

RESTORING REGIONAL HUMILIATION: MENDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WOUNDS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

Arab Spring movements that can also be labeled as regaining “Arab Honor” may have occurred as a result of years long humiliation either from the West or from autocratic administrations. For those groups in opposition that echoed more democracy and fair living standards Turkey posed an inspiration. Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan has also captured the hearts and minds of the Arab streets and partly due to his charismatic leadership, his rhetoric that grabs the grassroots in the society and lack of a formal leadership in the Arab Spring movements. Lately, there has been some discussions on whether Turkey, with her Ottoman heritage, could be accepted as a role model or even a big brother in the Middle East. This paper will analyze the major humiliating points in the Arab history and will assess whether Turkey can be a role model.

Key Words: *Psychology, psycho-politics, humiliation, Arab Spring, Erdoğan, Turkey*

BÖLGESEL AŞAĞILANMIŞLIK DUYGUSUNU TAMİR ETME: ORTADOĞU'NUN PSIKOLOJİK YARALARININ TEDAVİSİ

Özet

“Arap Onuru” olarak da adlandırılabilir Arap Baharı hareketleri gerek Batı gerekse otokratik yönetimler tarafından halka yaşatılan aşağılanmışlıkların neticesi olarak ortaya çıkmış olabilir. Demokrasi ve daha iyi yaşam şartları talep eden muhalifler Türkiye’yi bir ilham kaynağı olarak görmüştür. Başbakan Erdoğan da karizmatik liderliği, toplumun tabanı etkileyen söylemleri ve Arap Baharı’nın resmi bir lideri olmamasından ötürü Arap halklarının zihin ve gönüllerini fethetmiştir. Son zamanlarda Osmanlı geçmişi sebebiyle Türkiye’nin Orta Doğu’ya bir rol model veya ağabey olup olamayacağı tartışılmaktadır. Bu çalışma Arapların psikolojik aşağılanmışlık yaşamasına neden olan kırılma noktalarını analiz ederek bu bağlamda Türkiye’nin rol model olup olamayacağını değerlendirecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Psikoloji, Psiko-politik, aşağılanmışlık, Arap Baharı, Erdoğan, Türkiye*

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Introduction

The Arab Spring or to put it in a more appropriate term the “quest for the Arab honor” is generally being analyzed from a Western perspective. Most of the time, discussions are about the possible result of these movements, whether it will be more Islamic or not. However, most analyses fail to consider the historical and psycho-political motives of the Middle Easterners. The Arab Spring did not come out of nowhere. It is a cry, a mass protest against injustices, trauma, humiliation inflicted by the West and the regional leaders. It is also a call to take charge of their future. The Muslim world is diverse within, ranging from the Arabian Peninsula to the great historical Persian Empire and to the Ottoman Empire. Despite the diversity, there is still a collective consciousness of what constitutes being a “Muslim” or being a “Middle Easterner”. For a long time the success of the Islamic Empire was shadowed by the late Middle Ages Christian development. Since then Islam has mostly faced failures which might have created a feeling of humiliation transmitted in the Muslim consciousness from one generation to another. This article assesses the major stages of humiliation for Middle Easterners and Muslims in general, connecting the past traumas to the current Arab Spring movement.

Characteristics of Large-Group Identity

The notion of large-group identity must be addressed for a comprehensive analysis on the Arab humiliation and the perceptions related to the large group identity. All societies are formed by its individual members and thus carry the psychology of these individuals to a level of group consciousness. Freud describes the individual as a component of the identified groups¹ “The linkage between individual and group dynamics is seen in shared rituals and symbols of identity which emphasize a group’s distinctiveness even where objectively defined intra-group variation may be high”.² Although each individual is different, they all bring together a certain group behavior that can be described as a large-group. Large groups are described as a large number of people sharing specific particular emotional and intellectual attitudes that differentiate them from different groups.³ Individual behavior also influences group behavior. When an individual identifies with a group, he/she is most likely to behave or feel differently. For instance, people tend to follow the ideas of the majority to assure they are included in a group. Although individuals

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 5th Imp., The International Psycho-Analytical Library, No:6, Translation: James Strachey, London, 1949, p.3.

² Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Ethnic Conflict”, Stanley A. Renshon, John Duckitt (Eds.), *Political Psychology: Cultural and Crosscultural Foundations*, New York, NYU Press, 2000,

³ Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity*, Charlottesville, Pitchstone Publishing, 2006, p. 23.

belonging to the large group generally never meet each other they are still bound by “sameness” and belonging to the same group.⁴ It can be suggested that large groups are alive and has a level of collective consciousness that is constructed and carried on from one generation to another. Based on these definitions ethnic, national or religious groups may be categorized as large groups. Large group identities invest in specific habits, attitudes, prejudices, customs, traditions and values. While these attributes are perceived as being positive; customs, traditions and values of other or unknown groups may be perceived as being inferior or negative. Hence, Volkan describes the seven threads of large group identities as follows: shared reservoirs for images associated with positive emotion, shared good identifications, absorption of others’ bad qualities, absorption of leaders’ internal worlds, chosen glories, chosen traumas, formation of symbols that develop their own autonomy.⁵ These qualities of the large group altogether shape how we perceive the “others” and how “others” perceive us as perceptions are developed through how we define ourselves and our large group. As the symbolic features of group identity passes on from one generation to another, leaders may interfere with how the large group perceives the outer world. During times of crises, economic recession or mass humiliation, the group can regress and leaders of large-groups can mobilize individuals to scapegoat or even attack those who are perceived and presented as “others”.⁶ Similar to individuals, large groups also try to maintain or repair the identity through rituals. It is necessary to point that unlike crowds or masses, large groups share a common history or collective memory that is shaped by historical events. Large groups have a specific characteristic. In this sense, historical glories, traumas and humiliations define the present day psychology and collective identity of such large groups. It is also important to note that the large-group identity is a present reflection of collective historical memory and that this collective memory is generated from facts as well as emotions rooting from societal perceptions.

Traumas, Humiliation and Regression

Every individual and group possesses a certain level of narcissism which can simply be described as self-confidence. There are times when this narcissistic self is injured/wounded such as traumatic events which as a result create a reaction.

The word trauma derives from its Greek origin “traumat” which stands for wound. From a psychological perspective trauma is as an emotional upset⁷

⁴ Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines*, Charlottesville, Pitchstone Publishing, 2004, p. 12.

⁵ For additional detail on the seven threads of large groups please see Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines* ..., p. 37.

⁶ Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the ...*, p. 173-174.

⁷ Trauma-Definition, *Merriam-Webster*,

and can also be defined as a psychological injury to the identity caused by an external factor. Humiliation, degradation, dehumanization, rape, war, genocide or even bankruptcies and political failures can constitute traumatic events. Although traumas endured by individuals are also very important in shaping one's identity and characteristics of leaders, the main subject of this paper is more related to mass traumas endured by a group of people who identify themselves with a certain ethnic, religious or national group. As described above, such groups are identified as large-groups.

One aspect of traumas is that such events can also be socially constructed in the public memory and consciousness. Even though traumas can either be real or constructed, the way that groups perceive such events as traumatic is the most important element that may determine the course of events. The mental images of a traumatic event shared by a large group may become what Volkan has called a chosen trauma, a crucial marker of large group identity. A chosen trauma is "a large group's mental representation of a historic event that resulted in collective feelings of helplessness, victimization, shame and humiliation at the hands of others and typically involves drastic losses of people, land, prestige and dignity".⁸ Hence, not all traumas are "chosen" but only ones that are markers of collective identity, consciousness and memory. For instance, Karbela for Shi'ite Muslims is a chosen trauma that is transmitted through the collective mind which played a major role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.⁹

Humiliation can be described as a sense of disgrace, dishonor and shame.¹⁰ According to Moisi humiliation is similar to impotence where one no longer has the control of his own life.¹¹ Saurette describes humiliation as a feeling within a relationship where one party anticipating a higher status feels shame or a loss of self-respect after being lowered in status.¹² Humiliation at the hand of others is a major attack on the large group identity which impacts the self-perception of the large group and preoccupations with mending the humiliated identity.¹³ Humiliation can also be described as an asymmetric conflict in which a much stronger perpetrator insults a much weaker victim.¹⁴ A combination of anger and shame, humiliation is a typical emotion of

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma>, retrieved: Dec. 9, 2011.

⁸ Volkan, *Bloodlines*, p. 49; Volkan, *Killing in the ...*, p. 173.

⁹ Hasan Onat, "Kerbela'yı Doğru Okumak", *Akademik Ortadoğu*, Cilt 2, Sayı 1, p. 4-5.

¹⁰ Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin J. Sadock, *Comprehensive Glossary of Psychiatry and Psychology*, Baltimore, Williams&Wilkins, 1991, p. 86.

¹¹ Dominique Moisi, *The Geopolitics of Emotions*, London, The Bodley Head, 2009, p. 56.

¹² Paul Saurette, "You Dissin Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics", *Review of International Studies*, Vol 32, No 3, 2006, p. 496.

¹³ Volkan, *Killing in the ...*, p. 70.

¹⁴ Clark McCauley, "Humiliation and Martyrdom in the Jasmine Revolution", *Psychology Today*, www.psychologytoday.com, Access date: 28.11.2011.

asymmetric conflict.¹⁵ Despite being present in most cultures to a varying degree humiliation can be destructive if it has no hope and can eventually lead to revenge.¹⁶

Time to time feelings of humiliation is reassured by transmitting the re-constructed images of the traumatic events to the next generation.¹⁷ Expressions of humiliation can take “a central place in the language and the practices of a culture”.¹⁸ In some cultures, such as the Arab and Muslim culture, humiliation is deeply associated with “shame” which is remains a distinct part of Muslim teaching. The feelings of humiliation and loss can be spread via communication and political rhetoric. Moghadam states that “humiliation is frequently absorbed through images on television channels, such as Al-Jazeera, where pictures of Palestinians and Iraqis demoralized by superior Western armies are transmitted on a daily basis”.¹⁹ Impacted by the historical humiliations literature, poetry, arts and politics shape the oral history which is re-constructed through the generations and becomes a different structure. Furthermore daily rituals of groups might also be affected by such unconscious transmitted images and may remind the group of the humiliation on a daily basis.

Former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Abu Ghraib images are important markers in recent history that might have had humiliating effect on the Arab nations. Images of Saddam’s mouth being examined by American an physician and later his public execution; inhumane images from the Abu Ghraib can be mentioned as symbols of humiliation. Another recent humiliation took place in 2006 in Denmark where a newspaper published a cartoon devaluing to the Muslims. The Islamophobic cartoon depicting Prophet Mohammed frustrated many Muslims around the world and was viewed as an insult to Islam.²⁰

The most recent humiliating incident can be identified as the death of former Libyan dictator Col. Qaddafi. In October 2011, opposition forces in Sartre, Libya captured the wounded Col. Qaddafi and killed him. Before his

¹⁵ Clark McCauley, “Celebrating Osama’s Death: An end to Humiliation”, *Psychology Today*, www.psychologytoday.com, retrieved: 28.11.2011.

¹⁶ Moisi, *The Geopolitics ...*, p. 57.

¹⁷ Jay Winter, “Notes on the Memory Boom: War, Remembrance, and the Uses of the Past”, Duncan Bell (Ed.), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, New York, Palgrave, 2006, P. 69; Volkan, *Bloodlines*, p. 48.

¹⁸ Khaled Fattah, K.M. Fierke, “A Clash of Emotions: The Politics of Humiliation and Political Violence in the Middle East”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 15 (1), 2009, p.70.

¹⁹ Assaf Moghadam, “Suicide Terrorism, Occupation and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of Dying to Win”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, No 29, 2006, p. 722.

²⁰ Pernille Ammitzbøll and Lorenzo Vidino, “After the Danish Cartoon Controversy”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2007, p.3.

death videos show that Qaddafi was tortured and possibly sexually assaulted both extremely humiliating, especially bearing in mind that these humiliating images of the tyrants' death circulated in the mass media and social networks. For the supporters of Qaddafi the humiliating images of his death might become an important marker in Libyan history further on. Although it's fairly early to make an analysis in the case of an unsuccessful revolution the same psyche can be inferred for the opposing forces.

When a person or a group feels humiliated or insulted the ego defense mechanisms start working in the unconscious mind to protect the self or the group. These can be described as reactions to minimize the impact of the wound. Most known defenses are repression, projection, displacement, denial, sublimation and regression. Regression is defined as an "unconscious defense mechanism in which a person undergoes a partial or total return to earlier patterns of adaptation".²¹ Not specifically good or bad, regression is a normal response to humiliating, traumatic incidents that can either be a short term or a long term reaction. As the individual or society stays in a regressed stage for a long period, the effects can be more dangerous. Similar to that of individual regression, societal or large-group regression "takes place when a majority of group members share certain anxieties, expectations, behaviors, thought patterns and actions that can be explained by the concept of regression. This process reflects the efforts of a group and its leader to maintain, protect, modify or repair their shared group identity".²²

The Arab Psychology: Years Long of Humiliation

Moisi states that even though the Arab world is comprised of various nations they are united by a common psychology where humiliation is present in large portions of the Arab-Islamic world. Moisi describes this common psychology as Arab emotion which is also a portrayal of collective identity.²³ Kassir points that contrary to the Western world, the Arab nations are faced with a constant disappointment due to the loss of the glorious status and power proclaimed in the past.²⁴ Arab humiliation is also partly attributed to the lack of technology and literature produced as well as the failure to adjust to new developments. The psychology of humiliation seems to be one of factors contributing to societal regression and the radical Islamist terrorism that can easily mobilize masses by humiliation propaganda. This can be seen in Osama bin Laden's 2001 speech in which he states that the Islamic world has faced

²¹ Kaplan, Sadock , ibid , p.160.

²² Vamik D. Volkan, "September 11 and Societal Regression", *Mind and Human Interaction*, Volume 12, Number 3, p. 197.

²³ Moisi, *The Geopolitics of ...*, p. 58.

²⁴ Samir Kassir, *Arap Talihsizliđi*, Translation: Özgür Gökmen, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2011, p. 17.

humiliation for more than 80 years.²⁵ In this sense, there is a perception that history and the history makers were not fair to the Arab world and that history is written by those who were victorious.²⁶ Although a part of this Arab psychology is based on perceptions, it has to be noted that underlying these perceptions are the historical realities that pertain to a disappointment and blame on the West. There are several cornerstones of the Arab collective identity that may have created a humiliating effect for the Arab and occasionally to the Muslim world in general. It can be concluded that the most humiliating events took place in the last hundred years during the time when the Middle East was re-shaped by the hegemonic powers. However, since nations carry a historical memory it is possible that the Arab humiliation is a build-up of a longer period that goes back to the Islamic dynasty. A more thorough synopsis of these events will be discussed below:

1. Decline of the Islamic Civilization: Not all Arabs are Muslims but the Arabs are predominantly Muslim. Therefore there is a direct link between the journey of Islam and the Arab world which is very diverse in and of itself. To understand the historical sense of humiliation the Arab-Islamic history is needed to be addressed very shortly. Once a great civilization Islam stretched its borders from the Middle East to Europe and dominated the Western world.²⁷ The Arabic language became the equivalent of what English is today and Islam excelled in science, medicine, math, astronomy, architecture, philosophy, literature and arts.²⁸ The Islamic civilization was at its peak when the Christian civilization was struggling. However, after the Middle Ages the Christian West became the pioneers of the civilized world and technology while Islam faced a major decline. The loss of the glorious history of the Umayyad, Abbasid and later Ottoman Empire is still present in the collective memory while the Muslim societies yearn for the long lost success.²⁹

2. Ottoman Domination/Conquer of Arab Lands: When discussing the Arab humiliation psychology Ottoman conquerors of the Arab lands should also be mentioned briefly. Arabs fell under the Ottoman rule during the 16th century. Arabs had a privileged position in the Empire due to the Caliphate institution which was passed on from the Arabs to the Ottoman Sultans in 1517

²⁵ Osama Bin Laden: Videotaped Address, October 7, 2001, <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/481921texts.html>, retrieved: Feb 1, 2012; Khaled Fattah, K.M. Fierke, *op.cit.*, p.67.

²⁶ W. Nathaniel Howell, "Killing in the Name of God: Motif and Motivation", *Mind and Human Interaction*, Volume 12, Number 3, p.147.

²⁷ Syndey Nettleton Fisher, William Ochsenwald, *The Middle East: A History*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1990, pp. 70-74;

²⁸ Nettleton and Ochsenwald, *ibid*, pp. 99-116; Moisi, *The Geopolitics of ...* p. 59.

²⁹ Khaled Fattah, K.M. Fierke, *op.cit.*, p.75.

with the conquer of the Holy Lands. The importance of religion in the Ottoman Empire and the fact that Islam generated from the Arab lands were the reasons behind this privileged position.³⁰ However, this privilege does not change the fact that the Arabs that once established a great civilization now lived under the Ottoman rule in which the Turkish-Ottoman culture dominated the empire.³¹ According to Moisi, the Ottoman period was the “last great expression of the world of Islam, but it also marked the beginning of decline for a great civilization, symbolized by the fact that the ruling family spoke Turkish. The West was on the move, and the Ottoman Empire was on the defensive”.³² For centuries, due to the conquests of the European lands Islam has been associated with the Turks.³³ This is symbolically and realistically true in a way that the Ottoman Empire represented Islam for a very long time and conquered Arab lands. Therefore the decline of the Ottoman Empire might have created ambivalence in the Arab mind where on one side this decline represented a hope for national states, freedom and on the other side represented the failure of Islamic dominance in world politics. Overall, decline of the great Islamic empire, living under the Ottoman rule, the loss of power and finally the failed efforts to create liberated states may have caused emotional humiliation. During the last 19th early 20th century the nationalist and reformist movements influencing Ottoman Empire transformed the Ottoman identity and created a gap between the Arab Muslims and the Porte.³⁴ Awad states that “for centuries Muslim Arabs identified themselves as Muslims and the Ottoman Empire was their state. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim states and the attendant rise of Christian states, traumatized Muslims sought explanations. A group of Arab Muslims, the Islamists, continued to view Islam as their primary identity”.³⁵ However, in a very short period during the Ottoman modernization and the new Turkish republic the religious symbols pertaining the past were mostly alienated and Western symbols were acknowledged instead.³⁶ For that reason, it can be inferred that the Ottoman modernization has been a cornerstone in the re-shaping of the Arab-Turkish

³⁰ Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Arap Ortadoğu'suna Karşı Politikası*, Ankara, Barış Kitap, 2010, p. 3.

³¹ Samir Kassir, op.cit, p. 45-46.

³² Moisi, *The Geopolitics of ...*, p. 59

³³ Abdülkadir Çevik, “Globalization and Identity”, in Sverre Varvin, Vamık D. Volkan (Eds.), *Violence or Dialogue*, International Psychoanalytic Association, London, 2003, p. 156.

³⁴ Michael Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present*, New York, W.W. Norton Co., 2007p. 368.

³⁵ George A. Awad, “The Minds and Perceptions of the others”, Sverre Varvin, Vamık D. Volkan (Eds.), *Violence or Dialogue*, International Psychoanalytic Association, London, 2003, p. 156.

³⁶ Nilüfer Göle, The Voluntary Adoption of Islamic Stigma Symbols, *Social Research*, Vol 70, No 3, 2003, p.820

relations where the Arabs no longer related themselves as Ottomans or saw themselves as equal citizens of the empire.³⁷

3. Re-carving the Middle East: Sykes-Picot Treaty:

Perceptions and reality may not always be on the same line but perceptions are sometimes more important than reality. The Ottoman rule of the Middle East was considered a hegemony and occupation for parts of the Arab world specifically those groups affiliated with nationalist movements. It should not be a revelation to find Arab nationalist movements across Arab lands since it was the trend of the century that originated from the West and was a cry for independence.³⁸ The move for independence was shadowed by the secret Allied treaty that conspired to divide the Ottoman lands. The Allied powers signed the Sykes-Picot treaty in May 1916 that guaranteed the end of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey by the end of WW I. Sykes-Picot granted the Ottoman lands to Russia, France, Britain and later Italy.³⁹ At the same time the British were offering a peaceful solution to the Arabian Peninsula and supported the Arab revolts against the Ottoman Empire. Securing the British support Arab leaders took up arms against the Ottoman Empire but failed to gain their independence.⁴⁰ The secret Sykes-Picot Treaty may have triggered the emotion of betrayal which is seen as a major factor of the Middle East humiliation.⁴¹ The impact of this treaty and current political rhetoric can be seen in Osama bin Laden's 2003 speech where he said "...our wounds have yet to heal from the Crusader wars of the last century against the Islamic world, or from the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 which brought about the dissection of the Islamic world into fragments"⁴²

4. The Balfour Declaration:

The First Zionist Congress in 1897 was held in Switzerland by Theodore Herzl where the congress defined the aim of Zionism as the creation of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine to be secured by public law.⁴³ A sociopolitical and nationalistic movement in the 19th century Zionism was soon transformed into a political movement due to the anti-Jewish sentiments in Europe and Russia.⁴⁴ The Holy Lands were a passionate subject matter for

³⁷ Ömer Kürkcüoğlu, op.cit, p. 4; Awad, op.cit, p. 160.

³⁸ Oren, op.cit, p. 367; Awad, ibid, p. 157.

³⁹ Fisher, Ochsenwald, op.cit, p. 387; Oren, ibid, p. 346,347.

⁴⁰ David Fromkin, *The Peace to End All Peace*, First Owl Boks Edition, New York, Henry Holt and Co, 2001, p. 188-189, 219.

⁴¹ Fattah, Fierke, op.cit, p.69; Awad, op.cit, p.161.

⁴² Peter L. Bergen, *The Longest War: Enduring Conflict Between America and Al-Qaeda*, New York, Free Press, 2011, p.27.

⁴³ Efraim Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, London, Osprey Publishing, 2002, 14.

⁴⁴ Fisher, Ochsenwald, op.cit, p. 387; Oren, op.cit, p. 387.

many Jews across Europe. During WWI the Zionist lobby for a Jewish national home in Palestine intensified more than before. British Zionist Federation President Chaim Weizmann, a close acquaintance of Arthur Balfour suggested that a Jewish state would serve the interests of Britain and the US.⁴⁵ On November 2, 1917 one of the most influential documents of its time was published by the British cabinet which was called the Balfour Declaration. The Balfour Declaration was a letter that favored the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.⁴⁶ Despite suspicions, the British managed to convince the Arabs that the Arab revolt and Zionist movements both can co-exist without clashing.⁴⁷ Mainly, the Balfour declaration secured Jewish immigration to a country that was 90% populated by the Arabs.⁴⁸ Another humiliation and betrayal by the West, the Balfour Declaration, was signed without informing or involving the Arab leaders.⁴⁹ Moreover, the mass displacement of the Palestinians from their homeland was perceived as a compensation for the Western crimes.⁵⁰

5. Occupation of the Arab lands by Western powers: The San Remo Conference

By the end of the 19th century as nationalism became more popular within the Ottoman Empire, just as in Europe the Arabs were also influenced by this sentiment as well another major ideology, Ottomanism. Partly due to the Turkish modernization the Arab nationalism drew attention from the Arab societies which helped the mobilization of masses against the Ottoman Empire to gain independence.⁵¹

Following the Great War the world witnessed the fall of empires and a new map was drawn for the Middle East. American administration mainly believed that Arab peoples were incompetent of self-governance.⁵² No decision was made at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Consequently, based on the 1916 Sykes-Picot Treaty the mandate system, agreement on oil and pipelines was recognized in 1920 at the San Remo Conference.⁵³ As a result, the Arab nationalists who desired independence from the Ottoman Empire were

⁴⁵ Fromkin, *op.cit.*, p. 269-277; Oren, *ibid.*, p. 348.

⁴⁶ Oren, *ibid.*, p. 362.

⁴⁷ Efraim Karsh, *op.cit.*, p. 14-16.; Oren, *ibid.*, p. 383.

⁴⁸ Awad, *op.cit.*, p.161

⁴⁹ Khaled Fattah, K.M. Fierke, *op.cit.*, p.75.

⁵⁰ Awad, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

⁵¹ A.A. Duri, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation* (trans: Lawrence I. Conrad), London, Cromm Helm, 1987, P.214; Joel Carmichael, *The Shaping of the Arabs: A Study in Ethnic Identity*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, p. 304-305.

⁵² Oren, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

⁵³ Fisher, Ochsenwald,, *op.cit.*, p. 387; Michael B. Oren, *ibid.*, p. 395.

deceived by the West.⁵⁴ Moreover, the British and French signed an agreement regarding the Turkish Petroleum in Mosul. Fattah and Fierke state that “the boundaries and structures of the Middle Eastern states were imposed by European colonizers. The Middle East itself is an artificial Western construct. The current political map has thus been historically constructed by Western powers, and this international, regional and national configuration is understood to be the source of ongoing humiliation and betrayal in the region. Against this background, Islamists have employed a narrative of ‘paradise lost’, of a past empire of glory, followed by a loss, and the possibility of restoring a transnational Muslim ummah”.⁵⁵

6. Establishment of an Independent Israeli State

The existence of Israel is a major symbolic humiliation. On 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly endorsed the partition of Palestine by a two-thirds majority.⁵⁶ The state of Isreael was proclaimed by David Ben-Gurion in 1948 and one of the first laws was the Law of Return which provided the right to return for the Jewish people.⁵⁷ Kagan points that Islamists, present in the Arab world, have more than a century of humiliation which Israel has become the living symbol.⁵⁸ More importantly Jerusalem is a holy city for Muslims where the Dome of the Rock, Masjid Al-Aqsa, Masjid al-Haram are situated. Similarly Moisi points that the creation of Israel in the midst of Arab lands was a proof of humiliation and weakening. According to Arabs the state of Israel was established as a result and reparation of the Christian barbarism against Jews, however this incident was paid for by the Muslims which was seen as unfair.⁵⁹ In addition to the betrayal by the West after the WWI, another betrayal took place when an independent Israeli state was established by the assistance of the international community while the Palestinians were displaced from their homeland. This pain associated with the establishment of an independent Israeli state can be seen in Osama bin Laden’s speech where he says: “...the banner of God’s unity is raised once again over every stolen Islamic land, from Palestine to al-Andalus and other Islamic lands that were lost because of the betrayals of rulers and the feebleness of Muslims”.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Kürkçüoğlu, op.cit, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Fattah, K.M. Fierke, op.cit, p.74.

⁵⁶ Efraim Karsh, op.cit, p. 21.

⁵⁷ Fisher, Ochsenwald, op.cit, p. 387; Oren, op.cit, p. 647.

⁵⁸ Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, London, Atlantic Books, 2008, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Dominique Moisi, “The Clash of Emotions”, *Foreign Affairs*, Jan/Feb 2007, Vol 86, Issue 1, p.9.

⁶⁰ Bruce Lawrance (Ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, London, Verso, 2005, p.14.

7. The Six Day War: 1967

The Arab-Israeli War broke out in 1967 which resulted in the defeat of the Arabs with the loss of Golan Heights, Sinai Peninsula, Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁶¹ Hence, the war is described as an-Naksah or “The Setback” in Arabic.⁶² The Six-day War has demonstrated the Arab inability and lack of power against Israel.⁶³ According to Moisi the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War was a military and moral setback which caused the Arabs to lose confidence in themselves and was a feeling that accumulated over the years.⁶⁴ One reason of the Arab humiliation is that Israel is geographically small compared to the Arab lands. Thus, a defeat by the hands of the Israelis, a geographically small state, might have had some effect. It is important to note that Egypt felt most humiliated by the defeat in the Six-Day War as the failure demonstrated the decline of Nasser’s Arab nationalism. One psychological reason for this might be the historical relations between the Jews and Egyptians where one was the slave and other was the Pharaoh.⁶⁵ The Six Day War defeat and the Israeli attitude towards the Occupied Territories can be considered as one of the sources of the Arab anger towards the West.⁶⁶

8. From The Yom Kippur War to Camp David and The Siege of Beirut

Egypt’s influence as a regional leader was diminished after the 1967 Six Day War. Moreover, the Israeli occupation of Arab territory had expanded by 1973. Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian successor of Nasser, initiated the Yom Kippur War to restore the honor and self-confidence of the Arabs, reverse the humiliation of Egypt from the Six Day War and restore Egypt’s dominant status in the Arab world.⁶⁷

With the aid of US President Jimmy Carter Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat concluded the Camp David accords in 1978 and Israel returned Sinai to Egypt by 1982. Israeli administration then planned to destroy the PLO and impose a peace treaty on Lebanon which resulted in the invasion of Lebanon. Lebanon became a showcase of power between Israel and Syria which resulted in the siege of

⁶¹ Fisher, Ochsenswald, *op.cit.*, p. 387; Michael B. Oren, *ibid.*, p. 612.

⁶² Six Day War, 1967 Arab-Israeli War, <http://www.sixdaywar.co.uk/>, retrieved: Feb. 26, 2012.

⁶³ Samir Kassir, *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Moisi, *The Geopolitics of ...*, p. 61.

⁶⁵ Moisi, *The Geopolitics of ...*, p. 65.

⁶⁶ Awad, *op.cit.*, p.163.

⁶⁷ Stephen D. Brown, *Anwar Sadat and the Yom Kippur War*, Course 1: Foundations of National Security Strategy.

Beirut by the Israelis. The Western capital of Lebanon was mostly destroyed.⁶⁸ Kassir describes the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982 as one of the most humiliating incidents of the Arab history that demonstrated the incapacity of the Arab countries to defend themselves.⁶⁹

Long Awaited Charismatic Leader

The last charismatic leader in the Middle East is considered to be Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt who was the champion of the Arab nationalist movement. Nationalizing the Suez Canal and fighting with corrupt leaders Nasser is regarded as the first revolutionary leader to appeal to the streets of the Arab world.⁷⁰ Since then Egypt is perceived as the flagship of the Muslim Middle East. However, Nasser's failure in the Arab-Israeli War can also be considered as a failure of Arab nationalism and Egyptian lack of ability to fight Israel. Despite Egypt's implicit leadership in the Arab world the successor administrations could not fill Nasser's shoes of such a role model.

The Western oriented successors of Nasser lacked popular support and were considered as the puppets of the West who couldn't protect the rights of the Arab states.⁷¹ For instance in 2008 Egypt blocked Gaza's Rafah border to stop arms smuggling which caused a lot of suffering for the Palestinians including starvation.⁷² The recent movements in the Middle East, mainly in Egypt and Tunisia, were movements for citizens to take charge of their own destinies against the Western oriented regimes.⁷³

It can be inferred that Arab collective humiliation increased as the Arab dominance in Middle Eastern policies declined drastically and the Israeli influence increased by each day. One of the most important points that should be mentioned is the perceived incompetence of the Arab leadership during the Arab-Israeli war and peace talks. As a result it is highly possible that the Camp David accords may have ignited the belief that Arab leaders are incapable of protecting their own rights and honor.⁷⁴ This is most likely to be a source of frustration in the Arab Spring movements.

Another important point is the corruption in politics which helped spark the upheavals in Tunisia with Bouazizi's self immolation. For instance in

⁶⁸ Fisher, Ochsenswald, op.cit, p. 387; Oren, op.cit, p. 600-601.

⁶⁹ Samir Kassir, op.cit, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Michael Scott Doran, "The Heirs of Nasser", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 3, p.17.

⁷¹ Fattah, Fierke, op.cit, p. 78.

⁷² Egypt Moves to Close Gaza Border, *CNN World*, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-02-03/world/gaza.egypt_1_gaza-border-gaza-egypt-gazans?_s=PM:WORLD, Feb 3, 2008, retrieved: Jan 30, 2012.

⁷³ Arab Uprising Termed a 'Refresh Development', *The Express Tribune*, April 28, 2011, Retrieved: Jan 30, 2012.

⁷⁴ Veyssel Ayhan, "Mısır Devriminin Ayak Sesleri", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Şubat 2011, Sayı 26, p.19.

Tunisia, it was reported that half of the country's commercial elites were related to former President Ben Ali. Egypt was a similar case where President Mubarak was connected to business elites despite widespread unemployment and poverty.⁷⁵

In the midst of all the economic, psychological troubles and repeating traumas of the above mentioned Middle Eastern states, Turkey and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's already shining star started to rise with a boost from a pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli rhetoric. In the Near East and North Africa Erdogan is perceived as a leader replacing corrupt governments and represents a more Islamic style in a secular-democratic country with policies towards the Palestinians that offered much more than the Arab states. For instance Turkey's efforts and Erdogan's personal support in sending a flotilla aid to Gaza and bringing up the Palestinian cause in the political scene might have all influenced what can be termed as the "Erdogan charisma" in the Middle East. More importantly, vacuum generated by the lack of formal leadership in Arab Spring movements might have also increased the influence of Erdogan. Since most Arab leaders were perceived as Western pawns, Erdogan could easily capture the hearts and minds of the Arab streets.

It should also be noted that Erdogan is perceived as a man of the people, one who is more close to the grassroots rather than the political elite. This image might have also triggered a populous base for Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's perceived charisma. The fine line between the leader and the country represented by the leader seems to be lost in this regard. The admiration for Erdogan is transmitted as the admiration for Turkey which eventually improves Turkey's soft power in the Middle East.

Restoring the Honor of the Humiliated Middle East

It could be said that the pro-Israeli Western allies of the Arab countries such as Egypt's Mubarak and Tunisia's Ben Ali have brought on shame to the Arab people. Corruption, unemployment rates, Western skepticism and historical psychological humiliation from the Israeli state have fed up the people of the Middle East.

On the other hand, Turkey has been dealing with her own humiliation for a long time. The successors of the great Ottoman Empire have faced an unbearable decline since the capitulations. The capitulations which provided privileges to Western powers have been a symbol for humiliation.⁷⁶ It can be argued that even the establishment of modern Turkey by Ataturk, a charismatic and visionary leader, could not fully outdo the humiliation resulting from the

⁷⁵ Lisal Anderson, Demystifying the Arab Spring, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2011, Vol 90, Issue 3, p.2. Alaa Al Aswany, *On the State of Egypt: What Caused the Revolution*, Eng: Jonathan Wright, Edinburgh, Canongate, 2011, p. 25.

⁷⁶ Fisher, Ochsenwald, op.cit, p.291-292.

fall of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁷ It can also be argued that the tragic fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Western occupation has been quite traumatic for the peoples of the Empire, mainly the Anatolian Turks. The defeat in the WWI, loss of lives of millions of Muslims starting from the Balkan Wars, Western occupation and the Greco-Turkish War can be said to have an effect on the collective memory of the Turks. However, Turks could not properly mourn their previous losses because of an extraordinary leader, Atatürk's strategy in a new nation building. At that time it was necessary to maintain a psychological, political and physical distance from the Arab countries as both parties only remembered -or chose to remember- the last 30 unpleasant years of their history together. However, Turkey failed to reconnect to the long lost Ottoman lands even after Atatürk. It can be argued that for a short time until the death of Atatürk, Turks were able to restore the long history of humiliation. However, successor administrations obliged to the West for all policies and acted as a security guard in the region to control the spread of Communism during the Cold War era. During the same time Turkey's bid for the European Union became a major issue in determining the policies where the Middle East was mostly ignored and unfortunately looked down upon. Despite a very long process Turkey's EU bid still remains unsolved. Due to the complicated relations with the EU and Western criticism Turkey has also felt humiliated. For almost 50 years Turks could not see the glory of the Atatürk era. Weak coalition governments, corruption and inflation rates also effected this humiliation. It seems that most Turks felt the need to be taken seriously, to be respected. To sum up, both Turks and the Arabs carried psychological wounds that were not healed.

Until the Arab Spring the Arab honor and pride was represented by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad crediting his anti-Israeli rhetoric and aim to gather all Muslims nations under Iranian leadership. In the meantime, becoming a bridge between the West and Muslim world Turkey's AK Party administration started the process of what could be called a historic reconciliation or rediscovery.⁷⁸ It would probably not be possible for other administrations to achieve this rapprochement because of the lack of trust from the Arab countries. It can be inferred that the Arab communities had a certain dislike of the modern Turkish Republic because of changing the Arabic alphabet –the Holy language of Islam- to Latin alphabet and the abolishment of the caliphate.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the AK Party's Islamic roots eased this perception in the Arab minds. As the Iranian government failed to respond to

⁷⁷ Dominique Moisi, *The Geopolitics of...*, p. 63.

⁷⁸ F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No.4, July/August 2007, p. 103.

⁷⁹ Ahmet Uysal, *Ortadoğu'da Türkiye Algısı: Mısır Örneği*, SDE Rapor, Ankara, Nisan 2011, p. 80.

the unexpected Arab Spring movements, Turkey with her ever growing soft power took the role of a regional influence by responding to the requests of the Arab street. It would not be an overstatement that Erdogan's "One Minute" frenzy in Davos and the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident upgraded Turkey's credit in the region as a true supporter of the Palestinian question. Unlike the Arab leaders, Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, openly took a stance against Israel's policies towards Palestine and became an international voice for Palestinian human rights. Therefore, Erdogan's image won the hearts and minds of the Arab communities.

As mentioned above, a humiliated Arab world showed signs of regression mainly due to the events of the 20th century. This regression could only be reversed by the support of a charismatic leadership. It can be suggested that because of the lack of a leadership in the Arab Spring movements and the increasing soft power of Turkey, the charismatic Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan has become a symbol to repair this humiliated identity.

Is Turkey a Role Model or Big Brother?

The grassroots movements dubbed as the Arab Spring is a revolt in a way that tries to replace the decades old humiliation with hope, dignity and honor.⁸⁰ The psychological wounds and humiliation of Arabs and Turks might have created an opportunity for Turkey during the Arab Spring. As the Turkish foreign policy rhetoric switched from a Cold War containment policy to a new rhetoric re-discovering and embracing the Middle East Turkish influence became more visible. For the last couple of years the AK Party administration has mastered the use of public diplomacy and creating public opinion in and outside the country.⁸¹ Increasing commercial ties through companies and cultural ties through NGO's and most importantly presenting the image of an ideal Turkey through TV series all became Turkey's soft power tools.⁸² It seems that Turkey became a point of attraction for its neighbors and Middle Eastern countries by setting an example of a state that is modern, prosperous, and considerably democratic yet, Muslim. This can be called the "Turkish Experience".⁸³ More importantly, Turkey's bid for the EU might have been a humiliating process for the Turks but it is rather viewed with admiration by the Middle Eastern countries where Turkey can be their only link to Europe,

⁸⁰ Emma Sky, "Arab Spring...American Fall?", *Perspectives*, Harvard International Review, Summer 2011, p.23.

⁸¹ For more on public diplomacy please see İbrahim Kalın, "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in Turkey", *Perceptions*, Vol XVI, No 3, 2011, pp.5-23.

⁸² Bülent Aras, "Turkey's Soft Power", *SETA*, April 14, 2009, <http://www.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=5489&q=turkey-s-soft-power>, retrieved: Jan 30, 2012.

⁸³ Mehmet Şahin, Tunus Olayları, Ortadoğu ve Türkiye Deneyimi, *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Şubat 2011, Sayı 26, p.13-14.

modernization, yet again with a Muslim identity. Additionally Arab and Turkish nationalism both seem to change its course which might have made this rapprochement more possible.

What Turkey has come to achieve mostly in the last 10-15 years through a more active foreign policy to re-connect with the Middle East can be also understood as the maturation of the Turkish identity. For a long time, the West or anything related to the Western world had a high status in Turkey. Yet today, Turkey seems to come to terms with her unique identity which a combination of modern Turkish identity incorporating both Middle Eastern and Western cultural characteristics and Muslim identity. This can be described as acknowledging that the modern Turkish identity is not totally separate but rather continuous in a sense that it also incorporates Ottoman identity.

Turkish social, political, cultural and economical experience has become an influence in the Middle Eastern countries in general. However, it is very crucial to note that Turkey's influence should not be exaggerated or blown out of proportion. It is probably in Turkey's best interest to call this influence "an inspiration" The major argument behind this is that a political discourse of "influence" might have negative impact on Arab countries. An influence might resonate a feeling of interference which then might invoke the emotions associated with the Ottomans.⁸⁴ Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu mentioned of a common destiny, history and future for Turkey and Syria. Davutoğlu's remark on Turkey and Africa or Syria having a "common destiny" is a bit too fanciful and stands on unreasonable grounds.⁸⁵ It is important to keep in mind that Turks and Arabs have had different histories which at times crossed paths. There are two sides of a story and two sides of history. In this regard, most Turks recall the Ottoman Empire with nostalgia, while some segments parts of the Arab society do not even want to hear about the Ottomans. Therefore, it is very important not to present a dominant image and use a pretentious rhetoric that might invoke negative feelings, but rather to be candid and become an inspiration. This means that Turkey must be aware of cultural differences and vulnerabilities while dealing with other nations especially those who were formerly under the Ottoman rule. For that reason, Turkey cannot risk the decline of her rising star in the region by acting like a big brother. Instead with

⁸⁴ Tarık Oğuzlu, Ortadoğu'da Demokratikleşme ve Türkiye Model Olabilir Mi Tartışması: 'Evet, Ama!', *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Mart 2011, Cilt 3, No 27, p.74; Yasin Aktay, Osmanlı'yı Okuyarak Türkiye'yi Anlamak, *Stratejik Düşünce*, Şubat 2011, pp.5-8.

⁸⁵ Davutoglu: Common Destiny, History and Future is Slogan of Turkey and Syria, *Today's Zaman*, Oct 13,2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-189784-102-davutoglu-common-destiny-history-and-future-is-slogan-of-turkey-and-syria.html>, retrieved: Jan 30, 2012; Turkey and Africa Share a Common Destiny, *AK Parti English*, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/haberler/turkey-and-africa-share-a-common-destiny/17512>, retrieved: Jan 30, 2012.

all the historical experience, Turkey should take the role as a key negotiator to sustain her role as a regional power promoting peace.

The historical humiliation of Turkey and eagerness to become a regional superpower seem to be intertwined in shaping Turkish perceptions towards the Middle East. Although neo-Ottomanism might not be a foreign policy objective, such a feeling is constantly being implied by domestic and foreign media. For instance the national press coverage of Erdogan's Africa visits, Time magazine cover of Prime Minister Erdogan, the Der Spiegel front page article on "Turbo State Turkey" and various other news boosting Turkish ego should carefully be managed. Such a boost should not overshadow Turkey's factual influence in the Middle East. Such domestic and international news might have an effect in creating a nostalgic neo-Ottomanism only in the minds of the Turkish public. Although at times such a boost in self-image and self-respect is necessary to maintain an identity it should not be a foreign policy discourse. Therefore, it is important for Turkey to grasp her factual influence and continue being an inspiration for those nations that have hopes to do better.

Conclusion

Emotions have almost no part in constructing foreign policy; however emotions do play a major role in persuading the public to follow those policies. Moisi describes the Arab psychology as drawn into "nostalgia", reminiscence of the glorious past. The same could be said for the Turks. Middle Eastern nations, most being Muslims have feelings associated with years long of humiliation either by Western hands or unfortunately by the hands of their own autocratic leaders, authorities. For a very long period, humiliated and devalued Muslims of the Middle East craved for a glory, a victory. Turkey, has demonstrated that economic, social and technological progress and that democracy is possible. In that sense Turkey represented the revenge of the 20th century Muslim humiliation. As a matter of fact Turkey has been in inspiration to the Muslim Middle East or what can be described as the aggrieved nations since becoming the third in 2002 World Cup Finals. It actually did not matter if Saudi Arabia lost if Turkey continued to win.⁸⁶ Therefore, the Arab Spring movement was a response to humiliation, a cry to take charge of the future. Turks as well had been for a long time craving for a success which has been exemplified in the charismatic leadership of Prime Minister Erdogan and proactive Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East/North Africa. Turkey's influence in the region has a dual psychological effect for the Turks and Arabs where Turkey is a candidate to restore the regional humiliation. As a matter of fact, Turkey is the most likely candidate to reverse the feelings of

⁸⁶ Can Dündar, "GS Şerefine Ateş Açan Tank", *Milliyet*, 10.19.2002, retrieved: Jan 30, 2012.

humiliation. However, regional and national differences in perceiving history should be kept in mind at all times. More importantly Turkish influence and Erdoğan's aura might diminish if the Arabs choose their own Arab Spring leader. Turkey can and should be able to grasp her proper role as an inspiration through non-coercive policies towards the Arab nations.

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