

# From Coups that Silence *Ezan*-s to *Ezan*-s that Silence Coups!: Sonic Resistance to the 2016 Turkish Military Coup

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At around 1 a.m. Turkish time on July 16, 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan joined a live CNN Türk broadcast via the anchor's smartphone, FaceTiming in from an unknown location. During the preceding hours, a military faction calling itself the "Peace at Home Council" had initiated a coup, taking control of strategic sites in Istanbul, sonically blasting cities with low-flying jets, and issuing an announcement over the state media outlet TRT (ABC haber 2016). From the smartphone screen, Erdoğan denounced the coup, insisting that the coup plotters would "pay dearly" (*çok ağır ödeyecekler*) and issuing a call to viewers to resist the coup: "I am making a call to my nation: I invite our entire Turkish nation to our city squares and airports, and as a nation let's gather at the squares and airports" (Just Watch 2016).

Some 6000 miles away, in Texas, I heard Erdoğan's call in real time. Switching anxiously between Turkish and international media outlets, I watched the forced abandonment of the CNN Türk news desk, heard bombs hit the Turkish Parliament during an interview given from inside the building, and listened to Turkish officials try to reassure the public that the government was still in control. Over the course of his five-minute FaceTime call, President Erdoğan had forcefully repeated several times his vow to punish the coup plotters and his call for Turkish citizens to take to the streets, but from my vantage point—and as most Turks would likely agree—he appeared a leader rapidly losing his grip on power.

Within three hours, however, President Erdoğan had landed at Istanbul's Atatürk International Airport and addressed the world in a televised speech, effectively signaling that the coup attempt had failed (Arango and Yeginsu 2016). How was such a dramatic shift possible? Following ethnomusicologists Denis Gill (2016) and Evrim Hikmet Ögüt (2016), I contend that sound profoundly shaped the course of the coup attempt. After President Erdoğan issued his call via FaceTime for the Turkish nation to take to the squares, imams and muezzins in mosques all over Turkey powerfully echoed his words with Islamic calls to prayer—specifically the *ezan* and *sela* calls—and spoken directions urging Turkish citizens to take to the squares and "defend democracy." These calls prompted Turkish citizens to

pour out of their homes and resist the coup attempt, with 290 people killed and more than 1,400 injured over the course of the ultimately successful resistance to the coup during the early hours of July 16 (McKenzie and Sanchez 2016). I argue that during the early hours of July 16 Islamic calls to prayer sonically forged Turkish citizens into a collectivized body politic that asserted its opposition to the coup by taking control of urban streets and squares.

My first goal in this article is to draw on ethnomusicological theories of collectivized music making to examine the process by which Islamic calls to prayer helped forge that body politic. I turn to YouTube videos and journalistic accounts in order to hone in on the coup resistance as it unfolded in real time. In so doing, I consider the ways in which online platforms themselves become sites for ongoing resistance and political subject formation. At the same time, these platforms open up a space for voices of skepticism amidst overwhelming public denunciation of the coup and support for President Erdoğan, and thus offer a glimpse of alternative reactions to the coup and its resistance.

The occupation of urban streets and squares inspired by calls to prayer continued over the weeks following the coup attempt through nightly “Democracy Vigils” (*Demokrasi Nöbetleri*) held in urban squares leading up to a massive August 7 “Democracy and Martyrs Meeting” (*Demokrasi ve Şehitler Mitingi*) in Istanbul. My second goal is to demonstrate that these nightly gatherings harnessed and extended the sonically forged collective effervescence of the immediate coup aftermath (Durkheim 1995), embedding the sounds and collective experience of a new, transformed Turkey into the stone and concrete of urban streets and squares. As these urban streets and squares were laden with new sounds, new associations, and new experiences, they were transformed from spaces that had birthed the secularist Turkish Republic to spaces where a new, neo-Ottoman Turkey emerged, transforming the Turkish public sphere in the process.

The urban soundscape in Turkey has long been the site of ideological conflict, but control has more often come from above than below. As this article’s title indicates, the sonic resistance to the July 15 coup marks an unprecedented turning of the sonic tables relative to the 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997 coups in Turkey orchestrated by the Turkish military, which for much of the twentieth century considered itself the guardian of secularist Kemalism (Ahmad 1993; Zürcher 2004). For example, as part of a project of national identity formation, during the 1930s Kemalist elites attempted careful manipulation of the urban soundscape—especially in the new Republican showcase Ankara—which was to be marked sonically more by the sounds of military parades and symphonic concerts than Turkish art music and Islamic calls to prayer (Bartsch 2011; Değirmenci 2006;

O’Connell 2000; Azak 2010). Upon state directive, moreover, the call to prayer was given in Turkish during the period from 1932 to 1950 so that, where it was clearly audible, it marked a particular brand of Turkish Islam distinct from perceived Ottoman and Arab backwardness (Azak 2010). According to Martin Stokes’s (1992) account, this urban showcase was shattered from the 1960s on by the sounds of the popular Arabesk genre, which met with swift denunciation from Kemalist elites for its perceived associations with Arab fatalism and mushrooming urban shantytowns populated by rural migrants. During the same period, violent street clashes between Leftist and Rightist youth groups paved the road to the 1980 military coup. During the 2013 Gezi Park protests triggered by President Erdoğan’s plan to replace a central Istanbul park with a neo-Ottoman barracks turned shopping mall, resistance to the allegedly heavy-handed tactics of Erdoğan’s government was given sonic support by the “Gezi Park Philharmonic,” touring pianist Davide Martello (Brumfield 2013), and local residents’ banging on pots and pans (Seeman 2015). In short, where prior coups brought a military-imposed silence, where urban Kemalist elites previously asserted control over urban soundscapes, and where the Gezi events pitted civilians against the civilian government, in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt a broad range of civilians brought together by Islamic calls to prayer defended the civilian government against a military coup. This unprecedented convergence of sonic, social, and political forces parallels and at the same time shapes an epochal shift in Turkish Republican politics in which segments of society formerly left out of the national dialogue raise their voices together with the country’s imams and muezzins.

The use of imams, muezzins, and Islamic calls to prayer to foment resistance was not unprecedented, however, in the territory that constitutes modern-day Turkey. Nor was this the first case in which social media facilitated large-scale protest. As Denise Gill (2016) has noted, *sela* and *ezan* were used to call Ottoman Muslims to arms during the World War I Allied siege of Gallipoli and during the Greek siege of Izmir during the Turkish War of Independence. These events—which loom large in the Turkish Republican founding narrative that still resonates with many Kemalist Turks (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Özyürek 2006; White 2014)—now form a historical parallel with the resistance to the 2016 coup attempt for Erdoğan’s supporters. Elsewhere in the Middle East during the twenty-first century, moreover, social media was crucial to the Arab Spring protests (Brown, Guskin, and Mitchell 2012). Thus, though the nationwide coordination of Islamic calls to prayer through FaceTime and text messaging on the night of the coup attempt was unprecedented, there *was* a precedent for the use

of calls to prayer to foment resistance in Turkey's Ottoman past and for using social media to organize resistance in the contemporary Middle East. Erdoğan and his followers have drawn strategically on these precedents to imagine a New Turkey rooted in the distant Ottoman past rather than the immediate Republican past, much as the previous "new Turkey" founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rejected its immediate Ottoman past in favor of an ancient Turkic one (Lewis 1999).

### Methodological Hybridity

The fact that I was able to follow the coup attempt in real time while perched anxiously on the edge of my sofa 6,000 miles away exemplifies a truly unprecedented aspect of resistance to the 2016 coup attempt: the hybrid virtual-physical sphere in which it played out. As in past coups, the military faction leading the 2016 coup dutifully took control over the state media outlet TRT, but they neglected to account for the numerous other outlets in Turkey's burgeoning twenty-first century media market. Thus, though separated by an ocean, I followed developments in real time alongside Turkish citizens, even FaceTiming family in Ankara who were similarly monitoring the situation from home. Echoing this virtual-physical hybridity methodologically, in this article I extend my virtual view from the couch in Texas into physical urban spaces in Turkey occupied by sonically collectivized resistance through analysis of online media and videos. Thus, one of my primary methodological goals in this article is to illustrate a case of ethnomusicological research conducted in real time using online media. Moreover, these online platforms themselves become sites at which Turkish citizens revisit coup resistance and continue to construct their individual and collective political subjectivities, a process to which online comments sections give access (Cooley, Meizel, and Syed 2008).

It must be noted, however, that this method of data collection can only provide a limited view into the role of sound in the coup attempt. Online media and YouTube videos are subject to change, deletion, and censorship—particularly in Erdoğan's post-coup Turkey. The range of video of the coup and its aftermath uploaded to YouTube is necessarily constrained by the segment of the Turkish population filming and uploading video to this platform. And not to be forgotten is the fact that search algorithms on the internet platforms that I employ present me with material filtered along the previous paths that I have trodden across the internet. But these caveats arguably constitute merely the reappearance in a novel setting of the inherently limited subject position from which any ethnographic inquiry is necessarily conducted (Clifford and Marcus 1986). As a Texas-born ethnomusicology student whose father hails from Ankara, I bring a

particularly positioned perspective to this inquiry whether I am seated on the couch in Texas or standing in the square in Turkey. Thus, I propose, as in any ethnographic study, that the data-collection methods employed in this article—detailed further below—are intended to give a limited opening rather than a conclusive ending to inquiry.

### Examining Islamic and Urban Soundscapes

A number of scholars have engaged with the sonic dimensions of social life in the Islamicate world, often focusing on contested sonic negotiation of urban public space. Most significant for this article, anthropologist Charles Hirschkind examines resistance to state-promulgated secularism in Cairo by Islamic bodies formed through what he calls ethical “sedimentation”—the shaping of a pious self through the “affective, kinesthetic, and gestural” practice of listening to cassette sermons (2006, 28). Other publications have focused explicitly on Islamic calls to prayer in urban spaces. For example, John Eade (1996) and Regula Qureshi (1996) have considered sonic negotiations of Islamic spaces in the UK and Canada. Tong Soon Lee (2003) has argued that giving the call to prayer over the radio and text message unites Muslims in the pluralistic Singaporean public sphere, leading to reflections on the role of technology in maintaining identity in a pluralistic society. Chapters from Philip Bohlman (2013) and Andrew Eisenberg (2013) have examined the contested use and reception of the call to prayer in urban spaces in Western Europe and Kenya. Most recently, art historian Niall Atkinson’s (2016) pathbreaking work has examined the structuring and contestation of the urban public sphere in renaissance Florence through bell ringing. In this article, I build on these studies through examination of *ezan* and *sela* during a moment of highly concentrated political upheaval and its ongoing aftermath. I contribute to a small but growing corpus of writing on the Summer 2016 coup attempt, including work on sound and calls to prayer (Gill 2016; Ögüt 2016), the circulation of political slogans and symbols (Chovanec 2016), and feminist perspectives on the coup and its aftermath (Gökariksel 2017).

### Theorizing Bodies and Sound in Space

A concern for the role of sonic practices in defining and producing public spaces in Turkey and political subjectivity within those spaces underlies this article. In recent years, geographers such as Doreen Massey (2005) and Nigel Thrift (2009) have articulated a conception of space as continually recreated historical production. Rejecting a Kantian conception, Thrift has claimed that “rather than space being viewed as a container within which

the world proceeds, space is seen as a co-product of those proceedings” (95), while Massey has argued that, “what is needed is to uproot ‘space’ from that constellation of concepts in which it has so unquestioningly . . . been embedded (stasis, closure, representation) and to settle it among another set of ideas (heterogeneity, relationality, coevalness)” (13). These authors thus open the door toward a conception of space continually shaped and reshaped by a multitude of forces, including sounds and the publics they constitute.

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino’s theorizing of music’s affective power and its role in social formation provides a framework for examining the process by which Islamic calls to prayer fomented resistance. Over the course of several publications, Turino (1999, 2009, 2014) applies Peircean phenomenological semiotics to analysis of music, sound, experience, and affect. I contend with Turino that “by focusing attention on experience, [Peircean semiotics] brings us back to concrete individuals who are the loci of actual musical experiences and social life” (2014, 187), and thus I find this framework useful for conducting careful analysis of the role of sound in the aftermath of the coup—allowing me to probe beneath the surface of such broad and much bandied-about concepts as “embodiment,” “affect,” and “identity.”

The specific nature of the sign is crucial in Peirce’s system. Signs operate on three different levels: *firstness*, an “entity without relation”; *secondness*, a “direct relationship between two entities without the mediation of a Third;” and *thirdness*, which “involves the mediation of a First and a Second by a Third so as to generate something new” (Turino 2014, 190). Adapting these levels to music and sound, we might say that Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony is a first; the *Eroica* symphony causing a listener to close her eyes and hum along is a second; and a musicologist teaching the student that the *Eroica* symphony narrates Beethoven’s struggle with fate is a third.

Peirce likewise identifies three varieties of sign. The first is the *icon*, which links a sign and its object through “some perceived resemblance between the two” (Turino 2014, 192). The second is the *index*, which Turino calls “the most direct, actual, reality-saturated sign type” (195). Indexical signs form through “the connecting of a sign and object by a perceiver through co-occurrence; i.e. the perceiver has experienced the sign and object together, often repeatedly, and so their connection is simply true or a fact” (195). Indices often sit at the intersections of the body, habit, and individual and collective identity, and thus are significant for my analysis here. Turino writes that “indexical connections become fundamental to the very composition of the self” comprised of “a body, plus the individual’s total collection of habits of thought and practice” (195). Finally, the third type of

sign is the *symbol*, which for the purposes of this article is understood as a linguistic sign operating at a higher level of abstraction using agreed-upon definition within a given context.

I expand my analysis from the individual body to the sonically collectivized body politic through Turino's discussion of participatory music making and rhythmic and social synchronicity in *Music as Social Life* (2008). The rhythmic affordances of music—its ability to organize sounds and bodies into regular, repeated patterns—are crucial to the musically forged social synchronicity that Turino discusses:

Repetition of the rhythmic groove and predictable musical forms are essential to getting and staying in sync with others. Social synchrony is a crucial underpinning of feelings of social comfort, belonging, and identity. In participatory performances, these aspects of being human come to the fore. When things are going well they are experienced directly in a heightened way, and the performance as a whole becomes [an] . . . index—a direct effect of social unity and belonging. This is one reason that group music making and dance so often form the center of rituals, ceremonies, and activities intended to strengthen and articulate social bonds. . . . It is *in the doing* that the feelings and direct experience of being in sync with others is most pronounced, and this is one reason that participatory music is so valuable in societies throughout the world. It is also why politicians, fascists, and nationalists use this same potential (44).

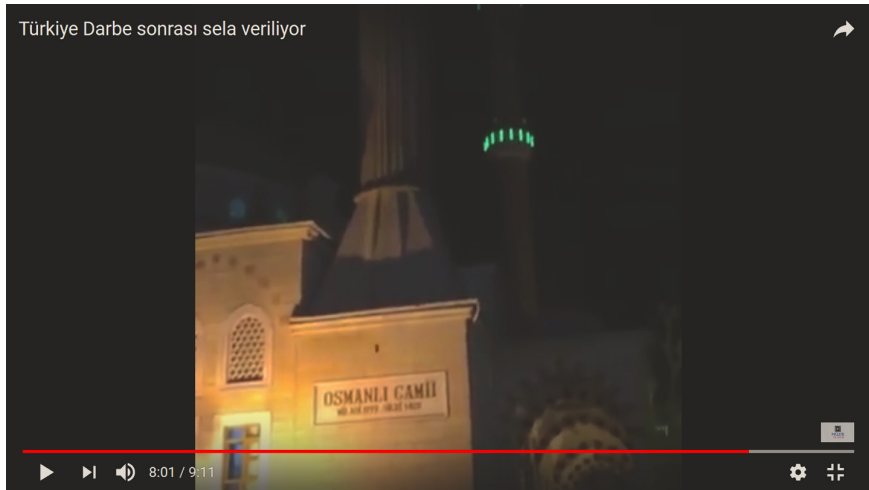
Rhythm—or its lack—thus comes to the fore in my analysis of *sela* and *ezan* in the aftermath of the coup

### Listening to Coup Resistance

I now turn to the coup resistance. In this section, I present the results of internet-based ethnographic analysis of sonically forged resistance during the 2016 coup attempt and its aftermath. I conduct this analysis in two parts. First, I examine video of sonic resistance to the coup. Second, I examine discourse in the Turkish media about the role of sound in the 2016 coup attempt.

But first, a bit more background on the sounds that I consider in this section: the *sela* and the *ezan*, or call to prayer. Of these two, the *ezan*—recited five times daily in Arabic and considered to be a form of recitation rather than a type of music—is far more common (Çağrıçı 1995). Despite the outsized role it played during the hours after the coup attempt, the *sela*—comprised of an Islamic text recited in Arabic—is less common. Considered a form of religious music, *sela* settings can be composed but are more often improvised according to the rules of the Turkish modal system *makam* (Özcan 2009). Turkish interlocutors have not claimed a





**Figure 1:** Screenshot taken from YouTube video titled “The sela is being given in the aftermath of the Turkish coup” showing the mosque around which crowds gathered (Müzik player 2016).

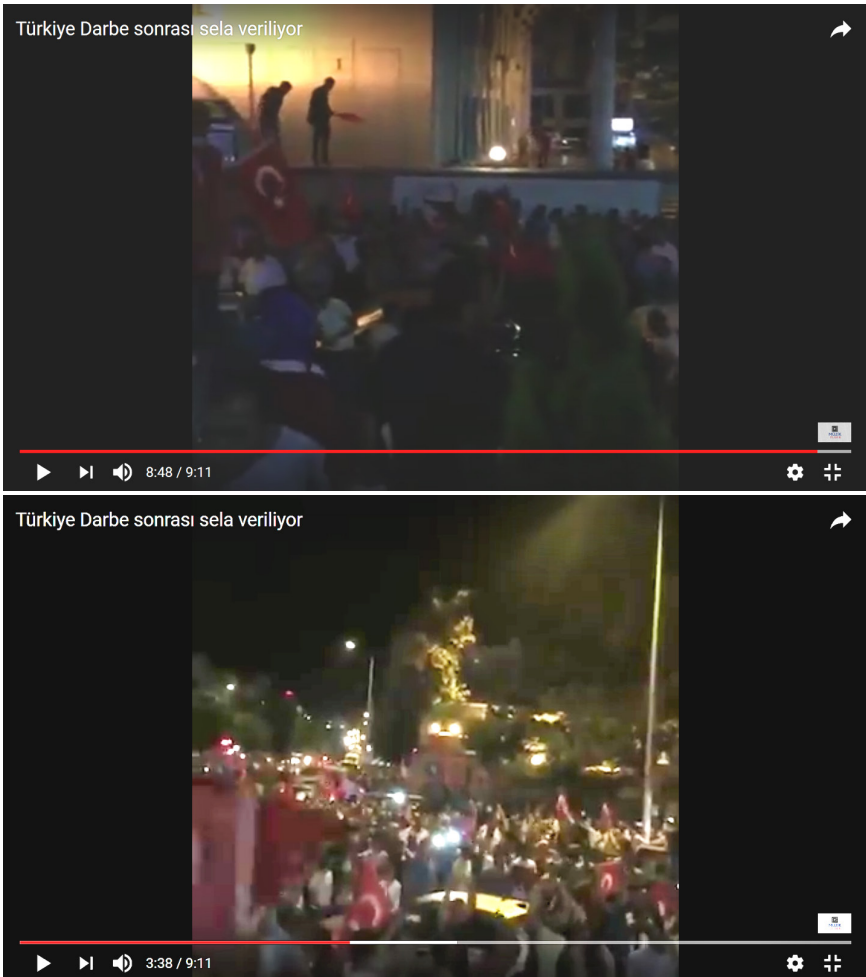
great deal of familiarity with the *sela*, consistently indicating only that it is usually recited in conjunction with funerals. As noted above, in this article I use the term “Islamic calls to prayer” to refer to both the *sela* and *ezan* unless further disambiguation is necessary.

### Listening to Coup Resistance: YouTube Videos

I analyzed video derived from a YouTube search of the term “*Türkiye 2016 Darbe Sela*” (Turkey 2016 coup *sela*). This search yielded around 500 videos, of which I examined the first ten. For purposes of analysis, I organize these ten videos into three groups. The first group of videos is distinguished by its focus on large crowds in urban settings accompanied by *sela/ezan*. The second group of videos is distinguished by its focus on the *sela/ezan* in the absence of crowds. The third group is composed of three “outliers”: a set of still photographs set to a *sela* recording (Yeni Türkiye 2016), a video showing an imam as he recites the *sela*, and a video showing a group of young men reciting the *sela* in Nusaybin on the Syrian border (İpekyolu Gazetesi 2016). I do not analyze all of these videos, but rather focus on those I deem most relevant to my argument, devoting particular attention to those in the first group due to their focus on large crowds.

The two videos in the first category are both characterized by a relatively large viewership and high numbers of comments, with a viewership at the time of writing in fall 2016 of around 53,000 (Müzik player 2016)





**Figure 2:** Screenshots of crowd assembling in front of the mosque (Müzik player 2016).

and 22,000 (CTV 2016). At the beginning of both videos, a large crowd, mostly male, is seen moving slowly to the accompaniment of *sela* along an urban street—likely in Istanbul in the first video, the eastern city of Elazığ in the second. In both cases, the focus of the camera person and the crowd is on the mosque from which the *sela* emanates. Both crowds remain fairly quiet through the end of the *sela*. In both videos, however, once the calls to prayer have been completed, the crowd erupts into a non-sung, rhythmically organized chant “*ya allah bismilla allahü ekber*” (“O God, in the name of God, God is the greatest”) lasting for several minutes. After the crowd finishes chanting, the pitched, nonrhythmic calls to prayer resume. In one of the videos, this is followed by spoken instructions for resisting the coup

attempt emanating from the mosque. These instructions provoke applause from the crowd, which then begins a sung chant of “*allahü ekber, illallah.*”

Islamic calls to prayer have long existed as a sonic force widely experienced in Turkish urban settings, where stone and concrete resonate with calls to prayer often coming from several different directions at once. The penetration of this sonic force has increased in recent years due to the increasing use of powerful loudspeakers and a surge in mosque construction that have ensured that no Turkish citizen remains uncalled (ABC Gazetesi 2016). Indeed, there could arguably be no more indexical set of sonic signs in Turkey than Islamic calls to prayer repeated multiple times each day. As Turino describes, the type of repeated indexical signification constitutes subjects through “particularly direct . . . un-reflected upon . . . effects at a variety of levels of focal awareness” (2014, 196).

For many, though not all, Turkish citizens, moreover, calls to prayer index the practices of Islam and are affectively and somatically linked to the bodily routines of daily prayer. The result is what Hirschkind calls an ethical “sedimentation,” a “somatic learning” that brings about a collectivity through a “shared moral orientation . . . that finds embodiment in a coordination of gestures, bodies, and hearts fashioned as a mode of pious sociability and public engagement” (2006, 122). In other words, the sound of the call to prayer is linked indexically to the physical rituals of daily prayer in a positive feedback loop in which sound, bodily movement, spirituality, and group identity grow ever more enmeshed.

During the early hours of July 16, however, for many Turkish citizens calls to prayer registered not only as an index of daily life and Islamic practice, but also as a symbol at the level of thirdness. After Erdoğan issued his call for citizens to take to the streets and defend democracy via FaceTime, *sela* and *ezan* became symbols signifying affiliation with Erdoğan and resistance to the coup. Thus, during the hours after the coup attempt, the set of signs emanating from Turkish mosques constituted an affectively embodied index of daily life and Islamic practices at the level of secondness and a symbolic signification of resistance at the level of thirdness—a powerful, semiotically dense force for unifying Turkish citizens in body and mind against the coup attempt.

Nevertheless, as a would-be collectivizing sonic force, Islamic calls to prayer lack a framework of rhythmic repetition that would support possibilities for corporeal synchronization. In the aftermath of the coup, however, the spoken chant “*ya allah bismilla allahü ekber*” that erupted in response to the *sela* filled this role. The chant’s rhythmically repetitive structure provided a path to feelings of embodied social unity through sonic and corporeal synchronicity, and thus transformed the group of

individuals into a synchronized, collectivized body politic capable of commanding urban streets and squares in resistance.

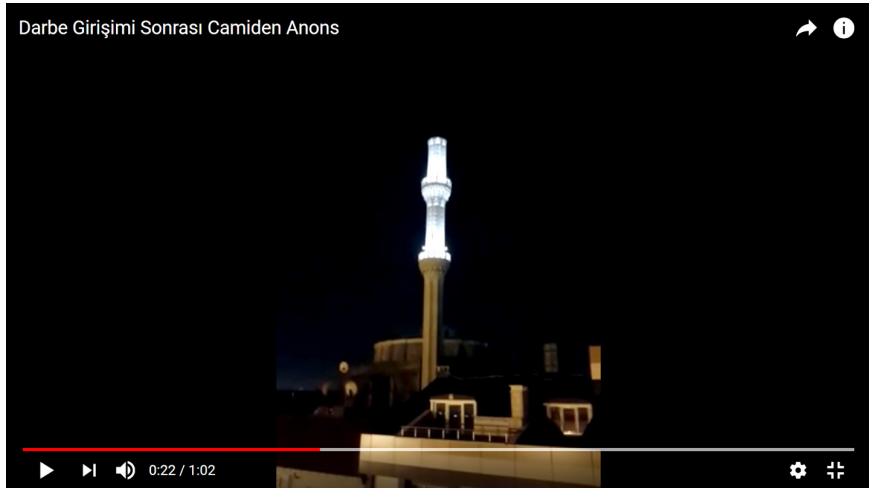
Online comments on these videos indicate that individuals used the platform to prolong the collectivized emotional state that emerged in the aftermath of the coup, whether or not they experienced that state by taking to the streets and squares or by accessing them virtually via YouTube. These commenters address the role of the *sela* and *ezan* explicitly in highly emotional terms such as “my God, don’t silence these crystal clear selas until doomsday,” “my God, don’t leave my fatherland deprived of these ezan-s,” and the pithy “from coups that silence the ezan to ezan-s that silence the coups!” One commenter used the platform to point out that resistance to the coup had brought Turkish citizens from different backgrounds together: “I am also a Kurd and I also went to the airport [to resist the coup and greet Erdoğan], we are one community of the faithful, we are one nation in Muhammed, and we resisted as one iron hand.”

For others, the videos become vehicles for deep religious sentiment. One commenter, using the online name “the last Ottoman,” wrote “my hairs were standing on end, thousands of angels descended to the earth at that moment. With God’s consent, this people poured into the streets for God, for nation, for martyrdom. God is the greatest.” Another, whose online profile shows an image of the Kaaba in Mecca, wrote, “may it be accepted by the people reading this. My hairs were standing on end. May God be contented; we the Turkish nation are God’s soldiers on the earth. I have watched this video 50 times.” Despite the varying degrees of religious fervor they exhibit, these comments indicate the perceived significance of Islamic calls to prayer for coup resistance and the platform that YouTube videos provide for reflection upon and deepening of an emergent, affectively embodied collectivity.

Not all Turkish citizens see a place for themselves in that collectivity, however. There are a small number of dissenting voices to be found among the YouTube comments, such as this one expressing belief in US complicity in the coup attempt:

The Department of Religious Affairs [that coordinated Islamic recitation] already knew of the coup the day before; the goal of this coup was not to take the country—if that had been the case it would have been in every city. With 300 soldiers what kind of a coup is this my friend? Also, a real coup happens at 3 while everyone is sleeping, not at 10 in the evening. Because of Tayip [Erdoğan] the USA has Turkey under its finger and unfortunately our people has been very badly tricked.

Where this commenter claimed that Erdoğan and the US government were operating together, another commenter appeared to question the sincerity



**Figure 3:** Screenshot taken from YouTube video titled “Announcement from the mosque in the aftermath of the Turkish coup” showing the minaret from which announcements were made (Serhat Güzel 2016).

of Erdoğan’s democratic values, writing “I have another question for you all. How is it that Sharia Erdoğan also defends democracy????????? He has defended nothing, he just uses that word to play with your minds. You are a believer in Sharia and you defend the word democracy????????????” Thus, though the majority of YouTube commenters use the platform to reflect upon calls to prayer and deepen their feelings of solidarity with coup resistance, at least a few—perhaps capitalizing on the anonymity the online platform provides—use it to voice their resistance to the officially promulgated and widely accepted narrative of the coup attempt and its resistance.

Whereas the two videos in the first group focus on large crowds in the streets and yield insight into the effects of Islamic calls to prayer on crowds, videos in the second group are characterized by their focus on calls to prayer in the absence of crowds. These videos, each of which received around 10,000 views and drew few comments, deepen several insights gained above. By homing in on calls to prayer in the absence of large crowds, these videos bring the sounds that forged coup resistance to the fore. Whereas in the two videos discussed above viewers might recall or imagine an experience taking to the streets and squares, these videos encourage a more intimate interaction with calls to prayer and coup resistance perhaps only possible through private access to YouTube.

One video in group two stands out for its juxtaposition of the non-Koranic, Turkish-language words recited from the mosque with a description of the *sela* and its role in resisting the coup (Serhat Güzel 2016). In

this video, the camera is focused on a nondescript urban mosque, allowing the spoken words emanating from the minaret to dominate the frame of perception:

Don't leave us without life, my God! . . . Don't leave us without Muslim piety, my God! . . . Don't leave us without mosques and ezan, my God! Don't leave us without a shepherd, my God! Don't leave us without love for you, without water, without air . . . my God!

This statement conflates the possibility of a failed coup resistance with the prospect of abandonment by God. The muezzin's voice as he recites is affectively charged, taking advantage of the upward inflection of Turkish on the syllable before the negating postposition in the repeated word for "don't leave us"—"*bırakma*"—for dramatic effect.

Interestingly, the video's description makes no mention of the spoken text, focusing only on *sela*:

In Istanbul as the people were flowing in the streets the sounds of sela began to be heard. When one went silent the other began the sela. Quickly, all the sounds of sela being spread from the mosques had caused Istanbul to rise up. Everyone is flowing to the streets and city centers.

#### WHAT IS THE SELA'S MEANING?

In the time before television and the internet, the sela was a way to give news. Selas are being read with the purpose of both giving a reaction to and giving news about the coup attempt.

While this written description of the video seems to be somewhat at odds with its content, it can perhaps alert us to a mixing of semiotic levels. This unremarked-upon juxtaposition of heard speech and description of *sela* might prompt us to question Turino's relatively sharp distinction between the immediacy of affectively charged musical sound at the level of secondness and speech at the level of thirdness. This distinction appears blurred by a case in which musical sound carrying a highly formalized text (the Arabic religious text of the *sela*) not easily comprehensible to most Turks begins to take on meaning as a symbol of resistance while the semantic content of language spoken in Turkish seems to appeal for its affective, "musical" qualities.

Nevertheless, though this blurring of semiotic levels may have played a role on the night of the coup, the preloading of spoken instruction with calls to prayer—the preparation of the mind through the body—does seem to have been consistently applied on the night of the coup attempt. And this preloading is illustrated nowhere more clearly than in the group



**Figure 4:** Screenshot of the muezzin reading out instructions after reciting the *sela* (Şuayip 13091928 2016)

three video that stands out dramatically for its level of viewership—around 361,000 at the time of collection in fall 2016 (Şuayip 13091928 2016). In the video, which was picked up in the news media and featured in an article in the *Yeni Akit* newspaper titled “The muezzin who cried during the *sela* on the night of July 15” (*15 Temmuz gecesi salâda ağlayan muezzin*) (2016), the camera is focused on a muezzin in the Aegean region city of Manisa as he recites the *sela* into a microphone, the sounds of blaring car horns in the background. Upon completing the *sela*, we see the muezzin reach down and pick up a piece of paper from which he reads the following announcement:

We invite our honorable people and nation to be in a state of unity and togetherness alongside our government. We invite our honorable people and nation to be in a state of unity and togetherness alongside our government and homeland.

As in the videos in group one, instructional text at the level of thirdness is read only after Islamic calls to prayer at the level of secondness have affectively tuned listeners’ bodies. Like the video analyzed in group two, however, this video too seems to allow for a more intimate interaction. And this point reinforces a key emphasis of this article: the multiple virtual and physical sites at which coup resistance was carried out. Even as the calls of Erdoğan and the muezzins to take to the streets and squares brought about a collectivized occupation of physical urban spaces crucial for successful resistance to the coup attempt, this occupation becomes accessible in real

time long after the fact to me and to Turkish citizens both individually and collectively in the virtual spaces of YouTube. Even as calls also sounded at more intimate registers and in more intimate spaces both virtual and physical—traveling from Erdoğan’s zoomed-in face on his smartphone to Turkish citizens sitting in their homes, from the voice of a crying muezzin to the ear of a solitary citizen—they are circulated nationwide and internationally in the media. But, as seen above in the analysis of comments, even as these spaces collapse into each other to accommodate one and all in the aftermath of the coup, they leave only a limited space for dissenting voices. These voices become only slightly more audible in the analysis of print media that follows.

### Listening to Coup Resistance: News Media

For the analysis of discourse on sound and the coup in the Turkish news media, I entered “*Türkiye 2016 darbe sela*” (Turkey 2016 coup *sela*) into the Google search bar, limiting results to “news” and the time span to the period between July 15, 2016 and August 15, 2016. This search yielded many articles addressing the role of Islamic calls to prayer in the 2016 coup attempt. Excluding articles from non-Turkish sources, I collected and read the eight articles on the first page of results, separating them into two groups. While articles in the first group address the *sela* and the process by which it called citizens to the streets, the second group documents incidents of citizen attacks on imams reading the *sela*. Though the articles frame these attackers negatively, I read between the lines, listening to voices of opposition to coup opposition. As Zeynep Kurtuluş Korkman (2017) has noted with regard to secularist women’s precarious positions in the coup resistance movement, these voices of opposition have been increasingly difficult to access in the midst of post-coup masculinist militarization. By listening for these hidden perspectives, I point to the potentially negative indexical associations of Islamic calls to prayer for secularist Turks.

Of the five articles addressing the logistics of calls to prayer on the night of the coup attempt, one is especially notable for its detailed account of the *sela* and the process by which it came to be recited in response to the coup. Titled “*Sela* read after the coup attempt” (*Darbe girişimi sonrası sela okundu*), this article was published in the *Bureaucrat News* (*Memur Haber*) during the coup in the early hours of July 16. The article provides information on the *sela*: “in the time before television and the internet, the *sela* was a way to give news. *Sela*-s are being read with the purpose of both giving a reaction to and giving news about the coup attempt.” The article then gives a detailed account of the process by which the *sela* reading was coordinated:



The Head of the Ministry of Religion, Mehmet Görmez, invited the citizens to oppose this uprising without resorting to violence. According to the information taken from the Ministry of Religion by an *Anadolu Ajans* reporter, Görmez's message against the uprising was sent to all imams in a short message. Beginning his message by using the expression "my religious volunteer," Görmez made this call:

"Today the greatest duty to fall upon us to do is to protect the law of our nation. The trampling of our country's and nation's unity, peace, and prosperity, the crushing by force and violence of national self-determination, can never be accepted. As our nation's spiritual guides, we are together with our nation in opposition to all extra-legal undertakings. I invite all of you from our minarets, which are symbols of our freedom, to make our people oppose this great treachery without resorting to violence. Tonight, the minarets' lights will be lit, and by giving the *sela* our nation will be invited to lay claim to our nation's law."

In addition to providing a view into the logistics of the unified sonic resistance provided by Islamic calls to prayer, the statement from Görmez is significant for its call to "oppose our people to this great treachery without resorting to violence" (*halkımıza bu büyük ihanete şiddete başvurmada karşı [koymak]*). This language indicates a premeditated awareness that Islamic calls to prayer would forge a collective resistance that could "lay claim" to the nation's streets and squares.

Articles in the second group focus on attacks committed against those reciting calls to prayer and thus give a view into the alternative indexical significations of Islamic calls to prayer in the response to the July 15 coup. Two of the three articles document attacks in Turkey's third largest city, Izmir, located on the Aegean coast. This is not likely a coincidence, as Izmir is the largest city in Turkey that consistently contributes a plurality of its votes to the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), which was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and constitutes the main opposition to Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) (Seçim.Haberler.Com 2015). Indeed, there are reports that the order to recite *sela* was not followed as assiduously in Izmir as in other large cities (Gill, pers. comm.). Citizens of Izmir, in other words, were likely less inclined to accept calls to prayer as a call for coup resistance. Whereas for pious Muslim Turks Islamic calls to prayer index Islamic practices, for secular and non-religious Turks, strongly represented in Izmir, Islamic calls to prayer index a sense of unease or even hostility toward perceived Islamic backwardness, provoking some citizens to resist the imams and muezzins reciting *sela* and *ezan* on the night of the coup attempt.

An article published in the *Habertürk* newspaper details an attack on the recitation of *sela* and gives a fascinating view into the situating of *sela*

and the coup attempt vis-à-vis the Turkish War of Independence. The article, titled “They attacked a muezzin who was reciting *sela*” (*Sela okuyan müezzine saldırdılar*), notes that “it has come to light that, on the evening of July 15, after the coup attempt by a group within the Turkish Armed Forces, a muezzin in Izmir’s *Narlıdere* district reciting the *sela* according to the Ministry of Religion’s instructions was attacked.” In a video accompanying the article, the mosque’s *imam* gives the following spoken account:

The use of *sela* is one of the most important actions in our glorious history. When Izmir was suffering under the Greek occupation, when the Greek army began to occupy, the *selas* from the minarets awoke the nation and made the call for unity and cooperation. Also at that time . . . the *sela* voices that are part of our nature awoke the nation and played an important role in the War of Independence.

The Turkish War of Independence occupies an outsized place in the Turkish collective consciousness as the nation’s founding struggle. The imam’s comparison to the use of *sela* around the time of the War of Independence can perhaps be interpreted as an astute attempt to appeal to Turkish Republican patriotism. The message seems to be that Izmir residents—would-be coup sympathizers among them—should not fear the *sela*, but rather see it as the herald of a turning point rooted in the past but looking toward a new Turkish future.

I include a final article—not the product of a targeted search—as a conclusion to this section’s examination of calls to prayer and the process by which they forged unified resistance in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Titled “Who had the night of July 15 *Sela* and *Ezan* idea, what kind of effects did it have?” (*15 Temmuz Gecesi Sela ve Ezan Fikri Kimindi, Ne Tür Etkileri Oldu?*), and published on November 13 in the eastern Anatolian *Van Politics (Van Siyaseti)* newspaper, the article foregrounds the importance of *sela* and *ezan* to coup resistance:

If the night of July 15 evolved from a dark night to a bright morning, there are several contributing factors. The most effective of those was our president’s saying “I call my nation to the streets and airports” and his leaving and meeting with the nation.

The second biggest factor however in my opinion was the delivering to the ear of *sela* and *ezan* from the minarets by our nation’s holy children. . . .

I want to give two examples of what kind of effect the reading of *sela* and *ezan* created.

One: On the night of July 15 among the first places in Istanbul attacked by coup plotters was the Police building on *Vatan* Avenue. Immediately behind that building there are two historic and highly spiritually valuable mosques: *Hırka-ı Şerif* and *Mesih Ali Paşa*.

After the *ezan* and *sela*s read from the minarets of those two mosques (following our own calls) the citizens [of the neighborhood] *Fatih* flowed to the *Vatan* police building. It was such that it turned into a flood of people from the *Akşemsettin*, *Keçeciler*, *Sarıgüzel*, *Kocasinan*, *Balıpaşa*, and *Fevziyaşa* avenues.

Two: Two days after the coup had been resisted, one of my friends who had been on the July 15 Martyrs Bridge said this while we were talking:

“We met right in the vicinity of the *Hazreti Ali* Mosque by the entrance to the quite crowded bridge. We asked ourselves ‘what are we going to do?’ We hesitated at the point of whether we should walk on to the bridge or not. We waited for a reason, something to make us start moving. Suddenly we heard the *sela* from the minaret of the *Hazreti Ali* Mosque. After that the *ezan* started to be read. A spirit came to all of us [*Hepimize bir can geldi*]. We all started with *tekbir* [saying “*allahuekber*”]. As if emptying a trough, we all started to walk toward the bridge.”

These two accounts illustrate the combined indexical and symbolic signification of Islamic calls to prayer and their collectivizing function in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt. Particularly in the second example, the indexical effect of Islamic calls to prayer comes to the fore (“a spirit came to all of us”). This “spirit” was the affectively embodied sediment of countless past encounters with Islamic calls to prayer. This indexicality of calls to prayer was also loaded with symbolic meaning, however—Erdogan’s FaceTime call to the nation had made it clear that *sela* and *ezan* were recited in opposition to the coup attempt and in support of the civilian government. The subsequent group chanting (“we all started with *tekbir*”), provided a rhythmic framework for vocal and bodily synchronization and thus for sonic collectivization. Once sonically collectivized by this complex layering of indices and symbols, the group was prepared to enter the bridge and oppose the coup attempt as a unified body politic.

### Sounding Neo-Ottomania

Thus far in this article, I have aimed to give a close reading of the manner in which calls to prayer addressed the affectively attuned bodies of many—though not all—Turkish citizens, collectivizing them into a unified body politic opposed to the coup attempt. This body politic was able to assert control over urban streets and squares on the night of the coup attempt, but maintaining this control in order to orient Turkey toward a new, neo-Ottoman direction required embedding the materiality of sound and sonically disciplined bodies into the stone and concrete of urban spaces, thus transforming them and Turkey’s public sphere. Writing during the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt, Feyza Akınerdem argued that:

Postcoup democracy vigils [altered] the conventions of public appearances and voices of the street. In Istanbul, the street used to be predominantly a space of representation for the republican ideals of the Kemalist regime. . . . The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has challenged the exclusionary regime of Kemalism during its thirteen years of governance. It assembled the lower class, nationalist, and Islamist populations under the rubric of *majority* and granted them “authentic citizenship.” . . . Taksim Square was once iconic for its association with May 1 marches, Gezi resistance, and many other dissident protests and was highly symbolic for Kemalist Turkey. Following the Gezi uprising, due to heavy policing, no mass demonstrations could take place in Taksim Square. That changed on July 15, 2016. The masses that the AKP government hails as “the majority who represent the national will” claim Taksim today (Akınerdem 2017, 189–90).

As Akınerdem alludes, during the weeks following the coup attempt, city squares became sites where post-coup collective effervescence was perpetuated as citizens gathered in nightly “Democracy Vigils” (*Demokrasi Nöbetleri*) held throughout the country on Erdoğan’s invitation. Starting the day after the coup attempt, these vigils were held nightly for weeks on end and often drew thousands of participants. Banu Gökariksel states:

Crowds came out to occupy public squares in celebration of new heroes and democracy. The government encouraged these “democracy vigils” and ensured access to them by suspending all fees for public transportation. Heroic moments of that night played over and over again on public screens set up at the squares where people gathered. (Akınerdem 2017, 173)

In addition to images of heroism, these vigils were consistently accompanied by music played over loudspeakers. Often featuring songs such as the wildly popular folk-influenced patriotic 1993 song “I will die for my Turkey” (*Türkiyem Ölüürüm*), these “democracy vigils” were also the setting for music with explicitly neo-Ottoman historicist and/or religious overtones, such as Ottoman Janissary music and Islamic *dhikr*. The collectivization that took place at these rallies is expressed through recurring phrases in the news media such as “today we are one heart and one nation” (*bugün tek yürek, tek milletiz*) (Milliyet 2016; Sabah 2016a).

These nightly watches culminated in a massive, five-hour “Democracy and Martyrs Meeting” on August 7 that drew around five million people to a square in Istanbul’s *Yenikapı* neighborhood. The Turkish government had created this square—called the Yenikapı Meeting Area (*Yenikapı Miting Alanı*)—by filling in a portion of the Marmara Sea in 2014 (Milliyet 2013). Already alleged on the morning of July 16, influential Pennsylvania-

based Islamic cleric Fetullah Gülen's masterminding of the coup was by now taken for granted and Turkey was once again united with "one heart," with leaders from all major political parties (excluding the Kurdish *HDP*) speaking. President Erdoğan was clearly the star, however, for his speech was the culmination of the meeting, and a large image of him was notable for being adjacent to and of the same size as the requisite image of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

In this new square, music and sound were once more central to articulating the new national consensus called decisively into being in squares throughout the country on the night of the coup attempt. The meeting featured a variety of recorded music projected over the sea of people and red Turkish flags, including several songs that have become a kind of "coup resistance soundtrack." These include "Hurry to unity, my great Turkey" (*Haydi Birliğe Büyük Türkiyem*), featuring the line "everyone hand in hand in the squares" (*meydanlarda herkes el ele*) in its chorus, and the "July 15 Democracy March" (*15 Temmuz Demokrasi Marşı*), featuring the line "the commander in chief gave the order: to the square!" (*Başkomutan emir verdi: inin meydana!*) in its chorus. The fact that these new songs, rather than early Republican-era patriotic songs still popular in Kemalist circles such as the "İzmir March" (*İzmir Marşı*) or "Ten Year March" (*Onuncu Yıl Marşı*) and its popular 1990s remix (Özyürek 2006), provide the musical framework demonstrates the shift initiated in the aftermath of the coup attempt away from a Kemalist brand of public patriotism. The direction of this shift was indicated clearly by the two live performances given at the meeting: a forty-five-minute concert of Ottoman Janissary music and a fifteen-minute koranic recitation. As at the "Democracy Vigils," these performances sounded the neo-Ottoman historicist and Islamist orientations of President Erdoğan's new Turkey at its largest meeting yet. As a symbol of Ottoman military might that predates even nineteenth-century Ottoman westernizing reforms, the Janissary band was in keeping with Erdoğan's at times irredentist Ottoman nostalgia—a nostalgia also to be seen in the transformations of Turkish urban landscapes wrought by such projects as the massive neo-Ottoman Çamlıca Mosque that now visually and sonically marks the entire Istanbul cityscape from its hilltop position (Danforth 2016).

In short, the "Democracy and Martyrs Meeting"—what Salih Can Açıksöz has called "the founding event of the postcoup national consensus" (2017, 180)—represented the culmination of a spatio-sonic transformation of the Turkish public sphere. Islamic calls to prayer had addressed individual citizens, forging them into a unified body politic that claimed the squares on the night of the coup attempt, and this body was sustained in the squares at the "Democracy Vigils" over the ensuing weeks by the

new sounds—never mind that some of them were not new at all—of a New Turkey. After the vigils, the individuals making up this body could return home to their computers, where they could relive, reflect upon, and discuss their heroic resistance during the early hours of July 16. They could hear their president’s call and the calls to prayer, they could feel the same feelings over and over again, and they could see themselves in videos posted to YouTube of the vigils in which they had only just participated, in which they were still participating even as they sat in front of their computer screens. And at the “Democracy and Martyrs Meeting,” they could meet this neo-Ottoman New Turkey—see and hear it assembled by the millions in a new square.

### Conclusion: Concretizing Sound, Reinscribing Public Space

In summer 2017, I ventured from the couch to the square, finding myself in a space at once familiar and transformed. During the intervening period, under an ongoing official state of emergency, the government had purged more than 150,000 civil servants with alleged ties to Gülen and jailed more than 50,000, while intensifying an ongoing crackdown on the media (Nordland and Timur 2016). In April 2017, a national referendum on replacing Turkey’s parliamentary government with a strong presidential system had passed by a slim margin, granting Erdoğan greatly increased powers. In combination with commemoration of the one-year anniversary of coup resistance in squares throughout the country, this event had accelerated the pace of transformation in the New Turkey. To take one example, an ongoing controversy in the Turkish media during summer 2017 centered around changes to public school curricula that would de-emphasize Kemalism and curb the teaching of evolution while introducing the concept of jihad. Looking to the long term, I had the clear sense during summer 2017 that the coup attempt and its resistance were being framed as a historical counterpart to the Turkish War of Independence—a founding struggle for a new Turkey—even as some remained uneasy with or opposed to this direction. Indeed, measures such as manipulation of school curricula parallel in many ways those taken in the aftermath of the Turkish War of Independence. In light of the larger argument of this article, this brief consideration of the long-term implications of the coup attempt and its resistance should illuminate the full measure of the impact that sound and the resistance it forged during the hours and weeks after the coup have had and will continue to have on the course of Turkish political and social affairs.

But what of the squares? Are they really transformed? Before concluding, I spend a bit of time in Ankara’s Red Crescent (*Kızılay*) Square—long a





**Figure 5:** Ankara's July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square, previously Red Crescent Square, August 2017. Photo by Erol Koymen.

center of middle-class life in Ankara and a central point around which my own, life-long relationship to Ankara has pivoted. During summer 2017, to be sure, the square was transformed visually: it featured a sign in large, three-dimensional red letters reading “15 Temmuz Destanı” (the July 15 epic) alongside a collection of images of nine men marked “*destan burada yazıldı*” (the epic was written here), indicating that the men had died in the square while resisting the coup attempt. Competing for attention with this sign was a large billboard advertisement—a telling reminder that neoliberal consumerism is also a pillar of Erdoğan's New Turkey.

The square had been transformed in other ways, as well. During the period in which collective control of city squares and streets was being reasserted on a nightly basis, Red Crescent Square was renamed the “July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square” (*15 Temmuz Kızılay Milli İrade Meydanı*) by the Ankara municipal government, which is controlled by Erdoğan's party (Sabah 2016b). Among the few other spaces thus renamed was the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul on which some of the most direct resistance to the coup attempt had been mounted and many of the coup's casualties were recorded. Renamed the “July 15 Martyrs Bridge” (*15 Temmuz Şehitler Köprüsü*), this bridge now memorializes those who died upon it while resisting the coup (BBC Türkçe 2016).

Why was Red Crescent Square—now July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square—renamed? To me, it seemed an unexpected choice in comparison with a space like the bridge. Indeed, my sense was that “Kızılay” (Red Crescent) rather than “*15 Temmuz Kızılay Milli İrade Meydanı*” is still



used in daily parlance, though I did note that municipal public transportation routes have been altered to indicate “15 Temmuz Kızılay Milli İrade Meydanı” (July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square).

Then again, this is not just any Turkish square. July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square is situated at the intersection of Atatürk Boulevard and Gazi Mustafa Kemal Boulevard in the center of the “new Ankara” laid out by German urban planner Hermann Jansen during the 1920s for a then-new Turkish Republic (Kezer 2015). Abutting the square and forming the tip of Ankara’s wedge-shaped government district is Trust Park (*Güven Park*), whose most prominent feature—a massive stone memorial to the Turkish military—faces the square (Batuman 2005). In short, July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square has historically represented the core of Kemalist secularist nationalism and its long-term association with the Turkish military. Kenneth Foote proposes that “human modifications of the environment are often related to the way societies wish to sustain and efface memories” and that “landscape might be seen . . . as a sort of communicational resource, a system of signs and symbols, capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication” (1997, 32–33). Islamic calls to prayer and music—systems of sonic signs and symbols—enabled control of urban spaces in the immediate aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt and contributed to maintaining that control for weeks thereafter. The reinscription of Red Crescent Square as a memorial to coup resistance converts those sonic signs heard throughout the city into a concrete symbol at its secular center that sustains the memory of the coup resistance and contributes to the shift toward a New Turkey. Just as sound claimed the square on the night of the coup, the square was shaped by that sound and has now claimed the collective effervescence it produced, freezing it to shape the neo-Ottoman New Turkey. There are those who dissent, who refuse to say “July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square,” but even they can’t deny that they are in a new square in a new Turkey. The coups used to silence the *ezans*, but now it’s the other way around.

Notes

1. All translations by the author.
2. In other words, as far as I have been able to determine, composed versions of the *sela* were not recited. Rather, the *sela* was improvised according to the rules of Turkish scales called *makam-s*.
3. When asked about her typical reaction to the call to prayer, one staunchly secularist Turkish citizen reported to me that she usually finds it to be an interruption and waits for it to end so that she can continue whatever she is doing at the moment.

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