

The Image of the State: The Saga of Wild Dumrul in the "New Turkey"

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Tale of Deli Dumrul is the fifth story in the Book of Dede Korkut revealing the epic of a young and vigorous man who strives to be recognized (by everyone) and overcome death. He builds a bridge over a dried-up riverbed to collect tribute from the ones on both sides of the bridge. As a legendary endeavor, he challenges the angel of death, Azrael. After losing the fight, God grants him an option. If he could find another person to give his/her soul for him, Dumrul would survive. His parents are reluctant to abandon their souls, but his nameless wife volunteers. Dumrul, once again, begs God and gains 140 years of life for him and his wife.

According to many folklorists and historians, Dumrul is Tughrul Bey, the founder of the Seljuk State, who lived in the 11th century. This hypothesis explains why Dumrul surfaces as the representation of the state whenever a government demands new taxes; drafts new regulations putting the citizens in charge; or when a bureaucrat or politician asks bribery for their duties, etc. Thus, in almost all the instances, Dumrul mirrors an adverse character abusing his power to obtain something he doesn't deserve. However, being submitted to the rule of God, the death, he gains a long time to live a virtuous life. Pursuing this hypothesis, I suggest that Dumrul, as an archetype, might be used to grasp the image of the state in the Turkish political culture. Therefore, analyzing the behavioral pattern of Dumrul might be helpful to explain the affective aspect of the relation(s) between the state and citizens, in the civic culture. Methodologically, this attempt will mean locating Dumrul in three contexts, first in the narrative framework of the legend; second, in the historical context of the formation of Seljuk state; and finally, in the context of the contemporary political debate focusing on the last two decades under the rule of the AKP and Erdogan. The Story of Deli Dumrul, along with the Jungian conception of the archetype, is crucial to grasp the ahistoric elements carried by the political affects interplaying in the current political scenery of Turkey via nationalist and Islamist discourses. In this sense, I argue that archetypes, thanks to their ahistoric character, are useful devices while dealing with the autonomous nature (Massoumi, Malabou) of the affects, which play an extensive role in the contemporary populist conservative politics.