

Screening Late Ottoman Memory in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in International Studies

University of Washington

2019

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Abstract

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In viewing historical rehabilitations as objects that have the capacity to transform people, this thesis seeks to explain the popular consumption of one such rehabilitation as a function of its resonance with an existential memory of social transformation. This thesis' deep reading of the Turkish television series *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, a show about the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who ruled the Ottoman Empire from 1876-1909, yields a new vantage point from which to view a cultural product's inherent historicity – in spite of its historical inaccuracies and revisionist position. This paper demonstrates how, through an analysis of the cinematographic language of *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, we may access a subtextual articulation of an existential memory that explains its wide resonance today.

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people for the encouragement, mentorship, feedback and support in the development of this thesis. As they say, it takes a village. First and foremost, I express deep and heartfelt gratitude to Professor Deborah Porter, without whom this project simply would not have materialized. Not only am I thankful for our deep discussions working through complex (and sometimes thorny) components of this thesis, but I must also extend my deepest appreciation for her warm mentorship. I will certainly never look at eating scenes in the same way. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the experience to work with such an incredibly talented and curious kindred spirit.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor Reşat Kasaba, for both his guidance throughout the development of this thesis as well as for the intellectual space he has provided to students like myself through the Turkish Circle. I have learned (and grown) a great deal from partaking in the circle and am lucky to have had such an opportunity. I would like to offer my thanks to Professor Selim Kuru, who not only has been of great assistance throughout this research process but has also taught me how to always question my positionality, (interpretive) paradigm and perspective; for this, I am incredibly grateful.

I wish to thank my Turkish instructors, Dr. Melike Yücel-Koç, Aydan Soycan and Yağmur Aslan; their enthusiasm for teaching has made my language learning experience truly special. I must also extend a thank you to the Center for West European Studies and the Center for Global Studies at the University of Washington, for their financial support throughout the summer and academic year has made the production of this thesis possible.

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Chapter 1: Rehabilitating Abdülhamid II in Contemporary Turkey

As is the case with research, this thesis does not end where it began. At its inception, this project sought to investigate how a recent Ottoman Turkish linguistic revival espoused a new kind of nationalism, one that aimed to evoke collective Ottoman memories at the most basic and everyday levels and to shape contemporary collective identity (Ongur, 425-8). The climax of this revival came when, in 2014, President Erdoğan and the state's National Education Council proposed making Ottoman Turkish compulsory in all Turkish high schools, both religious and secular, rationalizing that students not lose touch with their cultural heritage¹ (Pamuk). Erdoğan's selective usage of Ottoman Turkish words in daily language and speeches, as well as the re-naming of university buildings using words symbolic of Ottoman pasts, highlights additional sources of this kind of Ottomanistic discourse in the contemporary Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) era (Ongur, 426-7). I viewed the 2014 policy attempt to make Ottoman Turkish compulsory for high school students as yet another facet of this discourse.

Initially my research sought to illuminate the hidden processes of Ottoman Turkish's linguistic power, especially as a form of regulation, domination and social construction (Zou and Trueba, 94) through the analysis of AKP speeches, press statements and interviews about the policy. I planned to unravel the ideological codings embedded in cultural representations (Zou and Trueba, 101) to highlight the hidden intentions driving the policy efforts to increase Ottoman Turkish proficiency among Turkish subjects. Over the course of my research, however, it became clear that while speeches, interviews and press statements centering around the 2014 policy could provide a macro-level perspective of the linguistic revival in terms of a top to bottom approach to

¹ Although the government was forced to change the policy to make the course an elective as opposed to a requirement in the face of major criticism from secular opponents, Erdoğan nonetheless still very publicly supports a mandatory, universal Ottoman Turkish course for everyone.

national identity construction,² they were unable to explain a bottom up approach, or more specifically the public reception of, what many opponents of the 2014 policy might call, revisionist elements of rehabilitating something from the past in the present. Such data represented the aims and interests of the state apparatus, but could not explain public reception of the policy. I was in Istanbul as I began to grapple with this perspective change, and an experience on the Metrobüs sparked a change in thought.

Crammed in the middle of the Metrobüs, mid-July, on what felt like an hours-long journey to Avcılar, I reached for a handle dangling from the ceiling of the bus to stabilize myself so that I wouldn't fling into the rest of the sardines packed next to me. As I grabbed the clear plastic handle, I saw that inside the handle was an advertisement for a television series: not just any television series, though. It was an advertisement for an Ottoman television series, one that focused on an obscure Ottoman victory during World War I. Thinking about the television series, I turned to look outside of the stifling-hot Metrobüs and noticed something else: an advertisement, on a billboard, for another Ottoman television series, though this one focused on the reign of a past sultan. My mind was spinning, and it wasn't from the heat or crowd: What are these shows? How do they fit into this Ottoman revival discourse and, the question that I couldn't answer prior, how does the public receive them?

It was here that I pivoted, from a focus on the linguistic revival to an investigation on the popular consumption of cultural objects – specifically Ottoman focused – that seem to reify the sociolinguistic intentions driving the AKP's 2014 Ottoman Turkish policy push. In the last five years or so, there has been an increasing amount of 'historical' Turkish television dramas, ones

² See: Davis and Boon and Gopinathan for examples of studies deploying top-down approaches to identity construction.

that specifically focus on Seljuk or Ottoman pasts.³ As an object of sociohistorical analysis TV dramas may fill different roles: from propaganda to critique, political commentary or a vehicle for escape. In the contemporary Turkish case, TV dramas are often viewed through a political lens. In a work on cultural representations in TV dramas, Nas articulates such shows in terms of the way they shape socio-political realities in Turkey, through the formulation of a ‘national center’ – the Turk – and the ‘periphery’ – the Kurd (14, 68). Cetin, along a similar vein, argues that, since Turkish TV experienced a transformation in the early 2000’s, dramas have come to be politicized, and have themselves transformed into a battleground site of political contest over ideological meaning (2463). Işık argues that Turkish TV dramas are sites for storytelling as a folk tradition, ones that, in particular, function as a mediator for the negotiation between agency and society (120). Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy, in attempting to explain the popularity of Turkish TV dramas in Arabic-speaking countries, view Turkish TV dramas in the greater Middle East as a “state-guided communication effort” by the Turkish government to express its soft-power in the region (2354). In analyzing TV dramas in such a way, this particular approach also focuses on how these series serve different purposes in the different countries where they are shown.

One recent iteration of a revisionist Ottoman slant to a series is the Turkish television series *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, first airing on February 24, 2017 by state-broadcaster Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, TRT). The show follows the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the thirty-fourth sultan who ruled the Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1909. The series is a production of ES Film, with Serdar Akar⁴ as director and Osman Bodur and Uğur Uzunok as script writers.⁵ Filming of the series took place at the Seka Film Studio in

³ For example: *Diriliş Ertuğrul*, *Yunus Emre*, *Filinta*, *Zeyrek ile Çeyrek*, *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, *Mehmetçik*.

⁴ Serdar Akar was also director of *Valley of Wolves: Iraq*, a controversial Turkish film that was criticized as anti-Kurdish and anti-Semitic. See Özdemir’s article in Spiegel Online for an assessment of the movie.

⁵ See Anadolu Agency’s “Sultan Abdülhamid’s era depicted in new TV series” in the *Daily Sabah*.

İzmit, among other historical locations across Turkey. The series airs on Fridays at 8PM, and as of this writing there are three seasons totaling in 87 episodes.⁶

Series' Reception

Just as the 2014 Ottoman Turkish language policy triggered widely disparate responses, so too does the series, whose extremist representation of the sultan's Ottoman reign maddens scholars and journalists alike. Eldem denounced the series as appalling and an infringement on history (Cited in Armstrong, 28:50), while Schick coined the series a "state-mandated hagiography" (73). Journalists, too, agree. Daly commented on the series' zealous idealization of Abdülhamid and his reign, which he states portrays the sultan as a magnificent and godlike character. Along the same vein, Erdemir and Kessler described the series as state-propaganda feigning as historical reality – despite its inaccurate portrayal of historical events – one that is replete with anti-Semitic undertones. Atay correspondingly focused on the dangerous historical inaccuracies of the series, and Atakli described it as outright "brain washing". In general, the show has been labeled by academics and journalists alike as alarmingly misleading and inaccurate in its portrayal of the late Ottoman era.

Despite these condemnations, the series itself has been well received by the public in Turkey. The show has been regularly rated as one of the top dramas in Turkey since its debut,⁷ the reception of which may come as surprise to the above critics. When the first episode aired in February 2017, nearly one in ten television viewers tuned in to watch.⁸

⁶ May 24, 2019, see IMDB's page: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6536562/episodes?season=3&ref_=tt_eps_sn_3.

⁷ See "TRT 1'in yeni dizisi Payitaht, reyting yarışına kaçınıcı sıradan girdi?" in *T24*.

⁸ See "24 Şubat 2017 Rating Sonuçları" in *Medya Faresi*, <http://www.medyafaresi.com/ratingler/2017-02-24>.

In light of the critiques laid out above that the series has engendered, it is of little surprise that it has been widely praised by AKP officials. TRT's place as a state-broadcaster is often used to explain the narrative of the series itself. TRT was established in 1964 and operated as Turkey's only television station until the early 1990's, a period that saw the proliferation of commercial broadcasters (Karanfil and Eğılmez, 1). TRT has often been regarded as a political mouthpiece – a tool – for the ruling regime, one that Karanfil and Eğılmez argue has been mobilized by the current AKP regime (2). President Erdoğan himself has applauded the show on multiple occasions, the most notable of which when he stated that people should watch *Payitaht Abdülhamid* in order to learn history.⁹ Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş visited the set prior to its first broadcast, remarking on the value of such a project and giving his thanks to TRT for such a historically important undertaking.¹⁰ A co-founder of the series' production company ES Film, Yusuf Esenkal, has called the series a "historical drama", one that he hopes will increase interest in Turkish history.¹¹ Even the sultan's great grandson, Osmanoglu, praised the show, having acted as a consultant in the series' production.¹²

Rehabilitation as a Phenomenon

The series' revisionism with regard to Abdülhamid's reign belongs to a global phenomenon in which the (sometimes maligned) memories of historical figures or events are rehabilitated in contemporary times for political intentions. In the Turkish context the study of rehabilitations is no new topic, with the last twenty years seeing a significant amount of scholarship on the subject. In the recent discussions of this phenomenon, those in Turkish and Ottoman studies generally view

⁹ See "Erdoğan, 'Tarih öğrenmek için Payitaht Abdülhamid izleyin' demişti; dizinin eski yönetmeni: Olmaz, kitap şart!" in *T24* and "Erdoğan değerlendirdi: Diriliş mi, Payitaht mı?" in *Yeni Akit*.

¹⁰ See "Numan Kurtulmuş, Payitaht Abdülhamid setinde." in *Sabah*.

¹¹ See Anadolu Agency's "Sultan Abdülhamid's era depicted in new TV series" in *Daily Sabah*.

¹² See "Şehzade Orhan Osmanoglu: O benim dedem değil!" in *THM Haber*.

a ‘rehabilitation’ or the ‘act of rehabilitating something’ as “historical figures, events, images and motifs” that are carefully selected, articulated and disseminated by social and political actors “for present [day] consumption as a means of swaying public opinion to castigate adversaries or to support one’s cause” (Göknar and Schull, 10). That is, the recovering of occurrences, objects and peoples from the past for socio-political reasons, namely as a strategy for political legitimacy. Within this discussion the emphasis lies on the strategic selection of a particular rehabilitation, which is believed to signal what its redeployment aims to do. This perspective understands the “political authority” as employing such historical symbols to shape the “memory of the society in a fashion favorable to its own interests” (Karateke, 2001, 185).

Within the study of rehabilitations, one that dominates in the contemporary Turkish context is that of representations of Ottoman pasts. Scholars in modern day Turkey have broadly categorized the frequent representation of imagery from Turkey’s Ottoman past as ‘neo-Ottomanism’, which I see as a corollary to the aforementioned Ottoman Turkish policy. Such studies analyze the rehabilitation of various reincarnations of Ottoman imagery in political discourse, policies and the media in present-day Turkey. In the context of a President Erdoğan and AKP-led state, Ongur and Yavuz both explain the deployment of such historical symbols as a tool for domestic and international legitimation as well as a ‘course correction’ for the “history- and religion-deprived version of the Turkish identity seen to have been imposed upon it in the Republic era” (429; 462-4).¹³ As such, of ultimate importance is who will have the power and authority to (re-)write the nation’s history, and from what perspective.

¹³ See also Erdem, Chien Yang, pp. 710-728 and Fisher Onar, Nora, pp. 229-241. A handful of Ottoman rulers are the objects of such rehabilitations: see Çınar, pp. 364-391, for an analysis of the contemporary representation of the conquest in Istanbul, focusing on Mehmet II, another sultan who has often been re-represented.

This phenomenon also includes what has recently been coined the Abdülhamid-Erdoğan complex,¹⁴ wherein Sultan Abdülhamid II's image – himself a highly controversial figure – is rehabilitated in the context of a President Erdoğan-led Turkish state. This particular facet of the rehabilitation discourse places the two figures in conversation and comparison with one another via images and symbols. According to this scholarship, President Erdoğan and the AKP often deploy this rehabilitation themselves.

Eldem highlights the year 2014 as a turning point for a more overt refashioning of Abdülhamid by President Erdoğan and the AKP, wherein Abdülhamid's image increased in the media and public space more broadly (32-3). The understanding of the deployment of the historical figure of Abdülhamid in scholarship varies slightly, but generally follows the same logic and may be delineated as follows: Uzer explain this as a rebuke by President Erdoğan and the AKP of early republican historiography (355), while Gökner and Schull focus on President Erdoğan and the AKP's actions as way to legitimate an ideological agenda (10). Eldem views it as sort of synthesis between the two, as a way for President Erdoğan and the AKP to establish an interlinked narrative between the present and an Ottoman past (31). Despite slight differences in argumentation, scholarship on the Abdülhamid-Erdoğan complex, and the broader neo-Ottomanism discussion in general, posits intentionality on the rehabilitation, generally explaining its deployment as a means to generate political and/or social legitimacy through the re-writing of history from the deployer's perspective.

In recognizing *Payitaht Abdülhamid* as a rehabilitation we are positioned to investigate the implications of this status, especially with regards to its popular consumption. While it seems commonsensical to suggest that the series' popularity signals the degree to which the public

¹⁴ Duke University's exhibition had three themes, one named Historical Change, which focused on this "Abdülhamid-Erdoğan complex", to be understood in tandem with neo-Ottomanism. See: Swanick, p. 16

accepts AKP revisionist intentions, such an explanation falls short of apprehending the series' internal dynamics and popular reception, including the historical meaning that can be extracted from it. The ungrammaticality of the series' title, *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, in particular, implores a new optic for understanding the relationship between collective cultural objects, such as TV series, and the subjects who consume them.

The Ungrammatical Title

In spite of many classifying this as an overtly intentional revisionist series, others have pointed out how the absence of any syntactical logic whatsoever in the series' title paradoxically diffuses the rhetorical effect of the rehabilitation. In discussing the series, Eldem noted the “weirdly called” title (34). Similarly, Schick described the series' title as nonsensical (73). Here lies the conundrum: while the revisionist intentions of this series are overdetermined, the illogicity of the title bespeaks a different generative logic that actually obscures them. Why is the clearly revisionist intention of the series obscured through a title that makes no grammatical sense?

To help answer this question I draw on the work of psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, who offers a unique theorization of the complex interrelationship between private, internal experiences and the world of external objects. Bollas extends the language of psychoanalysts into aspects of society and culture, and offers an overarching model of psychic structure that helps to explain collective aesthetic consumption.

Christopher Bollas' Theory of Object Relations and Grammars of Being

In his work, Bollas developed a language for discussing very early experiences and their traces in adult life. Though Bollas focuses on how an environment shapes individual identity

formation processes, the application of his theory to collective experience lends itself well here. According to Bollas, human identity is a product of the “complex rules for being and relating” that are transmitted from mother/caretaker to infant (50). Bollas’s theory, and my argument, revolve around the “traces in adult life” of the early relationship between “mother” and child (2). In this context, “mother” may be understood not just as the child’s biological mother, but as any person or environment that cares for and handles the child in infancy. Bollas asserts that an infant in the pre-verbal stage of development sees this environment not as a separate and independent (human) object, but as a subjective process of transformation that existentially changes an infant’s entire experience of reality. For an infant, the environment – encapsulated by the presence of the caretaker – is associated with acts such as feeding, diapering, comforting, and sleeping, which all represent moments in which the caretaker transforms the infant’s reality: hunger is sated, anxiety soothed, and so on (13). In this way the caretaker constitutes the infant’s total environment.

Bollas construes the way a caretaker handles interactions with an infant as an “idiom of care” (13). The cumulative experiences of transformational interactions inform what Bollas calls the infant’s developing “grammar” of self-management rules, ones that ultimately inform identity formation. The specific ways in which the caretaker (environment) is experienced as a transformational process constitute this “grammar of being”. Through an idiom of care, her “way of holding the infant, of responding to his gestures, of selecting objects, and of perceiving...internal needs” (13), the infant internalizes this as “an experience of being rather than of mind,” without fully objectifying or representing the mother’s actions (32). This grammar of being later informs the development of a subject’s identity, which is expressed upon the acquisition of language.

In this way, we might view a subject’s grammar of being as an artifact of a historical

existential experience of transformation. Bollas posits that adults unconsciously seek objects that will elicit this existential memory for its transformative resonance: a form of déjà-vu in which one is exposed to a place, person, thing, or idea reminiscent of the handling idiom, which reminds one “of something never cognitively apprehended but existentially known” (16). Transformational objects establish a symmetry between a pre-verbal, pre-representational ego memory of transformational processes and an equivalent object in adult life. Moreover, these processes occur within both individual and collective identity formation processes.

The Hamidian Era as a Transformational Period

I propose that in addition to viewing *Payitaht Abdülhamid* as a rehabilitation, that we also see it as a transformational object, that is, a symbolic equivalent to the preconscious process of collective transformation experienced by the subjects of Abdülhamid’s rule. Put another way, popular consumption of *Payitaht Abdülhamid* may be explained as a function of the way it embeds within an existential memory of the transformative conditions that led to the formation of Turkish national identity. For Bollas, the arts play a central role in stimulating pre-conscious memory of the aesthetic associated with early transformational experience. He claims that “we go to the theatre...to search for aesthetic experiences” (17). People watch dramas to be transformed. In this way, if collective consumption reflects aesthetic alignment with AKP revisionist intentions, it does so because these intentions themselves resonate with a collective “unthought known” (52), or déjà-vu of the transformational Hamidian era.

The historical realities support this understanding. The Hamidian era has been a point of focus in historiographical work in terms of its transitional nature in both domestic and international contexts. This period has been associated with tremendous changes that ultimately rewrote state-

society relations within the empire,¹⁵ including understandings of the political as well as individual rights and equality (Eldem, 43). Deringil postulates that the strain between state and society during the Hamidian era represented a culmination of a ‘legitimacy crisis’ or ‘legitimation deficit’,¹⁶ whereby the relationship between ruler and ruled collapsed. In addition to this domestic struggle, the state felt the need to legitimate its place in the international system (1999, 9). Abdülhamid’s regime, Deringil argues, deployed a comprehensive legitimacy structure that aimed to counter this creeping deficit (1991, 1993, 1999).

The length of Abdülhamid’s reign should be noted here as well, nearly 32 years long, significantly longer when compared to his closest predecessors Murad V (a few months in 1876), Abdülaziz (around 15 years from 1861 to 1876) and Abdülmecid (around 22 years from 1839 to 1861) (Karateke, 50). The longevity of his rule amid this transformational period crystallized in time to form a collective grammar of being, the embryo of Turkish national identity. At the same time, his distinct style of ruling during the transformational era impacted sociolinguistic realms of interaction to eventually shape a generation’s grammar of being. In short, the particular experience of subjects of Abdülhamid’s reign contours Bollas’ general theory.

It is in this way that I view the series as a transformational object, one whose grammar can be explained by the déjà vu affect it evokes with regards to the Hamidian era. I posit that not only does the cultural object inhere in the same grammar of being as the sultan’s idiom, but that this grammar is key to accessing the collective existential memory embedded within. We have already raised the possibility that the ungrammaticality of the title provides an opening for understanding the series as tacitly pointing to the historical conditions of revisionism in the first place. Here, we

¹⁵ Not just within the Ottoman Empire: consider other dynastic rulers as well, like the Romanovs and the Habsburgs. Deringil aptly places the legitimacy crisis in the Ottoman Empire into global context in terms of the changes occurring between dynastic regimes and their people, see Deringil, 1993, pp. 3-5.

¹⁶ He draws here on Jurgen Habermas and his notions of legitimacy.

can advance that theory to state that the title's illegibility may now be seen as an artifact of a grammar oriented towards obstructing signification of some sort. As the following reveals, the collective grammar is shaped specifically by the sultan's preoccupation with and need to conceal rumors of his genealogical legitimacy. It is precisely Abdülhamid's grammar or way of being that shaped his political style, which in turn informed his ruling idiom. This idiom has been written into the very transformational period it has come to represent. Its internalization by the collective – the ruled – represents the internalization of complex rules of being and relating as implicitly articulated by Abdülhamid's ruling style. The series' title, despite its revisionist elements, evokes an existential and unarticulated memory in the form of Abdülhamid's ruling idiom.

Abdülhamid's Ruling Grammar: Policies of Concealment

To demonstrate the centrality of obfuscation for reconstructing the existential memory embedded in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, the grammar of which represents defining aspects of Abdülhamid's rule, I will draw on the preoccupations and policies which came to define his rule, and in doing so expand to the ways in which communication at large was affected during this period. At the same time, I will contextualize social and political vulnerabilities that influenced these defining aspects.

Karateke highlights one telling example of the extent to which Abdülhamid went to regulate the spread of information about his genealogy: in order to injure the reputation of Abdülhamid, his opposition spread a rumor wherein it was claimed that Abdülhamid's mother was an Armenian concubine. He notes that this "tactic was particularly effective at a time when the Ottoman state was experiencing problems with its Armenian population" (2005, 47). To counteract this, Abdülhamid had the memorandum written by his father at birth – essentially a document

confirming his royal pedigree – inserted into the front of all the State’s official almanacs (2005, 47). Karateke adds, “he wished to prove thereby that he was the legitimate heir to the throne, both by heredity and by merit” (2005, 47). That a rumor necessitated such a response by Abdülhamid is telling. Such levels of censorship underscore an important element of Abdülhamid’s characteristic of rule. I construe this form of censorship as playing a defining role in terms of the ways in which Abdülhamid’s rule was guided, this particular preoccupation ultimately underpinning the ways in which he ruled: what I define as his ruling idiom.

This preoccupation lead to policies that were heavily informed by his need to defend against and conceal these rumors. Scholars have noted the salience and nature of censorship in the sultan’s ruling idiom. Though there were ebbs and flows during the Hamidian period in terms of levels of suppression, Abdülhamid generally had a tight hold on the media. Zürcher argues that the Hamidian era, in this context, represents both a continuation of the past as well as a break from it: a continuation in terms of the increasing reach of the media, but a very clear break in terms of the suppression of the media (74). When strict censorship was introduced in 1888, the number of new periodicals per year dropped to one on average – as compared with nine to ten new periodicals per year prior (Zürcher, 74). This included both active government censorship as well as voluntary censorship by the media, which was limited to espousing the regime’s narrative (Eldem, 37). Ultimately, media in the Hamidian era saw a new kind of institutionalization as a means of control, one that the regime was able to exploit to “cement loyalty to the state” and eliminate opposition (Erol, 708-9). This was enabled through “new methods and technologies of monitoring, policing, and regulating the political conduct and physical mobility of inhabitants of the Empire” (Altıntaş, 107).

The focus of censorship was not only towards the press but went beyond, to constitute what Yosmaoğlu has described as a greater “control mechanism” that had two constituent parts: self-censorship and informing (22). Both of these elements were driven by a need to protect the sultan from insults (Brummett, 90), while at the same time motivated by an increasingly overriding concern with loyalty to his person (Zürcher, 75). Self-censorship, though operating in more muted ways in the early years of his reign, became much more conspicuous throughout the Hamidian era, which is especially evident through the avoidance of words that might have insulted or offended the sultan (Yosmaoğlu, 22). Of these forbidden words, a notable one was “nose”, in “allusion to the Sultan’s rather protruding facial feature” (Yosmaoğlu, 23). Other words were banned in dictionaries, too: “constitution”, “dictator”, “discipline”, among others (Yosmaoğlu, 22). Cioeta highlights how even the name of the deposed sultan Murad, his older brother, was considered forbidden, the assumption being that it called into question the legitimacy of Abdülhamid’s ascension to the throne (176). This censoring of vocabulary affected the linguistic surround of the period, literally blocking the ability to employ such words in the public space.

Informing was another aspect that contributed to control. The creation of a police force and a large network of spies, “directly dependent on the Palace”, emphasized the focus of “protect[ing] the interests of the regime” (Erol, 712). The network of spies themselves “belonged to various ethnic groups and to diverse ranks of society”, some even ordinary people who spied to get into the good graces of the sultan (Erol, 712). This atmosphere of informing is also illustrated by the actions of senior Ottoman officials who, in order to secure the sultan’s trust, began to monitor lesser officials on behalf of the regime (Erdoğan, 221). This element of control penetrated class and ethnic lines, making an imprint on society at large.

Some have labeled this desire for control as verging on full paranoia, further provoked by a reclusive life at Yıldız palace, though his distrust is somewhat defensible given the number of assassination attempts against the sultan during his reign. Between 1896 and 1904 the Hamidian security services succeeded in averting four assassination attempts, all of which were, of course, censored out of the news (Alloul, Eldem, de Smaele, 17-8). These four do not include the most well-known attempt in 1905, by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, just outside the Hamidiye mosque in Yıldız (1). The fate of the preceding sultans, too must be contextualized: Murad V, the sultan immediately preceding Abdülhamid, was deemed “unfit to rule” only months after his accession due to his deteriorated mental state (Zürcher, 68). Abdülhamid’s uncle, Sultan Abdülaziz, was deposed in a coup d’état, shortly after which he committed suicide (the same year of Abdülhamid’s accession to the throne). It is with this context in mind that we must understand the sultan’s proclivity for control of information, one that was fostered by both physical and ontological insecurities.

In this way the Hamidian era saw an institutionalization of censorship more broadly, beyond just the press, especially in terms of how censorship shaped networks of communication. This control of information was an important and defining factor of Abdülhamid’s reign, as is evidenced through the various mechanisms established to regulate information.¹⁷ In spite of the rigorous restrictions on specific types of information, this period saw new technologies that enabled greater readership through the newspaper’s ability to reach a much larger public (Zürcher, 74). It is in this way that the banality of linguistic control reached a larger audience, beyond just that of the palace and its immediate surroundings. I suggest we understand censorship during the

¹⁷ Brummett argues that the year “1908 brought a greater liberation of tongues and of pens in Istanbul” (84). 1908, of course, being the year of the Young Turk Revolution, after which, in 1909, Abdülhamid was deposed. This is an ironic statement, given the further institutionalization nature of censorship after Abdülhamid’s reign. See Erol, p. 708.

Hamidian era in this way, as more than just a set of policies but rather a climate of concealment, aimed at the regulation of information in even the most banal of ways, all of which animated and defined the sultan's rule.

It is these very historical realities that shaped the environment of the collective in such a way that established a shared grammar, one that exists as a refraction of the ruling idiom of the sultan. I assert that this historical existential experience of transformation was written into the very grammar of the collective and is one that we can access through the series itself. In order to access the grammar that animates the series, we will require a distinct methodological approach that enables a reading of the cinematographic elements that make up the series' grammar.

This thesis proceeds as follows: first, in order to demonstrate how an existential memory may be accessed within the series, I will lay out the methodological approach of this paper, one that relies on the deep reading of cinematographic elements of the series. Three analytical chapters will follow, all of which will contribute to the articulation of a subtext that forms the existential memory. After, in this paper's epilogue, I will return to the earlier discussion of collective identity formation processes in contemporary Turkey.

Chapter 2: Accessing Existential Memory in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*

I construe the series itself as animated by a grammar, one that adheres to an internal logic that defines the limits, boundaries and rules of what can be expressed through visual, auditory and dialogic elements in the series. More specifically, I argue that the series' grammar is driven by the very logic of Abdülhamid's grammar; that is, a grammar of concealment. Furthermore, our ability to access this logic hinges upon our ability to contextualize, extract and translate the filmic elements into a cohesive syntax. Identifying the syntactical rules, which are embedded in what I will refer to as the series' subtext, requires a specific methodological approach – a deep reading process and the translation of cinematographic language into Turkish words. I will elaborate on this process below, but first, we shall take a closer look at the series' title as an example of what this deep reading enables us to say.

A close reading of the series' title will reinforce the interpretive links suggested thus far, while also illustrating the application of this methodology as a way to access the memory of Abdülhamid's grammar. If the ungrammatical title mirrors an ungrammatical grammar of being forged by the transformations experienced by Ottoman subjects during the reign of Abdülhamid, the title's breakdown in signification also more specifically resonates with the particular affective experience of the sultan's preoccupation with his origins: elements of censorship, which devolve on notions of pedigree, ancestry and origins, actually find themselves reflected into the very title of the series. My position is that Abdülhamid's very ruling idiom, concentrated on censorship, generated a linguistic surround, which in turn animates the series' title. Only by tracing this network of semantic coherence does the title's obfuscation seem more than just "weird".

We begin with the dissonance between the title's grammatical punctuation markers. Within the series' episodes themselves, the title is listed as *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, without any punctuation

marks. On the series' website (on TRT TV), however, the main page lists the name as *Payitaht* “*Abdülhamid*” with quotation marks around *Abdülhamid*.¹⁸ Furthermore, on TRT World's webpage, in an article about the series, the title is listed as *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, with a colon in between *Payitaht* and *Abdülhamid*.¹⁹

This multiplicity of grammatical forms of the series' title devolves on inconsistent punctuation rules. This mirrors the process by which punctuation was adopted into the Ottoman Turkish language, which culminated during the Hamidian era (Hagopian, 3). I construe the conflicting punctuation as a form of déjà vu that reminds of Abdülhamid's ruling grammar. More specifically, I claim that the series' ambiguous title and the latter's incompatible punctuation forms suggest a grammar of being determined to render the sultan illegible; the inconsistent punctuation is a linguistic artifact of the existential memory inscribed in the series.

The punctuation of each title lends itself for a similar interpretation. The first, conspicuous for the absence of punctuation markers, could both denote continuity between the two words while also obscuring precisely how they are connected. It has been noted how the rhetorical practice of *seci* – borrowed from Arabic and made obligatory in Ottoman Turkish, which, due to the absence of punctuation, consisted of “stops by words which rhymed within a sentence” – meant that “meaning [was] often abandoned for the sake of a fine sounding rhyme” (Mardin, 255). Is this reminiscent of an absence of punctuation as was seen in Ottoman Turkish by the 18th century? If so, an absence of punctuation could emphasize continuity: at the expense of establishing clear and definitive endings and beginnings.

A similar concern may also be recognized in the second punctuation form, with the quotation marks around *Abdülhamid*, which begs the question – what about Abdülhamid is being

¹⁸ See the series' website on TRT TV: <https://www.trt.tv/payitaht-Abdülhamid/bolumler/80326>.

¹⁹ See the TRT World article: <https://www.trtworld.com/video/showcase/on-the-set-of-payitaht-Abdülhamid/5a40bcd541736a1f528acfc1>

marked? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, quotation marks are “principally used to mark the beginning and the end of a quoted passage”. In this way, the quotation marks suggest the notion that the sultan’s reign, his ruling grammar, was idiomatic; attention is called to the style or characteristic of *his* reign in particular, even as it denies elaboration.

The third, with the colon, denotes discontinuity: a colon’s “best defined use is to separate clauses which are grammatically independent and discontinuous... thus it may introduce an antithetic statement” (OED). The grammatical punctuation markers of each version denote very different meanings making it unclear how one should interpret the relationship between the two words. Should *Abdülhamid* be understood as a continuation of *Payitaht*? Or a break from it? The ambiguity endemic to the series is clear from the start.

The befuddlement of the “title” – *başlık* – which means “title, “heading”, “cap”, “caption” and, among others, “headline”, is to the series as the tip of the iceberg is to its enormous base below sea level. The title’s perplexity or illegibility encodes a grammar of being in which linguistic strategies perform as a “hood”, *başlık*, to cover or shroud something about the identity of Abdülhamid.

The overdetermined breakdown in signification manifested in the ungrammatical title implores us to read this as a defining characteristic of the series’ representation of Abdülhamid’s grammar of being. Close attention to splintered linguistic patterns permits us to reconcile this context – this grammatical breakdown – with the existential memory of a transformational era defined by a grammar of concealment generated by Abdülhamid’s ruling idiom. Porter, an expert on cinematographic close reading, likens this process to assembling a jigsaw puzzle, where “our ability to reconstruct the piece implied by the jagged edges relies on our ability literally to ‘read’ the absence that defines it” (9).

The series' title provides a gloss for understanding the ungrammaticality of its content, a linguistic contextualization of this grammar. Dictionaries provide the translation of *payitaht* as “capital city”.²⁰ This translation emphasizes that the city in question is of a kingdom or empire.²¹ Given the context of empire, some scholars translate the word as “imperial city”. Kanar's Osmanlı Türkçesi Sözlüğü (Ottoman Turkish dictionary) specifies *payitaht* as first *başkent* or “capital city” and second as *taht dibi* or “bottom/base/foot of the throne” (804). Grammatical punctuation marker confusion notwithstanding, how do we make sense of a series whose title is “*Foot of the Throne Abdülhamid*” or “*Bottom of the Throne Abdülhamid*”? How do we reconcile a connection between the two objects within the title?

Lexical clues for how to reconstruct the meaning of the two-word title blurred by their ungrammatical relation are intimated in the form of a synonymic chain of words that devolves on the notion of “origin”, *asıl*, such as “foundation”, *temel*, and “bottom”, *dip* (*dibi*'s nominative form). These words convey the sense of a physical substructure or underpinning. At the same time the words denote the figurative sense of “origins,” referring to the act of “being born from a particular ancestor or race; parentage, ancestry, extraction, pedigree” (OED). It is interesting to note here that *asıl* – with a dotted *i* instead of the dotless *ı* – means “royal” or “noble”. Despite the difference in *i* and *ı* (the latter indicates a close back unrounded vowel sound while the former indicates a close front unrounded vowel sound) that *asıl* and *asıl* both point us to Abdülhamid's origins – his supposed “nobility” – is telling.

This preoccupation with ancestry and nobility is historically grounded. Deringil notes how legitimization policies during Abdülhamid's reign “can be observed in the prominent place given to the Ottoman genealogical lineage in the state almanacs” (1999, 27). He also points out

²⁰ <https://tureng.com/en/turkish-english/payitaht>

²¹ <https://www.seslisozluk.net/en/what-is-the-meaning-of-payitaht/>

how these particular legitimization efforts “had emphasized the strength and universal nature of the rule of the Ottoman Sultan” (1991, 345). In addition to the clues leading us to noble origins, it is interesting to note that the series’s title – while including Abdülhamid’s name – does not include his sultan title in any form. *Sultan*, *padişah*, *hakan*, *han*, *hünkar* – all titles for denoting the authority and role of the sultan, none of which are found in the title of the series. Strange, for a series that presumably reveres and exalts the *sultan*. This raises the possibility that we are meant to view the series as being about his person rather than his role.

Translation of the Cinematographic Language

These linguistic clues – in particular, the chain of semantic links leading us to “origin” – tell us something. “*Origins of the Throne Abdülhamid*” advances a very different idea of the series’ preoccupation as compared to “*Capital City Abdülhamid*”, but this is, of course, not said. A similar semiotic strategy is reflected in the overall composition of the series’ first season, including cinematographic elements such as images, auditory and lingual elements – dialogue – in addition to plot lines. Porter argues that these components yield themselves as cinematographic clues that can be used to access an existential memory; I contend we can apply this method to the rehabilitated object itself. I therefore see the title’s ungrammaticality as a commentary on the illegibility of the very era it seeks to portray because of the need to conceal. I deploy Porter’s methodology of translating cinematographic language – that is, visual, auditory and lingual features – into Turkish words, to demonstrate its overdetermined aspects and the subtext that it conveys when read in tandem with the surface meaning of the series. Uncovering this new linguistic system inscribed in the series enables us to see beyond the title’s incomprehensibility.

To confirm such lexical evidence, I will rely upon Oxford English Dictionary²² for English and Tureng Dictionary²³ and Sesli Sözlük²⁴ for Turkish.

In terms of scope, the first season of *Payitaht Abdülhamid* will be the object of analysis, with a particular emphasis placed on the first episode. Each episode varies in length – anywhere from two hours to three hours – but is generally around two hours and 15 minutes long.²⁵

The events comprising the plot of the first season stretch over seventeen episodes and revolve around the attempts of Abdülhamid to keep his empire unharmed from the conniving machinations of those inside and outside seeking to destroy the Ottomans.²⁶ The series begins in the year 1896, with the final episode of the first season ending in (what is presumed to be, though not made clear) 1897, and includes a number of plot lines over the two hour-plus episodes. The first season's plot machinates between schemes contrived by the conspirators and Abdülhamid's thwarting of said schemes. Abdülhamid plans to build the Hijaz railway, a project whose dismantlement is continuously attempted at by the British, German and his advisor and brother-in-law, Mahmut Paşa. At the same time, Abdülhamid must continuously think one step ahead to outsmart Theodor Herzl and his co-conspirators, who are attempting to carve out a chunk of the empire to create a Jewish state. In the end, most of the conspirators end up working together against Abdülhamid – the Armenians are working for the Jews, who are also in cahoots with Mahmut Paşa, the Ottoman revolutionaries/constitutionalists (including Mahmut's son, Sabahattin), the British, and a German gun trader. The series is not without its romance, however: Abdülhamid's

²² To be referenced as OED going forward, <http://www.oed.com/>.

²³ Tureng website: <https://tureng.com/en/turkish-english>.

²⁴ Sesli Sözlük website: <https://www.seslisozluk.net/en/>.

²⁵ Due to commercials the actual television airing of the episodes is even longer – three hours each. I have accessed the episodes on TRT's website, and therefore have been spared from the additional commercials. Full episodes, with minimal commercials, can also be accessed on Payitaht Abdülhamid's official YouTube channel.

²⁶ In the series, the central conspirators against Abdülhamid are many: various representatives from the British, German, French, Russian and Greek governments, Theodor Herzl and his 'First Zionist Congress' accomplices that are attempting to create the state of Israel, the Armenians, Ottoman revolutionaries, and traitors within his palace, the most notable being his advisor and brother-in-law Mahmut Paşa.

harem is incorporated in the series' plot, with (non-sexual) relationships displayed between him and his wives, as well as between other Ottoman officials and women of the harem. The first season's last few episodes' plot lines revolve around a plan drawn up by the conspirators to bomb the Ottoman bank and take innocents hostage, one that Abdülhamid is able to frustrate. The final episode exposes Mahmut Paşa to be a traitor, after which he is prepared to be hanged, and shows Abdülhamid preparing for war against Greece.

The following three chapters contain evidence of the presence of a collective existential memory through the deep reading and translation of distinctive elements of the series. All of the chapters demonstrate how cinematographic elements tacitly communicate the presence of a level of signification, or subtext, distinct from that generated by the revisionist surface meaning. The first chapter highlights the series' dominant cinematographic strategy for signaling its own embedded subtext.

The following chapter will build upon this working glossary by investigating the psychological mechanisms that inform the sultan's grammar, and how such psychological structures – ones that specifically center on the need to conceal an impure royal bloodline – impacted public linguistic circulation processes. This chapter will draw on scholarship that uses scenes of eating as sites for uncovering information about the aforementioned psychological processes.

The final chapter focuses more broadly on the representation of the impingement of the sultan's idiom on the self-managing grammars of three representative groups of late Ottoman subjects. The chapter demonstrates how the subjects' grammars are reminiscent of the same preoccupations informing the sultan's grammar: all are organized around issues involving ethno-

religious lineage purity. Together, the chapters paint a picture of the role played by Turkish lineage purity in collective identity formation processes.

Chapter 3: Reconstructing the Existential Memory's Grammar

Beginnings

The first episode, running two hours and eleven minutes long, introduces the viewers to Theodor Herzl in his home in Vienna, as well as Abdülhamid's plans for the Hijaz railway, a project which he and his advisors – including his brother-in-law, Mahmut Paşa – are negotiating with the British for funding. The viewer also learns in the first episode that Mahmut Paşa and his son, Sabahattin, are scheming behind the sultan's back. The viewer also becomes familiarized with the sultan's familial relations, in particular that between the sultan and his son, Abdülkadir. In its function as the catalyst for the complex plot lines that are to unfold in the series' portrayal of the Hamidian era, the opening episode, like a literary prologue (Porter, 76), brackets the main events of the plot and links them to larger contexts, such as the sultan's ruling idiom. I approach the opening episode as containing a specific form of communication that serves as a guide for accessing the series' embedded existential memory. The first episode's scenes present crucial visual and linguistic glosses for understanding how the cinematography points to the existence of such signification within the series.

In examining the series as evidence of symmetry between the rehabilitation and a collective existential memory, we can turn to the series' opening scene to glean cues informed by the particular affiliations between the two. This opening scene precedes the series' credits as a sort of prologue – the only such episode in the first season to do so – thus demonstrating its importance in terms of how it presents the series' first visual articulations of the sultan's ruling idiom. The opening scene, though lasting a mere two minutes and 32 seconds, establishes a cinematographic grammar which, I claim, represents the collective memory of the sultan's ruling idiom.

The scene itself is of a parade, with Abdülhamid driven in a carriage at the center of the procession down a long avenue, officers surrounding him, and cheering onlookers on both sides of the procession. Towards the end of the scene, a man on the side of the procession tosses a gold coin to an officer at the front of the procession and, with the gold coin as a cue, the officers ahead of Abdülhamid turn around and shoot back at Abdülhamid's carriage. The scene ends here.

I contend that the simplicity of the opening scene belies the complexity of the mode of expression. This scene presents a framework marked by a split: on the one hand, at the surface level, Abdülhamid's royal prerogative is emphasized; on the other hand, translation of cinematic imagery cryptically points to the concealed object of the sultan's preoccupation. I suggest the opening scene be read as the first verbalization, so to speak, of the beginnings of these two differing stories.

Imagistic patterns explicitly and implicitly provide a historical memory of the Hamidian era. Translation of the opening scene's dominant images into Turkish words dramatically exemplifies the linguistic mechanisms by which the presence of two levels of signification are indicated. Analysis will reveal a linguistic phenomenon wherein the Turkish words signaled by the images are homophones with wide semantic ranges. What emerges upon close reading is that the homophones are linked by the way in which they yield meaning that communicates simultaneously a revisionist level of meaning, one that represents royal prerogative, and another, which silently adumbrates the specific issue whose concealment was required during Abdülhamid's reign. Only by translating the images into lexical forms can we access the latter level of signification – 'the other beginning' – that is unclear to the viewer at first watch. The opening scene will then be understood as a presentation of both of these levels, the surface and the

subtext, with our reading keeping a sharp eye on the overdetermined elements of the former to elucidate shrouded elements of the latter.

The timing of the series' start, in 1896,²⁷ which bypasses the fact that Abdülhamid's reign began twenty years prior, in 1876, calls attention to the prominence of selective memory as an element of the era. The series' treatment of two decades of history emerges as a testament to the necessity of exclusion in the maintenance of royal legitimacy. Although the surface level rationale for the choice in start is displayed as a commemoration of Abdülhamid's twenty years on the throne, the concern with containing the representation of the *beginning of his reign* belies an equal concern with the *beginning of his being*. This can be read as a strategy of avoidance, the disassociation of which points to it as an important aspect of Abdülhamid's grammar of being. By exposing this selective beginning as one that fits into a greater grammar of concealment, we can understand this choice of start not just as "random" but rather as a mechanism of avoidance. That said, we must understand exactly what it is that this selection excludes – and why.

The Armenian massacres of 1894-96 shape the representation of the sultan in 1896, but the absence of direct reference provides a retrospective clue concerning the grammar of the sultan's idiom.²⁸ Of particular relevance is how the date obscures Abdülhamid's suppressive and violent policies towards the Armenians, which have been shown to be notorious aspects of his ruling idiom (Yılmaz, 143). That this overdetermined start writes out any connection between the sultan's origins, the beginning of his reign, and the Armenians invites interrogation, especially when considering Abdülhamid's previously mentioned anxiety around the rumor spread about his illegitimate birth by an Armenian concubine (Karateke, 2005, 47). This obscurity finds grounding

²⁷ This temporal marker is made clear after the opening scene, in the scene that follows the opening credits.

²⁸ Allen, in an analysis of the photograph album sent by Abdülhamid to the British Library in 1893, comments on the exclusion of certain aspects from the album: "[The] omissions... are intriguing. For example, there are no identifiable photographs of Armenian subjects, an ethnic group that was of great interest to many Americans in the late 19th century" (126).

in the recent words of an Armenian bookshop keeper, Monsieur Ara, from Istanbul: "... Of all the Circassian women in the harem, Abdülhamid's mother was an Armenian." When asked if he was certain about this, given the violent actions of Abdülhamid towards the Armenian population, he responded, "Aren't your enemies always those who are closest to you?" (qtd. in Savas). Regardless of the factual legitimacy of this rumor, its very existence – read in tandem with events occurring at this time and the series' choice of start – directs us to view the selection of 1896 not only as a commemoration of Abdülhamid's twenty years on the throne, but rather as an element of concealment of this very rumor that colored the linguistic surround at that time.

The pointed temporal start speaks to the silencing or exclusion of points of view about the sultan's reign's origins and, by extension, his genealogical origins within a definite hereditary context. The start of 1896 obfuscates the historical realities in the way that it silences or excludes what does not fit into the surface meaning – a representation of an "Ottoman moment" dominated by a revisionist point of view. At the same time, the diverse experiences of the collective are filtered through linguistic chains, expressive channels organized to conceal and exclude something about the sultan's family origins. In viewing it this way, we begin to see a symmetry between the reappropriation and the historical realities it seeks to portray, despite its revisionist elements. Exclusion comes to the fore as a grammatically defining feature that impels both the temporality of the series as well as Abdülhamid's policies towards the Armenians and other minority groups.

Succession's Linear Path

From the first frames, the salience of the signifier of linearity attests to the series' split representational nature. The opening scene begins with an image of a parade that runs down the center of a long unnamed avenue, bracketed by grand buildings (Figure 1.1). On both sides are

cheering onlookers, which enhances the sense of linear and forward movement conveyed by the parade's procession. I read the parade as a cinematographic clue which hints that its content and form has two sides to it, two levels of meaning. The imagery of the lineal procession suggests an allegorical condensing of the sultan's reign to two distinct spaces. The central focus on the procession – with the sultan squarely positioned amid this line – emphasizes the centrality of the sultan to this split, while the continuously changing camera shot from the parade's sidelines looking towards the center adumbrates the presence of a marginalized existential memory.



Figure 1.1. Line suggesting a split level of meaning

As a representation of a “line”, or *hat*, the parade signals to the viewer that the story moving forward has two sides to it, two levels of meaning: the surface, which is clear to the viewer, and the subtext, which is the obscured existential memory of a transformational period. That this can be read as two divergent stories is reinforced by the changing camera shot during this scene: the view continuously changes, often with a vantage point from the sidelines looking towards the

center. This can be interpreted as a symbolic signal for the viewer to read the story from two different sides, in effect reading two different stories.

The series' cinematographic language mediates the production of meaning in both stories. For example, the centrality of the image of the procession signals its significance as an integral component of the scene's meaning. On the one hand, the magnitude of the procession portrays the sultan's royal prerogative and stature. This context dominates the surface meaning of the cinematography. When we translate the image into a Turkish word, however, we find that a word associated with "parade", *geçit töreni*, shares a synonymic link with *sıra*, through its emphasis on "procession", and in doing so obscures other possible connotations of the word *sıra*, including "alignment", "order", "sequence" and "succession", all words that resonate with notions of hereditary rule – an issue about which we have seen a particular sensitivity exhibited, especially during the 19th century.

Karateke articulates an important shift in the rule of succession in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century: father to son succession, as compared to the rule of seniority (which was informally codified from 1617 until the mid-19th century, during the reign of Abdülhamid's father – Abdülmecid) (2005, 39). Karateke states that "the first endeavors to change the rule of succession in the nineteenth century can be traced to Abdülmecid's reign" (2005, 39). Understanding the timing of this change has no one easy answer, however Karateke postulates the decisive factor being the weakening of the Ottoman dynasty's authority and a questioning of its legitimacy by the people (48). "The debates about changing the rule of succession unveiled existing sentiments against the Ottoman dynasty, a natural outcome of the process of secularization in the Ottoman world" (Karateke, 2005, 48). The imagery of a line denotes not just that of a parade procession but

also of (familial and filial) succession, a concept which was undergoing significant changes during the 19th century.

This succession practice should be understood in the context of Deringil's argument on genealogy as a critical feature of a larger legitimacy structure deployed by Abdülhamid (1991, 1993, 1999). Deringil demonstrates how Abdülhamid drew on his lineage in the face of this legitimization deficit (1999, 9). This is evidenced through a fixation on an 'official' dynastic myth, one that traces back to Adam and Eve via the legendary Oğuz tribe (Deringil, 1999, 27). Such dynastic myths were "an ancient tradition in Islamic court panegyrics, but what is interesting here is that it should be featured in a state almanac", especially given the status of almanacs as a "creation of bureaucratic modernization" that included mundane data such as agricultural products and various minister names (Deringil, 1999, 27). One almanac claimed that the House of Osman is, "according to the research of experts, one of the oldest in the world, and will last forever" (Deringil, 1993, 10). Recall, too, that Abdülhamid used the state almanac to publish what was essentially his certificate of royal pedigree in attempting to refute the rumor about his ethnic and dynastic origins (Karateke, 47). It is fair to say, then, that genealogy and ancestral authority were critical aspects of a greater legitimization structure that ultimately supported Abdülhamid's thirty-plus year reign. I suggest we read genealogy not only as a feature supporting a greater legitimacy structure, but also a defining feature of Abdülhamid's grammatical structure of being.

If the existential memory evoked by the procession's linear action hinges on notions of succession and lineage, notwithstanding its signification of royal prerogative, then the image of the sultan's literal position as rider and figurative position as driver of the car in which he rides engages in the same semiotic operation. Translating the image of "driving" into Turkish yields the word *sürmek*, "to drive". Like *sıra*, a homophone whose range of meanings includes notions of

lineage and succession, the word *sürmek* too has multiple meanings in addition “to drive”, another one, in the noun form of the verb, being “smear”, recalling the rumors and smears that so vexed Abdülhamid. Linguistically, when we translate the series’ first images of royal prerogative into a Turkish word, we can see how the images work to circumscribe other meanings of the words. Just as the image of a “procession” obscures another meaning of the word – “succession” – so too does the image of “driving” hide the word “smear”. The imagery emerges as a form of camouflage that conceals an existential memory of Abdülhamid’s royal identity as the heart of a defiled lineage.

A parallel materializes here, then, between the images and their subtext and the historical conditions shaped by a need to camouflage the smeared image of Abdülhamid, a defining element of that time – especially when considering the importance of international reputation for the sultan. The reappropriation’s embodiment of a familial smearing, through its foregrounding of driving, also resonates with the collective experience at that time through the depictions of Abdülhamid – often represented by the European press²⁹ – in a sexualized manner. Whether it was details of his sexuality, his harem (Schick, 56), venereal disease, or even questions concerning his royal paternity (59) – despite often being apocryphal – these insinuations found wide circulation and would have contributed to a blemished reputation.

Sürme’s other lexical affiliations intersect with the embedded semantic network of meanings devolving on notions of succession and smear. For example, *sürmek* also emphasizes a “continuing”, as in continuing a line, continuing a lineage. This finds salience in the procession’s linear, forward movement. At the same time, it can also denote “leading”: in this way it shares meanings with other verbs, including *yönlendirmek*, “to give direction”, and *yönetmek*, “to direct”, as in directing a nation. The semantic connections between “driving” and “ruling” move us to

²⁹ Generally French, German and British, as detailed by Schick.

divert our attention away from the pomp of the parade, and instead towards a fixation on the “ruling”. With Abdülhamid at the center of the drive our focus turns towards him, however the other linguistic clues pointing to ancestry and lineage enable us to understand “ruling” as the entire family who holds such positions of authority. The general practice of Ottoman sultans using allusions to the achievements of their predecessors to strengthen their claim for legitimacy enables us to draw this line between Abdülhamid and his ancestors (Karateke, 2001, 190). The linearity of the smear – the procession moving forward in a line – supports this interpretation, intimating that what is smeared or shameful devolves on royal ancestry.

Broken Money, Tainted Lineage

Tensions between notions of royal legitimacy and genealogy are also intimated by the third dominant image and related actions in the opening scene, that is, the gold coin that is tossed into a group of Abdülhamid’s officers at the head of the procession from a man on the sideline, a cue for the officers to shoot at Abdülhamid’s carriage. The visual preoccupation with the sideline as an important space, evidenced by the camera shot’s repeated return from the procession to the man on the sideline, as well as the camera’s tracking the coin’s trajectory after it is tossed, highlights the imagery’s communicative intentions with regards to the linguistic subtext uncovered thus far. That is to say, the cinematography elucidates the same veiled network of exclusion that is camouflaged by the dominant images of the procession and driving.

Before unveiling the network, it is important to note the overdetermined revisionist intentions of the imagery. In light of the sideline man’s portrayal in the series as a ‘non-Ottoman’ – in following episodes we learn he is a spy from the Vatican – we can view this portrayal of exclusion as a parallel of exclusionary acts during Abdülhamid’s reign for the sake of creating an

‘Ottoman citizenry’. During a time of change in terms of how the state saw the citizen, the notion of Ottomanism was, at face value, “meant to unite all peoples living in Ottoman domains” (Deringil, 1993, 5), however these policies were carried out at the expense of groups that were seen as not abiding. The harsh state and paramilitary violence unleashed at minorities – on the largest scale towards the Armenians and Bulgarians – was carried out to “thwart nationalist and successionist intents of revolutionary groups” (Eldhem, 42). Thus, the intention was to create an overarching and conforming Ottoman identity, but only through the exclusion of groups that did not fit – or did not want to fit – this mold. The portrayal of the sideline man as non-Ottoman, and his positionality outside the parade, speaks to an aura of exclusion that is analogous to the policies of exclusion which were necessary in creating a homogenous Ottoman identity.

The camera’s lingering attention to the inscription of the Jewish Star of David on the gold coin further deepens these associations by linking Jewish ethnicity to actions that are disruptive to royal power (Figure 1.2). On the revisionist surface level, the image reinforces the notion that the actions of outsiders are the true culprits for the demise of Ottoman power. This is confirmed by the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about the Dönme, which believe that Abdülhamid was deposed by a “cabal of Dönme, or secret Jews” (Baer, 527). In fact, adherents to this conspiracy theory believe that the Dönme orchestrated Abdülhamid’s overthrow (Baer, 531). However, if we take seriously the cinematographic grammar uncovered thus far, what is signaled by the camera’s focus on the distinction between the processional line and that which is located outside it is another perspective that reveals more about the source of royal anxiety.



Figure 1.2. The gold coin that camouflages the “tainted” and “broken” nature of what it symbolizes

The camera directs the viewer to pay attention to what occurs “outside”, *dışarı*, the line of procession and, by extension, the genealogical line. In addition to connoting an object's positionality, this adverb, *dışarı*, also denotes a position of "exclusion," or of having been "left out," as reflected in the compound verb *dışarıda bırakmak*. The camera's return to the sideline emphasizes the man throwing the coin, and the thrown coin itself, as objects excluded from the royal procession. A similar linguistic operation is reflected in the verb form of the noun “sideline”, *gözden düşmek*, another apt translation of image of the coin thrower's location, which means “to fall out of favor with” or “to fall from grace”.

Once we recognize how the dominance of the imagery's locative meaning camouflages a semantic range of meanings that resonate with those generated by the procession and driving imagery, we can understand the role it plays as an ambiguous element fogging the focal point of the descent of Abdülhamid. Indeed, the synonymic link between the words "sideline" and the verb "descend", in (*aşağı*) *inmek*, reinforces these lexical overtones. The semantic overlap between

verbs meaning "descend" – as in as walking down a flight of stairs – and those connoting descent through an ancestral line – such as (*aşağı*) *inmek*, *soyundan gelmek*, “to descend from” someone or “to be sired by” someone – raises the possibility that the camera's interest in the sideline simultaneously points to a camouflaged danger posed by someone who is “outside” the processional – that is, genealogical – line.

The gold coin's role as a catalyst for the events that unfold in the remainder of the scene commands our attention as a pivotal moment and, in doing so, follows the same linguistic operation as aforementioned overdetermined aspects. Like the parade and driving, the image of the coin itself is emblematic of ultimate sovereignty and royal power (Pamuk, 88) – especially during Abdülhamid's reign, when in 1881 the link with silver was severed and gold was accepted as the standard for Ottoman currency (Pamuk, 217) – while also concealing a linguistic network that directs our attention to something tainted.³⁰ Several Turkish words are frequently used to denote coinage, many of them variants of the word "money" or "currency", *para*, such as "metallic" or "iron" money, *madeni para* and *demir para*. Also included in this semantic chain devolving on the meaning of "coinage" are the words "coin", *bozukluk*, and “change”, *bozuk para*, or, more literally, "broken money." The sense of rupture and irregularity conveyed by the word "broken" is augmented when the word *bozukluk*, another homophone, is read in tandem with its synonyms, "distortion" "defect" and “taint”, all words that we can now see as refining our understanding of the cinematographic line of logic: the camera's emphasis on the ethnic status of the outsider in whose hand lies the symbol of Ottoman (genealogical) legitimacy communicates in cryptic form

³⁰ It is of interest to note here that sexualized depictions of Abdülhamid during the Hamidian era – of which there were many, specifically coming from Europe – could be found on “... items such as a gold medallion” (Schick, 54). The case which Schick discusses is that of “Abdülhamid's face as a composite of women” on a gold medallion (54), which could be interpreted as literally representing a tainted object.

that the authority bestowed to the sultanate is tainted, “infect[ed] with pernicious, noxious, corrupting or deleterious qualities” (OED).

The directionality of the coin toss, from sidelines to the center and head (*baş*) of the procession, supports this interpretation. Not only does it evoke hereditary hierarchy, but the linguistic network of “brokenness” demands that we read the coin's trajectory as an image that depicts a direct disputation of the genealogy of the sultan. The coin enters the parade from the outside in; if the parade's linear feature paints a picture of genealogical legitimacy, then the very act of the (tainted) coin “breaking” into the line provides a symbolic gesture of “penetration” of a royal line by an ethnic other, the excluded man throwing the excluded object. In this way the image of the coin's trajectory ultimately points to the anxiety-inducing rumors of Abdülhamid's Armenian ethnic origins.

Glossing Red as Bloodline

Tension between dynastic authority and illicit origins is also reflected in the salience of redness in the opening scene, through red flags, red hats (the fez), red attire and red décor (Figure 1.3). Again, identifying the revisionist intention of the dominance of red allows us to unmask a concealed lexical network of exclusion in the same way that the images of the procession, the man and the coin do.



Figure 1.3. Consanguinity paints the picture red, with Abdülhamid at the center

The red objects belong to a repertoire of “pomp and symbolism”, which were “employed with renewed vigor” by Abdülhamid “to mobilize former passive objects of history” to legitimize new forms of power relations (Deringil, 1991, 353). The combination of the red fez and red flags reveal an expression of sovereignty comprised of “Central Asian Turkish as well as Islamic motifs” (353) meant to project the sultan as heir to a “mythologized and perhaps ritualized history” (354).

As a sartorial choice, the fez emblemizes the revisionist intention of the opening scene. The fez was considered the “national headgear” for the Ottoman state beginning in 1826, ultimately gaining association with Abdülhamid’s regime (Aktürk, 167). Abdülhamid promoted it “in the name of national and Islamic tradition” (Yılmaz, 25). In the opening scene, Abdülhamid’s location at the center of this sea of red redolent with symbolic elements of national solidarity, so to speak, amidst waving flags, we can understand the dominant red to insinuate Abdülhamid’s centrality to the state, ultimately conveying a solidarity with his figure.

At the same time, however, the red-stained screen tacitly evokes a stain of another sort, namely the historically rooted disparaging name used by some (often Europeans) for Abdülhamid: *Kızıl Sultan*, or the “Red Sultan.”³¹ This version of “red” (*kızıl*) signifies “blood”, or *kan*, and refers to the bloody massacres of Armenians (among other groups) that took place during Abdülhamid’s reign.

If we understand the depiction of “red” to be lexically linked to “blood” in the context of the Hamidian era, as is intimated by *kızıl*,³² we are in a position to fully unsheathe the camouflaged elements of the meanings conveyed by the imagery. In its representation of the word “blood”, *kan* can also refer to familial lines, which is supported by *kan*’s other meanings: “lineage” or “descent.” This reading of red emphasizes consanguinity or, more literally, “blood relation”: the blood of an ancestral line, that which colors the opening scene of the series. This understanding of “red” is supported by the earlier linguistic clusters discovered, especially as they devolve on a camouflaged ancestral focus. That the red is everywhere – literally painting the entire view – emphasizes the level of intensity in terms of a fixation on descent.

Color salience thus emerges as a cinematographic component that generates two distinct but interrelated meanings of the word: bloody, as in the “Red Sultan”, and “blood line”. When read in tandem both cohere with the already established subtext of meaning that devolves on the smearing of a name and a fixation on the ancestral bloodline. Reading “red” in yet one more image – this time in the final seconds of the opening scene – reinforces these internal linguistic resonances.

³¹ For a larger discussion on Abdülhamid’s “European detractors” see Schick, pp. 47-73.

³² This name – *Kızıl Sultan* – has specific historical connotations. I mean here not to condone the name but rather to point to the fact that this was, during the Hamidian era, a known name for Abdülhamid, thereby coloring the linguistic surround.

The final frames depict an officer who catches the aforementioned gold coin thrown into the procession. He shouts to his surrounding group of officers who then turn and fire their weapons towards Abdülhamid's carriage. The noun "fire", *ateş*, is a homophone whose scope of meaning yields a distilled lexical portrait of the series' aesthetic of being: the word denotes both "shooting" and the noun "fire", as well as "flush", as in the reddening of skin from a fever caused by some kind of ailment. Just what ailment that may be is suggested by the synonymic link between the word *ateşlemek*, a translation of the "firing" action of the soldiers, and *dağlamak* – "stigmatizing" – and *lekelemek* – "smearing" – all of which insist that we read the first scene as a coda that glosses Abdülhamid's ruling idiom in terms of a smearing or debasement of the royal blood line. The multiple meanings of red aptly display the double story of the sultan, ultimately symbolizing a humiliated ancestral line that characterizes the concealed rendition.

A Fixation on the Past

Yet another assertive sequence of images in the final frames of the opening scene points to an anxiety over the sullied Ottoman dynastic line, in the form of a head shot of Abdülhamid where he looks backwards. His face is obscured from view as he looks back, behind him, just moments prior to the gold coin toss (Figure 1.4). Following the cinematographic grammar laid out thus far, we can read the sultan's locative fixation on something *literally* behind him – the procession – as a tacit acknowledgement of the series' interest in what lies behind the head of the dynasty, Abdülhamid – that is, his past.³³

³³ Similar associations are suggested by the linguistic overlaps between the Turkish word for "backwards", *geriye*, and *geçmişe*, "back" "backwards" or, more literally, "to the past".



Figure 1.4. Abdülhamid obscured while looking backwards, to his past

If we are to only concentrate on the revisionist intention this could be considered a reference to Abdülhamid's significant use of the past, one that Deringil places in a greater legitimization structure (1999, 27-33). This is highlighted through the sultan's memorialization of the Ottoman dynastic line, examples of which can be found in his commission of monuments and photograph albums, both of which fit into Abdülhamid's focus "in an unprecedented fashion on the 'creation myth'³⁴ of the Ottoman State" (Deringil, 1999, 31). The photograph album given to the British Library in 1893 by the sultan contained photos of "towns³⁵ associated with the rise of the Ottoman dynasty to imperial greatness" (Waley, 120). Similarly, the legendary Ertuğrul Gazi, founder of the Ottoman dynasty, was memorialized by the sultan through the building of a shrine-turned-commemorative mausoleum in Söğüt, with annual commemorative ceremonies that included "the 'original Ottoman tribe' the Karakeçili, [riding] into Söğüt dressed as Central Asian nomadic horsemen" (Deringil, 1999, 31-2). These associations resonate with the sultan's interest

³⁴ For more on the myth see: Imber, 1987, pp. 7-27 and Imber, 2005.

³⁵ Eskişehir, İznik, Söğüt (Waley, 120).

in the fez and other objects that symbolically link Ottoman national identity to the Turkish roots of the Ottoman dynastic family.

At the same time, the image of the sultan's backwards glance may also be viewed as a cinematographic cue for *us* to look backwards. In film, the backward look may alert "us, in retrospect, that there are seemingly inexplicable things in this narrative... that *become* explicable or meaningful if read with a backward or retrospective gaze – from end to beginning, present to past..." (Rashkin, 2009, 316). The backwards look implores us to look backwards, too. That said, if we take seriously the burgeoning subtext uncovered thus far, the fact that the backward looking gesture obscures the viewer's ability to see Abdülhamid's face raises the possibility that the representation of its obverse speaks of the veiling of another story: just as his face is concealed, so too is the other story concealed.

Lexical evidence for this interpretive position is found in the Turkish homophone *yüz*, which means both "face" and "obverse". If we understand Abdülhamid's concealed "face" to be semantically associated with his concealed "obverse" story, we can understand the backwards direction of the look as emphasizing the root of this concealment: in looking to the past whatever cannot be articulated must be covered, as an articulation would require a revealing, that is, a revealing of the other genealogical story that lies in the past. Another reading of *yüz*, read in tandem with the other subtexts uncovered thus far, tells us exactly that which is concealed: in addition to the meanings previously mentioned, *yüz* can also denote "physiognomy", or, in reference to physical appearance, "the general cast of features or the facial type of a people, group" (OED). That is, the physical features of Abdülhamid about which his critics have commented, namely their articulations that he "looked like an Armenian" (Karateke, 2005, 47). Thus, linked to his concealed

face and concealed story are the comments about the very physical features that define him, namely those smears that call into question his genealogical purity.

Abdülhamid's need to conceal must also be read in conjunction with his absence in the final seconds of the series' opening scene, when he is left out of view as the officers turn backwards towards the carriage and shoot (Figure 1.5). Despite his centrality to the parade's procession, the scene closes with his image concealed from the viewer's perspective. This absenting of the subject, when read together with the backward directionality of the officer's turn, may be seen to stage through imagery an existential memory of a ruling idiom defined by the absence of the sultan. This sequence's subtext underscores the role of concealment in the sultan's ruling idiom, borne from anxiety over his perceived ethnic origins, and by extension his position within the Ottoman ancestral line. That it is presented in slow motion only emphasizes this point.



Figure 1.5. Another gesture to look to backwards, to the past, to understand the concealed story of Abdülhamid

Once the scene ends, after the opening credits, the viewer returns back in time – what we later learn to be a day or so prior – to Abdülhamid’s 20-year commemoration of his ascension to the throne, yet another reinforcement of a return to Abdülhamid’s past. The viewer is taken into the past by the series itself, though the revisionist surface frustrates a return to the depths of the past that would elucidate an understanding of Abdülhamid’s need to conceal.

Conclusion

The first two minutes and 32 seconds act as a visual and lexical gloss on the cinematographic language that suggests a collective existential memory shaped by Abdülhamid’s ruling idiom. This close reading analysis of the opening scene represents the imagistic and lexical DNA, so to speak, of the existential memory, all the while yielding the key for how to trace its influence over the internal dynamics of other aspects of the series.

The existential memory’s other level of meaning – distinct from the revisionist surface message – reflects linguistic strategies that unknowingly aim to avoid words associated with the impurity of the sultan’s Ottoman bloodline. The dominant strategy of concealment, as is shown above, has been to rely on the communicative power of visual images to camouflage alternate connotations of Turkish words that represent the visualized object. As a foundational articulation of the grammar of the sultan’s ruling idiom, this analysis prepares us with a reading strategy that will help reconstruct the existential memory embedded through other thematic elements within the series.

Chapter 4: Psychic Origins of the Ruling Grammar

Sites of Eating and Psychic Processes

With our glossary in hand, we can turn to other patterns in the series to unearth how this internal logic manifests beyond the opening scene. The frequency of scenes involving the consumption of food in the series – especially in the first few episodes – invites us to take a close lens to the eating scenes in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, especially because cinematographic representations of eating scenes are readable as a trope for psychic assimilation (Rashkin, 1995, 370). Literary and film critics, such as Rashkin, have looked at scenes depicting the physical ingestion of food as a parallel to the psychic swallowing and digestion of an idea, concept or experience (1995, 360).

I approach eating scenes as sites for unearthing information about the psychological mechanisms that lead to the formation of Abdülhamid's ruling grammar. That food plays an important symbolic role in human social behavior is attested to scholarship that has specifically identified food and psychic processes in the context of religious rituals surrounding eating, especially processes of mourning (Rashkin, 1995, 367). In the same way that the consumption of food among mourners symbolizes processes whereby, through talking and naming the loss among others who suffer so that the experience can be integrated (to the extent that the community is able to accommodate its occurrence without ontological disruption), so too may we construe the symbolic role played by food as a marker of the communication rules in operation for psychic assimilation to transpire in the context of the royal family. In the case of *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, we can view the rules that inform ingestion to mirror the rules (and their restrictions) that inform Abdülhamid's ruling idiom.

The notion that rules surrounding physical ingestion transmit social information about what can and cannot be explicitly named in public linguistic circulation hinges on the link between acts of naming and processes of psychic accommodation, and the consequences of this relationship for the formation of mental structures. My analysis reveals how the eating scenes reinforce the camouflaging patterns unveiled in the series' opening scenes, even as they refract our vision to focus on the psychic dimension of Abdülhamid's grammar to represent a mental structure organized around the need to deflect the absorption of words contaminated by association with rumors questioning the purity of his bloodline. The eating scenes dramatize how Abdülhamid's ruling grammar is a product of a psyche structured by the mechanisms aimed to exclude words from psychic assimilation.

One well known example of lexical censorship during the Hamidian era can be found in the banning of the word "nose", or *burun*, whose excision from the social lexicon has been considered as part of a greater pathology caused by paranoia around words (Yosmaoğlu, 23). Some have interpreted this expurgation as a response to a sensitivity about the sultan's "rather protruding facial feature" (Yosmaoğlu, 23), one that interestingly coincides with the (racist) stereotype that ascribes large noses to Armenians as an ethnic group³⁶ (Babayan). This lexical elimination points to a similar preoccupation with the negation of any marks of ethnic difference, as is also seen in the example of the published royal bloodline in the state almanacs. The sensitivity displayed in avoiding ethnic associations of a physiognomic feature, namely one that hints at an Armenian maternal bloodline, echoes these findings.

³⁶ I do not condone this stereotype. It ascribes a primordial physiognomic feature to an ethnic group, generally deployed to construct ethnic difference. Despite its inaccuracy and incorrectness, that the stereotype exists and its connection to the excision of the word "nose" from the social lexicon warrants interrogation.

At the same time, this act of lexical avoidance – in the form of prohibiting the circulation of the word “nose” – may also be read as staging, the deeper unnamed reality that the public in fact already “nosed out” the truth of his maternal ethnic origins. This is hinted at by the semantic network of actions surrounding “nose”, that is, “to smell” and “to nose around”, *koku almak*, a verb which shares a synonymic connection to *sezmek*, “to intuit”, “to have a scent for something”, “to sniff”, “to detect”. Each denotes a development of a sense of awareness or discernment of something that was previously unknown or secreted.

At the same time, *burun* can mean “nozzle”, which is more primarily associated with the word *meme*. *Meme*, which would have also been limited from circulation owing to its synonymic link to *burun*, is a homophone whose other connotations involve associations with maternal physiological features used for breast feeding: “breast”, “teat”, “nipple”. It is in this way that the semantic matrix of meanings surrounding the word “nose” allows us to view Abdülhamid’s efforts to control linguistic circulation as a symptom of a psyche that cannot swallow or digest the idea that an ethnic *maternal* bloodline has been exposed.

The eating scenes recapitulate the internal logic informing Abdülhamid’s censorship of the word “nose,” but in the case of the former, these scenes represent a grammar of ingestion as a metaphor for the sultan’s psychic processes. The visual and dialogic elements in eating scenes can be interpreted as framing the limits and rules of what can and cannot be ingested or named. As was the case with the opening scenes, we will read the cinematographic language of eating acts and related dialogue in tandem with their supporting lexical networks and historical representations to form a grammar – a rulebook – of ingestion.

Contextualizing *Kahvaltı*

The frequency of scenes involving the family gathering around breakfast, or *kahvaltı*, invites us to question why this mealtime, in particular, was chosen. The use of *kahvaltı* as the setting itself implies a sort of sequenced or ordered framework through which we are to understand the rules of ingestion, while at the same time underscoring the importance of breakfast scenes as a site for the transmission of such rules. *Kahvaltı* literally means “[that which is eaten] under coffee”, *kahve altı*. Implicit in the very name of the meal is a grammatical rule for ingestion that alerts us to the importance of ordered temporality. As the directional term “under” signals, the term’s meaning hinges on sequential order: first we eat, then we have coffee. We have already seen how issues of succession were implicated in the subtext generated by the camouflaging imagery in the series’ opening scenes. The salience of breakfast as an object of physical ingestion raises the possibility that similar issues underlie the cinematographic language of eating scenes as well.

In the same vein, the intrinsic ordering principle conveyed by *kahvaltı* is viewed by Turkish subjects as linked to the sequencing of relating patterns among people who ingest coffee as suggested in the popular Turkish proverb “a single cup of coffee is remembered for 40 years.” This proverb links the act of drinking coffee to subsequent conversations of an intimate matter (Hurriyet; Küçükkömürler and Özgen, 1699), and reveals an internal logic in which boundaries for linguistic circulation are generated by the physical ingestion of an object. At the same time, that *kahvaltı* is the first meal of the day is significant in the way that it proclaims itself as an antecedent to anything that is to come; not only does it signal the start of a new day, but it signals itself as an event “before all others” (OED), it is cardinal. The over-determined focus on breakfast scenes, rather than other scenes of eating which take place later in the day, signals to the viewer sequential relations as a principal dimension of the scenes’ communicative logic.

The First *Kahvaltı*

The interpretive value of taking this signaling seriously is demonstrated when considered with the particular position that the eating scenes themselves occupy in an ongoing sequence of scenes that depict Abdülhamid's rule. The first eating scene in the series is preceded by a conversation between Abdülhamid and Tahsin Paşa, his closest advisor, in Abdülhamid's woodworking room in the palace. Abdülhamid is working on an ornate top for a small wooden chest when Tahsin Paşa enters. Tahsin Paşa tells Abdülhamid that an English telegraph has arrived with a bid for the railway and a response must be sent, necessitating Abdülhamid to sign papers. Abdülhamid voices the completion of this railway as his dream, for, he says, now a Muslim will be able to pass from Sarajevo, through Istanbul, and on to Medina in only a week. Abdülhamid utters "bismillah",³⁷ signs the papers and the scene ends.

The construction of the Hijaz railway during the Hamidian era is considered a significant cornerstone of Abdülhamid's pan-Islamic policy (Deringil, 1991, 352), one that was meant to increase the sultan's authority over the empire (Wasti, 1998, 61) and establish central control (Zürcher, 72). The railway project came into being in the wake of the loss of the Balkans in the 1877-8 war, as a part of a greater policy drawing on Islamic solidarity (Özyüksel, 6). The railway project itself symbolized the authority and sovereignty of the caliph of all Muslims, which was especially significant given the foreign management and operation of all other lines in the empire at that time (Wasti, 1998, 61). The project was pursued despite the empire's financial hardships, a testament to the principal nature of the project and the influence it would project.

From a scene that exalts the sultan's royal capacity to conflate space and time required to complete a pilgrimage to Medina the series segues into the first breakfast representation, occurring

³⁷ "In the name of God/Allah."

fifteen minutes into the first episode. In terms of plot, the sultan's wife, Bidar, and his daughter, Naime, wait for the sultan to enter and, once he does, they sit for breakfast. The sultan's son, Abdülkadir, enters late, gripes about his father's censoring of newspapers, which then evolves into a family conversation about deceitful images propagated by these newspapers. The scene ends after this.

Though lasting a brief two minutes and 34 seconds, the scene projects an image of the sultan that foils the celebration of royal prerogative that immediately precedes it. Whereas the former focuses on the sultan's control over (rail)lines to shore up his transformation of the channels by which his subjects may commune with each other, the breakfast scene zeroes in on the sultan's control over family lines of communication, to comment on the psychic conditions that undergird his political acts. In short, the eating scene transmits a symbolic articulation of a grammar of ingestion.

This transmission begins with a conversation between two servant-women prior to Abdülhamid's entrance into the scene, who speak in the sultan's absence. One, who is presumably higher rank than the other, chastises the lower-ranking servant for the excessive food that has been laid out on the table. "I guess you are new, this plate is extra", she says, as she points to, and the camera follows, a plate upon which are laid out slices of *pastırma*, cured meat (Figure 2.1). "Padişah doesn't like to waste, take it away. Take it away!" Following this command, the lower-ranking servant takes the plate of *pastırma* away from the table and out of the scene.



Figure 2.1. The removal of multiple blood lines from the table

At the revisionist surface level, the removal of the plate of cured meat in response to the sultan's disapprobation of waste directs the viewers to see the sultan as abstemious and sparing, a figure who is not lavish or excessive but rather prudent. If we consider, however, the role of scenes of eating in terms of psychic assimilation, read in tandem with the uncovered subtext from the opening scene, we are in a position to understand how the removal of the plate of meat imagistically evokes what Abdülhamid cannot psychically accommodate. This offers another explanation for the assessment of what is and what is not wasteful.

With the image and resonance of the red line in the opening scene still fresh, however, one cannot but be struck by the visual resonance suggested between the form of Abdülhamid's procession and the red, vertically-placed strips of meat on the plate ordered to be removed. Recall, from the opening scene, how the image of the linearity of the red parade directed us to a subtext that devolved on notions of ancestral succession. This same linearity is represented in the wasteful

meat, and its redness too recalls a similar visualization of the red line. In this case, however, the multiplicity of red lines directs our attention to the inability to assimilate the notion of multiple lines in the context of succession. The denigration of the food item as wasteful and necessitating removal suggests that the cluster of lines infringes upon the boundaries of the rules of ingestion which themselves are governed by assimilation processes organized around strategies of excision. The very act of the removal of the plate sets up the limitations of what cannot be eaten while also mirroring that which cannot be named; that is, a story about multiple bloodlines.

Similar rules of ingestion are also evidenced through other semantic networks at play. For example, the source of the sultan's aversion towards excess food and his inability to assimilate waste both hinge on the variety of connotations attendant on the homophonic Turkish word that connotes it, *atık*. In addition to meaning "waste," the word *atık* also implies "contamination," a semantic link that is also reproduced in another homophone, the Turkish word *bulaştırma*. *Bulaştırma* suggests both the defilement or impurification of something, as well as the "blurring" or obscuring something by hiding or concealing it from view through its synonymic connection to *bulandırma*, "blurring". The removal of the meat, represented through the image of red (blood)lines, reflects how designating something as wasteful is a psychological technique for blocking the assimilation of words that must be avoided lest they threaten the integrity of the sultan's psychic structure. That is to say, the removal of the meat is tantamount to the blurring of genealogical lines that impinge on the sultan's psychic structure. It is in this way that the obscuration of the plate from view emerges as a grammatical rule of psychic ingestion that aligns with the sultan's self-managing grammar.

Further analysis of the Turkish word used to designate the core ingredient of *pastırma*, "meat," *et*, which is removed from the table, tells us more about why the idea of multiple lineages

cannot be psychically assimilated. *Et* shares a synonymic link with the word *öz*, which means “core”, “self”, “essence”, that is, the “central or innermost part” of something or someone (OED). Just as the plate of meat is expelled from the breakfast table, so too is Abdülhamid’s own psyche constituted by an expulsion of another, imagined, “self”. The resultant mental structure is one organized by the need to expel speech about himself, setting up a pattern of self-management and royal rule. The cured nature of *pastırma*, too, which is dried for preservation purposes, is symbolically reminiscent of the rationale driving the linguistic strategies of avoidance, namely the preservation of his royal stature, and by extension, that of Ottoman rule.

Another element reflecting Abdülhamid’s rules of ingestion can be gleaned from the verbal cues made to Abdülkadir as he begins to eat. Prior to his entrance into the scene, Abdülhamid sits down and, before eating, says “bismillah”. Abdülkadir arrives late to the table, after which he immediately begins to eat. His mother interrupts his eating with a firm reminder that he must say “bismillah” before eating. He pauses his eating and repeats: “bismillah”. While Bidar’s insistence on the correct ordering of speaking and eating again may be understood as a reflection of the sultan’s piety and adherence to religious principles, the mother’s command in the context of ingestion calls attention to the role of women or maternal figures as the first source of an infant’s ingestion processes, and by extension, women’s role in establishing the parameters for the transmission of rules for ingestion and linguistic circulation. In the Turkish context this would include the female servants who attend to the feeding and other needs of the royal family, such as the two women whose conversation set the scene into motion. This is supported by the historical role of the women of the imperial harem in the Ottoman Empire, who yielded a considerable amount of power, especially the *valide sultan* or “mother sultan”, who has been called the “exemplar of the dynasty” (Peirce, 225).

Abdülkadir's seeming resistance to his mother's self-regulating cue should not be seen as a rejection of the religious blessing in and of itself, but rather a rejection of the discomfort of a psyche constrained by a parent's self-managing grammar. Affirmation of this perspective can be found in the dialogue about constraints imposed by Abdülhamid, which his son complains are too prohibitive, such as forbidding of the newspaper, *Meşveret*, to enter the palace. This level of censorship about what language may or may not be expressed in the palace evokes the idea of a royal psyche organized by similar rules of linguistic exclusion.

In response, the sultan picks up the forbidden newspaper that Abdülkadir has surreptitiously brought into the breakfast scene. He reads it and then, to demonstrate why he does not allow such linguistic accounts in his palace, he shows his family an image printed in the newspaper: that of Indian Muslims praying in a mosque with their shoes on (Figure 2.2). He claims that even an ignorant Muslim knows that one cannot pray with shoes on in the mosque, and insinuates that the photo represents the British government's deliberate attempt to deceive readers in order to strip the Ottoman empire and caliphate of its sovereignty.



Figure 2.2. The concealed truth, as represented through concealed feet

Revisionist intentions would have us understand this scene as a commentary on Western intervention into the affairs of the empire; trickery that is aimed to deceive innocent and unknowing citizens of the empire through the printing of inaccurate information about Islam in the newspapers. This is echoed in a contemporary AKP narrative which views the United States and other Western countries as meddling in Turkish domestic affairs (Akyol; Koplow). In the context of eating and psychic processes of assimilation, however, the cinematographic elements offer an alternative optic for explaining the object of the sultan's ire.

While ostensibly incensed by the act of trickery effected through the British circulation of an image of Muslims praying with shoe-covered feet to cast aspersions on the legitimacy of the caliphate, translating this image into Turkish words elucidates another rationale for banning *Meşveret*. Abdülhamid's sensitivity toward feet coverings – shoes – is reminiscent of the series' title, especially the first word, whose semantic range included the sense of a “base,” *temel*. The

Turkish word “foot,” *ayak*, in addition to referring to the body part that humans use to walk, also connotes a sense of a position or status as low or at the “bottom” of something (OED). If we recall, *temel* shares a synonymic connection to the word *asil*, a word that more primarily evokes connotations meaning “original”, “actual”, “truth”, “origins,” it becomes clear that the sultan’s prohibition against the image of feet covered by shoes also stages the self-censorship that governs his psychic assimilative processes. The image of covered Muslim feet cannot be psychically accommodated because the expression and transmission of this information in open circulation, its airing, would indeed undermine the integrity of the sultan’s psychic structure, and by extension that of the caliphate’s, putting its legitimacy at risk.

At the same time, that *Meşveret* is the point of discord tells us something about the assimilation processes that are manifested in his control over the newspaper. On top of the newspaper’s dissenting, anti-Hamidian leanings (Wasti, 2002, 97), the name of the paper tells a deeper story about the processes of ingestion. The Turkish word *meşveret* itself means “consultation”, evoking the notion of counsel or guidance provided to someone, hinting at the “interchange of opinions on a matter of *procedure*” (OED, emphasis my own). The open discussion on matters of procedure, defined through the word “consultation”, assumes a process or sequence of events that rests upon the “established or prescribed way of doing something” (OED). It is the word’s relationship to this very sequencing, one that has also been demonstrated through the use of *kahvaltı* as a site for digestion, that recalls the same sequencing examined in the opening scene discussion; that is, the (sequencing) practice of succession. It is through this lens that we can understand the passionate rebuff by Abdülhamid against the newspaper: the notion of open consultation or matters of opinion conveyed by the newspaper – specifically about acts of

succession – challenges Abdülhamid’s mental boundaries, so much so that the newspaper must be put out of circulation.

As objects that represent the public circulation of information, the prohibition or allowance of newspapers in eating contexts brings to the fore the symmetry between the sultan’s censorship strategy that aimed to “impede the diffusion of harmful material” about him (Eldhem, 37), and a mental structure whose rules for operation require rigorous management in order to protect and preserve its integrity, or “core,” and “essence.” It is in this way that we can view newspapers at the scenes of breakfast as emblematic of the ways in which the control over the dispersion of information is represented through the rules of ingestion. The fact that all eating is paused during the conversation on the newspaper highlights the link between thwarted ingestion and obstructed verbalization.

A Second *Kahvaltı* and the Excesses of Waste

The repeated invocation of the theme of waste in another breakfast scene, which occurs around 46 minutes into the first episode, transmits a similar message about royal rules of ingestion, only this time it is Abdülhamid himself who introduced the concept into the conversation as he walks with his wife, Bidar, into the dining room. Before sitting Abdülhamid notices the *kahvaltı* options, and disapprovingly comments on the wasteful nature of the spread. It is of no small significance that the sultan repeats the very concepts conveyed by the servant women in the earlier breakfast scene, reinforcing the notion that these women’s conversations conditioned the formation of the sultan’s psychic ingestive grammar. Abdülhamid expresses his displeasure about the spread: “Maşallah”, he says, “this table can feed the entire capital city [*payitaht*]” (Figure 2.3), as he censoriously looks to Bidar and the servants for an explanation. Echoing the centrality of the

rules of ingestion surrounding waste seen in the first breakfast scene, this conversation's inclusion of the condemnation of waste supplements our understanding of the sultan's psychic boundaries.



Figure 2.3. The rejection of the public consumption of Abdülhamid's origins

Along the same vein, we may recall how the word *payitaht*, which is used in the context of criticizing the excessiveness of the breakfast spread, is the very same *payitaht* of the series' title, meaning both "capital city" and "base/foot of the throne". Abdülhamid's reaction to the display of excess may also be seen as a rejection of excessive language that may, in the process of psychic assimilation, reveal something about the origins of the throne's occupant. What the sultan can't ingest, so too must it be rejected by the capital city.

At the same time, the scene calls attention to the role that Bidar plays in triggering Abdülhamid's overt establishment of the primary grammar of ingestion. That the impetus for Bidar's ordering of an extravagant spread of food was her desire *to talk* about something important with Abdülhamid reifies the association between (mentally) processing or dealing with something

through conversation and food. “This morning I wanted to prepare a table that is delicious [*ağzına layık*] for our sultan”, she continues, explaining the reason as to why she has had this table ordered, “there is an issue I want to discuss with you.”

Bidar’s strategy reflects how food preparation and eating are metaphors for bringing topics into open linguistic circulation. This is supported through the word she uses to describe the table that she has had prepared: “delicious”, *ağzına layık*, an idiom whose literal translations yields “worthy to [your] mouth”. That the food is prepared to be worthy for the sultan’s mouth parallels Bidar’s attempt to bring a matter into open circulation, the aim being the sultan’s digestion of both endeavors. If the food is worthy for the digestion of the sultan, so too may the topic brought into conversation be worthy for psychic acceptance by the sultan.

The issue that Bidar seeks to place into open circulation engenders a disapproving response from Abdülhamid, thus signaling that there may be an obstacle to digestion. She enquires about procuring her brother’s possible involvement in the railway project mentioned in the scene directly preceding the first breakfast. In response to Abdülhamid’s curt reaction to her request, Bidar apologizes, admits that she has crossed a line [*haddimi aştım*] and the discussion of her brother is terminated.

Whereas the removal of the cured meat plate in the earlier scene metaphorically represents a psychic mechanism that blocks the assimilation of the idea of multiple lines, here it is the sultan’s cutting off of Bidar’s excessive speech about her brother and rail lines that once again illustrates the prohibition of words associated with multiple lines. The elimination of Bidar’s brother from the discussion (and project) alludes to the rules of ingestion for blocking psychic assimilation of anything to do with mixed (blood)lines.

A Third *Kahvaltı* and A Guest in White

We are given a similar message from a different angle in a third breakfast portrayal, one that occurs in the second episode, which includes the presence – in addition to members of the royal family, Abdülhamid, Bidar, Abdülkadir and Naime, the sultan's daughter – of a young woman in white (Figure 2.4). The young woman has lost her memory and forgotten her name due to an accident that occurred earlier in the episode, and it is during this scene that Abdülhamid provides her with a new name. This breakfast portrayal is preceded by a representation of Herzl and his Zionist colleagues, signaling to the viewer a (revisionist) threat against Abdülhamid, one that is juxtaposed against the ontological and subtextual threat emanating from this breakfast scene.



Figure 2.4. Abdülhamid's whitewashed maternal origins

After the young woman in white arrives to the breakfast table, Abdülhamid relays to the family the doctor's diagnosis that she has, indeed, lost her memory. Her blank memory and absence

of her origins, when considered in tandem with her role as a nameless female, convokes the image of a young woman whose identity has been emptied or washed clean. The sartorial element of her all white dress enhances this understanding. That she is washed in white, enables a viewing of her character as one that has been whitewashed³⁸ – a female figure whose past and origins have been concealed from view.

That her bleached past is palatable for the sultan is evidenced through the linguistic networks upon which descriptors of her character rest. As previously mentioned, she is wearing all “white”; her dress is colorless, it is “pale”. The translation of her pale-shaded dress to Turkish yields *solgun*, “pale”, a word that can also be used to describe someone with a “whitish or ashen appearance...” and, in recalling the red images in the previous scenes, someone who is “bloodless” (OED). The semantic connection between her “white” dress and her “bloodless” past stresses the association between her character and an absence of ancestry. At the same time, her amnesia makes her presence at the table easy to digest, illustrated through the semantic chain devolving on “amnesia”, or *bellek yitimi*: *bellek* emphasizes “memory” and “mind”, the latter of which can also be described through the word *istek*, as in “have in mind (to do something)”. A word with many meanings, *istek* most primarily means “desire” or “request” but can also imply “appetite”, as in, “having the appetite (for something)”. It is precisely her bloodless – whitewashed – past that makes her attendance something for which Abdülhamid has an appetite.

Moreover, that the whitewashed character is female tells us something more specifically about why Abdülhamid provides a name for her. Her erased past recalls a similar preoccupation as we have seen with the previously uncovered subtext, that is, Abdülhamid’s mirrored erasing of his own maternal origins. The imagery of a bleached string of pearls affixed to her neck heightens

³⁸ It should be said that the whitewashed nature of her image warrants deeper investigation into its religious connotations – namely that of the maternal figure Mary – an undertaking that, with more time and space, could reveal interesting and illuminating connections.

this interpretation, especially when considering the linguistic and visual aspects of the mother-of-pearl,³⁹ or *sedef*, which convey an iridescent maternity. It is in this way that we can read the young woman as symbolic of Abdülhamid's own maternal figure, one that is only digestible through the absencing of her past. His "appetite" for naming is stimulated by the very symbolic representation her character projects, that is, his own whitewashed maternal origins.

Through this lens, then, we can understand the lead-in to this scene, by way of Abdülhamid's naming of her, as one that is based on a symmetry of biological ingestion and analogous psychic ones which hinge on acts of naming. After Abdülhamid states that she has lost her memory, he declares: "my girl, let's find you a name." After Bidar comments on the young woman's beauty, Abdülhamid assigns her a name: *Ahsen*, a word of Arabic origins, which can be translated as "the most beautiful" in Ottoman Turkish. The name he chooses – *Ahsen* – highlights his royal prerogative in the way that it draws on Arabic, itself associated with Islamic rule and his role as the caliph of all Muslims. It is in this way that he establishes his royal authority as the primary element that must be assimilated by all at the table.

At the same time, that the naming process revolves around that which can be psychically digested is supported by the semantic networks around the naming itself. "To give a name" can be translated into Turkish words as *isim vermek* and *ad koymak*, both of which share a similar connotation to the compound verb *ilan etmek* in the way that they announce or designate something. *İlan etmek*, however, more primarily engenders meanings of "publicizing", "publishing", and "making known (to the world)", all acts that allude to the outward broadcasting or communicating of its appropriateness for public consumption. That Abdülhamid ultimately

³⁹ Mother-of-pearl was, in particular, a highly valued resource in terms of Ottoman material culture, both in terms of its usage in the palaces and of its revenue-making ability. See Deringil, 2003, 320; Ellison, 2012, 4, 188.

decides the name supports the subtext established thus far: that the naming must be sanctioned by Abdülhamid.

In light of this, the naming of the whitewashed maternal figure can be seen to signify Abdülhamid's projection of his royal authority through the whitewashing of his own maternal origins, one whose psychic assimilation enables a mirrored process through the digestion of food. After the sultan names her, the signal to eat is announced – *afiyet olsun*, or bon appetit – indicating a readiness for psychic and biological processes of ingestion.

Before he can ingest, however, his whitewashing efforts are thwarted. A servant arrives at Tahsin Paşa's request with a tray of newspapers for Abdülhamid to read. Abdülhamid takes the newspapers and begins to read the newspaper names and their headlines aloud: "Le Rappel... 'Sultan Abdülhamid shed Christian blood again'... English Daily Chronicle... 'Red Sultan Abdülhamid takes an innocent to execution under the excuse of assassination, we call the British embassy to intervene for the innocent monk'... Neue Freie Presse... 'Vatican red cross [*Vatikan kırmızı çarmıhtır*]'"" (Figure 2.5). The newspapers themselves are referring to events that transpired earlier in the episode, where the man who threw the gold coin – who is found out to have come from the Vatican – is imprisoned for attempting to assassinate Abdülhamid during the parade scene. The newspaper headlines themselves represent inaccurate Western accounts of what occurred earlier.



Figure 2.5. Newspapers hinting at Abdülhamid's mixed blood origins

Though the headlines are, at the surface level, about a monk from the Vatican, the reference to Christianity and blood recalls our previous discussion of the ‘Red Sultan’ and his implicit role in the massacres against another group, one whose identity has often been defined in terms of its association with Christianity: the Armenians (Panossian, 129). This implicit reference to the Armenians calls to the fore his red-stained relationship with the Armenians.

In looking deeper, however, the third headline – “Vatican red cross” – reveals another aspect of the relationship between Abdülhamid and Armenian blood, that is, one of ancestral concern. This is evidenced through the headline’s use of “red”, *kızıl*, an element of the subtext that has been shown to be lexically linked to genealogy and lineage. The image of a “cross”, *çarmıh*, or “crucifix”, *haç*, refers to the “point where two lines... cross each other”, one that may result in the “intermixture of breeds or races” (OED). It is along these lines that the translation of “cross” into Turkish implies *melez*, “cross” or, more primarily, “mongrel”, “hybrid”, “crossbreed” and “mixed blood”. This semantic matrix enables a viewing of “cross” beyond the dominating image

of what the series seeks to portray: instead of understanding the headline as an erroneous account of Abdülhamid's actions, we can understand it to hint at a crossed, mixed bloodline, from which a crossbred mongrel is born.

It is in this way that the newspapers themselves expose the reality that he attempts to conceal through the earlier naming of the young woman: the whitewashed character obscures that which he is reminded of and challenged by in the newspapers, that is, his maternal ethnic, mixed (blood) origins. Abdülhamid's mounting fury as he reads the headlines adumbrates a preoccupation with a mixed bloodline, one whose open circulation is a rebuke to his earlier action of psychic boundary-setting through naming. Abdülhamid's inability to integrate what he is reading and the association with the inability to digest food is evidenced through his frenzied exit. Just as he cannot assimilate the information conveyed by the newspapers, so too can he not stomach breakfast. He exasperatingly utters *afiyet olsun* – indicating that, as the topic is no longer under discussion, they may eat – and exits, without eating himself.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a codification of the series' articulations of the royal grammar, and in doing so establishes its lexical core. The royal grammar is triggered by notions of waste, ones that point to the necessary blurring of that which evokes notions of ancestral lineage, that is, the image of the red line. At the same time, the role of newspapers as a source of the social circulation of information proves to be anxiety-producing, especially given the subtextual meaning they convey: that of concealed roots, the concealment of which points to mixed or crossbred – ethnic Christian – origins.

It is only through understanding the scenes of eating through the lens of a grammar of ingestion that we can understand what transpires beyond the revisionist intention, that is, eating scenes as yet another way in which the series calls attention to the existential memory embedded within it. Abdülhamid's grammar manifests in eating scenes as a syntax organized by strategies of lexical inclusion and exclusion, both on the level of physical eating and its figural psychic dimension. This investigation, then, brings awareness to these aforementioned linguistic (avoidance) strategies, ultimately demonstrating that they are the product of psychic operations that were shaped by the specific social environment in which the sultan was raised. Furthermore, this analysis delineates the link between the topography of the sultan's psyche and his royal inclination towards secrecy and censorship, that is, his ruling idiom. We can now use this grammar, borne of the opening scene and the above eating scenes, to take a closer eye to traces of this royal grammar in other family grammars.

Chapter 5: Traces in Late-Ottoman Subjects' Grammars

Whereas the preceding chapter examined the link between unassimilable Turkish words and the mental structure that undergirds Abdülhamid's censorial ruling grammar, this chapter will zero in on the impingement of the sultan's ruling idiom on the grammars of his subjects and their own sensitivities to the same preoccupation of the ruling idiom: problematic origins. With the semantic chords of concealment and deception still fresh, we may now take an eye to other representative grammars in the series in an effort to understand the ways in which such concerns manifest in communal linguistic circulation and self-management processes.

This chapter demonstrates that, in addition to representing the existential memory of Abdülhamid's ruling idiom, the series also discloses the means by which the memory was preserved and transmitted. Through its repetitive framing of three lineage scions whose identities are implicated in acts of concealment, the series provides a synchronic perspective of the impact of the sultan's idiom on different segments of society. In accessing the existential memory as it is embodied through these representative elements of society, such an analysis will also highlight the general ontology of three different groups of subjects outside the immediate royal family.

These three different perspectives – first, Istanbul's urban public; second, a family marked by its ethno-religious difference from Ottoman Muslim subjects; third, a family marked by its advocacy to incorporate Western traditions as an antidote for royal rule – comprise a composite portrait of late Ottoman subjects' social identity formation processes informed by the encroachment of the ruling idiom on family's grammars, what I will call lineage grammars. As we shall see, the cinematographic language once again serves to gloss the visual level of signification in its presentation of the three perspectives. This time, the gloss directs our attention to the salience of concerns over illegible identities that have penetrated public and family discourse via words

implicated as dangerous in the sultan's ruling idiom; words that we have seen before, such as rail lines and bases or foundations. Though the plotline circumstances around each perspective vary, each representative element demonstrates an encounter with identities that have been made illegible.

An opposition to the sultan's sovereign claims also links the three perspectives of Ottoman subjects. This convergence aligns with the overt revisionist intentions seeking to portray the sultan as surrounded by disloyalty, but the series' detailed attention to the grammatical rules that organize these subjects' self-management and relation patterns also has much to tell us about the dynamics driving national identity formation processes in the wake of his unseating in 1909. This analysis will show that, ultimately, anxiety surrounding problematic lineage identities – ones that are distinguished by ethnic and religious markers – drives these representative lineage grammars in such a way that we see resonance with the sultan's ruling idiom. At the same time, we may also identify specific currents that drive this angst as ones that also guide identity formation processes during a particularly significant time in Ottoman and Turkish history.

Grammar Traces in the Public

The series' representation of a public unable to recognize royal identity in the physical form of Abdülkadir alerts the viewer to its interest in forms of collective self-management. In the first episode, the prince escapes from the palace to join his cousin Sabahattin to attend a music hall, where they meet with a friend of Sabahattin's known for his anti-government expressions. In this secret excursion outside the palace not only is the prerogative of Abdülkadir's royal gaze challenged, when another of the event's audience members misreads the prince's facial expression,

but even the city police are revealed to be blind to Abdülkadir's "true" identity. After Abdülkadir is taken by the city police, he asserts that he is prince, to which the police respond in laughter.

Taking a step back, we may understand the general crowd's inability to recognize Abdülkadir as an implicit inability to recognize his father, Abdülhamid, too: after all, Abdülkadir has inherited his royal pedigree from his father. The confusion or illegibility around Abdülkadir's identity also marks an urban public's confusion or illegibility around Abdülhamid's royal identity, one that is mirrored in the series' title's illegibility. At the same time, that Abdülkadir's secret exit from the palace is enabled through a system of underground basement tunnels presents an even more refined optic for understanding the source of both Abdülkadir and his father's illegibility.

Film critics have frequently interpreted basement spaces as places that stage unconscious thoughts and activities (Huppert, 143). This interpretive position is reinforced when we view the basement as another signal of the series' dual levels of representation. The basement's subterranean position reveals it as a figure for what is below or precedes consciousness. At the same time, as the base of the palace or house, and by extension, lineage, we can view this base or substructure as a locative symbol for the origins of a lineage. A Turkish word for the base floor, *taban*, recalls its synonym "base", *temel*, which we have noted is lexically linked to notions of lineal descent, as reflected in the Turkish word "matrix", *kaide*. A matrix refers to a "place or medium in which something is originated, produced, or developed"; it also signifies the "supporting or enclosing structure" of the female uterus (OED). This understanding of "matrix" is conveyed by the Turkish word *dölyatağı*, which also means "womb".

It is here that we see another representation of the obscuration of royal origins, one that is made possible by the secretive nature of Abdülkadir's escape from the palace: his exit through a system of secret tunnels that lie under the palace. The imagery of a matrix of basement tunnels

supports the linguistic – gynecological – implications it evokes. Thus the tunnels, themselves, act as a stand-in for maternal origins, and in viewing them this way we can understand Abdulkadir's exit through them to implicate such origins as a factor contributing to his mistaken identity. It is in this way that the series directs us to understand Abdülkadir's usage of the underground tunnels – and his subsequent misidentification by the public – as a mirroring of his father's own secreted exit from his mother's womb, though in the sultan's case, an exit that *had* to be made illegible.

The scene's cinematography implores us to recognize this juxtaposition – a product of the sultan's ruling idiom (the son) and the public's inability to recognize his royal origins – as a representation of the impact of the ruling grammar on the construction and internalization of an existential memory that *must* be rendered illegible. The prospect of descending from maternal origins that nullified a purely Turkic claim to the throne was deemed so potentially damaging that it *needed* to be blurred out, made unclear to the public. Let us recall, here, how linguistic excision plays a role in the way that it acts as a mechanism for exactly this kind of blurring out. This is how we must read the public's receipt of Abdülkadir's secret basement exit: as a refraction of the impact of the ruling idiom, one that is unintentionally organized by the sultan's need to conceal by way of illegibility.

Basement Sites

In the series, the basement is shown to be a space for the concealment of activities between and within families. Just as the basement acts as the root of the larger structure, one that is unnoticed or concealed, so too are the behaviors that take place there concealed and of a concealing sort.⁴⁰ At the same time, the verticality of the space evokes associations of bloodlines and linearity

⁴⁰ It is notable that Abdülhamid's place for deliberation and counter-scheming, too, lies at the basement level of the palace.

along the same vein that is intimated by the images of the red linear parade and the red straight-edged pieces of meat. The link between concealment and lineages is reinforced by this prevalence of the notion of the rail line – another association to bloodlines and linearity – in the speech content of the conversations between family members. This analysis will show how the ideation of the rail line triggers revelations of a family's own concealed history, just as it did in the breakfast conversation between Abdülhamid and Bidar. This rhetorical effect refracts the subtle and nuanced ways the sultan's ruling idiom impinged on lineage grammars that were, themselves, already organized to screen problematic lineage origins.

Of course, the fact that the speech and behavior of families linked to royal operations would be inflected by the cadence of secrecy and concealment in palace operations is not surprising especially because the basement scenes factor into the central intrigue driving the series' plot. Nonetheless, the symbolic resonance between basements and concealed lineage origins makes them important sites for the inspection of imperceptible way in which the sultan's ruling grammar highlights an analogous sensitivity to origins that afflicts a range of lineage grammars. This analysis will examine how the sultan's preoccupation with his lineage purity is similarly reflected by lineage purity issues in other family grammars.

Grammar Traces in the Ethno-Religious 'Other'

Along the same lines as the mistaken reception by the public of Abdülkadir, *Payitaht Abdülhamid* also represents two other sons whose identities are inextricably linked to problematic lineage origins. The first lineage is represented in the form of a basement conversation between a son, Theodor Herzl, a foremost figure in the push of Jewish immigration to Palestine, and his father. The dialogue reveals that the father's opposition to his son's violent Zionistic plans led to

his current imprisonment – at the hands of his son – in the latter’s basement. That Theodor Herzl represents the stereotypical ethno-religious ‘other’ is supported by the prevalence of markers of Jewish identity, including the visual image of the Star of David, not to mention the Hebrew language, which accompanies Theodor’s fevered prayer for divine favor in his Zionistic efforts. As such, his role as an indicator of the ethno-religious ‘other’ may be substituted in for other representations of this stereotype, a marker we will return to later. First, we will examine the interaction between Theodor and his father.

Interrupted during prayer by labored breathing coming from outside the camera’s view, Theodor walks over and sits next to a dirty, locked-up hand – his father’s (Figure 3.1) – and begins talking, explaining his plans to create a Jewish homeland by hijacking the Ottoman railway and using it as an instrument to transport Jews to Palestine.



Figure 3.1. The Herzl lineage secret, under lock and key

As we have done earlier, we may identify the revisionist intention here. Even before we see his mistreatment of his father, we can glean from the darkness of the room and the threatening nature of the percussive, aggressive music that his character is one with evil intention. Theodor's abuse of his father, and his menacing plans for the future, only strengthen this representation. The use of Jewish symbolism seeks to align his wickedness with his Jewishness, and in doing so recalls the Dönme conspiracy narratives earlier discussed alongside the gold coin, those of which blamed the Jews for the downfall of the empire.

However, the camera's lingering shot on the father's hand that holds a padlock for the chains which bind him to the basement alerts us to the possibility that more is at stake than the general villainy of ethnic characters. The camera's focus on the image of the father's padlocked hand, all the while Theodor is talking out-of-sight, is a cue that the padlock tells us something important about Theodor's self-managing behaviors. The primary focus on the hand-held padlock suggests a form of self-management organized around something that was kept secret, something that pre-existed the ostensible family dilemma that led Theodor to shackle his father, even as it also helps explain what motivated the behavior. Theodor's concealment of his father's speech from social circulation due to the damage the latter's words could cause for the son's plans effectively places those words "under lock and key", or *kapatılmış*.

Theodor's actions to conceal his father unwittingly stages behavior that is shaped by the need to repress and conceal his problematic father, or understood figuratively, his problematic origins; the scene represents this as an organizing element of his grammar and one that colors the family grammar. Furthermore, the acts following Theodor's declaration of intention points to the notion that his problematic origins center on a lineage secret, one that indicates his place within

the Herzl ancestral lineage – and one that is triggered by Theodor’s discussion of his plans for the rail line.

“Father [*baba*]”, he says, “today I took the first step to make my dreams come true... Of course, not just for me. The dreams of all our Jewish brothers and sisters will come true. They will have a homeland too.” He continues to elaborate his plans: “I set such a game up, that the railway [*tren yolu*] in which the sovereign thinks will go to Mecca will carry all the Jewish people to their homeland... My servants are going to capture the railway in a few days.” Theodor’s ideation shows yet another connection to lineal ancestry and blood: that of the promise of future genealogical reproduction in a new land, that is, the extension of the Jewish bloodline. His designs for the Ottoman railway will ensure an expansion of the Jewish bloodline.

In addition to this, that his designs involve the railway tells us something else about Theodor’s grammatical associations with linearity. The inflection of the notion of lines – inextricably linked and expressed through the images of the railway and blood – has moved beyond the sultan’s ruling grammar and been absorbed by the ‘other’. The rail line is again linked to that of the bloodline: only through the commandeering of the rail line can Theodor be in control of the bloodline.

This association, between rail line and bloodline, recalls the very same association earlier, one that we saw at the breakfast table between Bidar and Abdülhamid. Just as we saw at the breakfast table, wherein Bidar’s request for the mixing of blood and rail lines proved to be a charged one, so too is Theodor’s mixing of lines a charged item in his conversation with his father. After Theodor asserts his plans, his father retorts with a literal “spitting out” of shocking information that was concealed from Theodor regarding his paternity. His father spits on his face

and begins his rebuke: “I fought with your mother so many times. Do you know why? Because I didn’t believe you were my son [*oğlu*]!”

His father rejects his mixing of rail and blood lines, an act that demonstrates the penetrating nature of the rail line as a charged lexical notion in the family’s grammar. It is in this way that the series presses us to read Theodor’s concealment of his father not only due to his criticism of Theodor’s plans, but more importantly as a response that would conceal his father’s assertion of his questionable origins, thus blurring the allegation or making it illegible. By concealing his father, Theodor, too, conceals the accusation around his origins; he makes the indictment of his patrimony illegible. The claim by his father that he is not his legitimate heir recalls a similar challenge experienced by Abdülhamid, one whose containment was similarly handled through censorship policies that ultimately muddled and obscured any indication of non-royal origins.

At the same time, his discourse resonates with the sultan’s ruling idiom on another level: his religious identity is used as a way to camouflage problematic origins. Similar to Abdülhamid’s deployment of Islam as a state ideology – the implementation of which has been viewed as an “instrument [used] to legitimize his power”, that is, a vehicle to establish his authority and mask any delegitimizing factors (Gülalp, 26) – we may view Theodor’s utilization of a religious identity as one that seeks to obscure any delegitimizing elements. Theodor’s usage of Zionist aspirations camouflages his problematic patrimonial origins only because the identity of a Jew is formed by matrilineal descent, that is, by the mother. This matrilineal focus echoes gynecological associations – the matrix, the foundation of the origins – and, when put into context, demonstrates religious identity as it is used as a vehicle to camouflage patrimonial problems.

Grammar Traces in the Western-Leaning Family

A second basement representation that highlights the religious dimensions of another family grammar is exhibited through a sequence of scenes that depict Mahmut and his son, Sabahattin, concealing Hiram, the Christian man from the Vatican who threw the gold coin, in their home. During these scenes Mahmut also has Sabahattin hide a bottle of wine that Hiram is drinking in the basement. Later, Mahmut and Hiram share wine and discuss, with Sabahattin, their plot to place blame on someone else for their myriad ruses. By this time the series has shown that Mahmut, a close advisor to Abdülhamid, is secretly collaborating with the British – and representatives from other Western countries – to bring down Abdülhamid. Sabahattin aids him in this task, and as such both are portrayed as paradigmatic subjects pushing for a “Westernized” secular state order.

The series signals the salience of problematic origins in Sabahattin and Mahmut’s family grammar in the storyline that serves as a prelude to, and thereby glosses, the basement scenes. Mahmut arrives home after a long day and goes upstairs to retire. As he enters the salon, Sabahattin speaks from the corner of the darkened room. His words and presence visibly frighten Mahmut, who did not see Sabahattin as he entered the salon, and who instinctively pulls a gun on his son (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2. Spectral son of an illegible (Christian) lineage secret

Though the scene may seem inconsequential at first watch, the father-son interaction in fact dramatizes a central feature of their lineage grammar and its source. When read together, Mahmut's fear and Sabahattin's lurking in the darkness evoke the idea of a haunting by an obscured figure carrying a disembodied voice. Mahmut's response to Sabahattin's shadowed presence says as much: he damns Sabahattin for scaring him and, still startled, screeches: "What is that [my son], you've been buried like a retired hangman in the shadows [*Ne o oğlum, böyle emekli cellat gibi gölgelerde gömülmüşsün*]." By casting his son in the role of a man enshrouded by the "shadows" or "ghosts", *gölgeler*, Mahmut identifies Sabahattin as someone who carried out a death sentence against a condemned person. From this, we might infer that Sabahattin's concealed identity frightens Mahmut because of its resonance with a lineage's existential memory of conditions implicating a member in a murderous act. When considered alongside Sabahattin's

familial identification of Mahmut as “father”, *baba*, we can understand more clearly his identity as a spectral signal of the illegibility of a son past.

Recognizing how this prelude to the basement scenes effectively glosses father and son interactions as one of several pieces related to a larger puzzle of the illegible family past prepares us to notice cinematographic clues that help fill in the details of the conditions that caused a lineage grammar to blur an ancestral son’s identity. Thus, Sabahattin’s instinct to hide the Christian, Hiram, in the basement, and Mahmut’s to conceal the bottle of wine – the ingestion of which is, itself, a signifier of Christian identity – may be seen more broadly to stage the concealment of an identity marked by Christian associations. The fact that their concealment skills are refined to the degree that they can deceive royal officials – who search the basement looking for Hiram – about the presence of a Christian identity in their midst, and the fact that Mahmut is later represented as not only allowing the presence of wine in the metaphorical space of his family origins, but as also having likely imbibed the liquid itself, strengthens the associations between the concealed lineage secret as one defined by Christian identity markers (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3. Accommodation of Christian identity as a lineage secret

If accommodating both Hiram and the presence of wine in the basement – the metaphorical roots of a lineage – suggests a compelling link between Mahmut’s ancestors and Christian identity, the symbolic status of wine as a form of Christ’s blood (Jacob, 285) deepens the associations between lineage bloodlines and Christian identity. The consistent theme of misidentification that threads through the conversation carried out in the basement, after the officials fail to find Hiram, tacitly weaves together a more precise account of the conditions that gave rise to the spectral dimensions of Sabahattin’s character.

Up until this basement scene, we have seen the son refer to his father as both a paternal figure and a *paşa* (an Ottoman official with a highly ranked political status). In this scene, the son attaches a new, religiously inflected designation to his father: that of Satan, or *Şeytan*. Sabahattin, referring to his father’s manipulation of Abdülkadir, says, “The prince read to his father [the sultan] the lies that the devil [Mahmut] whispered in his ear [*Şehzade, şeytanın kulağına fısıldadığı*]

yalanları babasına bir okumuş.]]” Hiram, the Christian, counters with a rhetorical question suggesting that Sabahattin has misidentified his father – that even Satan could learn from him.

Sabahattin’s misidentification is the first of a slew that are discussed as the three conspire to place blame on Bidar’s brother, and in doing so devise a plan that will mix identities to keep the sultan blind to their machinations. Satan-like, Mahmut comes up with an idea to muddle identities so as to place blame on someone else for his transgressions. He goes as far to say that his prior crime of altering the rail line maps won’t be discovered because Abdülhamid will be unable to distinguish the person responsible. Misidentification proves to be a crucial syntactical pattern in this lineage’s communicative practices.

Remarkably, this is not just reflected in the speech of the father and son, but also in the father’s body language, which bespeaks the secret of the lineage son’s identity that had to be obscured. Just as the discussion of rail lines triggered admissions in the Herzl lineage grammar, so too does the incorporation of the notion of rail lines in the discussion generate a similar response, though this time its depiction is corporeal.

As the conversation about successful misidentification occurs, Mahmut traces the rim of his red wine-filled chalice and smirks (Figure 3.4). Of course, his grin can be read as an expression of satisfaction with himself for his successful deceptive actions: he is gloating over his ability to effectively trick Abdülhamid, who is unaware that Mahmut has been scheming against him. In spite of this, the tacit inclusion of the topic of rail line, viewed in conjunction with Mahmut’s concurrent corporeal actions that center on symbols of Christianity, suggests that his actions bespeak of a lineage son’s complicity in causing the death of someone due to Christian identity.



Figure 3.4. Mahmut fingering his lineage secret: markers of Christian identity

Mahmut's reference to obscuring the traces of his forgery of rail lines initiates a corporal articulation of the reason why the identity of a lineage member had to be pruned out of his family grammar. The scene urges us to view his inclusion of the charged notion of the rail line into the discussion as a force that drives Mahmut to reveal what had to be curtailed or restricted from open circulation through the literal tracing of the chalice of red wine.

On its own, the image of the red wine recalls the redness of the parade and the plate of red meat, both of which were shown to have semantic resonance with ancestral bloodlines. At the same time, the representation of the red wine and chalice evokes Christian symbolism in its embodiment of the symbolic capacity to ingest and swallow the "body and blood of Jesus" (Jacob, 285). In light of our earlier focus on psychic structure and eating processes, it is significant that the ingestion of wine demonstrates the ability to psychically accommodate that which is consumed, that is, a marker of Christian identity. Mahmut's actions, triggered by the ideation of the rail line – a screen

for bloodlines – reveal a concealed family history that centers on the ingestion of Christianity into the family lineage – and its subsequent pruning.

Mahmut's fingering, *ele vermek*, of the chalice can be symptomatically read as an enactment of a situation in which someone was fingered or informed on for an adherence to Christian religious practice. Mahmut's captivation in the act suggests that the chalice and wine function as an object that stimulates a memory about an elided dimension of the family's misidentifying behavior. The inclusion of Christian symbolism implores a reading of his sympathies towards Western and Christian representations as one that lies at the root of the family's concealed past. Just as Mahmut is concealing a Christian body – Hiram – in his basement, so too has the family concealed a secret around the obscuration of a Christian identity within their family lineage, one that necessitated removal for their own survival.

Mahmut's earlier accusation of the haunted as "buried in the shadows like a retired hangman" reinforces the notion that the words of a Christian lineage son had to be choked out and obstructed. It is this very betrayal, too, that had to be made illegible, highlighting how the inability to outwardly accommodate religious identity markers implicates religion in hiding a lineage lie. The scenes, when read together, ultimately highlight the pruning of family lineages as a result of problematic origins centering on religious identities.

Notwithstanding the family's earlier fingering behavior, that Mahmut is sharing the wine – itself a marker for Christianity – with Hiram, a Christian, highlights the family lineage's Western-leaning associations as enabling an accommodation of identity markers of the West and Christianity. On a broader level, Mahmut's behavior represents that of the Western leaning subject, one that can accommodate Western values within their lineage grammars.

The Blood(Line) Red Wine

In taking a step back from our analysis of lineage grammars, one can't help but dwell on the implications of the blurring of the wine imagery in light of the overall reading I have advanced so far, even as I acknowledge it as a function of complying with the regulations implemented by Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu (Radio and Television Supreme Council, or RTÜK) on Turkish media. Included in these regulations are the prohibition of images of alcohol and smoking, as well as “obscene” romantic scenes, those of which are considered against or destructive to “moral values” (Karakartal; Finkel). It is of no surprise, then, that the alcohol would be blurred out on a state-broadcasted series.

With that said, however, the execution of the regulations reproduces the very logic that I have argued inheres to the existential memory preserved in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*. The blurred-out image of the blood-red wine, one that happens to also signify a Christian blood(line), implicitly suggests a concealing of any connections between what is represented historically in the series – Abdülhamid's throne origins – and that of Christian blood origins. The blurring of the wine blurs connections between Abdülhamid's reign and Christian identity. The very technological mechanism used for censorship, in this case, blurs the blood(lines) of the very image it seeks to conceal.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated the ways in which three different representations of late Ottoman subjects' grammars, through their actions and speech patterns, act in a manner reminiscent of the sultan's ruling idiom. Though each representative grammar experiences different circumstances as per their discrete storylines, they all share the same need for illegibility

to blur problematic origins. The internalized rendering of illegibility as an organizing principle of the collective grammar is brought to the fore through the series' representations of distinct clusters of society. From this analysis we can glean how the collective conditions of concealment – through censorship, motivated by a need to obscure family origins – in turn establishes a need to conceal problematic origins in discrete family lineages, all the while affecting the linguistic eco-system in a way that produced charged words with the capacity to destabilize boundary-setting behavior.

In considering what these unearthed grammar narratives mean in the context of Abdülhamid's own grammar, it is not just by chance that two of these primary characters – Theodor and Mahmut – haunt Abdülhamid throughout the series as the main conspirators in their attempts to destroy the empire. This reading provides us the keys in unlocking another way to read their haunting of Abdülhamid: together, they represent an ethno-religious identity, one that is defined through its dissimilarity with that of a 'purely Turkic' identity. Theodor's depiction as an ethno-religious 'other' is evidenced through his 'Jewishness', though his character may be read as stand-in for other stereotypes of this nature: for example, the Armenian. Mahmut's portrayal falls along religious identity lines, particularly demonstrating a link to the West and Christianity. In both cases, they are rendered as the 'non-Turk': their ethnic and religious dissimilarities and affinities create boundaries excluding them from belonging as 'purely Turkic'. In doing so, they highlight the real preoccupation plaguing Abdülhamid, one that cannot be articulated, and one that is the logical consequence of a descent from Christian origins: his non-Turkic origins.

Chapter 6: Epilogue

In brief, the above analyses have demonstrated how, alongside the series' overdetermined revisionist level of signification, another level of meaning is embedded within *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, one whose semantic forms adumbrate two psychologies: first, the protagonist, Abdülhamid's psychology, structured by linguistic strategies organized to avoid words whose meanings may draw attention to the sultan's inability to claim pure Turkic origins. The other psychology outlined in the series is the social psychology of the public, wrought by the more-than-a-quarter century duration of a sociolinguistic environment shaped by a ruling grammar oriented to render illegible problematic aspects of a lineage history.

The findings of this thesis strongly indicate the degree to which an autocratic ruler's mental organization operates on a sociolinguistic level as a conceptual structure that may be passed down through family lines.⁴¹ Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates a link between mental organization and individual and group identity formation processes. The series urges us to view the most salient elements of late Ottoman collective identity as a function of royal lineage pruning, wherein ethno-Turkic identity is defined in religious terms that emphasize the royal family's status as descendants of the house of Osman (Deringil, 1991, 346). It is this status that also granted religious justification in the bestowment of the title of sultan-caliph to the ruler (346).

Payitaht Abdülhamid's reliance on religious elements to cryptically communicate information about a character's unspoken family history makes it possible to discern what in the films' characters' family histories had to be rendered illegible. In fact, we are implored to view the role of religion in the sultan's ruling idiom as a cover or camouflage for problematic non-ethnic

⁴¹ And, in doing so, suggests that this framework be used for further study of the implications of the mental topography of other autocratic and dynastic rulers.

Turkic origins, and are similarly asked to see how this defining characteristic also afflicted family grammars outside the palace. Stepping back from the close reading, we are in a position to rehistoricize how these psycho-linguistic structures impacted the ontological boundaries of the late Ottoman collective in a way that informed Hamidian-era identity construction as well as beyond it, into the Republican period.

One historical insight provided by the series is the extent to which Abdülhamid's ruling idiom is a product of the dissolution of an Ottoman imperial grammar characterized by a ruling apparatus that displayed tolerance towards its diverse subjects (Onar, 230).⁴² The Ottoman state's efforts in the mid-19th century to build a multicultural citizenship model off its multi-ethnic and multi-religious constituency ultimately failed (Yavuz, 441), the aftermath of which was illustrated by the massive loss of land and people in the Balkans in 1877-8 (Onar, 231). This period marked a shift away from a ruling idiom able to digest a multicultural collective, and towards one that drew upon a more singular defining feature to shore up legitimacy: Islam. Abdülhamid's ascension to the throne, also mired in problems of its own through dubious political circumstances surrounding his paternal family members, must be understood in this context: as a critical conjuncture that required an ethnically distinct and religiously masked political legitimacy for survival.

Consequently, a multicultural Ottoman social grammar became retroactively clandestine and no longer digestible. This affective charge, moreover, only crystallized in time over the sultan's nearly 32-year long reign. Therefore, just as the sultan retroactively blurred the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman social grammar, so too was it necessary that the collective blurred their own multicultural pasts, in order not to pose a threat to the sultan's ruling idiom.

⁴² While, of course, recognizing that equality and tolerance are two different things.

As such, we can assess the larger implications of these findings with regard to Turkish national identity formation. Indeed, we can use this framework to understand the Kemalist shift towards state secularism as one that, in fact, reproduces the same logic that animated the sultan's idiom in its effort to make problematic origins illegible. Recall that the very same subjects represented in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, whose grammars or self-management regimens were shown to be organized around the need to render illegible religious identity markers deemed 'non-Turkic', were those who ascended to power in the early Republican years. Notwithstanding their splintering into differing factions even as they universally propagated a new national grammar against the dynastic status-quo (Taglia, 6-7), these proto-founders of the Turkish Republic nonetheless ultimately reproduced the very same logic that undergirded late Ottoman social grammar, albeit cloaked in Kemalist rhetoric.

This social grammar is, in particular, evidenced through the 1928 Language Revolution (*Dil Devrimi*), wherein the Turkish alphabet was changed from Arabic-based script to Latin-based characters in an attempt to rid the language of 'non-Turkish' influence (Çolak, 70). The policy eradicated from social circulation linguistic artifacts from the preceding Ottoman period which, tainted by their ethnoreligious affiliations, posed obstacles to Kemalist intentions to reconfigure national – collective – identity on secular grounds. The Kemalist political vision of a pure collective identity uncontaminated by ethnoreligious inflections, in fact, displaced *and* replicated the logic of a 'non-Turkish' identity as one that is defined along religiously affiliated lines. As with Abdülhamid's ruling idiom, the Kemalist sociolinguistic approach also sought to frame the Republic's 'ethnically pure' political lineage as historically rooted, as is evidenced through the argument developed following the establishment of the Republic which stated that "there were no Kurds in Turkey, only those who had forgotten their 'Turkishness'" (Zeydanlıoğlu, 101). This is

also highlighted by the ‘theses’⁴³ developed in the 1930’s to support this political behavior: the ‘Turkish History Thesis’ (*Türk Tarih Tezi*), which claimed that the Turks were the creators of culture and their lands – Central Asia and Anatolia – were the cradle of civilization (Zeydanlıoğlu, 104), and the ‘Sun Language Theory’ (*Güneş Dil Teorisi*), which claimed that Turkish was the “mother of all languages” (Çolak, 83). Here, the notion of Turkish as the “mother” source camouflages other ways in which “mothers” or maternal sources figure into national grammars, and in doing so effectively whitewashes the concept of the maternal source. Just as the woman in white in the eating scene symbolized the link between a whitewashed maternal source, psychically assimilable words and a ruling idiom, so too does this nexus figure into the Kemalist sociolinguistic approach. While the defining markers of what is or is not problematic shifted, the internal logic of Abdülhamid’s idiom persists.

When considered alongside the social violence, genocide, perpetrated again against the Armenians in 1915, in the wake of the sultan’s 1909 removal from the throne and prior to establishment of the Republic, the Kemalist secular position may be more precisely construed as a strategy to render illegible the problematic origins of a Republic. The repetitiveness of genocidal acts, following Abdülhamid’s murderous treatment in 1894-1896, invites us to view its later occurrence symptomatically, as an enactment on the social level of the excluding operations of the sultan’s psychic structure; acts which may have been catalyzed by the sultan’s dethronement and the subsequent breakdown of the social grammar’s capacity to sustain its integrity when its author disappears. The whole-scale massacre of what is estimated to be as high as 1.5 million Armenians (Cooper and Akcam, 82) represents a symptomatic pruning of a subset of the Ottoman population from the ‘Turkic’ line, one that is marked by Christian faith. Seen from this perspective, the

⁴³ Despite later falling out of favor, they accurately represent the underlying foundations driving this approach.

Kemalist political position is especially reminiscent of Mahmut's pruning of his own family's complicity, one that caused the death of a member of the lineage who retained Christian identity. In this way, the Kemalist sociolinguistic approach emerges as a strategy to obscure problematic dimensions of the responsible embryonic political entity from which the new state arose.

We can extend this perspective to understand the impact of the ontological conditions of political behavior up to the present, and in doing so trace the roots of the social and ruling grammars that persist today. *Payitaht Adülhamid*'s role as a transformational object brings to the fore a parallel between the existential conditions of the Hamidian era and the grammatical logic of President Erdoğan and the AKP ruling idiom. The similarities in condition enable a viewing of the Erdoğan and AKP political vision as one that is shaped by the same mental topography of the aforementioned idioms that preceded it.

Perhaps the most compelling dimension that links Abdülhamid's reign to contemporary sociohistorical conditions is their transformational quality. Turkey is in the midst of a transformational period, one that has reformulated notions of identity and the nation, the start of which scholars identify as the early 2000's with the rise of AKP as a political force both domestically and internationally (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, 301). Erdoğan's positioning of Turkey as the regional superpower of the Middle East, evidenced through international facing policies⁴⁴ that identify Turkey as historically and geographically situated for active diplomatic engagement (Murinson, 947), highlights an apex for Erdoğan in terms of his role as the imagined leader of the (Islamically-defined) Middle East. This is not only seen abroad, but also at home, through Erdoğan's promise of Islam to bring change in the form of a "pious generation" (Lüküslü), which

⁴⁴ I refer specifically to the primary foreign policy strategy of the AKP-led state that was developed from Ahmet Davutoğlu's strategic depth doctrine, of which a component is the 'zero problems with neighbors' approach. For an assessment on the success of this approach, see Askerov, pp. 149-167.

is evocative of Abdülhamid's imagined status. The inability to sustain such a political vision of 'leader of the Islamic world' acts as a trigger for political behavior that instigates a need for a pruning of problematic features that threaten the state's political prerogative.

This interpretation is reinforced by Erdoğan's comments about his own lineage background, which are extraordinarily echoic: after noting that he had been previously *misidentified* as a Georgian, he followed stating that, what is even worse, he had been *misidentified* as an Armenian, which would be ridiculous, because, as he retorted, he is a Turk.⁴⁵ Erdoğan's need to 'otherize' in order to claim 'pure Turkic' origins continues to play itself out through rhetoric that seeks to differentiate the 'Turk' from the Armenians, Kurds, Jews, and so on, a strategy that is essential to maintain the integrity of Erdoğan's ruling idiom, and one that also impacts sociolinguistic realms of society. These reverberations contextualize our understanding of AKP linguistic revisions, too, especially in the way that they use one marker of lineage purity to distract from another that would nullify a claim to 'Turkic' ancestry.

With that said, I return full circle to where I began: Erdoğan's 2014 language policy. The policy, despite its failure, sought to bring back into circulation Ottoman Turkish, an effort we may now understand as an integral part of an idiom that seeks to validate one ancestral past in order to blur the existence of another. That which aligns with the identity markers deemed digestible and compatible with the boundaries of the idiom's construction of Turkic origins becomes exaggerated, overdetermined, amplified. All the while, linguistic markers of 'difference' are erased, as is evidenced through the historical role designated to the Kurdish language, one that has been restricted to the point of, what some call, "linguicide" (Zeydanlıoğlu, 106). In this way, Erdoğan's

⁴⁵ Taylor quoting Erdoğan in *The Washington Post*.

ruling idiom reifies that of the sultan's in the way that he must mask that which must be rendered illegible: origins which threaten his ethnic and religious claims to political legitimacy.

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