberal economic conditions shaping the labor market globally might have a wider power of explanation in Turkey's migration policies within the last several decades. Towards the end of the Cold War period, globally escalating neo-liberal economic policies, the increasing weight of the private sector in the economy, and the acceleration of globalization with the end of the Cold War led to significant changes in migration movements and migration motivations. In the case of Turkey, these changes were evident not only in the context of external migrations but also in internal migration movements. As mentioned earlier, the proportion of rural population in Turkey had already begun to decline by the 1980s. However, especially from the 2000s onwards, the total rural population rapidly decreased, and rural settlements such as villages and towns began to empty. Almost simultaneously, significant changes occurred both in external migration movements and in the state's migrant policies.

Particularly with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, significant migrations occurred from former Soviet Bloc countries to Turkey. Unlike the Turks migrating from Bulgaria to Turkey, economic factors were more influential in these migration movements. According to Coşkun (2015, 108), approximately 1 million migrants came to Turkey from countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine in the 1990s, with the majority of them being forced to work informally in sectors such as textiles, construction, and even prostitution. Apart from former Soviet bloc countries, there were also migrants who came to Turkey irregularly from Africa and Middle Eastern countries or entered legally and then fell into irregular status. As Aslantürk and Tunç (2018, 16) notes, obtaining clear information about the number of foreign workers employed informally in Turkey seems difficult. However, it is estimated that thanks to these workers, employers have made profits exceeding $4.5 billion in labor costs over 15 years, based on the exchange rate at that time (2018, 16). It should be noted that these workers, who come to Turkey through irregular migration and are employed informally, often work for wages well below the

normal rates and are frequently subjected to harsh working conditions and occupied in high-risk jobs (Coşkun, 2015, 107).

On the other side of the coin, due to some positive effects on the economy resulting from reducing labor costs, governments are observed to avoid making regulations on this issue. As İçduygu and Aksel put it, the hegemonic approach of the state during the 1980s has been an amalgamation of "ignorance and neglect" towards migration (2013, 184). Although at first glance, this situation may seem to stem from the state's lack of information and foresight regarding existing problems, the benefits of indifference towards informality should also be considered. Besides the economic benefits that informal workers provide to employers, their effects on the overall economic structure are also significant. Informal workers contribute to economic growth and production, but due to their invisibility in records, they can be laid off during times of contraction without affecting unemployment figures, and they can even return to their countries; or as Standing puts it, they function as a "shadow reserve army" in the labor market (as cited in: Şenses, 2015, 5).

Another important factor in terms of the external migration received by Turkey in last decades is the political turmoil and internal conflicts in the region and neighboring countries. One of the first examples of migration waves in this regard is the migrations from Iran following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It is estimated that approximately 1.5 million Iranians migrated from their country during this period, with an estimated 100-200 thousand staying in Turkey while the others either migrated to third countries within a few years or were repatriated (Özbay & Yücel, 2001, 15). In 1988, as a result of the massacres perpetrated by the Saddam regime, particularly targeting Kurds in Iraq, and later the First Gulf War in 1990, a total of half a million Iraqis were forced to migrate to Turkey, yet a significant portion of them settled in third countries (Şahin & Düzgün, 2015, 171).

Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Turkey has also been affected by the turmoil in Afghanistan, witnessing influxes of migration from Afghanistan at various times. The majority of these migration movements, mostly irregular, continues due to the lack of political stability and economic conditions in Afghanistan. According to Tümtas and Köse, the number of irregular Afghan migrants apprehended in Turkey exceeded half a million between 2015 and 2023 (2023, 71). While the number of Afghan nationals applying for

international protection in Turkey was 116,400 According to UNHCR data, President Erdoğan stated in a speech in 2021 that there were approximately 300,000 undocumented Afghans in Turkey (Tümtaş & Köse, 2023, 72). Considering all these, it can be seen that Turkey has increasingly become an important transit and destination country globally for international migration and irregular migration movements since the 1980s.

Due to a series of reasons such as high inflation, high unemployment rates, corruption, and weak political rights and political repression, protests against the government began to escalate in Tunisia in December 2010. As the protests expanded, Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was forced to resign from his presidency and leave the country (Britannica, 10 December 2023). The so called "Arab Spring" started. Following the Tunisian example and with the help of newly emerged social media tools, protests spread in the Arab world, affecting several countries such as Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and then several others. Some protests already emerged in Syria at the end of January 2011. However, the major protests took place on March 15th of the same year. With harsh responses to the protestors from the Bashar al-Assad Regime, events soon turned into a civil war that continues today, even after more than a decade.

One main direct result of the Syrian civil war was the forced displacement of people. As of 2024, it is estimated that more than 12 million Syrians have been displaced, making it one of the largest forced displacements globally, and nearly half of these people fled to neighboring countries, mostly Turkey and Lebanon (UNHCR, 2024). The first refugee waves from Syria to Turkey began as early as April 2011, then the numbers increased to 15 thousand by July 2011 (İçduygu, 2015, 6). The initial strategy of the Turkish government was to replace these Syrian refugees in temporary refugee camps (Dinçer et.al. 2011: 11). The AK Party government's main approach in this period was to open the borders for those fleeing Syria, for the initial stage at least. This "open-door policy" as it is called, was criticized by several opposition parties including the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) which is in a quasi-coalition relationship with AK Party currently. Despite the criticisms and even against some angry voices from the Turkish society and media outlets, Erdoğan did not step back on his political decision.

Meanwhile, in international politics, Erdoğan (Turkish Prime Minister back then and Turkish President after 2014) gradually changed his tone from friendly advice to harsh criticisms of the Assad regime (Demirtaş, 2013). As we will see in the following chapter, Erdoğan narrates this gradual change as a response to inhumane attacks of the Assad regime toward Syrians, sometimes referring to Assad's actions as "disobeying his words." Beneath the surface, however, lies the attitude of a bigger brother in the Middle East. Rooting from the National Outlook Movement (*Milli Görüş Hareketi*) led by Necmettin Erbakan, the AK Party government has always assembled itself with a political camp that criticizes the traditional foreign policy towards the Muslim world and especially the Middle East for being too state-centric and distant, and instead suggested an approach that inherits the imperial Ottoman past sometimes referred to as neo-Ottomanist approach (Demirtaş, 2013). Thus, Turkey's growing interference with Middle Eastern politics became inevitable in foreign affairs while domestically making some important changes and alterations in Turkey's policies towards international migrants coming from the eastern borders.

Mass immigrant movements to Turkey continued through different channels from various countries after the Syrian Civil War. Taking advantage of the power vacuum after the Syrian Civil War, a radical terrorist group called ISIS (so called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) occupied a large portion of Iraq and Syria, displacing many more civilians after 2014. Furthermore, following the withdrawal of US troops, Taliban regained control in Afghanistan. New waves of refugees emerged. While some of these refugees took shelter in neighboring countries like Iran and Pakistan, some others trespassed Iran and came to Turkey for various reasons one being the hope to reach Europe somehow for better living conditions and job opportunities (Alamyar & Boz, 2022).

4.4. Summary of the Chapter

To sum up what is covered so far, the Turkey's history of migration has always been very active. Right from the establishment of the new Republic, the country had to deal with migrations inherited from the last decades of the Ottomans coupled with new migration waves that happened in the War of Independence and population exchanges. Through these migrations, the demographic structure of the country has changed significantly, non-Muslim population decreased dramatically and much efforts have been invested to fill the gap with Muslim immigrants referred to as *muhacir*. With the end of the World War II, Turkey aligned itself with the Western Bloc, causing important changes in Turkey's internal and international policies. In terms of migration movements, Turkey has seen the dissolution of rural population, rural to urban and urban to urban migrations increased. The impacts are still observable in the Turkish society, as it was as late as 2000s that the total population living in the rural areas decreased dramatically. First introduced as "guest worker programs" on the other hand, opened the gates of western countries to Turkish emigrants. In the following decades however, the "guests" became permanent leading new waves of emigration from Turkey to these countries.

The coup d'etat of 1980, added more to the waves migrating abroad both with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers from Turkey and irregular migrants. Toward the end of the 1980s, Turkey faced a refugee wave from Bulgaria due to increasing political pressure of the Bulgarian government on ethnic Turks (Parla, 2015). These muhacirs were also welcomed with the discourses of compatriots running from the wrath of the Communist regime and taking refuge in the motherland of Muslim Turks. After the end of the Cold War, the policies also changed. On the one hand, the Bulgarian Turks were reconsidered as potential supporters of the political agency of Turkish minorities in Bulgaria (Parla, 2015). To make a parallel with this, Turkey still tries to use its influence on people of Turkish origins living abroad, encouraging them to participate in political activities in line with Turkey's political agenda.

Nevertheless, Turkey had the opportunity to benefit from the existence of an unregistered labor force. With the end of the Cold War, the global market has seen some significant transformations, one of many results being the increasing mobility in the labor force. Turkey both as a transit and destination country, has been affected by these transformations. Adding up to an already existing unregistered market, Turkey has sought migration waves coming from former Soviet Bloc countries as well as other underdeveloped countries. People hoping to find better opportunities and find themselves a place in the unregistered economy contributed to "suitcase trading", invisibly increased production and economic growth. Without the protections provided to the registered labor force, however, they have found themselves vulnerable to exploitation, working in hard conditions for lower wages.

In the last decades, under AK Party's almost single-party rule for over two decades now, Turkey continued to be a land of diverse migrations. More dramatically, beginning in 2011 with the protests in Syria, Turkey saw unprecedented waves of migration, mainly from Syria, but including Iraq, Afghanistan, and some other countries. Seeking refuge from the unending war in Syria, almost 4 million Syrians took shelter in Turkey (M. Erdoğan, 2020). As Turkey preserves its geographical limitation on the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, these immigrants cannot be referred to as refugees in the Turkish legal framework, which is also the reason for using the word "immigrants" instead of "refugees" in this study. To respond to emergent and massive influx, the "Law on Foreigners and International Protection" (LFIP) was published in 2013. Together with the Regulation on Temporary Protection, which came into effect later in 2014, Syrians who took refuge in Turkey after the Syrian Civil War have been identified under the status of "temporary protection". Non-Europeans who take refuge in Turkey are considered "conditional refugees," excluding those under temporary protection. By defining their status as conditional refugees, Turkey recognizes their stay and protection in the country until their resettlement into a third country.

Globally speaking, the number of people forcibly displaced worldwide has exceeded 100 million, and after internally displaced people, refugees come as the second largest group with more than 35 million people in these statistics (UNHCR, Global Trends

2022 Report). Turkey still hosts the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide with 3,6 million people (UNHCR, 2022). It is worth noting that these numbers do not cover unregistered or transit immigrants as well as people who resettled into Turkey and were granted citizenship, nor does the terminology referring to refugee status seem to be accurate since for non-European asylum seekers, the term is inapplicable in Turkey. Coupled with other irregular immigrants coming to Turkey from various countries, seemingly ungrounded and exaggerated numbers of asylum seekers and "illegal" immigrants are speculated to exceed 10 million people. These claims mostly come from some opposition leaders and the source of information remains vague at best. Yet, even the best estimates for foreign immigrants settled in Turkey exceed 5 percent of the total population.

At this point, the question of how the AK Party government, and especially the current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was able to convince the citizens to accept intense immigration influx becomes important. Erdoğan has been the leader of the AK Party since its establishment in 2001, except for the short period between 2014 and 2017, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey between 2003 and 2014, and the President of the Republic of Turkey since 2014. Moreover, his hegemony over the party and the government is almost indisputable. Therefore, it could be said that he is the most important decision-maker regarding Turkey's post-2010 immigration policies. Yet, as this thesis argues, Erdoğan's narratives concerning immigrants and asylum seekers widely prevailed to overcome concerns regarding the intense immigration influx, especially at the beginning. Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants encompasses a wide range of issues, from Turkey's ambitions of being a local superpower to inheriting the Ottoman legacy, touching historical claims from religious perspectives sometimes, as well as humanitarian concerns guided by Muslimhood. However, the power and the strategic utilization of his narrative include several other reasons and factors.

In this chapter, Turkey's history of migration has been debated in accordance with academic historiography. Some basic legal concepts concerning refugee status both at the international and domestic levels have been discussed based on the legal documents. As observed in Erdoğan's narrative, especially in the setting behind this narrative, Erdoğan

barely touches these critical milestones in Turkey's history of migration. Even when he mentions certain events, the intentions are widely different and the historical portrayal of events is distorted. Nonetheless, these observations should not be considered criticism. In line with aim of and the perspective taken in this research, the power of the narrative lies elsewhere. The following chapter will focus on the findings and observations that intend to elaborate more on this dynamic and complex structure.

5. Analysis and Findings

5.1. Setting in Erdoğan's Narrative

In his narrative, Erdoğan frequently uses historical and geographical themes to create a rich background. In this background, the history of Turkish-Islamic civilizations and the geography that these civilizations have reached are frequently referenced. The establishment of such a rich background makes helping Syrian immigrants who took refuge after the Syrian Civil War a kind of obligation, a duty imposed on the Turkish government and nation by this historical and geographical imagination. The establishment of such a setting also legitimizes the open-door policy implemented by the AK Party government in the aftermath of Syrian Civil War. Bruner's concept of "narrative necessity" would be able to explain this dynamic (1990). In crafting a narrative, specific choices and actions are framed as the only logical or moral outcome in accordance with the flow of the narrative, thus creating a perception that the actor's action or choice is the only viable option, the necessary action in other words.

In Erdoğan's narrative of Syrian immigrants, the spatial and temporal imagination is utilized as the setting of his story. Accordingly, the stage is set through a historical lens, including the Muslim or Turkish civilizations of the past, covering a much wider geography than the borders of modern Turkey. This rich historical and geographical setting, in turn, necessitates the actor, Erdoğan and AK Party government, to take actions beyond the national borders of Turkey.

In this thesis study, after limiting Erdoğan's speeches between 2011 and 2014 with the segments concerning Syrian immigrants, the selected data is coded under three main categories; setting, characters, and emplotment following Oppermann and Spencer's (2019) approach. This method helps simplify and re-organize the narrative of Erdoğan concerning

Syrian immigrants. In parallel with that, I will first introduce some basic and frequently observed elements and themes that construct the setting in Erdoğan's Syrian immigrants' narrative. As Erdoğan's narrative delves deeper into the history of Turks and Muslims and concerns a wide and blurry geography, I have decided to compose the main findings of this research within two sub-categories named "Historical and Geographical Themes" and "Religious Themes" under the setting of Erdoğan's narrative.

Historical and geographical themes mainly focus on the historical and geographical elements related to Erdoğan's narrative of Syrian immigrants. The second sub-category, the religious themes, focus more on the narratives and analogies Erdoğan constructs based on the Ansar-Muhajir narrative. Ansar, meaning "helper," is an important reference to first Muslim exile called the Hijrah. Accordingly, the Ansar in the Prophet Mohammed's time opened their houses to those taking refuge from Mecca. There are three main reasons for separating ansar-muhajir narratives from the narratives of history and geography. First, as a separate concept, it is observed that the Ansar-Muhajir dichotomy has an important place in Erdoğan's initial narrative of Syrian immigrants. Second, constructing an analogy between the Ansar-Muhajir of the Prophet Mohammed's times and current Turkish hosts (as Ansar) and Syrian immigrants (as Muhajir) is worth more investigation in this research. Lastly, the themes and emotions Erdoğan touches on in the Ansar-Muhajir narrative could sometimes be significant. Within the setting category, I will first examine the historical and geographical themes, and then I will discuss the religious themes.

5.1.1. Historical and Geographical Themes

There are both broad and consistent references to history and geography in Erdoğan's narrative. When the relevant parts of the speeches are examined, a particular historical narrative stands out in the general construction of Erdoğan's Syrian immigrants narrative. In parallel with that, Erdoğan's narrative intertwines history that is understood to be the history of the Turkish-Islamic societies and the geographical limitations are being set in accordance with this understanding of the history. As mentioned in the theoretical and conceptual framework chapter, narratives connect events and characters within a certain

space and time. Erdoğan, therefore, connects the Turkish-Islamic societies and civilizations with a geography that more or less could be identified as the widest borders of these societies and civilizations. I shall elaborate on this argument with some examples from Erdoğan's speeches.

In a speech given at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) on June 26, 2012, Erdoğan defends the government's position against those criticizing the government's policies towards Syria and Syrian immigrants. Erdoğan gives some examples, accusing the opposition, as he says, of being ignorant about "our history." In this narrative of Turkish-Islamic history, Erdoğan mentions Kilij Arslan I of the Seljuks, drawing a picture of a "hero in Anatolia" who fought for his life to defend Jerusalem and Damascus. The heroes mentioned in Erdoğan's narrative expand as he adds Nur ad-Din Zengi of the Zengids and Salah ad-Din Ayyubi to the story. He then concludes: "During the Seljuk period and the Ottoman period, Damascus was a holy city for us as much as Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina." (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-8, 2019: 388). This example sets the audience on the road to rethinking the historical and geographical boundaries of the civilizations that Erdoğan proudly mentions. As discussed before, the setting in the narrative necessitates an embracing attitude and specific actions such as the open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants who fled their country after the civil war. After all, when the spatial and temporal imagination of the country's roots are set accordingly, Syrian immigrants and their concerns are also prioritized, and taking action against the violent acts of Syrian Leader, Bashar al-Assad becomes a necessity in Erdoğan's narrative.

In another speech of address to the nation (*Ulusa Sesleniş Konuşması*) that is broadcasted nationwide on the 30th of December 2011, Erdoğan made evaluations about various public agenda topics, including but not limited to topics such as the government budget for the next year, the economic growth of Turkey, and the External Affairs of Turkey under AK Party government (Efendi Değil Hizmetkar Olmak-7, 2019, 222-228). In the part of the speech in which he talks about the foreign policy, Erdoğan mentions about the "zero-problem policy" and explains his government's stance towards the issues concerning Syria and Turkey (2019, 226). In this part, he briefly explains a primary reason for re-thinking the

historical and geographical boundaries of the contemporary Turkish state. In his own words, the primary reason is that:

> "Although borders physically separate countries and people, they cannot separate hearts from each other. Especially, there can never be any boundaries drawn to brotherhood." (Efendi Değil Hizmetkar Olmak-7, 2019, 226)

This explanation of Erdoğan provides a magnificent example for understanding what is meant by connecting events in time, as briefly mentioned in the theoretical and conceptual framework in this thesis study. One could understand by this example that, when Erdoğan talks about Turkey's foreign affairs, the borders are not set by the official borders of the contemporary Turkish nation-state. This is simply because these official borders can not draw a line between brothers and their hearts.

However, the logical framework extracted here in a simple form could be tested in other examples that Erdoğan provides about the setting of his Syrian immigrants narrative. In another speech, he explains the reason to re-construct geographical and historical boundaries in an even more straightforward way:

> "Geographic borders have never existed in the hearts of this nation, and they still do not today. Just as this nation has always viewed its brother under the same roof and within the same family throughout history, it now looks at Muslims thousands of kilometers away in Arakan, Aceh, Palestine, Syria, and Somalia with the same perspective." (Efendi Değil Hizmetkar olmak-7, 2019, 373)

This speech was made by Erdoğan on the 12th of August 2012 in Istanbul during an iftar program (2019, 371-374). Before making this statement, Erdoğan explains some basic tenets of his and his party's "cause" (*dava*), making an explanation in reference to some moral and religious values in order to answer several questions, including why Erdoğan and his government "open their arms" to Syrian immigrants (2019, 373). Then, by making the explanation provided in the quotation above, Erdoğan provides a very similar logical structure. The reason for providing shelter for Syrian immigrants is explained by being "under the same roof" and "within the same family throughout history" in Erdoğan's speech. What is more in this example is that, the geographical and historical setting in Erdoğan's narrative extends well beyond the Syrian borders as well, although the main

concern in this part of the speech is the growing numbers of Syrian immigrants in Turkey and the opposition parties' criticisms towards the AK Party Government's migration policies. It is understood that the theme of "muslimhood" becomes the main driver to set the geographical and historical borders of Turkey beyond the contemporary Turkish state.

Erdoğan's narrative on the geographical and historical setting provides numerous examples highlighting the Islamic civilization's history, geography, and values. While he appears to emphasize a broader global geography by stating that there are no geographical borders in the heart of the nation, his examples point to the geography where Muslims resided more prominently or left some significant historical and cultural legacies behind.

The historical and geographical setting that is covered in these examples taken from Erdoğan's speeches might seem loosely connected to the issues regarding Syrian immigrants. However, the logic behind Turkey's "open door policy" towards Syrian immigrants is explained through this setting in Erdoğan's speeches. This logic can explain some other policy decisions made by Erdoğan and his government, or it may contradict in other cases. Within the scope of this thesis study, it should be concluded that the geographical and historical setting of Erdoğan's narrative repeats a similar logic. Regarding Syrian immigrants as the brothers and sisters of the same family throughout different times and spaces necessitates providing shelter to those Syrian immigrants as a moral necessity. This necessity, coded in the setting of Erdoğan's Syrian immigrants narrative, reshapes the attitudes, behaviors, and actions to be taken towards Syrian immigrants. Whether this "narrative necessity" as Bruner (1990) calls it is followed by actions and behaviors in the political sphere becomes a different issue than criticizing the narrative as a whole.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, setting the historical and geographical boundaries so that these boundaries contain Syrian immigrants, would also help Erdoğan legitimizing his government's open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants. The construction of historical and geographical bonds with Syrian immigrants prioritizes taking action within Erdoğan's narrative, through the agenda-setting feature of narratives. On the other hand, it gives the power and legitimacy to speak for "Muslims thousands of kilometers away" to

AK Party and Erdoğan. Thinking accordingly with the modern national borders, these discourses would have seemed obsolete maybe, or irrelevant to Turkish public. Through the geographical and historical themes used in his narrative, Erdoğan sets the audience re-thinking about the geographical and historical borders of Turkish government's responsibility.

5.1.2. Religious Themes

In this section, the main focus will be on the Ansar-Muhajir analogy that Erdoğan conveys in his narrative regarding Syrian immigrants in Turkey. This analogy is important because it illustrates more about the religious themes of the setting other than the historical and geographical themes. To add more contrast to two different pictures that are on the one hand, the Ansar-Muhajir story that happened at the early stage of Islam, and Turkish citizens as Ansar (helper) and Syrian immigrants as Muhajir (those who migrated) on the other, it would be much easier to compare the similarities and differences between these two sides of the analogy. Furthermore, Erdoğan has often used this analogy of Ansar and Muhajir during the researched period during the time period between 2011 to 2014.

First, the narrative of Ansar and Muhajir in the event of Hijra should be summarized. This simple summary will be a ground for comparison, and thus, it should reflect a similar perspective to Erdoğan or at least be rooted in Erdoğan's narrative. In other words, the aim is to find the meta-narrative (Somers & Gibson, 1994) behind Erdoğan's reconstruction of the Ansar and Muhajir narrative. Now that the intention is more transparent, a simpler yet more verifiable narrative about the Hijrah should be drawn.

In Islamic resources, it is told that following confrontations with opponents from the Quraysh tribe, Prophet Muhammad and his followers found themselves in a precarious situation in Makkah. As the oppression of the Quraysh toward the newly emerged Muslims intensified, the Prophet and his followers migrated to Madina, located a few hundred kilometers north of the Quraysh-controlled Makkah. From then on, Madina became the center for the Muslims until the conquest of Makkah. The local people of the city were referred to as Ansar (helpers), and the Muslim immigrants from Makkah were referred to as

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Muhajirun (those who took hijrah). The Arabic word Muhajirun is derived from "hajara", which originally meant -to depart from but later gained the modern meaning of exodus (Etymonline, n.d.).

The historical root of the Hijrah (the forced immigration of the first Muslims to Madina in the 7th century) could be summarized as such. The origins of the Hijra story could be found in the Quran, especially the surah "Al-Anfal" provides the meaning (Quran, 8:72-73). The narrative analysis in this case, could be extracted from the commentary on the official website of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). According to this commentary, the relationship between the Ansar and the Muhajir is understood as a relationship that goes even beyond fraternity. Instead, the commentary based on the Quranic verses (8:72-73) offers an explanation that the Prophet Mohammad made the Ansar and Muhajir the inheritor to each other one by one, arranging a holy covenant that differentiates the legal-religious bond between Ansar and Muhajir from non-believers as well as other Muslims (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, n.d.). One implication of this religious narrative is that the Prophet, as God's messenger, established this special bond between the Ansar and Muhajir by the covenant that was sent to him. Ansar, or the people of Madina, opened their arms to their Muslim brothers and sisters migrating from Mecca; shared everything they had with a religious and moral duty, as the story is told.

In his Presidential Election campaign, Erdoğan held a meeting in Hatay on the 20th of July 2014. In this speech made in Hatay, Erdoğan opened his speech by describing Hatay as the "Ansar to its Syrian muhajir brothers," praising the solidarity shown by the local people (Hayaldi Gerçek Oldu-2, 2019, 393). Within the context, the city of Hatay becomes significantly important as it was one of the main foreign issues Mustafa Kemal Ataturk dealt with until the end of his life, and it wasn't until 1939, through a referendum, that Hatay joined the Turkish state. Later in his speech, Erdoğan makes a more straightforward definition of what it means to be Ansar. Accordingly, Erdoğan recognizes the challenges brought by "keeping the doors open for our oppressed Syrian brothers and sisters" but also warns that friendship and fraternity are revealed in challenging times (2019, 396). He explains that being an Ansar means "to share his own bread," and "self-sacrificing," assures

that the tough times will be over, Syrian "guests will return home sooner or later and the honor of being Ansar will remain with us" (2019, 396).

Comparing the two narratives, one being the meta-narrative of Hijrah and the other being Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants, reveals some similarities. First, Erdoğan's narrative naturally leans on the meta-narrative of Hijra as the story of Hijra has been narrated throughout the history of Islam by different narrators. Second, there are various similarities between these two narratives, such as the message of solidarity between the Muslims against oppressors, sharing the resources by the belief that oppressors will be defeated sooner or later, and that "good faith" will prevail eventually.

There are, however, some striking differences as well. In Erdoğan's narrative of Ansar and Muhajir, Syrians as "Muhajir" are not the equivalent of the original Muhajir; they are "guests" taking shelter in Turkey rather than being the pioneers of a new belief system. This slight difference in the meaning is significant because it has some substantial impacts on how the Syrian immigrants are perceived by the "hosts" or the "Ansar" in Erdoğan's words. First, their ties with the host society are more temporary and looser. Second, the "hosts" in Erdoğan's narrative have more hierarchical superiority. As a matter of fact, the hierarchical order extracted from the meaning is revealed directly in Erdoğan's own words in some cases, while in some other cases, it is more ambiguous. During an iftar speech in Istanbul on the 15th of July 2014, Erdoğan praised Istanbul for providing opportunities to people "coming from all over the world" including Syrians who took shelter in Turkey (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-11, 2019, 311). He proudly announces what it means to be the one providing these opportunities by leaning on a Turkish proverb: "the hand that gives is superior to the hand that receives" (Veren el alan elden üstündür), and claims that this situation creates hope for the oppressed people of the world (2019, 311). Therefore, one main difference seems to be that the host society, Turkish people, are in a morally superior position by helping the immigrants or "muhajir" in Erdoğan's analogy. Furthermore, this hierarchical superiority is utilized in many cases and used strategically to stand for the rights of oppressed Muslims in Syria as well as other countries. By doing so, Erdoğan gains the power to be some sort of "speaker of the rights of Muslims and the oppressed people"

in his narrative.

To sum up, the setting in Erdoğan's narrative of Syrian immigrants has been analyzed under two main aspects. First the historical and geographical boundaries in Erdoğan's narrative has been analyzed previously. Accordingly, Erdoğan's narrative provides a rich background concerning history and geography. The depiction of a nation that is descendant of great empires and civilizations, reset the historical, cultural and geographical boundaries well beyond the national borders. This setting helps the narrator, Erdoğan, to construct a story that would include Syrians as well as other Muslims from a wider geography in his narration and creates a narrative necessity to take action against the oppression of the Assad Regime in Syria. On the other hand, the intentional state entailment in his narrative reveals the Islamic and historical understanding of Erdoğan in the communication of his narrative.

Secondly, the religious themes under Erdoğan's narrative of Syrian immigrants set the moral and religious grounds. The analogy of Ansar-Muhajir meta-narrative in Islam with the Syrian immigrants coming to Turkey makes the open-door policy as a political action to be the only viable choice of action morally. Therefore it becomes a necessity again, to open arms to Syrian immigrants for Turkish hosts from a religious perspective. This analogy was especially useful to set the ground for hopes that if and when the Assad Regime is replaced, the Syrian immigrants will return their homes with their gratitude toward their Turkish "brothers and sisters." However, the analogy has been strategically utilized so that Erdoğan, his government, and country is set to be in morally superior position in defending the rights of Muslims and people who are oppressed.

5.2. Actors in Erdoğan's Narrative and Their Characterization

In Erdoğan's narrative of Syrian immigrants, characters are mainly positioned in relation to what Erdoğan frequently calls "us." To put it differently, what is meant by "us" is dependent on the context and the usage of the word by Erdoğan in sentences. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the constructed identity is the collective identity of the self, or the "ontological narrative" as Somers & Gibson (1994, 30) call it. It could be observed in Erdoğan's narrative that the collective identities that could be simply called as "us" and "others" are reciprocally constructed. What is meant by "us" could be extracted from what is defined as others. To complicate things a little, there is a third category of collective identity in Erdoğan's narrative, which is also the subject of this thesis. This collective identity is, of course, the Syrian immigrants in general. In Erdoğan's narrative, they are referred to as "immigrants," "guests," "muhajir," and even "refugees" although they are not considered refugees as previously explained in the "Migration and Turkey" chapter. Syrian immigrants in this sense, should be examined under another category, different than "us" and "others." This is not only because the research topic necessitates such a categorization, however. In Erdoğan's narrative, Syrian immigrants do not fit in the category of others, but they do not fit in the collective identity of the self, or "us" in Erdoğan's words, either. In order to examine the reasons, first, I will introduce the characterization of Syrian immigrants and the way they appear in Erdoğan's narrative. Then, I will introduce the characters of "others" and "us" in Erdoğan's narrative.

5.2.1. Characterization of Syrian Immigrants

In Erdoğan's narrative, Syrian immigrants appear in various forms of words such as Syrian, "muhacir" (muhajir), "misafir" (guest), "sığınmacı" (asylum-seeker), and "mülteci" (refugee). Most of the times, Erdoğan calls Syrian immigrants as "our Syrian brothers and sisters" (Suriyeli kardeşlerimiz). As previously mentioned, Syrian immigrants are mostly excluded from the collective identity of the self in Erdoğan's narrative which will be

referred to as "us" from here on just for the convenience. Syrian immigrants are not fully recognized within "us", yet they do not seem so distant either. As Yılmaz (2017) puts it, the construction of the Syrian immigrants as a collective identity is shaped by the subjectivities attached in Erdoğan's discourses, which in return shapes the position of "us" and others. This ambiguous relationship amplifies the uncertain situation of Syrian immigrants on the one hand (Yılmaz, 2017), yet it also allows Erdoğan to set a moral leverage against the others putting the Syrian immigrants in an intermediary role as a character. This kind of characterization appears a lot in Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants.

In several speeches Erdoğan explains why it was necessary to open the doors for Syrian immigrants who are targeted by the violent events in Syria. Interestingly, he refers to several reasons for this decision. In a speech given in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) on the 5th of September 2012, he explains to the MPs of his party group, informing them about the contemporary situation in Syria (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-9, 2019: 112). Then he explains the reasoning behind the AK Party government's policies toward Syrian Immigrants, as well as the relations between Turkey and Syria. First, he explains that Turkey could not be indifferent to the events happening in Syria, while he claims a country in Europe, Africa or America could. Accordingly, he continues, Turkey shares its longest border with Syria. Syria is the neighboring country in which "our brothers and relatives" live. He adds that Syria is an integral part for the stability and prosperity of the region. He concludes that Turkey could not and did not turn its back on Syria while such brutal massacres are happening there (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-9, 2019).

The logical reasoning here, changes from one sentence to another. Considering the reasonings Erdoğan offers, at least two different readings are possible. On the one hand, it is argued in this speech that Syria is important for the stability of the region and Turkey's proximity to Syria necessitates Turkey to take action. On the other hand, people living in Syria are brothers and sisters of the Turkish people, therefore taking an action against the oppression of "our brothers and sisters" are necessary. Combining logical and emotional reasons empower the narrative put by Erdoğan. As discussed before, inter-narrativity feature makes it possible for different narratives, or reasonings within a narrative in this

case, to empower each other. On the other hand, as Bruner explains, narrative is "a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requirements" (1990, 4). In this case, Erdoğan's construction of the narrative depicts Syrian immigrants as emotionally close to Turkish society, a bond of fraternity constructed. At the same time, a logical reasoning is made in accordance with the geographical proximity of Syria to Turkey. This way, the power of the narrative is enhanced by the emotional as well as logical conclusions made by Erdoğan.

In another example, Erdoğan is speaking for the opening ceremony of AFAD's (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) logistical centers (2023'e Doğru, 2019). The speech was given in Ankara on the 18th of February, 2015. Erdoğan proudly presents his government's humanitarian aid efforts in Indian subcontinent after the 9.1 magnitude earthquake that shook the region in 2004 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). He claims that these efforts are made after taking the example of ancestral roots of a great civilization which reached as far as the Indian Ocean. Then, he explains the main reason for these efforts: "This was our humanitarian, conscientious and Islamic duty; that is why" (2023'e Doğru, 2019, 174). In the following sentences, the main topic suddenly changes to the situation in Syria and Iraq. He says:

> "Especially in Syria and Iraq, brothers need each other in these days, right? If we do not embrace our Syrian and Iraqi brothers today in these troubled times, how will we look at their faces tomorrow? More importantly, how could we look at our own nation's face?" (2023'e Doğru, 2019, 174)

In this example, the emphasis is on the emotional ties between Turkish society and Syrians. Within the context, it could be understood that these ties are mostly constructed and shaped by the shared identity of Muslimhood. The "Islamic duty," as Erdoğan calls it, constructs the norms and shapes human behavior. In other words, the ontological narrative Erdoğan constructs, sets the position of collective self-identity toward Syrian immigrants. This self-identity could refer to the government, the nation as a whole with blurry lines, or the followers of Erdoğan. However, the ontological narrative is not independent of the meta-narrative of Islam. Islamic duty, as Erdoğan calls it, is constituted by this meta-narrative. It theorizes the social action to be taken and encodes the moral codes behind the structure.

To conclude what is covered about the characterization of Syrian immigrants in Erdoğan's narrative, there are several points to underline. First, Erdoğan constructs a subjective ground through the characterization of Syrian immigrants. This observation is very similar to what Yılmaz (2017) observed in her study previously. This subjectivity of the Syrian immigrants in return, allows him to combine both rational and emotional reasonings in his narrative. Second, the ontological narrative, or the collective identity of the self, is constructed through the subjective characterization of Syrian immigrants in the narrative. Third, the meta-narrative of Islam is present in Erdoğan's ontological narrative, enabling him to theorize what should be done in response to the dire events that happened in Syria which led some millions of Syrians to take shelter in Turkey. Additionally, this meta-narrative sets the moral codes for action and behavior behind the social structure Erdoğan tries to promote.

5.2.2. Characterization of "Us"

After illustrating how Syrian immigrants are portrayed and characterized in Erdoğan's narrative in line with the collective self-identity, it would be plausible to focus more on the characteristic details of this identity. This collective identity has much simpler equivalents in Erdoğan's words: he overwhelmingly refers to this identity as "we" or "us" during his speeches related to the Syrian immigrants. In order to find and reveal some of the characteristic details of this collective self, or "us," one example from Erdoğan's speeches concerning Syrian immigrants will be examined here. The aim here is to make an introduction to what kind of collective identity Erdoğan is building about his narrative towards Syrian immigrants. More detailed meaning of this collective identity, or "us" in Erdoğan's wording, could be extracted from the emplotment of the characters "us" versus "them" after the section concerning the characterization of "them."

Erdoğan gave an emotional speech to his party group in TBMM on May 14, 2013 (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-10, 2019, 98). He elaborated his position on the issue regarding Turkey's open-door policy towards Syrians. The position, as understood by the text, is against the political opponents of the AK Party, mainly CHP (Republican People's

Party) and MHP (Nationalist Movement Party). Erdoğan asks the question: "If we are to close our doors to the guests knocking on our doors, then why did we need this movement?" implying AK Party. Then he claims that CHP, MHP and the other "status-quo parties" did that enough in the past and explain what is different in AK Party in his own words: "there is heart in our foreign policy, there is conscience, reason" (2019, 98).

As Bruner puts it: "Narratives are about people acting in a setting, and the happenings that befall them must be relevant to their intentional states while so engaged – to their beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on" (1991, 7). In this case, it could be argued that the narrative constructed by Erdoğan operates in a highly relevant setting to Islamic beliefs and values. In this speech, Erdoğan differentiates his and his party's stance, not only limited to the issue concerning what to do about Syrian immigrants, but in a more general context. Accordingly, it is understood from the speech that AK Party's stance toward Syrian immigrants is set in accordance with what Erdoğan describes as "heart, conscience, and reason" in line with it's foreign policy. This way, Erdoğan utilizes religious and moral codes with Turkish foreign policy, including the action taken toward Syrian immigrants by the AK Party government. This type of a narrative not only attempts to legitimize AK Party's open door policy, but also puts AK Party's stance to a morally and ideologically superior position comparing with the opposition parties.

In this case, an important task remains: roughly determining what kinds of values and beliefs were used by Erdoğan as the ingredients for portraying "us" in the making of the Syrian immigrants narrative. Erdoğan utilizes several moral, religious, and humanitarian values and norms in the construction of "us" but these values and norms could be best extracted from his emplotment of "us" versus "them" in regards with his narrative of Syrian immigrants. Thus, the following section will deal with the positioning of these characters within Erdoğan's emplotment.

5.2.2. Characterization of Bashar al-Assad

Following a similar path to the previous section, shedding more light on Erdoğan's characterization of Bashar Al-Assad, the head of the Syrian Regime, would be useful. As mentioned before, the characterization of "us" is constructed in contrast relation with the "others" or "them" in Erdoğan's speeches. The same is true for his characterization of Assad, only that there is a slight difference here. Erdoğan's characterization of Assad as the "bloody-handed dictator" is much relevant to his contrasting construction of self-identity as the leader, or the leader of a government in this case. This is highly important because, through the characterization of bloody-handed dictator, Erdoğan legitimizes his position toward not only the Syrian immigrants, but also all the oppressed people in the world, especially Muslims. Additionally, criticisms toward Bashar al-Assad are strategically linked with how Erdoğan and his government rule, making a contrast with the depiction of a cruel dictator, thus empowering the legitimacy of Erdoğan's leadership as well as Turkey's policies in Erdoğan's narrative.

There is one exemplary speech made by Erdoğan, it was a long one but covers most of the themes and arguments Erdoğan utilizes for the characterization of Assad Regime in his narrative. Erdoğan made a speech in the Grand National Assembly on June the 26th, 2012; talking to his fellow party members again. In this speech, he points to those criticizing the AK Party government's foreign policies towards Syria (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-8, 388). He blames the critics for being ignorant of "our" history, not being able to understand "our ancestors" and their great civilizations. He then concludes that those who are ignorant to their own ancestors cannot analyze AK Party's policy regarding Syria. More importantly, he continues to his speech by narrating the history of Turkey-Syria relations.

He starts with the history, rolling back the time to a century before (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-8, 2019, 389). He says: just as those who sold Jerusalem in return for gold do not represent "our Arab brothers and sisters", current regime in Syria would never ever be capable of representing "our Syrian brothers and sisters" (2019, 389). He claims that the

current leader, Bashar al-Assad, "promised" to Turkey that he would not be like his father, Hafiz al-Assad, he would not oppress his own people, he would not take a hostile attitude toward Turkey. Then he expressed his frustration that after all these "hopes" given by Bashar al-Assad, he turned to be just like his father despite all the support Turkey gave Syria in this process (2019, 389). He concludes that the current "Syrian government has no legitimacy left whatsoever" (2019, 389).

After finishing his assessments of Bashar al Assad, the contemporary situation happening in Syria, and the oppression of the Assad regime toward Syrians; he characterizes "us" again and legitimizes AK Party's attitude towards the contemporary matters happening in Syria, including the mass exodus of Syrians to Turkey. Accordingly, he says: "We are Turkey, we are a great nation-state," "we are a nation that would raise voice over injustice," "without calculating our own interests" (Beraber Yürüdük, 2019, 390). He concludes that: "we will not let this blood spill over our nation's hand and conscience" (2019, 390). As seen in this example, the portrayal of Bashar al-Assad resembles some evil character or some villain from a super-hero movie or novel; the villain initially is a friend of the story's hero, but in a surprising turn of events, he turns into the fierce enemy of the hero. What constitutes the villain in those stories, also constitutes the hero. The plots and the emplotment of these plots, also draw what makes the main character a "hero." In this process, generally, some people are being oppressed by the actions of this villain, which in this case would be similar to Syrian immigrants.

A similar structure could be seen in the example of Erdoğan's narrative here. Erdoğan does not only draw a character of a villain out of Assad, he also re-constructs "us" by encoding national, religious, and sometimes human traits and virtues, which are categorized generally under responsibility and solidarity in this thesis. Moreover, he draws a character that could be best described as a "hero" on the political stage, defending the rights of the oppressed people (Mazlumlar) against the oppressors (Zalimler). These heroic actions and behaviors are produced by him and his AK Party government as his narrative suggests.

It could be noted here that, there are numerous examples concerning Erdoğan's

portrayal of Bashar al-Assad, although most of these examples are similar to this example. The timing of the speech in this example also reflects that. Before this speech, in many cases, Erdoğan did not provide a full-fledged narrative about the Assad regime in Syria, nor did he make a portrayal of the Assad regime so intensely. However, beginning from 2012 to the end of 2014 (because of the limits of this research), Erdoğan repeats similar if not the same structure in his narrative toward the Assad regime within his narrative concerning Syrian immigrants in Turkey (For further analysis on this topic see Demirtaş, 2013, and 2023; Morgül, 2023). The reasons for this sudden attitude change toward Bashar al-Assad could be found in Demirtaş' article, while Morgül's research might provide valuable insights concerning Erdoğan's narrative after 2014.

For the purpose of this study, however, the main findings concerning the portrayal of Assad could be summarized in four points. First, Erdoğan attaches sharp and evil traits to the portrayal of Assad, depicting him almost as the villain of his narrative about Syrian immigrants. Second, by contrasting these evil traits and depictions such as bloody-handed dictator and oppressor (zalim) he attributed to Assad by his depiction of "us" as a collective identity, nation, government, and even himself; he legitimizes the policies of his government. Third, he drags the audiences, not only the parliament members but the citizens and maybe even Muslims from different countries, into his narrative by assigning them the same traits and virtues, responsibility and solidarity, merging them together in his construction of collective identity: "us." Lastly, he consistently repeats the same structure, although segmentally, throughout his narrative roughly beginning from 2012.

5.3. Emplotment in Erdoğan's Narrative: "Us vs Them"

In Erdoğan's speeches, it is apparent that Erdoğan constitutes the collective self in a cyclical relation with others within his narrative. As the research material is limited to speeches concerning Syrian immigrants, the positions are given regarding the actions and behaviors of these characters, "us vs them," simply. This technique gives the advantage for Erdoğan to define specific characteristics of each character that he compares with "us" on the one hand. On the other hand, the process of emplotment cyclically reproduces what he means by "us" and interprets the actions and behaviors of these characters that are coded with several values and norms. As discussed earlier, ontological narratives or the depictions of self-collective identity is never in isolation, it is constructed in reference with others. To make things simple in analyzing the moral codes embedded in Erdoğan's narrative, this thesis simplifies the values and norms attached to Erdoğan's narrative under two categories: responsibility and solidarity, and humanitarian concerns and international law. By doing so, it would be easier to compare the characters involved in his narrative.

Regarding the criticisms towards the AK Party Government's open-door policy towards Syrian immigrants, Erdoğan defends their position by criticizing and othering the opposition parties and their leaders frequently. One example is already given in the previous part. However, the research material provides some other striking examples.

In a party group meeting in TBMM on the 5th of September 2012, Erdoğan talked about a tragic historical event that happened on Boraltan Bridge separating Turkey's border with the USSR, in 1945 (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-9, 2019, 114-115). He is accusing CHP, the one-party government of that time, of handing over 146 Azerbaijani intellectuals who fled Stalin's persecution and took refuge in Turkey back to the Soviets. He made his conclusion from this story by stating that: "This is what CHP is." Then he continues translated as such:

"Today CHP cannot proudly go to Azerbaijan. Today, CHP cannot go to Crimea, to the cities of our Arab brothers with all its might and pride. But we can go to Sarajevo, to Cairo, to Tripoli, to Tunisia and Gaza with pride. CHP will not be able to go to Damascus tomorrow. But hopefully we will go to Damascus as soon as possible. We will embrace our brothers with love at the tomb of Saladin Ayyubi. We will pray in the Umayyad Mosque together, we will make it." (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-9, 2019, 115).

The angry voice and harsh criticism toward CHP should be noted. What makes this example more striking for analysis is that, he interconnects CHP as a character through the time, which is roughly 80 years, then characterize AKP (Us) against CHP (Them) through the emplotment of widely different events happening in widely different times; one happening in the World War II era, and the other occurs after the Syrian civil war started in 2011. Erdoğan compares his party and government with CHP through their positions towards the Syrian immigrants, who are the people fleeing from the Assad Government in Syria and taking refuge in Turkey. The similarity is more apparent now whether it is plausible or not; those Syrian immigrants are similar to the 146 Azeri intellectuals who fled from the cruelty of the Stalin Regime. Coding the message conveyed by Erdoğan in this example, it could be understood that Erdoğan portrays his government as having the sensation of much more responsibility and solidarity towards the Syrian immigrants compared to CHP. Through encoding the moral values and norms, Erdoğan creates and image that is morally superior to CHP on the one hand. On the other hand, this depiction characterizes the Syrian immigrants as people who are protected by Erdoğan and his AK Party government.

As a matter of fact, Erdoğan provides many more examples similar to this one, but they could not be examined in here in so much detail. This analysis illustrates that Erdoğan encodes "us" with high morals; beliefs and values that are simply coded in this thesis study as solidarity and responsibility. To enrich this observation, some other examples will be provided. Nonetheless, this time these examples will be kept short, as the aim is to compare different characters regarding the coded values and norms.

In a similar vein to the previous example, Erdoğan criticized his main opponent before

the Turkish Presidential Election on the 10th of August 2014. Erdoğan made his speech at the TBMM, on the 15th of July 2014, roughly 3 weeks before the election (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-11, 2019, 302). He criticized CHP and then their joint candidate for presidency with MHP, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (Cumhuriyet, 2014). Erdoğan criticized his opponent's statement, calling him a "mon cher" in a pejorative way and accusing him of trying to curry favor with his CHP master over İhsanoğlu's statement that the Turkish government should stay impartial in the civil war in Syria and keep the gates closed to the massive influx of immigrants from Syria. Erdoğan concluded: "There is no sense of history, no conscience of civilization, no respect in memory of our ancestors in them" (Beraber Yürüdük Biz Bu Yollarda-11, 2019, 302). To sum up, in Erdoğan's characterization and emplotment, the opposition in Turkey lacks the values and consciences of responsibility and solidarity, which then positions his party and government in a morally higher position. Thus, the anger and disappointment in his tone only amplify these messages conveyed in his characterization and emplotment regarding his domestic speeches. On the other hand, the historical setting in his messages is utilized to legitimize his and AK Party's stance in favor of implementing an open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants.

Nevertheless, there are some contradictory findings to that observation in Erdoğan's narrative. Regarding his messages regarding international politics, the values and norms conveyed change visibly. First, as expected, the religious tone conveyed in the issues related to domestic politics is softened in the speeches about international issues, leaving a more dominant tone that amplifies the rational arguments. Second, the encoded norms and values change slightly from "responsibility and solidarity" to humanitarian concerns and expectations about taking actions in line with "international norms." To elaborate more about these changes and their implications, some other examples from Erdoğan's messages to the international actors will be provided.

In a meeting honoring the 9th anniversary of a think-tank organization in Yalta (Ukraine), Erdoğan speaks to an audience of high-level officials, on the 14th of September 2012 (Ezberleri Bozarken-4, 2019, 409). In this speech, Erdoğan informs the audience about the contemporary events happening in Syria and warns them about the possible

intentions of Assad that would endanger the stability of the region. He emphasizes Turkey's efforts to raise international pressure on Assad Regime and support the opposition groups in Syria so that a "democratic and pluralist" Syria could be established. He claims that despite all the financial burden and security risks, Turkey is keeping its doors open for Syrian asylum-seekers reaching 100 thousand people at that time (2019, 409). He then explains: "Our sole aim is for Syria to achieve democracy within its territorial integrity and thereby serve as a positive example for the entire region." After that, he warns international actors such as the UN, China, and Russia about their responsibility to stop the human tragedy happening in Syria (2019, 409).

In this example, the language and tone of the messages are softer than in his domestic speeches. Instead of using a code of Islamic values and norms, the messages convey more universal values and norms, described here as "humanitarian concerns and international norms" for convenience.

For comparison, examining some other examples might be useful. Between the 2nd and 5th of February 2014, the prominent figures of the AK Party government, including Erdoğan, visited their colleagues in Germany and attended several meetings in nearby locations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Erdoğan made a speech for a meeting organized by an association named the German Foreign Policy Association (DGAP) in Germany (Ezberleri Bozarken-5, 2019, 307). In this speech, Erdoğan makes an entry into the issues concerning Syrian immigrants by claiming that events such as the global financial crisis, the Arab Spring, and the issues in Syria enabled seeing how much the European Union (EU) needs Turkey (2019, 308). After talking about different topics, he says that "we" could have closed our eyes to the events happening in Palestine, Egypt, and Syria; "we could have closed our doors and stayed unresponsive to oppressed people gathered at our borders" (2019, 308). This argument contradicts other speeches Erdoğan made for domestic audiences, some already discussed here. More importantly, Erdoğan makes a rather different explanation for this choice of action in the following parts. He claims that the geographical conditions do not allow that for Turkey and added that being indifferent to injustice has a cost that he would never allow Turkey to pay (2019, 308). As it

is seen in these examples, Erdoğan emphasizes the geographical proximity to Syria as a reason for taking action and utilizes more universal norms such as justice, democracy, freedom, and peace.

In regards to the changes in this narrative, it could be observed that Erdoğan's attitude toward the international actors changed gradually, because the characterization of them also changed within the narrative through time. Combining the examples covered thus far with various others that could not be examined here, Erdoğan's expectations from the international actors are more or less clear. Initially, roughly within the first year of Syrian Civil War, Erdoğan declared his expectations to share "the burden" of Syrian immigrants in an international cooperation and promoted a "democratic change" in Syria, opposing the Assad Regime. As Demirtas explains, "in a mere 3 years" between 2009 and 2012, Erdoğan's portrayal of Bashar Al-Assad changed from a dear "friend" to a "bloody-handed dictator" in his narrative (2013, 111-120). The narrative change towards the international actors such as the EU and the United Nations has a similar pattern. I would like to explain this change with two examples.

On the 17th of November 2012, Erdoğan visited the University of Cairo in Egypt and made a speech (Ezberleri Bozarken-5, 2019, 41-47). In that speech, Erdoğan evaluated the events happening in Syria, gave friendly messages to Egypt and the Morsi Government, and then criticized the international actors. First, Erdoğan expressed the demand for radical changes in the structure of the United Nations Security Council. Then he criticized the "double standard", or the hypocrisy, in the silence towards what is happening in Syria and Palestine by the same actors who talk about democracy and freedom (2019, 46). Erdoğan's rising criticism toward the "West" and the "world" is apparent in most speeches, although it might fluctuate through time and the space in which the speech is delivered.

Similar to this example, in a speech given in TBMM on the 1st of October 2014, Erdoğan informed the Parliament Members about the actions taken towards the Syrian immigrants (2023'e Doğru, 2019, 43-44). Erdoğan started the topic by criticizing the "Europe", asserting that Turkey has opened its doors to 1.5 million Syrian immigrants

while the whole continent of Europe accepted only 130,000 refugees from Syria (2019, 43). Then he proudly stated that Turkey's spending for Syrian "guests" have reached 4 billion US Dollars.

In a number of examples from the speeches, Erdoğan gave information about the government's spending on Syrian immigrants to the audience. Most of the time in the period that is researched, he announced the numbers proudly, announcing that these spendings show how great the Turkish nation is. Through the middle of 2014, however, Erdoğan raised his criticisms toward this unfair share of "burden" as well as other criticisms toward what he described as the West. This change in the characterization of the international actors, coincided with other developments in the issues related to Turkish foreign policy; such as the Gezi Protests that happened in 2013 or the growing isolation of Turkey in the international stage. The causal links to these changes in the narrative, as Bruner (1991) puts it, could not be extracted solely from the materials of this research of course. However, one implication of this growing criticism is that Erdoğan interestingly utilized the othering practices toward the "West" in his public speeches, which is observed in the research material.

Erdoğan's portrayal of "others" in reference to what he calls "us" in his Syrian immigrants narrative is rich in details, creative, and emotional in speeches made to domestic audiences. As a leader with strong communication skills with the public, Erdoğan uses the power of narratives effectively. Putting aside his skills and the rich content in his speeches, his narrative is rather straightforward. While Erdoğan positions his domestic political rivals based on their stance against Syrian immigrants, he clearly conveys the message that they are alien to Turkey's religious, cultural, and historical values. By doing so, political opponents such as CHP, and many other opposition parties are alienated from the collective identity of the self or the ontological narrative Erdoğan constructs.

This narrative is slightly altered in the speeches made to international audiences and in the speeches concerning foreign affairs. As seen in the examples from Erdoğan's speeches, the doubtful but hopeful expectations from the international actors to share the "burden"

and act in accordance with what is simply described here as the "international norms and values" fade away over time. The implication of this, as mentioned earlier, is the utilization of growing criticism towards the West in domestic speeches. This pattern is highly similar to what Oppermann and Spencer point out in their research about the Brexit campaign, characterizing the collective self in the "underdog" position and "facing opponents in a materially stronger yet morally weaker position" (2019, 6). In parallel to this, Erdoğan is increasingly declaring his moral superiority over the West, just as he does over his domestic political rivals.

On the 3ʳᵈ of January 2013, Erdoğan attended a dinner meeting with Turkish ambassadors in Ankara (Ezberleri Bozarken-5, 2019, 80-85). In his speech, Erdoğan drew some parallels between Turkey's contemporary international policies and the historical position of Seljuks and Ottomans regarding their diplomatic stance, claiming that these civilizations have always helped the neighboring societies who are in need of their help (2019, 83). After that, Erdoğan claimed that Bashar al-Assad has come to the end of the road. He said:

> "Unfortunately, Bashar al-Assad chose stalling and violence instead of taking steps when we issued our warnings on the very first day. Just so Assad could maintain his dictatorship for another two years, tragically, 60,000 innocent people lost their lives. However, the outcome will not change. I believe that, sooner or later, this illegitimate regime will yield to the will of the people. God willing, when the people's demands are fulfilled, Turkey will stand alongside Syria and elevate its brotherly cooperation with Syria to even higher levels." (Ezberleri Bozarken-5, 2019, 84)

As seen in this example combined with other examples previously analyzed, the message is mainly concerning the future of the Syria. As Erdoğan argues, the dictatorship of Assad will be ended, and the hopes are that the Syrian immigrants will return their home. The future of Turkey's relations with Syria and other neighboring countries are expected to change with this expected outcome. Erdoğan clearly hopes that after Assad's replacement in Syria, the relations will be much more cooperative in the region due to Turkey's role in the regime change. These hopes are never materialized however. On the other hand, the criticisms toward the international actors in Erdoğan's narrative gradually rises.

In an event organized by the Union of Turkish Ambassadors in Germany on the 4th of February 2014, Erdoğan made a speech about Turkey's foreign policy including the issues concerning Syria (Ezberleri Bozarken-5, 2019, 312-317). He told the audience in this meeting:

> "We are striving to end this human tragedy that the entire world has ignored and are fighting to deliver humanitarian aid. Across the Middle East, the Balkans, and all crisis regions, we stand for justice, peace, and humanitarian and moral values." (Ezberleri Bozarken-5, 2019, 315)

It is apparent in the voice of this message that the hopeful claims that the Assad regime in Syria will be replaced by democratic opposition faded away. Instead, Erdoğan emphasize in his messages that despite Turkey's efforts to end the human tragedy in Syria, "the entire world" kept their silence, blaming all the international actors. As a matter of fact, as seen in the previous examples, Erdoğan's criticisms toward the West and the international actors increased through the end of the researched period of this thesis study, roughly corresponding to 2014. Instead, the messages shift from the high hopes that the international actors will help the process of democratization in Syria, to blame the international actors against their unwilling attitude toward sharing "the burden" of Syrian immigrants. Erdoğan repeatedly raises his frustration that the international actors don't share this "burden," while stating how much Turkey has spent for the Syrian immigrants.

6. Conclusion

Narratives lie at the core of social life; a construction of the human mind constructs the meaning of social actions and behaviors, and narratives are in all places, all people, and societies. Ontological narratives, in this sense, construct the imagination of who we are, and more importantly what kinds of moral values and norms we stand for. Nevertheless, the construction of collective identity as an ontological narrative is not an isolated process. Instead, it is a process depending on the construction of "others" which then enables setting the normative features that make this collective identity. The narrative of collective identity then is reproduced through the emplotment of events in the past, present, and the future.

In this thesis study, Erdoğan's speeches concerning Syrian immigrants through the timeline of 2011 to 2014 are collected and analyzed in regard to the structure of this narrative. The main research quest is to understand and reveal how Erdoğan constructs and communicates his narrative on Syrian immigrants. As discussed in the literature review chapter, the main focus is on the rising populist narratives in politics that take an anti-refugee stance. Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants could be considered as a unique case in this sense. First of all, the narrative Erdoğan constructs is not an anti-refugee narrative. As a consequence of his government's open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants, Erdoğan had to explain the reasoning behind their policies to the public. Secondly, Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants is much more about the collective identity he constructs rather than Syrian immigrants.

Erdoğan strategically utilizes most of the features and functions of narratives that are discussed in the theoretical and conceptual framework. In this thesis study, Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants is analyzed by its setting, characters, and emplotment of these characters following Oppermann and Spencer's (2019) approach. The analysis reveals that through strategically using the power of narratives, Erdoğan encodes the norms and values attached to Turkish collective identity and through this process, he legitimizes the AK Party government's open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants as well as Turkey's international affairs more generally. His narrative sets the moral and normative ground,

and encodes several moral beliefs and values through the attitude and social behavior toward Syrian immigrants. By doing so, Erdoğan claims AK Party's moral superiority over the opposition parties as well as the "West" and other international actors.

On the other hand, Erdoğan sets the agenda on the issue of Syrian immigrants through his narrative. Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants does not involve issues such as the future of Syrian immigrants in Turkey, or the problems they face in their integration to Turkey. By deliberately excluding these topics, Erdoğan's narrative changes the focus from security issues, and prioritizes the values of Turkey's policies toward Syrian immigrants. This type of narration helps Erdoğan to de-securitize the issues regarding Syrian immigrants and legitimize Turkey's open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants as the only viable choice of action.

Erdoğan's narrative on Syrian immigrants is rich in detail considering the geographical and historical themes and identifiers. Through the setting of these historical and geographical themes, Erdoğan puts forward a temporal and spatial imagination for Turkey, that reaches well beyond Turkey's geographical borders. In parallel with that, Erdoğan's utilization of religious themes and the analogy of Ansar-Muhajir, attempts to make it harder to imagine Syrian immigrants as "strangers" on the one hand. On the other hand, this setting helps Erdoğan to legitimize producing policies concerning Syrian immigrants and other Muslim societies, setting the agenda so that it is the Turkish government's responsibility to reach these people beyond the national borders. Additionally, these settings in the narrative create a narrative necessity implying that the open-door policy toward Syrian immigrants was the only viable choice for the AK Party government.

Erdoğan's characterization of Syrian immigrants focuses on the oppression Syrians faced in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War. Together with the characterization of Bashar al-Assad as the bloody-handed dictator, Syrian immigrants are characterized as subject people to protect. This emplotment empowers Erdoğan's narrative in the sense that it sets Erdoğan's and AK Party's policies in a superior position by utilizing the moral codes shared in the Turkish community. Furthermore, international norms and values are also utilized to criticize the "West" and other international actors, claiming that despite Turkey's sincere efforts, these international actors failed to "share the burden" of Syrian immigrants. It could

be understood from Erdoğan's speeches, and the change of tone through the researched period that Erdoğan's main expectation was that the Assad regime in Syria would be replaced by a democratic coalition. Thus, the Syrian immigrants who were treated as Muslim brothers and sisters by the Ansar people of Turkey would return their home with gratitude toward Turkey and AK Party government who have opened their arms in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War. As these expectations did not materialize, Erdoğan's criticisms toward the West and the international actors have risen.

This thesis study focused on Erdoğan's speeches concerning Syrian immigrants from 2011 to 2014. Thus, Erdoğan's strategic use of narratives in the case of explaining his government's policies concerning Syrian immigrants is analyzed. This analysis can not reveal the responses of Turkish society evaluating Erdoğan's narrative. However, it should be suggested that more research about the responses to the narrative put forward by Erdoğan and AK Party elites would be useful to understand how these narratives are reflected in society. Furthermore, more comparative studies regarding the narratives on Syrian immigrants in Turkish politics could be useful in understanding competing narratives and their dynamic relations.

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Curriculum Vitae

2012-2016 Bilkent University Political Science and Public Administration:

- Graduated with High Honor Degree in 2016.

2016-2017 IMPR Humanitarian:

- Worked as Field Research Coordinator

2017 Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM):

- Worked as Deputy Advisor

2018- 2020 WeltHungerHilfe & KLWA:

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2023-… Samsun University Political Science and Public Administration:

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2021-2024 Turkish-German University European and International Affairs Master Program:

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