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Complexities of the Secular/Islamic Divide and Multiple Secularisms in Turkey: The Anti-Capitalist Muslims in the 'Gezi Park' Protests²

Introduction

The Gezi Park protests in Turkey were carried out against the so-called Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) Government, which has ruled the country since 2002. The protest began on 26th of May 2013 and continued for more than a month. The initial demand was to save the park located at the heart of Istanbul from the AKP Government's neo-liberal projects: building a shopping mall and re-establishing a military barracks as a historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the police violence against protestors, on the one hand, and the Government's obstinate and arrogant attitudes, on the other, provoked the masses all over the country (Tuğal 2013, p. 2). By early June, the Gezi protests had become a nation-wide struggle for social rights.³ Various socio-political identities – including socialists, feminists, the LGBT and other gender identities, Kemalists, the so-called “apolitical” youth, Kurds, Shiite Muslims/Alevis, and even Sunnis – plus hundreds of thousands of people, the majority of whom had no connection to any political association or party, had organised themselves spontaneously through social media and took to the streets.⁴ For a month they

¹ I would like to thank Sila Laçın for her invaluable patience and backups during the process of writing this article. I am thankful to Tracey Montague-Lofti and Mr. Guy Torr for editing the language of the text. I am grateful to the comments of Leonidas Karakatsanis, Wei-Yuan Chang, Nazlı Sila Cesur, Şule Tomkinson, Nazım Can Çiçektakan, and two anonymous reviewers. I am also grateful to all my participants for their kindness and hospitality.

² This article is dedicated to Mehmet Ayvalıtış (20), Abdullah Cömert (22), Ethem Sarısülük (26), İrfan Tuna (47), Mustafa Sarı (27), Selim Önder (88), Ali İsmail Korkmaz (19), and Berkin Elvan (15) who lost their lives in the Gezi Park protests.

³ Leonidas Karakatsanis (2013). *Χρόνος*. July 2013, [online:] <http://www.chronos-mag.eu/index.php/l-karakatsanis-political-frontiers-parallel-universes-and-the-challenges-for-the-gezi-park-movement.html>, accessed 19 September 2013.

⁴ In their book on the Gezi Protests, Kongar and Küçükkaya (2013, p. 31–36) cite multiple surveys on the profile of protestors. While one of those surveys suggests that the 53.7%

struggled against the police, and resisted the excessive use of tear gas, pressurised douches and truncheons at the cost of losing their eyes, and suffering the death of eight citizens.⁵

Concepts of “city life” and “lifestyle” appear as the main sources of conflict in rigidifying the frontiers between the Gezi protestors and the AKP. On the one hand, the heterogeneous totality of the protestors viewed the neo-liberal projects of the AKP as authoritarian interventions threatening their existence and lifestyles. The protests were a response, a reaction against the economic-developmental and moralistic-Islamic interventions of the Government in redesigning urban life. Examples of these AKP interventions include: nuclear energy politics, urban transformation projects (erecting skyscrapers, residences and shopping malls), the gigantic Canal Istanbul project to build an artificial canal and peninsula in Istanbul, as well as constructing the largest airport in Europe, the third Bosphorus Bridge, and a huge mosque to serve Istanbul’s remaining forestlands. For the Gezi protestors, these interventions were a threat to the historical and natural fabric of Istanbul, and Turkey in general. The Government’s moralistic-Islamic interventions include projects to revitalise Ottoman-Islamic images in public places, prohibiting alcohol sales between 10pm and 6am, heavily censuring TV series (including prohibiting swearing, cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption and sex scenes), heavy Internet censure (banning hundreds of social, political, and pornography sites), statements against abortion and even caesarean sections, and moralistic statements against couples kissing or hugging each other in public. Furthermore, Prime Minister Erdoğan persistently suggests that women must give birth to at least three children and that their primary duty is to look after their children at home. The moralistic-Islamic politics of the Government is often perceived as an authoritarian imposition of a particular form of Sunni-Islamism (Akinhay 2013, p. 30).

On the other hand, the AKP Government viewed the protestors as a group of pro-coup mindset – ideologically biased marauders with no respect for democracy, morality, or society. During the second week of the Gezi protests, the AKP organized “Respect for the National Will” rallies in metropolitan cities, where Prime Minister

of the protestors were never involved in protests before, another one suggests that the figure is 44.4%. Nevertheless, the second survey also suggests that 93.6% of the protestors had no relation to any social group or political party.

According to a survey cited by Kongar and Küçükkaya (2013, p. 33), 69% of the protestors were informed about the protests through social media.

⁵ One of these citizens is a police officer who died accidentally after falling out of a building while running after protestors. *Radikal*. 10 June 2013, [online:] http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/komiser_mustafa_sarinin_ailesi_atilmadi_dustu_iddialar_spekulasyon-1137019, accessed 20 September 2013.

According to the statistics shared by the *General Directorate of Security* [Göztepe 2013, p. 10], during the Gezi protests 4.900 protests were carried in 80 out of 81 cities with 3.545.000 participants. 5.300 protestors were taken into custody, and 160 protestors were arrested. According to the statistics shared by the *Turkish Medical Association* [Göztepe 2013, p. 9], during the protests, eight people lost their lives, wounds of 63 out of 8.163 casualties were critical, 106 people had head trauma, and 11 people lost their eyes.

Erdoğan accused protestors of desecrating mosques by entering them with their shoes on and consuming alcohol within them. Asserting that protestors physically attacked women veiled with Islamic headscarves in the streets, forcefully removing their scarves, he condemned the protestors as immoral beings with no respect for collective norms or national values.⁶ The Gezi protestors were also defined as vandals, who burned the city, fought against the police, and plundered shops.⁷

Nevertheless, the emergence of city life and lifestyle as sources of conflict is not new in Turkey. As many scholars have argued (Çınar 2005; Göle 1997, 2002; Özyürek 2006), during the past two decades, conflicts around secularism and the lifestyles it embodies have materialized between “secular-Western” and “Islamic-Ottomanist” identities. Throughout “the privatisation of politics,” to dub Esra Özyürek’s (2006, p. 5–6) term, “[t]he public sphere is becoming intimate as private matters of sexuality, morality, and family values have become key issues to be discussed in public [...] [T]he global ideology of neoliberalism and the local controversy between Islamism and secularism make privacy and intimacy vital to politics and citizenship in a particular way.” In contemporary Turkey, where politics and lifestyle, public and private, and global and local are intertwined, hegemonic secular and Islamic political projects produce alternative versions of neoliberal modernity, competing identifications of the Turkish nation, and contending forms of the (urban) lifestyles accompanying it. Accordingly, urban public life appears as the main site for the production, regeneration, negotiation, and contestation of these competing projects. The secular/Islamic conflict is persistently produced and regenerated through projecting competing forms of lifestyles in towns and cities.

The frontiers of the Gezi process would have been explained as a temporal modality of the decades of old secular/Islamic paradigm. However, the presence of Islamic identities such as the Anti-Capitalist Muslims as allies within “secular” Gezi Park protests reveals that the frontier between Gezi protestors and the AKP Government is not a replica of this paradigm. On the contrary, by showing the possibility of mutually inclusive and reconciling interactions between Islamic and secular socio-political identities and lifestyles, the Gezi Park protests call us to rethink the dominant idea of a secular/Islamic divide: if the frontier between the secular and the Islamic is not *a priori* “out there,” and if these identities and lifestyles are not always produced in opposition to each other, how could we redefine the

⁶ The accusations of Erdoğan were never proved. On the contrary, the imam of the concerned mosque dismissed that the Gezi protestors consumed alcohol in the mosque. *Akşam*. 4 June 2013, [online:] <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/gezi-park-c4-b1-eylemcilerinins-c4b1-c4-9f-c4-b1nd-c4-b1-c4-9f-c4-b1-camide-ya-c5-9fananlar/haber-212629>, accessed 15 March 2014. Recently published CCTV recordings of the concerned scene, on the other hand, dismiss the accusation that the Gezi protestors attacked women with Islamic headscarf. *Sözcü*. 13 February 2014, [online:] <http://sozcu.com.tr/2014/gundem/kabatasta-aslin-da-bu-olmus-456817/>, accessed 15 March 2014.

⁷ Leonidas Karakatsanis (2013). *Χρόνος*. July 2013, [online:] <http://www.chronos-mag.eu/index.php/l-karakatsanis-political-frontiers-parallel-universes-and-the-challenges-for-the-gezi-park-movement.html>, accessed 19 September 2013.

formation, institution, and transformation of this divide in explaining the Turkish experience with secularism?

This article is theoretically and politically concerned with the ambiguity and complexity of the secular/Islamic divide in Turkey, while being empirically grounded in field research regarding the Anti-Capitalist Muslims as allies within the broader Gezi Park protests. In doing so, it follows a recent body of literature, showing that the formation of this divide is a product of complex social construction processes, rather than an *a priori* opposition between secular and Islamic political identities and lifestyles. However, I suggest that explicating the constructed, contingent and context-sensitive nature of this divide is only the starting point. In the light of the interviews I conducted with seven (four male and three female) members of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, and my participatory observations in the two “Earth Tables” (*Yeryüzü Sofraları*) protests organised in the Maltepe and Yedikule regions of Istanbul, I will argue that *the secular/Islamic divide is essentially political and potentially vulnerable to contestations and transformations; this divide opens the socio-political landscape to the production of multiple secularisation projects beyond it.*

What follows in this article is, first, a contextualisation of the political nature of the secular/Islamic divide. I then discuss the political discourse and identity of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims as a “paradigmatic case” (Flyvbjerg 2007) for studying the potentiality of the urban Turkish public context in contesting this divide. Third, drawing on my participatory observations in the Earth Table protests, I will show that the urban Turkish public context is already open to the production of alternative secularisation projects beyond the existing secular/Islamic divide. Finally, I will revisit the Gezi protests and show that the pluralist secularisation project they hint at is a possible challenge to the existing divide.

Contextualising the secular/Islamic divide: tracking the political

The theorisation of the secular/Islamic divide in Turkey goes back to the 1940s, if not earlier. In the 1960s, for example, Niyazi Berkes (1964, p. 6) suggested that the basic conflict in secularism in Turkey “is often between the forces of tradition, which tend to promote the domination of religion and sacred law, and the forces of change.” In the past two decades, due to the emerging public visibility of Islam, contemporary scholars (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Çınar 2005; Göle 2002; Özyürek 2006) have avoided confining the study of politics to formal institutions and political structures. Rather, they embraced a broader approach to the study of politics by taking the (urban) public sphere as the main site of political activity (Çınar 2005, p. 33). Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002, p. 2) defines public life as a site for the generation of the political. In her influential study analysing the production of the secular/Islamic conflict, Alev Çınar (2005) compares the ways in which the competing secularist-Western and Islamic Turkish national identification projects have been instituted in the public sphere. By looking at the secularist-Westernist and Islamic interventions in bodies, places, and time, she shows how the images of unveiled and veiled women, the

Western architecture of Ankara and Islamised Istanbul, and the secular and Islamic-Ottomanist versions of Turkish history were produced by secularist and Islamic socio-political actors respectively in contraposition to each other. Similarly, by focusing on memory as a site of political struggle between secularist-Westernist and Islamic projects, Özyürek (2007, p. 116) shows how “Islamist activists demonstrate that public memory is not only a ground of cultural reproduction, but also a source of resistance to it.”

A common denominator among contemporary scholars is their articulation of the secular and Islamic interventions to urban Turkish public life as methodologically the most important moments in studying the production and regeneration of the secular/Islamic divide. By taking (urban) Turkish public life as the main site of political activity, recent literature abundantly showed that the secular/Islamic divide is a product of a complex social construction process. In the words of Craig Calhoun *et al.* (2011, p. 20) “the demarcation between religion and the secular is *made [constructed]* and *not* simply found [*a priori* out there].” Therefore, this literature trend productively opens a new trajectory to trace its *political* nature (Hurd 2011); the production of the secular/Islamic divide is essentially political and its institution and maintenance in the socio-political landscape is a product of hegemonic interventions to urban Turkish public life. The term *political* is used to refer to the construction of antagonisms through which the “secular” and “Islamic” Turkish national identification projects come into play in the process of perceiving each other as their existential enemies (Laclau, Mouffe 1985, p. 122–134; Mouffe 2005; Norval 1997; Thomassen 2005). Whereas *hegemony* is used to refer to the politics of producing consent between multiple subject positions in marking the rival identification project as the existential threat of the projected (secular or Islamic) Turkish national identity, through which the latter has been carried in a set of interventions to urban Turkish public life (Gramsci 2003; Laclau, Mouffe 1985; Howarth 2004). For the purpose of this article, the discussion on the political nature of the secular/Islamic divide is limited to the post-2000 Turkish context.

In the post-2000s, this divide has been persistently regenerated in and through the confrontations between two hegemonic forces. On the one hand, there is the historically hegemonic *Kemalist secularist project of Western Turkish national identity*. On the other hand, the counter-hegemonic Conservative Democratic movement of the AKP Government was formed and the *Islamic Turkish national identification project* was carried with it. These two forces offer competing versions of secularism. In Kemalist secularist discourse, secularism is identified as a “way of life, which should be adopted by an individual” and the secular individual as *s/he* who “should confine religion in the sacred place of his[/her] conscience and not allow his[/her] belief to affect this world” (Kuru 2006, p. 136). The Conservative Democratic movement, however, defines it as a constitutional regime for the state. As Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan puts it: “There is no such thing as the

secular individual. There is only the secular state.”⁸ Although these two versions of secularism have been formed through the articulation of different principles, they equally regenerate the secular/Islamic divide through constructing antagonistic relations with each other.

Being a product of the Kemalist establishment’s identification of Islamic subjectivism as backward, uncivilized and anachronistic, the Kemalist secularist discourse has been hegemonically instituted through the articulation of three principles: liberation, paternalism, and control (Damar 2012, p. 77–115). The notion of liberation is used to refer to the identification of Islamic subjects as victims of their false-consciousness who must be liberated through the paternalistic interventions of the secular state. Paternalism captures the top-down-oriented reforms of the Kemalist establishment in dictating to society the true meaning of life, religion, individualism, and citizenship. In other words, paternalism refers to the Kemalist state’s involvement in “matters from the clothing of its citizens to the music they were to listen to, from the type of leisure activity they would be engaged in to the type of family relations they would have” (Çınar 2005, p. 15). The principle of control captures the state’s tight rule over religion through the formation of such state institutions as the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) and the appointment of *imams* as public servants (Çınar 2006). This aggressive secularism is the product of the Kemalist establishment’s antagonistic engagement with Islamic subjectivism, wherein the presence of the latter is perceived as the impossibility for constructing a civilized, Western, and secular Turkish national identity (Damar 2012).⁹

Still, being a product of the AKP elite’s antagonistic engagement with the Kemalist secularist project of Western Turkish national identity, the secularising discourse offered by the Conservative Democratic project has been hegemonically instituted through the articulation of another three principles: majoritarianism, moralism, and toleration (Damar 2012, p. 197–230). Majoritarianism captures the AKP’s identification of elections and ballots as identical to the people’s will and, therefore, as democracy. Moralism is used to refer to the AKP’s politics of national identification in accordance with Sunni Islamic principles. The examples of moralism include attempts to promote veiled women in public, social and political life, acts of building gigantic and sublime mosques in city squares in order to signify the Islamic identity of the place, and the organisation of ostentatious religious rituals such as breaking fast (*iftar*) dinners to mark the “Muslim” identity of the Turkish nation. The principle of toleration, finally, is used to refer to the establishment of a hierarchy between the Sunni Islamic majority and non-Sunni/non-Islamic/nonreligious

⁸ *Milliyet*. 26 January 2008, [online:] <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2008/01/26/son/sonsiy17.asp>, accessed 20 September 2013.

⁹ We elaborated the authoritarian and exclusionary dimension of this secularism toward Islamic-oriented socio-political identities and lifestyles in Çiçekçakan, Damar (2010). See also Cizre, Çınar (2004), and Çınar (2008).

identities, within which the latter can only live and enjoy their lifestyle within the Sunni Muslim framework.

Although such a discourse on secularism is productive in the sense of gaining visibility for Islamic identities in public life, it authoritatively excludes nonreligious/non-conservative identities and lifestyles, including artists, leftists, workers, feminists, LGBT and other gender groups or Western-secularist Kemalists. The economic-developmental and moralistic-Islamic interventions of the AKP that I enumerated at the beginning of this article are often experienced as an authoritarian imposition of a particular Sunni Islamic discourse on social life. What is more, the AKP's persistent identification of those who contest its politics as antidemocratic marauders, addicts and boozers, who have no respect for democracy or society, and who should learn to live in accordance with the moral norms of the majority, reveal the Government's ignorance towards nonreligious voices. Indeed, the formation of this secularising discourse itself is the product of the AKP's antagonistic engagement with nonreligious identities, which are denied by being identified as a group of pro-coup mindset elitist, who dictate their lifestyle to the entire nation.¹⁰

The political character of the secular/Islamic divide reveals its ambiguous nature and complex formation. "Tracking the political" blurs the rigid separation between "the secular" and "Islamic" by approving the possibility of the production of "multiple secularisms" in the form of competing projects.¹¹ The conflict between Kemalism and the AKP Government shows that both camps produce contending discourses on secularism in order to hegemonically institute their projects of Turkish national identity. Thus, it would be implausible to suggest either of these projects is any more or less secular than its counterpart. Nevertheless, for both the Kemalist and Conservative Democratic secularisms come into play in the process of constructing antagonistic relations with their counterparts, both projects are equally complicit in producing and regenerating the secular/Islamic divide as the hegemonic rule in dominating the urban Turkish public in the post-2000 Turkish context.

Contesting the secular/Islamic divide: the Anti-Capitalist Muslims

Does this contextualisation, however, mean that urban Turkish public life is subsumed or exhausted by the secular/Islamic divide? Does it mean that secular and Islamic identities and lifestyles have always been produced in contraposition to each other? In case the rigid frontier between "the secular" and "Islamic" is taken for granted, the formations of identities such as the Anti-Capitalist Muslims would

¹⁰ Melis Alphan (2013). *Hürriyet*. 8 June 2013, [online:] <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/23458977.asp>, accessed 20 September 2013.

¹¹ I borrowed the term 'multiple secularisms' from Göle (2010) and Stepan (2011), although my elaboration of the term significantly diverges from their understanding. While they develop the term from a comparative perspective by studying the divergence of secular regimes in different national/regional contexts, I use it to account on the possibility that a given context involves the potential of generating multiple secularisms in the form of competing projects. I elaborated 'multiple secularisms' in Damar (2012).

be aporetic cases. Indeed, the Islamic political discourse and identity of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims provides an abundance of resources to delineate and trace the contestability of this divide.

The formal Chair Mustafa Vatansever [male, 35], who professionally works in the media sector as a website designer, describes the Anti-Capitalist Muslims as a small group with, at most, 150 members. Many of them used to be members of local religious communities and brotherhoods, where they were taught on the dominant understanding and practice of Islam in Turkey. However, in the years immediately prior to the foundation of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, they began to perceive the dominant Islam as a mistake, for it was transformed, especially by the AKP Government, into a structural logic of instituting an unequal and oppressive regime. Vatansever asserts that the AKP Government “manipulates Islam to sustain its politically and economically dominating neo-liberal regime over different socio-political identities.” Moreover, he states that, in the hands of the AKP, Islam has turned into a show. Whereas Islamic rituals such as praying and breaking fast are performed as ostentatious parts of this show, the essence of Islam and its relation to social justice is totally neglected.¹²

Such a critical engagement with the dominant Islam led the Anti-Capitalist Muslims to organise sessions where they discussed the Qur’an, the Deeds of the Prophet Mohammed, films, sociology, and social movements in Turkey. Vatansever defines these sessions as products of “deliriums of a group of young people, who thought that Islam should or must be different than what we had been taught in the name of it.” Being influenced by the work of such thinkers as İhsan Eliaçık (2006)¹³, whose writings seek to articulate Islamic and leftist values in instituting a democratic regime, they developed a new understanding of Islam:

When we returned to the Qur’an, we saw that God’s will is totally different than what we have been taught in the name of it. We read many verses similar to “The oppressed shall lead in this earth.” Although issues on solidarity, equality, and equal distribution of wealth are discussed nearly in every page of the Qur’an, today Islam is understood by the rhetoric of “Allah’s will is to see Muslims rich and powerful.” But only a small group of the elite got powerful and rich through using Islam, and others are forced to be dependent on them. Muslims in Turkey think that they are in power, because the lifestyles of governors are similar to theirs; they are praying, and their wives are veiled with Islamic headscarf. Therefore, when issues such as

¹² *The Economist*, 18 July 2013, [online:] <http://www.economist.com/blogs/charlemagne/2013/07/turkish-politics>, accessed 21 October 2013.

¹³ There seems to be a common agreement in the national and international media in marking İhsan Eliaçık as the public face of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims. Nevertheless, all the Anti-Capitalist Muslims I interviewed informed me that their group had no organic relationship with them. They used to organise their sessions at Eliaçık’s office and have good relations with him. Nevertheless, my participants told me that they were uncomfortable with the media identification of Eliaçık as the leader, ideologue, or public face of the group. This discomfort is partly due to their reaction against the concept of leadership in social movements.

the headscarf, Palestine-Israel conflict, or desecration of mosques appear as public debates, Muslims raise the roof. But there is a deep silence among them when the state violates and even kills people just because they challenge its authority. If we choose to follow the Qur'an, we must first admit that the issue in Islam is by no means whether one is a Muslim or not. The issue is to institute a just regime, wherein a Muslim will always stand against oppression by taking its side next to the oppressed – without judging its identity, character, religiosity, lifestyle or cultural background [Mustafa, male, 35].

The Islamic discourse of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims is produced in contra-position to, and in tension with the dominant Islamic discourse of the AKP. The information provided by Yasin [male, 26], who is a recent member of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, enables us to trace this tension.

Yasin is the son of a traditional Islamic family in a conservative town near the Black Sea. He dropped out of his studies at the university twice before becoming a member of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims. When he first decided to join the group, his family's reaction was uncompromisingly harsh. He was considered an anarchist, who would fight against the state. He told me that he had contentious discussions with his family. However, because the Islamic sources that both he and his family drew upon were the same, his family was not unfamiliar with the language he was using. Apparently, he says, he began to influence his family's vision with his understanding of Islam and his rereading of Islamic sources in the sense of always being on the side of the oppressed. After a while, his family became much more open to recognising and understanding the existence of non-Islamic demands, identities and lifestyles, on the one hand, and more critical of the exclusionary and dominating politics of the AKP Government on the other. Defining the tension he experienced with his family as a productive process, he explains it in following way:

For many years I was thinking why all the oppressed identities of Turkey cannot get united. I met with the Anti-Capitalist Muslims while this question was in my mind. When I saw that they are also thinking about the same question, I decided to join them. Thereafter, we have tried to set up a lifestyle, and make ourselves heard. In this process, we sometimes struggle with our families. The incontestability of the authority is still a dominant perception in conservative society, where my family and I come from. For conservative circles the state is greater than even Allah. But now we are experiencing a process of change; both Muslims and seculars who have perceived Muslims as backward are passing through a critical reasoning process. Both sides are trying to understand and interact with each other. For example, my family could not resist the words I use, because those are taken from the Qur'an, and the Prophet's Deeds. Therefore, after a while they began to understand me and, more importantly, began to question their own perception of Islam. Their taboos are gradually cracking, although it is not an easy process. [Yasin, male, 26]

Apparently, what kicks up the dust between the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and the AKP is the former's openness, whereas the latter's closure to the existence of secularly-oriented identities and lifestyles. Insofar as the Anti-Capitalist Muslims

contests the marginalising/dominating politics of the AKP Government, they open the socio-political landscape to interactions and negotiations between Islamic and secular identities and lifestyles. Indeed, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims' "repertoire of contention" (Tilly 2003) abundantly shows the possibility that the secular and Islamic identities may politically act together. Thus far, they have taken part in the "secular" field of resistance through emphasising their "Muslim" identities. They have become a publicly famous political identity, especially after their involvement in the May Day celebrations in 2012. They appeared in Taksim Square in Istanbul, and performed funeral prayers for all the workers who have been killed in their struggle for rights during the Republic's entire history.¹⁴ They then became involved in the broader Gezi Park protests, struggling against the developmentalism and moralism of the AKP Government. During these protests, they organized Islamic rituals of "blessed night" (*kandil*) and "Friday resistance" (*Cuma Direnişi*). Far from affirming the AKP Government's engagement with these rituals to show the essentially Islamic identity of the nation, they performed them to contest the Government's imposition of neo-liberal Islamism (Atasoy, 2009) on social life.¹⁵

The Islamic discourse and identity of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims reveals the openness of Turkish public life to the production of multiple secular and Islamic identities beyond the existing secular/Islamic divide. It further shows that neither Islam nor secularism is one but multiple in Turkey. In a nutshell, the case of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims abundantly marks the contestability of this divide by showing that these multiple Islamic or secular identities are not necessarily produced in contraposition to each other.

Transforming the secular/Islamic divide: the "Earth Tables" protests

The alternative Islamic vision projected by the Anti-Capitalist Muslims also has a potential transformative impact on the dominant secularist vision within which the Islamic subject is often perceived as a threat against the modern, secular and civilised character of Turkey. In the light of my participatory observations on two "Earth Tables" protests, and interviews with protest organisers, I will now discuss why the post-Gezi Park Turkish socio-political landscape already provides resources for us to trace the transformation of the existing secular/Islamic divide. I will show that the Gezi protests opened the Turkish landscape to the proliferation of new articulation politics/strategies between secularised and Islamic demands and practices.

The end of the Gezi protests was the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. Consequently, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims developed the idea of "Earth Tables"

¹⁴ Oral Çalışlar (2012). *Radikal*. 27 April 2012, [online:] http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/oral_calislar/fatih_harbiye_hattindan_1_mayisa_ismcilar-1086159, accessed 20 September 2013.

¹⁵ Interview with Ö.K. Kıvanç in anonymous authors (ed.) (2013), *Devrim Taksim'de Göz Kırptı*. İstanbul: Kaldıraç Yayınları, p. 371-373.

protests. The meaning they attributed to Earth Tables was significantly different to the conventional meaning attributed to the ritual of breaking fast (*iftar*), as held by the AKP municipalities during the past decade. The municipalities organise public *iftars* as a cultural ritual for Muslims only. Therefore, they often limit the participants of *iftar* meals only to those who live in accordance to Islamic cultural norms. Indeed, in the hands of the AKP municipalities, the public organisation of *iftar* appears as a technique to mark the essentially Islamic identity of the Turkish nation.

The Anti-Capitalist Muslims, by contrast, define Ramadan as a symbolic month of solidarity, fraternity, fellowship, equality and sharing. In developing the idea of Earth Tables *iftar*, they invited everyone, regardless of whether or not they were fasting, consuming alcohol, Muslim or a believer to parks and streets to modestly practice the ritual of *iftar*. This was to show that the Anti-Capitalist Muslims were not concerned with the Muslim identity of the nation. The Earth Tables idea protested against the ostentatious, bourgeoisie and rich fast-breaking dinner tables of the AKP Government, and, concurrently, contested the dominant understanding of AKP Islam and its “show off” culture. It is also important to note that the Anti-Capitalist Muslims did not organise the Earth Tables. Rather, they developed the idea and shared it with social circles through social media. The idea was then embraced by these circles, and Earth Tables were spontaneously organised in different neighbourhoods in Istanbul and other cities.¹⁶

I conducted my field research in two Earth Tables protests organised in the Maltepe and Yedikule regions of Istanbul. My first observation in Maltepe was that the Earth Tables appeared as a simulation, wherein secular- and Islamic-oriented socio-political identities politically negotiated to act together. The population in this protest was by no means limited to people who were fasting or leading an Islamic-oriented lifestyle in general. Many participants were eating, drinking water or smoking before the *iftar* time. Everyone brought food, drinks or desserts to share at the table. Representatives of leftist, anarchist, feminist, LGBT communities, and football supporter groups were involved. The Maltepe Park, where the Earth Table was set up, was surrounded by photos from the Gezi protests and of civilians who had lost their lives in these protests, as well as by the markers and banners of feminist, LGBT and leftist social and political organisations.

The Earth Tables are an example of the constitutive impact of the Gezi protests on blurring the frontier between secular and Islamic-oriented political identities and lifestyles. On the one hand, this protest shows the openness of the Islamic identities to secularly-oriented nonreligious/non-Islamic identities in practicing Islamic rituals. On the other hand, it reveals the transformation of the dominant secularist imaginary, which is grounded upon excluding Islam in social, political and public life. The participation of secular identities in such an Islamic ritual shows the

¹⁶ Unfortunately there is no material stating how many Earth Tables protests were carried during Ramadan. This unavailability is partly related to the spontaneous dimension of these protests. Nevertheless, a brief survey in newspapers and online blogs reveal that more than 50 Earth Table protests were carried out in Turkish cities.

openness that dawned within the secularist imaginary to Islamic identities, lifestyles, and practices. This point requires a further explanation which I shall carry out in the light of an example from an interview I conducted with a secularist organiser of an Earth Table protest in the Yedikule region of Istanbul.

Suna [female, 29] is the daughter of a secular family living in Istanbul. She grew up in Istanbul and went to New York to study anthropology. After spending seven years in the US, she returned to Turkey in 2010. She defines herself as an atheist having problems with religion and God. She is interested in political activism with special reference to social issues such as street children, prisons, and women's right. She actively participated in the Gezi Park protests from the beginning to the end. She was also one of the organisers of an Earth Table protest in Yedikule, Istanbul. The Yedikule Earth Table protest was carried out by totally non-religious left-wing people like Suna against the AKP Istanbul Municipality's act of destroying a 14 hundred years old historical garden in the region, and, in its place, building a park as a backyard for newly built residences. The protest was carried out during the Ramadan period. Inspired by the idea of the Earth Tables, approximately 60 left-wing protesters organised such a protest in order to create a collective consciousness in the neighbourhood that might save the historical and natural fabric of the region. The rationale behind organising the Earth Table was their perception of the *iftar* dinner as an environment for peaceful exchanges between activists and neighbourhood locals. Yet, as she told me, for a group of politically motivated people, who speak through the language of the secular left, to organise such an Islamically-motivated ritual also meant something:

This protest means that I [as a secularly-oriented agent] do not "Otherise" you. I respect your religion, prayer, and rituals. I share your rituals with you. We can have your rituals together, and transform it into a collective act. I do not think similarly to those who perceive you as a threat against civilisation and the progress of this country. This is not toleration. I would, rather, like to say that I accept them for who they are. Our protest reveals that secularly- and Islamic-oriented people would accept each other for who they are and can still act together. It reveals that *the wall between "us" and "them" is cracking*. [Suna, female, 29]

Suna defines her current openness to Islamic-oriented values and lifestyles as a product of a long critical engagement process with her secular taboos:

My secular taboos on the Islamic symbol of the headscarf and the secular symbol of Atatürk began to crack when I was at university. I come from a secular circle. Stereotyping Islamic-oriented people such as women veiled with the Islamic headscarf as a threat against women's liberation, civilisation and progress is still dominant in these circles. However, I remember, for example, my conversation with a woman with an Islamic headscarf in the Yedikule protests. She had a critical stand against the AKP Government. She had many things to say against them. The crystallisation of the possibility of having much more sophisticated and thought-provoking discussions with Islamic-oriented people in comparison to the mainstream "secular elite" broke our classical taboos on feminism. [Suna, female, 29]

The replication of the Earth Tables protests, as well as the resulting openness that dawned upon both secular and Islamic imaginaries, reveal that the Turkish socio-political landscape is open to the proliferation of new articulations between secularised and Islamic values and practices. This articulation possibility reveals that the rigid secular/Islamic divide is potentially transformable, because it shows that urban Turkish public life is open to the production of *alternative and multiple secularisms* beyond it.

Beyond the secular/Islamic divide: revisiting the Gezi protests

Indeed, the Gezi Park protests hinted at the production of an alternative *pluralist secularisation project* as a possibility going beyond the existing secular/Islamic divide. This project affirms neither Kemalist nor Conservative Democratic secularisms. In fact, the Gezi protests in general, and particularly the pluralist secularisation project, gave a glimpse of what is the product of protestors' antagonistic engagement with the authoritarian and social engineering dimensions of Kemalist and Conservative Democratic secularisms.

A unique aspect of the Gezi Protests in Istanbul was the protestors' transformation of Gezi Park into a habitat. For a month, hundreds of protestors slept in tents, and spent their time in the Park. During this process, protestors designed a simulation of a new collective life. Scrutinising the way in which the protestors described this simulation enables us to trace three principles hinting at the possibility of the production of a pluralist secularisation project: political activism, horizontal hierarchy and recognition politics. Political activism refers to a specific logic of collective action within which protestors themselves, *and not the state or any other institution*, set up a simulation of their desired system of life. Horizontal hierarchy captures the institution of equal responsibility in the processes of decision-making and action. Finally, recognition politics refers to border transgression due to the emerging acts of negotiations and interactions between a wide range of secular and Islamic identities and lifestyles.

An Anti-Capitalist Muslim, Özgür, who spent a whole month at Gezi Park, describes the political activism and horizontal hierarchy principles of this simulation in the following:

After we occupied Gezi Park, we began to set up a collective life. It did not include the state, police, army, or any other institution. People took equal responsibility and were voluntarily involved in meeting the needs of the people. We were sharing everything that was beyond our need. No one was hungry or out of shelter. Money was invalidated. All of us maintained our daily activities (praying, reading or negotiating) in there. For us, this was a heaven on earth. Our utopia is to institute a social life wherein people share their values and surpluses, and voluntarily take on the responsibility for others. Once we set up social life in accordance with the principles of consent and inclination, there is no reason for the world not to turn into heaven. Our understanding of secularism must be thought of in relation to these principles. For us, any project that seeks to dictate a lifestyle to people is simply not secular. [Özgür, male, 36]

While Özgür is pointing out the political activism and horizontal hierarchy dimensions of the Gezi Park simulation, Mustafa Vatansever emphasizes the production of recognition politics:

The Gezi Park protests reveal the bankruptcy of mainstream sociology theories. The people who, according to these theories, can never come together actually came together. The spirit of the Gezi cannot be explained with a collective will to overthrow the Government and by replacing it with another government. It is about border transgression. Muslims exceeded their limits and took part in secular spaces. Secularists did the same and appeared in Muslim spaces. And people enjoyed this transgression a lot! They got to know one other. Secularists realised that their imagination of Muslim as s/he who slaughters people in the name of God is untrue. Muslims realised that their imagination of the secular as an apolitical partying guy is wrong. The spirit of the Gezi is nothing but the collective enjoyment people had in knowing one other. Those who were marked as terrorists before turned into brothers. In Gezi Park, we were all Muslim, atheist, LGBT, socialist, communist, nationalist, and Kemalist at the same time. And we got on very well [...]. [Mustafa, male, 35]

In a nutshell, this pluralist secularisation project symbolizes a rhetorical imperative: “we should build a life together.” This rhetoric signifies a possibility of transforming the secular/Islamic divide into a different modality in the post-Gezi Park context of Turkey. By affirming – indeed asserting – the coexistence of secular and Islamic socio-political identities and lifestyles, the pluralist secularisation project does not regenerate but (radically) contest the existing secular/Islamic divide. Thus, it opens a new trajectory in rethinking the Turkish experience with secularism beyond the secular/Islamic divide.

Of course, one could argue that the reason that these diverse identities get on well in the Park was because they were all fighting against a common enemy. This argument clearly involves a truth dimension, for fighting against the Government is the condition of the possibility for these identities to come together in the Park. Nevertheless, the period that they spent together also created new forms of social interactions and negotiations which have potential impacts on producing new and alternative discourses and projects. The pluralist secularisation project could be considered as one such new possibility – which also reveals that the Gezi protests are more productive and creative than being simply defined as anger against the Government.

Conclusion

This discussion suggests that the secular/Islamic divide in Turkey in the new millennium has been regenerated, especially in urban Turkish public life, through the construction of antagonisms between Kemalist secularist and Conservative Democratic forces in instituting their contending versions of Western and Islamic Turkish national identification projects. Taking the Islamic discourse of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims as a paradigmatic case, I have shown that the urban Turkish public context is not subsumed or exhausted by the secular/Islamic divide. The

Gezi Park protests and the presence of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims as allies within them reveal that the secular/Islamic divide in Turkey is ambiguous and potentially vulnerable to contestations and transformations. The contestability of this divide opens the Turkish socio-political landscape to the formation of multiple secular and Islamic identities. It also hints at the production of multiple secularisation projects beyond the existing divide. The pluralist secularisation project that is hinted at as a result of Gezi Park appears as one such possible alternative. The regeneration, contestation or transformation of this divide in Turkey's near future will be the product of hegemonic struggles between these multiple secularisms which have been produced in the form of competing projects.

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Abstract

This article suggests that the Gezi Park protests in general, and particularly the presence there of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims is a valuable example for studying the ambiguity and complexity of the secular/Islamic paradigm in Turkey. Conducting field research on the formation of the Anti-Capitalist Muslim identity, I argue that the secular/Islamic divide is politically produced, and potentially vulnerable to contestations and transformations, for it opens the socio-political landscape to the production of multiple secularisation projects beyond this divide.

Key words: Secular/Islamic divide, multiple secularisms, Kemalist secularism, AKP Government, Anti-Capitalist Muslims, Gezi protests