

SPECULATIVE UNDERGROUNDS: Oil's Absent Presence, Neo-imperial Nationalisms, and Earth Politics in Turkey

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A BLACK CAT IN A DARK ROOM

“Why does Turkey have so little petroleum when its neighbors possess some of the largest oil reserves in the world?” asked Murat, a seasoned exploration geologist employed at Turkey’s state-owned oil exploration and production company Turkish Petroleum (TPAO). Murat was speaking at a panel titled “The Future of Exploration and Production Fields in Southeastern Anatolia,” organized in the oil-producing eastern town of Adiyaman in October 2016. “That’s the question I always get from people when they learn my occupation. I’m sure other geologists and petroleum engineers in the room are also familiar with this,” Murat added. The audience, mostly composed of young TPAO employees and graduate petroleum and geological engineering students, smiled and nodded. Murat was referring to a series of questions constantly asked of petroleum geologists by Turkish people in everyday life. During my research between 2016 and 2018, I encountered similar questions as a non-geologist whenever I mentioned that I was investigating the social and political aspects of Turkish petroleum. “Is Turkey actually oil-rich?” “Is its oil hidden from the public?” “Is oil production being obstructed?” Such questions almost always proved affectively charged, with a sense of suspicion, loss, or desire accompanying them.

The panel formed part of a larger event co-sponsored by TPAO and the Turkish Chamber of Geological Engineers to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the first discovery of commercially viable petroleum in Turkey. I had initially planned to explore the intersections of petroleum exploration and extraction with military-colonial politics in Turkey's Kurdish-populated southeast. But crucial as those intersections might be, I soon realized they were not the entire story. I observed that the very meaning of petroleum differed in various scientific, political, and popular accounts in Turkey. Oil in Turkey, I soon realized, had an *absent presence* generative of a series of questions that occupied the everyday lives of Murat, his audience, and millions of others.

Figuring out what lay under the ground was not the only issue; geopolitical questions followed: To whom did that ground—and the oil resources that might lie under the ground—belong? Why had the underground of Turkey's territory proved so unyielding of oil, when its neighbors had enjoyed its abundance for a century? Where was the oil that remained undiscovered? Was it somehow hidden by sinister powers aiming to obstruct Turkey's development? It became apparent to me that uncertainties about what was under the ground were further linked to contemporary anxieties and desires of territorial belonging and geopolitics in Turkey; such uncertainties proved central to histories of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and nation-state formation.

For Murat, as a geologist, answers to such questions were linked to the geological properties of Turkey. On that day at the panel in Adıyaman, after a brief pause, he continued: "Well, the questions we encounter are not irrelevant, but I usually answer them with another question: How do you find a black cat in a dark room? This is what exploring oil in Turkey is like." People in the room sighed affirmingly. "Of course, we have *some* hydrocarbon reserves—about 300 million barrels of proven oil reserves—but those are minor compared to OPEC countries, some of which border us in the east and southeast," Murat added. Two young petroleum geologists sitting next to me chuckled. "Not exactly Iran or Iraq, huh?" one of them whispered to his friend.

Murat and his petroleum-geology-trained audience that day were primarily concerned with how, in Turkey, the thirty-billion-year-old geophysical and geochemical history of southeastern Anatolia had generated some of the world's most minor and most difficult-to-locate oil fields. Anatolia sits between three major tectonic plates that have been colliding for millions of years. This geophysical process has squeezed eastern Anatolia between the Eurasian and Arabian tectonic plates, with petroleum settling in small traps under the ground. Further, the quality of

Turkey's few existing oil deposits is relatively poor. Turkish Petroleum and other companies have drilled thousands of wells in the past, yet many did not prove economically feasible, leading to their decommissioning. Consequently, no significant oil discovery comparable to those in Iran or Iraq has occurred in Turkey. The year I attended Murat's talk, for example, Turkey's limited domestic oil production covered only 7 percent of its annual demand (MAPEG 2017).

If oil exploration in Turkey resembles finding a black cat in a dark room, for Murat, petroleum geology could not fully know the underground. The geologic, or the physical, material qualities and processes of the Earth itself, had a material quality beyond technoscientific attempts to grasp it. Despite technological advances in seismic modeling methods, for example, the subsoil, its workings, and history could not be fully known. Chronically faced with gaps in knowledge and the inability of mediating tools to fully capture the materiality of the underground, geologists reflexively liken themselves to interpretive social scientists and historians.¹ The resemblance between geological and other forms of interpretative reasoning reconfigures the underground into a rich terrain for a series of territorial and geopolitical speculations in Turkish public life. The fraught tectonic history of Anatolia, the indeterminate materiality of the underground here, and geology's inability to fully know the properties of the underground have given oil in Turkey its absent presence.²

In this article, I examine how oil's absent presence incites a series of speculations in Turkish public life, while simultaneously producing concrete geopolitical and affective outcomes in the present. In doing so, I trace widespread speculations regarding oil's alleged abundance and its obstructed production in Turkish public and political life. In such speculations, people often claim that oil wells are intentionally plugged by Turkish oil companies or that sinister Western powers are blocking oil exploration and production in Turkey. Murat, for instance, often complained about the countless calls and letters he received. In these communications, whom Murat called "concerned citizens" would come across petroleum seeps and claim that such traces of oil indicated a significant and undiscovered oil field in the area. Others insisted that oil companies had maliciously decommissioned wells despite containing plentiful petroleum. In situations like this, Murat would often find himself having to explain the difference between commercially viable oil and unrecoverable petroleum resources.³

I also focus on a rather specific speculation revolving around the centennial anniversary of an international treaty that founded the Republic of Turkey on July 24, 1923: the Treaty of Lausanne.⁴ According to a widespread theory that

circulated in Turkish public and political life during my fieldwork, the Treaty of Lausanne was going to expire on July 24, 2023, on the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the republic. Although no evidence points to the reality of such an event, many people in Turkey viewed it as an established fact. Once Lausanne expired, many believed, Turkey would have full sovereignty over its petroleum reserves.

As such, I bring together ethnographic research on two seemingly unrelated topics concerning contemporary Turkey: Uncertainties about what the underground contains and how it could not be rendered entirely knowable, on the one hand and, on the other, anxieties and desires around the never fully settled political borders on top of the ground. I argue that both are subject to endless modes of speculative reasonings, and propose the concept of the “speculative undergrounds” to make sense of the surprising resonance of these multilayered currents of geopolitical, territorial, and affective registers across the geologic that I found during fieldwork. I propose that an ethnographically grounded analysis of the speculative underground in Turkey can help us better understand the relationship between the geologic and the sociopolitical, more generally.

How do I conceptualize speculation? I discuss speculations about hidden or obstructed oil production that circulate in everyday chatter and regional and national media. Such speculations often stem from abandoned oil wells, visually observable oil seeps over the ground, and Turkey’s geographic proximity to large petroleum fields outside its borders. In these speculations made without clear-cut scientific evidence, or even despite it, people claim that oil is actually abundant under the ground and that Western powers have plugged oil wells to obstruct production. Speculations about Lausanne’s expiration and the subsequent reclamation of oil resources in Turkey constitute a reversal of [Mandana Limbert’s \(2010, 18\)](#) account of the dreamtime of oil in Oman, where official oil projections prompt the “constant anticipation of oil’s depletion in twenty years—an ever-deferred horizon.” Whereas the potentiality of Turkey’s future centers on the presence and or discovery of oil, Oman’s future is bound by its impending depletion.⁵

Further, speculations about the expiration of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 2023 harken back to anxieties and desires around territorial partition and nation-state formation in the aftermath of World War I. In this context, speculations about obstructed oil production also take on a new life, as they are co-opted by the Turkish state and utilized to reinterpret Turkey’s official imperial and national histories and to legitimize expansionist and irredentist politics in the present. At the end of World War I, with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, imperial

territories from Northern Thrace to the Arabian Peninsula, including oil-rich regions in present-day Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, were granted to other nation-states or became parts of “mandates” of Great Britain under the United Nations. While Lausanne delimited the boundaries between Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria, the question of the Mosul border remained unsettled until 1926, when the League of Nations awarded the province to Iraq.

Against this historical background, speculations about the expiration of Lausanne and its consequences coalesce with nationalist imaginaries of territorial loss, as well as with the neo-imperialist historical revisionism of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, which has popularized long-held Islamist arguments about the political significance of Lausanne in the 2010s. Such neo-imperialist geopolitical imaginaries reinterpret Lausanne as a defeat rather than a victory in Turkish nationalist memory. They signal toward a new territorial order in which Turkey might (re)attain its imperial might. In doing so, such imaginaries further legitimize contemporary irredentist and expansionist politics, as they did during the military operations that the Turkish armed forces carried out in oil-rich Mosul in 2016 and 2017.

The centennial of the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 2023, approached while I was completing this article. The Treaty of Lausanne did not expire. Yet the intertwining of territorial imaginaries and geopolitics in Turkish public and political life will likely persist after that date. Speculations about the expiration of Lausanne in July 2023 might be displaced by another historically significant date in neo-imperialist and nationalist mythmaking.⁶ Further, as the two devastating earthquakes that struck southeast Turkey in February 2023 revealed, speculative powers of the geologic will continue to shape social and political worlds beyond resource and energy politics in Turkey. Uncertainty about what lies under the ground—petroleum, fault lines, and more—will continue to be utilized by neo-imperialist or profit-hungry states and private entities. A geologically attuned anthropology is more relevant than ever today, not only in Turkey but also in other speculative (under)grounds where neo-imperial and colonial prospects of territorial control and extraction continue to shape social and political worlds.

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ABSENT PRESENCE: From Petroleum to the Geologic

At first glance, Turkey seems an unusual choice to study oil anthropologically. Turkey has limited oil reserves, and due to Anatolia’s geophysical setting, the materiality of existing oil deposits in Turkey are heavy and located in small deposits.

This situation contrasts with the now well-known tales of abundant crude oil. In petroleum-rich states, oil has been fetishized as a magical resource with enormous political power and geopolitical significance (Appel, Mason, and Watts 2015; Coronil 1997; Rogers 2015; Watts 2009). But oil was never successfully established as a smooth linkage between the nation's natural body and its political body in Turkey, unlike what happened in Venezuela or Russia, for example.

Yet despite the perceived deficit of oil reserves, the prospect of yet-to-be-discovered abundant oil fields has never lost popularity in Turkish political and public life. Since the start of oil prospecting in Turkey's eastern and southeastern provinces after the new Turkish state's founding in 1923, state-owned mineral and petroleum exploration companies have insisted on prospecting for more and larger oil deposits, despite little luck discovering large oil fields.⁷ International oil companies operating in Turkey shared the same fate, leading to increased scrutiny and suspicions about their intentions. Oil's absent presence has been central to Turkey's territorial and geopolitical projects and imaginaries, especially in relation to the Kurdish-populated southeast, where most of Turkey's oil reserves are located.⁸

Taking the absent-present materiality of oil seriously reveals not only how power is distributed among elites and state, or how resources are fetishized, as anthropologies of oil in petroleum-rich states have demonstrated (Coronil 1997; Rogers 2015; Watts 2009). It also attends to the productive powers of the speculative.⁹ Thinking about speculation anthropologically demands an investigation into how social and political life revolves not around *what is*, but what *may be* or *may have been* (Weszkalnys 2013, 2015). By examining the underground in Turkey through a lens of the speculative, this article extends beyond the parameters of an anthropology of presence (see Bessire 2014; Bond 2022; Gordillo 2014; Navaro 2020). In other words, I explore what geological matter does and what kinds of worlds it composes even in the absence of oil under the ground. Relatedly, I contend that it does not suffice to take petroleum as an object of analysis: an investigation of the speculative powers of the underground itself proves equally important. In doing so, we can grasp how speculative undergrounds in Turkey fuel territorial anxieties and desires in public and political life with concrete geopolitical effects in the present.

What, then, unites the spectrum of public and political speculations about oil's absent presence and the post-imperial nationalist desires that intersect with it is *the ground*, or the geologic. Speculative powers of the underground, and their concrete territorial and temporal effects on Turkish public and political life, speak to the importance of thinking/working with the geological in anthropology.¹⁰

Scholarship in anthropology, geography, and philosophy that takes the “stuff of politics seriously” (Braun and Whatmore 2010, ix) has investigated how the geological informs politics, and at the same time, how political and social worlds are constituted, limited, and unsettled by the Earth (see Bobbette and Donovan 2019; Clark 2011; Grosz, Yusoff, and Clark 2017; Povinelli 2016; Yusoff 2021). These works have pointed toward the importance of the geologic in the constitution of political and social life, and even argued that the distinction between life and non-life has been central to regimes of power (Povinelli 2016).

Despite this novel and significant body of work, ethnographic and ethno-historical accounts of how the geologic and politics relate to each other remain lacking, especially in non-Euro-American contexts.¹¹ Furthermore, although we have learned a great deal about how geology proved central to the workings of colonial and nationalist modes of power, such as the intersection of geology with racializing ideologies and anti-Blackness in settler-colonial contexts (Yusoff 2018) or technoscientific knowledge (Kinchy, Phadke, and Smith 2018), we still need empirical accounts of how relations between (under)grounds and world-historical events such as the end of World War I and so-called postcolonial nation-state formations have unfolded and shaped collective notions of history and subjectivity in the Global South.

Speculations about oil in Turkey then, are questions about the geologic as much as about post-imperial, nationalist anxieties around territorial loss and desires for territorial expansion. It is in this context where the ground—what’s under it and who exerts political claims over it—becomes a productive ground where multiple ethno-nationalist and neo-imperial notions of territorial belonging, loss, and desire play out. These notions have geopolitical, affective, and subjectifying effects. Only by recalibrating our analysis around the geological and its generative powers can we better understand how speculations about oil in Turkey are informed by both the indeterminacy of the underground and the political legacies of post-imperial collapse and nation-state formation that emerged after the First World War in Turkey.¹² In other words, a geologically attuned anthropology of oil in Turkey shows how world-historical events such as the Treaty of Lausanne continue to shape nationalist, neo-imperial, and irredentist history politics and affective investments in the present—fueled as they are by the speculative powers of the underground. It also reveals how these speculations shape contemporary geopolitics.

In what follows, I trace the political, territorial, and affective speculations that resonate across the geologic in Turkish public and political life. These are

elements from public chatter, media, geopolitical imaginaries, and foreign military policy that appear at first glance to have nothing to do with one another. But viewed from an ethnographic lens across multiple scales, debates about an international treaty signed at the end of World War I and whether oil exists under Turkey's territory cohere into one analytic field.

AN ABANDONED WELL

On a Saturday afternoon in June 2016, I joined Murat on a field trip. We spent a few minutes lurking around an abandoned oil well in the Kurdish-populated, oil-producing, southeastern province of Batman. Murat had brought me here to show me that the well was plugged with cement, and definitely *not* mercury. His demonstration served a specific purpose: Many people in Turkey believed that foreign oil companies plugged these decommissioned wells with the heavy and toxic substance of mercury to ensure they would never be opened again. "Why would using mercury instead of cement ever be reasonable? It's so expensive! Some people are nuts," he grumbled, as I walked around the abandoned well, taking pictures and dipping my fingers in the black goo that is a low-volume oil seep. "We should show the pictures you took to Hacı Mahmut, pictures of what you're seeing here; maybe then he'll believe me," Murat told me. I could see the dried layers of cement blocking the drill hole.

We had been at Hacı Mahmut's garden of fig trees the day before. Hacı was a seventy-year-old Kurdish man from a small village near Batman.¹³ He lived with his wife in a mudbrick house, just ten kilometers south of the abandoned well. He believed the well had been plugged with mercury some four decades ago by foreign oil companies. Rolling a cigarette in the garden as he sat on a three-legged stool, he told Murat and me that the underground was, in fact, "swarming with petroleum, but certain forces are hindering its extraction." Murat laughed. "You're right, Hacı," he said sarcastically. "No, not really. The abandoned well you mention is indeed one that Mobil *decommissioned* in 1975, but not because of ill intentions." He went on to explain that the company had capped the well either because it was no longer economically viable, or because it dried out. "No!" Hacı reacted. "I've seen it with my own eyes; oil has been leaking from that well." For Hacı, oil seeping from the pipe proved the presence of much more oil under the ground, waiting to come to the surface.

Murat went on to explain to Hacı that the seeps could stem from several different possibilities. Even if the seep had originated from the abandoned well, it did not mean that drilling or recommissioning the well would make sense

economically. “Our oil is too thick and heavy, too difficult and costly to extract and transport—it’s nothing like the gushing crude oil you see in the movies, Hacı,” Murat pointed out. Hacı was not convinced. Shaking his head, he mumbled: “Then how on earth is it possible that oil is so abundant just 150 kilometers south of here? I just don’t get that. There must be something going on.”

Such speculations about hidden or obstructed petroleum are extremely popular in Turkish public life. During my fieldwork, I observed many who shared Hacı’s views. For many, the proximity of one of the world’s largest oil fields in Iraq’s Mosul or Kirkuk itself gave proof to the idea that more oil was waiting to be discovered and drilled nearby, oil “hidden” by sinister powers: foreign oil companies, “the West,” and their domestic co-conspirators. Local and national media frequently amplified these speculations. Sensationalized headlines like “Hope of Oil Discovery,” “Mobil’s Abandoned Wells Leak Oil,” and “Citizens Demand: Unplug Our Future” continued to link petroleum seeps and abandoned wells to an anticipated yet obstructed future of oil discovery and wealth that oil’s absent presence fostered in contemporary Turkey.

Geologists and oil companies tried hard to refute these claims. Until 2019, for instance, the official website of the Turkish Petroleum Company had a “Frequently Asked Questions” section, mostly devoted to debunking similar speculations about hidden or obstructed oil.¹⁴ “Why does Turkey have no oil when its neighbors have the largest reserves in the world?” the page asked. “Is Turkey floating on a sea of petroleum?” Using a Q&A format, the website rejected speculations. It explained why Turkey had relatively poor oil resources despite neighboring rich oil fields due to geological factors: plate tectonics, the Arabian-Eurasian collision, and the formation of the Alpine-Himalayan Belt.¹⁵ This particular geological history and tectonic setting, the site explained in detail, left oil concentrated in small traps in Turkey. “If found commercially unviable or dried out during production,” the FAQ section noted, “petroleum companies decommission wells, and cover them with cement to prevent leakage. This is a perfectly normal process in the oil industry.” The site also contended that oil seeps did not always indicate substantial reserves.

However, such explanations do not end oil speculations in Turkish public life. Instead, despite geologists’ and petroleum engineers’ efforts, millions of people continue to believe that certain factions of the Turkish state, allied with multinational corporations and under pressure from foreign states, are trying to hide something.¹⁶ In 2016 and 2017, such speculations revolved more directly around the Treaty of Lausanne and its upcoming centennial in 2023.

AN EXPIRING TREATY

In 2011, the AKP government declared its grand “2023 Vision”—a list of ambitious economic growth goals to coincide with the centenary of the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 2023. According to this program, Turkey would become an economic powerhouse with a \$2 trillion economy (making it the world’s tenth-largest), a per capita income of \$25,000, and \$500 billion in exports—all by 2023. Energy security was to play a significant role in this renewed economic development plan. It included increasing Turkey’s capacity to generate power, commissioning three nuclear power plants as well as ambitious infrastructure and transportation projects. But according to widespread speculation, something much bigger was going to take place in 2023: The Treaty of Lausanne, which officialized Turkey as a sovereign state recognized by international states, was going to expire on its hundredth anniversary, on July 24, 2023.

The exact origins of the theory remain unknown, at least to me. Still, the idea picked up steam once the then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan started to comment on several public statements uttered by Turkish officials in 2021. In a ceremony celebrating the eighty-ninth anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne, for example, the rector of the University of Thrace in Edirne stated, “2023 has become a buzzword nowadays, but we must keep in mind that 2023 will mark the expiration of Lausanne, and we must all unite to protect our republic.” Since then, Erdoğan has continuously referred to the year 2023 and the Treaty of Lausanne in a cryptic, foreshadowing manner, as a relatively insignificant urban myth started to slowly grow into what its critics labeled a “conspiracy theory,” finding its way into public gossip as well as national TV shows and newspaper columns.

Speculations around Lausanne’s expiration were not entirely new. They occurred against a more extensive history of geopolitical shifts in Turkey and their interpretation of Turkey’s foundation in the aftermath of World War I. According to this collective historical narrative, Lausanne was directly juxtaposed with another, overturned treaty: The Treaty of Sèvres. Notorious in contemporary Turkish historical narrative because of its destructive consequences for the Ottoman Empire, Sèvres was signed following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, on August 10, 1920.¹⁷ Yet the Lausanne Conference saw Sèvres overturned and, on July 24, 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, designating the sovereign borders and territorial unity of modern Turkey.¹⁸ In the Turkish nationalist imaginary, Sèvres, became a historical event encapsulating the anxieties of territorial dismemberment in present-day Turkey (Bilgin 2012; Nefes 2021).¹⁹ What international relations scholars refer to as “the Sèvres Syndrome” continues to foster the

paranoia that Turkey is in imminent danger of the imposition of Sèvres, and thus, partition (Guida 2008; Gürpınar 2019). In contrast, secular and Kemalist historians of Turkey interpreted Lausanne as a diplomatic victory exercised on equal terms, in stark contrast to what other defeated parties faced at Versailles (Toprak 2003).

Turkish official historiography might have interpreted Lausanne as a victory and a timeless deed of peace, but countervailing actors in Turkey viewed Lausanne quite differently. Since at least the 1950s, Islamist/conservative thinkers in Turkey have produced a counternarrative that portrays Lausanne as a defeat. Beginning with the essays of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (under the pseudonym Detective X; *Dedektif X Bir* 1949, 1950), Islamist intellectuals have repeatedly described the Lausanne Treaty as a “mourning” (*matem*) (rather than a “holiday” (Coşkuner 1966); as a “defeat” (Atılhan 1964; Mısıroğlu 1971) and, more recently, as “worse than Sèvres” (Cuma 1993) and a “bill of imperialism” (Duygun 2007). For these intellectuals, Lausanne represented the eradication of the mighty Ottoman Empire, Islamic civilization’s territorial, economic, and ideological/moral loss against Christian Western imperialism, and the subsequent demotion of the New Turkey to an “unassuming third-rate country” (Gürpınar 2019, 35).

In the 2010s, what had traditionally constituted a relatively minor conservative/Islamist critique of the Treaty of Lausanne began to gain momentum. Although this was not new, with the neo-Ottomanist political ideology of the AKP and heightened territorial anxieties in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in 2017, speculations about the expiration of the Treaty of Lausanne acquired an extra layer. The topic proved immensely popular in national media. On *Mirrors of History*, a program airing on Show TV in 2017, a guest speaker (a man in his mid-fifties) introduced as a “history expert” recounted a “true story” involving İsmet İnönü, one of the co-founders of the Republic of Turkey: “Right after the delegations signed the Treaty of Lausanne,” he said in a bold, confident voice, “İnönü left the room, let out a sigh of relief, and declared, ‘We have earned another hundred years.’” For him, this anecdote proved that Lausanne would expire on its hundredth anniversary and that the Republic of Turkey was, in his words, “just a temporary state.” For him, this meant that after July 2023, Turkey’s future would be wide open, its territorial boundaries malleable.

Another speaker, this time a younger man introduced as a “national security expert,” in the same show argued that it did not matter if Lausanne did or did not have an expiration date. Like all treaties, he claimed, it would become obsolete if one of the parties rejected it—or if war were declared. In fact, he noted, almost

all the political treaties that had shaped the Middle East had come undone in the post–Cold War period. The infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement, which carved out Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, for instance, had been completely abandoned in the past decades. “Why not Lausanne as well?” he provocatively asked.

More respected social scientists reacted to such bold claims with caution and even fear in the following months. Respected historians rushed to TV programs to persuade the public that the treaty certainly *did not* have secret clauses or an expiration date. They reminded viewers that opening up Lausanne for discussion would be “extremely dangerous for Turkey.”²⁰ They asserted that “Lausanne is the title deed of the Republic of Turkey,” implying that discussions over the termination of Lausanne also meant putting the Turkish state’s sovereignty on the table—a “highly dangerous act.”²¹ But the cat was out of the bag. In 2019, a respected polling company reported that 48 percent of Turkish citizens believed that the Treaty of Lausanne would expire in July 2023 (KONDA 2018).

As the next section discusses, although such attempts at rewriting history are neither uniform nor complete, yet they produce concrete temporal and territorial politics in the present.

FROM HISTORICAL REVISIONISM TO IRREDENTISM

Speculations about the expiration of the Treaty of Lausanne create a politically exploitable narrative of post-imperial anxiety, territorial trauma, and the desire to recover “lost” oil. For its proponents, the Treaty of Lausanne’s potential expiration in July 2023 conjures up not only a future of oil abundance but also revised histories and possible futures of territorial expansion. The Islamist counternarratives surrounding Lausanne gained renewed attention in the early 2000s as the AKP rose to power. Embracing a populist ideology nostalgic for the Ottoman Empire, the AKP sought to reconfigure Turkey’s official history, particularly the significance and territorial implications of the Treaty of Lausanne. In this period, the long-held Islamist counternarratives about Lausanne attained newfound popularity. These entailed the popularization of the sentiments of defeat and the sense of an “unfinished business” once held by the Islamist intellectuals, leading to the emergence of the aforementioned “Lausanne Syndrome” (Drakoularakos 2021, Tziarras 2022). Described as neo-Ottomanism by scholars and journalists, this new political discourse involved the reconfiguration of Turkey’s recent history, especially the political significance of Lausanne.²² Was Lausanne a defeat or a victory? This question that the conservative/Islamist intellectual Kadir Mısıroğlu first posed in 1971 re-emerged with greater vigor.²³

In this ideological setting “alternative history” magazines in the 2010s proclaimed to uncover the obscured truths behind official historical accounts of Lausanne. These included the appearance of a number of titles investigating revisionist themes, including *Backdoors of History*, *Hidden History*, and *Deep History*. In these pseudoscientific historical magazines, key moments from modern Turkey’s history pertaining to questions of sovereignty and territory were met with scrutiny from the AKP-backed media, with Lausanne figuring prominently in the discussions. Central to these authors’ contention was the idea that Lausanne constituted a “conditional” agreement.²⁴

The most popular version of the conditional-approval thesis revolved around the issue of petroleum. According to this theory, it was only by giving up Mosul and, thus, the oil-rich Mesopotamian provinces once controlled by the Ottoman Empire that Mustafa Kemal and the founders of the republic managed to successfully convince the Allied powers to recognize Turkey’s sovereignty. This theory reversed conventional accounts of Turkish history by portraying the founders as pro-imperialist collaborators. Whereas it had formerly been the Kemalists who had accused Mehmet VI, the last Ottoman sultan, of being a pawn of the European imperial powers for agreeing to the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres, the neo-Ottoman revisionists of 2016 redirected this charge against the founders of the Turkish Republic.

Many of these narratives reappraised the Ottoman era as a period of grandeur, casting the emergence of the republic as submission to Europe, rather than an assertion of sovereign independence. Accordingly, they glorified the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), rather than Atatürk. The reason petroleum figured so prominently in this equation was Abdülhamid’s interest in the empire’s potential oil fields. After becoming aware of oil resources in the area, he transferred the title deeds of Mosul and Kirkuk to himself in 1890. In 2016, the property records of Mosul resurfaced, with TV news claiming that they had been “discovered,” proving that Mosul “still belongs to Turkey.” *Deep History*, a popular monthly magazine funded by sources close to the AKP government and President Erdoğan, often showed Sèvres, Lausanne, and Mosul on its covers, with sensational titles such as “We Took Peace, Surrendered Petroleum at Lausanne” (*Derin Tarih* 2016), “How Did We Give Mosul to the British?” (*Armağan* 2016), “The Title Deed of Mosul and Kirkuk Belongs to Abdülhamid II” (*Hülagü* 2017). According to these accounts, “the valuable and prolific oil reserves in Turkey’s southern and southeastern provinces had already been documented by Sultan Abdülhamid” (*Hülagü* 2017), but Lausanne had banned their exploitation. When Turkey would

finally be “freed from Lausanne’s constraining articles, it would want to follow the footsteps of the Ottomans.”



Figure 1. An image of Thomas Edward Lawrence with the caption “The end of 100-year Treaties” on the cover of the July 2015 *Derin Tarih* [Deep History] magazine. Next to Lawrence it reads, “No one guards Sykes-Picot anymore.”



Figure 2. The July 2016 *Derin Tarih* [Deep History] magazine cover depicts a French caricature of the Lausanne conference delegates signing the agreement with the caption: “In Lausanne, we got peace, gave away oil!”

Through a rewriting of imperial and national histories, a new approach to Turkish energy and territorial ambitions was born. In this period, neo-imperialist discourses in Turkish public life fired up speculations about Lausanne’s expiration and its aftermath, which undermined the significance of the Treaty of Lausanne. In doing so, they simultaneously legitimized Turkey’s military presence in Mosul, signaling that Mosul could be annexed into Turkey at some future date. Speculations over Mosul’s title deeds evoked an alternative future in which the Lausanne would be void and Mosul finally included in Turkey. This proved even more significant because the debates took place in 2016 and 2017, when Turkish military forces were carrying out illegal operations in Iraq and Syria.²⁵

Between the 1940s and 1970s, Islamist writers in Turkey often compared the territorial concessions (Cyprus, Mosul, Western Thrace, Aleppo) of Lausanne to the National Pact (*Misak-ı Milli*). The National Pact describes a set of six decisions made by the final term of the Ottoman Parliament in Istanbul on January 28,

1920, which outlined the irreducible borders of the Ottoman polity (İçduygu and Kaygusuz 2004). The Islamists repeatedly called for a revision of the treaty in favor of possible annexations. As I demonstrate in what follows, Erdoğan frequently evoked the territorial expansionist and irredentist imaginary that the National Pact held in the Turkish collective historical imaginary.

During a speech in 2016, Erdoğan declared, “July 24 is Turkey’s second National War of Independence. In 1920, they showed us the Sèvres card and made us settle for Lausanne. Then some people tried to sell Lausanne to us as a victory.”²⁶ In another speech, he claimed that Turkey could not remain passive regarding Mosul: “They are claiming that Turkey should not enter Mosul. How can I not?” He continued: “I have a 350-km common border with Iraq, and this border is under threat. We will be part of the operation, and we will be at the table. Our non-involvement is out of the question. Why? Because there is a history here for us. They can read the National Pact if they wish and learn our past from there” (Erdoğan 2016). In the following months, Erdoğan would continue to assert that “Lausanne should be modernized” (Smith 2017). These statements alarmed Turkey’s neighbors, as Erdoğan’s comments came when Turkey was preparing to carry out multiple military operations in the Middle East. Already disapproving of the presence of Turkish troops in Mosul, both the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people reacted harshly to his message. The then-prime minister of Iraq, Haider Al-Abadi warned against a Turkish occupation of Iraq.

In raising the specter of the National Pact of 1920, Erdoğan’s statements not only served to undermine the significance of the Treaty of Lausanne but also to legitimize Turkey’s military presence in Mosul, signaling a possible annexation at a future date. Mosul’s fate could be directly affected by a revision of Lausanne for the following reasons: In securing the borders of contemporary Turkey, the cartographic imaginary of Lausanne corresponded almost perfectly to the borders outlined in the National Pact. Yet the oil-rich province of Mosul, occupied by Britain at the time, proved an important exception. While the National Pact had included Mosul within Turkey’s borders, the Treaty of Lausanne left it out—until its inclusion in Iraq in 1926.

The pro-AKP critics of Lausanne present the unrealized cartographic imaginary of the National Pact as a popular rival to the former. Since the borders of the National Pact are vaguely defined, they embed a sense of imperial loss—as well as a desire for territorial expansion. Further, since it is a document produced by the final Ottoman Parliament, and not by the Mustafa Kemal–led new government in Ankara, the National Pact fits neatly within the neo-Ottomanist narrative. All

three aspects of the National Pact were embedded in another speech that Erdoğan made in 2016. Claiming that the Turkish people were not happy with Turkey's current borders, he declared that as a result of the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey's size "shrunk from 2,500,000 km² to 780,000 km² in only nine years." In making this claim, Erdoğan falsely equated the Treaty of Lausanne with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. "Those who are trying to imprison Turkey in a vicious circle since 1923 wish to erase our thousand-year history in this region," Erdoğan added (Erdoğan 2016).

Against the backdrop of these irredentist statements the Turkish military launched a campaign in Iraq during the Battle of Mosul on October 23, 2016. The attack aimed to capture the city of Mosul from ISIS, which had seized it in June 2014 (*Al Jazeera* 2016). Following the operation, public debates started to revolve around Turkey's "historic rights" in Mosul. Talk show commentators claimed that the National Pact was "Turkey's Magna Carta" declared by the "heroic and patriotic Ottoman Parliament in 1920 during the National War for Independence." Maps of the Ottoman Empire from different periods circulated on TV programs, with anchors comparing them to the current borders of Turkey. Graphic illustrations juxtaposed the two maps, making it clear that while the National Pact placed Mosul inside Turkey's national borders, the Lausanne left it out. These debates and images signaled the Treaty of Lausanne as a defeat. In doing so, speculations around Lausanne's expiration helped rewrite national and imperial histories and thus reopened for debate existing territorial boundaries fixed in international law.

As I demonstrate in the next section, these speculations also inform political subjectivities in Turkey.

AFFECTIVE-POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES

In January 2017, I had a conversation with Akif, a twenty-six-year-old security guard at a university campus in Istanbul. Once I told him about my research on the cultural and political aspects of oil exploration and extraction in Turkey, he immediately presumed I was investigating what he believed to be the expiration of Lausanne. "We'll finally be able to control our underground resources in July 2023!" he exclaimed. I countered him by saying, "As far as I know, Lausanne does not have an expiration date." He met my words with laughter. "Of course, none of the official sources will tell you that. There are secret clauses in the treaty. And you can't find them, because they're secret!" he confidently countered. "What will happen once Lausanne expires?" I asked. "We will extract our oil, our boron, and other valuable resources. We will rise," he responded.

It became immediately evident to me that Akif was a fervent AKP and Erdoğan supporter. For him, the government had no fault in Turkey's current economic difficulties. Instead, they resulted from the constraints that Lausanne had placed on the country. "Our president is doing everything he can, while the whole world is against him and Turkey. We must be patient until 2023 and not lose our faith in him. Our state has been preparing for that time. The moment Lausanne expires, we will take hold of our resources again. We will prosper," Akif added. "What will that mean for you?" I followed up. "I'll hold my head up high, as our ancestors did. It'll come true; you'll see. All those countries requiring visas for our passports will line up in the visa queue to be able to enter Turkey. The tide will turn."

Akif's suspicions about hidden oil, like those propagated by the AKP and its extensions in the media, coincide with desires for neo-imperial expansion and irredentism in Turkish public life. They are fueled by the indeterminacy of oil, and the historical revisionism of the AKP, which has popularized long-held Islamist arguments about the significance of Lausanne. Such geopolitical imaginaries reinterpret Lausanne as a defeat rather than a victory, and challenge Turkey's current borders, aspiring to a new territorial order in which Turkey (re)attains the imperial might it is once believed to have held. Yet not everyone endorses this theory and the historical revisions attached to it—an important point that calls attention to the differentiated subjectivities and modes of citizenship in current Turkey.

Murat, in sharp contrast to the views of Akif, thought the speculations about Lausanne's expiration complete nonsense. He felt certain that Turkey's tectonic structure rendered the prospect of discovering major onshore oil reserves quite low. Yet he also noted that Turkey lacked abundant reserves for political as well as geological reasons. "When the borders were set during the Lausanne Conference, the West knew that they weren't giving us any rich oil fields. They already had intel from their geologists who had surveyed the area around the current Iraq-Turkey border." For Murat, then, speculations about 2023 seemed partially correct, but he didn't have any desire for a revision of Lausanne. What mattered to him was that Lausanne was a peace treaty that ensured the territorial integrity of Turkey, at the time threatened by dissolution and oblivion. "We have to accept what we conceded, and we have to hold on to what we preserved," he told me. Plus, maybe it was a good thing that Turkey had "lost" Mosul and other rich oil fields: "We can't forget that the wealth brought by oil is not necessarily happiness and prosperity. When you think about it, we might actually have been lucky, avoiding the oil curse. Because having rich resources also makes you a target of imperialist and

colonialist powers.” For Murat, one had to come to terms with the extent of one’s power sometimes, as “one might go farther and fare worse.”

Hacı Mahmut, the elderly Kurdish villager from Batman who had expressed his suspicions about abandoned oil wells to me earlier, also had different ideas about what the oil wells and the seeps meant. A few months after our first encounter, I paid another visit to Hacı. This time, I wasn’t accompanied by the state-owned oil company’s geologists. I asked him about speculations about Lausanne’s expiration in 2023. He laughed and shrugged his shoulders. “What difference does it make?” he asked, and added: “We Kurds have been oppressed by the republic, but also under the Ottoman Empire.” He was pessimistic: “I know I am an uneducated man. But if Lausanne is going to expire, what will it mean for us Kurds? Does it mean that the promises made to the Kurdish people will be fulfilled? I don’t think so. We have always been pawns in the eyes of these Western powers. No expiration will change that.” Hacı shared the neo-Ottomanists’ anti-Westernism, but he wasn’t proposing counter-imperialism. The Kurdish people, he thought, were played by both powers, and used as a pawn in imperial geopolitical agreements and territorial agreements. Sèvres, which continues to haunt Turkish historical memory, was in fact a failed promise for the Kurdish people, Hacı Mahmut implied; and it was Lausanne itself that marked a territorial and political sense of loss and the crushing of ideals of self-determination.

A few months later, I spoke with Hacı’s son, Firat.²⁷ He had a different approach to thinking about the future. Firat and I met in a café in Batman. Firat worked at TPAO’s drilling sites as a technician, making his father proud. In Firat’s interpretation, the Treaty of Lausanne was responsible for scattering Kurds across four states—Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and making the Kurdish people the largest stateless population on the planet. Lausanne, for him, was a colonial, imperialist scramble. “In 1923, our right to self-determination was sacrificed,” he murmured, as we sipped tea at a café located in TPAO’s company town. For Firat, Erdoğan’s efforts to revise Lausanne constituted another imperialist attempt to further Turkey’s territorial aspirations in the region. But when I asked him if he agreed with those who criticized attempts to revise Lausanne, he disagreed: “No, what I’m saying is that we should revise Lausanne; not the Turkish state, not a European colonizer power, but we, the people of Turkey and Kurdistan. We should all sit down and ask each other where and how we want to live. The Kurds deserve to be heard. Our aspirations need to be honored. You know what? The legendary Ottoman Empire collapsed after six hundred years. The American Empire? Collapsing in slow motion. Nothing is forever. TC is not forever either.”²⁸

EARTH POLITICS OTHERWISE

With its excessive materiality and its unknowability by petroleum geology and geologists, the underground becomes a literal ground that generates an array of speculations in Turkish public life. Here, the indeterminacy of the underground and the absent present materiality of oil tangle with ongoing geopolitical and affective legacies of the end of World War I, imperial dissolution, and nation-state building. Coupled with omnipresent fears of territorial dismemberment that continue to haunt the political present in Turkey, the speculative underground legitimizes neo-imperial desires and politics of territorial expansion that aim to re-attain lost imperial mastery through territorial and temporal fixes in the present. In doing so, speculative undergrounds in Turkey continue to shape anticipatory futures of oil wealth and rearrange national pasts and foundational cartographic imaginaries.

We can therefore understand speculations about the expiration of the Treaty of Lausanne and the subsequent fate of Turkish oil as Earth politics in the service of neo-imperial and ethno-nationalist anxieties and aspirations in Turkish public and political life.²⁹ They are diagnostic of the contingency at the heart of the “nomos of the of the earth” (Schmitt 2003)—*earth* or *terra* taken in a twofold meaning: as the political space where political conflicts over territory, sovereignty, and capitalization take place; and, as the excessive materiality of the forces of the Earth. As discourses that both react to the political, economic, temporal, and territorial arrangements on Earth *and* those that attempt to reshuffle them, such speculations can be understood as attempts to exert or regain control and sovereignty over the subsurface and surface, as well as power-desiring attempts to redesign existing geopolitical orders. In return, they generate concrete geopolitical effects as they are further mobilized by the Turkish government as a tool for historical revisionism. Further, as the ongoing Turkish occupation of parts of northern Iraq and northern Syria (or Southern Kurdistan) demonstrates, they also authorize irredentist politics in a period of global power crises and emergent neo-imperial politics.³⁰

To close, I return to more speculative questions pervasive in Turkey, ones that hold implications for anthropology and political theory more broadly. The notion of *speculative undergrounds* helps us see just how malleable international agreements and territorial orders in the post-imperial world might be. The political futures that speculative undergrounds foreclose and/or render possible can no longer be cordoned off from anthropological inquiry. A geological anthropology (Oguz 2020) can be put in the service of unsettling dominant worldviews of geopolitics (Last 2015) that characterize territorial politics in Turkey and beyond. These

worldviews are often state-centric; they naturalize ethno-nationalist borders. In other words, it might be time to take seriously the geopolitical praxis at the heart of territorial and oil-related speculations in Turkey. Things can be different: material and territorial arrangements, notions of time and temporality, political subjectivities and desires can be otherwise. Yet as I have demonstrated in this article, in contemporary Turkey, this “otherwise” is in the service of neo-imperialist and ethno-nationalist politics that negate the ongoing layers of violence of the new imperial order created by the Treaty of Lausanne.

How might an anti-nationalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial Earth politics otherwise reverse the power-hungry political ends of dominant forms of speculative thinking in Turkey and beyond? In speculating about such futures, I join thinkers in Black and Indigenous studies to suggest, here from the problem space of nostalgic imperialism, a shift toward a radical Earth politics of emancipation and justice. In the homelands of Armenians, Kurds, Turks, Yazidis, and Assyrians where my ethnographic fieldwork is situated, such a praxis is necessarily both contradictory and pluralistic. As Firat reminded me, however, it can be animated by an attunement to the contingency of futures in which contemporary national, colonial, and international territorial orders—such as those forged by Versailles, Lausanne, Sykes-Picot, and others—might cease to exist and be rearranged against *both* ethno-nationalist and neo-imperialist worldviews.

ABSTRACT

The fraught tectonic history of Anatolia has given oil in Turkey an absent presence. In this article, I examine how oil's absent presence produces a series of speculations in Turkish public life regarding oil's alleged abundance and its obstructed production. In particular, I trace widespread speculations that claim that the Treaty of Lausanne, which founded Turkey in 1923, will expire on its centennial anniversary in July 2023. I argue that speculations about the expiration of Lausanne harken back to both anxieties around territorial partition and neo-imperial desires of expansion in contemporary Turkey. Such speculations are further utilized by the AKP government to reinterpret Turkey's history and to legitimize expansionist and irredentist politics in the present. In this context the ground—what's under it and who exerts political claims over it—becomes a productive zone in which multiple ethno-nationalist and imperialist notions of territorial belonging, loss, and desire are played out. I conclude that by recalibrating anthropological analyses around the generative powers of the geological, we can better understand how the indeterminacy of the underground entwines with the political legacies of post-imperial collapse and nation-state formation that emerged in the aftermath of World War I. [resources; geology; underground;

speculation; territorial politics; geopolitics; Turkey; politics of history; politics of nature]

NOTES

1. [Robert Frodeman \(1995\)](#), for example, argues that geology is a historical and interpretative science. In his account of the Schlumberger Company's oil exploration activities between 1920 and 1940, [Geoffrey Bowker \(1994\)](#) likens geophysics to medicine, another science of the particular that derives its data and techniques from individual cases (compare [Günel 2019](#), 170). [Gökçe Günel \(2019](#), 168) writes about the “geologists’ belief in the ultimate unrepresentability or unknowability” of the Earth’s subsurface.
2. For a more STS-framed discussion of absent presence in relation to oil shales and resource making, see [Kama 2021](#). Also see [Oguz 2023b](#), my earlier ethnographic account of oil’s absent presence in Turkey.
3. In petroleum engineering, unrecoverable may become recoverable resources in the future as commercial circumstances change (such as oil prices), technological developments occur, or additional data are acquired ([Society of Petroleum Engineers 2000](#)).
4. After its defeat in World War I, the Ottoman Empire was faced with the Treaty of Sèvres in 1919, though it was not ratified. Signed between Turkey and the Allied powers following an eleven-week conference in Switzerland, the Treaty of Lausanne triggered population exchanges that forcefully displaced 1.5 million people from their homelands and established a new imperial order in the region in the aftermath of World War I ([Conlin and Ozavci 2023](#)).
5. [Mandana Limbert’s \(2015\)](#) more recent observations suggest an unexpected alignment of Omani and Turkish speculations over oil. Interventions to enhance accuracy in oil forecasting in Oman have paradoxically given rise to suspicions about hidden oil. Consequentially, the future is no longer understood as bleak, though coupled with even greater mistrust of the oil industry and expectations of hidden truths, corruption, and conspiracy. Also see [Anna Szolucha \(2021\)](#) for an account of conspiracies around shale gas exploration in Poland and the United Kingdom.
6. Such as 2053, which is the 600th anniversary of the occupation/conquest of Constantinople/Istanbul by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II; or 2071, which is the 1000th anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert/Malazgirt fought between the Byzantine and the Seljuk empires, which, in the Turkish nationalist imaginary, marks the beginning of Anatolia’s Turkification.
7. Turkey has recently discovered offshore gas fields in the Black Sea. Although President Erdoğan in 2022 ([Reuters 2022](#)) claimed that the discovery amounts to 710 billion cubic meters, no independent audit of total and recoverable gas has been made available to the public.
8. The majority of Turkey’s domestic oil is extracted in Turkey’s Kurdish southeast, a region characterized by armed conflict, emergency rule, and military occupation in the past century. Elsewhere I discuss how oil continues to haunt social and political landscapes in Turkey, shaping geopolitical imaginaries and even functioning as a technology of governance in Turkey’s majority-Kurdish regions ([Oguz 2023a](#)).
9. For important approaches to the radical potentials of speculation in Black and Indigenous studies, see [Brown 2021](#), [Carrington 2016](#), [Commander 2017](#), [Goffe 2022](#), [Rifkin 2019](#), and [Schalk 2018](#).
10. See [Oguz 2020](#) for an earlier conceptualization of “geological anthropology.”
11. For recent examples, see [Bobbette 2023](#), [d’Avignon 2022](#); [Marston and Himley 2021](#), and [Oguz 2021](#).
12. The Treaty of Versailles is an overlooked watershed moment in global history that still “haunts the world” ([Nucho 2021](#)).
13. Village name obscured for anonymity.

14. The web page is no longer active, but parts of the essay can be read at Tayland Efeoğlu, “Petrol Efsaneleri” [Petroleum Legends], *Jeofizik Bulteni* (2009), https://www.jeofizik.org.tr/resimler/ekler/64a82d4f8febf98_ek.pdf?dergi=29
15. The website is completely rebuilt now in line with a global corporation aesthetic, and this page no longer exists.
16. As Limbert (2015), Laura Kunreuther (2014), William Mazzarella (2006), and Todd Sanders and Harry West (2003) have pointed out in different ways, it is the very claim to transparency that produces expectations of conspiracy in political life.
17. Sèvres warranted the dissolution of its army and the cession of considerable territory, including the formation of an independent Armenian state, a possible autonomous Kurdistan, and a Greek presence in eastern Thrace and on the Anatolian west coast, as well as Greek control over the Aegean islands commanding the Dardanelles (Helmreich 1974).
18. In contrast to the Treaty of Sèvres, the Treaty of Lausanne abandoned Kurdish and Armenian demands for self-determination. Nevertheless, the Treaty of Lausanne left the fate of the oil-rich region of Mosul (included in the National Pact) undecided. In 1924, the League of Nations assembled to determine the fate of Mosul, deciding that it would remain part of Iraq, despite Turkish claims over it (Conlin 2020).
19. Also see Franck Billé’s (2016) discussion of “cartographic anxieties.”
20. Author’s personal notes.
21. Author’s personal notes.
22. See Alev Çinar and Hakki Taş (2017), Murat Ergin and Yağmur Karakaya (2017), Yağmur Karakaya (2020), Öykü Potuoğlu-Cook (2006), Nagehan Tokdoğan (2018), Jeremy Walton (2010), Bilge Yabancı (2020), and M. Hakan Yavuz (2020) for anthropological, sociological, and historical treatments of neo-Ottomanism and “Ottomania” in contemporary Turkey.
23. The liberal revisionist historiography of the 1990s often encouraged such currents. It criticized the Kemalist historiography of the former period that had discredited almost every aspect of Ottoman modernization and assumed a radical rupture between the empire and the republic.
24. *Deep History* also argued that the British approved Lausanne only after the abolishment of the Islamic Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a claim that also had roots in the conservative/Islamist counternarrative about Lausanne circulating from the 1950s to the present (Armağan 2016).
25. Despite claiming to target ISIS forces, Turkey’s main concern in these operations was to obstruct the potential formation of a Kurdish state south of its borders and the alleged territorial threat this would pose to Turkey.
26. Author’s personal notes.
27. Translates as “Euphrates,” as in the Euphrates River.
28. “TC” is a colloquial (and often derogatory) abbreviation for the Republic of Turkey.
29. Also see the discussion in Whittington and Oğuz (2023) of “Earth as praxis” for a critical account of how earthly materialities are linked to repressive and liberatory forms of power and politics.
30. Such as Russian neo-imperial aspirations (see Kassymbekova and Marat 2022).

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