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**Rethinking the multiple dynamics of the Gezi Park protests**

**Semra Akay**



## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the spatialities, multiplicities and temporalities of protest events, using the 2013 Gezi Park resistance as a case study. The protest started by rescuing a few trees from being cut down. It turned into a national uprising. The thesis sets out to understand the protests, through careful examination of the key protagonists, including the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Gezi activists, as well as the economic, cultural, sociological, and political changes that have shaped the modern secular Turkish state. Given that protests create their own spatialities, multiplicities and temporalities, Gezi protests have made contesting identities visible over the space.

Interviews, participant observation and content analysis of media are used to argue that existing explanations of the Gezi protest are inadequate, because they are either mono-causal or too presentist. In this sense, as distinctive contribution to the literature, this thesis provides a holistic approach to the Gezi protests by examining the event from its own spatialities, multiplicities and temporalities. It concludes that there was not one overarching cause, but rather multiple processes including neoliberalism, secularism, postsecularism and democracy, with different histories and geographies, must be taken into account if we are to understand the Gezi resistance. Ultimately, this thesis argues that more nuanced accounts of protest politics are needed.



Rethinking the multiple dynamics of the Gezi Park protests

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Geography  
Durham University  
2017



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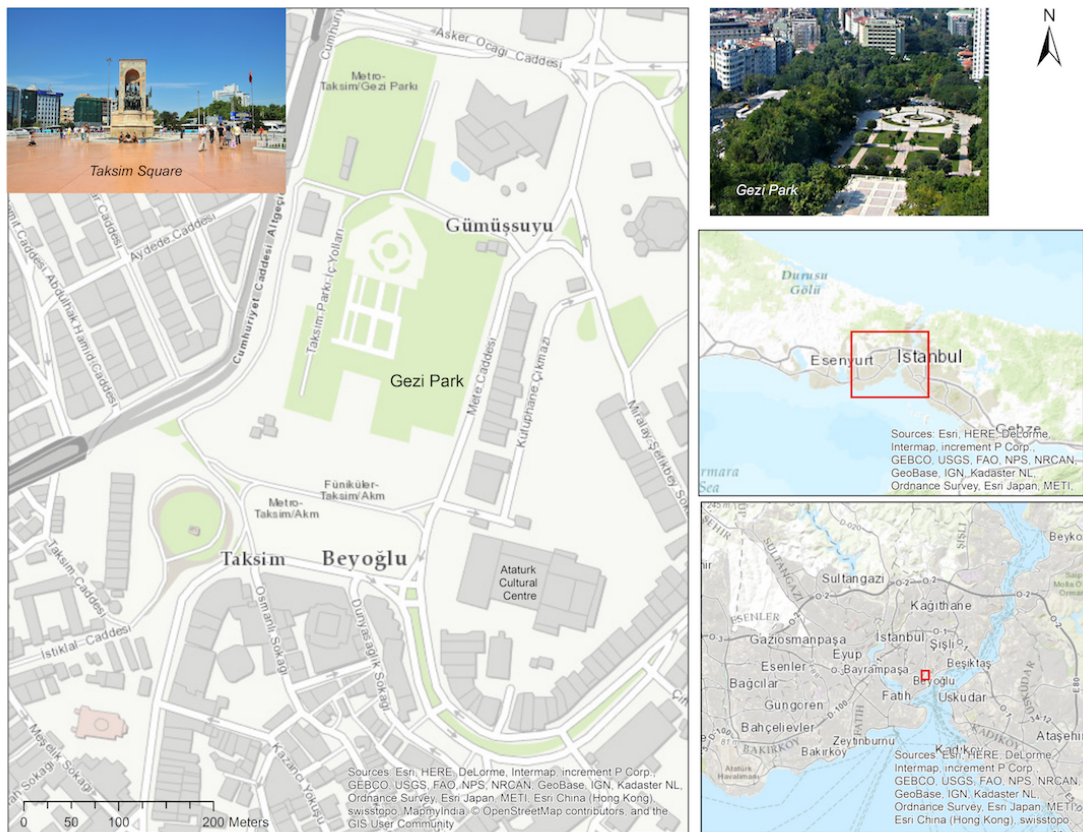
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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In the summer of 2013 Turkey witnessed significant events after a protest against the government's plan to demolish Gezi Park, Taksim in the central of Istanbul (Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1-1:** Map of Gezi Park and Taksim Square

Sources for the images: Gezi Park from: <http://showdiscontent.com/archive/gezi-parki/2013-05-27,28,29/img/0527-gezi-parki.jpg>

Taksim Square from: <http://www.cities-of-europe.com/ploshtad-taksim-istanbul-turtsiya/>

The protests began on 27th May 2013 as a reaction against the uprooting of trees in the park. Although only a few protesters stood up against the bulldozers, the police

response was excessively punitive. Therefore, the protests gradually expanded. In addition, the harsh response of the then ex-Prime Minister<sup>1</sup>, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, inflamed the situation and the mobilisation soon after turned into a nationwide anti-government uprising. During the 15-day occupation in Gezi Park and Taksim Square, protests on a massive scale continued in other parts of Istanbul and across Turkey as a whole. The protests also crossed borders to cities like Berlin, Los Angeles, Paris, Kiev and Moscow in which pro-Gezi rallies were organised (Haberturk, 2 June 2013). According to data from the Turkish Ministry of Interior, 2.5 million people from 79 cities took to the streets during the protests in June, and there were only two cities in Turkey in which no protests occurred (Milliyet, 23 June 2013). 8 people died<sup>2</sup>, thousands were hurt and arrested and there are many ongoing unresolved cases involving protesters.

The Gezi Park protests can be considered as a milestone in modern Turkish history. Different groups and individuals from different social and cultural classes coalesced around varying concerns that related to the policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Of course, there have been many protests against the AKP's policies since it came to power. For instance, small-scale neighbourhood acts of resistance against urban redevelopment plans, dams in northern region of Turkey, privatisation policies and the candidacy of Abdullah Gul, the former president, for president in 2007 (known as the Republican Meetings). The Gezi protests were neither the same sort of resistance as other acts of urban resistance against redevelopment and privatisation (cf. Karaman, 2013; Kuyucu and Unsal 2010; Lovering and Turkmen 2011; Islam 2010), nor a mere expression of Republican Meetings (cf. Ozyurek 2006; Karaveli 2010; Damar 2012). What makes the Gezi protest distinctive is that it comprised many aspects of the other protests over the previous ten years. The protests attracted both professional and non-professional citizens, and turned into an arena in which people from different backgrounds expressed their dissatisfaction with the AKP government. In other words, police brutality sparked various anti-AKP protesters to show their outrage, which had accumulated over the previous decade. For fifteen days of occupation different

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<sup>1</sup> Erdogan was the Prime Minister during the Gezi protests and became the President in August 2014. Therefore, I will use Prime Minister to refer to Erdogan throughout the rest of thesis.

<sup>2</sup> The deaths occurred in other parts of Istanbul and Turkey.

individuals and groups voiced various demands, such as cancelling the construction plan for the park, asking for more participation in decision-making processes, and asking for the resignation of Erdogan.

“Everywhere Taksim, everywhere resistance” became one of the significant chants that showed the protests were about more than a localised issue. Demonstrations and protests in an urban park brought together a whole body of different interest groups: leftists, nationalists, Kemalists, LGBT people, football fans, Alewites, Kurdish activists, Anticapitalist Muslims, artists, celebrities and more. The coexistence of differences around a threatened park and bigger issues created something unpredictable that was previously thought impossible. In other parts of Istanbul and across Turkey, many people assembled in squares or parks to show solidarity with the protests. For a long time afterwards the Gezi protests were the primary topic on the Turkish current affairs agenda. There were also several attempts to revive Gezi once again. The conflict between Gezi activists and the conservative AKP government meant that relationships never returned to what they had been before and, on the contrary, the polarisation between the sides increased (Ete, 2013; Keyman, 2014).

However, the protests in Gezi were far from unusual when viewed from a global perspective. The 2010s witnessed mass protests in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, as thousands of people took to the streets to topple unelected tyrants and demand their first free elections. The Occupy movements in Zuccotti Park, New York and at London’s St. Paul’s Cathedral allowed young activists to bond together and protest against financial institutions that created undemocratic income inequality. Economic crises in South European countries caused mass protests in Greece, Spain, and Portugal. All these protests serve as expressions of dissatisfaction with the current political and economic position. Alongside this, all these movements received massive attention because of the way they used new social media and significant spaces of the city such as Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park (Castells, 2012; Merrifield, 2014).

Some scholars like Castells (2012) Harvey (2014) and Merrifield (2014) have explained these global protests through one lens. For example, Harvey expands his concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, while Merrifield uses ‘global neo-Haussmannisation’. For these authors, all global protests appear to be reactions

against the neoliberal project or capitalist urbanisation. They argue that these projects have created urban dissatisfaction and alienation across the world. Thus, the global protests offer “new forms of resistance, contesting amongst other things, our hyper-exploitative undemocratic system of globalisation” (Merrifield, 2014: VIII). For Castells (2012), since the neoliberal project generates ‘collective outrage’, these mobilisations all over the globe generate ‘hope’ to address economic and social problems. These authors put all the protests in the same equation. Such a universal mode of conceptualising fails to address the important differences between each protest. While there are clearly forms of inspiration and practice that circulate transnationally, this thesis argues that the national and urban context needs to be elaborated in order to better understand the Gezi protests. Commencing in Taksim and spreading in waves to many other cities, the Gezi Park protests have some similarities in terms of style with these global movements. Similar to other protests the use of technology was prominent in the Gezi protests. Social media - Twitter and Facebook - became important tools through which to circulate news, images and videos, as well as to attract the media. The act of occupying important spaces in the heart of city – Taksim Square and Gezi Park – also resembled the occupations carried out during the other global protests. However, a proper understanding of the Gezi protests requires a deeper analysis of the economic, sociological, historical, and political processes that have constituted the modern secular Turkish state.

This thesis has two objectives. The first is to build up a broad theoretical understanding of the dynamics and implications that played an important role in the Gezi protests. I argue that only a combination of different theories can offer a comprehensive approach, which grasps the complexities of protests. In the case of Gezi, it is hard to define one single motivation, aspiration or demand by different individuals and groups. Therefore I argue that the Gezi protests have multifaceted dimensions that require us to carefully examine the sociology of Gezi as multiple. Rather than accepting a single concept, this thesis is based upon multiple theories, including neoliberalism, democracy, secularism, and postsecularism, each of which is employed to understand one facet of the protest. While all these concepts are interlinked with each other, each has its own specific histories and geographies that need to be elaborated. Although many scholars like Tugal (2013), Kuymulu (2013), Karaman (2014), Igsiz (2013), Mourdorous (2014) and Musil (2014) treat

neoliberalism as omni-causal in explaining all the undesired and harmful circumstances in the governance of Turkey, I argue such an approach misdirects us away from grasping complexity. In the Gezi context, neoliberalism is only one aspect amongst many others. Thus, by refusing to reduce Gezi to a single framework, this thesis seeks to tease out the intricacies of the protests.

The second goal, related to the first, is to understand the politics of Gezi in time and space by elaborating the subjectivities of the Gezi protests. I argue that Gezi created its own multiplicities and spatialities, as well as its own temporalities. Such an approach allows us to understand the resistance with all its own dynamics and circumstances. From this perspective, Gezi is unique as it brought together individuals and groups in ways that were once considered impossible. However, this togetherness should be understood through the lens of the specific time when the protests occurred and also the specific spaces through which people engaged with it.

The next section outlines various explanations of resistance, which enable us to take the spatio-cultural specificities of the protests into account. Then it presents a review of the literature on the Gezi protests and the multiple perspectives through which to understand the protests. The research questions and outline of the thesis will be presented at the end of the chapter.

## **1.2. Understanding the complexities of the Gezi protests**

Although the Gezi protests started as a reaction against a few trees being cut down, it turned into a national upheaval in which not only many disparate powers took a stance against the AKP government, but also specific contingencies were revealed. These specific localities and contingencies cannot be explained through universal explanations. To understand the differentiation of protests, local conditions should be interpreted in depth. Thinking about Gezi through literature on resistance offers conceptual tools to grasp different power relationships and the spatio-cultural specificities of the Turkish context.

Most of the literature on resistance studies underlines how everyday subjects disrupt, appropriate, and contest the spaces of hegemony and domination. It can be argued that there are two classifications in terms of approaching power relations: Marxism and poststructuralism.

Scholars like Harvey and Castells argue that spaces of resistance are constructed in opposition to relations of power, and therefore resistance occurs against state oppression, and also sometimes against non-state actors. These are sanctioned indirectly by law and regulation. In other words, for these scholars power is already structured by the state and thus social agents cannot take part in power networks. For example, Castells in his influential book, *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) defines resistance using a wide range of cases. Through urban protests and mobilisations he introduces the concept of urban conflict and its impact on urban spatial forms. He defines resistance as “a consciousness collective practice, originating in urban issues, able to produce qualitative changes in the urban system, local culture, and political institutions in contradiction to the dominant social interests institutionalised as such at the societal level” (p. 278). For him resistance has a relationship with its own society as well as with global systems. For example, through his case on gay mobilisation, Castells thinks resistance is not only a reflection of the working class, but rather different groups and social classes can coalesce around multiple issues, and thus resistance can be across culture and class. He considers the political activities of grassroots organisations as limiting resistance, since self-identification by local interest groups succumbs to the state programmes directed at those specific interest groups. Instead of competition between identities, he argues forming coalitions is a more effective way of fighting against the system. This argument was expanded in his more recent work, *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012), in which he shows that cross-class coalitions have been formed in global protests.

In contrast, poststructuralist scholars examine resistance through the lens of more complex relationships of power (Pile, 1997; Creswell, 2000; Sharp et al, 2000; Routledge, 1997). These scholars think that, in order to better understand the complexity and multiplicity of resistance, it should be articulated through the roles of social agents in networks of power relations. This argument derives from Foucault’s critique of power relations conceived as unidirectional, top-down and monolithic. Instead, Foucault argued, “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet or rather, consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” (1984: 94). He continued, “These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of Great refusal, no soul of revolt,

source of all rebellions or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case.” (ibid: 94-95).

Sharp et al (2000) build on Foucault’s critique by suggesting there is an entanglement of domination and power. This more diffuse understanding of power relationships also discloses “more nuanced ways in which the ability to shape social actions take place.” (2000: 4). Power is always contested in nature, as it is not only located within the process of the local and national government, but also “within and between the practices of everyday life.” (ibid: 10). Therefore, resistance should be viewed as “unremittingly entangled with relations of power and domination”. (ibid: 31). Similarly, Creswell (2000) describes power as working through a multitude of individual activities. He discusses how power has a transformative capacity to change acts. “This transformative capacity cannot be destroyed as it exists at the heart of all possible social relations” (2000: 262). Therefore, power cannot be destroyed, but rather transformed and used. Resistance in power relationships appears “as a motivation to deployment of power” (p. 264). This means that people are not just located in multiple power relationships, but constitute and unfold relationships of authority, meaning and identity through their different activities within power relations (Pile, 1997). While different power relationships constitute multiple spatialisations, resistance is not a simple expression of oppression and exploitation, rather it operates successfully “between the spaces authorised by authority” (Pile, 1997: 13). Consequently, power relations, social structures, knowledge, domination and resistance are intertwined with each other through conflicts in particular spaces (Routledge, 1997).

Resistance is often thought as a conscious action (Castells, 1983; Routledge, 1997; Creswell, 2000). Routledge (1997) defines resistance as “any action, imbued with intent, that attempts to challenge, change or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes and/or institutions.” (1997: 69). Similarly, Creswell (2000: 266) think that people are located within a multitude of invisible modes of power and resistance can be strategically used to reveal these power relations. In contrast, for Pile (1997) resistance does not necessarily have to be intentional, rather it might be unintentional. He suggests “[p]ower relations might produce discontinuous spaces, which resistance might transgress or move between, implying that there could

be other places in the map of resistance” (1997: 14). Thus, “geographies of resistance are multiple, fluid, dynamic and in some ways uncontainable or at least unintended,” (ibid: 27).

Resistances create their own spaces, and spaces create resistances. Pile (1997) argues that geography makes resistance possible or impossible in the same way that resistance makes other geographies or other places possible or impossible. Thinking through geographies of resistance, Pile believes that domination and resistance cannot be separated from each other. This does not mean, however, that they both have nothing to do with each other, but rather although resistance has its own spatialities, there are different forms of control, which work through different geographies. Whereas the spaces of resistance hinge on domination, simultaneously they are displaced from spaces of domination. Similarly, Routledge (1997) suggests “the articulation of resistance is always contingent upon the spatio-cultural conditions of its emergence and the character of its participants” (1997: 83). Routledge claims that resistances are “rhizomatic multiplicities of interactions, relations and acts of becoming” (p. 69). That multiplicity has to change its nature in order to gain or lose a dimension that it is ceaselessly transforming itself. Resistances take multiple forms and as rhizomatic multiplicities they can form new trajectories, strategies, relationships, possibilities and connections against dominating power relations. He insists that the meaning of particular places can be changed by the practice of resistance either temporarily or permanently, but at the same time he believes material, symbolic and imaginary features of particular places affect the articulation of resistance. Yet, these places are not only connected to the sites of resistance, but also to broader processes and sites at national and international levels. Thus the relationship between resistance and space is mutually constructive.

Social agents have an important role in changing the formation of resistance. The acts of resistance are endless since people have the capability to change things by assigning their own meanings and finding their own strategies in order to avoid, attack, undermine, endure, and mock the everyday exercise of power (Pile, 1997). From these practices Pile believes resistance is omnipresent: “Resistance does not just act on topographies imposed through the spatial technologies of domination, it moves across them, under the nose of the enemy, seeking to create new meanings out of

imposed meanings, to re-work and divert space to other ends” (1997: 16). Hassan (1997) shows how the everyday life experiences of agents shape the nature of resistance through different urban protests movements. He claims that it is not structural conditions that shape resistance, but rather values, norms, beliefs and specific experiences that have an important impact on the nature of resistance. His work examines three different types of protest movements in Palestine. Despite the commonalities in terms of social and geographic location, these resistances in three neighbourhoods display diversified patterns. Although the demands of all three neighbourhoods are more or less similar - to improve the conditions in the neighbourhoods - the strategies the neighbourhood organisations took were quite different from each other. Hassan suggests that people’s engagement with territory and place create different forms of resistance. In this manner, different interpretations and approaches shape the organisations as much as the forms of resistance. Thus, cultural interaction with different environments, either internal or external, personal biographies of individuals and groups within organisations, and nearness to the centre, constitute the protest. It appears that variation in resistances do not derive from the societal context, but rather it is “rooted in the different ways in which different human agents located in varying places framed their experiences: that is identified the source of injustice, set their goals and suggested lines of action” (1997: 256). Therefore through different forms of resistance, he suggests that it is the experiences and interpretations of actors that shapes what the protest will look like.

There are some attempts to locate relations of power in national and international political activities (Slater, 1997; Featherstone, 2000 and 2003). These scholars attempt to conceptualise resistance through globalisation and neoliberalism. Slater (1997) illustrates the importance of geopolitics in making a difference to power relations. Drawing on Connolly’s (1991) political theory that constructs a boundary between the internal and external, he seeks to conceptualise resistance through geopolitical discourses. While Connolly’s evaluation is based upon the societies of Europe and North America, Slater believes that despite the differences between Western and non-Western societies, geopolitical memory and power relations should be taken as the focal point. Therefore, resistance for him is “frequently seen as phenomena that occurs within society, existing in juxtaposition to those key political structures that give them their essential meaning, namely, states and the states system.”

(1997: 262). In this sense, while resistance can affect the policies of the state and the priorities of political parties, and act as an intermediary in the inner political system, there is also a connection with global politics. It is this geopolitical connection that makes it possible to reveal complex relations of power both internally and externally to resistance. Likewise, Featherstone (2003) illustrates how spatialities and power are constructed through resistance against neoliberal globalisation in subaltern geographies. He uses the term 'counter globalisation' instead of anti-globalisation to explore various connections and power relationships in which diverse resistances were established. He argues that these anti-neoliberal global movements contest not only the power relationship of neoliberal globalisation, but also political discourses. He challenges the existing spatial understanding of relations between space, power and resistance (see Sharp et al, 2000). For him power relationships are constructed through antagonism and resistance is always situated in and already a product of multiple trajectories. These different trajectories constitute political activity, which is foremost in political spaces. Different spatial practices make power relations visible and contest parts of the terrain. These practices are productive and generative of political activities that engage with ongoing forms of geographies of power (Featherstone. 2003).

Conceptualising resistance is an elusive but at the same time a fruitful task. It appears that the practices of resistance become apparent when they are faced with oppression. Moreover, as Pile argues, there are not only many spaces of struggle in which people become political, these struggles also constitute political subjectivities. Therefore, resistance is not something to be theorised through generalised explanations, but instead every resistance has its own spatio-cultural specificity, and even within each resistance there are many localities and multiplicities (Routledge, 1997). This approach then helps us to understand the subjectivities of the Gezi protests. Different motivations from various identity-groups accumulated against the AKP in multiple ways. Gezi was not a simply protest through which a common ground was formed. Therefore, thinking about Gezi through resistance reveals the complexities of the protests.

### **1.3. Contextualising Gezi in relation to other global protests?**

The 2010s witnessed protests on the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, Madrid, Athens, New York, Ferguson, Baltimore London, Istanbul and many other cities around the world, which drew inspiration from each other. For example, while the Tunisian rebellion inspired the Egyptian revolt, both then inspired other protests such as the Indignados and Occupy movements all around the world (Merrfield, 2013; Nigam, 2012).

In Arab countries, the protests did not start out seeking to overturn the authoritarian regimes. Rather small local events spontaneously turned into massive protests (Bamyeh, 2013). Public anger and outrage become highly visible in public spaces throughout the protests. Bayat (2013) argues that the practice of ‘public nagging’ is one of the noticeable features of Arab culture through which ordinary citizens share their public opinions on everyday life. He states that through the Arab Spring people complained about many issues, ranging from electricity cuts and high prices to punitive police responses and undemocratic systems, for which governments were held responsible. Dissenting public voices arose because authoritarian regimes contributed to the unbalanced distribution of resources between the rulers and ruled. As El-Ghobashy (2014) indicates, under the tyrants police states were established and their coercive apparatus became the driving forces of all areas of daily life.

In contrast to the protests in Arab Countries, the Occupy Wall Street movement in the USA deployed the famous slogan of “We are 99%” against financial capitalism. While Wall Street represented the 1%, the 99% could be anyone who was affected by the unequal distribution of resources (Calhoun, 2013). In the case of the Black Lives Matter campaign the protest moved beyond its initial scope. While it started out protesting against the killing of black people by police, it turned into a movement that aimed to challenge dominant ideologies about race. From Ferguson to Baltimore people stood up against the misrepresentation of the historical narratives of black politics (Hooker, 2016). As Alicia Garza (2014), one of the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement articulates, all the marginalised people within the Black liberation movement, be they black, queer, disabled, or women, became the centre of Black Lives Matter. In other words, Black Lives Matter points to how black people are divested of their basic human rights and dignity and, as a consequence of state

violence, are criminalised and oppressed in US society in various ways. Thus the protests enabled us to think about the different type of inequalities. While the Occupy movements employed a more general claim against neoliberal regimes, Black Lives Matter movement spoke up for the rights of traditionally marginalised groups in US society.

Global protests are thus comprised of a heterogeneous patchwork of activism with quite diverse political agendas. For example, in the case of Arab Spring, although most of the participants were from religious Muslims groups, there were also seculars, nationalists, leftists and non-Muslims who stood side by side (Bayat, 2013; Stein, 2012; Hanafi, 2012). When discussing the Egyptian revolt Bayat asserts that while many religious protesters deployed religious rhetoric, it does not mean they sought the establishment of an Islamic state, similar to the Iranian model. On the contrary, the protesters were driven by ‘post-Islamist’ convictions that are neither un-Islamic nor secular, but religious. In other words, the Egyptian rebellion sought “to transcend Islamist politics by emphasizing people’s rights rather than just their obligations; people are seen more as citizens than mere subjects.” (2013: 592). The squares and streets of Tunis, Benghazi, Cairo and elsewhere in the region were occupied by diverse groups of people. As Hassan (2012) proclaims, the crowd in each square held up a mirror to society, and could not be appropriated by a single political group. This was also manifested in the Occupy movements. Cloke and Sutherland (2016) claim that Occupy movements were successful because a diverse group of people were able to rapproach their differences. That is to say, mutuality within various subjectivities was found, and thus the movements were shaped and reshaped through the rapprochement of differences.

Many scholars argue that the Arab Spring involved revolutionary actions as it happened in unpredictable ways (Stein, 2012; Badio, 2011; Bamyeh, 2013; El-Ghobashy, 2014). Bamyeh (2013) argued that the revolutionary actions of the Arab Spring were brought about by ordinary individuals without any organisational backing, leadership and guardianship. The protests were horizontally organised in ways that acted powerfully against highly hierarchical forms of the state (Bambey, 2013). In other words, Hanafi (2013) claims, the disparaged citizens sought to establish their common values against the despotic Arab regimes. Moreover, the

protests brought a new kind of subjectivity rooted in the political and social structures of the region. Thus, the Arab Spring influenced the other global protests in terms of building up solidarity between and among protesters (Greene and Kuswa, 2012).

From the Arab Spring to the Indignados and Occupy movements, participants were mobilised in both public squares and digital spaces. The spatiality of the public spheres – physical and virtual - formed the space and time of the protests (Murray, 2016). Many scholars point to the role of the social in the formation of Occupy-style movements (Carney, 2016 and Calhoun 2013). They assert that digital media has provided new spaces for assembling and contestation. While the role of Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and others cannot be ignored, it is important to acknowledge that physical presence in public spaces also provided a powerful weapon with which to build up new coalitions. Through emphasising the role of physical and digital spaces in the Egyptian protests Gregory (2013) argues that successful revolt does not only depend on digital media, but also on brave people who showed their presence on the streets. What is fascinating about the protests in Egypt is that people reconstructed Tahrir as a public space. In other words, not only people continued their daily basis such as eating and sleeping but also they protested for their very basic rights in the public square (Butler, 2011). As Gregory asserts, state surveillance had been highly visible in public spaces in the Middle East over the past few decades, in particular in the squares. Despite this, the streets of Cairo witnessed the collective actions of Egyptians. Although many protests occurred in important squares across the country, they were either controlled by the regime through fences and barricades, or subjected to brutal police force. Despite the state surveillance, Tahrir Square was reproduced by the protesters. In other words, Tahrir became a corporeal space since “[the] sounds and images from the square, together with the distant responses that they elicited, found their way back into— affirmed and emboldened—the performance of Tahrir as both a physical and a corporeal place.” (2013: 241). Moreover, Murray (2016) asserts that face-to-face interactions in public squares were a critical tool for publicity as people slept, talked, discussed, ate, and protested, and simultaneously shared their actions on digital media. In particular, screening the brutal response of security forces on both visual and social media helped the protests to become nationally and internationally significant (Calhoun, 2013). Thus, physical and digital spaces are intertwined in regards to the formation of spatialities of the public sphere.

While the protests happened in unexpected ways, what they can culminate in is also uncertain and contested. The dimensions and impacts of the protests are multiple and dynamic and change according to the political environments around them. What is particular about the Arab Spring is that there are no guarantees for success. For example, the Arab Spring did not have the same influence on all countries in the region. While in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya undemocratic despotic regimes were overthrown, in other countries like Syria, Yemen and Bahrain the strong ties between the military and international powers became obstacles to change (Hanafi, 2012). As Hassan (2012) argues, even in the countries where authoritarian regimes have fallen, the revolution is still open to contestation and it does not necessarily follow that that democracy or a new type of society has followed. In fact, the opposite can happen, such as in Egypt, the revolution was replaced by Al-Sisi's dictatorial regime that can be considered worse than Mubarak's regime in many ways. Six years after the revolt it can be said that, apart from Tunisia where parliamentary regime still stands, the Arab Spring did not produce positive outcomes in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. Public life has been controlled more than it was before, and terrorism (particularly ISIS) effectively changed the public. As Abaza (2016: 3) indicates, "the direct effect of Arab revolutions has been the triumph of both international terrorism and the enhancement of military establishments." In the case of the Occupy movements, the protests had a limited effect on public life. As Calhoun (2013) emphasises, the impacts of the movements are felt in cultural terms rather than as a permanent change in the politics. These movements enabled us "to look seriously and critically at inequality and at the question of whether actual democratic institutions are really working."

In summary, there are many connections between different protests across the globe. In particular, similar spatial practices, techniques and tactics can be observed in all the protests. These protests provoke us to rethink power relationships, inclusions and equalities. Yet, to put all these protests in the same equation is misleading. The impulse behind the Arab Spring was not the same as the Occupy movements. There have been divergences in governing styles, historical experiences and the practices of everyday life in different places around the globe. Thus, it is difficult to claim that they have had similar impacts on society. This is also in the case in the Gezi protests,

the biggest in the Turkish history. There were multiple trajectories that played a role in the formation of the Gezi protests.

As Massey argues that space is not a 'surface' or a 'continuous material landscape'. Space is "a momentary coexistence of trajectories, a configuration of a multiplicity of histories all in the process of being made." (1995: 229). Massey's definition of space is intrinsically relational, heterogeneous and processual. "This is the event of place in part in the simple sense of the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing. This is place as open and as internally multiple. Not capturable as a slice through time in the sense of an essential section." (2005: 141). From this perspective, political, economic, social and cultural conjunctures alongside with historical experiences of Turkey constructed multiple dimensions and trajectories of the Gezi protests. This thinking enables us to unravel the complexities and heterogeneities of the Gezi protests. The next section presents how Gezi was understood by different academics.

#### **1.4. How the Gezi protests were perceived**

Since the protests, the literature on Gezi has mushroomed. Some scholars have investigated the politics of public space (Gole, 2013; Erensu and Karaman, 2016; Gambetti, 2014; Kaya, 2014), while others looked at it from an historical perspective focusing on the dichotomy of the Islamic versus secular divide (Damar, 2014; Yel and Nas, 2013; Kaya, 2013; Oncu 2013). Others focused on the previous decade of AKP governance (Yoruk, 2014; Igsiz, 2013; Tugal, 2013). First and foremost, neoliberalism has been blamed for the protests and foregrounded in many arguments. Explanations that explore Turkey's postsecular history have been less prominent, but nevertheless employed by some scholars. Although it is very difficult to connect multiple perspectives and topics with each other, more or less similar arguments have often been repeated.

Scholars like Tugal (2013), Musil (2014), Karaman (2013), Erensu and Karaman, (2016), Kuymulu (2013), Mourdorous (2014), Yoruk (2014) and Dikec (2013) argue that there has been a hegemonic neoliberal regime since the AKP came into the power. For them, thanks to various political and social strategies, the AKP has succeeded in extending neoliberal domination over the economy and society. Tugal (2013) asserts

that Turkey has a much more hegemonic neoliberal regime than Western and Arab countries because the Islamist ruling party has been quite successful in establishing a popular base and creating partisan intelligentsias. He believes that this relies on the coming together of multidimensional ideological, political, religious and economic factors. Likewise Musil (2014) illustrates that in Turkey's case neoliberalism is embedded in the government's political and social strategies. That is why the Turkish experience of neoliberalism has created economic growth and stability on the one hand, while controlling and oppressing social and political life on the other. Karaman (2013) argues that the AKP's success, based on real estate and construction, have been the main pillars of the AKP's neoliberal policies. Not only have the neoliberal urban projects created dispossession and displacement, with Haussmann like operations the authoritarian faces of neoliberal policies have also become incredibly dominant. Similarly Kuymulu (2013) defines this practice as 'authoritarian neoliberalism' in which neoliberalism has become dominant. He questions why such protests occurred at a time when Turkey was enjoying economic stability, and unlike Spain and Greece, rising levels of growth. He asserts that in the same way as other uprisings around the world, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with global capitalism, which has taken on an authoritarian character. Unlike the austerity uprisings in Europe, which were a result of uneven economic growth, the protests in Turkey occurred during a period of economic growth that had improved the living standards of the population. In order to understand why the middle class participated in the protests, the economic success of the AKP should be questioned. Particularly through the privatisation of public lands, which has become more systematic under the AKP regime, urban spaces have been transformed into vast construction sites. Therefore, for him it is clear that, like other middle class movements across the globe, in Turkey the protesters in the park were speaking out against the urban policies of the AKP in general.

Moudourous (2014) argues that the AKP has succeeded in creating harmony between Islam and neoliberalism. He argues that the AKP's urban policies cannot be separated from its imagined imperial past. In particular, in order to make Istanbul a global city, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire has been drawn on to promote the capital. In this respect, there is a profound parallel between Taksim Square and the AKP's imagined imperial past. As Dikec (2013) indicates, Taksim has importance for secular and

leftist people, because of the Bloody Labour Day in 1977, when citizens trying to go to Taksim Square were confronted by security forces, resulting in deaths and injuries. By contrast, for the AKP Taksim represents the political vision of the old Kemalist regime, and in order to reproduce the Ottoman Empire, its Kemalist secularist past should be banished. He claims that for the Islamic class, the destruction of the Topcu Barracks was a historic defeat for Islam. Therefore, as a Turkish Islamic identity will dominate the square if the barracks are rebuilt, there is a risk that the new buildings will worsen political polarisation between different groups. In addition, the destruction of public and green spaces, and their replacement with elaborate buildings symbolises the AKP's vision of Istanbul transformed into an ideological capital (Maoudourous, 2014).

In this literature, there is a widespread assumption that the protesters were drawn largely from the 'new middle class', and that participation from those further down the social scale was either low or non-existent (Tugal 2013; Keyder, 2013; Karaman 2013, Yel and Nas 2013 and Karayakali and Yaka 2014). Keyder (2013) claims that a new middle class that was not only created by the AKP, but also benefited from the economic policies of the AKP, took part in the protests. For Keyder this younger generation of protesters grew up in a 'politically consistent decade' thanks to the AKP, and were therefore labelled apolitical since they were distanced from the traditional politics of the earlier period. This new middle class has relatively modern employment and consumption habits shaped by global trends. In addition, they also seek "new guarantees for their way of life, for their environment, for their right to the city; and they resent violations of their personal and social space", such that the current government does not know how to deal with this new type of disaffection. In contrast to Keyder's 'new middle class' explanation, David Harvey (2014) provides an explanation based on 'rising class' who established democratic assemblies through caring for each other. He argues that those who did not participate in the protests, the Islamic working classes, possess their own antimodernist-cultural solidarities. Furthermore, he claims those classes value the mosques and shopping malls built by the AKP, despite the corruption encompassing this building boom, since the boom provides increased job opportunities.

Looking at the moment in which the Gezi protests occurred, Gole (2013) argues that Gezi brought a new form of citizenship which went beyond the Islamic versus authoritarian secularism dichotomy. She states, “The Gezi movement marked a new threshold for democracy. As every new event unfolded, there is a date, ‘before’ and ‘after’ Gezi” (2013: 8). For Gole, the movement not only created its own time, but also its own actors who come from different backgrounds. Therefore, she argues that ‘civilian’ and ‘pluralistic’ movements remind us of the importance of civility in public spaces in which democracy is exercised through everyday life and everyday practices. Musil (2014) argues that the Gezi protests were an anti-political antagonistic impulse against the representation of the political in public. What makes it antagonistic is that it was a leaderless resistance against all aspects of politics dominated by political leaders. For Moudorous (2014), bringing different ideologies together enables people to contest the ideological vision of AKP by highlighting how it monopolises power. For the AKP ‘new’ means the transformation of Turkey through the economic and social improvement that it claims it has brought about. For the Gezi resistance, the ‘new’ means the rejection of all previous ideologies. Moudorous asserts that as the Gezi protest was defined neither by Islamic paternalism nor Kemalist authoritarianism, it was revolutionary. A similar argument is made by Karayakali and Yaka (2014), who argue that a new form of political subjectivity was found in the Gezi event. Although individual political groups and subjects took part and voiced their particular chants and slogans, the fact that they encountered and interacted with each other is unique. In this sense, the mixture of people in Gezi Park is not simple, but rather a re-composition of the people, which can be identified as ‘a becoming of the people’. Thus Karaman (2013) claims that Gezi Park brought various young people together, and through collective action and encounters the power of the common goal was enhanced. He asserts that these mostly secular youths were there anonymously, and with no leader. They thus created a space in which differences could coexist. On the one hand, they were campaigning for a common goal, in this case to protect the park. On the other hand, they were defending a future urban common space. Thus, the Gezi youths were exploring other ways of producing space (Karaman, 2013). However, this research argues that the Gezi’s moment was not cohesive. Although solidarity was established against the ruling party and its leader, there was little common ground between different oppositional groups.

In response to the living space that was created in the park for fifteen days, Abbas and Yigit (2015) and Yel and Nas (2013) show how bodily actions differed between different spaces. They make a distinction between those who were in the park, those in Taksim Square and those in other places. While marginal and extremist political groups were situated in the Square, in the park more liberal and peaceful activists were located. However, they acknowledge the unification of different groups in the park around a specific issue, if only temporarily, as a unique moment. They state that whatever the differences, the Gezi movement gave a voice to individuals on widening citizenships and participation, since it coalesced around different groups in ways that was once believed unthinkable. Yet, they argue that the peaceful resistance in the park and other protests were violent. For these authors, the discourses of liberty, multiplicity and pluralism promoted by the Gezi activists were not an outcome of the event itself, but rather a result of the democratic atmosphere under the AKP regime.

### **Rethinking Secularist Versus Islamist divide**

One of the main arguments given voice in the protest was a concern about Islamic lifestyles and religious codes that the conservative government were compelling people to adopt in the public sphere. As Walton (2013) asserts, neoliberalism is inherently situated in the space of secularism. In view of this argument, he categorises two types of governance: Kemalist secularist and neoliberal AKP. He asserts that in contemporary Turkey “the critique of neoliberalism implies a critique of political Islam and a celebration of secularism” (2013: np). These two politics and ideologies are both opposed and inextricable. On the one hand, Kemalist governance, which has its roots in the legacies of the founder of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, embraces secularism as a political ideology and anti-neoliberal discourses. On the other hand, neoliberal Islamic governance was formulated as the critique of Kemalism. What is important to note here is that Walton thinks that ideology plays an important role in interpreting the event. While some scholars critique political Islam and valorise laicism<sup>3</sup>, or more precisely Kemalism (Kaya, 2014; Oncu 2014), other scholars argue the exact opposite (Yel and Nas, 2013; Yayla, 2013). A further set of scholars critique both ideologies and claim the impossibility of explaining the event in the context of

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<sup>3</sup> Oncu and Kaya used laicism instead of secularism to glorify Kemalism (the foundational principles of the Turkish republic).

the secular and Islamic divide (Gole, 2013; Damar, 2014; Yoruk, 2014; Moudourous, 2014).

Kaya (2014) argues that the foundations of modernity in Turkey were destroyed under the governance of the AKP. He claims that while a new type of capitalism was developed by the conservatives, it does not have to be defined as modern. What the protests did was to show that Islamic modernism could not bring a mode of democracy. A similar point is made by Oncu (2014), who argues that under the AKP regime, the Islamic and secular divide has become more visible than ever. In his account, while laic individuals are affiliated with the secular Republic of Turkey founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Islamic individuals are at the opposite end of the scale, where they are only faithful to Allah and Prophet Mohammed, not to any law. Oncu asserts that the image of Mustafa Kemal was clearly apparent in almost all collective actions in Gezi, to show the protesters' affiliation with laic identities. The Gezi community was an imagined community made up of people who differentiated themselves from the AKP's vision of society. One way they did this was by waving the flags of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and chanting that they were 'the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal'.

Drawing on Gramsci's idea of hegemony, Yel and Nas (2013) address the resistance in terms of centre-periphery relations. They believe the protests were against a particular socio-religious class represented by the Prime Minister. They think that there was not any particular hegemony established by the AKP government, rather it was a post-hegemonic period seeking to improve democratic rights for society as a whole. If hegemonic politics is the preference of certain groups and class, the AKP took a multicultural approach in order to decentralise power. The authors indicate however, that in terms of lifestyle and culture, the secular class is still dominant. Since the AKP has come to power, the periphery has been represented in the public realm and the increasing visibility of religion and religious lifestyles has disconcerted the previously advantaged groups, namely the secular middle class. Although the Gezi discourse can be portrayed as liberal, democratic and unifying of different subjectivities, it can also be understood as a hegemonic oppositional bloc contesting the visibility of the periphery in the public realm, which cannot unify and pluralise the multitude of different subjectivities.

In a similar vein, Abbas and Yigit (2015) and Atay (2013) argue that a decline in the power of the older secular establishment induced the protests. Although the protests brought different political subjectivities together, the driving force was culture. Abbas and Yigit (2015) argue that although the AKP has tried to improve democracy by weakening the power of secular elites, these elites were anxious about the Islamisation of the country, which they saw as a betrayal of their Kemalist heritage and a threat to their cultural norms. The rise of Islam in the public sphere exacerbated those fears. Indeed, although the AKP has developed a new understanding of secularism that serves as a model for Middle East according to Yel and Nas (2013), other authors such as Abbas and Yigit (2015) contend that the AKP has become quite authoritarian under Prime Minister Erdogan in recent years.

Damar (2014) and Gole (2013) argue that the protests should be interpreted using lenses that look beyond the Islamist and secularist divide. Damar believes that resistance offered a new way to articulate politics and strategies between secular and Islamic groups. Participation of Islamic groups such as the Anticapitalist Muslims led to a rethinking of the division between Islamic and secular classes. He argues that the divide between secularists and Islamists is a political one that can be contested and transformed due to its vulnerability. Thus, this dichotomy also provides opportunities for the production of multiple secularisation projects. What the Gezi protests brought to the fore was neither the AKP nor Kemalist secularist ideology, but pluralist secularisation that was emerged from the antagonistic intersection of two authoritarian projects.

Although the attendance of the Anticapitalist Muslims at the Gezi protests is frequently repeated to emphasise the plurality and inclusiveness of the Gezi discourse and creation of a new form of secularism in the park (Damar 2014, Musil, 2014, Karayali and Yaka 2014, Pearce 2013 and Oncu 2014), Yel and Nas (2013) contend that repeated references to the Anticapitalist Muslims reproduces the sanction of the non-secular, rather than an approach to pluralism. It is possible to state, “this kind of approach or discourse reflects an intention to create conflict on the basis of cultural differences rather than embracing plurality.” (Yel and Nas: 45). Indeed, Abbas and Yigit (2015) argue that because of globalisation and localisation, the appearance of religion in public life is significant. They assert that the AKP has succeeded in

producing a postsecular or post-Islamist model for Muslim countries. That is to say “the secular young are cut from the same ethno-cultural cloth as their more pious Muslim counter-parts, but their ideological and religious outlook has diverged, with a secularist old guard forced to retreat in the light of the expanding new Muslim presence in Turkish society.” (2015: 71). Under these circumstances, it should be questioned whether the Gezi event reproduced secularism and reconfigured the Islamic and secular divide.

It appears that the Gezi Park resistance was also a cultural resistance by the secular middle class in order to regain the rights they had lost during the AKP era. The rights that have been lost, something Yel and Nas (2013) and Abbas and Yigit (2015) addressed repeatedly, are also mentioned by other scholars (Dikec, 2013; Kaya, 2014; Oncu 2014; Yoruk, 2014; Karaman, 2013). The AKP considered jailing army members, journalists, politicians and academics as a revanchist action against the Kemalist bloc, or what Erdogan named the ‘White Turks’. In order to eliminate the role of the army in the political sphere, the AKP initiated vast police and juridical operations. While the AKP’s attempt was appreciated in the West, at the same there was a great deal of criticism (Damar, 2014, Altinordu, 2014). For example new laws restricting the sale of alcohol, Erdogan’s advice to families to have three children in order to increase the birth rate, and other AKP social policies, have been perceived as a loss of rights brought about by the authoritarian tactics of the Islamic party. Thus, for some the AKP gave rise to a polarisation between the existing Islamic and secular divide, and for others it is a normalisation period in which religious lifestyles have become more public.

In summary, Gezi has been investigated in many ways, and two important points have emerged from this review. First, as the protests started from an urban issue, many scholars used the concept of neoliberalism and its relation to urban and social life to explain the Gezi protests. Second, some scholars also focused on secular/postsecular debates either beyond the Islamic and secular divide or within this dichotomy. However, using both approaches offers a fuller understanding of Gezi. Moreover, in spite of the different dimensions of the protests that were investigated by scholars, very similar arguments were repeatedly expressed. It is argued that the Gezi event brought something new, such as a multitude of different ideologies and political

groups. This multiplicity hinged on physical spaces, Gezi Park and Taksim Square, and temporality, in other words the time the protest occurred. Yet, this multiplicity seems to be either romanticised or ignored, such that heterogeneity of the protests was not fully recognised. Thus, rather than attempting to understand the diversity of the event itself, the majority of scholars have argued for one interpretation: ‘Gezi was against the neoliberal urbanisation and commodification of public space(s) and assets’ (Igsiz, 2013; Erensu and Karaman, 2016; Karaman, 2013; Tugal, 2013; Kuymulu, 2013); ‘Gezi was against authoritarian style of government’ (Moudorous, 2014; Oncu, 2014; Kaya, 2014); ‘Gezi demanded democracy’ (Karayakali and Yaka, 2014; Ors, 2014; Musil, 2014); ‘Gezi was against particular classes who are represented by Erdogan’ (Yel and Nas, 2013; Yayla, 2013) ‘Gezi illustrated how pluralism can be exercised in the public space’ (Damar, 2014; Gole, 2013; Altinordu, 2014). However, these singular claims cannot encompass the plurality of the protesters’ demands, motivations and aspirations. A more nuanced analysis is needed to reveal the complexity of the protests. Consequently, this thesis asks:

**1: What have been the various processes behind the Gezi protests?**

**2: What specific novelties arose during the Gezi protests?**

**3: How did the key protagonists - the AKP, protesters, and media – co-constitute the protests?**

### **1.5. Outline of the thesis**

The next chapter describes the methodology used in this thesis. It outlines the ethnographic research undertaken, ranging from semi-structured interviews and participant observation, to media review and photography. It discusses how the research area and case was selected, and how the analysis of political data and the researcher’s identity played an important role. It also presents the difficulties that arose during the field research, as well as conceptualising the research and finding suitable methods, and finally, the limitations of the thesis are laid out.

In chapters three to eight the empirical findings of the research are presented. Chapter three examines the relationship between political economy and the Gezi protests. It illustrates how, although the economy had been liberalised in the 1980s, the AKP redefined ‘governance’ and intensified neoliberalism. What made the AKP’s time unique is that Islamic moralism and ethics coupled with neoliberalism. The AKP’s political Islam mobilised the urban poor in particular, leading to the remodelling of the welfare state with new technologies and techniques of commercialisation and calculative choices (Collier, 2011; Ong, 2006; Larner, 2003). Thanks to the AKP’s social policies that were redefined through market logic, poor people increasingly supported the AKP. Yet, the state’s alignment with different business groups also significantly changed. Thus, the chapter asks to what extent the Gezi protests can be understood as anti-neoliberal.

Chapter four focuses on urban change in Istanbul and sheds light on the relationship between neoliberal urban transformation and the Gezi protests. The chapter argues that the AKP has used real estate and construction sectors not only to stimulate economic growth, but also for its development plan – improving the living standards of people. In particular, Istanbul, as the largest city in the country has been transformed by massive-scale urban development projects. The chapter shows that while the AKP aspired to transform Istanbul into a global city, the Gezi protests challenged this vision. The protesters stood against construction-based development that has diminished public spaces and destroyed historical assets and forests. Thus, the chapter argues that the Gezi discourse entailed criticism not only of the Taksim Pedestrianisation project, but also of other grandiose urban projects across Istanbul.

Chapter five examines the ways in which post-secularism was manifested during the Gezi protests. From an historical perspective, the chapter discusses how Turkey has been transformed from a strict Kemalist interpretation of secularism to an Islamised postsecularism under the AKP regime. Although religious lifestyles have been visible in the public domain since the 1980s, the AKP accelerated this transformation, and Istanbul has become a unique place in which to create multiple post-secular spaces. While the protesters were against this post-secular transformation, the participation of diverse groups led the protesters to re-negotiate their stance with their religious counterparts and pioneer

postsecular practices in the park. Drawing on critiques of secularism (Asad, 2003; Habermas, 2006, 2008; Connolly, 1999, 2005) the chapter argues that new postsecular relationships emerged between religious and non-religious people, as shown by the performance of Friday prayers in the park and breaking fast together around ‘earth tables’.

Chapter six demonstrates how democracy was understood and exercised in relation to the Gezi protests. The chapter argues that democracy is a contested concept, which can be defined in multiple ways (Connolly, 1991; Barnett and Low, 2005; Guttman and Thompson, 2004). Emphasising antagonistic relationships between the AKP and protesters, the chapter shows how each side claimed they were protecting democracy. While the protesters depicted twelve years of AKP’s governance as ‘authoritarian’, Erdogan claimed that he was ‘a gatekeeper’ of Turkish democracy. Exploring different protagonists’ visions of democracy, the chapter illustrates that even within the Gezi protesters, democracy was understood and practised in different ways.

Chapter seven examines the actual practices of protest in the square itself. After exploring the ideals behind the Gezi protests, the chapter argues that the moment when and where the protests occurred is also significant in understanding the politics of the Gezi protests. It shows the ways in which diverse actors such as the protesters and media envisaged the moment. Looking at the different bodily actions of the protesters, it argues that the Gezi protests created its own time and space. Concepts including the ‘politics of encounter’ (Merrifield, 2014; Wilson, 2016), ‘performativity’ (Butler, 2011, 2012) and ‘carnavalesque’ (Bakhtin, 1984) are used to explore the significance of various bodily actions and reactions in different times and spaces.

In conclusion, I present a set of broader reflections about the protests. The concluding chapter illustrates the consequences of the Gezi protests that arose in the aftermath. It shows to what extent Gezi has shaped the political and public sphere, as well as urban policies.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Doing research on the Gezi Park Protests**

#### **2.1. Arriving at the topic**

It is important to note that my political and personal stance along with my religious and ethnic background plays an important role in shaping my choice of topic and approach to research. I have been always interested in cities. I used to live in the Bakirkoy district of Istanbul, in which mostly the middle and upper middle-classes live and I worked as a geography teacher in the Zeytinburnu district, which is close to Bakirkoy. This neighbourhood is, on the contrary, mostly composed of working class people, who migrated from Anatolia and central Asian countries. Even across such a short distance different lifestyles and living conditions were quite visible. However, new buildings and gated communities were emerging in Zeytinburnu, and the old buildings were being replaced by new luxury apartments through urban transformation projects. Indeed, this was quite apparent almost everywhere in the city - gentrification in the inner city and slum areas, ever-expanding to its peripheries. This endless change in the urban landscape always concerned me. While my criticism about the urban policies of the government developed, I started to strengthen my intellectual thinking during my master degree and my master dissertation is on gentrification in the Beyoglu district of Istanbul.

When designing my PhD proposal, I wanted to flesh out my master's research and develop an empirically rich understanding of the impacts of neoliberalism on urban redevelopment projects. Smith's (2002) argument on 'gentrification as a global urban strategy' was crucial in my PhD proposal. I was interested in how urban redevelopment strategies were adopted by the state and how people resisted against these projects. Moreover, Istanbul was empirically rich, since there have been many urban redevelopment projects in the inner city and also massive mega-projects such as the third bridge between the Asian and European sides of the city, the third airport

and so on. All these projects have created rent for capital accumulation through a coalition of central government, local municipalities, and private capital. In this regard, although there was not an exact case, I was interested in urban redevelopment projects in the historical city centre, Beyoglu, and Suleymaniye, because these places have always been important since the Ottoman Empire era. When the local resistance movement to protect Gezi Park sprang from an urban issue on 27 May 2013, I was incredibly excited and thought I could take the Gezi Park protests as a case study. I thought I could reveal a relationship between neoliberal urbanism and creating and gentrifying public space in terms of the privatisation of public space and the meaning of publicity. It is because of the fact that a public park would have been transformed into a commercial centre with a historical appearance. Indeed, Gezi Park was not only a protected green space in the Taksim area but also a hidden space used to host homeless people and facilitate exchange activities for the LGBT community. However, as the protests went on, it became clearer that this was not only a matter of privatising an urban park anymore. Whilst the protesters still cared about the park, it was also a secular uprising against the Islamist AKP and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In particular, by the night of 31st May the Gezi discourse had become more about the Islamisation of the country, authoritarianism and democracy; hence, the park issue retreated into the background. Yet, it does not mean the urban question was insignificant but rather it was expanded more generally to other urban issues such as massive mega-projects, urban development projects, gentrification, and so on. In this vein, one aspect that remained important from the Gezi event was neoliberal urbanisation but it was not only about the urban problem. Therefore, the previous framework I was using could not suffice well enough so I revised my theoretical approach .

My reading of the Gezi event through visual and social media had to be related to secularism to a particular extent. Thanks to my supervisors' guidance I became conversant with the literature around postsecularism and postsecular cities. In particular, William Connolly's (2008) ideas on the relationship between religion and capitalism led me to think critically about neoliberalism in terms of its engagement with religious belief. Likewise, his thoughts on secularism and pluralism (Connolly, 1999 and 2005) and Talal Asad's (2003) critical engagement with secularism inclined me to challenge the contradictory modernism of the Turkish Republic. Moreover, I

also investigated the literature of postsecularism and the postsecular city (Beaumont and Baker, 2013; Habermas, 2006; Rosati, 2012). Despite the fact that there have been various interpretations of the Gezi protests, I insist that no single theory can explain Gezi since there were multiple identities whose demand and motivation contested and contradicted one another. I evaluated and combined different theories such as neoliberalism, democracy, secularism, and postsecularism with each other.

Furthermore, my identity, as a Kurdish and religious person, also played an important role in choosing the Gezi protests as a case study. Initially, it is well known that one of the founding ideas of modern Turkey was nationalism, which suppressed all ethnic identities apart from Turkishness. As a result of that, ethnic Kurdish identity has been in a struggle with official understandings of Turkey. This struggle particularly peaked in the 1990s because of the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party), which is listed as a terrorist organisation by many countries. It carried out attacks on Turkish security forces in the name of Kurdishness. The state's reaction escalated from ethnic denial to severe suppression of not only the PKK but almost all Kurds, such as evacuating Kurdish villages including my grandmother's village, banning Kurdish language, songs, and even names, closing down pro-Kurdish political parties several times and declaring a state of emergency in the Kurdish region for more than a decade. Yet, by the 2000s the Kurdish problem was slowly recognised and in March 2013 a peace process was initiated between the state and the PKK's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan. It was the closest Turkey had ever been to forging a legal solution in a peaceful way. During the first days of Gezi, a member of parliament of the then pro-Kurdish political party (BDP), Sirri Sureyya Onder, went to the park and stopped the bulldozers from cutting down the trees. As a participant in an anti-government protest and an active actor in the peace process his involvement in Gezi sparked the idea of the possible failure of the process via dispersing the protests to the Kurdish cities. In this sense, how Gezi and the BDP would affect the peace process was important for me, as I hoped the peace process would succeed.

With regard to my religious identity, since Turkey operated a strict type of secularism, religious rights were not recognised. In particular, after the mid-1990s the oppression of religious people had become more systematic and visible. Many protests were organised by secular civil organisations in the mid-1990s and during the AKP's

earlier rule. In the 1990s the protests led to military intervention against the Islamic Welfare Party that was in power. The democratically elected government was forced to step down and religious groups were defined as the most dangerous groups in Turkey for many years. On the other hand, Republican meetings that were organised against the candidacy of Abdullah Gul whose wife chose to wear a headscarf were coordinated in many cities before the election in 2007. Although the protests asked the army to take down the AKP government and protect the main pillars of modern Turkish Republic, they did not succeed. Both protests in the 1990s and 2007 used secular rhetoric against the Islamic parties, claiming that ‘Turkey is laic and will remain laic’. Because of the state’s understanding of secularism I had to remove my headscarf when I was doing my undergraduate degree and also when I was teaching at high school. In 2011, when I moved to the UK to continue my academic work, the first thing that caught my attention were the women in hijabs who worked in Heathrow Airport. That was striking me since I was not used to seeing women in hijabs in work places in Turkey, although it was a Muslim country. My religious and my ethnic identity never made me feel that I had equal citizenship in Turkey.

While pious and Kurdish people had long been oppressed by the state, such massive protests like Gezi had never happened in Turkish history. Although there had been long-term resistance that sometimes turned into violence in the cities in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, the mainstream media never paid attention. Like many others, I was shocked by the fact that the Gezi protests become much larger and influential. I was aware of the fact that the former privileged Kemalist class had never been content with the conservative government. However, although occasionally I was concerned about some of the activities that the AKP performed in the recent years, especially the rhetoric of the Prime Minister, I never thought that the secular class would have felt such fear anymore. Like the vast majority of society, I was also incredibly annoyed with the unreasonable exercise of police force when the protests began. I was also astonished by the collective wrath of the people when I was online on Twitter, looking at the tweets and hashtags on 31st May night. Yet, for me, Gezi both resembled and differed from the previous Kemalist protests. The tweets suggested that a group, walking on Istiklal Street, the main shopping street in Taksim, claimed ‘they were soldiers of Mustafa Kemal’. At the same time, the tweets also claimed that anti-Kemalists swept into Taksim. In other words, there was a complex and plural

bloc against the government. Therefore, I was energised to understand the concerns of these multiple groups with whom I have never previously had any affinity.

Likewise, as a regular Twitter user, I closely followed the Gezi Park event in both the social and mass media from the beginning (27 May 2013). Before the Gezi protests, I was tweeting about my causal life related to either my academic work or my daily routine. As social media, and in particular Twitter, became one of the main sources for spreading the news during the Gezi event; suddenly I found myself caught up in that battle of social media. On the one hand, I viewed the news channels and followed many national and international newspapers. On the other hand I regularly checked my social media accounts. In particular, in the first days, apart from fulfilling my basic needs the only agenda that I had engaged with was the Gezi protests although I was not precisely sure what it was about. Personal experience of the multiple identities involved led me to take the Gezi resistance as the focus of the entire thesis

## **2.2. Ethnography**

In order to understand how social agents formed the Gezi protests, how they took part in this event and how to interpret the continuation of the protests in particular spaces, an ethnographic approach was chosen for the research. Crang and Cook (2007) suggests that ethnography deals with real-world messiness. It is because of that the ways in which many events are produced and recited is not understood as a product of singular human agency. Rather there are intersubjective truths that explain the complex relations of people's activities. The space of the park and the square also plays an important role in determining what happened. Thus, ethnography reveals such complex relationships between people and their cultures, nationalities, classes, genders, sexualities, beliefs and other identities (Crang and Cook, 2007; Watson and Till, 2010; Herbert, 2000). An understanding of the complexity of the protest movement – that is to say how and why individuals and groups, who have different backgrounds, join the protest - required a deeper engagement with everyday life. In the introductory chapter, I explained that protests as a form of resistance should be understood through the analysis of the complex power relationships between different actors. From a poststructuralist perspective, I discussed how protests create their own spaces and certain spaces create protests. Thus, the space of struggle makes people

become political. Political subjectivities themselves are formed through these conflicts. An ethnographic approach is used to reveal the complex power relationships and their importance in social situations shaped by the economic and political system. Ethnography has been widely used to grasp an understanding of protest movements. For example, Schiffman (1991) showed how civil society takes part in power relations through social movements. Similarly, Ui (1991) examined how the state and economy shape and limit the strategies for occupy movements. In order to better understand the performative and affective dimensions of anti-global activism in Prague and Barcelona, Suris (2008) found ethnography and media analyses rewarding. Halvorsen (2015) similarly used ethnography to reveal the everyday life, routines and rhythms of occupy movements in London. All these studies suggest that the way in which people's activities are understood and experienced needs a deep engagement with the study of people in their own time, places, and everyday lives. To do that ethnographic approaches leave researchers with a wide range of possibilities and opportunities to engage with the everyday lives of people.

Ethnography is an iterative research approach that sheds light on the procurement of social facts (Watson and Till, 2010). It ascertains processes and meanings that underpin the social, cultural and spatial life of people. Through everyday processes that were constructed by sets of meanings, people create their own social and spatial worlds. Thus, ethnography brings an understanding of the processes and meanings that clarify the relations between human agency, structure and spatial context (Herbert, 2010). As Ley (1988: 121) asserts ethnography ““is concerned to make sense of the actions and intentions of people as knowledgeable agents; indeed, more properly it attempts to make sense of their making sense of the events and opportunities confronting them in everyday life.”” Ethnography involves multiple techniques and methods such as participant observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews, visual and documentary materials (Watson and Hill, 2010, Crang and Cook, 2007 and Herbert, 2010). I used semi-structured interviews, media review and participant observation.

After the police evacuation from the Gezi Park and Taksim Square, these sites became places of everyday protests. Any political or social situation could easily have become a reason for protest there. Calls for participation, particularly via social media,

were made by certain user accounts such as Taksim Solidarity and Occupy Gezi, and a number of protests were organised in the aftermath of Gezi (Figure 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3). Besides, the conflict between the sides was not seen only in the protests, but also in everyday life and in cyberspace and the media. Although I was not in the space of protests when the conflict between the protesters and government erupted, I followed online and conventional news resources because, as mentioned above, my master's thesis was already covering Beyoglu.

At the first opportunity, I set foot in Taksim Square in order to grasp the ways in which processes and meanings are produced through the everyday life of people. I used participant observation, in-depth interviews, and media review as a data collection technique. I spent 5 months in Istanbul during the period between April 2014 and September 2014. Apart from fieldwork, newspaper articles and opinion pages were collected between 27th May 2013 and 31st 2014 and ethnographic content analysis was undertaken.

This project is ethnographic in that it seeks to understand the ways in which particular groups make sense of particular events through their everyday life. I spent five months in Istanbul. During this time I interacted with many groups. Apart from conducting interviews I attended many group meetings and had a chance to learn not only about the protests but also about the way they perceive other more general issues. Moreover, spending time in particular spaces regularly, and thinking about what I experienced and witnessed in these spaces, led me rethink and reshape my thoughts on many issues related to the Gezi protests. Although not all of these are made explicit in the thesis, the way I framed my research grew out of the ethnographic process.



**Figure 2-1:** Occupy Galata protests in Galata Square, Beyoglu (picture is taken by author, 21 June 2014)



**Figure 2-2:** The first anniversary of Gezi, early in the morning, Gezi Park, (picture is taken by author, 31 May 2014)



**Figure 2-3:** LGBT Pride March, organised by LGBT groups and attended by thousands of Gezi supporters, Istiklal Street, (picture is taken by author, 29 June 2014)

### 2.2.1. Interviews

Interviews were one of the important data gathering methods that I used. Ethnography also entails interviews in order to better understand “the context and contents of different people’s everyday social, cultural, political and economic lives.” (Crang and Cook, 2007: 60). In total, I conducted 29 interviews with students, academics, activists, journalists. I chose my interviewees from different NGOs, political parties, and youth organisations. As the Taksim Solidarity platform acted as a coordinator of the Gezi protesters, I accessed their online website, looked at the components of the organisation and I got in touch with those who have a web page and contact details. In order to make initial contact, I sent emails to various NGOs, and political parties before I left for field research. I received few emails back, and did not find emailing very productive. Therefore, I used the telephone to arrange meetings while I was in the field.

In order to represent an overview of the protesters I intentionally selected particular organisations and political parties. I was attentive to the need to select organisations that represent different political backgrounds. I categorised the constituents according to their political opinions and selected a diverse sample. For example, I selected people from the main opposition party (CHP), nationalist left (Communist Party), ultranationalist (Turkish Youth Organization and Labour Party-IP-), Kurdish nationalist (Socialist Democrat Party and Labour Party - EMEP) liberal leftist (LGBT, Lambda Istanbul, Green Party, DSIP) and religious (Anticapitalist Muslims) groups and secretariats of the Gezi movement (the Chamber of City Planners and the Associations of Turkish Engineers and Architects). Likewise, I reached key people such as those who had been invited by the Prime Minister to negotiation meetings and “the standing man”, who became one of the symbols of the Gezi protests. I also randomly chose some participants from some protests I attended. I gave up doing more interviews when the interviewees started to express very similar opinions on the same issues to the previously interviewed ones. For an official perspective, despite to all my efforts, including my first individual attempt, which was to contact municipality by using my connections - a former member of parliament - I could not arrange any meetings with the municipality. By using my connections, I arranged one meeting with the Deputy Chief of Riot Police in Istanbul.

Furthermore, most of the organisations that I got in contact with agreed to interviews. Only 4 people rejected after we arranged a meeting. One rejection was from one of the important actors from the Association of Turkish Architects and Engineers, who was one of the key activists during the Gezi protests. I met her a few days before the anniversary of the resistance in Gezi Park and she gave me her contact details. Although she was interested in my research project, she never replied to my calls. So I sent her a text message, to let her know that I was the person who was attempting to interview her. While we arranged a meeting, later she said she could not make it because of her health problems and would let me know when she recovered. She never got back in touch. Likewise, when I attended one of the meetings of the Taksim Platform (a neighbourhood organisation based in Taksim that is different from Taksim Solidarity Platform) I met with many people. When I explained my research project, some of the group members agreed to interviews with me and we exchanged contact details. Among them, an elderly man, who lives in Cihangir, an affluent

neighbourhood in Beyoglu, and also a member of the Cihangir Neighbourhood Association, never returned my calls and I decided not to force him. A young researcher who wrote a book on her memories during the occupation in Gezi Park had been suggested by another protester whom I interviewed. I exchanged several emails with her and we scheduled an appointment. When I met her in a coffee shop in Nisantasi, an elite neighbourhood, she asked me many questions about my research. Although I wanted to explore her memories through her book, I did not find a chance to ask any questions about that. She was sceptical about my research and me. During a half hour meeting I answered all her questions and eventually she was not convinced enough to agree to an interview with me. And finally, I met with two young TV programmers who work for 'Capul' TV, which had been established soon after the protest occurred, and while they seemed interested in my work, they never responded to my calls.

I conducted face-to-face interviews. In order to enable them to feel comfortable in a place of their choice, I met them at different places such as coffee shops, political party offices, and universities in different parts of Istanbul. I thought talking to people in 'their' environment might give them comfort and as a result, the conversation would become more relaxed (Valentine, 1997). I was quite flexible in terms of timing. I adjusted my schedule according to their request, since my interviewees were mostly either students or employees. Each interview lasted roughly an hour (the shortest was 45 minutes and the longest 2 hours). Apart from the Deputy Chief of Riot Police, all the interviewees willingly approved my request to tape-record our conversations.

Conducting interviews is not just an unequivocal exchange of information but also a complex encounter that is driven by power relationships (Rose, 1997). Thus, it is difficult to create an opportunity for a productive exchange and make interviewees feel comfortable. One approach is to bring in the personal. However, getting personal should not be just a way of obtaining more information from the participants but also "a way of creating both greater empathy and attempting to reduce the power differentials in the actual encounter, even if it is wishful thinking at broader social scale" (McDowell, 2010: 161). From this perspective, I was not simply conducting interview with the participants. Before commencing the interview for at least half an hour I conversed about other aspects of their lives, as well as introducing my research

and myself in more detail. This relationship was not a friendship, but rather it was a way to make the exchange between them and me more collaborative (McDowell, 2010). Therefore, occasionally I met some of my interviewees more than once, in particular with those who specialised in urbanisation, such as architects and urban planners. The first meetings with them focused on getting to know each other and familiarising them with the research. I would not have asked them the same questions that I asked other participants because the questions I prepared for urban issues seemed very simple to ask them. After gaining an impression about their expertise I revised my interview questions and arranged a follow up meeting later on. This tactic was quite practical and allowed me to interact with these participants in-depth.

In order to allow the conversation to take a natural course I prepared 4 sets of questions that focused on their experience of the Gezi protest, their opinions about the changes in the urban landscape, the Taksim pedestrianisation project, the representation of Taksim for them and their thoughts on religion and the visibility of religion in the public sphere. I was quite flexible in terms of ordering sets. If they started to talk about different themes I asked the questions about the same theme in order to make the conversation flow more spontaneously. As is suggested general descriptive questions gives interviewees an impression that they can talk freely (Valentine, 1997). Therefore, I started with simple questions about their involvement with the protest, such as “how did they hear about the protest?”; “what were they doing when the protest started?”; “what kind of things did they do during the protest?”; “who else participated in the protest?”. I found that asking the mundane questions first was quite helpful in opening up further topics. After asking descriptive questions I followed up with more structural and thoughtful questions. Since it was conducted the interviews a year after the protest almost my all interviewees were excited about talking about the Gezi experience. Thus, the interviews I made were quite productive and insightful.

### **2.2.2 Participant observation**

Participant observation involves watching, listening and discussing what is being observed (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). What distinguishes ethnography from other techniques is that by doing ethnography researchers interact with people they are

interested in. Watson and Till (2010) assert that observation “entails description of and reflection upon embodied and emotional experiences, intersubjective and material exchanges, social and non-human interactions.” (Watson and Till, 2010: 126). Thus, this practice is not an ‘objective form of reporting’, it is indeed a practice of discovery that evokes the ways in which people encounter material, fluid social spaces, emotions, and everyday geographies (Crang and Cook, 2007). Participation, in this case, means making knowledge with people through participating in and interacting with the space in which they live (Watson and Till, 2010). 2.5 million went on the streets during the protests; the communities and the protesters were huge groups. It would have been difficult to carry out an ethnographic research without knowing who and what to observe and how to participate and engage with. I was interested in finding out about the struggle between the Gezi activists and government in particular spaces and places. I was also interested in the way in which they interact with space. When and why do they protest? Taksim has been always a political space where people gather for mass demonstrations and protests; in particular after the Gezi event the number of protests in the area soared. Participant observation in the Taksim area was a key practice for grasping the ways in which people interact with themselves as well as with the space. From this perspective, I had two objectives: the former was to attend formal protests and the latter was to go to the Gezi Park and Taksim Square to observe the everyday mundane practices of the people who used the area. Although I did not refer to their mundane everyday practices in the thesis, the observations gave me insights into how they engaged with particular spaces. Besides, when I met with the interviewees, they invited me to attend to their group meetings and so I attended many group meetings organised by the neighbourhood organisations and political parties. This allowed me to interact with larger groups and to identify their feelings and perspectives through everyday politics and everyday lives.

Before commencing participant observation, I produced a list of points that I wanted to observe. I was closely following social media, in particular, some users such as Taksim Solidarity, Anticapitalist Muslims and so on, to check if there were organising protests. I was interested to discover who takes part in the protests; how they protest and how they are treated by the police. In this sense, I attended many of the protests that were connected to the Gezi. For example, on the 1st anniversary of Gezi on 31st May 2014, a 1st May rally, LGBT pride march, and some other small protests were

organised by the pro-Gezi activists. Apart from these protests, I also went to other protests, which were not linked to the Gezi in the Taksim area. This allowed me to explore the similarities or differences in the protests in terms of their demands, participations, chants, and police responses. Although I did not use this data, it allowed me to learn more about my participants and their other practices.

Furthermore, I visited Taksim three to four times a week. Sometimes I sat in Gezi Park and sometimes around Taksim Square in order to observe everyday life of people. People had become very political in the aftermath of the Gezi protests. Therefore, several times I witnessed individual or very small group protests, and the ways in which they were dealt with the security forces in the Taksim Square. Likewise, a number of times I observed the closure of Gezi Park and Taksim monument to the public by the police.

While doing participant observation, writing, photographing and recording are important in terms of understanding how people make worlds, places, and meanings (Watson and Till, 2010). Through these notes, photographs and other types of mapping is created an understanding of everyday life, mundane practices and unexpected situations (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). Therefore, while I was taking part in the protest and staying in Taksim and Gezi Park, I noted down what I observed and photographed mundane practices.

### **2.2.3 Media review**

Participant observation and interviews allowed me to interact with people on specific sites for the ethnographic research. Yet, these data gathering techniques only provided opportunities to acquire information from those whom I interacted with. Although I was interested in the conflict between the Gezi protesters and the AKP, I started my research project a year after the massive protests. In so doing, from the time the protests occurred to the end of my field research, media was an important information source. As Askew and Wilk (2002: 10) asserts media is “simply one aspect of contemporary social life”. In order to grasp an understanding of how the Gezi protests were perceived, in both the Turkish and international media, I conducted a mass media review.

It is important to note that news as a text is interpreted and understood differently, not only by audiences, but also by the media itself.

The media's power has increased significantly since the invention of printing press, which increased the availability of information for average citizens (Baylor, 1996). News as a text is interpreted and understood differently, not only by audiences but also by the media itself. Media is significant in reflecting and influencing politics, culture and the social life of people (Gitlin, 1980; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993 and Juris, 2008). Not only does the media have an impact on the construction of social reality but also its influences are partially due to an interaction between mass media and its consumers (Scheufele, 1999; Altheide, 1997). In other words "media discourse is part of the process through which individuals construct meaning, and public opinion is part of the process through which journalists and other cultural entrepreneurs develop and crystallize meaning in public discourse." (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989: 2).

Gitlin (1980: 7) defines a media frame as "largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organizing the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports." In a similar way, Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 143) describe the media frame as "central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events . . . The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue." Viewing media or news frames as the precise way in which human consciousness is affected, Entman (1993) offers a more detailed explanation. He argues that media frames illustrate the power of a communicating text. Therefore, salience and selection are the fundamental factors that media frame rely on. "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (1993: 52). Thus the ways in which particular news and events are framed and presented somehow shape the perceptions of media recipients (Scheufele, 1999).

Gomson and Modigliani (1989) suggest the media frames always involve 'media packages' which consist of metaphors, pictures, catchphrases and other symbolic devices. These 'media packages' not only construct meaning over the time but also integrate new events or situations into their interpretative framework. "Packages

succeed in media discourse through a combination of cultural resonances, sponsor activities, and a successful fit with media norms and practices. Public opinion influences this process indirectly through journalists' beliefs, sometimes inaccurate, about what the audience is thinking." (Gomson and Modigliani, 1989: 9). Such packages "affect opinions simply by making certain considerations seem more important than others; these considerations, in turn, carry greater weight for the final attitude" (Nelson et al, 1997: 568).

Framing processes are dynamic and involve many agents, such as political actors, journalists, producers and recipients of media frames. Each actor plays a different role in shaping the ways in which the news is constructed. "A frame's ability to dominate news discourse depends on complex factors, including its sponsor's economic and cultural resources, its sponsor's knowledge of journalist practices, these practices themselves, and a frame's resonance with broader political values." (Carragee and Roefs, 2004: 216). That means that since frame sponsorship and texts are shaped by economic, cultural and political resources, power relationships remain significant. As Entman (1993: 55) remarks, media frames are "the imprint of power" and they register "the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text." As a result, media frames are usually in favour of political elites (Carragee and Roefs, 2004 and Entman, 1993 and 2010). Entman (2010) suggests that elites usually control public attitudes, as they want people to favour or contest their elite choices. They usually shape and influence public behaviour through telling them 'what to think about'. Consequently, media frames reflect power relations.

In regard to protests or big events, media frames affect the self-definition of movements. Since these movements usually challenge hegemonic power and values, not only they challenge the frames that the media use but also their impact depends on how they are framed. Although a movement embodies "a field of actors, not a unified entity" (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 283), the media generally uses reductive frames that simplify the membership and meaning of protest movements. "The heterogeneity of movements makes the development of collective action frames a complex process, a process marked by conflict and negotiations." (Carragee and Roefs, 2004: 227). Moreover, Juris (2008: 85) stresses, "the mass media are generally more sympathetic to discourses and practices that reflect dominant values, such as the sanctity of private

property and the state, and can be easily incorporated into the hegemonic framework.” Thus, protest movements frequently receive more press coverage if they engage in peaceful protests and embody reformist rhetoric (Juris, 2008).

From this perspective, a great deal of attention was paid by the media to the Gezi event. Not only Turkish newspapers but also international ones were significant in terms of managing perceptions during the Gezi protest. Although social media and internet news have augmented newspaper journalism, newspapers are still important in Turkey. More importantly, there was a considerable growth in the circulation of the newspapers during the event. Therefore, I wanted to investigate both the national and international newspaper media’s attention of the Gezi event.

I selected five Turkish and four international newspapers, namely; Cumhuriyet, Sozcu, Hurriyet, HaberTurk and Sabah for the national case and the New York Times, Guardian, Haaretz and Der Spiegel for the international case. In terms of Turkish newspapers, the reason why I picked out these newspapers was to represent a range of views. While some of these newspapers do not reflect the ‘state’ frame, they still reflect power actors in Turkey. Although there are other significant Turkish newspapers, online accessibility played a significant role in this selection. For the international newspapers, publication in different countries in English and online access were determinants. Also, the selected newspapers do not only represent the mainstream views of the country they are published in, but they are also well known in Turkey. More importantly, international newspapers were so interested in the Gezi protests in that they not only they covered it extensively in ‘interpretative packages’ but also increased their coverage of Turkey after the protests.

For instance, in my first meeting with Kenan, a member of Anticapitalist Muslims, he received a call from Al Jazeera’s New York office. Since none of them could speak English properly, Kenan kindly asked me if I would respond to the call. I acted as a translator between the editor of Al Jazeera and Kenan. The editor wanted me to ask if the Anticapitalist Muslims had any plans to protest about the result of the local election as they had participated in the Gezi protests. Kenan was surprised about this question and asked me to tell Al Jazeera that they respected the result of the local election. The editor insistently asked if the Anticapitalist Muslims thought the election had been manipulated by the AKP and wanted to know their opinion. Kenan,

on the other hand, stuck to his original comments. He asked me to say that they would organise a protest against any decision by the Egyptian Court to sentence members of the Muslim Brotherhood to death, and if she, the editor, was interested he could talk about it. This anecdote shows that it can be said that the international media tended to connect any conflict with the Gezi protests. Therefore, I wanted to investigate their views and response to particular events not only during the massive protests, but also during the aftermath of the protests.

In the Turkish newspapers, while Cumhuriyet, Sozcu, and Hurriyet are known as opponents of the AKP, Sabah is known as pro-AKP and HaberTurk is as neutral. Cumhuriyet means Republic in Turkish and was founded during the independence war in the 1920s. Its name came from Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Cumhuriyet's editorial policy is based on the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic. Since Sozcu was established in 2007, it has been bought by the ultranationalists and Kemalists, and its circulation has substantially increased thanks to the protest. Hurriyet, meaning independent in Turkish, was established in 1948 and is owned by Dogan Holding Company. Although its relationship with the government is based on mutual interests, it represents secular Turks. Whereas all three newspapers are very critical of the AKP, there are some functional differences in terms of their criticism. While Hurriyet tends to represent mainstream and liberal views and its criticism of the AKP is mostly found between the lines, Cumhuriyet and Sozcu take strong positions against the AKP and are more radical. The former is based upon actual facts, but propagandises the main opposition party, Republican People Party (CHP), Sozcu has more a radical stance and uses abusive, polemical, and speculative language against the AKP such always calling President Erdogan with his first name (Tayyip) which is considered disrespectful. Sabah was established in 1985 and until 2007 it took an oppositional stance towards Islamic parties. In 2007, the newspaper was confiscated by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund and was purchased by an instruction company, which had close relationship with the AKP. It now justifies all policy decisions taken by the AKP. And finally, Haberturk was established in 2009 by the Ciner Media Group, and unlike other newspapers, it gives space to diverse range of columnists and editorial perspectives.

Particular dates were picked out in terms of collecting editorial and opinion pieces. Since the resistance was still only a local protest until 31st May 2013, there was less reporting on it. Therefore, from the date the protest started on 27th May 2013 until 1st June, I collected almost all the articles and opinions related to the protests. Then, I selected 5th June when some representatives from the protesters' groups met with the Deputy Prime Minister, Bulent Arinc for the first time. I also chose 12th June when the Prime Minister invited the protesters to his office, and 17th June when the occupation was brought to an end by the police. Other selected days were 11th March 2014, which is the date when a 15-year-old boy, who was hit by a tear gas canister fired by a police during the mass protest, died after being in a coma for 269 days, and also Labour Day (1st May 2014) and the anniversary of the protests (31st May 2014) and some dates linked to events held by particular organisations, such as the public forums and the earth tables. Then I looked at each newspaper on 10th of each month (or the closest day thereafter) until June 2014. Since there were vast reporting and opinions in the first days of the protests, only two columnists were chosen from each newspaper. Here, I took continuity as a criterion and chose those who represented the editorial position of the newspaper. Moreover, as the speeches that were given by politicians and international organisations repeatedly reported by all newspapers, I only selected titles and the first few opening sentences from each newspaper in order to explore differences or similarities in interpreting the same event. In terms of the timing for the international newspapers, I was flexible since the news was not covered immediately (a day before or after). As the international newspapers did not cover the event as much as national agencies did, I collected all the articles and opinion pieces I came across.

### **2.3. Analysing data**

Data analysis is messy work, which requires patience. As Crang (2003: 130) suggests, analysis is not only about constructing an idea and then writing it up, but rather "it is thinking of writing that tends to reveal the flaws, the contradictions in our ideas, forcing us to look, to analyse in different ways and rethink." Interpreting data is a process over which we do not have complete control. Our material not only withstands our analyses, but also it drives us in a new direction (Crang, 2003). From this perspective, the data analysis process started just before the formal data collection.

The theories I wanted to investigate, the case I chose and the questions I prepared for the interviews created the preliminary framework for the analysis. However, during the process of analysis, the initial questions evolved into something different. That is to say, the process created its own ways (Crang, 2003).

Interview transcriptions, field notes from participation observation, photographs and newspaper pieces from the case I collected were the main sources of analysis. I used NVivo software for coding. The initial codes and themes I had in mind considerably changed during the analysis process.

Using software like NVivo helped me to organise the data into a single file and clear sections. I based the coding process on interview transcripts. Before using the software, I had already read all the transcripts in depth, and used coloured pens to reveal a general understanding of the transcriptions. However, using NVivo enabled me to create as many nodes as possible so that I followed an open code process (Potter, 1997). This also prevented me from becoming too biased. After coding all the individual transcripts, I linked the codes to other similar codes. Thus, I developed categories and sub-categories. In a similar style, the same procedure was used with newspaper articles and opinion pages. Styles, contexts, images and nuances were the key topics for analysis (Altheide, 1996). Thus, not only content was revealed, but also the differences and nuances in terms of reporting and interpreting the same events were revealed. In order to develop plausible explanations from data, I brought related categories together. After figuring out all the categories and sub-categories for each data set, together with the field notes from participant observation, I linked similar groups with each other and built relationships between the sub-categories. Although categories or dominant themes were produced during the analysis process, while writing the thesis these themes also transformed. As Crang (2003) suggests analysis is an active process in which a coherent account of material is made. Therefore, while transforming materials into text, the analysis process continued. Eventually, each theme that emerged from the material formed a chapter in the thesis, which is shown in the table below.

<b>Chapters</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Chapter 3	Neoliberal transformation and its reflection on the protests
Chapter 4	Urban development
Chapter 5	Postsecularism and postsecular city: Istanbul
Chapter 6	Defining multiple democracies
Chapter 7	Describing ‘the moment’ of protest

**Figure 2-4:** Themes emerged from data analysis

#### **2.4. Positionality and reflexivity**

Positionality and situated knowledge has become a central theme in feminist geography. Positionality refers to the importance of various identities of the researcher, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, and nationality in the research. As Pratt (2009: 556) suggests, “a researcher’s social, cultural and subject positions... affect the questions they ask; how they frame them, the theories they are drawn to and how they read.” Our positionality affects the way knowledge is produced. Furthermore, knowledge is not universally applicable, but it is limited, partial and specific (England, 2006; Rose, 1997). Rose (1997: 305) states that “all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it in some way.”

Additionally, all subjects understand the world differently. As Rose (1997) argues, positionality is the way in which the world is conceived from different locations. Positions, hence, shape not only the way in which analysis made, but also the researcher’s interactions with researched ones (Rose, 1997). As England (2006: 289) states, “as researchers we are a visible, indeed embodied and integral part of the research process. Both our embodied and presence as researcher and and the participants’ responses to us mediate the information collected in the research encounter.” Therefore, there is always a different power relationship between the researcher and the researched. As Rose argues, usually the researched have more power than the researcher, since they are more central and are also insiders. The distance between the researcher and the researched depends on this relationship.

Feminist researchers seek to reduce the distance between the researcher and the researched through building commonalities (England, 2006). In this regard, differences between the researcher and the researched should not be seen as a problem, instead they should be seen “as spaces of conceptual and indeed political opportunities and negotiations.” (Rose, 1997: 315). From this perspective, in order to reduce the distance between my participants and myself, I applied different strategies. Yet, my position, being a woman who wears a headscarf and a senior researcher who does her PhD in the UK, played a complicated role during the field research. Sometimes, one of my identities helped me to minimise the distance but sometimes it increased the distance between my participants and myself.

One of my identities took particular precedence over my other identities. I was aware of the fact that since I was wearing a headscarf, at the first glance people might think that I support all the policies of the AKP, no matter what they are. It might have been a big challenge to gain access the community and convince them to participate in my research. As Cassel (1988: 87) states, the researcher “... should adopt a role or identity that meshes with the values and behaviour of the group being studied, without seriously compromising the researchers’ own values and behaviour... [and] not... inventing an identity; we all have several, ... but... the most appropriate one can be stressed.” In this vein, in order to create a good impression, I choose to send emails from my university email account or emphasise that I was doing a PhD degree in the UK when I contacted potential participants. This had a positive influence on my interviewees. They appreciated not only my work but also the value of a PhD degree from outside Turkey. My identity as a PhD researcher helped me to convince organisations to conduct interviews with me. In particular, with the undergraduate students from different universities in Istanbul, my identity facilitated constructive interaction and exchange. In that case, through commonalities and similarities, the distance between my participants and me was blurred and therefore, it created constructive interaction. I was seen as an insider as long as they thought I had similar viewpoints on particular political and religious issues.

My position did not always help my field research go smoothly. Sometimes, my religious identity, as a woman who wears a headscarf, created difficulties before or during interviews. In such circumstance, it did not matter that I was a researcher, and

my religious identity was quite apparent. I had to be careful and strategic in order not to increase the distance between my participants and myself. From this perspective, I did not conceive differences between my participants as long as I got information from them. Yet, several times I was asked why I selected Gezi as a case study and was expected to approve their criticism against the policies of the AKP. I carefully and openly explained what I was interested in and what I wanted to investigate.

I felt particularly uncomfortable when I was interviewing an Armenian journalist. He was very critical of the government. By voicing criticism of the AKP, he was using an accusive rhetoric against me too. For example, when he was blaming the AKP for its policies and politics against minorities or Gezi protesters, he used 'you' in the plural form instead of 'they' or 'it'. A couple of times I had to remind him I was only a researcher, not an AKP representative but he persisted with his accusatory language. This made me feel uncomfortable and hence I could not take charge of the interview and ask him all the questions that I had planned to ask. My appearance as a hijabi woman played a negative role in this situation.

My identity again as a hijabi woman affected the ways in which I engaged with the protesters when I attended in their protests<sup>4</sup>. I was the only one wearing a headscarf. This caused the protesters to be sceptical about me. Therefore, it was apparent that I was considered as an outsider by the activists. Many scholars argue that being an outsider is a disadvantage in the production of knowledge and research process. As Rose (1997) argues, some positions are more influential than others. It could have become much easier to be accepted by the community if I had a similar appearance to them. Yet, I found my role as an 'outsider' was advantageous for my research because of the fact that their approach towards me as 'an outsider' produced the kind of knowledge that I wanted to explore.

Once I attended a protest, which was against the local municipality's teashop in Galata Tower and I was standing up in a group. I was asked by a middle-aged woman if I was a member of Anticapitalist Muslims and I said I was not, but again, she asked me

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<sup>4</sup> It does not mean that women in hijabs have not supported or participated in the protest but it is clear that since the Gezi there has been an increase in the polarisation between Gezi supporters and non-supporters. While Gezi activism is affiliated with secular people, conservative masses in Turkey generally connected to the AKP.

if I was a supporter of the Gulen movement. When I asked “why?” she asked me the same question again and I said I was not a part of them. The woman said that because these groups were also against the government, she imagined I was a member. Likewise, a journalist from the Gulen<sup>5</sup> movement's news agency (Cihan News Agency) asked me if I wanted to do an interview with them about the protest since I was wearing a headscarf. Similarly, in the anniversary of Gezi resistance, the police banned Taksim from being used for publicity and I was walking with a group of protesters. An older man asked me if I was working for the AKP. When I said I was only a researcher, he told me that he was not scared of the AKP and its policies and asked me to address the scandalous politics of the AKP. Similarly, when the police announced the closure of the Taksim area to public use and were setting up barricade and removing people; I asked them why they were doing such an absurd thing, and among them one told me “At least you do not say that!” He assumed I supported the policies of the AKP and thus was on their side since I was wearing headscarf.

Being an outsider played a complex role in the research. During the field research, wearing a headscarf led me to experience some difficulties in being accepted by some groups. This then partly affected the way I framed the research and my findings. My experience showed that wearing a headscarf still signifies the division between the secular and religious classes in Turkey. As Gole (2002) discusses, women are signed or marked with regard to the construction and articulation of religious identities. Therefore, such gendered issues particularly shaped the fifth chapter through the inclusion of secular and postsecular debates in the discussion. That is to say since my religious appearance –a hijabi woman- was an issue in the research, I became aware of the importance of secular and postsecular debates. Additionally, since I was not accepted fully by different groups (as mentioned above), this led me to question the unity of Gezi. In other words, although I was already aware of heterogeneity of protests, experiencing it through my identity avoided me to put all the protesters in the same equation. Thus, instead of making singular claims, I tried to explore and explain the heterogeneity of the Gezi protests.

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<sup>5</sup> The Gulen movement is a transnational religious and social movement that collaborated for a long time with the AKP. However, they have been in conflict since a corruption scandal in December 2013, which was launched by the pro-Gulen prosecutors.

## **2.5. Limitations of the case**

Conducting fieldwork about the protests, of course, was not as smooth as anticipated. Turkey had witnessed the biggest public protest in its history. It was something new and fluid. It is very difficult to assume its temporary or permanent effects on the Turkish politics since the Gezi event is still unfolding. The Gezi protests led to several political instabilities. One was a corruption scandal that was effectively a criminal investigation into many key people in the Turkish government, including the sons of some ministers. It was not also a coincidence that this investigation was primarily about the construction sector. This scandal was also driven by a power battle between different political groups. It is plausible to believe that the instability created by Gezi created led to the corruption investigation. Yet, to investigate the Gezi protests in such way is impossible and beyond the scope of one PhD. Therefore, the content had to be limited - what was Gezi, what was not. From this perspective, I had to focus my research on specific issues and dimensions.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Neoliberal transformation of state and the Gezi protests**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The protest started from a desire to save a public park from a development scheme that was symbolised through the cutting of trees from their roots. Gezi activism intensified fiercely when the municipal police forcibly removed protesters from the Gezi Park and set their tents on fire. That created solidarity among people and they flowed out into the Taksim Square. Suddenly thousands of people gathered in the square, social and political groups chanted their slogans and added more colour to the protests. That is why the Gezi Park protest was seen as rainbow coloured, with almost every oppositional socio-political group against the AKP involved. Therefore, various readings of the Gezi Park protest are possible. One of these colours reflected itself in the chant, ‘Capital is out, Istanbul is ours’, that voiced the resistance against the neoliberal transformation driven by the AKP’s a decade-long governance. Unrest about the AKP’s approach to neoliberalism has accumulated. This chapter argues that one of the strong colours of the Gezi Protests is based on being against the AKP’s neoliberalism. In order to demonstrate this I examine the relationships between the AKP and different capitalist groups to reveal the anti-neoliberal discourse underpinning Gezi activism.

The chapter is divided into three sections. It starts with a theoretical debate on neoliberalism, and illustrates that neoliberalism has been understood in multiple ways in different spaces. Then, from a historical perspective, it presents how neoliberalism has operated in Turkey, and suggests that neoliberalism has become more systematic and consistent with an Islamic interpretation under the conservative AKP. Finally, the chapter discusses to what extent Gezi can be explained as driven by anti-neoliberal discourses and then illustrates how the Gezi protests were portrayed as a potential economic risk in the newspapers.

### 3.2. Contextualising Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism can be defined from various viewpoints. Approaching neoliberalism as a ‘theory of political economic practices’ David Harvey (2005), a Marxist geographer, argues that neoliberalism has been hegemonic across the globe since the 1970s and is conventionally understood as “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.” (2005: 2). Focusing on the ascendancy of finance capital in the last three decades Harvey develops his concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ to define global neoliberal policies. Adapting and deploying Marx’s concept of ‘primitive accumulation’, that Marx defined as a mode of production for capital accumulation, Harvey suggests that ‘accumulation by dispossession’ is the key point for capital reproduction. Harvey lays out a set of practices that are associated with accumulation by dispossession, such as privatisation, financialisation, commodification of land and labour power. Through these strategies of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ Harvey believes social inequality, which is a persistent outcome of neoliberalism, has increased. Harvey argues that not only have global finance and trade been regulated by neoliberal international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, neoliberal thinking has also had a considerable effect on education, the media and financial institutions across the world. Harvey’s primary contention is that regardless of the country where neoliberalism is implemented, the process largely engenders the same outcomes: it actually limits or shrinks the working class’s share of national income and increases, or at least secures, the share of the capitalist class. Consequently, approaching neoliberalism as an accumulation strategy, neoliberalism for Harvey (2005: 19) is “either as a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.” For Harvey, neoliberalism is about the restructuring of class power by a coalition of different national actors such as the government, capitalist classes, intellectuals, the media and international institutions, such as IMF and World Bank. Since Harvey seeks a universal explanation of neoliberalism, his approach fails to address the ways neoliberalism emerges in different contexts and forms.

Like Harvey, Peck, Brenner and Theodore (2010) examine neoliberalism as a politically driven reinforcement of the rules of marketisation and commodification. Harvey's approach to neoliberalism differs from these theorists, as while he argues it is universal, they prefer to see it as variegated, taking on different forms in different contexts. These authors view neoliberalism a process, thus they use the term neoliberalisation rather than neoliberalism. They develop their concept in relation to Keynesianism. Accordingly, the shift from the Keynesian to the post-Keynesian era produced a switch of policy frameworks, which in turn resulted in priority being granted to market operations. For them, although the operation of commodification and marketisation goes back to the era of classic capitalism, in the 1970s the neoliberalisation process was born within the already unevenly developed institutions of the Keynesian era. To put it simply, they suggest that as a process, neoliberalisation appears as contingent forms that are both historically and geographically contextual (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

Nevertheless, they argue that neoliberalisation processes have not only allowed for increased marketisation and commodification, but have at the same time reinforced forms of uneven regulatory development across the globe. As Peck (2004: 402) suggests:

“While neoliberalism may have begun life as a North Atlantic intellectual movement, its mutation into a variegated and internationalized state project over the past thirty years has been associated with a profoundly transnational process of “social learning” which has established new circuits of neoliberal economic and legal expertise, new material connections between financializing and globalizing economies and new forms of connection around neoliberal forms.”

Here the crucial point that the authors emphasise is that neoliberalisation processes have a variegated character. In this context, the conceptualisation of the variegation of the neoliberalisation process is recognised as involving two processes: the neoliberalisation of uneven development and the neoliberalisation of regulatory uneven development. Focusing on the North Atlantic zone, the authors concentrate on the historical shifts in the constitution of the neoliberal project that they define as ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism. The first shift occurred in the 1970s when neoliberalism transformed from an abstract philosophical project based on Hayek and Friedman's thought, to the state-authored restructuring projects by “the active

destruction or discreditation of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions” (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 37). The financial crises of the 1970s led to the withdrawal or rolling back of state regulation and increasing market freedom. Thus, the particularity of this term was the way in which the state organised its power in regard to marketisation and deregulation projects, (Peck and Tickell, 2002). The second shift occurred in the early 1990s, when Thatcher and Reagan’s economic model was forced to deal with “the perverse economic consequences and pronounced social externalities of narrowly market-centric forms of neoliberalism that became increasingly difficult to contest.” (ibid: 388). Therefore, neoliberalism, at this time, incorporated socially interventionist policies and transformed into ‘ameliorative forms’, which the authors define as ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism. In other words, this era refers to “the purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalised state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations” (ibid: 37). The authors argue that the state uses new forms of institutional hardware, new forms of technologies and new social subjectivities in order to advance and extend neoliberal project. The main objective, they believe, is that the neoliberalisation process appears not only as spatially-temporally variegated, but also as an incomplete process. Consequently, they suggest that “the project of neoliberalisation can only be understood as a politically (re)constructed, nonlinear and indeed mongrel phenomenon.” (Peck, Brenner and Theodore, 2010:105). From this starting point, Peck, Brenner and Theodore attempt to identify neoliberalism through different institutions and spatial configurations. Their conceptualisation leaves a distinct separation between the state and its effect. In this sense, Collier (2012: 188) asks a plausible question “what happens when ‘neoliberalism’ designates phenomena at the level of structure, the context of context or the macro-context?” Since Peck et al’s focus is on the variegation of neoliberalism (neoliberal= neoliberalise = neoliberalisation) their conceptualisation continues to rely on a universal structural (Collier, 2012).

In contrast, Neo-Foucauldian and governmentality approaches, examine the relationship between knowledge and power in advanced liberal government. Unlike the political economy conceptualisation of neoliberalism that tries to frame neoliberalism by examining the political economic policies and programs which are necessary for neoliberalism, neo-Foucauldian scholars acknowledge converging assemblages and arrangements in micro-contexts. In other words, rather than

perceiving neoliberalism as a universal political project, which may produce on a set of variegated outcomes, neo-Foucauldian scholars emphasise the active role of governmental and non-governmental institutions through examining mundane techniques and technologies of government. Neo-Foucauldian scholars shift their focus from global scales and try to understand how particular types of subjects are fostered in local contexts through examining the complex assembling of different practices. By examining the relation between these techniques and governing programmes, other scholars investigated how these techniques and technologies travel and circulate (Collier, 2012).

For example, defining neoliberalism as ‘a mobile technology’, Aihwa Ong (2007: 3) argues that “neoliberalism is conceptualised not as a fixed set of attributes with predetermined outcomes, but as a logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts.” The core of her argument is that although American neoliberalism has become a global phenomenon since the 1970s, neoliberal logic has been constituted through assemblages of sovereign regimes and cultural ethics. From this point of view, she harshly criticises the assumption of radical political economists, namely Neoliberalism with a big “N” or Neoliberalism writ large. According to her arguments, the ways the Marxists such as Harvey (2006), and Hardt and Negri’s (2000) perceive the American model of neoliberalism as hegemonic throughout the world cannot explain how neoliberalism is working at the state level, due to overlooking the role of a variety of institutions, programmes and actors. She also finds it problematic to assume that neoliberalism represents such a dominant structural condition. For her, such identifications “unwittingly metaphorize neoliberalism as an economic tsunami that attacks national space, represented by an inert receptacle of market driven forces and effects.” (2007: 4).

Based on her empirical work in East and South Asia, she makes a forceful counter argument that neoliberal governmentality produces new connections between the space of governing and the space of administration. In other words, neoliberalism as a form of governing “results from the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics.” (2006: 4). Here she employs Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ to emphasise contemporary neoliberalism. In contrast to neoliberalism with big ‘N’, she believes neoliberalism with small ‘n’ reconfigures

connections between “governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and the sovereignty and territoriality.” (2006: 3). By doing that, Ong seeks to shed light on different practices of neoliberalism and local conditions. In her account, the state uses different techniques and knowledge to guide and regulate the everyday life of individuals. In other words, “neoliberal rationality informs action through many regimes and furnishes the concept that informs the government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness.” (2006: 4). She advances explanations for how neoliberal techniques and technologies are transported to, and deployed in, East and South Asian regions. The ‘travelling’ of neoliberal logic to a non-Western context is thus not only used as a technique of administration, but also as knowledge. Ong places emphasis on the mobility inherent in neoliberal techniques. In this sense, she stresses subjectivity. Ong believes neoliberalism forms new kinds of subjects, which are different from previous capitalist subjectivities. For example, in the case of Asian countries ‘Asian values’ play an important role in market conditions, therefore, neoliberalism “interacts with regimes of ruling and regimes of citizenship to produce conditions that change administrative strategies and citizenship practices.”(2007: 6). Ong’s conceptualisation of neoliberalism is compelling since not only does she establish her argument in relation to particular conditions, but she also articulates the complex relationships between subject and subject, and subject and market.

Collier (2009, 2011, 2012) in a manner similar to Ong, uses the concept of ‘global assemblage’ in order to define whether neoliberalism should be recognised as a ‘big leviathan’ or something else. He claims that neoliberalism should be understood not only by governmentality, but also by other concepts, which originate from Foucault’s lectures on neoliberal government. For Foucault, neoliberalism is neither the relation between knowledge and power nor governmentality itself, but rather “a form of thinking, a kind of reflection that aims to critique and remediate existing *mentalities* and practices of government that have become uncertain or problematic” (2009: 100). In this sense, he also criticises Foucauldian scholars whose work is primarily dominated by a focus on the concept of governmentality. He suggests that this kind of analysis results from only focusing on the ‘conditions of possibility’, which is stable but uninteresting. He argues that governmentality scholars have defined neoliberalism through Foucault’s ideas about knowledge/power – diagrams of power that specify

neoliberalism as a political rationality. Yet, Collier believes that such thinking only allows us to grasp “the conditions of possibility for certain modes of understanding and acting” (2009: 94). Thus, it does not shed light on various governmental forms in different sites i.e non-advanced liberal countries. In contrast, he believes that a topological analysis is needed in order to understand “the process of recombination and reproblematisation through which contemporary government - beyond ‘advanced liberalism’ – is being refigured”. (2009: 100). By a ‘topological analysis’, Collier seeks to “show how styles of analysis, techniques or forms of reasoning associated with ‘advanced liberal’ government are being recombined with other forms, and to diagnose the governmental ensembles that emerge from these recombinations.” (ibid: 99). Collier pursues three strategies to enable neoliberalism to be understood more effectively in different contexts: first, a critique of dominant narratives of neoliberalism and thinking through diverse historical conjunctures; second, viewing “the elements of neoliberal reforms” as flexible in that different relationships can be found with diverse political projects such as conservatism and, third, thinking more deeply about “the question of what makes a particular tradition “neoliberal”.” (2011: 248-9). Thus, for Collier neoliberalism is neither a style of purely economic reasoning nor a political hegemonic project, but a form of rethinking government and its mundane practices.

Larner, (2003, 2005 and 2009), like other governmentality scholars, challenges the prevalent notion of neoliberalism, as being best understood as a unified set of policies and political ideologies. Although she believes that both governmentality and structural approaches are important to understanding the complexity and contradiction of the neoliberal process, her viewpoint, however, remains largely Foucauldian. For her, the spread of neoliberalism at the national level is not just affected by the global expansion of neoliberal ideas, but rather by the fact that peripheries might develop political strategies and governmental programmes. She argues that the way neoliberalism travels cannot always be anticipated and so it produces contradictory spaces and subjects. Her empirical work on New Zealand paints a compelling picture of how neoliberalism is experienced over time. She found that while earlier periods (until the early 1990s) of neoliberalism had seen more marketisation programmes embraced, by the late 1990s local partnerships had become an important component in economic and social arenas. Such practices constituted new hybrid forms of

governance in New Zealand. Therefore, her work shows that “[a]lthough neoliberalism may have a clear intellectual genesis, it arrives in different places in different ways, articulates with other political projects, takes multiple material forms, and can give rise to unexpected outcomes” (2003: 511).

Although neoliberalism has been conceptualised in many ways, one thing that remains important is that it has been experienced differently across space. One of the basic motto, “run the state like a market” might seem straight forward but in practice it encounters national and local values, which differs from each other (Ferguson, 2010: 172). From general perspectives, the existence or implementation of neoliberalism in any given state can be structurally analysed, but in specific terms, the questions of how, with and by whom (political parties/ holding capitals/ civil societies), and how long might show distinctive experiences. Through the participation of different actors the position of neoliberalism shifts. From a neo-Foucauldian perspective I argue that new modes of governing are assembled in profound ways under the AKP regime in Turkey in that neoliberalism and Islam are coupled. Therefore, Turkey is an interesting example of one way in which neoliberalism and Islam exist in complex hybrids.

### **3.3. Neoliberalism in Turkey**

In the 1970s, due to both domestic and external problems, the Turkish economy was exposed to high inflation and a huge deficit. The global accumulation crisis in the 1970s resulted in severe debt crises and a loss of confidence in the inward-oriented model of industrialisation in Turkey (Rodrik, 1991). Thus, inflation and current deficit rates significantly increased. The second half of the 1970s in Turkey can be characterised by instability in both the political and economic spheres. While the political arena witnessed ongoing conflicts between the leftist and rightist parties, on the streets there was violence between revolutionary leftists and ultranationalist rightists. The security forces were unable to stop the growing violence in urban areas that threatened the safety and everyday lives of ordinary citizens. In particular, the leftist groups were seen as major sources of disorder and conflict (Onis, 1997). Thus, the military forces perceived a military intervention as the only solution to putting an end to the economic and political problems that Turkey had been facing. That resulted in the military coup of September 1980.

Prior to the military coup, the economic decisions of January 24 1980 stipulated that the stabilisation measures and structural adjustment policies required by the IMF and World Bank had already been taken. The general aim of the '24 January Decision' was primarily to implement a stability program between 1980 and 1983, and then in the following period, to liberalise the economy. Political instability, however, was a major obstacle in bring about such legal changes, although none of the political actors continued to defend the inward oriented model. For the military council (Milli Güvenlik Konseyi-National Security Council), it was easy to implement the economic decisions of January 24, 1980 (Ozatalay, 2011). As Karadag (2010) observes after the military intervention the political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations were banned and the only exception was TUSIAD<sup>6</sup> (Turkish Industry and Business Association) that was founded in 1971 as family holdings' businesses. In fact, even before the military intervention, TUSIAD had pushed the coalition government to liberate the economy and thus supported the military coup (Bugra, 1999).

Nevertheless, three years later in 1983, the military dictatorship was replaced by a parliamentary regime after national elections in 1983 that enabled a centre right party, the Motherland Party (MP), to be able to form a single-party government. The MP took the step of liberalising the economy of Turkey. On the economic front, as an advocator of monetarism, Turgut Ozal, the leader of the MP, led a change in its economic model from an inward-oriented model of industrialisation to an export-led model. From the 1960s there had been integration between the public and private companies. Yet, in the 1970s public companies (in the manufacturing sector) could not meet their costs. As a result of economic liberalisation, the state limited public investment in the manufacturing sector, and undertook fiscal austerity in that public companies were turned into 'self-financing organisations' in which companies had to 'become efficient'. That led to a gradual decrease in real wages in these sectors. Moreover, Ozal's government introduced VAT, export tax rebates, preferential loans and credit in order increase private investment in the manufacturing sector (Arıcanlı and Rodrik, 1991; Akca, 2014). Thanks to the existing capacity of import substituting-industries Turkey was able to enter into export markets. Thus, the export of manufactured goods increased from 36% to 78% in a decade. Ozal also used

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<sup>6</sup> These family business holdings date back to the early Republican era and they were enriched by the state. However, thanks to economic liberalisation they increased their international competitiveness.

privatisation as a tool to reduce the state's presence in the economic sphere and thus the first public asset - the Bosphorus bridge - was privatised in 1984. Yet, because of bureaucratic obstacles the privatisation of public assets only progressed slowly until the 2000s (Ozatalay, 2011). Although they had supported the opening up of Turkey, the leading figures in the military and civil society were reluctant to support privatisation policies as they did not want to lose control over the economy. Therefore the Supreme Court blocked or cancelled many steps towards privatisation<sup>7</sup>. (cf. Ozatalay, 2011).

Ozal came into power when many political parties were banned from the political arena. As the military had also prohibited trade unions, there were not any bottom-up pressures that challenged Ozal's autonomy. Thus, he took advantage of this situation in terms of implementing institutional reforms. However, Ozal's party supported a mixture of nationalism and conservatism with a liberal Western orientation and class-based ideologies and politics were perceived as outdated and 'old politics'. Therefore, a 'new' type of politics emerged, which "focused on identity, locality, consumerism, and a celebratory rhetoric of free choice." (Erol, Ozbay and Turem, 2016: 4). While labour movements or leftists groups who sought to capture governmental power became outdated, a depoliticised civil society and non-governmental organisations became ideal for the terrain of politics (Akca, 2014). Rapid urbanisation paved the way for the creation of 'new politics'. The state itself took a role in infrastructure projects and mass housing projects in the cities in order to give rise to depoliticised 'new identities' (Erol, Ozbay and Turem, 2016).

In the 1990s, politics once again became highly fragmented. The dispute between new identities, Kurdish versus Turkish, and secular versus Islamic that emerged thanks to Ozal's liberal policies, was the main characteristic of the 1990s. The confrontation between the Turkish military forces and the separatist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) produced violence in Kurdish cities. However, none of the coalition governments lasted more than 2 years in the 1990s. Therefore, although the 1980s had been a period of rapid growth, this situation had been interrupted in the 1990s many times. The 1990s can be characterised by precarious growth, high levels of inflation, deep

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<sup>7</sup> Turkey has a strong state tradition in that the state has been perceived as a 'Father State', which must protect its 'people'. Statism (etatism) is one of the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic. Therefore, protecting public assets is an ideological position as well as a political one.

political instability and financial crises. After a full currency convertibility decision in August 1989, Turkey was fully exposed to the risks of financial globalisation because of its high level of public borrowing and dependence on short-time capital inflows (Karadag, 2010). In the presence of severe macroeconomic instability and a poorly regulated financial system, it caused a fragile and uninterrupted development model in which growth became dependent on the highly speculative and lopsided flows of short-term capital (Onis, 2009). Besides, politicians and businessmen used both state-owned and private banks for their interest rather than to resolve economic problems (Karadag, 2010). Thus, the weak coalition governments resulted in several economic crises in 1994, 1999, 2000 and most importantly 2001<sup>8</sup>.

Consequently, from the 1980s until the early years of the 2000s, it can be argued that the structural adjustment of the Turkish economy went ahead unchallenged. This process apparently enabled growth in the Turkish economy in the 1980s, but caused serious economic recession through the whole of the 1990s. The 1990s and the early 2000s were held back by unsustainable domestic debt dynamics, structural problems in the financial system, and low economic growth rates. As a result, while the annual growth rate was 9.2% in the 1980s, it dropped to -4.6% in 1994 and -5.6% in 2001. During the same period, the inflation rate increased from 52.3% to 61.6%. Between 1991 and 2003 GDP per capita decreased from \$2681 to \$2607, whereas the OECD average increased from \$11141 in 1991 to \$22100 in 2003 (TUIK, 2013).

The coming to power of the AKP signified a new era in Turkey in terms of economic governance. The AKP implemented neoliberal policies and redefined governance. Although it relied on deregulation, privatisation and decentralisation (a set of policies), the ways in which these policies were put into practice, ways in which new forms of governmental techniques and technologies were assembled, illustrated a distinctive example. This condition is quite meaningfully put into words by Karadag (2010: 5), “even though the pressures on national economic models are obviously present, the results of the reform paths actually pursued are much more divergent than neoclassical economists could have imagined. The reasons for this divergence are

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<sup>8</sup> Due to an outflow of short-term capital \$5 billion was issued from the Turkish Central Bank within just a week. While the Treasury's interest loan was about 65 per cent in December 2001, it went up to 144 per cent in February 2001. The crisis, soon after affected the entire economy, leading to severe unemployment and the collapse of economic growth in 2001 (Akca, 2014 and Karadag, 2010).

many, and arise from specific political, socio-economic, and cultural contexts.” As long as the AKP government pursues policies of neoliberalism in Turkey, distinctive features of its version of neoliberalism are clearly visible.

### **3.3.1 AKP and neoliberalism**

As Collier (2011) highlights neoliberalism is about rethinking governance, in that governmental techniques and technologies are mobile and flexible. Therefore, neoliberalism is necessarily articulated along with other political projects, such as political Islam. This section, thus, argues that political Islam and neoliberalism are coupled under the AKP regime. While macroeconomic developments have heavily shaped the 90s, it is worth mentioning the rise of the Islamic Welfare Party (WP) in order to better understand the AKP’s rapprochement with neoliberalism. The WP formed in 1983 came out of the National Outlook Movement tradition (Milli Gorus). The National Outlook Movement had represented Turkish political Islam since the 1970s and had achieved considerable electoral successes in the 1990s. While in the local elections in 1994 the WP won in several cities, including Istanbul and Ankara, it also received 21% of the votes in the national elections in 1995. The WP formed a coalition government with a right-wing party; yet this coalition government lasted less than a year. The ideological perception of the WP was based on critiques of the West and Kemalism<sup>9</sup>. On the economic front, however, the WP supported a ‘Just Economic Order’ (Adil Duzen) that was strongly against the capitalist order and ran on a platform of anti-corruption, poverty alleviation, and redistribution. In contrast to the IMF’s unfair interest order, the WP intended to increase production and decrease income inequality (Refah Partisi, 1995). In its own municipalities the WP had already expanded the scope of charity welfare through most informal urban peripheries. In this way, the WP attracted different segments of society, from devout people to residents of the urban peripheries, religious leaders, small and medium scale entrepreneurs, and some intellectuals. It can be said that the WP’s ‘Just Economic Order’ appealed to the Islamic morality that was seen as the only salvation to fight with the state-monopolist bureaucracy and big bourgeoisies. The political rise of the

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<sup>9</sup>The founding ideology of the Turkish Republic that was based on Mustafa Kemal’s six fundamental principles – Republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, reformism and statism.

WP was reflected in the economic spheres. The political dualism that the WP created as political Islam versus secular West was represented in economic term by TUSIAD versus MUSIAD in economic terms<sup>10</sup>.

Since the WP's governmental power challenged the economic, cultural and political traditions of the secular state, the coalition government was forced to step down in 1997 by the military. Subsequently, the WP was banned by the Constitutional Court and the top cadres were banned from political activities. The military's tremendous efforts to discipline political Islam and its political and economic representatives did not solve the political crisis. Instead, it deepened in the successor coalition governments and resulted in an economic crisis in Turkey in 2001. The WP even after only a year of government succeeded in decreasing the state's current account deficit, internal debt, lowering interest rates and increasing real wages without help from the IMF. The coalition governments that followed were not only highly fragmented, but also the politicians were involved in corruption in the banking system.

A year later, in a general election<sup>11</sup>, the AKP, inheritor of the WP, was able to form a single government by winning approximately 34% of the votes. After the WP was banned, political Islam redefined its position towards the West. Instead of hostility, political Islam engaged with Western powers, the IMF and EU, to protect its identity. Unlike the WP's 'Just Economic Order' the AKP accepted the logic of a market economy by following the IMF's structural programmes. In contrast to previous governments, the AKP agreed to the IMF-supervised crisis management program that had already started in April 2001. Moreover, between 2002 and 2005 and 2005 and

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<sup>10</sup> With the rise of WP small and medium-scaled entrepreneurs who were affiliated with the religious capitalist class also formed a business association MUSIAD (Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen) in the 1990s. This business association, which is also known as 'Anatolian Tigers', was formed by the businessmen mainly from the central Anatolian provinces. Because of the change in the economic model- export to oriented industrialisation, these type of entrepreneurship became more dynamic (Bugra, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> The economic crisis in 2001 resulted in a 9% fall in GDP. The crisis badly affected the poorest groups of society, salaried professional and small and medium scaled businesses, to a point where many people were on the verge of bankruptcy. Many people from artisans to shopkeepers and small-scaled business owners went on the streets to protest against the coalition government and its economic policies (Atasoy, 2009). As Onis (2009) indicates, the political parties not the IMF became the centre of criticism since they used political patronage for their own sake. In the wake of the economic crisis the AKP came to power. Even in its first election the AKP gained a huge victory and was able to form a single-party government, whereas all the parties, perceived to have been involved in corruption in the 1990s, were not even able to meet an election threshold of 10%.

2008, the government signed two stand-by agreements with the IMF. In this way, the AKP effectively transformed the image of the 'lost' 1990s. This continued until the AKP refused help from the IMF in 2009 after the global economic crisis. Although after the post-economic crisis of 2001 the AKP had borrowed from the IMF to heal economic problems, the global crisis in 2008-2009 was different. In order to publicise its economic strength, the AKP decided not to seek help from the IMF despite TUSIAD's push (Onis, 2012). It might be thought that structural adjustments and IMF prescriptions would increase income divisions, leading poor people to withdraw their electoral supports from the AKP, as the economy was serving the rich people. Yet, the AKP has consistently increased or preserved its share of the vote. To understand this apparent contradiction, it is important to look how new governmental techniques and technologies have been assembled under the AKP government.

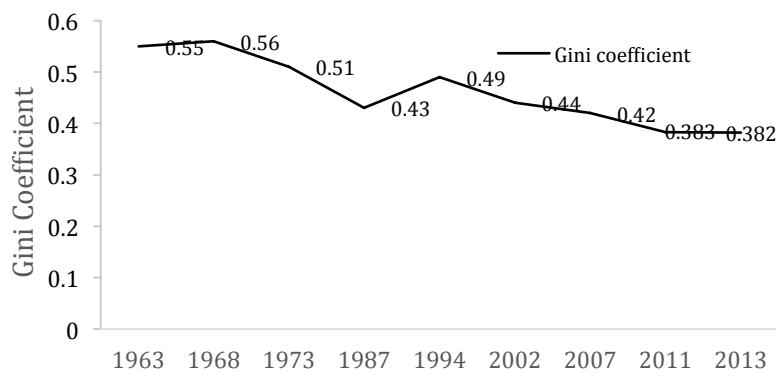
After coming to power, the AKP, in January 2003, launched on 'Emergency Action Plan' that involved huge changes in public administration, economic transformation and social politics. The plan emphasised the need to integrate Turkey's economy into the world. A few months later the AKP announced a 'Public Administration Reform', entitled 'The Change in Governance for Governing the Change' that was prepared with the collaboration of NGOs such as TUSIAD, TESEV (a think-tank which works with TUSIAD) and Istanbul Bilgi University (Guler, 2004). The plan emphasised that the reason why economic liberalisation had not been achieved since 1980 was the lack of reform in public administration. It stated that while between 1980 and 1990 free market mechanisms and free competition had been adopted and successfully implemented, after the 1990s structural adjustment policies had not adopted to the changing times. The economic crises of the 1990s and 2001 derived from structural faults and clear lack of problem-solving at the administrative level. Therefore, reconfiguration of governance was required. To do that, it commented on the IMF's structural adjustment policies and European norms. Collier's (2011: 151) perspective was that structural adjustment was recontextualised to make the "economy flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances." Thus, structural adjustment was not "an ideology or economic theory" but "an assemblage of heterogeneous elements" that distorted the problems of the domestic economy.

According to this plan, rapid and multifaceted change in the world necessitated reconfigured government and Turkey needed to adapt through new techniques and technologies and 'good governance' at local and national levels. The plan emphasised four main categories: 'the change in economic theory', 'the change in administration theory', 'the competitive structure of private sector and its progress' and 'the change in the forms of civil society' (Basbakanlik, 2003: 21). Accordingly, like countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand but also the former socialist states, governance was reconstituted according to new circumstances. On the other hand, the plan stated, Turkey had fallen behind in implementing new techniques and technologies in its governance. In a free market economy, governance which does not receive the consent of people displaced people and leads to a loss human resources as people move away from the country. In contrast, good governance gives people free choice, and in terms of capital, knowledge and technology become central. Therefore, as asserted in the plan, in a competitive market the citizen is treated as a 'target market' and 'customer'. Thus the only way to achieve 'good governance' is through privatisation, strong civil society and decentralisation.

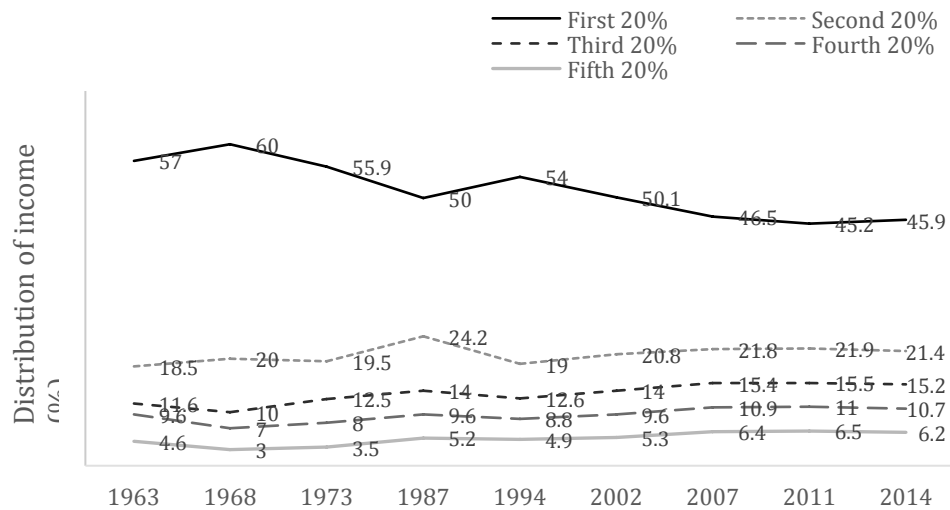
The plan was amended many times and finally turned into a bill and submitted to the Turkish parliament in June 2004. Although the President vetoed the bill, as it violated the main principle of the Turkish Republic (statism), a body of bills were passed during the ensuing years in order to achieve 'good governance' and shrink the state's presence in the economy. With these new bills, decentralisation was strengthened through the awarding of greater financial and political autonomy to local government. The formerly troubled banking sector was regulated and tight fiscal policies were introduced. The privatisation process was triggered. Although privatisation had already started in the 1980s, the AKP removed bureaucratic obstacles and intensified the policy of privatisation. Regional development agencies were formed in order to encourage private-public co-operation. In other words, the state-led development model was completely abandoned and in each region, small and medium-scale entrepreneurship was encouraged. Reforms were made to the health sector and welfare mechanisms were reformulated.

Under these circumstances, the welfare state was not destroyed even though the IMF's structural adjustment program was followed. Furthermore, inequality between

poor and rich people started to decrease (the 1990s are exception). This became more visible during the AKP's era which again is something that Marxist critics could not anticipate. Unlike in Western countries, there has been a consistent decrease in the gap between the rich and the poor since neoliberalism was introduced in Turkey. The share of the richest 20 percent, who received more income during the inward-oriented time, has consistently decreased since market liberalisation. The Gini coefficient rate was 0.56 in 1968 but it decreased to 0.379 in 2014 (Figure 3.1). While the richest 20 percent's share was twenty times more than the share of poorest 20 percent in 1968, this rate decreased to 7.7 times in 2013 (Figure 3.2). Although Turkey has always exhibited high rates of income inequality, it has consistently decreased since the crisis of 2001. Unlike many Western countries that have shrunk public spending on education and health sectors, the AKP has increased public expenditure in these sectors. Thanks to the high rates of economic growth the AKP enhanced public sectors provision in the early years of its rule. Free books were provided in primary and secondary schools, tuition fees for higher education were removed and new public universities were opened in disadvantaged Anatolian cities. After the reforms in the healthcare system, more low-income groups benefited from free health facilities, public health facilities were extended to larger segments of society, and the prices of medicines were cut. Thus, the AKP improved the living standards of the lower and middle-income groups of the society (Onis, 2012). As Islamoglu (2016) rightly points out, the poorer sectors of society have supported the economic policies of the AKP, as they have enabled them to access public services more easily.



**Figure 3-1:** The Gini coefficient rates in Turkey



**Figure 3-2:** Distribution of income between groups

Source: Ozatalay's (2014) data was extended with TUIK's data (<http://www.tuik.gov.tr>).

### 3.3.2. Islamic neoliberalism

While an assemblage of new governmental techniques and technologies enabled the AKP to maintain its popularity, the AKP's economic policies coupled with their religious identity also played a vital role. As in the case of the Gezi protests, the morality, or perception of the AKP as moderate or political Islam, has become an area of significant focus in discussions about the neoliberalism of the AKP (Tugal, 2009; Akca, 2014; Cavusoglu and Strutz, 2014; Moudouros, 2014 and Gurcan and Peker, 2014; Karaman, 2012 and 2013). In this sense, it is important to look at case studies of how political Islam coupled with neoliberalism during the AKP era.

Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of the 'hegemony' Cihan Tugal (2009) illustrates the changing relationship between political parties, local authority and civil society in Sultanbeyli, a poor and conservative neighbourhood in Istanbul. He looks at the transformation from radical Islam to moderate Islam proposed by the Western world. What is crucial in his line of argument is his belief that not only has moderate Islam successfully absorbed radical Islamism; it has also constituted the hegemony of neoliberalism over society. The question Tugal raises, then, is how did moderate Islam not only absorb radical Islam but also create a hegemonic bloc? In pursuing this question he draws on Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution' that can be defined as "one of the convoluted, and sometimes unintended, ways by which the dominant

sectors establish willing consent [‘hegemony’] for their rule.” (p. 4). Unlike a classical revolution, in a passive revolution, rather than exercising force directly, the popular class is mobilised around revolutionary discourses, which results in strengthening the existing system. How the moderate Islamist, the AKP, brought about this passive revolution, was to combine ex-radicalism with secularism, neoliberalism and Western domination in an extended process. What is interesting is that these ex-radical Islamists fought against neoliberalism, secularism and US hegemony for many years, and then embraced the discourses that they were once against. Tugal defines this passive revolution as a “viable, even if unstable, route to a market economy.” (p. 4).

Furthermore, Karaman (2012, 2013), embracing Tugal’s social movement theory framework, argues that neoliberalism and Islamism should not be understood through absorption of each other, rather it should be understood as political rationalities, what he calls ‘neoliberal Islamic assemblages’. While neoliberalism is a machine that seeks to expand marketisation, Islamism as a machine that aims to extend Islamic norms and values and eventually Islamise the country. In doing so, unlike Tugal, he believes Islamism has not been absorbed by neoliberalism at all; instead, it has become a mainstream force in Turkey. He argues that instead of being separate, one should absorb another, and eventually a synthesis appears between them, thus neoliberalism and Islamism can coexist together. In other words, both have a mutual reinforcement. His examples range from the increase in the number of Islamic newspapers and magazines, the Islamic fashion industry, the emergence of single gender use hotels, swimming pools and public parks in everyday life, more references from Islam and Quran and less tolerance for secular lifestyles (although he does not give any examples to prove this claim), prove the Islamisation of the country. On the other hand, he thinks that since neoliberal policies disadvantageously affect the poorest segments of society, the AKP expands the market through a moral economy of the gift. Accordingly, municipalities run by the AKP distribute welfare to poor people.

Although Karaman’s link between neoliberal subjectivity and Islamic morality is interesting, in fact, he believes that the AKP has destroyed welfarism by intensifying the privatisation process. As I elaborated above, the AKP used different mechanisms to arrange redistribution, and protect the social welfare state. Besides, the use of

welfare does not pertain to the AKP municipalities; regardless of the party, many metropolitan municipalities according to the ‘Municipality Law No. 5393’ have to have a particular unit that distributes welfare to poor people. The other problem with Karaman’s formulation is that he believes that the AKP uses Islamism as a rationality that aims to Islamise secular lifestyles, yet this thinking overlooks the subjectivities of those who practice and demand religious activities. In other words, Karaman’s understanding shows that the AKP uses top-down Islamism to change the secular way of life on the assumption that those people who vote for the AKP as mere objects. In contrast, the AKP creates ways for its religious supporters to be represented in the public sphere by offering alternatives to secular lifestyles. Rather than reducing political Islam to a movement with a secret agenda, wishing to Islamise secular lives, I believe the Islamism that the AKP has embraced emerges from existing religious bodies seeking alternatives to secularism. In this regard, I agree with Tugal’s analysis of Islam absorbed through neoliberal logic. Tugal generalises his case to the nation as a whole by drawing on ethnographic research conducted in a marginal neighbourhood in terms of economic and socio-cultural conditions and religious practices. However, Sultanbeyli cannot represent an overall trend in Turkey and religious communities cannot be considered simplistically as radical Islamists. Besides, even in the first election the AKP expanded its potential basis and became a centre-right conservative party. Moreover, I do not approach neoliberalism as an ideology that seeks to produce a hegemonic force. As Barnett (2005: 5) rightly points out, envisaging neoliberalism as a hegemony “lacks any clear sense of how consent is actually secured, or any convincing account of hegemonic projects are anchored at the level of everyday life, other than implying this works by ‘getting at’ people in some way or other.” Borrowing Karaman’s term, I argue that ‘neoliberal Islamic assemblage’ has sought to increase marketisation through Islamic moralism and ethics that have been deployed to all mechanisms of the economy. Coming from the National Outlook tradition the AKP has sought to assemble bodies through Islamic moralism and ethics, on the one hand, and to maximise marketisation on the other.

It can be said that the AKP integrated its commitment to political Islam, which used to be very critical of the IMF and the European Union, with neoliberal policies. In this sense, Atasoy (2009) and Onis (2012) argue that the AKP has taken a ‘Third Way’ in response to neoliberalism. Atasoy (2009: 109) defines the AKP’s way of embracing

neoliberalism as “a course of integration between the neoliberal market economy and citizen-empowerment politics.” The AKP embraced neoliberal logic at the transnational level in regard to its relationship with the IMF and EU; on the other hand, its Islamic roots resulted in the implementation of neoliberalism along the lines of Islamic moralism. Thanks to this coupling the AKP was supported by broad segments of society and formed a cross-coalition between disadvantaged classes and big competitive firms (Atasoy, 2009).

Islamic moralism created an ethic that applied to all mechanisms of the economy. Disadvantaged groups willingly approved the logic of the market for that reason. According to the AKP’s understanding, to engage in economically disadvantaged groups, one has to be culturally developed. That is to say “[t]he identification of individual self-growth with economic freedoms underpins the AKP’s neoliberal orientation, politicized as a cultural project of citizen-empowerment based on ‘trust.’” (Atasoy, 2009: 111). As Atasoy (2009) further claims, “through self-reliance and self-discipline, individuals endowed with an Islamic ethos and morality would be able to fully manage their position in society”. While the AKP appealed to its pious bourgeoisie, in the shape of MUSIAD, to expand Islamic trust networks within a dynamic market economy (Gokariksel and Secor, 2009), at the same time, it protected the welfare state and embraced a social version of neoliberalism. What I mean by the social neoliberalism is that to redistribute wealth to the disadvantaged classes is in line with the Islamic commitment to social cohesion. In this way, the AKP has been trying to consolidate its power within the poorer segments of the society. To do that, the AKP used formal and informal strategies that expanded its popularity. Informal strategies operated through municipalities and non-governmental charities and formal strategies included the expansion of public spending on social services.

Consequently, this section indicates that neoliberalism in Turkey may date back to the 1980s, but it is clear that the AKP integrated structural adjustment policies into its governance policies and redefined governance. While doing that, it preserved its conservative democrat identity, which might seem to contradict neoliberalism. Thus, I argue that during the AKP era the logic of the expansion of the market has conjoined with conservative Islam. On the one hand, neoliberalism has become more comprehensive and consistent under the AKP regime, in that its ability to involve

disadvantaged people has become important. On the other hand, the AKP has drawn on a morality of Islam to strengthen its power. Thus, while poor people have supported the AKP's economic policies, neoliberalism has had negative impacts such as brutal capitalism and crony capitalism on Turkish society. After being in power for more than a decade the AKP has created its own capitalist classes. While earlier it mostly worked with big capitalist firms (TUSIAD), many members of TUSIAD have been excluded from the public bids more recently. Moreover, in particular, in Regional Development Agencies political connections have become a widespread necessity for people trying to work. This 'who you know' ethos excluded other classes and this issue became more apparent in the Gezi protests. The next section illustrates ways to rethink the relationship between the state and capitalist firms through the Gezi protests.

#### **3.4. 'Capital is out, Istanbul is ours': Contradicting point of the Gezi Protests**

This section explores the relationship between political economic change and the Gezi protests. To do that it traces the complex relations between the AKP and different capital groups ie. TUSIAD and MUSIAD. Revealing the AKP's alignment and realignment with different capital groups the chapter pursues the extent for which Gezi activism can be accommodated in the context of anti-neoliberalism.

Max Weber (2002) in his famous book, "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*" sheds light on the relationship between rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism and modern capitalism. Weber devoted himself to understand how this spirit of capitalism can be found in the cultural and religious realms of Calvinism. He convincingly argues that, unlike other religious orders Calvinism played a major role in developing the spirit of capitalism. He believes that that Calvinism added positive meaning to "the idea of the necessity of proving one's faith in worldly activity. Therein it gave broader groups of religiously inclined people a positive incentive to asceticism." (2002: 121). Thus, Weber thinks that Calvinism is an important contributory factor to the capitalist spirit. Weber also claims that Islam cannot be compatible with the spirit of capitalism since Islam is an essentially political religion. In other words, Weber suggests while worldly ascetism can be found in Protestantism, in Islam, on the other hand, ascetism was eliminated through the efforts of warrior groups and Sufi brotherhoods that made Islam mystical and otherworldly. Therefore,

he believed that capitalism could not be developed in the Islamic world. However, the rise of Islamic bourgeoisies since the late 1990s in Turkey proves Weber's assumption wrong. Islamic ethics have been interwoven into capitalism through the rise of Islamic bourgeoisies. Similar to Weber's thesis on the capitalist spirit, Islamic morality has also been a productive source for capital accumulation. This accumulation has become more visible during the government of the AKP, and it will be useful to rethink how different business associations realigned with the AKP, and what kind of particularities emerged within it.

The AKP's economic strategy has been to establish a big collaboration between small-medium scaled firms and big firms; yet, it produced different relationships with different business organisations. Therefore, private capital has been realigned during the AKP's term. This has appeared in various capital interests between TUSIAD and MUSIAD and other Islamic bourgeoisies.

TUSIAD supported the AKP's economic policies, and with the AKP era, TUSIAD firms became globally competitive firms. Consisting of mostly large-scale holding companies, TUSIAD aimed to improve the social status of state-created bourgeoisie companies and associated itself with a secular orientation. TUSIAD advocates the European model of economic and social development and takes a pro-EU approach. Although it shares the same economic interests as the AKP, TUSIAD has always politically and ideologically kept a distance from the AKP. In other words, TUSIAD has supported the economic policies of the AKP, but it never has politically advocated the AKP since it has a strong commitment to the secular principles of the Turkish Republic.

On the other hand, representing small and medium-sized firms, MUSIAD has always been a key element of the AKP's economic policies, so much so that ten members from MUSIAD were elected as parliament members in the AKP's first election in 2002 (Atasoy, 2009). The strategic vision of MUSIAD is to 'unite businessmen' and strength community through 'Islamic ethics'. In other words, MUSIAD used Islam as an ideological tool to cooperate and create solidarity between producers at national and international levels. MUSIAD offered an alternative form to TUSIAD. Pious MUSIAD businessmen embedded Islamic social justice in their discourses in order to succeed in their economic activities (Bugra, 1998). Unlike TUSIAD, MUSIAD

supported the AKP's cross-class coalition and always kept it away from the secular state. For MUSIAD 'Muslimness' serves as an important tool to represent those who are excluded by the system. From this perspective, MUSIAD "offers a different image of the state and political life from below, posited within the moral, normative, and cognitive framing of society." (Atasoy, 2009: 118). As Hosgor (2011: 349) discusses, using the discourse of 'moral capitalism', these pious classes can be considered as "self-maximizing, rational, calculating, competitive, innovative and utilitarian [subjectivities, but at the same time, they conceive] the well-being of society at large." From this perspective, like the Protestant work ethic, Islamic bourgeoisies can be called 'Islamist Calvinists' (See also Hosgor, 2011 and Kosebalaban, 2007). As there has been a strengthening of the connection between MUSIAD and the AKP, pious businessmen can easily access state sources, in particular in the construction sector. MUSIAD now has more than 11000 members with 60000 firms. It is represented not only all over the country, but also all over Europe and Asian countries. Thanks to the AKP's policies these Islamic bourgeoisies have improved their competitiveness at national and international levels. For example, Calik Holding started off in textiles in the late 1980s, invested in the energy sector in the 1990s and formed a holding company in 1997. When the AKP came to power it started to invest in mining, finance and telecoms. The business expanded nationally and internationally and its CEO is now one of the richest businessmen in Turkey. Another illustrative example is BIM retailer, which is mainly owned by the Topbas Family. BIM pioneered a hard-discount model that limits production in terms of items and sells them at the lowest price. Although BIM only opened in 1995 with 25 stores, it now has over 4500 stores in Turkey and many stores in Egypt and Morocco.

The rise of the Islamic bourgeoisies in the economy has challenged the Istanbul capital that is represented by TUSIAD. The AKP does not hesitate to show its support for MUSIAD and other Islamic bourgeoisie. For example, just before the national referendum in 2010, Prime Minister Erdogan shared his desire to see capital changing hands. In his speech in a live broadcast on one of the pro-AKP private TV channels, ATV, on 9 September 2010, Erdogan proudly and publicly claimed his party's economic policies had given rise to the Anatolian capital. He states:

"From the beginning, the Istanbul capitalists has agreed to make profit with us,

but it didn't agree to do politics with us. From time to time, they have confessed that 'We have gained five times more, but we cannot support [you] politically, it is our political opinion.' However, whether they are happy or not in Turkey, the capital has started to change hands in serious manners. It is a primary source of trust for us. From all over Turkey, in Southeast, Eastern Anatolia and because of investment, participation in exports has leapt forward and that cannot be compared with three to five years ago. Now, this may frighten them... At the moment, there are 'Anatolian Tigers' that have integrated with the world. It may also bother them... However, we also want Istanbul capitalists be intertwined with the Anatolian capitalists." (Hurriyet, 11 September 2010).

Although Erdogan highlighted the rise of the Anatolian bourgeoisie, in reality, TUSIAD still dominates the Turkish economy. By 2016, TUSIAD had a membership of 4000 companies with around 600 memberships. TUSIAD controls 50% of total value in Turkey's economy; more than 50% of the non-agricultural and non-governmental workforce was supplied by TUSIAD and 80% of Turkey's foreign trade was operated by TUSIAD (TUSIAD catalogue, 2016). It is obvious that as a result of the AKP's systematic neoliberal policies TUSIAD has also benefited. However, on many occasions, TUSIAD made statements against the AKP when it comes to religion. For example, although TUSIAD advocates democracy, TUSIAD never engaged with problems of lifting the headscarf ban or solving Islamic school problems, rather it saw these as obstacles for democratising the country (Atasoy, 2009). Besides, the AKP's relationship with the Islamic bourgeoisie that derived from Islamic cohesion created dissatisfaction for TUSIAD members. Therefore, some leading members of TUSIAD participated in or supported the protests.

'Capital is out, Istanbul is ours' was one of the initial and salient slogans of the protest. The AKP was charged with transforming society under the market logic. In other words, the protesters took an anti-neoliberal stand against the neoliberal AKP. Yet, from the very beginning, some of the big business firms showed their support for the Gezi protests. Direct or indirect support of large business firms in Gezi created sophisticated relationships between Gezi activism and neoliberalism. In particular, Turkey's richest classes – including some members of TUSIAD – who had shown

their sympathy with the protests, illustrated quite an interesting example of complex power relationship between the AKP and different firms. Perhaps the most interesting support came from the ex-chairman of TUSIAD, Cem Boyner, who is also the CEO of the Boyner Group, a retailer chain with 500 stores across the country. Not only did Cem Boyner actively participate in the protests with his family but he also emailed his employees to let them know about the protests. His support was very much appreciated by the protesters and on social media he was appointed 'economy minister' of 'the people's cabinet' (Radikal, 5 June 2013).

The Divan Hotel, a five-star hotel owned by Koc Holding, is located next to Gezi Park. During the protest, the hotel was used as an infirmary. The owner of the hotel asked his employees to open up the hotel for the protesters. On the last day of occupation when the police removed the protesters from the park, the protesters sheltered in the hotel. The Koc Holding, one of the biggest conglomerates in Turkey, materially supported Gezi protest. The Koc Holding is not only the oldest conglomerate that was formed in the 1920s but also the 127th biggest company in the world. According to its website, the Koc group defines 2005 and 2006 as 'a milestone in the history of the Koc Group' since TUPRAS, Turkey's only oil refiner, was privatised on behalf of the group and joint venture to Yapi Kredi Bank, the fourth largest public bank in Turkey. From this perspective, the holding gained from the AKP's privatisation policies and thus tripled its company share value. The Koc's participation in the protests was an interesting case. As a result of its material support and sympathy for the protesters, it is believed that the Koc Holding was punished by the government and victimised when the tax inspectors raided TUPRAS along with the police and conducted a detailed inspection in late July 2013. The newspapers connected it with Gezi. *Sozcu* (7 December 2013) depicted this incident as "the AKP showed its stick against the Koc Holding", and *Cumhuriyet* (11 November 2013) claimed that this action was illegal and unfair. Similarly, an article in *Hurriyet* (26 July 2013) argued that the Koc Holding was paying the price for TUPRAS's success as Turkey's largest company. The article even claimed that it was revenge for Gezi that drove the AKP. An article in the *New York Times* (4 September 2013) also depicted this action as motivated by 'a vengeful mood' and stated "It is a warning worth heeding. The government's skills at divide and rule will not work with market sentiment: A witch hunt against one section of Turkish business will destroy investor

confidence overall. If the A.K.P. persists in playing politics with the economy, its own supporters among the business elite may be the first to rebel.” An article in *Der Spiegel* (20 August 2013), also defended Koc Holding by stating “Now Erdogan's aggression is also being directed against the economic elites for the first time. The premier has accused Koc Holding, Turkey's largest corporation, of “cooperating with terrorists.” During the Gezi protests, the Divan Hotel in Istanbul, also owned by the conglomerate, gave shelter to demonstrators fleeing police violence.”

The Koc Holding responded by sponsoring an exhibition about the protests by Kutlug Ataman, a filmmaker, the following September. When he shared his opinion about Gezi in a private TV channel, he criticised both the AKP and Gezi protesters. Since he did not entirely criticise the AKP, his exhibition was cancelled by another member of the Koc Holding. He was told the Koc Holding expected all artists to criticise the AKP harshly (T24, 14 August 2013).

The examples above show that the protesters welcomed the big conglomerates' explicit support. When ‘capital is out’ was employed in the discourse of protests, it referred to the AKP's capital, which can be interpreted as Islamic capital. The company, which had won the contract for the Taksim Pedestrianisation Project, Kalyon Construction Company, was one of MUSIAD's firms. On 3rd June 2013 when massive protests were happening all over the country, thousands of protesters went to Kanyon Shopping Mall, built by the Ezcacibasi conglomerate, one of the oldest family holdings of TUSIAD that serves for the upper classes. Their purpose was not to protest that Kanyon as a commodification space, but rather to show their solidarity with Gezi (Milliyet, 3 June 2013). In this sense, they were selective in who they chose to target.

One of my interviewees pointed out this contradiction. Ziya, a Marxist human right activist, who supported the protests from the beginning, later withdrew his support when the protesters insisted on staying in the park despite the meetings arranged between the protesters and Prime Minister, Erdogan. He was very critical of the leftists who supported the protests.

“They turned to the market. My sister, for example, also participated in those activities and stayed in a nearby hotel during the protests. She said she

counted the trucks, Migros trucks carried food, water, and supplies, coming to the back of the Divan hotel one by one. Then Koc made a statement and Boyner said something... The rational left must have thought like, ‘okay they are making a revolution, but is there any revolution that is supported by big capital in the world?’ If you want to overthrow big capital and conquer the state, which is supposed to be the means of oppression, then how could Koc, the biggest capital of the country support you. They never questioned that. They didn't question how DHKP-C [a terrorist organisation] and Rahmi Koc [the owner of Koc Holding] could stand side by side.” (Ziya, July 3, 2014, Halkali).

Consequently, it can be said that the involvement of the biggest conglomerates in Turkey in the protests rendered the position of Gezi against neoliberalism ambiguous. Thus, it is difficult to posit Gezi as a movement against the neoliberal system. Instead, Gezi was partly a protest against the dynamics of Anatolian capital and its political representative, the AKP. Since the AKP has come to power, Islam has not only become visible in the economy but also in the public sphere. For the first time since the modern Turkish Republic was established Islam has finally become mainstream in everyday life.

#### **3.4.1. The Gezi protests as a risk for economic crisis?**

The Gezi protests happened in a time when Turkey was emerging as one of the fastest growing countries in the world. Therefore, this economic success enabled “the regime to pay off the last of its IMF loans so that it was even in a position to offer the IMF \$5bn to help with the Eurozone crisis in 2012.” (Guardian, 31 May 2013). As Erdogan had always publicised the strength of the Turkish economy as evidence of success of his governance, during the first days of protests there were fluctuations in the stock market. In Turkey, the economic crises of the 1990s were mainly driven by the political instability brought about by various coalition governments. One of the successes of the AKP was that, as it has been able to form a single party rule thanks to its electoral majority, it has not had to face an economic crisis. As Gezi was the biggest political crisis the AKP had to deal with, in many articles, the Gezi protests

were portrayed as an economic risk. Thus, in this section, I will illustrate how the Gezi protests were perceived by the newspapers in regard to financial risk.

While Turkey's economic success was repeated over and over in the newspapers, the Gezi protests were portrayed as political unrest that might lead to economic collapse. It was emphasised that political instability can lead to economic instability although the AKP government has always had the confidence of foreign investors. They focused on the short-term impacts of Gezi on interest rates and how alarming this situation was. The Turkish stock market decreased by around 9%, interest rates increased, and the Turkish lira dropped in value (New York Times, 5/6 June 2013; Der Spiegel, 6 June 2013). While the Turkish economy was facing these fluctuations, the government and Erdogan, in particular, blamed financiers for stoking conflict and undermining the Turkish economy by increasing interest rates (Haaretz, 6 June 2013). The newspaper articles answered back.

An article in the Turkish newspaper Hurriyet, titled 'Hot money lobby' blamed Erdogan's policies for the increase in interest rates. It stated "Turkey is a hot money heaven. If there is a lobby, it is a hot money lobby that the foreign investors brought in. They have benefited in the last ten years under the AKP regime." (12 June 2013). Furthermore, the article blamed Erdogan for creating political instability. It asserted that for as long as Erdogan made negative comments about the protests, the interest rates dramatically increased. Similarly, with a title, 'Investors Nervous' on 20th June, Der Spiegel newspaper drew attention to international financiers in Turkey and shows the state's pressure on international financiers. According to the news, the government launched a massive investigation to find out which institutions had been involved in this manipulation and portrayed financial institutions as victims of Erdogan's regime. It claimed that the government had tried to find 'scapegoats' in the financial sector. The article drew a pessimist picture for the future of Turkish economy. Furthermore, the article blamed Erdogan for creating political instability. The attitude that Erdogan and his party took was described as 'political suicide' in the article. It stated that since international investments were constituted by short-term commitments, alienation of foreign investors would worsen the economy. Later, it continues, "The government needs capital for its many investments, but capital is in limited supply in the Turkish private sector. The protests... showed that Turkish civil

society is no longer willing to give unquestioning backing to the megalomania of its government.” The article also depicted Gezi as the worst crisis for Erdogan since he had come into power. It continued with a view that his “success was based on his reputation for successfully managing the country. A weakening economy could spell trouble for him with regional and presidential elections only months away -- especially now that his rivals are already positioning themselves within the AKP.”

In a similar way, an article in the New York Times, entitled, ‘Large Risks in Erdogan’s Harsh Stand’ stated, “Mr. Erdogan’s harsh actions against protesters and harsh words against investors could backfire economically. The country depends on foreign investors to fund its big current account deficit. If they turn tail in response to the mounting unrest, interest rates will indeed have to rise.” The article draws an alarming picture that Turkey would not be politically stable anymore and that Erdogan’s heavy-handed stance against the protesters would undermine Turkey’s chances of joining the EU. Also, tourism would be affected negatively. The article ends with a suggestion to Erdogan. It stated, “The economic miracle, which Mr. Erdogan has presided over and which is one of the main sources of his popularity, might look like a conjuring trick. Instead of choking protesters, Turkey’s prime minister should try to make a genuine peace with them.” Ultimately, for the newspapers, the Gezi protests were a potential risk in which risk is understood within conventional economic rationalities. For the interpreters, the main reason behind the risk was Erdogan’s attitude and therefore, he was the person who should be blamed for a possible economic crisis.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter emphasised that the AKP, supervised by the IMF and the EU, has brought about necessary structural changes in the economy of Turkey through redefining governance. In due course, the AKP enlarged the markets at the same time as adding conservative values (Islamic ethics and morality) into neoliberalism. It seemed that some of the protesters allied with some of the alternate capital-holders, who were as responsible for the neoliberal transformation as the AKP. This contradiction leads me to the conclusion that the Gezi protests were actually against the way neoliberalism has been implemented by the AKP, not neoliberalism per se. Therefore, Gezi showed that the AKP’s interpretation of neoliberalism created

dissatisfactions not only from the protesters, but also from big corporate firms (as they can also be counted as protesters). The chapter also illustrated that the Gezi protests were portrayed as a potential risk for an economic crisis in some of the national and international newspapers. As the protests created a temporary instability this was interpreted as creating ‘a painful end’ for Erdogan’s government.

What differentiates AKP’s neoliberalism, this chapter argues, is that Islamic morality has been employed in the project of neoliberal transformation. Some scholars like Akca (2014) and Karaman (2012 and 2013) analysis the AKP’s neoliberalisation is a forerunner of Islamisation. This claim assumes that the resurfacing religious of ways of life in the public sphere is an indication of Islamisation. From this perspective, while doing that, the AKP seeks to restrict other ways of life, especially secular ones. I turn to these issues in chapter 5. However, the AKP’s collaboration with the capitalist elites has become more apparent in the governing and shaping of the cities. Therefore, the next chapter elaborates on these specifically urban issues.

# **Chapter 4**

## **Urban transformation and the Gezi protests**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter explores the relationship between process of urban transformation and reconfiguration and the Gezi protests. Although Gezi started as a movement against urban construction plans, it turned into protest was against all the AKP's urban policies. The transformation of Istanbul by big construction companies and central and local government was one of the most important critiques (Capital is out, Istanbul is ours) embedded in Gezi activism. In addition to that, the AKP's interrelationship with big players in the construction sector has been highly visible during the reconfiguration of urban spaces. Therefore, Gezi brought the dynamic relationship between economic development and urban space into the frame (Harvey, 1989, Brenner and Theodore, 2005). In this chapter, I argue that while for the AKP the construction and reproduction of urban space are essential elements in the neoliberal development process, the Gezi activists challenged the AKP's development policies.

The chapter is divided into four sections. It starts with a theoretical discussion on how neoliberalism has shaped cities across the world. It argues that although many cities have embraced market-dominated governance since the 1980s, associated strategies and techniques have been deployed in a number of ways. The second part of the chapter explains the material transformation of Istanbul over time, focusing on particular periods that ushered in economic and cultural change and particular locations. This includes Gezi Park, Topcu Barracks, and the Taksim Pedestrianisation projects which are important in the Gezi discourse against the AKP's urban policies. The final section reflects on the relationship between economic development and urban change in Gezi. It shows the ways in which the changes in Istanbul's urban material spaces were reflected in the protests, and argues that the strategies and techniques for urban development projects that the AKP government has been taking became one of the critiques of the protesters.

## 4.2. Neoliberal urbanisation

Neoliberalism is best understood as new modes of governmental techniques and technologies assembled in different spaces in particular ways. These theories, policies, programmes and techniques are flexible when they travel from one place to another (Larner, 2002; Collier, 2009; Ong, 2006). It is widely argued that since the 1980s neoliberal techniques and strategies have become important in the economic and spatial transformation of urban areas. While these strategies in the North Atlantic zones were mainly examined through practices of the Keynesian versus post-Keynesian eras, in other parts of the world these strategies take multiple forms.

Peck et al. (2010) state that cities have become crucial spaces for reproducing, reconstituting and mutating neoliberalism. As the cities in North America and West Europe were the central places for Fordist-Keynesian systems in terms of production and reproduction practices, they have also been epicentres for neoliberal rollback strategies. Peck et al. (2010) claim that due to the changes in the scalar politics of the neoliberalisation process the urban domain has accomplished multiple types of scalar power in post-Keynesian times and as a result, they have turned into strategic hubs. After the creative destruction of the Keynesian system, the role of state also shifted. Peck et al assert that the shift from Keynesian to post-Keynesian systems resulted in two important features in urban areas. Firstly, cities today are located in uncertain geo-economic environments that are not only characterised by financial instability and the speculative movement of the financial capital, but also by major transnational partnerships to strengthen international and local competition. Secondly, in order to revive local economies, neoliberal strategies have been internalised into urban regimes through ‘shock treatment’ based on deregulation, privatisation, liberalisation and increased fiscal austerity policies.

As the state’s role shifted from that of a regulator to an agent, the state played a major role in the (re)configuration of urban spaces (Harvey, 1989). During this time, ‘urban entrepreneurship’ emerged as new urban politics. The cities transformed from ‘urban managerialism’ to ‘urban entrepreneurialism’ (Harvey, 1989). Managerialism is the urban governance of the Keynesian system that relied on national regulation, strong city administration and high rates of consumption in the surrounding region. In contrast, in the last few decades, urban entrepreneurialism has been generalised both

nationally and internationally. Harvey (2012: 404) asserts the aim of urban entrepreneurialism is “to create sufficient synergy within the urbanization process for monopoly rents to be created and realized by both private interests and state powers.” Moreover, Hackworth (2007) states that ‘urban entrepreneurship’ relies on unregulated growth and the division of regulatory power between national authorities and local government. In order to stimulate commercial innovation, the neoliberal state intervenes in the supply side of the economy and promotes redistributive welfare schemes tied to increase flexibility in the labour market. Moreover, while the Keynesian state focused on extending public investment in urban infrastructure and housing projects for the local population, this trend shifted towards commercial mega projects, beautification and gentrification projects. Local governments use cities for marketisation, economic growth and consumption (Brenner and Theodore 2002 and Hackworth, 2007).

Nevertheless, Brenner (2004: 449) states that ‘urban entrepreneurship’ can be seen “as significant expressions and catalysts of ‘glocalization strategies’ oriented towards a fundamental rescaling of national state space.” Here, globalisation and localisation play a major role in terms of regional development. Therefore, Swyngedouw et al. (2002: 550) perceive urban entrepreneurship as ‘a new visionary urbanity’ that would “stand the tests imposed by a global and preassumably liberal world order.” They consider large-scale urban development projects as a leitmotif of this new urban visionary. As ‘elite playing fields’ these projects shape the future of urban environments through market-led initiatives. They have become the pivotal strategic tools in terms of re-equilibrating the fiscal balance of local governments. As they assert “[s]patially focused policies aimed at producing increasing rent income, altering the socioeconomic tax basis, and generating profitable economic activities are among the few options available, particularly in a context in which the structure of fiscal revenues is changing rapidly.” (2002: 557)..

Consequently, the impact of neoliberalism, globalisation and the changing role of the state have been vital in urban spatial configurations. (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, Hackworth, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2004 and Smith, 2002). With entrepreneurial regimes, an elite partnership between private sector and public state institutions whether they are local or central administration, has become imperative to produce

more affluent landscapes. Therefore, it can be said that urban entrepreneurialism is “for ephemerality and eclecticism of fashion and style rather than the search for enduring values, for quotation and fiction rather than invention and function, and, finally, for medium over message and image over substance.” (Harvey, 1989: 13).

Moving beyond the Western world, it can be observed that the production of urban spaces takes shapes in more distinctive ways in the other parts of the world. Roy (2009) seeks out how the production of space takes place in different urban areas with different geographies such as Latin America, South Asia, East Asia, Africa and Middle East countries. She convincingly argues that there is not a permanent geographical fact and that every part of the world can be ‘a heuristic device’. Transnational accumulation and development play an important role in the production of space in various metropolitan cities in Latin America and East Asia. Hill et al. (2012) also illustrate the ways in which the production of urban and regional spaces offers an alternative context regarding the relationships between neoliberalism and urban policy in East Asian countries. They argue that, unlike North America and Western Europe, that have experienced Fordist-Keynesian welfarism, East Asian countries operated neoliberal reforms under the development rationalities. Since the 1980s neoliberalism and developmentalism intersect in East Asian countries in ways that many scholars define as ‘developmental neoliberalism’ (He and Wu, 2009; Hill et al., 2012; and Saito, 2012). Previous developmental states took a pro-market approach that was based on pragmatism instead of ideology. In this regard, after adopting neoliberal policies, these countries still pursued developmentalism. In both neoliberalism and developmentalism, economic performance and capital accumulation are prioritised over other values and the states try to protect their existing development regimes through the neoliberal opening (Hill et al., 2012).

A similar trend can also be found in Turkey where as a newly industrialised country, developmentalism and neoliberalism have intertwined. On the one hand, through the neoliberal opening, the state has continued to invest heavily in the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects for capital circulation and social reproduction in urban spaces as in the case of Keynesian European countries. In contrast to the Keynesian model the state has undertaken large-scale infrastructure projects with the co-operation of big private companies through the build-operate-transfer (BOT)

model. In Turkey, since the late 1980s, the BOT model has been used for financing large-scale public/private infrastructure projects such as highways, bridges, marinas, airports and hydroelectric power plants. In this public-private partnership model, while private companies are appointed to construct infrastructure projects and operate and eventually transfer them to the state, the government provides 'demand guarantees' to private companies. For instance, in the case of the third bridge and Avrasya Tunnel, the state underwrote guarantees of 135000 and 68000 vehicles per day respectively. If fewer vehicles used the bridge and tunnel, the state had to compensate the developers by covering the shortfall using state funding. On the other hand, if there is more demand, the state only receives 30% of the profit. In this sense, the state underwrites all possible risks. On the other hand, under AKP governance, neoliberalism has become more systematic and consistent in the production of urban spaces, using laws introduced in 2002. Yet, unlike many other countries, the role of the central state has expanded during the process of decision-making. Therefore, the relationship between public and private has become even more blurred. As the biggest city in Turkey, Istanbul offers a distinctive case in terms of how neoliberalism and developmentalism are intertwined in the construction and (re)production of urban spaces. The next section presents a historical picture how Istanbul has been undergone a radical and dramatic (re)structuring process.

### **4.3. Urban change in Istanbul**

After Ankara became the capital city of the new Republic, Istanbul was depicted as part of the Empire and imagined as old, dusty and decadent, while Ankara was represented as modern. In the 1940s, Istanbul was shaped according to French urban planner Henry Prost's city plan, based on changes to the historical peninsula and Beyoglu district. On the peninsula, Beyazit Square was reorganised to accommodate national memorials, the Ataturk monument was erected and the Golden Horn was chosen as an industrial zone, and the Topcu Barracks were demolished in order to develop the Park of Modern Republic (Keyder, 1999 and Akpinar, 2010).

By the 1950s the city was being developed and urbanised through the construction of highways, roads and boulevards. For example, Vatan (Country) and Millet (Nation) avenues in the historical city, and Barbaros Boulevard from the Besiktas to Levent

districts, were built. Two decades later, the first bridge between the Asian and European sides of the city on the Bosphorus was opened in 1973. In addition, squatter settlements emerged across the whole city. Massive migration from the Anatolian cities accelerated this rise. However, the politicians overlooked the expansion of these unregistered settlements. Unplanned urbanisation, air pollution, environmental degradation, dilapidation and crowdedness were the only things that described Istanbul (Keyder, 1999, Aksoy, 2010). As Keyder (2010) asserts, Istanbul resembled a typical Third World sprawl before 1980. Thus, until the 1980s very limited state developments shaped Istanbul's landscape.

By the 1990s and under economic liberalisation, urban structuring entered a new phase. Like other global South cities Istanbul also experienced rapid growth through globalisation that quickly integrated the city into transnational markets. The service sector emerged during this new era of globalisation, as the city became the trade and financial centre of the country. Finance, advertising, media, art and real estate grew significantly and helped to make Istanbul a global city. The Mayor, Bedrettin Dalan (1984-1989), aimed to “transform Istanbul from a tired city, whose glory resided in past history, into a metropolis full of promise for the twenty first century” (Keyder and Öncü, 1993: 29). Therefore, many ambitious development projects, such as the expansion of Tarlabasi Boulevard after the demolition of hundreds of historical houses in Beyoglu, and the erection of second bridge over the Bosphorus were undertaken. Moreover, office towers, gated communities, shopping malls, elite residences, hotels and parks were built. However, in the 1980s and 1990s residential projects were mainly constructed on the peripheries of the city, the city centre remained dilapidated (Keyder, 1999). Thus, Istanbul “entered the new millennium as only an aspiring [city]... but was already taking its future shape as [a] dual and divided city” (Aksoy and Robins, 1996: 66).

By the 2000s, in order to brand and market Istanbul, the idea of ‘labelling’ had become one of the key elements. In this period Istanbul started to compete with other global cities. This time, not only the past was important, but also the future of the city shaped by its cosmopolitan past (Keyder, 2010 and Soysal, 2010). Therefore, private enterprises, government (both central and local) and international entities such as the European Commission and UNESCO took part in plans to make Istanbul a world city.

When Istanbul was designated one of the great cultural cities of Europe in 2010, this accelerated many urban-projects. The European Commission and UNESCO allocated funding towards regeneration in two historical neighbourhoods called Fener-Balat, along with the support of local municipality, central government and neighbourhood associations (Soysal, 2010). Indeed, as Keyder (2010) asserts, branding and marketing Istanbul has been successful thanks to the Islamist parties that have governed the city since the mid 1990s. The Islamist parties have pioneered many urban projects that enabled Istanbul to be competitive with other global cities. In addition, since 2002 Turkey has been administered by the AKP and it has allowed some laws, which gave local municipalities the power to implement urban development projects.

As a consequence, while from the 1980s public land was increasingly transformed into real estate, this became more systematic after the 2000s. In particular, public land has been pulled into the market sphere through privatisation. In recent years, on billboards and television and in magazines it is possible to see advertisements for luxurious and ultra-luxurious residence projects, such as Maslak Istanbul, Vadi Istanbul, Corridor Istanbul, Soyak, Soho and more. On the one hand, through massive mega-projects public land has been transformed for profit, while on the other hand regeneration projects have targeted the dilapidated areas of the inner city. The land, both in the historical city centre (Dinçer, 2011, Uysal, 2012 and Karaman, 2012) and the former shantytowns (Karaman, 2013, Unsal and Kuyucu, 2010, and Lovering and Turkmen, 2011) has been commodified. Thus, Keyder (2010) argues that “[t]he global has worked its magic: under the coherent urban coalition it gave rise to a land market that was instituted; with commodification of land, Istanbul will now become a true capitalist city” (2010: 33).

Soysal (2010) asserts that in spite of the social consequences the urban transformation projects gained public approval since these projects were presented through developmental discourses. Only a few elite organisations, such as the Associations of Architects and Engineers opposed the changes but their voice was marginalised and ineffective. The resistance movement against Taksim pedestrianisation project was arguably the first time different segments of society challenged Soysal’s statement.

## **4.4. Taksim pedestrianisation project**

### **4.4.1. History of space**

The Gezi protests started in response to the Taksim pedestrianisation project, which aimed to reconstruct the historical Topcu barracks as a part of the scheme. Therefore, before moving onto a discussion of the Taksim pedestrianisation project it is worth mentioning the history of the Topcu barracks and the importance of the Taksim area to Turkish history. It also provides clues about the dispute between each side.

The Topcu Barracks were built on an Armenian cemetery during the reign of Sultan Selim 3rd in order to modernise the artillery unit of the military in the 19th century (Figure 4.1). The barracks were envisaged as a rectangular shape in which there would be a huge yard where horse racing activities also took place. In addition, its surrounded areas were used for different displays and sport activities (Uzumkesici, 2010). It can be argued that even at that time, the Taksim area was seen as one of the pivotal places in Istanbul in terms of social activities. By the time the First World War started the barracks were evacuated and remained empty for some years. Later, the barracks were no longer used for either political or military purposes, although they were used for entertainment and sport. While this took place in the yard, the building was used by a variety of shops such as public houses, cafés, casinos, warehouses, mechanics, car parks, and residences (Uzumkesici 2010 and Akpinar, 2010).

After the new Turkish Republic was established in 1923 and through the 1950s there was a single party system and its modernisation projects treated public spaces not only as urban areas where modern and healthy society could develop, but also as public symbols of values of the new modern republic. The French school of urbanism, which was pioneered by Henry Prost, influenced the new Turkish Republic in terms of creating public spaces that symbolised Western imageries (Bilsel, 2010). There were two goals of the new era for Istanbul. One was “to revive old and historic Istanbul and convert it into a centre for tourism” and second was “[t]o convert the new Istanbul into a fresh and thriving city in line with urban planning principles of the century.” (Bilsel, 2010: 88). According to Akpinar (2010) , Prost’s master plan for Istanbul was also associated with the official rhetoric of the secular unitary state.

Therefore, his plan should not be seen simply as beautification, but also as an attempt to secularise the spaces of Istanbul with gardens or parks (Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4-1:** The front of historic Topcu Barracks (taken from Gulersoy, 1992: 83)



**Figure 4-2:** Topcu Barracks before demolition (taken from Gulersoy, 1992: 96)

The Taksim monument was erected in 1928 and commemorative ceremonies such as Independence Day and Republic Day were organised in the barracks and its western area. By the 1930s, according to the law every city had to establish development plans. Therefore, the Governor of the city, Lutfi Kirdar invited French city planner, Henry Prost. Between 1936 and 1950 he worked for the municipality. Although he submitted his first plan to the municipality and government in 1937, his plan was not approved until the death of Mustafa Kemal in 1938. His plan came into effect during the time of the second president, Ismet Inonu, such that Gezi park is also known as Inonu's Esplanade. Indeed, Istanbul underwent massive transformation during this period.

Prost's plan for the Taksim area was to build a public square. In order to do that the Topcu Barracks would have to be demolished and transformed into a city park. For Prost the barracks were not integrated into the square. Moreover, the barracks had been damaged during the war. It is questionable whether the barracks could have been rescued or not. According to scholars such as Akpınar (2010) and Bilsel (2010), there were no circumstances under which the barracks could be rescued. Uzunkesici (2010) however, argues that the barracks was used by refugees during the Second World War and that the demolition was harshly criticised by the public. In support of this argument, Gulersoy (1991) believes that demolition was the wrong decision. He states, "[i]f the barracks building had been preserved, a park could have been quite easily laid out behind them. The sections of the buildings surrounding the central space could have been restored and people sitting in the centre of the garden would have been able to enjoy both natural beauty and a rich historical heritage." (81).

The park was constructed in 1942, but not the surrounding buildings for art activities that Prost had planned. Instead over time hotels were constructed and a bus station (Figure 4.3). In recent years, the park was used by very few people and it was hard to notice behind the noisy bus station. According to Uzunmez (2010: 111), "today if services are provided in certain units, such as a marriage place, a parking area, cafes and temporary exhibitions are available... the place could never be planned according to true urban criteria in harmony with Taksim Square."



**Figure 4-3:** Gezi Park in the 1940s (taken from Gulersoy, 1992: 54)

#### **4.4.3. Taksim pedestrianisation plan**

On 5th June 2011 Istanbulites found about the Taksim pedestrianisation projects for the first time from the prime minister Erdogan during AKP campaigning in Istanbul. In front of excited crowds he spoke of the achievements of the AKP and its future political, social and economic commitments. During his speech in Istanbul, he emphasised the importance of the construction sector, from mega projects to infrastructure, transport, housing, in particular TOKI<sup>12</sup>, and various development plans. Most of the speech concentrated on developments in urban areas. With regard to the Taksim pedestrianisation project and Topcu Barracks he said:

“I am going to tell you some important things. We are going to change Taksim’s status. My brothers and my sisters, do you know what the green area was before? It was Topcu Barracks, Topcu Barracks. And then they demolished these. CHP’s mayor and governor demolished it... Now we are going to re-build it from scratch. It is going to be a magnificent structure I

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<sup>12</sup> TOKI is the Housing Development Administration of Turkey which provides social housing for lower classes.

hope that, we are going to use it for homes, hotels and shopping malls and we are going to make construct an underground a parking area; we will rescue Taksim from this problem [lack of hotels and residences]. In addition, there will no longer be vehicle traffic in Taksim anymore... Taksim is going to be a pedestrian zone; we do this, the AKP does this. CHP demolishes and we remake it. CHP demolished that Topcu Barracks, but we are going to rebuild it” (T24, 5 June 2011)

After the election which the AKP won, the Metropolitan Municipality approved the plan for the ‘Taksim Pedestrianisation Project’ in September 2011. Five months later, in January 2012, the municipality announced the plan to the public. Soon after, some trade unions and political parties led by the Association of Turkish Architects and Engineers and the Chamber of City Planners established the Taksim Solidarity Platform. For these groups, the plan was would render Taksim “concreted, dehumanised and deidentified”. The campaigners started to raise awareness through petitions, picnics, concerts, meetings in Gezi Park and statements to the press. At the same time, the Platform launched legal proceedings for stay of execution, not just for Topcu Barracks, but also for the entire Taksim Pedestrianisation Projects as a whole in May 2012.

Various difficulties arose between the time the plan was approved by the municipal council and its implementation. The municipality initiated two separate ballots about the Taksim pedestrianisation plan and reconstruction of the barracks. While the former was approved unanimously by both AKP and CHP members, only AKP members voted for the latter. This meant that the CHP effectively opposed the Topcu Barracks project. The Municipality announced a tender for the Taksim Pedestrianisation project in June 2012, and in August 2012, Kalyon Construction Company, known as a pro-AKP construction company was awarded the contract. The Municipality did not publish the tendering process for the reconstruction of Topcu Barraks. However, one architectural design was released in the newspapers, but not confirmed by the Metropolitan Municipality. This design covered one fifth of Gezi Park, which meant that approximately a hundred trees had to either be replaced or cut down. By the end of the project, a building similar to a shopping mall, which looked exactly the same as the Ottoman-era Topcu Barracks would have been erected and

would include galleries, museums, bookshops, cafes and restaurants. In addition, there would be a newly constructed ice rink in Gezi Park, which would eventually be surrounded by the barracks. The visitors would be able to enter the park through various gates in the building.

The reconstruction of the historical Topcu Barracks was contested. Since there were no historical ruins, it would be problematic to rebuild it unless it was designated a historical structure that was protected by the Cultural and Tourism Ministry. Both Taksim Square and Gezi Park were already officially registered as protected urban areas in 1999 and any plans or projects had to take account of this status. Accordingly, in November 2012 the Istanbul Conservation of Cultural Resources District Commission rejected the planned reconstruction of the Topcu Barracks, arguing that was against the public will. Arguing against this decision in one of his speeches, Erdogan persisted in calling for reconstruction of Topcu Barracks. He said, “[W]e are going to rebuild the Topcu Barracks. The Commission rejected the plan. We will overrule their rejection.” Again he mentioned the functionality of the new Topcu Barracks. Despite his speech, the Municipality did not initiate a tendering process for the barracks.

Eventually, as part of the Taksim Pedestrianisation Project, construction began in the Taksim area in February 2013. It is important to remember that this construction was about pedestrianisation rather than reconstruction of the barracks. First, the pedestrian bridge, which was used to connect Gezi Park with the opposite side of Taksim Square, was demolished by the municipal bulldozers. Following this, the Emek cinema, the oldest cinema of the Ottoman Empire, was closed down in preparation for replacement by a Madame Tussaud-like museum and a bigger cinema redevelopment project. Because of its historical and architectural value Emek was a significant cultural venue for Turkish cinema. Although protests were organised to mark the 1st May rally and the demolition of the Emek cinema, all the protesters were dispersed by the police. This sparked anger amongst most of the Turkish leftist groups. On 27th May, when the bulldozers started to cut down the trees in Gezi Park, some activists camped in the park to hinder the bulldozers. The police response to the activists included burning their tents while they were asleep in the early morning, spraying tear gas directly into the faces of activists and using of water cannons, which caused the

tense situation to spiral out of control. This police brutality exacerbated the anger within the leftist groups and by the night of 31st May all the leftist groups swept into Taksim.

During the implementation of the Taksim projects, it can be clearly seen that the exercise of political power in the urban landscape was problematic. In other words, although the Commission did not consider the Topcu Barracks as a historical asset in the first place, the ruling party persisted and eventually influenced the court. Moreover, the Taksim project was one of many massive infrastructure and housing projects. The protests happened at a moment when the exercise of political power over the material use of urban space, mainly concentrated on the construction sector. For this reason, not only rescuing Gezi Park, but also more broadly Istanbul and Turkey's urban landscapes from vested interests, was at stake. This was one of the fundamental rationales lying at the core of the protests that will be presented in the next section. That is why, in the next sections, by examining the Gezi protest, I will elaborate not only on the Taksim project, but also on urban development projects in general, and ask how anti-neoliberal stances were embodied in the Gezi discourse.

#### **4.5. Opposing anti-construction based development**

This section explores how the change in Istanbul's urban material spaces was reflected in the Gezi protests. In the last decade, the AKP government has been trying to transform many urban and non-urban public spaces without any social participation, thereby commercialising it and allocating it to big businesses. Thus, when members of Taksim Solidarity platform were invited to talk to the Deputy Prime Minister, Bulent Arinc, the members not only demanded cancellation of the construction plan for the park, but also, more broadly they voiced opposition to many mega projects, urban transformation projects, and dams<sup>13</sup> (Taksim Solidarity, 5 June 2013). All the protesters whom I interviewed were dissatisfied with the change in Istanbul.

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<sup>13</sup> After the meeting the Taksim Solidarity platform voiced their demands at a press conference. Those demands which related to urban concerns were as follows "We would like to inform those who are currently in government that the content of this rising reaction consists of

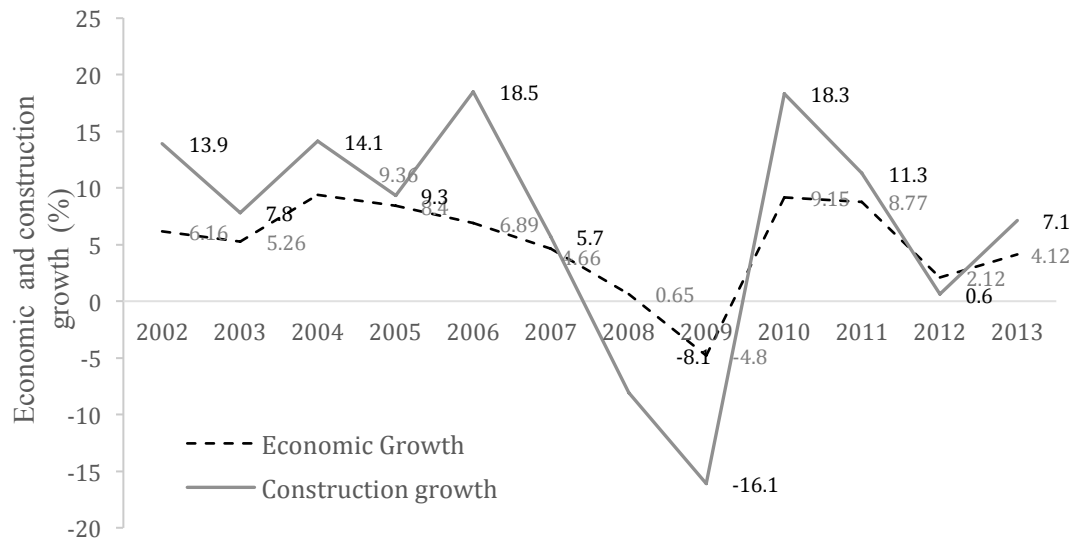
- our reaction to the pillaging of our ecological heritage with plans and practices like firstly the project for the 3rd bridge over Bosphorus, the project for the 3rd airport in Istanbul, Kanal Istanbul project, AOC (demolition of Ataturk Forest Farm), HES (Hydroelectric Power Plants) and more recently the draft law on the Protection of Nature and Biodiversity...
  - the rightful demands of the victims of urban transformation."
- (Taksim Solidarity, 5 June 2013: *Written in English*)

‘Concrete jungle’ and ‘concrete’ were the most repeated descriptions of Istanbul that I heard from the protesters. For example, Rojhat, an LGBT member told me “You know, Istanbul is not the golden city anymore that everyone talked about, it is indeed made up of only concrete and iron. It has turned into a city of industry and trade, nothing else...” Likewise, Necdet, a middle-aged activist who has been living in Istanbul for many years said, “Istanbul has become an ugly city, and it has turned into a concrete jungle. The construction policies are so bad” The Gezi protests that started as a reaction against the reconstruction of the park, in fact, turned into a rebellion that questioned spatial policies of AKP.

Since cities are like businesses, they have become key institutional spaces in which to implement neoliberal techniques and technologies. As Brenner and Theodore (2002) suggests, most municipal governments have been competing to attract investment and job opportunities. Cities are perceived as spaces “both for market-oriented economic growth and elite consumption practices.” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 368). Thus, cities have become institutional laboratories for different neoliberal strategies and experiments, such as marketing, urban entrepreneurship, public-private partnership and corporation. The Turkish government has been using different techniques –urban transformation and mega projects- to make Istanbul competitive with other global cities. This section argues that while the AKP’s vision of ‘a New Istanbul’ necessitates different techniques, Gezi was born out of protests against a project that was seen as a threat to public space and challenged the AKP’s vision.

The AKP’s neoliberalism is based on growth and development, and urban spaces have been shaped based on this ideology. Adopting the slogan ‘Turkey is ready, the target is 2023’- the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic- the AKP aims to make Turkey one of the biggest global powers in the international order (Moudouros, 2014). Prime Minister Erdogan repeatedly refers to the ways the nation will reach great heights of civilisation through development. According to this vision, both spatially and visually, the country should express its unique culture. Thus, the construction sector has become an important tool to enable Erdogan to meet these expectations. While the construction sector enjoyed its first golden age between 1980 and 1987, it has been the second golden age started 2002 under the AKP governments. The growth rate for construction sector has been more than the average growth (Figure 4.4).

While in 2002, the average growth rate was 6.2%, for the construction section it was 13.0%. During the global financial crisis, however, the growth rate of the construction sector in Turkey dropped to -8.1% in 2008 and -16.1% in 2009, in the same period the average growth shrunk to 0.7% in 2008 and -4.8% in 2009. Similarly, in 2013 the average growth rate was 4% whereas for the construction sector it was 7.2%.



**Figure 4-4:** Growth rate for economy and construction sector

Sources: For the economic growth TUIK (<http://www.tuik.gov.tr>) construction sector ITO (2012) and INTES (2016) (<http://www.ito.org.tr/itoyayin/0000400.pdf>) and ([http://intes.org.tr/content/insaat\\_2016.pdf](http://intes.org.tr/content/insaat_2016.pdf))

The AKP governments have been using construction to boost the economic growth and Istanbul, as the biggest city in Turkey, has been particularly affected by this landscape change. Adding to the dreams of preparing Istanbul for the 100th anniversary of the Republic, Istanbul's material spaces have been transformed through commodification. To attract investment and promote a globalised vision, Istanbul's new urban profile has been recreated. To do that the Metropolitan Municipality formed a Planning Office, which employs approximately 500 urban planners and architects (Aksoy, 2012). Through construction of new ports, airports, shopping malls, skyscrapers, residential complexes and commercial and business fairs Istanbul has being prepared to be shown off as the Great Turkey's global city.

In the new imaginary of Istanbul real estate sector is the shining star. The AKP has been using urban transformation projects to expand the real estate sector. Through collaboration between TOKI (the Housing Development Administration of Turkey), central and local governments and private construction firms, strategic shifts have occurred and land in Istanbul's city centres has become a valuable commodity. Until the 1980s construction schemes for new urban dwellers were overlooked by populist politicians. By the 2000s, new regulations had been brought about the unauthorised housing dwellers that authorised the removal of these squatters from the inner-city (Keyder, 2010). In 2004, a new criminal code rendered unauthorised city dwellings a crime. Moreover, as Istanbul is situated on a vulnerable zone in terms of earthquake resistance, 1106.25-hectare zone is considered at risk by the Council of Ministers. In Istanbul, 116173 independent units, including 101728 residences and 14445 workplaces, were considered vulnerable in terms of earthquake resistance (Hurriyet, 2015). That means that approximately half of Istanbul had to be replaced in the next 20 years. Therefore, urban transformation in the inner-city has been deemed essential by the national and city governments. To expedite the process, the AKP ratified a body of new laws. Within these laws "Law on the Transformation of Historical and Cultural Assets" gave the local municipalities incredible authority to expropriate and knock down historical buildings for urgent reasons. In this way, many historical neighbourhoods - Tarlabasi, Sulukule, Fener-Balat and Suleymaniye - were transformed through cooperation between local municipalities and big construction firms (Kuyucu and Unsal, 2010, Karaman, 2014 and Akca, 2014).

More recently the, "Law on the Transformation of Disaster-Risk Areas" has enabled the central government to declare any building at risk. This is another way for the AKP government to regulate the urbanisation process with the support of the TOKI. As TOKI is an organisation in the Prime Minister's office, it is exempt from taxes and duties. TOKI is also the sole authority for the sale of public land and properties and reconstruction projects. After the legal changes, TOKI gained authorisation to build mass housing on public lands because it gives itself planning permission. TOKI then produces mass housing projects through either its own affiliate companies (the Emlak Konut Real Estate Investment Company) or public-private partnerships (mostly pro-AKP developers). Although TOKI can effectively be seen as anti-neoliberal, since it disallows free market competition and dominates in the market, it uses the logic and

rhetoric of free-market. As Caglar (2010) points out, the first state-built mass housing projects in the peripheries were delivered through TOKI. Later municipalities provide infrastructure and services and afterwards peripheries are opened to private investors. Therefore, through this logic, living conditions of poor people are improved at the same time the land is commodified.

TOKI also takes part in urban transformation projects in collaboration with the district municipalities. As TOKI offers housing opportunities for low-income groups, it has become more popular within these groups. Emphasising TOKI's popularity over the poor classes, an article in *Der Spiegel* on 20th August portrayed TOKI as symbolising the Erdogan government. It argued that TOKI offers cheap housing facilities, allowing poorer people to buy an apartment through long term-loans. The implication was that TOKI's role was to stimulate economic growth through debt. The article suggested that the Erdogan government not only depends on the construction sector but also debt-driven consumption. To support this claim, the article used a compelling example of an ordinary Turkish family who benefited from the economic growth. According to the story, the family bought an apartment from TOKI; everyone in the household had smartphones, and flat-screen TVs and laptops. They bought everything using six credit cards and most of the times exceeding their credit limits. Through this story the article tries to show a "microcosm of the Erdogan regime's budget."

However, in many urban transformation projects, carried out by public- private partnerships, the low-income groups were pushed out to the mass housing areas built by TOKI on the peripheries of Istanbul (see also Karaman, 2013 and Kuyucu and Unsal, 2010). Thus, it appears that the AKP along with major business groups and state institutions, has been operating a systematic urban clearance and transformation program. The protesters whom I interviewed cited 'poor people' or 'working class' as the victims of urban transformation projects and criticised the way urban transformation projects have been carried out. Irem, an academic in the Architecture Department at Istanbul Technical University, argues that the AKP's spatial policies exclude the working classes.

"In fact, the Tarlabasi project and Taksim project cannot be considered separately. It proves how the AKP perceives low-income groups. Mr Erdogan and his group were elected by the lower income groups. Yet, their policies,

their spatial policies that they create, are systematically against their groups. All these groups who were displaced from their houses voted for the AKP. Tarlabasi people voted for the AKP. You know the 360 project, right? The small merchants were removed from Talimhane [a trade neighbourhood in Beyoglu district], and now it goes toward Ok Meydani [a poor neighbourhood in Sisli district]... As I have just stated, I think their spatial policies are against the groups that vote for them. First, we saw it in Sulukule. Systematically, an ethnic group, which is one of the oldest ethnic groups [in Istanbul], was displaced... In Turkey without asking the experts, everywhere has been transformed into the TOKI Republic!” (Irem, June 27, 2014, Taskisla)

It is clear from Irem’s approach that there is a growing notion that the urban transformation projects of the AKP displace the poor people. Marketisation and commodification has accelerated competition, in particular, at the urban scale. Thus, the AKP regime uses urban entrepreneurialism to create more affluent landscapes. It can be said that the urban transformation projects that were already completed still remain relatively small-scale. Therefore, urban transformation projects have not created an unstoppable force that displaces all the larger segments of the lower classes. Yet, according to ‘disaster law’ it is expected that urban transformation will become even more ambitious and destructive. As Cavusoglu and Strutz (2014) assert, the new law forces property owners to sell their properties to the municipality. Yet, “the rights of tenants are completely disregarded in the process, and even owner- occupiers have no legal way to protect their houses from demolition; they can only sue for higher compensation.” (2014: 147). All over Istanbul, slums and low-rise buildings have already been replaced by high-rise apartment buildings. Moreover, unexpectedly urban transformation projects have spread to more affluent districts such as Kadikoy and Etiler instead of areas at risk of earthquake damage. In these districts that already serve wealthier people, the rents are ever increasing, and they too are further commodified.

The AKP’s new Istanbul imaginary also seeks to brand Istanbul through mega projects (Figure: 4.5). As Orueta and Fainstain (2008) suggest, mega projects are the best examples of spatial restructuring driven by growth and competition. As part of

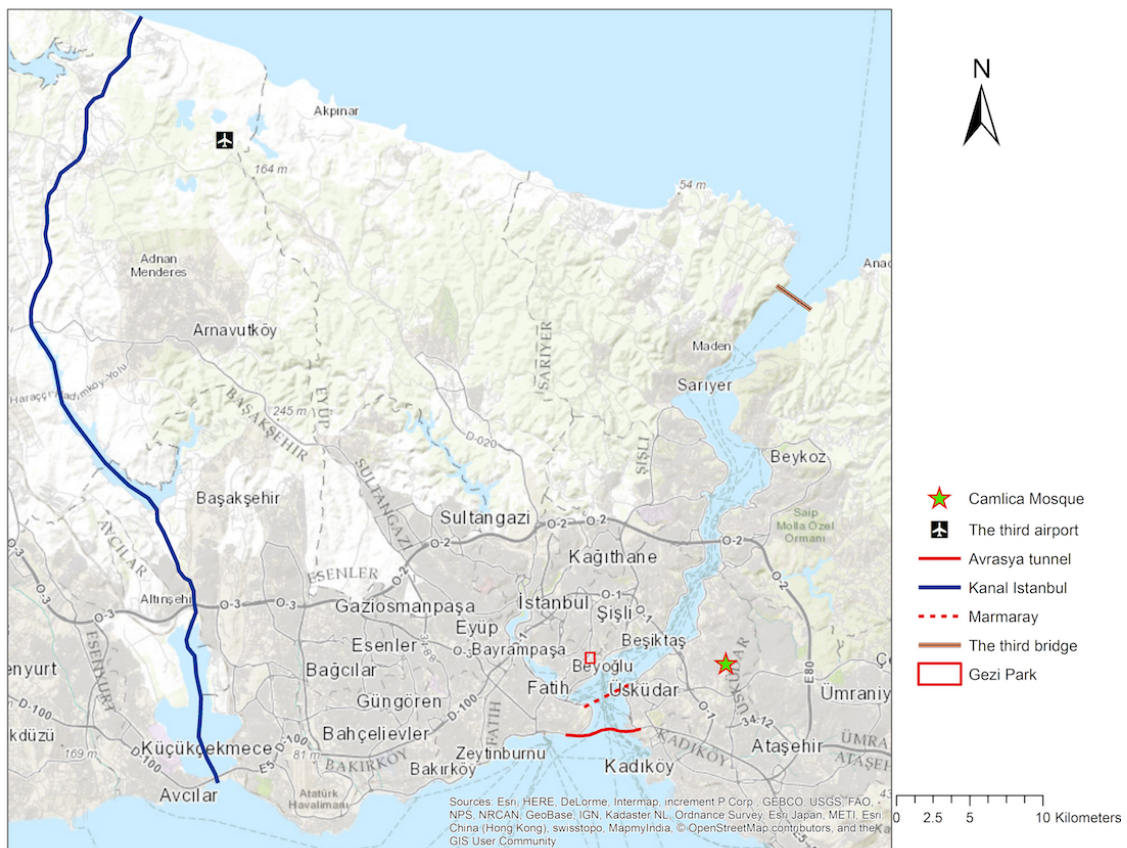
the Istanbul 2023 vision, the AKP described many mega projects as ‘*çilgin projeler*’<sup>14</sup> (crazy projects) during the national election campaign in 2011. The most remarkable of these projects was ‘the Kanal Istanbul’ that aims to connect the Black Sea with the Marmara Sea via a 45-50 km long artificial waterway that brings the second Bosphorus to the city on the European side of Istanbul. Erdogan announced it as ‘the biggest project of the century’. It not only aimed to reduce traffic in the Bosphorus Straits, but also by building a new city with residents, trade, financial centres and hotels, it will enhance Istanbul’s brand value. Thus the construction sector becomes a part of national-popular machine to increase Istanbul’s reputation as a global city. Other ideas include a third bridge, the widest suspension bridge in the world over the Bosphorus; a third airport on the northern part of the city, which will be the biggest airport in Europe; the Eurasia Tunnel, an underwater road tunnel between the European and Asian sides; The Marmaray, a rail transportation project under the Bosphorus Straits and a giant mosque on Camlica Hill. These urban projects amount to roughly \$254 billion. So far \$135 billion has been spent, and the rest of the plans are still in process (Hurriyet, 30 March 2016). Koray, an architect who lives in Cihangir neighbourhood, which was gentrified in the 1990s, often gives presentations about the city and space at academic and non-academic conferences. He invited me to his session at a public conference that was about “the urban transformation projects and spatial policies of the AKP” in Taksim Hill Hotel. When I met up with him in a cafe in Istiklal Street, Taksim, he was not categorically against the AKP’s policies, but was very critical of them nonetheless .

“In 2004, local development was the main campaign of the AKP. But the AKP perceived it as a threat because without getting city rent you can't protect your power. We are talking about the budget that is a thousands time larger than the whole Turkey's budget... The public administration cannot be perfect; it always has to question itself when it makes a decision. The administration has been run like a business now. Decisions are made with large enterprises. It is crony capitalism... Kanal Istanbul, the third bridge and the third airport, all these are just tools” (Koray, June 23, 2014, Istiklal)

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<sup>14</sup> ‘*Çilgin*’ means crazy in Turkish. For development projects it was used by the AKP to refer to ‘making impossible possible’. In this sense, ‘*çilgin*’ does not have a negative meaning.

Koray explores the clientelism that the AKP relies on to extend its power. Special political networks and contracts are needed to be able to win public bids. For these urban projects, as Swyngedouw et al (2002: 571) point out, “the way the process develops creates the conditions for the establishment of centralized and more autocratic management, which privileges direct appointments. Thus, the role of lobbies, family ties, business connections, and forms of “clientelism” become dominant.”



**Figure 4-5:** The map of key mega projects in Istanbul

Source for Kanal Istanbul’s location: <http://megaprojeleristanbul.com>

However, the general trend for opposing these projects is the environmental concerns as in the case of Gezi. Many protesters are worried about the future of Istanbul. Necdet, a leftist activist, is highly critical of the urban policies of the AKP. He opposes economic growth to be based on mega projects. He believes these projects damage the quality of people’s life by destroying the environment.

“We are categorically opposed to mega projects; the things that are presented as mega projects are designed without considering nature, environment, and

life. For example, the third bridge, in order to solve transport problems we destroy the forest, we destroy our breathing areas. Transportation can be solved through different ways such as underground or underwater channels... I believe we don't need these [mega] projects... The society doesn't correspond to this opposition. [They think] we are opposed to the growth, or against investment and development. Such consciousness and perception has been created in society; it has nothing to do with growth indeed. Of course, we are against this growth. The growth cannot be in that way if we don't think of how the future generations will live in the city. Such a thing cannot be accepted by the European societies... We are the Third World, right! We accept everything. The level of consciousness is low, but the rulers are responsible for protecting the citizens from this global attack.” (Necdet, April 16, 2014, *Istiklal*)

Necdet is dissatisfied with the way activists are portrayed as against development. When the real issue is the way the AKP uses these projects as a show of strength, marching thousands of people to witness the inauguration of all mega projects (see *Hurriyet*, 30 May 2013; *Hurriyet*, 30 October 2013 and *Sabah*, 7 June 2014). Coincidentally, on the same day that the municipal police officers burned the tents of the activists, Erdogan and government officials inaugurated the third bridge across the Bosphorus with the participation of thousands of people (*Hurriyet*, 29 May 2013).

During my field research I was between two worlds: Bagcilar where I stayed and Taksim, Kadikoy, Besiktas where I met my interviewees. Bagcilar is the most overcrowded district on the European side of Istanbul and mainly populated by Kurdish people who migrated from Southeast Turkey during the 1980s. Although the district was considered a deprived slum area, over the last ten years it has witnessed an ongoing massive development, thanks to the metropolitan and local governments. While the former expanded infrastructure such as new roads, metro and tram lines, the latter worked on the beautification of the district, designating new public spaces such as parks and squares, and providing services such as youth centres in which sport and education classes take place and women's centres where a range of courses, and also information and guidance, are provided. I took a new metro line, which was completed in late 2013, almost every day during the field research. The metro was always overcrowded but several times the people with whom I travelled expressed

their satisfaction with the services. 'This government is working' was perhaps the comment I heard most often. In contrast, the activists whom I interviewed all complained about the urban policies of the AKP municipalities and government. This became more apparent in the local elections of 2014, as well. While the AKP gained the metropolitan municipality, and in particular it was successful in disadvantaged districts, it did not gain any mayoral positions in the affluent districts such as Besiktas, Kadikoy, Sisli and Atasehir.

Despite the support of the poor, dissatisfaction with the urban policies of the AKP has grown in particular groups such as the Chamber of Urban Planners and the Association of Architects and Engineers. These groups have initiated legal proceedings against the Taksim Pedestrianisation project and many other urban projects. In particular, they have used the legal system to oppose the commodification of common properties such as historical assets and public land. Therefore, the protests were one of their weapons against the AKP's planning policies. During a pessimistic conversation with Emre, an urban planner from the Chamber of Urban Planners, we talked about the urban changes in Istanbul. Emre showed me the city almanacs for the years 2012 and 2013 that they prepared for Istanbul. After a quick glance, I noticed that for almost every project, either the Chamber of Urban Planners or the Association of Architects and Engineers pursued legal cases against the projects. I asked if they had ever supported any AKP urban project. He told me that they only supported the Marmaray underground railway and other underground projects. Emre claimed that the Chamber of Urban Planners does believe that the AKP's urban projects are in the public interest. This is the reason why they turned to the legal system to campaign against the projects. These organisations play a major role in modifying or curtailing some of the schemes proposed by the central or local governments.

“Istanbul and these skyscrapers weren't built spontaneously in the last 20 years. Because of decisions that the administrators have taken, the city has turned into something else. In recent years, with mega projects that come from the central government, local power has been abandoned and not recognised. There is such a pessimistic picture, and we are technically trying our best [to stop it]... I think Gezi hasn't finished yet. Well, the prime minister doesn't talk about Gezi anymore, he doesn't say anything about the Topcu Barracks,

but he doesn't also say that the park will remain as a park. Besides, when we look at the city in regard to planning, it has been plundered with many projects such as the third airport and Kanal Istanbul” (Emre, May 5, 2014, Besiktas).

The picture that Emre draws of the urban policies of the AKP illustrates how his institution opposes these policies. This opposition has always been embedded in the institution's stance and influenced Gezi's direction – after all his organisation that carried out the secretary of Taksim Solidarity platform that initiated the protests.

Furthermore, a similar trend can also be seen in the Taksim area, yet Taksim offers a special case. Taksim<sup>15</sup> is a touristic, cultural and political space that is important not only in Istanbul but across the country. It is a public place where New Year celebrations and political organisations take place. Taksim is one of the ‘symbolic’ spaces in which the AKP has been operating market logic (Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4-6:** From Taksim Square towards Istiklal Street (picture is taken by author, 18 June 2014)

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<sup>15</sup> Taksim and its surrounded areas were built by the European minorities -Jewish, Armenians and Greeks- during the Ottoman Empire. Even during that time, it was ‘an entertainment centre’ of Istanbul. With the establishment of the new Republic nationalist ideologies targeted the non-Muslim minorities, and after several events, the minorities were forced to leave the country. By the late 1950s, the neighbourhood's population had completely changed.

The Ataturk Cultural Centre, which symbolises architecture from the early Republican era has been closed for renovation since 2008. During the protest Erdogan declared that he wanted to rebuild the cultural centre with a mosque in Taksim (Hurriyet, 1 June 2013). Even though culturally Taksim has long been a significant space for Turkish secular people. Thus, for many Istanbulites, Taksim is more than a commercial and touristic destination. According to the protesters, not only the pedestrianisation project but also overall changes in Taksim have restricted the spaces available to them. Oznur, an LGBT member who often uses Taksim, believes that Taksim has changed a lot.

“There was nothing left that makes Taksim as Taksim. At this moment, Istiklal is like an open-air shopping mall. The historical buildings were transformed into shopping malls like Demiroren [a recently built shopping mall in Istiklal Street]. Serkidolyen [the name of a building in Istiklal] in which there was Emek cinema will be replaced by a shopping mall. Just a few meters away there is another building that will be replaced by a shopping mall, too. It is already an open-air shopping mall but with other shopping centres. There is nothing left in Taksim. I remember there used to be little bookstores. No bookstores on the streets, no cinema, no theatre anymore. There is only one thing as a triangle: food, shopping, and hotel. While I am going around the side streets, I notice that the old buildings have been turned into hotels, hostels, and residences. Now, Taksim is a place for only tourists. It is not a place for people who live here. Probably a year later, there will be only tourists here” (Oznur, May 7, 2014, Istiklal)

For Oznur the urban imaginary of the AKP only offers modernity based on consumption. With around 100 shopping malls Istanbul is one of the cities with the most shopping malls in Europe (Sabah, 14 June 2016). Although Taksim has always been a capitalist space since the Ottoman time, the AKP has sought to reproduce Taksim through changing its functionality towards a more tourism destination. This upset many Istanbulites who see the Taksim pedestrianisation and Topcu barracks projects as yet another blow to Taksim’s unique culture. Regardless of the barracks’ Ottoman past, the main concern of the protesters was the commercialisation of the

park. The Association of Engineers and Architects' case went further and aimed to prevent any construction in the park. Until the 31st of May the driving force that inspired people to go to the park was the need to protect the park from construction. Kenan, a member of the Anticapitalist Muslims, thinks the park should be open for everyone, not just for particular classes.

“The only thing that I know is there would be a shopping mall along with hotels, residences and Topcu Barracks... Maybe a museum would be built, or the park would be expanded. Yet, the biggest problem was it would serve as the capital. As if the park was expanded, instead of sitting under the trees for free, people had to pay for being there. So, it was meaningful to stand against this thing... Is Topcu Barracks really useful! No, it is not. Is it a place where people can make use of it? As if it was reconstructed, what would it mean? How many people would go to a museum if it was built?” (Ozgur, April 8, 2014, Findikzade).

As it appears, Ozgur's main concern is public access to the park. Instead of an open public space, a semi-private space would be created, since the park would be surrounded by cafes and restaurants. As the barracks were demolished more than seventy years ago, they do not hold any collective memory for the Istanbulites. On the other hand, the park has a long and colourful history. So constructing such a building under the name of Ottoman history denies the lived experience of Gezi Park.

Although dissatisfaction with urban change was a consistent theme that most of the people I interviewed shared, it was not widely reflected in the newspapers, which paid far less attention to urban questions. In the first few days of Gezi both a considerable amount of emphasis was placed on the importance of green spaces for Istanbul or the aesthetic problems that urban projects had created and then later this issue was dropped. For example, an article in *Sozcu* stated, “They stabbed at Istanbul's marvellous silhouette by erecting the worst skyscrapers in the world. They made graves by building shopping malls on the last remaining green spaces. They allowed TOKI to erect buildings on the military protected spaces and they built ugly buildings on beautiful green spaces. They cut down the 75-year old trees in Gezi Park in one day.”(Sozcu, 31 May 2013). Later, the newspapers paid very little attention to the urban development projects. An article in *Haaretz* stated, “Erdogan is pushing ahead

with a slew of multi-billion-dollar projects which he sees as embodying Turkey's emergence as a major power. They include a shipping canal, a giant mosque and a third Istanbul airport, billed as one of the world's biggest.” (31 May 2013). Yet, the newspapers emphasised that the government allowed little public input into these projects. For example, an article in the Guardian said: “The perception in Turkey that barely regulated development is being driven for the economic benefit of entrenched interests with links to party politics, rather than in the public interest” (Guardian, 31 May 2013). Moreover, the newspapers made no mention of the urban transformation projects that had created dispossession and exclusion. The reason why the newspapers did not examine the development and urban transformation plans could be because the protesters’ concerns shifted from the urban question to lifestyle concerns’ and ‘authoritarianism’. Therefore, the newspapers widely updated the event and politics of the protests, rather than delving into the initial problem - the urban question - that triggered the protests.

Consequently, the Gezi protests were specifically against the privatisation of the park, and more broadly against the privatisation of public spaces, gentrification of the inner city, the aesthetic changes due to ever increasing skyscrapers and opening up of the forest areas in the Northern Istanbul to construction. Although the protests created awareness around the challenges of urbanisation, such collective movements were not built around the other projects. Eventually, the third bridge was built, the airport has been erected, and many other projects are underway. Gezi Park which I often visited during the spring and summer of 2014, remained a park with visitors ranging from young Istanbulites, tourists and undercover police officers to all its previous users.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the argument that the Gezi Protests started out as opposition to the reconstruction of the Park and grew into wholesale rejection of AKP’s neoliberal urban policies. It showed that the AKP government aims to turn Istanbul into a globally competitive city along with increasing living standards in Turkey. Construction-based growth and development have been driving forces. The unrest among some people in Turkey, mainly opposition groups, erupted and resulted in the

Gezi Protests. From this point of view, this chapter concluded that protests about neoliberal development were a crucial point of the protests.

The chapter also illustrated how while local government played a significant role in organising space, central government has taken part a major role in the decision-making process. Thanks to this coalition the AKP governments (both central and local) has been using different techniques and strategies to increase growth and development, blurring the distinction between public and private. Thanks to these techniques and strategies the majority of Istanbulites still support the spatial policies of the AKP in that they still vote for the party. Although many urban transformation projects have displaced the lower classes, these projects are still relatively insignificant in the broader picture. Moreover, the chapter also illustrated that, although the Gezi protests grew out of an urban problem, and two professional organisations, Taksim Solidarity platform and the Chamber of Urban Planners, kept it alive, this aspect was not covered widely by the national or the international media.

In the previous chapter I argued that the AKP employed Islamic morality in its implementation of neoliberalism. Not only in the economic sphere, but also in the public sphere, the Islamic way of life has become an alternative to secular life. Therefore, the next chapter will delve into the historical development of secularism over the public sphere in Turkey and its intimate relationship with the Gezi protests.

# Chapter 5

## The manifestation of postsecularism in Gezi

### 5.1. Introduction

“The problem wasn’t really about three or five trees. The people wanted to have their life properly. This [demand] wasn’t really expressed through economical demands. It wasn’t for hunger nor for bread. The people wanted their rights back that they had once had. What can be said? For example, the alcohol law was very indicative. The abortion law as well. The people had feared that the AKP was interfering with their lifestyles...” (Gamze, June 6, 2014, Kadikoy)

Gamze narrates the protests as a voice against the AKP’s social and cultural policies. For her, the protesters’ dissatisfaction did not come from economic concerns but rather were more social and cultural. The night of the 31st of May shared posts on social media suggested that “the problem is no longer a few trees anymore, didn’t you get it!” As Gamze pointed out ‘lifestyle concerns’ were a key issue. Accordingly, the Gezi event was also a response of people against the imposition of Islamic values in both their private and public spheres. For the protesters moralistic-Islamic interventions by government threatened their existential lifestyle. In particular, Erdogan’s rhetoric on family and women was perceived as imposing Islamic moral values on non-religious lifestyles. Thus, this chapter looks at the relationship between religion, secularism and the public sphere in regard to the Gezi protests.

Under the AKP government, a new kind of relationship emerged between religion and secularism. It has been argued that Turkey has been transforming from a strictly secular country to a postsecular one (Gole, 2010; Rosati, 2012; Yavuz, 2009 and Keyman, 2007). The AKP authorities have always emphasised their commitment to secularism. After the Arab Spring, when Erdogan visited Egypt, he advised the Muslim Brotherhood to choose a secular constitution rather than an Islamic one (Hurriyet, 15 September 2011). Concern over lifestyle choices embedded in Gezi

discourse contest this and recall the division between seculars and Islamists. Yet, the participation of plural identities in turn contest this claim and enabled Gezi protesters to renegotiate the presence of religion in public space. Thus, this chapter explores the way secular and postsecular dynamics feed into and are deployed in the Gezi Protests. It argues that while the protests started against the postsecular transformation of the country, at the same time they enabled postsecular rapprochement. Focusing on the discourses, claims, practices and rituals of protesters I depict Gezi as a postsecular space, which reflects “ongoing negotiation on the complex balance between expressions of dominant cultures and alternative identities.” (Dronker: 2011: 66)

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section shows how secularism has changed since the establishment of the Republic and suggests strict secularism has been replaced by a postsecular model in Turkey. The second section presents postsecularism as a way of understanding complex spatial relationships between religious and non-religious ways of life. Finally, the chapter illustrates the Gezi protests as a manifestation of postsecularism and argues that although 2.5 million went on the streets, the manifestation of postsecularism was only visible in the city spaces of Istanbul.

## **5.2. Historical evolution of religion versus secularism in Turkey**

In relation to Turkey’s history, it has been said, “Turkey did not rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. It was made in the image of the Kemalist<sup>16</sup> elite which won the national struggle against foreign invaders and the old regime.” (Ahmad, 1997: 3). Thus, the process of modernising Turkey comprises different actors, institutions and discourses. Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Turkish Republic, together with the Kemalist elites who gained their power thanks to the new Republic, acted as transmitters of Republican ideas to the public. These Kemalist elites were academics, journalists, novelists, and army members. Gole (1997) claims that these elites drew their strength not from financial capital, but rather from cultural capital, and dedicated themselves to improving the fate and fortune of the nation by being loyal to Kemalist ideology and principles. Thus, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and

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<sup>16</sup> Kemalist is who believes in the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The ideas and principles of Mustafa Kemal are termed as Kemalism. Kemalism used to be official ideology of the Turkish Republic until the 1950s.

Kemalist elites attempted to establish political and cultural institutions in order to transform the country, to take it away from its Ottoman past, which symbolised the 'East' to a true 'Western' civilisation (Keyman, 2007). The reason why Mustafa Kemal and his follower elites sought Western civilisation was to protect the "general will" of the nation which the Ottoman Empire had failed to do. That said, Kemalists viewed the Ottoman Empire as a traditional political order in which Western secular reason and positivism were believed to be the main pillars in the building of a modern nation.

Since Islam was seen as a source of political, economic, social and cultural decline for Ataturk and his supporters, as in the case of Western orientalist, it had to be controlled by the state. In this sense, through the efforts of Mustafa Kemal and the Kemalist elites, radical institutional changes occurred during the early Republic in order to weaken the traditional forces and counterrevolutionary centres of power (Yavuz, 2003; Mardin, 1981). Moreover the single party era (1923-46) facilitated a swift implementation of these institutional changes<sup>17</sup>. These changes created new Republican elites who were not only cut off from their Ottoman past, but also differentiated themselves from the rest of population in terms of their lifestyle. Mardin (1977) indicates that since the builders of the state gave priority to strengthening the new system, the periphery, the peasants' areas, was neglected in terms of providing services for the lower classes. In addition, since the periphery was viewed as a place of disaffection, it was kept under control by the Kemalist regime. Not only was any opposition movement suppressed by the regime but also as soon as any opposition parties were formed they were banned due to their religious activities. Although three opposition parties were established at different times during the single party era, all of them were shut down soon after they were formed. Although one of the principles of the Republic was 'populism', the Republican People's Party never connected with conservative rural masses (Mardin, 1977, Yavuz, 2000 and Gole 2000). "The symbol of the peasant as the 'fundamental Turk' came up very early in the Kemalist movement, but Kemalist energies were devoted to the building of symbols of national identity, rather than to radically altering the place of the peasant in the system." (Mardin, 1977: 183). In this sense, not only was the Kemalist ideology's perception of society quite elitist, but the regime also deepened differences

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<sup>17</sup> These changes were more broadly about law, education, and administration.

in lifestyles between Kemalist elites and the rest of society.

The rise of Democrat Party in the 1950s and the neoliberal economic changes of 1980s challenged Kemalist state ideology and enabled religion to become more visible in the public sphere. In the aftermath of the military coup of 1980, religion was seen as a tool to secure recognition by the state while the left was perceived as a violent threat to the will of nation. Turgut Ozal's policies such as allowing freedom of speech, association and assembly, removing state monopoly over broadcasting, and encouraging and supporting religious activities and practices in the public sphere created possibilities for more open civil society. Islamic classes blossomed in alternative spaces such as television and radio channels, magazines, and newspapers, and also in the clothing industry and small and medium scale enterprises (MUSIAD) that attracted socially and economically excluded groups (Yavuz, 1999 and 2003). Religious lifestyles appeared as a counter to secular lifestyles in the urban centres. Gokarikel and Secor (2009, 2010) argue that from the 1980s onwards the rise of political Islam enabled the emergence of Islamic fashion industry and new modes of veiling style, popular among educated and young women in urban areas across the country.

Nevertheless, in the 1990s the confrontation between the Islamic Welfare Party, which gained a significant victory in local elections in 1994 and national elections in 1995, with the secular forces gave rise to corresponding struggles between secular and religious lifestyles (Gole, 2002, Ozyurek, 2006 and Yavuz, 1999 and 2003). While Islamic symbols and values became more visible in public spaces, at the same time, the Kemalist's reaction to this visibility created antagonistic relationships (Ozyurek, 2006 and Bekaroglu, 2015). Emerging Islamic identities and lifestyles in the public sphere were seen as a threat to the secular state. The diversification of culture by the Islamists was perceived as a sign of diminished Kemalist hegemony over the production of culture and norms. This conflict resulted in the process of 28 February when a secularist alliance between the military forces, media, judges, business organisations and civil society organisations<sup>18</sup> toppled the Islamist government in

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<sup>18</sup> These organisations are trade unions such as the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (KESK) and The Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK), the Turkish Medical Association, the Association of Turkish Engineers and Architects, and women unions. These organisations also directed Taksim Solidarity group during the Gezi protests.

undemocratic ways and the party was banned by the Constitutional Court in 1997. Moreover, the Islamic party, known as the Virtue Party was also banned by the court in 2001. Islamic voices were removed from the public sphere through the targeting and criminalising of Islamic political groups. The secularist state institutions not only shrunk the alternative spaces used by Islamic groups, but also oppressed these groups by banning hijabs in schools, universities and public institutions, restricting religious schools, and closing down Islamic businesses.

As a result of the pressures from the secular state, Islamic groups had to redefine their discourses towards secularism and West. Under the charismatic leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ex-mayor of Istanbul, a new party, the AKP, was established in 2001 and gained a significant electoral victory in November 2002. The AKP defined itself as a conservative democrat party rather than an Islamic one. With the victory of AKP a new era was ushered in terms of the relationship between Kemalists and Islamist, between Islam and secularism and between the state and civil society (Rosati, 2012). Many scholars including Yavuz (2003,2009), Gole (2010,2012), Rosati (2012), Kuru (2009) and Taspinar (2008) emphasise the role of the AKP in understanding secularism. They all agreed that the AKP is a crucial agent in understanding contemporary changes in Turkey and highlighted two processes that became crucial in this change: reinforcing neoliberalisation process and advocating EU membership. By deploying neoliberal rationalities the AKP has expanded the influence of the small and medium scale bourgeoisie in the public sphere and thus the religious class started to move to the economic centre, previously protected from Islamic groups by the Kemalist establishment (Bilgili, 2011).

In order to oppose the rigid Kemalist regime, the AKP pragmatically made laws to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria that every potential EU candidate must fulfil in order to gain full membership of the EU. The period between 2002 and 2005 is defined as the ‘golden era of reforms’. The reforms required Turkish law to meet the European standards, such as abolishing the death penalty, improving women’s rights, banning torture and detention, and allowing freedom of expression (Cerami, 2011). However, the AKP’s support of the EU does not mean that the party tried to westernise the country, but rather that an “Eastern identity” would be developed with “Western values” in order to allow Turkey be a member of the EU (Yavuz, 2009). In this sense,

the AKP's perception of the West is different from the Kemalist regime. While for the Kemalist regime westernisation requires rejection of Islamic lifestyles, for the AKP it is a tool to improve human rights and at the same time preserve Islamic culture and lifestyles (Yavuz, 2009, Atasoy, 2009). Akturk (2016) notes that EU did not pressure Turkey to improve religious rights such as the headscarf ban. Thus, the AKP had to collaborate with Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) to lift the headscarf ban from universities in 2008<sup>19</sup>.

However, it has been argued that in recent years the AKP has moved away from its founding principles. Similar to periods in the Republican era, the AKP has prioritised improving the rights of its supporters. For example, religious values and symbols in the public sphere were harshly controlled in the Kemalist regime by the Religious Affairs Administration (*Diyanet*), formed in the early part of Republican era. Yet, the AKP has also maintained the power of *Diyanet* both in Turkey and outside of Turkey (Bekaroglu, 2015 and Bilgili, 2011). While in the earlier era *Diyanet* was used to justify Kemalist secularism, for the AKP *Diyanet* is a pragmatic institution which teaches religion through Quranic classes. It should be noted that *Diyanet* answers the demands and needs of the Sunni order. For example, the rights and needs of Alawites<sup>20</sup>, the largest group of non-Sunni Muslims, have not been recognised by the state (Cicekatan and Damar, 2010 and Bekaroglu, 2015). Moreover, the AKP's previous emancipatory stance has been replaced by more conservative rhetoric, in particular Erdogan's intolerance towards opposition. All these things show that when the balance of power shifted against the previous secular elites, it benefited religious groups and their elite representatives. It appears that the AKP's position towards religion versus secularism created a new type of religious inclusion and exclusion of particular groups by the state.

How does this historical account help us understand paradoxical relations between secularism and religion in Turkey, and the Geri protests in particular? It has been argued that Turkey has been evolving in a progressive direction in that Islamic

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<sup>19</sup> The secular party, the CHP, appealed to the Constitutional Court to annul the legislation since it perceived the headscarf as a political symbol and thus against the secular state. But the Court did not annul it.

<sup>20</sup> Alawite is another branch of Islam in Turkey. With about 20% of population they are the largest non-Sunni religious groups in Turkey. They are associated with the Shia branch and their worship is different to the five pillars of Islam approach that is practiced in cemevi (djemevi).

movements have challenged authoritarian modes of secularism (Gole 2012, Rosati, 2012 and Yavuz, 2009). Under the AKP regime religious values, symbols, and lifestyles have become more visible. In particular, in urbanised areas such as Istanbul there has been both secular and religious practices (Beaumont and Baker, 2011; Cloke and Beaumont, 2013) that shape the landscape of the city socially, culturally and politically. In order to understand the sophisticated interactions between secular and religious classes, it is important to look at the Gezi protests from a postsecular approach. The next section offers perspectives on how postsecularism is perceived in the public sphere.

### **5.3. Postsecularism**

It has been argued that the paths that the twenty first century is following are considerably different from that of the twentieth century, primarily because the public and cultural importance of religion has become more visible (Baker and Beaumont, 2011; May and Cloke, 2012; Cloke and Beaumont, 2013 and Paddison, 2011). In this new century, with regard to public policy and governance, the importance of religion and faith communities has come into the centre of public life. This trend is creating new alliances in the public sphere on the one hand, and a dichotomy with secular groups on the other hand.

From a liberal perspective Rawls defines public spheres according to public reason. For him secular and public reasons are more or less similar to each other so he calls them ‘comprehensive doctrines’. He believes that secular reason should rationalise the public according to comprehensive non-religious doctrines and thus objectives of public reason should be identified by secular reason. Rawls insists on a secularist definition of religion in the political and public spheres. Thus, he seeks ‘secular justifications’ to manage the rights of both secular and religious citizens. Talal Asad (2003) criticises liberal perspectives of secularism. For him secularism as a modern project is “an enactment by which a political medium (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion.” (2003: 5). Assad argues secularism requires that “beliefs should either have no direct connection to the way one lives, or be held so lightly that they can easily be changed.” (ibid, 115). Likewise, Habermas

(2005, 2006, 2008) thinks religion is accommodated in religious people's everyday life and thus cannot be separated from the public sphere. Criticising Rawls's position on 'public reason' Habermas advocates de-privatisation of religion that emphasises the importance of religion's role in the public sphere. Although Habermas believes the secular character of the state is necessary, religion should be de-privatized in the public realm. However, he also opposes the idea that religious people have to establish their religious doctrines through secular conviction.

Postsecularism does not refer to seeing religion as a set of beliefs, but rather it embraces new religious practices, dynamics and public energies, not only for devout individuals but also for society more broadly (Baker and Beaumont, 2011). Paddison (2011) indicates that since public consciousness about the role of religion has shifted, religion has become more influential in national and local public spheres. Nevertheless, the influence of religion in public spaces is not seen as against secularist discourses, rather it is more likely to be intra-secularist. That is to say, there are both commonalities and disjunctures between secular and religious practices (McLennan, 2011). In this context, new connections of possibility are appearing between religion and science, faith and reason, and tradition and innovation

Cloke (2011) argues that postsecularism can be thought of as a kind of third way, where religion, faith and belief contribute to public life. Cloke approaches the postsecular concept in two arenas: discourse and praxis. By discursive arena, he refers to a common ground that has realigned faith-based and non-faith activities. Critically engaging with Philip Blond's (1998) critics<sup>21</sup> on secularism, Cloke agrees that there is a need to move beyond secularism. For him, a move from secularism does not refer to a transformation of the secular state but rather it points to a shift in which "secularist self-understanding" is occurring. Yet, he believes that the political and philosophical critique of secularism has brought both a secularist defence and counter discourses. By praxis arena, he highlights the importance of religious practices in everyday life.

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<sup>21</sup>Blond finds secularism problematic and offers three reasons why there should be a need to move beyond secularism. Firstly, if secular society excludes religious moderates in public, it might cause only extremist involvement in religion. When only fundamental extremists advocate religion, they might condemn other groups through radical religious discourses that induce a sort of fascism. Secondly, since secularism stimulates public consciousness, welfare, political and ethical spaces would be progressed according to only modernistic science. That said, the welfare state was shrunk by the political themes such as individual self-interest and market hegemony as a result of the erosion of such public consciousness. Lastly, secularism has been associated with a lack of hope and cynical pessimism, which cannot find new ways and possibilities to cater for society's needs.

Cloke points out that faith groups and Church activities such as serving homeless people, visiting prisoners and supporting asylum seekers play an important role for postsecular rapprochement between different faiths. Postsecular rapprochement can be defined as a form of transversal relationship between the religious and the secular in the public sphere. Despite the divergences in terms of theology, political and moral principles different citizens work together to address various social problems in the public arena.

Cloke's approach to postsecularism calls attention to Connolly's pluralism thesis. By suggesting secularism needs be refashioned Connolly (2005) thinks that there is a need for an ethos of engagement between monotheistic perspectives, secular ideas, aseular and nontheistic perspectives in the public sphere. That is to say, Connolly's pluralism requires a much deeper understanding of how multiple faiths and religions can coexist in the same public space. From this perspective, Cloke believes that emergent postsecular spaces and practices might be "most evident in traces, flows, fragrances and effectual tolerances, performed out of a mutual sense of theo-poetics rather than more structural political alignments." (2011: 250). Similarly, Cloke and Beaumont (2013) point out that not only postsecular spaces are the outcome of activities of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and third-sector organisations but also such spaces are being characterised by ethical performance of people of different faiths and non-faiths that converges between theological, ideological and humanitarian concern. They argue "postsecular rapprochement seems to work best as a form of resistance to the failings of government and excesses of secular modernism." (2013: 46). Therefore, postsecular spaces serve as both pragmatic and liminal spaces where people are able to share their worldviews with others without necessarily changing them.

The shift of religion's role from private to public can explicitly be observed in city spaces. Cities are the most visible context through which to analyse the relationship between postsecularity and public spaces (Dronker, 2011). A post-secular city is "a public space which continues to be shaped by ongoing dynamics of secularization and secularism (as a political and cultural ideology) but that also has to negotiate and make space for the re-emergence of public expressions of religion and spirituality" (Baker and Beaumont, 2011: 33). By combining spiritual and religious re-

enchantment with Soja's Thirdspace reformulation<sup>22</sup>, Baker and Beaumont (2011) illustrate how religion and spirituality shape and contribute to urban space. They argue that secularly inflected tools and methods for reinterpreting cities are not the only way to conceive urban space. Indeed, for them the postsecular creates a pragmatic rather than ideological environment, in which both religious and nonreligious groups are aware of complexity and issues such as poverty, terrorism, and the environmental problems that cities face in the twenty first century. The post-secular city is a laboratory that emphasises hybridity, diversity and mutual learning. Consequently, a postsecular city "reflects a more contested space where hitherto distinct categories are increasingly converging within a postmetaphysical composite." (Baker and Beaumont, 2011: 1)

When we move to the Muslim world the relationship between secularism, religion and the public domain diverges from the Western tradition. In the Middle East, from Iran to Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey, the impact of religion upon society and politics has become significant since the 1970s (Ismail, 2001, Bayat, 2005). Talal Asad (2002, 2003) challenges the application of the Western experience of secularism to non-Western contexts, as both traditions are historically and culturally different. He claims "there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes." (2002: 116). Like religion, Asad also critiques singular definitions of secularism, stating "the secular is neither singular in its origin nor stable in its historical identity, although it works through a series of particular oppositions" (2003: 25). Asad questions the rational superiority of the secular argument and rejects dominant notions of Western liberalism in the public sphere.

Adapting Assad's critique on secularism and liberalism many scholars have examined the constitution of contemporary Muslim identities and the revival of Islam in Middle East region. Since the beginning of the 1970s, Islam has become a manifestation and

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<sup>22</sup>Soja (1996) divides space into three categories- that is based on Lefebvre's formulation of space: Firstspace is the 'real' space where physical buildings can be seen. Secondspace is the 'imagine' representational space which is "made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies" (79) Thirdspace is the combination of first and second, which is "a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency."(11)

articulation of different lifestyles in the Middle East (Bayat, 2005, Ismail, 2001). Islam has played an important role not only in the public sphere but also in politics. Religious lifestyles and their articulation in daily practices have emerged as 'return to self' against Western liberalism, imperialism and secularism (Deeb, 2006, Bayat, 2005 and Ismail, 2004). It can be said that there are three main characteristic features of the revival of Islam in Muslim countries: consciousness, social diversity and dynamism.

First, contrary to the assumption in the West that Islam is anti-modern and ignorant, Islamic interpretation is 'self-consciously modern' through the process of revival of Islam in the public domain. Lara Deeb (2006) in her influential book, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, challenges the universal assumption in Western academic and media discourses that Islam is anti-modern religion. In particular, after the 9/11-terror attack, Islam was associated with terrorism and anti-modernity. Challenging this claim, Deeb argues that Islam and modernity are compatible. She discusses the ways in which Islam has a modern interpretation. As a result of effectively using scientific knowledge in the interpretation of Islam a new type of religiosity has emerged in Muslim countries. This new type of religiosity, she claims, is not only a move away from traditional religion, but also undermining of Western standards of 'being modern'. In a similar way, Ismail (2004) argues that pious Muslims do not need the interpretation of clerics in the construction of their identities anymore. Instead, they interpret and understand their religion through forming an 'objectified consciousness'. The consciousness of Muslims has been objectified thanks to the process of modernisation. In particular, Islamists have been at the forefront in constructing objectified consciousness. Thus, Islamic morality and Islamic values have become important in the articulation and representation of pious identities in the public sphere.

Second, the rise of the visibility of Islam in the public domain can be attributed to different social agents, such as militants, pious clerics, journalists, politicians and women, who all play different roles in how Islam is interpreted and perceived. For example, political parties mainly benefited from the Islamic revival; at the same time, they contributed to expanding the domain of religion in everyday life. Women have taken an active role in shaping Islamic society. In her influential work, *Politics of*

*Piety: Islamic Revival and Feminist Subject*, Saba Mahmood (2005) exposes the ways in which women participated in Islamic movements in Egypt. Mahmood asks “why...such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their own ‘interests and agendas,’ especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?” (2005: 2). In both poor and rich neighbourhoods, she shows that the mosque movement is made up of pious women informally gathering to empower their pious identities. Challenging the secular concept of agency, Mahmood illustrates how pious women are active social agents who express their reactions to the increase in secularisation and Westernisation in Egypt. Similarly, Deeb unravels the complexity around the way in which ‘being modern’ is understood by pious Shi’is women in Beirut, where she conducted ethnographic research between 1999 and 2001. Deeb claims that thanks to Hezbollah’s strategic position, pious women actively engaged with public piety, and in many ways contributed to constructing new kinds of pious identities. Moreover, as Ismail (2007) asserts, women also challenge the dominance of religious men’s disciplinary practices through participating in workplaces and becoming more active in the public sphere, whilst protecting their religious identities. Consequently, various social agents play different roles in articulating religious ways of life in the public and political spheres.

Finally, there is not a single set of Islamic lifestyles and norms in the public sphere. Although Islamic movements started in the 1970s and triumphed during the Iranian revolution, they developed differently in different places. Ismail (2007) claims that the processes of globalisation, post-modernity, rationalisation and individualisation are important in making Muslim identities. Yet, it does not mean that all Muslims respond to these processes in the same way. Ismail (2004: 630) asserts that “conformity and transgression against religious norms can be more appropriately explained by reference to alternative lifestyles and local social and cultural practices and norms”. Looking at different countries in the Middle East, Bayat (2005) criticises Western stereotypes that perceive Islamic movements as singular. He argues that all these movements should be thought about in relation to their own specific contexts. For example, although the Islamic movement in Egypt was stronger than in Iran, the Iranian Islamic revolution transformed the state from above. In Egypt, on the other hand, the strong mobilisation of Islamic movements caused reformist outcomes that

prohibited an Islamic revolution similar to the Iranian experience. Likewise, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and other movements elsewhere in the Middle East are shaped by local contexts in relation to global politics (Bayat, 2005). As Ismail (2004) asserts, the construction of Muslim identities in the public sphere is an ongoing process. Certain moral rules may change over time (Harb and Deeb (2013). For example, while wearing a headscarf was a manifestation of public piety during the 1970s and 1980s, it has recently become a fundamental element of clothing across Lebanon's pious society. Moral rules are always open to contestation and transformation. Thanks to the change in material context and history, the relationship between religion, secularism and the public sphere entails hybridity and ambiguity.

Perceiving the revival of Islam as a dynamic and hybrid process can help us to locate Islam in Turkey. Similar to other Middle Eastern countries<sup>23</sup>, Islam and religious lifestyles have become more apparent in the public and political spheres in Turkey over the last few decades. The substantial difference between Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries is that secularism in Turkey was institutionalised during the formation of new Republic in 1923. This, in turn, created a different type of relationship between secularism, religion and the public sphere. Since a French type of secularism was deployed in Turkey, the relationship between religion, secularism and the public sphere brought about different social, cultural and political settings. Instead of Anglo-Saxon secularism, the French positivist tradition became the key ideological basis for Turkish modernity. The ruling elites sought to engineer a new modern nation from above. Thus, Islam became as 'others' in the construction of new modern Turkish identities (Gole, 1997; Yavuz, 2000). Although this tradition has started to change since the 1950s, by coming to the power the AKP pioneered a fundamental change with regard to the relationship between secularism, religion and the public sphere. Therefore, in the Turkish context, postsecularism does not refer to any FBOs or spirituality and their influence on public space and their support for vulnerable groups (Cloke and Beaumont, 2013; McLennan, 2011, Baker and Beaumont, 2011; May and Cloke, 2012). Instead, it refers to the ever-increasing visibility of religion and religious lifestyles in the public sphere under the AKP government.

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<sup>23</sup> It is arguable to locate Turkey in the Middle East as it is also considered a European country.

It is argued that Turkey has been experiencing a hybrid form of life, which is influenced by both religion and secularism (Gole, 2012 and Rosati, 2012). After experiencing a very rigid form of secularism, there has been a transition from Kemalism to post-Kemalism, with the rigid Kemalist understanding of secularism undergoing replacement by a passive form of secularism in Turkey (Rosati, 2012) As Gokariksel and Secor (2014) rightly point out, unlike in Western countries postsecularism in Turkey does not refer to a new era. Instead Turkey was never a purely secular country as both religion and secularism have always played multiple roles in the Turkish political and public landscapes.

Bayat (2005) claims that Islamism has evolved over the time. Coming from an Islamic tradition the AKP's approach to religion and the public sphere has mutated from that of inheritor parties. The AKP's engagement with society has two dimensions: on the one hand, the party takes the sentiments of its grassroots into consideration, something that also transforms the party itself. On the other hand, it has succeeded in transforming its grassroots in terms of softening more fundamentalist views (Tugal, 2009 and Yavuz, 2009). In that, Yavuz (2009) believes that the ballot box has had an important influence. He stresses that electoral success has sparked the liberalisation the Islamic parties, as they have had to translate their feelings and sensitivities into more secular language in the public sphere. He believes that by using secular concepts, religious actors have learned ways to discuss, negotiate with and reverse different opinions. In this sense, the AKP is an outcome of this transition; political Islam was replaced by a conservative Islam. While the former refers an Islamic conception of society, the latter represents "the modern and dynamic face of a new cosmopolitan Muslim identity" by refusing to use the explicit language of political Islam (Yavuz, 2009: 2).

Gole (2012) asserts that the increasing visibility of religion, religious lifestyles and values in the public sphere has challenged the authoritarian mode of secularism in Turkey. In the Turkish case it is the Islamic movements that have challenged Kemalist understandings of secularism. As distinct from Western experiences, secularism is shaped not only by the development of the nation, but also by the constructive confrontation between the secular and religious. As with discussions of neoliberalism (see chapter 3), when a concept travels, it "never simply produce[s] a

replica of the original usage; every reiteration transforms the original meaning, adding new meanings to it.” (Gole, 2012: 43). In Turkey, “despite the political polarisation between the religious and the secular, the wall of separation between the two becomes more and more porous as mutual borrowings and cross-fertilizations blur the rigid distinctions.” (Ibid: 46). Thus, Rosati (2012: 69) points out that Turkey is unique as it is experiencing “an alternative way to politics and religion, religion and society, drawing on its own resources and its Ottoman past.”

Under the AKP regime, religious values, symbols, and lifestyles have become more visible. Through a sequence of reforms, the AKP regime appeared to acknowledge ethnic and religious pluralism (Gole, 2012). Even though the rights that were given to the religious Sunni-Muslims have been the most visible and prioritised, the AKP government has also attempted to improve the religious rights of non-Muslims minorities<sup>24</sup>. Not only have the properties of the minorities that were confiscated during the early Republic been returned to them, there has also been an attempt to renovate churches and synagogues. For example, for the first time since the establishment of the Turkish republic, a new church will be built for Syriac Orthodox Christians in Istanbul (Al Monitor, 2015). Likewise, the only synagogue in Edirne province, the third biggest synagogue in Europe, that was abandoned in the 1950s, was renovated and reopened in March 2015 (Hurriyet, 25 March 2015).

As the capital city of the Byzantium and Ottoman Empires and the largest city in the Turkish Republic, Istanbul has been an important laboratory in relation to multiplicity, diversity and pluralism. Although the capital was moved to Ankara after the establishment of the New Republic, Istanbul re-gained its importance in other ways. Since the 1980s, because of globalisation and neoliberalism, Istanbul has become the centre of accounting, advertising, marketing, fashion, design, and entertainment (Keyder, 2010). This engendered spaces for new identities (Isin, 2001). In particular, Islamic parties, the Welfare Party and AKP, which have run the city since 1994, pioneered multiple modernities. Islamist movements discovered the Ottoman past as a source of cosmopolitanism and an inspiration for Islamic identities (Isin, 2001) and spaces (Walton, 2010). Religious groups actively participated in producing new

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<sup>24</sup> After the establishment of the Republic, the number of non-Muslim minorities decreased dramatically. Now, non-Muslim minorities consist of less than 1% of the Turkish population.

spaces, not only for leisure activities such as cafes, restaurants, hotels and but also for worship such as mosques and madrassas (Islamic schools). For example, Walton (2010) examines how pious civil society institutions produce the city of Istanbul through the lens of neo-Ottomanism. Focusing on an old Ottoman madrassa, Rustem Pasha Madrassa, which was renewed by the Istanbul Science and Culture Foundation, he argues that the reproduction of madrassas can be considered a production of new public and pious space. Thus, pious imaginaries of Istanbul brought new Sunni cosmopolitanism in Istanbul (Walton, 2010). Since the 1990s, LGBT groups have become more visible in particular spaces across Istanbul. While only 30 people attended the first Pride March in 2003, since then every year, the Pride March has attracted ever-increasing numbers. Thus, Istanbul is an iconic metropolis that embodies religious and non-religious diversity. Therefore, it was not a surprise that Taksim and Gezi Park were the heart of action when 2.5 million people took to the streets during the massive protests.

In the case of the Gezi demonstrations, encountering others holding dissimilar views and leading conflicting lifestyles engendered a differentiation of identities in the public sphere. Discourses such as multiplicity, pluralism and encountering manifested themselves in the Gezi demonstrations and were symbolic of the postsecular transformation of the country over the past ten years. In this sense, by bringing diverse identities together, Gezi Park became a unique space for interacting with and contesting diversity and pluralism. I argue that while the evolution of Turkish secularism, as well as Istanbul as a cosmopolitan city, shaped Gezi Park, at the same time the interaction of different religious and non-religious lifestyles produced contested and contradictory spaces in Gezi.

#### **5.4. Gezi case**

Without a doubt, Gezi brought many diverse groups including Kemalists, leftist groups, LGBT groups, football fans, Armenians, Anticapitalist Muslims and other individuals together in a way that Turkey never witnessed before. The protesters claimed that their secular lifestyle has been put at risk by either Erdogan's discourses or the AKP's policies. Although one of the reasons behind the protests was 'interfering in people's lifestyle', the way the protest itself was practiced created

contradictory and contested spaces. On the one hand, the secular way of life was defended; on the other hand, pluralism was embraced by the protesters.

I argue that in a postsecular Turkey, Gezi both contested and embraced postsecularism. Gezi itself does not show there was a unity between different individuals; rather it was plural, multiple and fragmented. This argument is developed across three subsections. First, it shows what kind of ‘public reason’ is used by the protesters and media to justify the position of religion in the public sphere of Istanbul and as well as of Turkey. Secondly, it explores how symbols such as Atatürk’s images and Turkish flags are used to contest postsecularism. Finally, using Connolly’s ‘politics of becoming’ concept it evaluates how religious rituals and practices were re-negotiated in the Gezi protests. Rather than making generalisations I prefer to specify and show how diverse ideologies and groups perceived the event. In order to do that, I will not only look at the protest itself but how events after the protest that offer an understanding of the multiplicity and plurality that Gezi has created.

#### **5.4.1. Islamic lifestyle over secular country**

Although the AKP has transformed a strict type of secularism into a softer one, the AKP’s recent turn was understood as imposing Islamic values on secular lifestyles. Before the protests, there was already dissatisfaction with the AKP’s regulations about social life that recalled the Islamic-secular divide. The most notable of these regulations were an abortion law<sup>25</sup>, the restriction of alcohol sales<sup>26</sup>, the removal the prefix of Turkish Republic (T.C.) from some of the state institutions’ buildings, and the prohibition of demonstrations on the National Republican Day. In addition to these, Tayyip Erdoğan’s rhetoric on women and private life, such as advising women to have three children, justifying any laws through religious discourses and desiring to

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<sup>25</sup> According to the new code, abortion is legal until the tenth week of pregnancy. After the tenth week abortion can be performed only if woman’s life is endangered. Although the law allows abortion until the tenth week of pregnancy, historically, most of the public hospitals refuse to carry out abortions.

<sup>26</sup> The new law regulated the sale of alcohol. According to the new code, alcohol can be sold in the shops between 6am and 10pm, licence is required to sell alcohol, alcohol sales were banned near schools and mosques, and selling alcohol to underage (18) is prohibited (see more info at <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/06/20130611-1.htm>). Ironically, in order to regulate social order Kadikoy Municipality that is run by the secular CHP restricted the sale of alcohol in the district two months before the AKP’s regulation law; yet, it was not perceived as interfering with secular lifestyles in a district known by its secular identity.

raise 'religious youth' were seen examples of imposing Islamic moral practices on secular lifestyles. Additionally, in designing cities the role of religion has become important, including the inclusion of prayer rooms in shopping malls, universities and official workplaces, the construction of new mosques in urban landscapes, the emergence of alcohol-free restaurants, cafes, and hotels and the rise of gender-segregated swimming pools and beaches. Such changes engendered 'lifestyle concerns' amongst secular people who felt their rights have been annihilated by the Islamic AKP over the past ten years. In this sense, this section takes into account the ways in which such lifestyle concern is embedded in the Gezi discourse. Drawing on the critique of secularism (Asad, 2003; Habermas 2006, 2008), the section portrays the confrontations between different lifestyles, ideas, values, and practices. It argues that although lifestyle concerns are derived from a fear of the Islamisation of the country, such arguments are also multiple and fragmented within the protesters.

Compared to countries in Europe, Turkish secularism is, Keyman (2007) argues, more secularist than its European counterparts, with the exception of France. As in the case of French laicism, during the Third Republic (1871-1940) in which a separation of Church and state was defined in the constitution, in Turkey laicism also became the policy of the state (Mardin, 1977). Like the French anticlerical tradition of *laïcité*, the mission of Kemalism was to civilise the nation. Accordingly, religion symbolised the *ancien régime* and so laicism or *laiklik* in Turkish, "became the dividing line between enlightened and obscurantist; progressive and conservative; modern and traditional." (Taspinar, 2008: 4). Most of the protesters who I interviewed felt that their secular lifestyle is not recognised by the AKP government. Most of them cited the new laws and codes that I mentioned in the beginning of the section. Here I reflect on how they place religion in the public sphere according to their worldview, moral system, and lifestyle.

Burcak, a young engineer and activist in a socialist group, participated in the protests from the beginning to the end. The motivation that drove her to the park was to save the trees; yet, as the protests evolved many other reasons were added to her motivation. She is highly critical of the AKP's social and cultural policies. In particular, she believes that the AKP uses religion to oppress her lifestyle. She criticises the visibility of religious values in the public sphere. She thinks that religion

is private and should not appear in public.

Burcak: “Our existence in public life is hindered by what has been done with religion. For example, in the education system... It is one of the spheres where religious values became more apparent. So, with a new education system little children are coerced into getting a religious education... When they come to high school they are given two options, either to go religious schools or be slaves of capital. Even their [the AKP] reactionary teachers and principals don’t allow the pupils to sit next to the children of a different gender on the same chairs ”

Semra: “Do you think religion should not appear in the public sphere?”

Burcak: “It is the best that it should not. But, if it is rooted in culture and history, it can. There is no point arguing whether religious symbols and values should be visible in mosques or in churches. Of course these places should have religious values and symbols. But in other places, if you purposively make it more visible in order to show your power and use it as a tool for oppression, of course we take a stand against this.” (Burcak, May 5, 2014, Taksim)

Burcak’s narrative draws a firm line against any kind of public visibility of religion. While she considers mosques or churches as places where religion can be practiced, for her the public displays of Islam create problems. For her, as in the case of early Republic, religion should be a matter of private belief. She argues in effect that when it comes to arrangements in the public realm, ‘public reason’ should be used (Rawls, 2005). As long as religion stays in private sphere, it cannot be coerced onto others by the political authorities (Asad, 2003). As Assad states, secularism is the doctrine that dominates the public sphere according to neutral and non-religious views. It was not only Burcak who believed religion is a private issue between individuals and God. There were many others I interviewed who shared generally similar concerns . Duygu, an Alawite, believes that since religion has become more visible, it might create danger. For her, although religion was used in the forming of the nation state, Mustafa Kemal’s Republic was progressive. She thinks that the AKP aims to replace Mustafa

Kemal's Republic with an Islamic one. Religion has been used as a tool to oppress the people by the AKP.

“There are so many of examples that I do not know which one to start with. Everything can be connected with religion. People pray publicly. I think it is something that has to stay in a more private life. But people can judge you based on your religion. They can ask you if you have faith, they can exclude you based on religion... Now, mosques have been built in universities. And when you are against the construction of the mosque it is shown as if you are against religion. It has nothing to do with religion. You are only against religion being overly visible in the society. For example, in Yildiz Technical University we had debates about not having exams at Friday prayer time. I believe it cannot even be debatable. Who arranges her life according to religion? Then, why don't we arrange our bus times according to prayer times?.. Why should I wait for my class just because someone is going to pray? I think it's really absurd” (Duygu, April 21, 2014, Kadikoy)

It appears that Duygu thinks that religion should not be taken into account in organisation and production of public spaces. For example, since universities are educational spaces, religious activities should not be performed in these spaces. She perceives opening alternative spaces for devout people as a loss of secular presence in the public sphere. As Asad (2003) points out, the public sphere is not an empty place where our memories, aspirations, fears and hopes are not taken into consideration, but rather it is constituted by the different sensibilities. He argues that in secular countries the desire of devout people such as minorities is excluded from the public sphere. For Duygu, practicing religious activities in the public sphere is non-negotiable. Likewise, Ali's case was the most extreme and interesting one. Ali is a middle-aged activist who lives in Kadikoy, Istanbul. Ali refuses to call the protests to the Gezi protests. During our conversation every time I mentioned Gezi, he corrected me, calling it the June resistance. For him a few intellectuals, artists and LGBT members in the park made Gezi appear to be nothing more than a protest against destruction of a few trees. The truth was, he said, that millions of ordinary people on the streets wanted to demolish the Islamic AKP. For Ali, just as in the medieval era, the AKP uses religion to attack

enlightened and secular citizens. For him Gezi was an attempt to protect secular lifestyles from the Islamic government.

“If religion is present in everyday life according to religious groups and sects and allows everyone to construct their lifestyles, then it creates sectarian war like the Alawite [he meant Shia] and Sunni conflict in Iraq and the Alawite and Sunni conflict in Syria. In Turkey, there is a common understanding that if freedom equals democracy, that means everyone should reveal their religious views in everyday life... Everyone’s religious view is between her/himself and God, nothing else should interfere. This can only happen through a secular constitution. Turkey’s experiences as well as the world’s experiences proved that. But in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan it is opposite. The AKP’s strategy is to set up a substructure for this. Sometimes openly and sometimes secretly. All the laws that the AKP initiated create polarised lifestyles.” (Ali, 06 June, 2014, Istiklal Street)

As Ali’s position shows, he equates Islam with backwardness and argues that any kind of Islamic practices in the public sphere cannot be accepted. His case shows that secularism has pre-eminence over religion. While this conceit of secularism has been the legacy of the Kemalist regime, the presence of religious masses in the public sphere has not been accepted by many seculars. As Asad (2003) points out, the reason why such thinking excludes certain kinds of people, such as religious masses, is that religion is considered alien to seculars. As Ali’s case demonstrates, there is a sharp separation between religious and secular citizens (Asad, 2003).

In contrast to these ideas, some of the protesters do not feel their lifestyle is threatened. For them, the government does not impose a religious lifestyle. When the position of religion in the public sphere is discussed, often debates turn to the headscarf problem, which was banned in state-affiliated spaces and universities for more than a decade. Protesters who think their lifestyle is not under a threat, recall the headscarf ban and emphasise the plurality of lifestyles in public spaces of Istanbul. Ugur, who describes himself as an atheist, thinks that any religion belief should not be oppressed in the public sphere. While he is from Ayvalik, a coastal city in West Turkey, which is known for its secular identity, he went to Istanbul to study. He says that he was anti-religious when he was in Ayvalik, but living in Istanbul changed him

a lot. After the headscarf ban was removed in 2008, the first time he encountered hijabi women made him think about the absurdity of the headscarf ban. Therefore, his viewpoint on religion and religious practices changed.

“As an atheist who was trained as an atheist, I am not disturbed by religion. I used to feel uncomfortable because I was trained under the Kemalist education system. I used to be strongly against the headscarf and I was thinking the headscarf was against freedom or something like that. After meeting with different people I started to change, so I learned. I did not learn it from books. Well, by reading books you can learn that it is absurd to be against religion, but when you experience it, you learn it very well. I believe that people’s freedom of beliefs should not be restricted, so it does not really bother me to see religious practices in public realm. Instead, when there is pressure on this issue, I am bothered; it annoys me when somebody is oppressed... Now I see a person, wearing a crucifix necklace, another wearing a necklace with Ali picture [symbolises Alawites], that makes me happy. It means that people now have more confidence. That also means that there are some relatively emancipatory zones. For example, we could not say Kurdish, now we can talk about the Kurdish issue as much as we can, we can talk about Armenian Genocide. We can say that there was genocide. We can force the government to apologise for it (Ugur, May 8, 2014, Osmanbey)

Living in a cosmopolitan city has made Ugur rethink his position on diverse faiths. Through encountering with people from different backgrounds and lifestyles he has critically interrogated his worldview and recognised other people’s identities (Habermas, 2005). As Habermas (2005: 27) notes, secular citizens “may neither fundamentally deny truth-potential to religious worldviews nor deny the right of believing citizen to make contributions to public discussion in religious language.” From this perspective, Ugur reinterpreted the relationship between faith and knowledge and became more aware of different faiths in his everyday life. Likewise, Oznur, an LGBT member, thinks that Erdogan’s rhetoric confuses secular people. That is why secular people feel anxiety about their lifestyles. She asserts that there is a big separation between Erdogan’s rhetoric and his practice. While rhetorically he uses Islamic discourses to justify certain laws such as laws on alcohol and abortion, it

is a camouflage to cover up other crises he faces. Yet, she believes religion has become more apparent in the public sphere.

“Religion now has both positive and negative influences. In positive ways; the headscarf problem was solved and hijabi women are more visible now. The AKP didn’t make it; indeed, the hijabi women achieved it. In negative ways, ... I don’t know how to describe it but religious practices are more visible than my youth’s time. As I am not old, indeed, I don’t know the previous times. You know, religious symbols, rituals, and practices are more visible in everyday life. But, as I said I don’t think that religion has come and taken over our freedom. I don’t perceive it in that way but I often come across posters that advertise religious rituals such as the ‘Blessed Birth Week’ and the Holy nights” (Oznur, May 7, 2014, Istiklal Sreet)

Oznur objects to secularism when it is used to oppress religious identity, but she is in a dilemma about how to accept some aspects of religious practices in social life.

The fear of the Islamisation of the country was also reflected in both the international and national media. The Islamisation of the country was perhaps one of the most repeated themes in the newspapers. The social policies of the AKP were seen as imposing an Islamic lifestyle on secular *modus vivendi*. Regarding foreign newspapers, it should be noted that they used a monotone language to show the frustration and fear of secular groups over the Islamisation of the country. While the Islamic or Islamic-rooted government and the fear about Islamisation were consistently mentioned, any policies or developments that backed up this transformation were not. For example, in an article in *Der Spiegel* it was stated, “[i]t has taken a long time for the liberal, secular Turks to lose their patience. They have gritted their teeth and endured it as the conservative-Islamic government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan reined in their freedom.” (6 June 2013).

Such statements were evident in three other foreign newspapers, the *New York Times*, *Haaretz* and the *Guardian*. They mention some of the new codes that regulated private matters, such as restrictions on the sale of alcohol and abortion laws. In an article in *Haaretz* on 5 June 2013, Ilene Prusher compared the protest in Turkey with the social justice protests of 2011 in Israel.

“He [Erdogan] has been pushing the boundaries in Turkey’s tense secular-religious divide – another problem that looks a lot like Israel. Lawmakers in his ruling Justice and Development Party (AK) indicated last month they would support a ban on kissing in public places such as subways, decrying such public displays of affection as immoral. The controversy follows new government curbs on the sale of alcohol. Just last week AK parliamentarians rushed through legislation limiting the hours of the sale of alcohol, banning alcohol advertising and prohibiting new shops and bars from opening within 100 meters of a school or mosque. (In densely packed downtown Istanbul, that’s just about everywhere.)...Few Turks want Istanbul to look more like Tehran.”

The fear of Islamisation is also reflected in Turkish newspapers. It should be noted however that there was diversity in terms of the perceptions of Islamisation. Pro-Kemalist newspapers, *Sozcu* and *Cumhuriyet* deployed aggressive language against the government, arguing that the legacies of Mustafa Kemal had been destroyed. The pro-AKP newspaper, *Sabah*, focused more on the religious presence in the public sphere and accused the protesters of being traitors. *Haberturk* and *Hurriyet* tended to use more cautious language. For instance, in an article in *Hurriyet* on 5 June 2013, Ertugrul Ozkok describes why he felt threatened. He was one of the architects of the 28 February process and used to be very critical of the Islamic movements. In the opinion page, Ozkok indicates that although he never voted for the AKP, he supports most of the policies of the party, in particular its development policies. He asserts that Turkey is moving in a good direction in terms of economical progress which makes him proud of his country, but as a result of governmental pressures he is concerned with changes to his lifestyle.

“Life is not made up only by this. The place where I was born, my education, culture, lifestyle and personality do not make me happy with only economic successes. I have a character, dignity, fears and concerns. Although I try to be optimistic my surroundings worry me... I have taken a lot of lessons from life. I have learned how to live together. I have empathy with women who wear headscarves and I have understood their fears too. Sometime, I spend time with them, I talk to them. I try to express myself to them, I listen to their

criticisms and calmly and warmly answer them. As long as I understand them it makes me feel better. I am not as religious as I used to be; yet I am more emphathetic than I used to be.”

Ozkok’s fear has nothing to do with religious people and their appearance in the public sphere. He critically engaged with his past and the change in his mentality has made him to be aware of religion and religious people in the public sphere (Habermas, 2008).

In contrast, *Sozcu* and *Cumhuriyet* were always unsparing in their support for the legacy of Mustafa Kemal and their belief that it was ruined under the AKP government. Both the *Sozcu* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers in their opinion and editorial pages used terms like “*dinci*”<sup>27</sup> (radical religious) (*Cumhuriyet*, 6 June 2013; *Sozcu*, 12 June 2013), “religious mask” (*Cumhuriyet*, 1 June 2013; *Sozcu*, 1 and 6 June 2013), “*yobaz*” (bigot) (*Sozcu*, 31 May 2013), and “reactionary” (*Sozcu* 16 June 2013) to describe the AKP government, whereas for the protesters “enlightened face of Turkey”, modern, laic citizens (*Cumhuriyet*, 6 and 16 June 2013; *Sozcu*, 1, 6 and 12 June 2013) were chosen. Ugur Dundar in an article on 6 June 2013 describes the protest as a dignified reinvigoration of a nation. For him the protesters took their power from the past and the Turkish War of Independence that delivered laic, peaceful, modern Kemalist and democratic messages to an Islamic government. He offers reasons why the protest happened using a broad range of factors. According to him some of reasons behind the protest were:

“The uprising is against those who attack Ataturk and his Republic...

It is against those who hint that Ataturk and his friends were drunks...

It is against those who try to forbid the love of Ataturk and national celebration days...

It is against those who eliminate the principle of laicism...

It is against those who want to receive political gain from religion by inciting sectarian division when the society lives in peace...”

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<sup>27</sup> *Dinci* is used by the Kemalists to refer to those who use religion as a mask to protect their interests. (See also Duran (2015)’s article on *dinci* at <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/yazarlar/rahmi-turan/dinci-nedir-dindar-nedir-848624/>)

Dundar believes the values that constitute the country have been changed. His position is embodied in a Kemalist reaction that believes there were no problems with Mustafa Kemal's Republic since its foundation, and that problems were created by reactionary Islamists, the AKP. From this perspective, the Islamisation of the country was seen as a betrayal of the Kemalist legacy. National identity has to be defined through the principle of Ataturk, not religion. He ignores the presence of Islam in the public sphere since he interprets laicism as bringing people together. In this sense, as Asad (2003: 185) shows "secularists are alarmed at the thought that religion should be allowed to invade the domain of our personal choices - although the process of speaking and listening freely implies that our thoughts and actions should be opened up to change by our interlocutors."

The language Erdogan used to justify did not reassure people like Dundar because it was based on a religious rhetoric. For example, for the alcohol restriction he stated, "We do not want a drunk youth," (Haber7, 24 May 2013) "If you drink alcohol, drink at your home!" (Hurriyet, 28 May 2013) "Everyone who drinks alcohol is alcoholic" (Haaretz, 1 June 2013) and "Our national drink is *ayran* (a mix of yogurt and water)" (Sozcu, 23 April 2013). Likewise, he used the same justification for the abortion law saying, "all abortion is a murder" (26 May 2012). In this sense, his religious justification is also far from the inclusive political sphere that Habermas has outlined.

Ultimately, religion is more powerful in the current era than in any other era in modern Turkish history. The AKP paved the way for the presence of conservative lifestyles, which are now being normalised (Yel and Nas, 2013; Yavuz, 2009; and Ozbudun and Hale, 2009). Lifestyle concerns arise from a fear of the Islamisation of the country. Whether it is exaggerated or not, one thing that is clear is that secular fear about restricted lifestyles has been underpinned by Erdogan's rhetoric. Due to Erdogan's exclusive religious justification "the worst scenario" that - secular lifestyles would eventually be replaced by Islamic ones - was envisaged by the many secular protesters. Yet, for other protesters the visibility of Islam in public spaces pluralised the public sphere. The next section illustrates how secular anxiety and reaction were expressed in Gezi through the use of Ataturk's images and Turkish flags.

#### **5.4.2. The Turkish flag and images of Ataturk in the Gezi protests**

Images of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the Turkish flag were used widely in the Gezi demonstrations as a symbol of resistance and support for a modern secular republic. During the unrest the windows of many apartments in the country were draped with Turkish flags and images of Mustafa Kemal. In Taksim Square and other locations, countless flags and images were sold. The image of Ataturk became a symbol of the secular stance against the Islamic AKP. In this section, I argue that both images of Ataturk and Turkish flags are contested symbols in contemporary Turkey and therefore they were used by both Gezi activists and the AKP government in different ways. The section sheds light on how different interpretations of Mustafa Kemal should be understood through the transformation of Turkish secularism. While in the 1990s his image was extensively used by Turkish seculars in the public sphere to indicate a stance against Islamic appearance, this usage has become blurred as well. Thus, I show that in the protests the use of Ataturk's image in public spaces now represents a new balance between Kemalist and Islamic cultures.

As a symbol the image of the founding father, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, is at the heart of the Turkish value system. The founder of the modern Turkish Republic is considered sacred<sup>28</sup> and untouchable. From official public buildings to private buildings, from streets to public spaces, in squares, and on coins and banknotes his image is displayed almost everywhere (Ozyurek, 2006).

In the 1990s, when the Islamic WP governed the country, the Kemalist's reaction was to compete with Islamic symbols and eventually to replace them by using more Kemalist symbols and iconographies in both the public and private spheres (Ozyurek, 2006 and Bekaroglu, 2015). Images of Ataturk became a symbol for a secular and modern cultural identity. From this perspective, to many of the protesters he was a saviour, a man of the people (Ozyurek, 2006) and a triumphant hero (Rosati, 2012) whose path was destroyed by the current government. From the first day of Gezi "We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal" became one of the most common mottos chanted throughout Turkey (Cumhuriyet, 3 June 2013, Hurriyet, 12 June 2013). Afterwards, in every moment of the resistance, glorification was attributed to the image of Ataturk

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<sup>28</sup> Although sacred, as a mystical term, might contradict the idea of secularism, in the Turkish Republic, Ataturk's image is protected by law.

by the majority of protesters. This not only appeared in the form of the image itself but also in Ataturk's material representation, such as the Ataturk Cultural Centre and Taksim Ataturk monument that are sacred to secular Kemalist ideology too. For this reason, the different political groups and individuals competed with each other to display the biggest flag representing their parties or political ideologies in front of these material spaces.

While Ataturk's image was used as a symbolic tool to unify different groups and individuals, due to the transformation in social life that AKP brought about, the image of Ataturk was also seen as symbolic of 'a saviour'. As many people told me, great use was made of Turkish flags and images of Ataturk during the occupation. Those who expressed support for the founding father wanted to show that they were dedicated to his principles. Mahir, a staunch Kemalist activist who studied for a BA in law at a private university, explained that regardless of their different political ideologies, people united around the image of Ataturk and Turkish flags. He considers those who support different ideologies to be provocateurs propagating terrorist activities in the park. He clearly drew boundaries between the Islamist AKP and Kemalist state.

“On the one hand, there is a prime minister who calls Ismet Inonu (the second president of Turkish republic) and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk 'drunk', on the other hand there is Turkish youth who thinks the foundation principles of the republic were demolished and they embrace the national values and protect Mustafa Kemal... Indeed, many demands of people united around a single stratum, which is to weaken this illegal government by legal protest. The purpose of this civil commotion was to re-establish the completely modern and democratic Turkish Republic, based on the principles of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, in order to complete an incomplete revolution. So, as members of the Turkish Youth Organisation, we led the protest in this way.” (Mahir, June 24, 2014, Istiklal Street)

For Mahir, Gezi's aim was to revive the Kemalist regime again because the Islamist AKP has destroyed the secular principles of modern Turkey and therefore cannot represent the people. As individuals following Mustafa Kemal's principles they, the

protesters, are the real representatives of the Turkish Republic. Thus, the use of Ataturk was a symbol of the nostalgia for lost modernity (Ozyurek, 2006).

After the occupation, Mustafa Kemal and his image continued to be used. After the departure from Gezi Park various acts of civil disobedience occurred. Perhaps the most reported was the ‘standing man’ activity. On June 17 at around 6pm a lone man, who was a performance artist and a dancer from Izmir province, in a white t-shirt walked through Taksim Square and stopped facing the Ataturk Cultural Centre. For eight hours he remained standing without talking or paying any attention to anyone; he just stared at the image of Ataturk. Since he just stood there the police did not know how to react. They searched his backpack, which contained a gas mask, a bottle of water and some snacks. A few hundreds curious bystanders gradually joined him. After eight hours the police asked him to leave. Soon after his civil disobedience the action went viral and inspired similar activities around the country.

Although there were many reasons for the standing man to conduct such a protest, the main motivation behind his action was to promote a secular image of the nation. What is unique about his stance is that several times he used Mustafa Kemal’s sayings passionately to justify his position. Interestingly, when he read a passage from the “Address to the Turkish Youth”, Mustafa Kemal’s famous advice dedicated to the Turkish Youth, he intentionally highlighted ‘ill-will both in the country itself and abroad.’ For him the AKP government demolished Kemalist understanding of nation. Therefore, he told me that while during standing man activity, he imagined Mustafa Kemal and his legacy. He described his action as a hope; a hope which is a yearning for the modern republic that Mustafa Kemal initiated and a retort against the Islamist AKP (Ozyurek, 2006).

However, although Ataturk’s image must be sacred and intangible for everyone by law, it also started to have meaning for Islamic movements (Rosati, 2012). In contemporary Turkey, Islamic movements are trying to paint a different picture of Mustafa Kemal to that in Kemalist ideology. This stand contradicts the AKP’s hostility towards Kemalism. Indeed, the AKP authorities never glorify the modernisation project of Mustafa Kemal. Instead they depict Mustafa Kemal as a soldier and a war veteran (gazi) rather than a man who modernised the country. Regarding the Gezi park protests, the government used the image of Ataturk as a

soldier who saved the nation from the imperial powers and eventually, secured the nation's borders (Ozyurek, 2006). This became even clearer when the security forces cleared Taksim Square and the Ataturk Cultural Centre of protesters, and the banners and flags of different political parties and institutions were removed on June 11. Interestingly, afterwards the security forces "hung a massive picture of the founder of the Turkish secular state, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk" (Hareetz, 11 June 2013) with two Turkish flags from the Ataturk Cultural Centre. In doing so, the AKP tried to show that the legacy of Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish Republic, was saved. This claim was even more apparent in the speeches given by Erdogan. In one public speech he stated:

"The Ataturk Cultural Centre is a public institution. Illegal and legal organisations displayed rags there. There were pictures of terrorists and also insults against the prime minister of the Turkish Republic... What would we do besides removing these rags? I ordered my interior minister to clean all these things within 24 hours. We can't leave our nation to the terrorist. You saw what was on the Ataturk monument in Taksim. The main terrorist (the Kurdish imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan) was next to the picture of Gazi Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish flag. I call nationalists here. O! CHP and its supporters! How did you let this happen? Why didn't you remove these pictures?" (Sozcu, 11 June 2013).

Although a few months before the resistance, a peace process had been initiated between the Turkish state and the imprisoned Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan, Erdogan highlighted how Ataturk's picture should not in his view come together with someone involved with terrorist activities. While potentially undermining the ongoing peace process, Erdogan's statement deploys the Kemalists discourse of the sacredness of Ataturk.

It should be noted that although Ataturk's image was used widely, there were also some protesters who defined themselves as anti-Kemalist. This position blurs the view of the Gezi protests to be seen as a mere Kemalist resistance, as Gezi was fragmented in terms of ideologies. Although they accepted the Kemalist domination in the park in terms of numbers, non-aligned protesters rejected both Kemalist hegemony and the AKP's conservative hegemony. Ugur as an anti-Kemalist student,

believed that his opposition had two aspects. While outside the park he opposed the AKP, inside the park he fought with the Kemalists.

“The motto of soldiers of the Mustafa Kemal was very indicative. As a conscientious objector this motto is completely against my worldview. I can never be in a political protest in which they chant the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal. But Gezi wasn’t like this. Large sections of the society participated in the protests. They came with Turkish flags. I would never be in such a protest but I was there because I had something to discuss with the others, I had something to win. I trusted the movement itself and I thought those people could change and the entire movement could be more liberal as well.” (Ugur, May 8, 2014, Osmanbey)

The reason why the massive usage of Ataturk and his images did not bother Ugur was because the Kemalist ideology is not as widespread in the public sphere as it used to be. In Ugur’s case, as the protesters had diverse, plural and fragmented identities, the use of Ataturk’s image was tolerable. Thus, the protests enabled different perspectives to be present in the same public space although they do not agree with each other.

In summary, both Erdogan’s government and the Gezi protesters used images of Ataturk and Turkish flags as a way of legitimating their positions. While for the Kemalist protesters, flags and images of Ataturk symbolised the modern secular face of Turkey and anxiety about the Islamisation of the country, the AKP conceived of them as uniting the nation against betrayers.

#### **5.4.3. Religious practices throughout the protests**

Gezi brought different individuals and subjectivities together. While the majority of the protesters were from secular backgrounds, there were also Anticapitalist Muslims<sup>29</sup> and a few other religious individuals whose religious practices were

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<sup>29</sup>The Anti-Capitalist Muslims consists of a very small group of pious activists, and was established under the leadership of Ihsan Eliacik, a writer and commentator of Quran, a few years ago. They are against bourgeois Islam and think Islam has been corrupted by the AKP. ‘Dominion belongs to Allah’ and ‘Down with capitalism with Islamic ablution’ are the most important slogans of the group. They became visible during the May rallies of 2012 and then the Gezi protests popularised them nationally and internationally.

respected in the park. What made it unique was that secular classes willingly approached religious practices in the public sphere. This contradicted Kemalist versus Islamist dichotomies. Practising Friday prayer and Holy Night<sup>30</sup> in Gezi during the unrest and organising ‘earth tables’<sup>31</sup> during the month of Ramadan seemed to produce a new Kemalist understanding of secularism. It was not complete disaffection by the Kemalist class as before, but neither was it consent to Islamic sovereignty. Thus, I argue that while Gezi manifested postsecular pluralism, at the same time it showed the ambiguity and complexity of the Islamic and Kemalist divide. Through using different religious practices during the protests this section illustrates how secularism and religion were re-defined. To do this I will apply Connolly’s (1999 and 2005) “politics of becoming” to show plurality and multiplicity of Gezi. However, I will not approach such pluralism as persistent, but rather I argue that the production of a ‘politics of becoming’ was limited. In other words, I claim that although pluralism was produced between Anticapitalist Muslims and secular protests during the protests, such pluralism could not be expanded to larger segments of pious citizens.

Connolly seeks a new cultural pluralism through the rewriting of secularism. He proposes pluralism as an alternative to secularism that allows a wider variety of faiths to exist in the public sphere, rather than operating only at the margins. He insists that both believers and non-believers should present their beliefs in the public sphere, something that he calls the “*politics of becoming*”. In Connolly’s words the politics of becoming is a paradoxical politics by which “new cultural identities are formed out of unexpected energies and institutionally congealed injuries.” (1999: 57). Connolly (2005) thinks the politics of becoming requires two particular conditions: agonistic respect and critical responsiveness that take place through civic virtue and public negotiations. He believes culture needs to be inclusive in order to allow the politics of becoming to flourish.

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<sup>30</sup> Islam has some holy nights each year and one coincided with the Gezi protests. Traditionally and culturally, these holy nights are so important for Turkish people that religious people go to mosques and pray during the night. The leader of the Anticapitalist Muslims, Ihsan Eliacik on every occasion before the protests, claimed that the Holy nights are superstitious and should not be celebrated. However during the protests the Anticapitalist Muslims celebrated the Holy night and earth tables (see for example <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/571137-islamiyette-kandil-geceleri-yoktur>).

<sup>31</sup> Earth tables are gatherings to ‘break (the) fast’ organised during the month of Ramadan in 2013.

In the light of Connolly’s argument, the religious practices that were practiced during the uprising brought different religious and non-religious practices and views together in a way that created the sort of pluralism that Connolly describes. In this sense, the newspapers paid considerable attention to religious practices in Gezi. In particular, some newspapers tried to show that Gezi embraced all ideas, ideologies and people. They mentioned how people celebrated the ‘Holy night’ and practiced Friday Prayer on the front pages. For Friday Prayer it was mentioned that while pious Anticapitalist Muslims were performing the prayer, the activists protected them from possible police attacks. Although Haberturk and Hurriyet reported it on their front-pages, other newspapers did not even mention it (Figure 5.1). For the Holy night, it was highlighted that no alcohol was served or drunk that night. While Hurriyet chose the title of “Celebration of Holy night, Sabah chose “Sensitivity to the Holy night”, Haberturk selected “Holy night in Gezi”. Two Kemalist newspapers, Sozcu and Cumhuriyet very briefly mentioned that night (Figure 5.2). To be able to practice Friday prayers and Holy night in Taksim area and voluntarily giving up drinking alcohol, even when there was huge criticism from the protesters over the government’s decision to restrict the consumption of alcohol, shows that an “agonistic respect” was practised in Gezi (Connolly, 2005).



Hurriyet



Haberturk

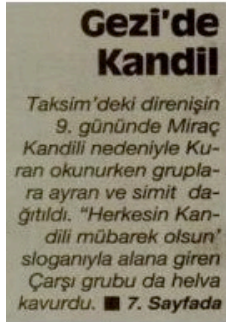
**Figure 5-1:** Practicing Friday prayer was featured on Hurriyet and Haberturk’s front pages on 8/06/2013



Sabah



Haberturk



Cumhuriyet



Sozcu



Hurriyet

**Figure 5-2:** The celebration of the Holy night was portrayed in five newspapers in different ways 06/06/2013.

In 2013, the month of Ramadan month fell just after the Gezi occupation ended and so it was a chance for protesters to expand their protests into everyday practices. Following the suggestions of the Anticapitalist Muslims, *iftaar* tables were organised in different parts of cities, especially in secular enclaves such as Taksim, Kadikoy and Yedikule in Istanbul. Taksim attracted the most attention in terms of participants, media and social media coverage. In contrast to the usual *iftaar* tents<sup>32</sup> provided by the municipalities, in 'earth tables' everyone was asked to bring food and share it with other people. Moreover, unlike *iftaar* tents, in 'earth tables' people used 'floor tables', mostly newspapers, and traditionally sat cross-legged. Regardless of whether or not they practised fasting everyone was invited to the 'earth tables'. This suggests "an alternative spirituality" that different ethnicities, genders, sexualities, religions and metaphysical faiths negotiated through "an ethos of engagement" between themselves. This multiplicity was constituted by a diversity of moral sources and metaphysical orientations that encompass monotheistic perspectives, secular ideas, aseular and, nontheistic perspectives, all engaged in the same public sphere (Connolly, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Iftaar tents initially started during the Welfare Party's governance in Istanbul in the early 1990s. The purpose was to provide food for people, in particular for poor people. Soon after *iftaar* tent became a tradition. Now not only in Istanbul but also in many cities municipalities provide *iftaar* during the month of Ramadan.

This alternative religious understanding also challenged the state's narrow sovereignty. The Anticapitalist Muslims described luxurious *iftaars* (the breaking of the Ramadan fast) as capitalist, *iftaar* tents as exploitative and earth tables of the 'people' as emancipatory (Hurriyet, 10 July 2013). They sharply distinguished their religious practice from any other types. While their practice represents the people, other practices represented the state. The Turkish newspapers also analysed this distinction. Accordingly, while the *iftaar* tent was seen as elite and normative, the earth table crossed boundaries between secular citizens and religious Muslims (Hurriyet, 9 July 2013; Cumhuriyet, 9 July 2013). At earth tables, multiple faiths and religions coexisted in the same public space and this created a benevolent understanding of pluralism. In an opinion page in Hurriyet, Ebru Capa describes the earth tables as follows:

“It is the first day of Ramadan. It will be the first *iftaar* of 2013. In Istiklal Street from Galatasaray Square towards Taksim an earth table will be set simultaneously with others. People will share their food though not everyone will observe fasting. There is a massive crowd, which consists of Muslims who haven't observed fasting until now to different religious groups. Even, I'm sorry to say, some of them are atheists... Believe me there are people from all religious orders, including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, gays, women, men and children.” (Capa, 14 July 2013)

She describes the *iftaar* tables provided by Beyoglu municipality in Taksim Square as tables covered with white sheets that should be protected from the Gezi protesters by security forces in contrast to the more sincere and spontaneous 'earth tables'. In the same paper, Capa gave wide coverage to the opinions of the leader of Anticapitalist Muslims, Recep Ihsan Eliacik, about the magnificent 'earth tables'. In his words, Eliacik explains why earth tables are warmer than municipalities' ones:

“There are two types of *iftaar*. First the municipalities' official *iftaar* that has elite tables and servants... the Sultan's table... The other is the people's *iftaar* that is protects the people from the police. It is overcrowded. People share what they have brought from their homes. There is no hierarchy. There are 40 types of meal and even more types of drink. It is a more spontaneous, richer and diverse table.”

Eliacik argues the *iftaar* tables, which are provided by the municipalities are exclusionary. On the contrary, their *iftaar* is made by the people.

#### **5.4.3.1. Multidimensional pluralism?**

It was important that the presence of Islamic practices during the resistance was acknowledged; in particular in a time when building a mosque in Taksim was a controversial topic. Although since the late Ottoman period construction of the mosque has been discussed from time to time, it had become a hot topic when the Islamic Welfare Party first time came to power in the 1990s. The construction of the mosque was perceived as a direct assault on the secular character of Taksim by secular people, and Islamic parties were accused of re-conquering Istanbul and Islamising the secular nation (Buyuksarac, 2005; Simsek, Polvan and Yesilserit, 2006). During the protests, these places were open to negotiation. For the first time in modern Turkish history, Taksim witnessed religious plurality, especially the practice of Friday Prayers between the Ataturk sculpture and the Ataturk Cultural Centre.

However, the multiplicity in the Gezi protests may not have constituted a multi-dimensional pluralism in terms of embodying different kinds of religious people. Apart-from Anticapitalist Muslims, people from other religious classes neither participated, nor supported the protests. As Celik (2014) found, many religious citizens who supported the protests in the very first few days withdrew their support when the protests became violent. In spite of the plural picture of Gezi Park, in other places in Istanbul and over Turkey, there were a considerable number of attacks against hijabi women during the protests (see also Celik, 2014, Yel and Nas, 2013 and Yayla 2013). It should be noted that the headscarf ban in public institutions had not been lifted at that time. Therefore, other religious people who had partly gained their right to practice their religion in public under the AKP regime were not convinced by Gezi's plurality. Moreover, the protesters applied the tactics of the 28 February process in that they banged pots and pans and turned the light off in the evening for fifteen days. Although banging pots and pans is a globally popular form of protest (Eltantawy, 2008), during the February 28 process Kemalist segments of society used this protest against the Islamic Welfare Party as a way of calling for its resignation. Thus, the pot banging protests evoked traumatic memories of the 28 February process when religious groups were defined as the most dangerous groups (Celik, 2014, Yel

and Nas, 2013). As a member of the Anticapitalist Muslims, Kenan was proud of his organisation because they led the earth tables, but he was quite upset by the dominant mentality in Gezi. During our meeting, he emphasised that the biggest handicap of groups was the ‘representation mentality’ that always thinks it should lead people. For him, the majority of protesters, in particular, leftist groups, disregarded religious people’s dignity. He asserts that these groups always employed the wrong attitude toward devout Muslims by saying “*Musulman mahallesine salyangoz diyorlar.*” “They looked down on devout Muslims.”

“Gezi had to be a civil resistance and when people asked us why we were there we had to tell them everything with a nice tone. Indeed there was something of an environment of consultation that attempted to respect all opinions from different ideologies and different people but it did not succeed since it was the first experience.” (Kenan, April 8, 2014, Findikzade)

Like Kenan, Koray, an architect, was also disappointed, as they could not persuade other religious groups and make them believe in their honesty.

“Betul [an academic who was invited by the Prime Minister for a Gezi meeting] and I visited Islamic groups and told them Gezi won’t be labeled as a leftist and secular resistance if they support us. Otherwise, we couldn’t make the government believe in our honesty. We begged them to join us since they had a close relationship with the government and therefore the government could be convinced... They told us if they joined the protests, the CHP [the main opposition/secular party] could have come to power and their lifestyle would have been oppressed again. Regarding education rights such as Quranic circles, religious education, and the schools for Hafiz [those who memorise the Quran] they owed a lot. They didn’t support the Taksim project, but apart from the Anticapitalist Muslims they didn’t trust us, they didn’t trust a new thing would be emerged from Taksim” (Koray, June 23, 2014, Istiklal)

This self-criticism shows that while Gezi produced some plurality within itself, at the same time, it involved numerous contradictions. As Connolly (2005) argues the politics of becoming requires critical responsiveness that involves careful listening and presumptive generosity. It also requires negotiation of different identities in terms

of their cultural recognition in the public sphere. In this case, the Gezi discourse only involved the religious views of those who fought the same enemy, the AKP. It seems that the practices of Anticapitalist Muslims were used in order to justify secularism through religious activities in Gezi rather than embracing the rights of devout Muslims. Therefore, the Gezi discourse included secular justifications for participating in the public sphere. As ‘lifestyle concerns’ were significant, for the protesters Islam was either represented by the Anticapitalist Muslims or Erdogan’s party. They defined diverse religious groups who were represented by Erdogan through a singular frame. Yet, there are many religious groups and individuals whose portrayal of Islam differs. When only the Anticapitalist Muslims’ practices are considered and the other bloc is envisaged as a singular group, religious diversity is sidelined.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to show the relationship between religion and secularism. Although every country experiences a different type of secularism, in the case of Turkey, history shows that the public realm had been conceived of using a strict secular rationalist logic for quite a long time. Islamism has challenged the secular and homogeneous public sphere and “[t]he construction of an Islamic public sphere(s) can imply pluralism but can also lead to a fragmentation of the larger public sphere that may cause it to lose its binding character.” (Gole, 2011: 111).

I employed a postsecular concept to understand interaction and encounter between different religious and non-religious ideas. As Habermas suggests, secular people can learn something from religious contributions and Gezi activists experienced this through the religious practices of Anticapitalist Muslims in the park. To be able to practice religious activities in highly secular public spaces was the biggest achievement with regards to the recognition of diverse lifestyles. While in subsequent years, the Anticapitalist Muslims have organised ‘earth tables’ in Taksim and elsewhere in Istanbul during Ramadan, not as many people have participated as in 2013. The constructive dialogue, exchange and interaction that were experienced between the Anticapitalist Muslims and other protesters did not extend to other religious people. Instead, it recalled the Islamic and secularist divide. Gezi even led to angry religious reflection in that religious people participated in the ‘Respect the

National Will' rallies that were organised by Erdogan's AKP as counter rallies against Gezi in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Kayseri and Samsun during the protests. Hundreds of thousands people participated in these rallies to show their support for Erdogan (Yel and Nas, 2013).

Although Turkey is increasingly a postsecular society, Gezi produced both plurality and exclusion. Thus, Gezi once again brought the discussion around Kemalist and Islamist division to the fore, and as a result the historically antagonistic relationship between these groups resurfaced. The next chapter looks at this antagonistic relationship and the ways in which democracy is understood by different groups.



# Chapter 6

## Understanding multiple democracies through Gezi

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways in which democracy has been exercised in relation to the Gezi protests in the Turkish context. While the initial intention of Gezi was around environmental concerns, mainly saving trees from being cut down, police brutality attracted the attention of diverse groups, and this made Gezi broaden beyond its initial aim. While in the previous chapters I discussed how the change in urban landscapes and the visibility of Islamic lifestyles influenced the Gezi protests, Gezi also manifested the ways in which democracy has been exercised by the AKP government. The Gezi protesters claimed, they as the other 50 per cent wanted their voices to be heard. According to the protesters, AKP governance has become more authoritarian under Recep Tayyip Erdogan's leadership. While Gezi activists focused on democracy, there were multiple ideas about the nature of democracy. Some groups called for a more participatory democracy; some felt threatened by the ways in which democracy was practised, and some claimed the AKP was an illegitimate government. At the same time, the AKP perceived the events as anti-democratic. In particular, Erdogan claimed to be 'a gatekeeper of democracy', and his punitive reaction toward Gezi activism was taken in the name of protecting Turkish democracy. Thus, democracy appeared as a contested concept (Connolly, 1985) that can be practised and defined in multiple ways (Guttmann and Thompson, 2004).

In fact, Turkey's experience with democracy has always been contradictory. As Barnet and Low (2005: 15) point out, "*who* should participate, *how* this participation is going to be arranged, and *what* scope of actions are to be subjected to democratic oversight, have become more problematic." From this perspective, in the Turkish case, the division between the conservative classes and secular groups has always raised questions around democracy. This historical relationship between the religious-secular binary suggests that there has been an antagonistic space in Turkish democracy (Mouffe, 2005). In the Turkish case, democracy has always been

something in which the side holding power is blamed for its very debilitation. The goal of this chapter seeks to understand the role of democracy more fully than existing accounts of the Gezi Park protests allow for, since these accounts use a simple authoritarianism-democracy binary that maps on to protesters against Erdogan (Karayakali and Yaka; Musil, 2014; Ors, 2014; Tombus, 2013). Looking at the rhetoric, discourses and practices of both Erdogan and various protesters - leftists, Kemalists, Anticapitalist Muslims, liberals, Kurds - I show the contestability of democracy in understanding Gezi.

The chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section reviews theoretical debates over democracy and offers contestability as a way of understanding the concept of democracy. The second section focuses empirically on Gezi and evaluates how democracy was understood and practised by different groups during and after the protests.

## **6.2. The debates around democracy**

Democracy is a popular term and a 'contested concept' (Connolly, 1991 and Barnett and Low, 2005). There are many ways in which democracy is operationalised and defined. The contestability of democracy has led it to be expressed in several ways such as aggregative democracy, assembly democracy, direct democracy, representative democracy, deliberative democracy, radical democracy, and pluralist democracy. Among political theorists, democracy has been conceptualised in three competing models, namely: aggregative democracy, deliberative democracy and radical democracy.

The aggregative model (Joseph Schumpeter, Robert A. Dahl) envisages democracy in economic terms. For example, Joseph Schumpeter (2003: 250), an economist and political scientist, in his famous book, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, defines democracy as an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will." Schumpeter's democracy thesis has been developed by many scholars like William H. Riker and Robert A. Dahl. The aggregative model predominantly aims at the aggregation of individuals through elections. Accordingly, democratic participation

primarily relies on voting. Yet, the electoral process resembles the logic of the market: while politicians and their parties seem to be producers, the people act as consumers in an election process. Like producers, politicians devise their strategies and positions through the demands of voters, and voters, based on these campaigns, choose their representatives. In the aggregative model of democracy, preferences do not necessarily need to be justified when any decision is made since the focus is primarily on the outcomes rather than on the process itself. Aggregative democracy is criticised for maintaining existing hierarchical power relations in society. Also, the aggregative model reduces democracy to majority rule that overlooks the demands and wants of other groups (Gutman and Thompson, 2004).

Unlike the aggregative model, deliberative democracy is interested in ethical and moral concerns in decision-making. John Rawls's use of 'public reason' and Jürgen Habermas's 'popular sovereignty' are well-known concepts in regard to the contextualisation of deliberative democracy. For Rawls public reason is the main idea of democracy. Rawls uses public reason to address how the relationship between government and its citizens or between citizens should be through identifying basic moral and political values in a democratic society. Likewise, Habermas situated his thesis through developing the procedural model of popular sovereignty. For Habermas political legitimacy is based upon the constructive exchange between political order (formal) and the public sphere (informal). Thanks to deliberation between institutionalised and non- institutionalised spheres the weaknesses or strengths of each sphere come into sight in a democratic society.

Regardless of divergences between two concepts deliberative democracy highlights deliberation in making political decisions. Gutmann and Thompson (2004) found three key features of deliberative democracy. The first is that in a democracy, decisions need to be justified by the people or their representatives. Deliberative democracy affirms the need for a rational debate between various perspectives. Rational debate means that citizens exchange their ideas and viewpoints and eventually reach a consensus. In this sense, deliberative democracy draws attention to mutual respect. The second characteristic of deliberative democracy is that the people are not thought as passive objects ruled through certain orders but rather as active and autonomous agents whose viewpoints are valued in the ruling. And thirdly, according

to deliberative democracy, decisions are prevalent for certain timescales. It means that decisions can be challenged and renewed at some point in the unspecified future. This feature of deliberation also makes the process of democracy more dynamic. In short, deliberative democracy is “as a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives) justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusion that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future.” (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004: 7).

The difficulties of establishing deliberative procedures is the main problem with the deliberative democracy model. These procedural conditions involve communicative competence, reciprocity and inclusiveness. That means citizens must have a “willingness to be persuaded, to have one’s pre-formed preferences transformed in the face of a better argument, and thus to set aside strategic concerns and behaviour in the pursuit of those preferences.” (Parkinson, 2003: 180-1). Therefore, such procedural processes raise the question of scale i.e. who will take a role in the process of deliberative democracy. Although deliberative theories assume different viewpoints are articulated in the political arena, at the same time their pre-formed preferences, interests and goals must meet the minimal procedural conditions that lead to some of the interests to be excluded from the process in the first place. For example, a religious fundamentalist is expected to be tolerant of plural truths when he/she enters into a public debate. Therefore, some people might consider deliberative democracy as procedurally unfair and illegitimate (Parkinson, 2003). Moreover, as Springer (2011: 530) points out deliberative democracy “reinforces the hegemony of the existing economic order by forestalling our ability to articulate political alternatives” instead of opening political spaces for those who are excluded by the system. Thus, as Springer (2011) emphasises, deliberative democracy may be considered anti-political. In addition, since reaching a consensus is the most significant feature of deliberative democracy, it aims to efface dissent and conflict in society. However as Mouffe (2005) asserts, conflict can be instructive in democratic processes.

Radical democracy challenges the oppressive power relations that exist in societies and advocates equal participations by the people (demos) in power. In their influential book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*,

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) articulated radical democracy through post-Marxist perspectives. They attempt to demonstrate that radical democracy can be plural and compatible with individuals' freedoms. Their earlier concept was expanded in several works that were written by the authors either together or separately. In particular, Mouffe's works broadly extend radical formulation of democracy. Mouffe criticises both aggregative democracy and deliberative democracy, as these prevail in the literature and practice. For her (2005 and 2009) both models fail to grasp the dynamics of antagonism. On the contrary, Mouffe insists on the importance of antagonism in the democratic process. Instead of elimination of antagonism from the political, she believes antagonism has to be sublimated and transformed into an agonism that she calls the 'agonistic model of democracy'.

Mouffe's (2005) thesis is based on the ways in which an 'us' and 'them' division is constructed. To advance her concept, she applies Carl Schmitt's (1985) friend/enemy distinction. For Schmitt, the friend/enemy division is indispensable in politics. He states that "the political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of friend-enemy grouping" (1985: 29). Similarly, Mouffe also thinks that since conflict always exists in society, antagonism cannot be thought as effaceable. What distinguishes her formulation from Schmitt is that Schmitt believes in the impossibility of a plural democracy because he thinks plural democracy destroys political association. Mouffe strongly supports plural agonism. In other words, although Mouffe values friend/enemy divisions in the formation of the political, she also believes that antagonism can be transformed into agonism, which makes her conceptualisation distinctive.

In her book, *On the Political*, Mouffe distinguishes the political from politics. The former refers to the dimension of antagonism, and the latter refers to the set of practices and institutions in which conflict is regulated through order. She argues that democracy inherently requires antagonism and conflict and so the political is "linked to the existence of a dimension of hostility in human societies, hostility which can take many forms and manifests itself in very diverse types of social relations." (2009: 6). She believes that all political identities include a 'we' and 'they' discrimination, and thus "[e]very order is political and based on some forms of exclusion." (2005: 22).

That means that elimination of antagonism from the political is never possible. This exclusion also means that to believe antagonism can ever be extinguished from society is only an illusion. She asserts that antagonism is an ever-present possibility; there are always possibilities that can be suppressed and need to be resurrected.

From the liberal perspective pluralism is 'recognition' of different and multiple views but Mouffe believes that without antagonism pluralism is not possible. This is because acknowledging different views, values, and interests does not necessarily mean embracing all these differences. She asserts that a 'harmonious ensemble' of different and multiple views cannot be possible. One view always negates another. Therefore instead of composing a 'harmonious ensemble', the fact of antagonism or conflict between different ideas should be accepted. In this sense, her position is very different from what Habermas and Rawls proposed. Rawls's formulation of 'social contract' and Habermas's 'public sphere' are ground in a discourse of morality that Mouffe rejects. Mouffe (2009: 4) states that these scholars perceive "the nature of the political as akin to morality, understood in rationalistic and universalistic terms" and such thinking pushes us to conceive political in terms of right or wrong in a moralistic way, rather than conceiving the struggle between the left and right. She believes that if the dimension of antagonism is expunged from politics, the political can be displaced by the judicial and moral. This produces anti-democratic practices and violence rather than pluralist democracy.

Mouffe (and Laclau's) thesis also requires a number of preconditions to occur. To transform antagonism into agonism requires a reconstitution of a new left identity. However, Laclau and Mouffe's concept raises some problems over the question of how to deal with everyday politics. As Barnett and Low (2005) point out, although Laclau and Mouffe claim radical democracy offers a new understanding of political actions, it overlooks ordinary politics. Barnett and Low argue that in Laclau and Mouffe's formulation, "the ordinariness and banality of ordinary politics is transcended by the promise of a more heroic variety of political transformation rooted in an image of liberating a properly unconstrained creativity unjustly contained by the limits of state, capital or bureaucracy (2005: 6). Thus Laclau and Mouffe's formulation of radical democracy appears similar to a type of 'idealistic superliberalism'. In addition, the radical democracy concept, through its

acknowledgement of egalitarianism and equality, is based on the triumphs of liberal political culture that Laclau and Moffue are reluctant to acknowledge.

The above discussion shows that there is not one way to identify democracy. It also reveals that there is no solid ground for the democracy theories in defining democracy - democracy is an essentially contested concept. Yet, all democracy concepts tend to define democracy according to the weaknesses and strengths of liberal democracy. Consequently, Barnett and Low (2005) argue it is important to engage with the aspects of liberal thought that are understood as egalitarian, democratic and liberal in respect to defining democracy. In short, they think that liberalism needs to be rehabilitated, and terms such as 'liberty', 'rights' and 'representation' need to be critically reshaped. They believe the term radical democracy should be redeemed from the politics of identity to become an alternative forms of liberalism- i.e. participatory democracy. These liberal terms – equality, liberty, and rights - are also crucial in understanding the Gezi protesters' demand for more participatory democracy.

Liberal political theories often conceptualise pluralism in regard to universal norms and democracy is always thought to be inherently Western (Barnett and Low, 2005). However, Barnett and Low assert, that democracy has historically had many trajectories; in particular, the postcolonial critique of democracy suggests that democracy is a product of unexpected combinations, impulses from both national and international pressures. They suggest that since the twentieth-century democracy has become hybrid, which has led to new inventions in democratic theory. Consequently, they argue that democracy is “a necessarily plural form, one that moves through processes of translation and that different variants are related according to different degrees of family resemblance.” (p. 13) Envisaging democracy through such a plural form then causes us to think of the geographical significance of democracy. In other words, democratic practices are mobile and the different aspects of democratic rule can be modified, combined and re-organised in different places. The ways in which democratic values are performed can change between different geographies. Consequently, democracy can be defined as “a political form that enables action that is characterised by being decisive without being certain, and is, therefore, open to contestation and revision.” (2005: 19).

Barnett and Low's work on the hybridisation of democracy is insightful. Thinking of democracy as having plural identities helps us to grasp how the values of democracy are enacted in different contexts. This approach also helps us to understand the ways in which democracy was deployed in the Gezi Park protests. The paths that Turkey has followed in regard to democratisation are different to those in Western countries. Moreover, regardless of which type it is – radical democracy or deliberative democracy - democracy theories have been contextualised through the experiences of Western countries. Therefore, it is difficult to use a single concept in order to situate democracy in the Turkish context. Since the establishment of the Republic, Turkey has always been an authoritarian state, but at the same time, was also considered a democratic state. Depending on the ideological view, democracy can be envisaged in many ways in Turkey.

The next section in this chapter looks at conflicting ideas about democracy with regards to the Gezi protests. Turkey's experience with democracy shows that in each era a different 'us' and 'them' has been constructed. While Gezi activists claimed to be the people from the 'other 50 per cent', Erdogan also insisted on demonstrating that his 50 per cent represents the people (demos). This raises the question of how 'the people' can be defined. By challenging Kemalist hegemony, the AKP has constructed new types of relationships between civil society and politics. Although Turkish society has always been fragmented, this division has become more apparent during the AKP governance. Under the leadership of Erdogan, the AKP has given a collective identity to conservative classes. The construction of such an identity has occurred through giving more rights to these classes while not considering other groups. From this perspective this chapter asks how we can understand the antagonistic relationship between the AKP and Gezi activism. Examining thoroughly both sides' approaches towards democracy, the chapter underscores the contestation of democracy and argues that it is almost impossible to find a political consensus between the sides. Instead of offering a model for Turkish democracy the chapter evaluates how antagonistic relation between different groups can be understood. In this sense, it agrees with Mouffe's conceptualisation at some level, in that Mouffe insists on recognising political antagonism in the democratic process and the impossibility of reaching a consensus. Her concept explicitly allows a multitude of views to express their ideas in the political arena, which provides democratic channels

for conflicting alternatives. However, Mouffe's critique fails to grasp Turkey's experience with democracy in two ways. First of all, its critiques focus on advanced liberal democracies, and it is hard to consider Turkey an advanced liberal country. While advanced liberal democracy enlarges the public sphere through promoting equality, liberty and rights, in Turkey, strict Kemalist rules undermined plurality in the public sphere. Although the AKP opened up the public sphere, traditional strong state rules continued to impact on civic rights and equality. Therefore, dissent was not totally eliminated but it was also not tolerated. Secondly, she fails to address everyday politics. Thus, rather than fully accepting Mouffe's thesis on radical democracy I embrace primarily her concept of antagonism in order to understand the conflictual relationship between the Gezi protesters and AKP government.

### **6.3. Democracy in the context of the Gezi Protests**

This section examines the ways in which different groups – Erdogan and Gezi activism - project democracy. Erdogan's understanding of democracy is based on majoritarianism and populism. As a result of his populist politics one group, the conservative masses, has gained recognition, while, other groups feel excluded in the public sphere. Through a historical context this section traces the reasons why the Turkish state seems to be strong and authoritarian. Then, using the practices of Gezi – public forums and the reactions for negotiation - it asks how inclusive and democratic Gezi activism was, and gives a sense of conflicting ideas in the public sphere. Lastly the section discusses the obstacles to transforming the antagonistic relationship into agonism.

#### **6.3.1. Erdogan's involvement in the protests**

There is no doubt that Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the single most powerful man in Turkey since Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (Cornell, 2014; Yavuz 2009; Damar, 2013). As a charismatic and popular leader, Erdogan himself was the most repeated theme in the newspapers reporting the events surrounding Gezi Park. Although I never asked any questions specifically about Erdogan in interviews, response to the questions about the state and government were linked with Erdogan. He was the target of criticism, given voice in the 'resign Erdogan' chant (Hareetz, 1 June 2013). He in turn rigorously targeted the protesters. In this section I will show why and how Erdogan

was involved with the protest and the ways in which he depicted himself as a guardian of Turkish democracy in the context of majoritarianism and populism (Laclau 2005; Panizza 2005).

Ernesto Laclau (2005) in his influential book on *Populist Reason*, analyses populism through a symptomatic reading. He looks at several cases from South America to France and situates his conceptualisation through a post-Gramscian theory of hegemony. Populism for Laclau is a “way of constructing the political.” (2005: xi). In other words, Laclau does not see populism as an established social or political movement, but rather a political logic. He conceptualises populism through the construction of the people (populus) and the discursive productiveness of emptiness. In this sense, for Laclau, populism needs firstly the formation of ‘the social logic of difference’, which is articulated through heterogenic demands. These demands come from plebs who were initially left out of power. Secondly, accumulation of these demands leads to a populist power grab, which presents itself as the will of the people. In this way populism constructs ‘the logic of equivalence’ in which demands are articulated through equivalential relation with other demands. Therefore, the process of the constitution of popular identity requires a division of society into two camps. An antagonistic division arises between two camps. While one part claims to represent the whole, the other popular part constitutes its identity through the equivalence of a plurality of social demands. This presents a populist discourse to be articulated through championing of the excluded plebs. In this discourse, articulations of plebs are used to mean the populus. Eventually, a leadership here appears as representing the various demands of ‘the chain of equivalences’ with embedded governing elites and the way they define people. That is to say, the unity of the group is identified under the name of leader. Thus, populist discourse actually represents some people but it is articulated and practiced as representing the entire populus.

Yavuz (2009) defines Turkish political parties as a ‘graveyard’ in which the leaders of political parties remain in their positions until their deaths. For Yavuz, it is precisely for this reason that Turkish political culture is based on a personal-centric system. One could argue this tradition is a legacy of the Ottoman Empire or the new Republic; yet, it is the case that in Turkish politics, political leaders are more valued than their parties and party programmes. Yavuz rightly warns that “[l]eaders are likely to be

turned into a Sultan, and they govern their own parties as their own domain.” (2009: 121).

From this perspective, it is important to focus more closely on Erdogan and his speeches during the Gezi protests and how he perceived the protests and was perceived by people and media. Erdogan was born in Rize, a Black Sea city, but moved to Istanbul when he was 12 years old and grew up in Kasimpasa, a neglected neighbourhood, populated by a mixed population of labourers, gypsies, and immigrants from the different parts of Anatolia. He was educated at an Imam Hatip School, which provides training for religion as well as science. He was interested in literature and football, which would affect his later career. When he was only 15 years old he began his political activism by joining the National Turkish Student Union, an Islamic-Turkish organisation against the Kemalist ideology. This organisation helped him to expand his circle through politics and after obtaining a BA degree in Economics and Commerce at Marmara University in Istanbul he worked for the Istanbul public transport authority. Later he joined Necmettin Erbakan’s National Salvation Party (MSP) as the head of the party's youth branch in Istanbul. He became the president of the Beyoglu branch of the Welfare Party in 1984, and although he was nominated as Beyoglu’s mayor in 1989, he did not win the election. However, his subsequent successful campaign led to him becoming the mayor of Istanbul through a significant victory in 1994. He was voted for by millions of people (25% of the votes) because he was seen as ‘one of the people’, as a result of his experience of poverty. During his mayorship, he was not only engaging with Istanbulites but he also visited different parts of Turkey and gave emotional speeches that created a bond with the people (Yavuz, 2009). In one of his speeches in the Siirt district, he read an emotional poem from a religious Turkish poet, Necip Fazil Kısakurek<sup>33</sup> that led to his imprisonment for four months between March and July 1998. Although he was banned from politics, he established and led the reformist cadre of Welfare Party the AKP in 2001. In the first national election in November 2002, the AKP gained a

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<sup>33</sup> Since the poem had religious sentiments, the court charged Erdogan with ‘inciting religious hatreds. The passage he read from the poem is as follows:  
“The mosques are our barracks  
The domes our helmets  
The minarets our bayonets  
And the faithful our soldiers”.

significant victory, and after 50 years of coalitions, established single party governance. While Erdogan could not be a member of parliament, a AKP proposal supported by the opposition CHP led to the removal of his political ban. After re-election in Siirt, he subsequently became a member of parliament and the Prime Minister in March 2003.

Erdogan is a pragmatic leader who makes effective contact with his base of supporters (Yavuz, 2009). His success is based on electoral victory. Since 2002 he has succeeded in both local and national elections; in every election, he has increased his share of the votes<sup>34</sup>. In doing so, his political language and political concepts are based on winning elections. For him, an election is the most important way to show political participation in a democratic country. For this reason, in his all speeches during the massive protests he reminded Turks of the importance of elections. In a statement on 6 of June 2013 he stated that

“As a government our every attempt, regardless of its concept, aim and goal is confronted with local reaction. I want to remind all 76 million people, every individual, that my glorious nation of Turkey is a country where the parliamentary system runs precisely to all its rules. Every four years, people go to a ballot box, and they make their decision. They give the right to govern the country to the political party they like, warn the one they don’t like and punish it by taking back their support. The principle of ‘authority, without any condition and reservation, belongs to the nation’ exactly appears in that way. Any other ways are antidemocratic, illegal and illegitimate... I don’t claim that the government which gets the majority of votes has unlimited authority, and it can do whatever it wants to do. Although the government gained the votes from the particular groups and individuals, it is the government of 76 million and it has to sensitively move forward... Just as the majority cannot oppress the minority, as the minority cannot oppress and enforce the majority.” (Haberturk, June 6, 2013)

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<sup>34</sup> For the national elections, in 2002 the AKP received about 35% of the votes, whereas this rate increased to 46% in 2007 and 49% in 2011, respectively. For the local elections, while the AKP got around 40% of the votes in 2004, after decreasing to 38.8% in 2009 this rate reached to 45.6% in 2014. In August 2014, Erdogan became the first president who was directly elected by the people. After his presidency the AKP’s votes decreased to 40.9% in the national election of June 2015; yet since a coalition government could not be formed, in November 2015 an early election took place in which the AKP achieved a victory with 49.5% of the votes.

Such sentiments were also found in his other speeches. Yet, valuing elections more than anything in the democratic process creates the problem of majoritarianism. Without a doubt, he has a majoritarian approach towards democracy. Such narrow understanding of democracy excludes certain groups and as a result dissenting voices cannot be heard and broader range of information is not taken into consideration.

Erdogan's majoritarian approach has been underpinned by antagonistic relations between different cultural classes in Turkey. He is the leader of the AKP<sup>35</sup> that represents one particular classes, conservative masses. Yavuz (2009) thinks it is neither the AKP nor any related movement that shapes the Turkish politics; rather it is the hegemony and domination of Erdogan that underpins domestic and foreign politics. As Panizza (2005) argues, populism is not only 'a crisis of representation' in which people replace their old identities with new popular ones, but rather it is 'the beginning of representation' in which people's identities gain representation that was never represented before because of their class, religion, and ethnicity. "Populist leaders appeal to both the never- enfranchised and the newly disenfranchised, but there is no populist leadership unless there is a successful constitution of new identities and of a representative link with those identities." (2005: 11). Due to the strict secularism that was imposed by the new Republic, religious classes have always been under-represented in the political and public spheres.

Although, after entering a multiparty system, right-wing parties tended to win elections, the Kemalist institutions guarded the system through military coups that led to the construction of antagonistic relations between the secular and conservative classes. Such relations re-emerged when a democratically elected party, the Welfare Party, was forced to step down, which was called a postmodern coup. In a meeting of the National Security Council on 28 February 1997, the military leaders forced the Welfare Party's prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, to sign 'the directives', which are known as the 28 February directives, that were mainly about controlling religious activities in the public sphere. It was called postmodern coup because the military did not use bullets and tanks to take the power, but rather judges, the mass media, business organisations, trade unions and women's associations to support its activities

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<sup>35</sup> Although he became the president in August 2014, he still has been acting as the leader of AKP. It explicitly appeared when the former Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, was asked by Erdogan to step down in May 2016.

against the Islamic threat (Yavuz, 1999,2003).The postmodern coup of February 28th had a negative impact on conservative classes, including a ban on the political leaders of Welfare Party, a ban on headscarves in state-affiliated institutions, closure of Islamic schools, neglect of Muslim bourgeoisies and more. Through the AKP, the conservative classes gained representation after the repression. Their election has led to a conflictual relationship between the Kemalist regime and AKP, in particular during the early years after AKP took power. Not only has Erdogan taken advantage of such conflict, but it has also shaped his political language. For Erdogan, both he and his party represent ‘the real Turkey’ and for the people who vote for him, he is ‘a man’ from ‘us’ (Yavuz, 2009). In this state, he often applies division between ‘the people’ and its ‘other’ (Laclau 2005). Erdogan has established his base’s political identity as the ‘others’ of the Kemalist regime. As Mouffe asserts, in order to construct a frontier a ‘we’ and a ‘they’ must be constructed. In this sense, the relationship between Erdogan’s ‘we’ and Kemalist’s ‘they’ has to be antagonistic in order to construct a political identity. His ‘us’ and ‘them’ rhetoric was also well articulated in the Gezi protests and has become even more aggressive since the Gezi protests ended. For example, in contrast to the CHP’s explicit support of Gezi protests, Erdogan said “if making a rally is the case, if he [Kilicdaroglu, the leader of CHP] gathers 20 people, I can gather 200 thousand, if he gathers 100 thousand, then I can gather 1 million. We don’t really care, but they shouldn’t let us reach that point.” (Hurriyet, 1 June 2013)

He compared his support to the Gezi protesters not only in numerical terms but also in terms of cultural, social and economic differences. First, he called the protesters ‘a few looters’ (*capulcu* in Turkish), and then when the protests spread nationwide, he blamed the main opposition party – the CHP - extreme leftists, international organisations, and media. He effectively manipulated the feelings of different classes. For example, he repeatedly mentioned in his all speeches that the protesters drunk alcohol in a mosque in Dolmabahce neighbourhood<sup>36</sup>, although the imam of the mosque denied it, and referred to the harassment of a woman who claimed she was

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<sup>36</sup> In first three days of the uprising the protesters clashed with the security forces in Dolmabahce, a district in European side of Istanbul. While the protesters targeted the office of Erdogan in Dolmabahce, the security forces used teargas to dispel the protesters. In order to flee from teargas the protesters took cover in the mosque.

assaulted by the protesters in Dolmabahce. Erdogan conceived of the resistance as against him and the conservative classes he represented. He tried to consolidate his base by reminding his supporters of the rights they had gained under his governance. In one of his 'Respect to National Will' rallies, he mentioned the violence of the Gezi protesters. Saluting the millions of people he had gathered, he called on the international media - CNN, BBC, and Reuters - to show the world what he believed was the real Turkey, not the scenes from Gezi that he described as chaotic and misleading. He even went further to claim Gezi was a theatre that was organised by national and international forces.

“We resisted patiently in our prayer. We resisted by considering the saying ‘Let us see what the Lord does, whatever He does, He does it well’, but they can’t understand it. We overcame the darkness of the 27 May with such resistance. We also overcame the darkness of 12 September and 27 April<sup>37</sup>. We never went to the streets as they did. We never took stones and Molotov cocktails to our hands... We never banged pans and drums to disturb our neighbours until midnight.” (Hurriyet, 15 June 2013)

It is clearly apparent that Erdogan divides values between himself, his base and the Gezi supporters. His stance has augmented the polarisation that already existed in society. As Laclau shows, the construction of populism depends on how the people are understood. In order to define the people in terms of populism, people must be divided into ‘populus’ and ‘plebs’ and plebs claim to be as equal as populus (Laclau, 2005). In this sense, the people Erdogan represents are those have been oppressed but finally gained rights and became equals with the old elites. It can be argued that Erdogan’s political position led new subjectivities to appear in the public realm. In other words, thanks to Erdogan’s populism religious identities have become equal to secular identities. However, one thing he forgets is that he has been in power for more than a decade. His divisive language worked well when he and his party confronted the elitist Kemalist establishments. Kemalism had failed to unify the people. Yet Erdogan’s exclusionist majoritarian politics are failing to offer alternatives too.

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<sup>37</sup> By these dates he refers to the military involvement in Turkish politics. While on 27 May 1960 the military coup happened against the Democrat Party, 28 February refers to the postmodern military coup in 1997 and to the 27 April e- memorandum which was staged by the chief of general staff against the AKP in 2007.

Ultimately, it appears that Erdogan's understanding of democracy aimed to (re)catalyse the the dichotomy of Kemalism during the Gezi protests. His rhetoric generated important support from his base and he continued to increase his share of vote in national elections. While Erdogan depicted himself as the 'guardian of democracy' the next sub-section examines how he was perceived in the media.

### ***6.2.2.1 Erdogan's representation in media***

It is difficult to remove Erdogan from the picture in terms of interpreting Gezi. Both the international media and the Turkish media covered Erdogan and his personality extensively in both opinion and editorial pages. They associated the rise of the authoritarian state with Erdogan. For example, an article in Haaretz stated that "The unrest reflects growing disquiet at the authoritarianism of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP)." (Haaretz, 31 May 2013). Almost all the articles the international media at least once emphasised authoritarianism and depicted Erdogan as an authoritarian leader. Accordingly, Erdogan was no longer depicted as a democratically-elected leader, despite once being cited as a role model for Arab countries. An article in the New York Times on 1 June 2013 compared the scenes from Gezi with the street chaos of Egypt's revolution. The widening chaos here and the images it produced to tarnish Turkey's image, which Mr Erdogan has carefully cultivated, as a regional power broker with the ability to shape the outcome of the Arab Spring revolutions by presenting itself as a model for the melding of Islam and democracy," After Gezi, he was even compared to the tyrants of the Middle East, such as Syria's Bashar Assad, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, and Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, and he was charged with moving away from democracy. In an article in the Guardian, the reaction of Erdogan to his people was compared with that of Hosni Mubarak. "There is a bitter irony to events in Turkey. The man who told the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak before his fall that "no government can survive against the will of its people" dismissed his own civil movement as looters, riffraff and foreign agents." (the Guardian, 11 June 2013). Likewise, an article in Haaretz on 1 June 2013 entitled "In the eyes of the youth in Istanbul, Erdogan is Turkey's Mubarak" was dedicated to finding similarities between Erdogan and Hosni Mubarak, Muammar Gadhafi and Bashar Assad. According to the

article, Erdogan's counterparts were the dictators from the Arab world and the pictures from Taksim square resembled the Arab Spring.

“Even if he was correct in some of those cases, he has found himself over the weekend in exactly the same position as his counterparts throughout the Arab world. His reaction to the demonstrations on the streets of Istanbul was no different than Mubarak's, and shows just how distorted Erdogan's perception of democracy really is.”

Terms such as Rambo of Kasimpasa<sup>38</sup> (Der Spiegel, 18 June 2013), totalitarian (Guardian, 15 June 2013), sultan (Der Spiegel, 6 June 2013; Haaretz, 1 June, 2013 and 5 June 2013; the New York Times, 31 May 2013), tyrant, dictator, and despot (Der Spiegel, 5 June 2013 and 17 June 2013; the New York Times, 1 June 2013 and Haaretz, 1 May 2014) were used explicitly to define Erdogan either by the commentators or by the protesters who drew on the names in newspapers articles. For example, in an opinion page in Der Spiegel it was stated “[w]ould Erdogan, the despot of the past two weeks, transform himself into a mediator? Since Sunday night at the latest, the answer has been a resounding no.” (Popp and Schmitt, 17 June 2013). By the same token, an article in the New York Times indicated that

“[t]he demonstrations began over a plan to tear out the last green space in the centre of the city, Gezi Park in Taksim Square, and to replace it with a mall designed like an Ottoman-era barracks. Mr. Erdogan, who once advised the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, to negotiate and compromise, sent out the police to clear the park.” (the New York Times, 11 June 2013).

Erdogan was often depicted as an Ottoman sultan. Although he was compared with Ataturk in terms of one of Turkey's most powerful leaders, his approach to ruling the country was perceived as being in the Ottoman style. In an opinion page titled “Democrat or Sultan?” the Economist dedicated an entire page to discussing Erdogan

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<sup>38</sup> Rambo is a film character who is known as violent and aggressive to his rivals, played by Sylvester Stallone in several films. According to Cambridge dictionary, Rambo refers to “someone who uses, or threatens to use, strong and violent methods against their enemies.” For the author Erdogan was a man from Kasimpasa, a neglected neighbourhood, who had to learn aggressiveness against the Kemalist elites who looked down on him.

in detail. On the front cover, Erdogan is portrayed in an Ottoman sultan's kaftan with a quilted turban, holding prayer beads with one hand and a gas mask with the other hand. Perhaps ironically, the Ottoman sultan on whom this image is based is known as one of the first reformist sultans, Selim III, who took a Europeanisation approach, initiated many legal and military reforms and sent many young Turks to Europe for training. The article starts by comparing Taksim Square with Tahrir in Egypt;

“Broken heads, tear gas, water-cannon: it must be Cairo, Tripoli or some other capital of a brutal dictatorship. Yet this is not Tahrir but Taksim Square, in Istanbul, Europe's biggest city and the business capital of democratic Turkey. The protests are a sign of rising dissatisfaction with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's most important leader since Ataturk.”

The article went on to consider whether Erdogan's authoritarian attitude was related to his religious background, or whether Erdogan uses authoritarianism in the same way it was used during the Ottoman Empire. With a subtitle “Ottomans are to be sat on, nowadays” the article draws attention to the pluralistic democracy that was established by ordinary people and argues that Erdogan has single handedly destroyed this pluralism

“For two reasons Mr Erdogan must abandon these ideas and prepare to pass leadership of AKP, and executive power, to the more statesmanlike Mr Gul at the next election. One is that many Turks are tiring of him... If Mr Erdogan stays, he may find his country increasingly ungovernable. He also needs to preserve his achievements, which are already fragile and are at risk of unravelling.”

However, the international media also referred to Erdogan's popularity with his base, usually in a way that compared them negatively to the protesters. For example, an article in Guardian asserted: “Erdogan still has great support among Turkey's religious masses, but the secular...” Similarly, in an article in Haaretz it was mentioned, “Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan is driving wedge through his country. While one half reveres him as a saviour, the other reviles him as a dictator.” (6 June 2013). The analyses also suggested that although he had a strong consolidated base, it was at risk. The Gulen movement was used to illustrate Erdogan's support weakening.

“But there is a danger, analysts say, because even with a strong majority as his base, he is vulnerable if the crisis drags on. Several columnists for Zaman, a pro-Islamist newspaper linked to Fethullah Gulen, an important spiritual leader in Turkey who is exiled in the United States, have become critical of Mr. Erdogan’s intimidation of the news media and his pursuit of a powerful presidential system.” (the New York Times, 11 June 2013).

Turkish newspapers also focused on Erdogan, but depicted him in different ways. Soczu and Cumhuriyet targeted Erdogan through the use of the terms ‘oppressor’ ‘sultan’, or ‘dictator’ . At the same time, he was portrayed as a coward who is scared of the power of the people. For example, in an opinion page, Emin Colasan stated, “he saw that he was about to go, and he panicked... He is provoking the angry masses. He is trying to divide the society from sacred values. All his speeches disperse hatred.” (15 June 2013). In particular, almost every day the Soczu newspaper headlined Erdogan on the cover page using only his first name, which is considered disrespectful in Turkish culture. Three examples are: “Well done! Tayyip, you taught children how to scream” (1 May 2014), “Tayyip spoke, and he stirred up trouble” (15 June 2013) and “Tayyip’s advanced democracy is indeed a police state” (1 June 2014). Moreover, both newspapers question the legitimacy of Erdogan. For these newspapers an oppressive leader cannot have legitimate power and so his power should be destroyed. An opinion page in Cumhuriyet contended:

“You [Erdogan] say they carry out a civilian coup against a legitimate government. Wait for the ballot box. You know, there were legitimate governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya too. You already joined the operation to tackle Qaddafi. In short, the problem is not whether a legitimate person is in power or not. Rather, the problem is losing legitimation in power.” (16 June 2013)

In contrast, Sabah took a pro-Erdogan position and compared the Gezi resistance to the historic February 28th coup, after which Erdogan developed the country. Mehmet Barlas, in an opinion page, talked about how Erdogan has changed the country and taken it in a more democratic direction. “Whenever they talk about Erdogan, I just remember the time when he was told he could not even be a headman. Erdogan in the last ten years has done more right things than them and brought Turkey into a new

era.” Haberturk and Hurriyet took a more neutral position than the other papers. Erdogan and his paternalist rhetoric were criticised while his steps towards democracy were acknowledged.

In conclusion, Erdogan is represented differently. While the international media’s depiction of Erdogan is monotone, in the Turkish media it is more colourful. Whatever the differences, one thing both the international and national mediated in common was positioning Erdogan as the main protagonist of the event. As Erdogan is the most popular leader in contemporary Turkish politics after Ataturk, he harshly criticised the protesters and received criticism not only from the protesters but also from national and international media. The bigger issue is that the Turkish democratic system gives extraordinary power to those who rule the country, as power is vertically accumulated (big state vs. small civil society). The next section looks at how the concept of “authoritarianism” can be placed in Turkey’s history of democracy.

### **6.3.2. Why is the Turkish state ‘strong’?**

After the AKP came to power, many believed that Turkey would eventually become a fully democratic country through its ability to connect wider segments of society with each other and distribute more power to the civil sphere (Taspinar, 2009; Yavuz, 2003,2009; Gole, 2010). Defining itself as a ‘conservative democrat party’ the AKP gained popularity from provincial merchants, small and medium scale business people, and religious and liberal intellectuals, as well as big businesses and the urban poor. Not only was the AKP associated with progressive democratic movements that derived from the 1950s Democrat Party and 1980s Motherland Party, but also it pursued a policy of developing closer relations with the European Union. Yet, being in power for more than a decade has turned the AKP into a party of the Kemalist system. In this section, I argue that the Turkish state is historically strong since the new Republic aspired to control all areas of the public sphere. Therefore, it was not difficult to predict that the AKP’s earlier reformist and decentralisation tendencies would be replaced by recentralisation.

Since the AKP came to power there have been a number of phases in which power has been exercised differently. In the first ruling phase, between 2002 and 2007, the party confronted the Kemalist military and bureaucracy- the president and judiciary.

In order to preserve national and international legitimacy the AKP had to compromise with the Kemalist establishment. While the Kemalist establishment sought to protect the principles of the Republic through exclusionary politics, the AKP used different tools not only to democratise the country but also to maintain its existence. Pursuing the goal of membership of the European Union to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, and particularly the legal obligations of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, appeared to have rescued the AKP. The Copenhagen criteria entailed “the insertion of the language of rights in the republican model of citizenship” and “granting rights to minorities and ethnic identities.” (Keyman and Icduygu, 2003: 12). In order to oppose the rigid Kemalist regime, pragmatically the AKP made laws to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria. For the AKP, the European Union was a tool to improve human rights and at the same time to preserve Islamic culture and lifestyles.

While the AKP portrayed itself as civilian, pro-democracy and representing the periphery and ‘the people’, the Kemalist establishment was presented by the AKP as elite, centre and authoritarian (Yavuz, 2009 and Tombus, 2013). Yet, the AKP had to retreat in terms of giving extensive religious rights to its base. For example, although the AKP introduced a bill that lifted the restriction on religious schools in 2004, because of the pressure from secularist elites, the AKP had to retract the bill, and delayed repealing the headscarf ban<sup>39</sup>. As the Kemalist guardians, such as the military and judiciary, strongly advocated the rendition of the secular character of the Turkish state, the AKP did not want to be closed down as in the case of the previous Islamic parties. Therefore, the AKP authorities<sup>40</sup> always claimed that their privileged agenda was not removing the headscarf ban or solving the problem of religious schools. It could be argued that as a representative of the conservative masses, the first phase of AKP rule focused on the struggle of being accepted as a valid political power by the old regime.

When the AKP achieved its second electoral victory in the early election of 2007 it reinforced its authority over the state through changing the leadership of embedded

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<sup>39</sup>While the headscarf ban was removed for only university students in 2008, in public institutions it was only partly removed in 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Erdogan played an important role in convincing his supporters that their rights would be gradually recognised by repeatedly declaring, “We will stand upright but we won’t get stubborn” (Bekaroglu, 2015).

Kemalist institutions. In this regard, the presidential election was crucial. The candidacy of Abdullah Gul for the presidency of Turkey, who was chosen by the AKP in parliament, was prohibited by a coalition of the military, the Constitutional Court, the Republican People's Party and many secularist civil organisations. The AKP called an early election and, after a great election victory in July 2007, Abdullah Gul was re-elected in the parliament. While the previous president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a laicistic bureaucrat had vetoed the bills that were sent from the parliament, the new president Gul supported the AKP. This allowed the legislative and executive powers to pull together.

Moreover, the AKP cooperated with the Gulen movement<sup>41</sup> to weaken and eliminate the Kemalist forces from powerful positions such as in the bureaucracy, military and top educational fields. Many military personnel, ultra-nationalists, political activists and crime bosses, who wished to preserve the Kemalist state, were accused by the Gulenist prosecutors of planning a coup attempt against the AKP government through two major lawsuits: Ergenekon and Balyoz. By the time of the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, the Kemalist authorities and bureaucracy had been weakened in the political sphere, which was seen as an achievement by civilians over military tutelage<sup>42</sup> (Tombus, 2013). Yet, both trials were controversial as many military officers, journalists, opposition lawmakers were accused of plotting a coup against the government. Both cases resulted in prison sentences for the suspects, including life imprisonment for the high-ranking members of the military. However, later it was revealed that in order to dominate in the state institutions, the trials were staged and manipulated by the prosecutors and judges who were affiliated with the Gulen movement. Therefore, all the suspects of Ergenekon and Balyoz cases were released in 2014. As Yavuz (2009) argues, the AKP did not have a clear ideological agenda to replace the Kemalist ideology. Unlike Kemalist hegemonic politics, that aimed at creating monolithic national identity the AKP relied on a more multicultural perception of society. For example, right before the Gezi event in March 2013, the

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<sup>41</sup> Since the AKP lacked Human Resources in bureaucracy, the cooperation was seen as practical for both sides.

<sup>42</sup> As the military tutelage was reduced, the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 might contradict it. Under the AKP governance the military's interference in politics has come to an end. Moreover, the coup attempt of July 15 did not come from the command centre of military; as the soldiers who were affiliated with Gulen movement were allegedly the driving force behind the coup plot.

AKP initiated a peace process<sup>43</sup> with the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan.

Nevertheless, the state apparatus of the Turkish Republican regime underpins a vertical concentration of power, which led the AKP to use this apparatus to protect and preserve its own interests. In particular, after a constitutional referendum in 2010, the judicial system underwent a massive change. While the old Kemalist bureaucracy was replaced by pro-Gülen ones, centralisation was reinforced. Once military tutelage was dissolved, the AKP could not establish a fully democratic system because the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases were unresolved. Senior commanders, journalists, academics and bueracrats who were hostile to the Gulen movement were arrested. Thus, the AKP no longer had a polemical dialogue with the Kemalist institutions; rather its conflictual relations with opponents entered the public realm. When the state institutions were controlled by the guardians of Kemalist state, the Kemalist elites were protected. The military, bueracracy and judiciary worked together to subdue religion and religious classes. After these Kemalist establishments were taken over by the Gulen movement and AKP, the Kemalist elites had no one to represent them. Moreover, the main opposition party, the CHP was seen as the last hope of representation for the old state authority. Due to ineffective opposition, the CHP led the base of the party to feel unrepresented in the political sphere (Ete, 2013; Atay, 2013). Thus, dissenting voices became more visible in the public sphere.

The newspapers I reviewed, and interviews I carried out did not critique the system itself in detail. Instead, their criticism was focused more on the fear of Islamisation and Erdogan's paternalist language. There were a few interviewees who were critical of the Kemalist regime as well as of the AKP. Necdet, a member of a leftist party, believes there is a huge difference between the AKP's earlier politics and that of recent years. He asserts that the reason why the AKP gained collective support was because of its 'victimised' background. For this reason, he thinks that not only

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<sup>43</sup> The 1990s witnessed violence between the state and Kurdish rebel groups. The ethnic, cultural, and linguistic demands of the Kurdish people were perceived as a threat to the Turkish Republic. During the rise of the AKP many rights were recognised by the state that ended up with the peace process in March 2013. Yet, the Kurdish peace process broke down in 2015 due to national and international changes – the Syria problem, the rise of violence in the city spaces in the Southeast region and so on (see also Akturk, 2016).

religious groups, but also the left, intellectuals, and liberals supported the AKP against the old regime, which was represented by the CHP in the political arena.

“But there is another period in which the AKP started to protect its power once it had controlled the old regime, which made it an oppressor. Once you start to worry about your power, you take actions against all the threats that shake your power. This is Kemalism too. This is also an “-ism” movement which is more or less similar to Kemalism, which controlled power for almost a century. It is the thing that drove the AKP into a corner. So, it has become more authoritarian, and it has turned into a party, which hierarchically justified its authoritarian tendencies that have sparked debate and made fur fly... However, during this conflictual time, something was achieved. At least, some partial changes in the constitution and the stage we reached in the Kurdish problem. In media and society only chauvinists could find a place, but now the Kurdish issue is taken seriously. Everyone talks about Kurdish problem as it was supposed to be. Once, if you even said ‘Kurdish issue’ you were at risk of being imprisoned, yet now such terms can be used by everyone. These are all important for normalisation, but that doesn’t show that the AKP is on the true path. The AKP doesn’t advance its power through this [normalisation], rather it constructs its power through claiming more sovereignty over society.” (Necdet, April 16, 2014, Istiklal Street)

Although he believes that the AKP normalised the country in many ways, he opposes the AKP’s use of power. Likewise, Kenan, a member of the Anticapitalist Muslims, his critique focuses on the state rather than the AKP itself or its leader. He argues that it is the state that produces undemocratic practices, and believes the critique of the system is overlooked by secular groups.

“You know there are different types of democracy. There is not a democracy in which everyone has a right to speak, or production is shared equally. There is a democracy for only sovereigns, and you are involved according to how much they want you to be involved... Where there is power, there is also coercion because the state’s apparatus is in a particular group’s hand, and this group attacks everyone who is against them through such apparatus as in the case of Gezi. This is, of course, embodied in the secular segments too. Now,

they face the repression that once they used. They also must radically criticise the system. They have to consider secularism and self-criticise through the critique of Kemalism... They never had a dispute with Ataturk. The AKP supporters like them never made a system critique.” (Kenan, April 8, 2014, Findikzade).

Very few newspaper articles interpreted the event through the expostulation of the Turkish state. One exception is Edhem Eldem, a Turkish historian, who takes a historical approach in terms of comparing the rule of the AKP with its counterpart, the Kemalist regime. For him, there is no difference between both modes of governance.

“We should recall that Turkey was not a democracy until 1950; that it was ruled consecutively from 1923 to 1946 by two unchallenged leaders, Ataturk and Ismet Inonu, each invested with dictatorial powers; and that its democracy was “interrupted” three times by military coups or interventions, in 1960, 1971 and 1980, not to mention a failed one in 1997. Moreover, Turkish “secularism” often marginalized and oppressed those who openly displayed their beliefs; head-scarf-wearing women were banned from universities, and few protections were given to religious minorities... Turkey’s past has little to offer in terms of democratic inspiration. Ironically, there is hardly any difference between the nostalgia for Ataturk-era secularism and the A.K.P.’s glorification of the Ottoman imperial past. Both rest on the reinvention of an imagined golden age — the former with a secularist emphasis, and the latter with a focus on Islamic identity. And both look back fondly on authoritarian regimes, which makes them all the less credible as political models for a democratic present and future.” (New York Times, 16 June 2013).

While himself argues that the AKP successfully used democracy in their first term to fight military control, later it applied the same methods and strategies as that of its Kemalist counterpart. Edhem suggests the Gezi protests have a symbolic meaning that sheds light on the frustration of urbanites over the AKP’s monopoly on power.

In an article titled “Whose Turkey is it?” Suzy Hansen touches upon many issues around the Turkish political system regarding the local election in Turkey. She examines why a local park problem or local elections became matters for the national

government, especially the Prime Minister. Citing the opinion of a Turkish expert on the constitutional law, she writes that:

“Osman Can, a constitutional scholar who is on the A.K.P.’s executive committee, says Erdogan’s ability to act unilaterally is a byproduct of Turkey’s highly centralized political structure, in which all decisions are made in Ankara. “The governors are appointed by the central government, so they are not elected,” Can says. “The mayors are elected, but Ankara also controls the mayors. Generally the mayor would decide things in a city. But if the prime minister happened to be interested in a park, the mayor can’t resist him.” (the New York Times magazine, 5 February 2014).

It suggests that the strong structure of Turkish state disallows alternative ideas to be seen as constructive. What the AKP achieved is to open the public sphere to large segments of society that led to the voice of excluded people being heard. The AKP initiated a number of democratic reforms that aimed to cope with the problems of minorities, such as Kurdish, Romas, and Alawites. In order to facilitate the democratic process, the AKP enhanced equal-respect rights and basic freedoms (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). The AKP established a consensus-driven dialogical exchange between different groups and thus it enhanced the public sphere. However, as in the past, Turkish politics still is based on a top-down interventionist mentality. Power is centralised, and regardless of who holds power the problem with Turkish democracy is the strength of the central state. The strong state establishments leave little space for people to act locally. In this regard, conflict or dissent is seen as something to be eliminated by the state which then imposes an authoritarian order (Mouffe, 2005). As Mouffe (1999: 756) points out “[b]reaking with the symbolic representation of society as an organic body - which is characteristic of the holistic mode of social organization - a democratic society makes room for the expression of conflicting interests and values.” In Turkey, the bills on alcohol and abortion were passed into law through a top-down operation rather than opening them up for public debate. For both bills the AKP relied on its majority in the parliament. With a public consensus these bills may or may not have passed into law, yet the way the AKP pursued its goal was by imposing its will (or the will of its base) on the rest of the population. The next section discusses responses to this mode of governance,

specifically the ways in which the protesters sought democracy through their claims, discourses, strategies and practices.

### **6.3.3 Re-claiming democracy and Gezi protests**

As noted earlier in this chapter, Erdogan and his base portrayed the Gezi protests as anti-democratic. Whilst Gezi activists claimed that under the AKP government, Turkish democracy has worsened and asked for more participation in decision making processes. Yet, the voices of protesters were not singular but rather multiple, ranging from those who wanted more participation in decision-making, to those who were in support of the old regime and wanted to overthrow Erdogan and his party. Thus, this section maps out how democracy was envisaged by the Gezi protesters through their practices. To do that, the section is organised into two sub-sections. First, it will look at the role of Taksim Solidarity and other leftist groups in Gezi process and argue that these groups became obstacles for Gezi's representation. As a result, Gezi led to more state control and authoritarianism. Later, using evidence from public forums the section argues that the idea of public forums brought opportunities around decentralisation and participant democracy but questions how inclusive the public forums were.

#### ***6.3.3.1. The demands of Gezi activism and challenging with the state's authority***

Yayla (2013), Ete (2013) and Abbas and Yigit (2015) found three main groups who were involved in the protests. While the first group was made up of 'individuals' who have no party affiliation and went to the park in the first days, the second group was made up of members of the main opposition party, CHP, who never took to the streets, and the final group contained leftist groups who took to the streets after 31st May. As Yayla (2013) and Ete (2013) claim, analyses mostly focus on the youth who took to the street in the initial days and their practices in the park, rather than taking a broader look at approximately 2.5 million people who took to the streets across Turkey. In doing so, these analyses fail to address the evolution of the protests. Although the protest had no official representation, no leader or political party, Taksim Solidarity (TS) was the driving force. In this section, I will focus on the event and the demands delivered by TS, and argue that Gezi could have brought new subjectivities if the antagonistic relationship had not turned into violence and a deep polarisation.

TS was established by the Association of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) in 2012 right after the government unveiled the Taksim Pedestrianisation Project. Soon after several trade associations and unions including women's trade associations and Turkish medical associations, and political parties including the main opposition party, CHP, joined the organisation. When the protests spread across the country, the number of affiliates increased dramatically and incorporated 128 different organisations. Although TS consists of various groups, its secretariat was run by the Chamber of Urban Planners and Association of Architects and Engineers. Some trade unions, the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) and the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (KESK), played a significant role in mobilising masses. Despite its diverse composition, TS stands with a strong Kemalist-leftist tradition. From this reason the trade unions and organisations that carried out the process were established as semi-official structures by specific laws, and as a result, they represented state authority rather than civil society (Yayla, 2013). Moreover, the organisation did not disperse after the massive protest, but instead continued its political activities. While the initial aim of TS was to halt the Taksim Pedestrianisation plan, as time went by it turned into an organisation that campaigned against all the policies of the AKP.

Although the very heart of Istanbul- Taksim Square and Gezi Park - was occupied for two weeks, the protesters were dispersed by police on 11th and 16th June respectively. The protests gained recognition from the government when the Deputy Prime Minister, Bulent Arinc, invited the representatives of TS, mainly from the Chamber of Urban Planners and the Chamber of Architect, to a meeting on 5th June<sup>44</sup>. TS representatives articulated their demands, including cancelling the construction plan and the Ataturk Cultural Centre, dismissing the chiefs of police and governors who were responsible for police brutality, immediately releasing all the detainees who were involved in the protests, prohibiting the use of gas bombs and tear gas in any future protests in Turkey, removing all the bans on meetings and demonstrations in public places over the country, and opening Taksim and Kizilay (Ankara) Squares for demonstrations. In addition, other demands were made that were more broadly against all the policies of the AKP and not connected to the Gezi protests (Sabah, 6 June 2013). As one of the members of the Chamber of Urban Planner in Istanbul, who

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<sup>44</sup> When this meeting took place Prime Minister Erdogan was in Tunisia.

participated in the meeting, told me, there was no negotiation in the meeting. They just delivered their thoughts to the Deputy Minister and were told their demands would be considered.

Erdogan's attitude towards the protest was to divide Gezi activism into two segments; while he paid attention to the group he labelled 'environmentalist youth', he harshly criticised other aspects of protests. Therefore, his solution focused on the concern over the park and police brutality. In contrast, TS moved away from its initial aim –to save the park- and added more demands by the day. However, while TS's demands about the park were well articulated, it was not clear what they asked for otherwise. Such substantial differences made it difficult to reach a common ground. Having said that, the occupation in the heart of not only Istanbul, but also Turkey, took a long time and the main concern at that time was how and when to end the occupation. After two weeks of occupation the police removed the protesters from the square and let them stay in the park. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's harsh tone was 'softened' and he agreed to meet with the protesters. He organised two meetings with them in Ankara on June 12th and 13th and some other meetings with the artists who did not participate in the protests. The first meeting was with different individuals from the groups of protesters, and the second meeting was with the representatives of Taksim Solidarity, artists and journalists. The first meeting enabled individuals only to share their experiences and concerns over the Gezi protests. The first meeting laid the ground for the second, while the Prime Minister promised to do what was necessary with the security officers who used excessive force. At the second meeting, influential artists and journalists were intentionally chosen to help to end the protests. As a member of TS who participated in one of meetings told me, initially they wanted to attend the meeting as a TS group but their demand was refused by Erdogan, who wanted to invite only two representatives, alongside artists and journalists. However, on the meeting day, Erdogan arranged a special flight for the TS group and eventually the whole TS secretariat participated in the meeting.

After the long meeting messages of reconciliation were voiced by both sides and possibility of a plebiscite over the Topcu Barracks was discussed. In a press release, the representatives of TS and celebrities made very positive statements and agreed to an end the protest with a final event in the park on Saturday (Hurriyet, 14 June 2013).

Simultaneously, the governor of Istanbul invited the protesters to a coffee shop in Besiktas on the night of 14 June and had a long meeting with around 150 protesters (HaberTurk, 14 June 2013). After the representatives of TS had gone back to the park, instead of emphasising the importance of meeting and the rights they had earned, TS downplayed the meeting. Together with other radical leftist groups they decided to stay in the park, while others ended their occupation. The following morning, in contrast to the previous statement, the TS proclaimed a controversial decision with a title ‘This is just the beginning, resistance will continue’ via its official webpage and social media account. Accordingly, the protesters would not leave the park; the resistance would turn into a much bigger struggle. TS called upon one million people to go Taksim the following Sunday.

“On the 18th day of our resistance, on Saturday June 15th, we will continue our occupation for the park and all the living creatures within it, our trees, our life spaces, our private lives, our freedoms, and our future. We will pursue this struggle until our demands are met. This resistance will be the reflection of the collective will of Taksim Solidarity and a symbol of our comprehensive struggle. From this day forward, we will continue to fight against all kinds of injustice and suffering in our country with the dynamism and strength generated by our struggle which has spread across the country and perhaps the world. We are stronger, more organised and more hopeful than we were 18 days ago.” ( Taksim Solidarity, 2013: *Written in English*).

Their decision to continue protesting despite their meetings with the government escalated the tension. Erdogan then asked the security forces to ‘do whatever was necessary’ (Hurriyet, 15 June 2013) and ultimately the police entered Gezi Park on Saturday night and emptied it by force. Although the park issue and police brutality legitimised the protests, the decision about holding a plebiscite was not welcomed by protesters. Yet, it was not clear what the protesters really wanted. Although the movement was against authoritarianism and in favour of more participatory democracy, the demands over such concerns were not well identified. The opportunity to reach a partial compromise was lost and relationships became polarised. Taksim became a battleground between the government and Gezi activism. Every Saturday, TS called on the people to go Taksim to protest. The security forces exercised zero-

tolerance for the right to the protest. As the state did not allow any demonstrations in the area, Taksim became the most protected space in Turkey. The area around the Taksim Ataturk monument and Gezi Park were closed to the public many times in order to protect the public from the public (Figure 6.1). Moreover, police vehicles and undercover police officers were constantly present around Taksim and Gezi Park. Thus, Taksim resembled a highly protected official site rather than a public space that is open to everyone.



**Figure 6-1:** Taksim Square, closed to the public for security reasons (picture is taken by author, 24 April 2014)

I met Buket, the deputy minister of a leftist party in her party building in Findikzade neighbourhood, a central commercial district in the European part of Istanbul. Although I scheduled a meeting for the mid-May, she asked me to postpone our meeting twice because of her political activities. Since an explosion at a coal mine in Soma district, West-Turkey, some protests were organised in Taksim and she wanted to participate in these protests. Finally, we arranged a meeting ten days later. At the beginning of our conversation she told me the story of her arrest. I did not know that she had been jailed for six months due to her involvement in violence during the Gezi protests. As she and 15 friends from her party were involved in direct violence against the police in Taksim, a day after the Gezi protests the police raided their houses and

arrested all of them. I did not ask more questions about her arrest and conviction as I thought she would be uncomfortable. During our conversation, she was highly critical of the AKP and its policies. One of the questions I asked was what they had gained from the protests. She replied that they gained their freedom by criticising the AKP and Erdogan. She blamed the AKP for creating 'a fear empire', but believed that this fear had been turned into hope thanks to the resistance.

"We [the leftists] were aware of that, but our proletarian people were not. Gezi put an end to this fear. Who is the state that we call it? It can be demolished. We gained this. I felt it again in the protests about the Soma disaster that I participated in. The state was the same there, too. It used plastic bullets and pepper gas against us, but no one cared about it. The state can do whatever it wants but we, the people, say we have authority in the decision-making process. After the local election, we psychologically felt beaten [since the AKP gained a victory], but now this feeling has fallen again thanks to the protests for Soma." (Buket, May 22, 2014, Findikzade)

Embracing a leftist discourse Buket argued that the state should be destroyed. It is not clear, however, whether her criticism is against the state or the AKP since she still cared about the results of the local elections. For her, democracy can be created through toppling the AKP. Therefore, Buket thinks that the protests are an important tool not for expressing dissatisfaction, but rather for demonstrating the people's power against the AKP, and eventually toppling it.

In contrast, some protesters blamed the leftist groups and TS for manipulating the Gezi movement. Koray, an architect and political activist, believes TS cannot represent Gezi.

"TS tried to restrict Gezi's scope; they tried to turn it into a secular resistance. They take this position in all urban movements. They were the ones who supported military tutelage too. They were the group who walked arm in arm with the plotters during the February 28th process. Therefore, of course, they did not represent Gezi. They had no concern with Gezi apart from sharing the same space. They wanted to use Gezi for the sake of themselves, like the government. There were also Anticapitalist Muslims and LGBT members, but they didn't consider

these groups as political subjects. They were kind of putschists. There is a left tradition, which wants to gain power inspite of the people. Turkish leftists are shady in Turkey. The left is reversed by the right in Turkey. The left represents the state's mentality and bureaucracy that is supposed to highlight class conflict... The Prime Minister took advantage of this. You see, he opposed this group when he suppressed the Gezi protesters. It is a good trick. Indeed, we are getting jumped on. They never accept the legitimate government, for them the government is illegitimate. When they met up with the Prime Minister, they couldn't deliver it. So, they played into his hands as in the case of the Ataturk Cultural Centre." (Koray, June 23, 2014, Istiklal Street).

Koray is very critical of TS and the approach they took. While he does not accept TS as a representative of Gezi, he does recognise the existence of LGBT and anti-capitalist Muslims, who are unlike TS and radical leftists who made Gezi pluralistic. Likewise, Necdet, a liberal leftist, thinks that because of TS and leftists groups Gezi's direction shifted towards violence and polarisation. He argues that Turkish leftism requires a paradigmatic shift that makes it more inclusive and pluralistic.

"When Tayyip Erdogan said that if the court resolves in their favour, they will hold a referendum, we accepted it since it was 'an earned right' for us. Imagine the prime minister of Turkey taking a step back thanks to the resistance of the people. Some groups didn't see it. If they willingly emptied the park, Tayyip Erdogan would fall into the void. He couldn't say he would make the shopping mall there. If he said, there would be a much bigger resistance, which wouldn't be dispersed by gas bombs. The conscience of society wouldn't think Gezi wanted to overthrow the government, and they would think Gezi produced pressure over the government... As a leftist person, I could say that the left needs to question their position in relation to resistance and taking everything by force. The protests are about giving a message to society; they are not the essence of everything. The essence is that the society should look after its problems. The left should abandon advocating for society. I think it is problematic for the left to think they should lead the society... Yes, in the past leading and party leaders were important, but in this century society may achieve self-determination by solving their problems themselves... (Necdet, April 16, 2014, Istiklal Street)

While Necdet supports Gezi's equalitarian and emancipatory aspects, he puts a clear distance between his party and other leftist parties that insist on direct violence with the police.

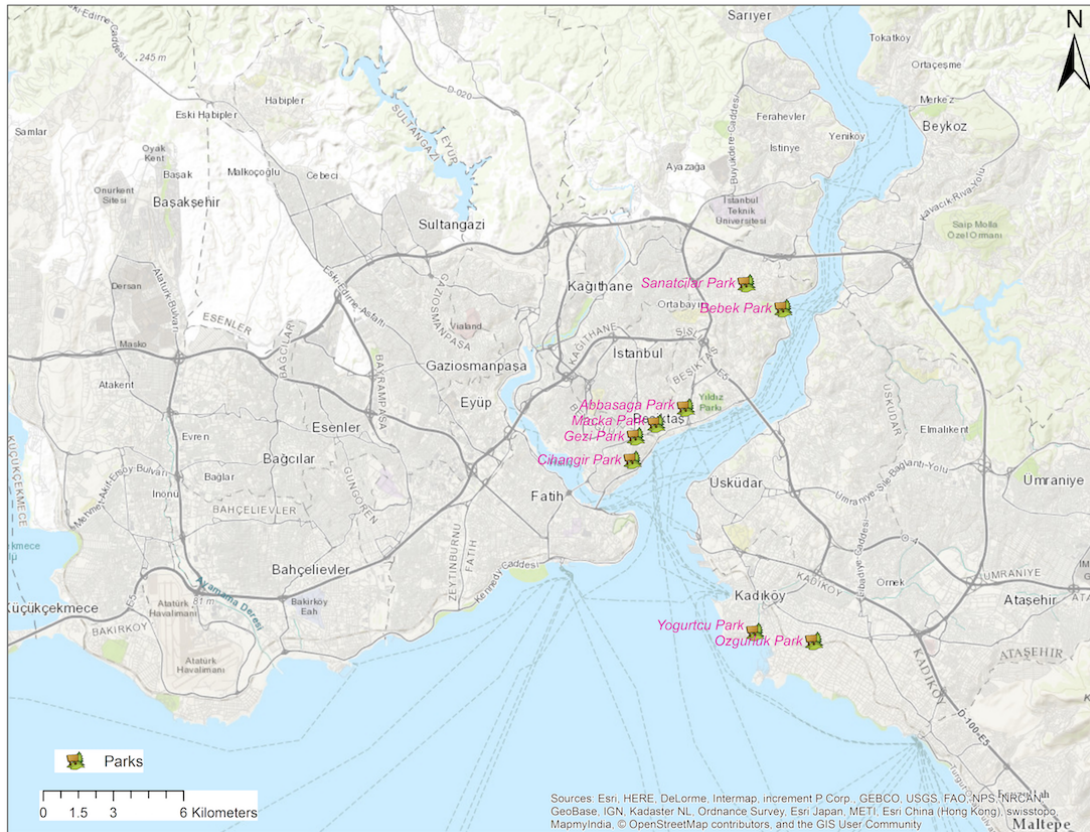
Without a leader or a leading party no one group was in charge of representing Gezi, but some groups dominated and undermined the process and led Gezi to take a different direction. Taksim, as a public space, appeared as a site of contestation between the AKP and the protesters as well as between the protesters themselves. Instead of transforming the conflict into an agonistic form, this conflict turned violent. In this case, the violence originated 'from above' and the AKP sought to protect the status quo that it had established (Springer, 2011). Another perspective is that the violence 'from below', from the TS and leftists groups, was not driven by a demand for equality and democracy but rather aimed to reinstate the previous status quo that the AKP had undermined. Despite this, the emancipatory side of Gezi that asked for more public participation in the decision-making process cannot be underestimated.

#### ***6.3.3.2. Public forums and demands for more participatory democracy***

The Gezi protests brought many promising actions politically. First, the debate around majoritarian vs. plural democracy and second, the public forums that allow participation in the political. In this section, I will illustrate how public forums constructed a more participatory democracy. I also claim that Gezi did not represent 'the people', but rather it represented a segment of 'the people' who were unsatisfied with certain AKP policies.

Many of the protesters who I interviewed told me that the idea of public forums came from the practices of everyday life in the park during the Gezi Protests. After the park had been occupied, the protesters continued their routine lives in the park. Spontaneously, they divided the park into different parts in which diverse groups and individuals lived. They developed common spaces such as a library, kitchen, garden, sports area and meeting area. They called their meeting area 'Democracy Square' as it was where regular meetings took place. When any decisions were made about the park, the protesters gathered in Democracy Square and discussed the subject. Accordingly, everyone in the park and Taksim Square participated in decision-making. In the meetings, everyone was free to express their opinions and thoughts. By this

means, although they did not completely agree with each other they had to respect and understand each other's views. Although there was no leader or political parties in the meetings, they were guided by TS.



**Figure 6-2:** The distribution of public forums in different parks throughout Istanbul

After the police evacuation of Gezi Park, the idea of coming together continued in public parks in some neighbourhoods of Istanbul. It started with Abbasaga Park, in Beşiktaş district, with the support of the Chamber of Urban Planners and spontaneously spread to other neighbourhoods- Yogurtcu Park in Kadıköy, Cihangir Park in Beyoğlu, Macka Park, Sanatçılar Park and Bebek Park in Beşiktaş and Özgürlük Park in Göztepe (Figure 6.2). The citizens decided to come together and talk about problems in their neighbourhoods and the outcomes of Gezi. During the whole summer of 2013, the public forums went on almost every night in these particular neighbourhoods. The topics, decisions and suggestions that were deliberated during the meetings were shared via social media and blogs. That allowed coordination between different forums. What made these public forums unique is that the citizens who attended the public forums were directly involved in the process.

Yagmur, an urban planner who works with the Chamber of Urban Planners of Turkey, describes the public forums as a way of bringing different people together. For her, as in the Gezi protests, the public forums enabled everyone to express their thoughts without any hesitation.

“The period of public forums that started after Gezi allowed everyone to express their feelings... Everyone listened to and respected each other even though they had different opinions. Indeed it was like you don’t know who lives next door, but you meet them in the parks because he/she also went to parks. I think it made the people closer and encounter each other... The forums did not gather only for Gezi, but rather they gathered for their neighbourhoods. People already saw in Gezi that they could prevent trees from being cut down. This problem is not intrinsic to Taksim, in every neighbourhood, we have such problems. The green spaces are being opened for construction, or educational spaces are being turned into residential areas. So, people started to produce politics over urban problems.” (Yagmur, May 29, 2014, Besiktas).

Gezi raised awareness of public spaces. In particular, public spaces played an important role in calls for democracy in a time when public spaces have become less public and more private. As Purcell (2013: 90-91) points out, in the global protests in the recent years, important urban places like “Pearl, Tahrir, Syntagma, Sol, and Zuccotti were not just metaphors for these movements, they were full participants as well. That is why each space was struggled over so acutely.” People horizontally organised and decision-making mechanisms were distributed to larger fractions. Unlike hierarchical power relations, public forums aimed to enable everyone to have an equal voice. While public forums awakened political consciousness, at the same time through the idea of urban assemblies they had the potential to decentralise power. As material spaces, public parks made visible the political action of people during the public forums. These spaces became gathering spaces in which to discuss everyday life and also sites for the contestation of different ideas. Therefore, these public spaces provided opportunities for entrenching collective performances, speeches, and agonism (Springer, 2010).

The public forums were examples of ways to expand democratic channels in everyday life. Yet, there were some methodological and strategic problems. First of all, the spontaneous public forums were a temporary effect. While in the summer of 2013 they attracted both the professional and non-professional people who had participated in the Gezi protests, soon after they fell under the influence of professional and organised political groups. Ugur, a history student, believes the protesters liked being outside during the protests, and that was why many people participated in the forums during the summer in 2013. While many individuals attended these forums initially, later they were organised by official groups. Moreover, these forums started to take place in venues arranged by these organisations rather than common public spaces. I met Yagmur at the end of May 2014 and asked her why the popularity of public forums declined. She claimed it was the winter weather that prevented the forums from taking place, the forums never regained their popularity and eventually stopped occurring.

Furthermore, a closer examination of the public forums reveals that they were organised in particular places across Istanbul. Although there were attempts to expand the forums across the whole city, the forums were mostly held in specific locations throughout Istanbul – Kadikoy, Besiktas and Beyoglu-, which are known as the enclaves of upper-middle classes. Therefore, the voice of citizens from ‘sterile’ environments was heard, while, the voice of marginalised neighbourhood was ignored or overlooked (Yel and Nas, 2014). In addition, while the forums aimed to find ways of developing an effective opposition, the decisions that were taken needed to be imposed on the rest of society. For example, in the forums, it was repeatedly mentioned “we have to tell the truth to AKP voters” rather than seeking ways in which more segments of society are included. The way they called on people to attend the forums was also based on a negative rhetoric. For example, they used phrases such as “We are meeting up with Gezi spirit against the darkness of AKP”, “We will continue until the pan gets cracked and the lamp [AKP] explodes” and “Take your pan and pots, box and sweeper. Only the people can clean such dirtiness [that the AKP has brought over the last decade]”<sup>45</sup>. Such exclusionist discourses led many

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<sup>45</sup> The topics that were discussed in the forums were published in a ‘Parks are ours’ website and its Facebook and Twitter accounts. While I used both Twitter and Facebook pages to look at ‘banners and posters’ which informed the people about the forums, I analysed the official website to grasp what had been discussed in the forums. Since the public forums are not organised anymore, the website page is

people to turn against the movement. Instead of finding ways to build a broad platform, Gezi activism turned into opposition against the AKP. Eventually, neither Gezi nor the public forums could establish an alternative political movement. As time passed, its effects faded away.

Ultimately, Gezi activists used the same rhetoric as Erdogan. While Erdogan argued that his base was the people, Gezi activism also claimed they represented the people. Although Gezi was presented by the protesters as a broad coalition against the AKP, in reality, Gezi represented a small segment of society (Yayla, 2013). While the main opposition party, CHP, explicitly supported the resistance, the other political parties in parliament put a safe distance between themselves and the protests. In the very beginning, the leader of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, warned his base not to participate in the event because Kurdish flags were used by some protesters and there was a potential risk that this would harm an elected government (Hurriyet, 5 June 2013; Haberturk, 7 June 2013). At the same time, due to an ongoing peace process between the government and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), the Peace and Democratic Party (BDP, later to be HDP) also warned its base about the danger that the resistance could bring (Cumhuriyet, 1 June 2013 and Haberturk, 31 July 2013). Although some individuals from these parties took part in the resistance, all three parties - AKP, MHP and HDP - collectively stood against the movement. Gezi attracted CHP and other small leftist parties' supporters as well as LGBT members and Anticapitalist Muslims.

Consequently, it can be said that the public forums showed in some ways how democracy can be operated. They contested the hierarchical and oppressive power relations in the society and offered more diffusion of power (Mouffe, 2003, Springer, 2010). However, the public forums failed to include all segments of society and eventually, they attracted only professionals. Thus, the way in which liberty and equality were put into practice was problematic. Moreover, like Erdogan, the protesters also applied a populist claim that they represented – the other 50% - and undergirded the dichotomy between an 'us' and a 'they' relation (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2005).

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inactive; yet, Twitter and Facebook accounts share ideas about everyday politics. (See more info at <http://parklarbizim.blogspot.co.uk>, <https://www.facebook.com/ParklarBizim> and <https://twitter.com/ParklarBizim>).

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

The massive protests during summer 2013 showed that the Turkish society is highly fragmented in terms of ideology and lifestyle and such fragmentation affects the ways in which democracy is understood by different people. On the one hand, according to Erdogan and his base, the AKP has improved democracy through improving rights and liberties and so re-distributed power in the society. Thus, the AKP represents the people who have achieved legitimation through elections, and Gezi was an uprising, that wanted to demolish such a legitimate government. On the other hand, Gezi had its multiplicities and mobility. In essence, Gezi, as an uprising was a response against police violence; as a result, it reflected reactions against the authoritarian tendencies of Erdogan and his party. Yet, it was uncertain how democracy was embodied within the protesters since there were various groups and individuals whose portrait of Gezi was different. Therefore, it was open to contestation and manipulation.

Although Gezi activism asked for more participation in decision-making, the way it was articulated was no different from the ruling party in some instances. While the state violation gave an ethical backing to the movement, this was reversed by the traditional leftist groups through producing a counter violence, including attempts to seize the Prime Minister's office in Istanbul and burn and destroy public and private assets across Turkey. The traditional left-wing parties took a maximalist rhetoric through endless demands. These groups not only pursued destructive discourses such as capturing Taksim, but also employed exclusivist rhetoric 'to tell the truth to the AKP voters' as though they were enlightened and the rest needed their enlightenment.

Nevertheless, Gezi brought some discussion around re-centralisation, participatory democracy and questioning the structure of the Turkish state. Such criticism was also taken into consideration by the government at that time. President Gul and the chairperson of the parliament, Bulent Arinc, repeatedly mentioned that 'democracy is not only about elections'. Likewise, the Mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbas, said that the public should even be consulted about the colour of a bus stop. Such outcomes were rapidly forgotten

# Chapter 7

## Understanding the politics of the moment in Gezi

### 7.1. Introduction

In the previous empirical chapters, looking at the historical geographies of the protests in the context of neoliberal urbanisation, (post)secularism and democracy, I have shown the multidimensional dynamics of the protests and thus the complexities of power relations in the modern Republic of Turkey. Although this historical geography perspective has given us broad clues about why the protests had happened, there was also a specific moment of protest and that moment has a story to tell. In this chapter I will look at the moment in which the protests occurred and explore the embodied performance of politics in Gezi park. There can be many interpretations and representations of this moment based on different agents, protesters, the state and the media.

The chapter is divided into two sections. Firstly, it will demonstrate the contradictions in the way the media perceived the protests. It will show that, for both the national and international media ideological positions and power relationships were significant in shaping how they envisaged the protests. Thus, their reporting sometimes moved far from what really happened in Taksim. Secondly, the chapter explores an understanding of the moment through using different concepts such as ‘politics of encounter’, ‘performativity’ and ‘carnavalesque’. While each concept refers to different practices, these overlapped with each other. Using these concepts the chapter seeks to understand the different narratives of the protesters, captured in the moments and practices of the protests. Such difference emphasises space as relational; created through the coming together of multiple trajectories (e.g. Massey, 2005). Massey (1993: 66) argues that places are not “areas within boundaries around” but rather they are “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.” This relational thinking of the place then enables us to think about the ways in which diverse actors and processes construct Gezi’s multiple moments.

## 7.2. Representation of protests in the media

In this section, I will present the ways in which Gezi is represented by the media. While the protest played a significant role in shaping how the media represented it, the media was selective in reporting the event. For example, while the protest was not covered by mainstream Turkish channels, international channels such as CNN and the BBC broadcast the violence for hours. In this way, the attitude of both the Turkish and international media had a significant influence on shaping perceptions. The ways the media represented the protest cannot be independent from dominant values and power relations. As Juris (2008) suggests, the mass media usually reflects dominant values in terms of reporting protests. For the national media, while *Sozcu* and *Cumhuriyet* dramatised the event in favour of the protesters, *Hurriyet* showed the protests in a positive light, but did not demonise the AKP. *Haberturk* tried to strike a balance between the protesters and government and *Sabah* disparaged the event in a way that advocated the stance that the government took. Thus, while for *Sozcu* and *Cumhuriyet* the protests were about a national rebellion against the AKP, *HaberTurk* and *Hurriyet* depicted them as peaceful protests that asked more for egalitarianism and freedom. For *Sabah* the protests were against a democratic state.

The main themes that the reporters stressed were environmental concerns and the use of force by the police. The front-page of *Hurriyet* on 30th May 2013 showed pictures of the police officers in Gezi Park removing and firing at the tents. In contrast *Sozcu*'s headline on 30th May, stated, "They said they would not allow the demolition of Gezi Park and they were attacked with tear gas". The next day's headlines was "Tayyip's gas: It is used against workers, white-collar workers, farmers, shopkeepers, students and martyrs' families. It is very effective and does not have side effects for pro AKP", emphasising police brutality through sarcasm. Similarly, *Cumhuriyet* attributed the protest to the people rather than the environmentalists. "Gas to Mothers" on 29th May and "The people are resisting" on 30th May, with photos depicting the woman in red and those who were affected by gas. In this way, the paper emphasises that the protesters were from wide-ranging segments of society, such as artists, academics, politicians and others. While *Haberturk*'s web portal gave as wide coverage as the other 3 newspapers, their coverage was the only news source about the use of police force. *Sabah* acted as if the protests had never occurred.

Nevertheless, by 31st May, there was a significant discrepancy between the newspapers. On the 31st Cumhuriyet and Sozcu not only covered every detail but also provided disinformation. For example, in one article entitled, “They are carrying gas bombs via ambulances,” they reported unconfirmed information by the authorities that “for hours the police used tear gas and water cannons on the group who is against the demolition of Gezi Park. While the injured people waited for ambulances, it has been revealed that the ambulances carried gas bombs for the police.” Cumhuriyet and Sozcu used similar reports to attempt to drive a wedge between the military and the police, alleging without any sources that the police and soldiers were in dispute in a military hospital in Taksim. Given the fact that the military coups held an important place in the history of Turkey, the news might have created ‘incitement’. In addition, the same newspapers alleged that the CHP’s MP, Gürsel Tekin, a Palestinian woman, had been killed during the protests. The following day their front-page headlines, read, “The People rebelled” for Cumhuriyet, and “Like Egypt’s Tahrir: the photo-novela of torture and cruelty against the people”. Sozcu headlines and photos focused on the protests in Taksim Square, as if it was a scene from a battle. Accordingly, “the police violence against those who supported human beings and city was the limit” (Cumhuriyet, 1 June 2013) and even “they gassed Ataturk [his sculpture] in Taksim Square and they spread the Turkish flag, too.” (Sozcu, 1 June 2013).

During the massive protests across the country between June 1 and 15, both newspapers employed military metaphors to depict protests, such as battlefield, war and ferocity. “It turned into a battle ...” (Cumhuriyet, 12 June 2013) and “police... interfered and it became a battle field. The youth hardly saved their life” (Sozcu, 12 June, 2013). Yet, both papers tried to show that the main purpose of the protests was demanding the resignation of Tayyip Erdogan. For example, even on the last day of the occupation Sozcu stated, “The protests that started on 31st May and spread to all cities as resistance against the AKP are still going on. People are still meeting in Gezi Park, walking towards the squares and chanting ‘Resign Tayyip.’” (15 June 2013). The only difference between these newspapers was that while Sozcu personalised the protests mentioning Tayyip Erdogan in headlines, Cumhuriyet used passive verbs. After the police’s withdrawal from Taksim and Gezi, Sozcu announced: “the victory of people” and that “Tayyip threw in the towel and the police left and Taksim Square rejoiced, chanting resign Tayyip.” (2 June 2013). Similarly, in Cumhuriyet, the same

headline “the victory of people”, mentioned that “Turkey experienced a never before seen resistance.” (2 June 2013). In the following days both Cumhuriyet and Sozcu covered the event in front-page headlines, justifying all the actions that the protesters took while criticising Tayyip Erdogan or the law-enforcement officers. These papers also suggested that violence amongst the protesters might also be attributed to the police. An article in Cumhuriyet stated that “Some people threw Molotov cocktails and stones at the police and attempted to fire water cannons and the police did not detain anyone in the square. People were critical that although the police detained those who tweeted about Gezi, they did not step in.” (11 June 2013). Sozcu mentioned, “a man who threw a Molotov cocktail drew attention. An activist, a seemingly middle-aged person, who had a gun, and other demonstrators who had police radios in their belts, raises the question of whether the police are provoking violence.” (11 June 2013).

Like Sozcu and Cumhuriyet, Sabah also focused on violence and overlooked the peaceful occupation in Gezi. Sabah started coverage after 31st May and portrayed the protests in a negative light by using of criminalising language about the protesters. The excessive use of police force on 31st May was justified in many articles, for example, “as soon as the activists started to walk toward Gezi Park, they faced the barricades from the police... since they insisted on walking, the police intervened with tear gas... [and] the political activists looted a market.” Moreover, in subsequent days and following the statements of Erdogan and other authorities, some front-page headlines stressed the divisions between the environmentalists and the marginal protesters. When the police cleared out Taksim Square on 11th June the headlines emphasised “The park is different from the square [Taksim]” and questioned the sincerity of protests, stating that the protesters used Molotov cocktails and guns during the intervention. In this sense, the article asserted that it was marginal groups that created violations (11 June, 2013). In another article this division became even clearer. The article alleged that a group of people, defining themselves as ‘resist for Gezi’ never involved themselves in violence and prevented the marginal groups from entering the park. In addition, the newspaper consistently reported that the protests took too long, giving the survey result of Andy-Ar, a private polling organisation that found while 82.8% of participants in the survey thought the protests should come to an end, and only 7.5% thought it should continue. Furthermore, it provided coverage

on how tourism in Taksim was badly affected by the protests, drawing on tourism agencies' opinions (15 June, 2013).

The way both Haberturk and Hurriyet depicted the protests was similar. Both newspapers covered the speeches of the authorities, and tried to show scenes from Gezi, including police brutality and solidarity in the park. On 31st May, Hurriyet complained about the use of gas in a front-page headline, "24 hours gas" and stated, "the police intervened in the group that occupied in Gezi Park to prevent the trees from being cut down from morning until night. The police were accused of using excessive force and injuring many people" with pictures that showed those who were affected by police gas. Haberturk, in a front-page pronouncing "Taksim is again on a knife-edge" mentioned police intervention in Taksim. When the police left Taksim, however, Hurriyet showed how the protests had changed over the last five days by drawing different scenes from Taksim, Gezi Park, Bosphorus and other cities that showed the spread of Gezi as a reaction to police brutality. With a headline, "the Prime Minister spoke and Taksim was open" Haberturk legitimised the protests through criticising the police force. Moreover, both newspapers also highlighted the carnivalesque effects of the protests. In one article Hurriyet likened Gezi to a carnival and asserted, "The young pictures of people in the park reminded us of the 1960's fabulous young 'flower children'. In Gezi, there was solidarity, encounter and joyfulness." (Hurriyet, 5 June). Likewise, Haberturk dedicated its cover page to an interview with a famous Turkish pop-star Sezen Aksu, "she tells the country: we should learn solidarity and love in Gezi. This language will carry us to the future." (June 5, 2013)

Until 31st May, the international media did not pay much attention to Gezi protests. After that date the international media covered the protests widely. The international newspapers focused as much on reporting violence as on as interpreting the event. All the newspapers examined for this research - The New York Times, Haaretz, Guardian and Der Spiegel - had a monolithic reporting style; yet there were nuanced differences in terms of interpreting the protest. For example, like Sozcu, Der Spiegel also specifically targeted Erdogan, justified violent protests and blamed vandalism on the police. Other newspapers were also critical of Erdogan. However, the scale of their criticism were not as strident as Der Spiegel. Like the Turkish media all the

newspapers persistently used military metaphors - 'war', 'battle', and 'battlefield'- to portray the police intervention. For example, the protest was first announced in the New York Times on 31st May "Police officers attacked a group of peaceful demonstrators on Friday in Istanbul's Taksim Square... turning the center of this city into a battle zone at the height of tourist season." When the police removed the protesters from Taksim Square on the 11th of June, Der Spiegel depicted the intervention as "a violent night in Istanbul, with Molotov cocktails flying through the air, water cannons drenching protesters and plenty of tear gas... Less than 24 hours after the first assault, Gezi Park and entire streets resemble a battlefield." (12 June 2013). Likewise, the Guardian newspaper mentioned, "Last night dozens of police were still engaged in running battles with jeering protesters in Taksim Square, firing volley after volley of teargas canisters... Tensions remained extremely high..." (12 June 2013). The police intervention on the last day of occupation was represented in the New York Times as follows; "With a helicopter flying overhead, the police set up barricades... The centre of the city once again resembled a war zone..." (16 June 2013).

The preliminary interpretation and reporting focused not only on violence but also on the authoritarian tactics of Erdogan's government. With a headline "Turkish police fire tear gas, wound scores of people in worst protests for years" Haaretz perceived the protest as an "unrest [that] reflects growing disquiet at the authoritarianism of Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted party" (31 May 2013) and "Thousands marched through streets in several cities on Friday, calling on Erdogan to resign" (1 June 2013). Similarly, the Guardian depicted the protests as a Turkish spring; "Istanbul park protests sow the seeds of a Turkish spring". It went onto "This is the context in which a struggle over a small park in a congested city centre has become an emergency for the regime and the basis for a potential Turkish spring." The New York Times too, declared the protests were against the authoritarian regime of Erdogan: "While the protest began over plans to destroy a park, for many demonstrators it had moved beyond that to become a broad rebuke to the 10-year leadership of Mr. Erdogan and his government, which they say has adopted authoritarian tactics" (1 June 2013). Like Sozcu and Cumhuriyet, the international newspapers likened Taksim Square with Tahrir Square and perceived the event as an attempt to overthrow the government. On 7th June, the New York Times front-page displayed an advertisement by the

protesters, paid for through a campaign on Indiegogo. The ad, entitled ‘What is happening in Turkey’, included an image of teargas canister to draw attention to the authoritarianism of the Turkish government, and stated:

“People of Turkey have spoken: We will not be oppressed!... Over the course of Prime Minister Erdoğan’s ten-year term, we have witnessed a steady erosion of our civil rights and freedoms. Arrests of numerous journalists, artists, and elected officials and restrictions on freedom of speech, minorities’ and women’s rights all demonstrate that the ruling party is not serious about democracy.”

Der Spiegel began to cover the protests slightly later than other newspapers, on 3th June, and it personalised the event, showing the protests were against only Tayyip Erdogan and mentioning his name in almost all headlines. For example, “Turkey’s Youth Have Had Enough: With violent protests against the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continuing in Turkey, both the US and Europe have called for calm”; “Revolt in Turkey: Erdogan’s Grip on Power Is Rapidly Weakening” on 6th June; “Everyone Is Afraid: Erdogan Regime Cows Embattled Media” on 12th June; and “Talking Turkey Lessons from the Crucible of Taksim Square... The Taksim Square protests have been hailed as a reflection of modern Turkey. United by a common goal, a motley collection of demonstrators has united to vent their fury with Prime Minister Erdogan”, “‘Hateful’ Speech in Istanbul - Erdogan Throws Fuel on Flames” and “Rambo of Kasimpasa: Erdogan’s Risky Response to the Revolt” on 18th June.

Nevertheless, international newspapers showed the protests as peaceful and revealed carnivalesque-like protests or “a vast, vibrant open-air democracy festival” (Guardian, 5 June 2013). Haaretz mentioned, “Police later pulled back from Gezi Park in Taksim, where the demonstration started peacefully on Monday.” (1 June 2013). An article in the Guardian on 16th June, entitled, “Gezi Park has become a hotbed of activity as Turks make their stand” portrayed the park as “the most vibrant political theatre”. The article further emphasised festive like protests, stating, “At 2 am on Friday, the park is still busy. Smoke rises from meatball carts. A percussion group drums its way through the crowds, plays a samba in front of a pro-Kurdish stand, and moves on. Sellers carry bright pink clouds of candyfloss, others offer pastries, tea, popcorn and watermelon

slices. Food stands distribute supplies for free.” Similarly, an article in the New York Times on 5th June stressed solidarity: “On Wednesday evening, undeterred Turks converged for a sixth day on Gezi Park for a gathering that has become the symbol of civic resistance, bringing together many strata of society in a showcase of anti-government solidarity.” Der Spiegel also underscored the diversity of the protesters:

“[A]lmost everyone had a reason to take to the streets, as the composition of the protest movement shows. It is a melting pot of conservationists and leftist Muslims, football fans and young creative types, and although it is still amorphous and disorganized as movements go, its existence alone poses a challenge to the prime minister” (17 June 2013).

The representation of protest in the media was multiple and variegated; yet their interpretations differed according to their political biases. The focus was on how and by whom the uprising had been created. However, there was not one single moment that defined the uprising. Rather, there were many moments in which the protesters acted and reacted, and violence was only one part of the event. In order to understand these multiple moments, it is useful to look at how the protesters perceived the protest. The next sections will explore the event captured in the protesters' own narratives.

### **7.3. The moment of Gezi protests**

In protests that involve occupying spaces, actions and performances that are produced by different identities are politically meaningful. Calhoun (2013) argues that they are moments that become important in occupy-style movements. Unlike social movements, which involve longer-term collective mobilisation, occupy-style movements occur for a short-term when public spaces are seized. Occupying a public place can be incredibly influential (Calhoun, 2013), since symbolic places makes us pay attention to social problems such as inequalities, democracy and so on. Calhoun (2013) argues that each mobilisation not only speaks for the future, but can also have an impact on existing relationships. Similarly, drawing on Lefebvre's (2002) work on the Paris commune, Halvorsen (2015) believes that the moment of protest cannot be separated from everyday life, and more importantly, it transforms everyday life in the occupying space. Occupy style protests are ‘a moment of rupture’ that brings new ways of life into being. Thus, occupation in a public space is not simply a power act

itself, but also produces powerful acts.

The Gezi protests, that started with the protection of trees and turned into a national upheaval because of the excessive use of police force, embodied diverse protest performances and bodily movements for the fifteen days. These experiences and practices, embodied in different subjectivities, had the potential to articulate a stance in the face of power in that moment. I argue that the Gezi protests created its own time and space, in which bodies performed, acted and experienced a different kind of sociality. I call attention to how they produced such unique space and how this space was shaped by internal and external dynamics. Massey's notion of space is instructive in terms of understanding the ways in which such unique spaces and times were constructed through a multiplicity of trajectories. For Massey (1993: 225) "space is a configuration of a multiplicity of trajectories." From this perspective, different people's interactions with Taksim and Gezi Park as well as their interactions with each other, as well as material practices and events, constructed Gezi's space and time.

Thinking through Gezi in this way then enables us to reimagine how Gezi as a physical space produced social effects. Taksim and Gezi Park turned into a living space in which people created their own space and time. As a result of these interactions different actions and reactions emerged. Therefore, to understand the moments according to the protesters' narratives, the concepts of 'politics of encounter', 'performativity' and 'carnavalesque' will be deployed to reflect different dimensions. First I will use the concept of 'politics of encounter' to emphasise the forms of new social relations in the park. Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' will be used to stress the political significance of bodily actions, even if there was not a single 'real' goal sought by protesters. Bakhtin's carnivalesque concept offers an explanation for how prevalent norms and social positions can be challenged through irony, humour, and parody.

### **7.3.1. Encountering in the Gezi protests**

After the police's withdrawal on the 1st June, an unusual multitude of people remained in Taksim and Gezi Park. On the one hand, thousands of people marched and walked through Istiklal, a pedestrian street between Taksim Square and the

Tunnel, which is one of the most crowded streets of Istanbul, chanting ‘We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal’. On the other hand, pro-Kurdish activists, holding pictures of the imprisoned Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan, joined the protests. Moreover, three football clubs, Fenerbahce, Besiktas and Galatasaray, that are known to be homophobic and sexist, participating in the protests alongside LGBT groups, Anticapitalist Muslims, women’s unions, trade unions, political parties and many individuals from various backgrounds. There were also many celebrities, artists, actresses, and more importantly, the capitalist class from big businesses expressed their sympathy with the protests through social media<sup>46</sup> and in the following days joined the resistance in the park. This unusual assemblage eventually shared the same space for two weeks and new forms of political expression were found in the Gezi protests. In fact, in cities like Istanbul there has been always multiplicity and such multiplicity comes together from time to time in different ways. Taksim has long been a space for protest. In particular during 2011 and 2012, multiple political groups participated in the 1st May rallies. However, it was the first time in the Turkish history that multiple groups spent 15 days together in the same public space. Therefore, it is useful to apply the concept of ‘encounter’ to explain ‘contact’ between different identities during the protests. I argue that encounters between multiple political identities in the unique space of the Taksim protest created a difference. This encounter generated affinity and solidarity, but at the same time it revealed that deep historical prejudices cannot be dissolved in such a short period of time.

Encounter is often used to describe practices of bringing different bodies together in unexpected ways. Wilson (2016) demonstrates that encounters allow the ways in which we think about bodies, borders and difference to develop. Encounters enable a “focus on the embodied nature of social distinctions and the unpredictable ways in which similarity and difference are negotiated in the moment.” (2016: 5). Thus, for her encounter is not merely bringing different bodies together, but more importantly, encounters generate a difference. She asserts that “words such as ‘rupture’, ‘surprise’, ‘shock’ and ‘animation’ are common to descriptions of encounter and describe a moment or instance in which something is unexpectedly broken open.” (ibid: 6).

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<sup>46</sup> According to the news in Hurriyet on 31st May many retailers such as Herry, Silk & Cashmere, Damat Tween and Boyner, claimed that they would not open their chains in the alleged shopping mall due to the protests. (see more at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/perakendeciden-gezi-parki-na-magaza-yok-23407298>).

Moreover, Valentine (2008) claims that history, material conditions, and power have a significant impact on encounters, and thus they should not be romanticised. In her work on white majority attitudes towards minority groups in London, she concluded that encounters should not always be understood using the lens of new urban citizenship and cosmopolitanism as social prejudices create gaps between the scales of encounters. Halvorsen (2015) also asserts that spaces of encounters are often ambiguous and incorporate antagonistic practices.

Merrifield (2011 and 2013) and Halvorsen, (2015) explore encounters in the context of urban protests. Drawing on Lefebvre's urban writing Merrifield believes that the current wave of protests can be understood through a politics of encounter. He does not take the question of how/when to make a successful encounter as the main point. Rather he argues it is unpredictable and every encounter produces subjectivities. "Affinity becomes the cement that bonds, perhaps only for a moment, but a moment that lingers, a lasting encounter, of people across frontiers and barriers." (2011: 109). What becomes important in such protests is that encounters are staged in the heart of the city as well as through Facebook and Twitter. For Merrifield these city spaces are not concrete physical spaces, rather they are public spaces which "enable public discourses, public conversations to talk and meet each other, quite literally." (2013: 919).

Gezi Park provided an open space of encounter in a way that empowered new social relationships between different bodies. In other words, Gezi became a site of 'throwntogetherness', a term Massey (2005: 9) uses to mark multiplicity, diversity and difference in cities: "the space in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity." People were flung together in Taksim that brought unpredictable consequences. Not only the event, but also the history of Taksim as a cosmopolitan place, enabled encounters of different subjectivities.

For many of my interviewees participating in Gezi was one of the most remarkable experiences in their lives, although some of them had participated in many other protests. During this time the catchphrase 'Gezi spirit' was widely used in social media and in the park to express how the social divisions were blurred. While 'spirit' is a religiously inspired word, a new meaning was attributed to this particular spirit.

Accordingly, Gezi spirit named an affinity between different bodies and subjects that had previously felt it was impossible to come together. Such a spirit challenged identity positions between organised groups and those who do not have a party affiliation, between LGBT groups and football fans, between the Anticapitalist Muslims and secular Turks, and between the nationalist Turkish and Kurdish groups. For example, Buket asserted that the atmosphere during first days of occupation resembled the atmosphere in a football stadium because of all the swearing. Yet, thanks to women and LGBT activists who set up ‘swear word workshops’ in the park, awareness about sexism grew, and as a result, the use of sexist and homophobic language was reduced. In this sense, attitudes and positions with regard to ‘others’ evolved through encounter.

An Anticapitalist Muslim, Kenan believes that encountering different classes was one of the most remarkable achievements of the protests.

“The biggest gain is that people from different parts of the society came together for the same goal. This was something that could not be achieved for a long time. The feasibility of this was implemented there. An amazing brotherhood was established there, and a sharing environment was established there. Everyone shared what they ate and drunk, they shared their talk and conversation. These are the things that I will never forget. For 17-18 days of the period a space that is like a ‘rehearsal heaven’ was constructed, and everyone was watching each other's needs. Indeed, this was what we actually longed for. It was a peaceful land, which is called as ‘dar es salaam’ in the Holy Qur'an. The only condition for this was that the authority and dominion [mulk<sup>47</sup>] weren't monopolised.” (Ozgur, April 8, 2013, Findikzade)

Kenan’s position is embodied in religious discourses. He carefully selected religious words to emphasise the affinity between people. As Merrifield (2013) indicates, affinity brings a new dimension to the crowds made up of people from different ages and groups who assemble and encounter each other. Gezi established horizontal relationships. Regardless of differences, they all shared a common sense of frustration

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<sup>47</sup> Mulk is Arabic word which means dominion. When he referred to the dominion he purposely used this Arabic word inspiring from the Surah of the Dominion in the Qur'an that starts with “Blessed be He in Whose hands is Dominion; and He over all things hath Power.”

and anger. Merrifield states,

Participants will come together not only as a singularity sharing passions and affirming hopes but also as a force that creates its own historical space. For the politics of the encounter will always be an encounter somewhere, a spatial meeting place. It will always be an illicit rendezvous of human bonding and solidarity, a virtual, emotional and material topography in which something disrupts and intervenes in the paralysis.” (2013: 114).

During the occupation, Kurdish groups with pictures of the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, and Turkish nationalist groups with Turkish and Atatürk flags coexisted in the same space. Such coexistence provoked amazed comments from the protesters. In particular, many protesters found a picture, in which one citizen, holding the Turkish flag, and two other citizens, holding the PKK flag and making the sign of nationalist movement stood together against the police force, incredibly evocative and impressive. Ahmet, a middle-aged activist, believes that thanks to the Gezi spirit everyone embraced each other, creating solidarity. As a Kurdish citizen who has been campaigning for the Kurdish rights for years, he thinks that Gezi brought the Kurdish problem into view and more people became aware of it.

“People wanted to solve a problem instead of protesting about something. It was not just a protest. It was a stance against this practice [cutting the trees]. A lot of things have been gained, a history has been made, a culture has been created, and a sense of brotherhood has been created. Can you believe that in Kadikoy and Besiktas the protests were organised against the construction of a police station in Lice [a Kurdish district in Southeast Anatolia]? You know, these two districts are known for their Kemalist identity, but as a result of Gezi spirit, they said ‘resist Lice’ and perceived Medeni Yildirim [who was killed by a soldier during the clash in Lice after Gezi protests] as a martyr of Gezi... And this posture is vital for the future of Turkey in terms of democracy, brotherhood, environment, peace, ecology, labour and any other rights” (Ahmet, May 5, 2014, Tarlabasi).

Gezi enabled the crossing of boundaries between different socio-cultural classes. Ahmet believes that this overcoming of power relations was inspired by empathy.

While for some people encountering Kurdish activists in the park generated empathy, the nationalist and Kemalist groups, on the other hand, were less supportive. Many activists were disappointed by the reactions of Kemalist towards the Kurdish groups. A leftist journalist who was one of the initial activists in the park told me that although the only thing that Kurdish groups were doing in the park was performing a folk dance (known as *halay cekmek*) for 24 hours, they were targeted by the Kemalists. Mahir, a law student at a private university, said that taking part in Gezi was an amazing experience. He articulated that in the park the only thing that mattered was brotherhood and egalitarianism. But he indicated that it was impossible for him to come together in solidarity with someone who holds a Kurdish flag. That was the reason why he put a distance between himself and the Kurdish groups in the park.

“Of course, there were some disagreements, conflicting ideas, but we had to get united and in solidarity. Some provocative groups tried to divide the mass and carried out the terrorist activities, but our people were never provoked. This was about who was leading the movement. The majority of people who were respectful about Mustafa Kemal and never gave up holding Turkish flags didn’t allow these provocative groups in the park. The crowds weren’t divided and didn’t leave the park because of Abdullah Ocalan’s flags. They persisted with their Turkish flags. They insisted on being respectful towards Mustafa Kemal. And these groups remained the minority in the park. The system drove them to the park, but the people took them out.” (Mahir, June 6, 2014, Taksim).

In Mahir’s case, encountering others with different political identities did not produce new social relations. Valentine (2008) observes how interaction with different political interests might engender resentment. As she indicates, attitudes and values towards different identities can remain unchanged and even toughen through encounters. Therefore, although from the outside it seemed as though the bodies that were resisting power united were united, there were still divisions out on the ground.

Consequently, although encounters in the park created a difference, this difference did not have the same impact on all groups and identities. For example, while the Anticapitalist Muslims performed their prayers, the leftists made a protective ring around them in case of police intervention. In contrast to this moment of solidarity

between Anticapitalist Muslims and the leftist groups, there was antipathy between the pro-Kurdish groups and nationalist Kemalists. This also raises questions around the nature of encounters with people who were not supportive of the protests, or the shopkeepers in Taksim area. There was a different relationship with the Gezi spirit inside and outside of the park. The protests did not produce close proximity with those who did not support the protest. On the contrary it created more aggressiveness. Yayla (2013) and Yel and Nas (2013) claimed that the protesters harassed women with the headscarves deemed to be supporters of the government. They were regarded as responsible for the policies of the AKP and subjected to both verbal and psychological pressure in many places throughout the protests. In my own experience, I felt that Gezi spirit did not embrace me many times when I participated in the protests. At many of the protests I felt as if I was an outsider, even a year after the Gezi uprising. As I mentioned in the methodology section, I was told to join the Anticapitalist Muslims or pro-Gulen movement in order to take part in the protests that I attended in Galata Square because I was wearing a headscarf. In this sense, there was a Gezi 'profile' in many protesters' minds, and encountering those who did not meet with this profile created exclusion and shock.

### **7.3.2. Performing bodily actions in the park**

On 28th May when bulldozers entered the park to cut down the trees, some activists kept guard in order to protect the trees but were forcibly removed and this continued until 1st June when the police left the park. Later, people continued to set up tents and established a community in the park. That said, from 28th May until the 1st of June the protesters performed different bodily actions according to the situations that they faced. Thus, during this period of time the bodies assembled and acted together to show their presence in Taksim. Using Judith Butler's concept of performativity to show how bodies acted together, this section emphasises the political acts behind the protests.

Butler (2011, 2012) examines bodily actions in mass demonstration through the concept of performativity. She seeks to understand how our identities are performed, initially using this concept to understand the ways in which gender is constructed through iterative performances. Performativity is not "the act by which a subject

brings into being what she/he names, but, rather... [the] reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (1993: 2). In the same way, Butler argues that when bodies congregate in public spaces, they construct a collective political body that moves, speaks, and makes claims together. Bodies do not act alone; rather they act together as political subjects. Through acting politically bodily actions arise ‘between’ subjects, co-constructing a new space in the already existing space in which they assemble. It is a space for bodily presence that is established by performative exercise between bodies. Following Butler’s claim, I maintain that it was the collective actions of bodies in solidarity in Taksim and Gezi that created a new space.

Initially, only a handful of protesters occupied Gezi to prevent its transformation. The police had dispersed previous protests in Taksim such as 1st May rally and the protest against the demolition of Emek Cinema, but their actions created the opposite effect on 28th May 2013. As long as the police used excessive force, including burning the tents of protesters in the early morning, the bodies insisted on defending the trees. Moreover, every time the police intervened, more people went to the park. Burcak, a mechanical engineer who was one of the first activists, thinks that not only excessive police force but also the process itself enabled the protest to develop.

“On the 28th of May, when we first went to the park, the bulldozers already stopped, and there were not more than 50 people in the morning. Since we knew the bulldozers would cut the trees, we occupied there to stop them. The police came later on, and the municipal police officers were there, too. And that day we realised something like that, there were also company employees and they dressed in police uniforms. With the operation of the bulldozers, we were faced with the attack of police and municipal police officers this time when we tried to stop or interrupt the bulldozers to cut the trees. After a while, we were attacked, pushed and squeezed in ways that you might have already seen from those first images... We were already used to the tyranny of the AKP but even the people who tried to prevent the cutting of the three trees were faced with despotism... As a matter of fact, as the hours passed, people began to assemble there, we were 50 then we became 100; we were 100 then we became 1000... It went like that” (Burcak, May 20, 2014, Taksim).

The protesters' persistence gained a particular meaning. Butler defines bodies that assemble on the street as precarious, obdurate and insisting on their collective identities in a particular space. She maintains that bodies not only appear and act, they also refuse and persist "under conditions in which that fact alone is taken to be an act of delegitimation of the state. It is not that bodies are simply mute life-forces that counter existing modalities of power. Rather, they are themselves patterns of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action" (2011: np). People in Gezi Park and Taksim refused to leave the park. Protecting a few trees might seem a naïve response, yet exercising a right to protect the trees and insisting on this right by staying in place gained meaning. Bodies mobilised in the space, they occupied the space, and they constructed a new space through bodily actions between them, thanks to this persistence.

After the initial occupation, the park was turned into a living space by the protesters. They established a communal life, spontaneously constructing a café, an infirmary, a kitchen, warehouse, garden, library, mosque, memorial area and other utilities. They called their garden 'Gezi Garden', the square 'Democracy Square', the market 'Revolution Market' and the library '*Capulcu* Library'<sup>48</sup>. The space that they constructed dismissed the traditional distinction between public and private. Using Butler's rhetoric, it can be said that a 'new form of sociability' was established in the rescued space. As Butler maintains, the ways in which bodies performed on the streets cross boundaries between public and private, and eating and sleeping became actions done in the public domain. That helped to form horizontal relationships between bodies that broke gender relations and spoke in the name of equality. She adds that "[s]leeping on that pavement was not only a way to lay claim to the public, to contest the legitimacy of the state, but also quite clearly, a way to put the body on the line in its insistence, obduracy and precarity, overcoming the distinction between public and private" (2011: np).

Bodies not only performed private bodily actions in the park, but also had new experiences and strategies through living in the space. They divided the park into cantons and each group set up their tents in different cantons. According to my interviewees, radical leftist groups with their flags were located in Taksim Square,

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<sup>48</sup> *Capulcu* means looter that I will address this word in the next section more broadly.

and diverse groups and individuals with no party sign or flags were concentrated in different parts of the park. For example, anarchists and socialists mainly stood at the edge of the park, whereas those who were not affiliated to particular parties preferred to locate themselves deeper inside the park. One of my interviewees, a member of a left-wing party, declared that they, as socialist and revolutionaries, were like ‘bastions’ that protected people from any interventions by law enforcement officers. This also reveals that there were some significant bodily differences in the wider body politic of the protest group. Protesters also constructed barricades from public and private vehicles, stones, wooden crates and seats, not only on the boundaries of Gezi Park, but also on all the streets towards Besiktas, Osmanbey and Istiklal in order to restrict access to the Taksim area. They used strategies such as running, hiding and escaping from the police and variety of solutions to diminish the effect of teargas. In this way, they were aware of the power that surrounded them and learned the ways to resist and oppose it.

The occupation of Gezi also enabled multiple bodies to become visible in the public domain. Different bodies had different demands, but they all became public in the material space that was supposed to be turned into a private shopping mall. In so doing, the material spaces of Taksim and Gezi became part of, and supported the action of, the broader protest body. Thanks to the protests, the park was saved. However, the park revealed that bodies could act in solidarity regardless of the political differences they had. Ugur, believes that Gezi changed his perspective in terms of being political.

“We won the GP. For example, it is a much better park than it was before. We also have gained something else, that is, we have made the government step back, and we saw that such a thing could happen. It expanded our horizons in this sense. We saw millions of people on the streets. This was an incredible experience that would not come true even if we wanted. No matter what, we wanted it also for 1st May rally and we will try it again on 28th [May- the first anniversary of Gezi protest]. I think this is not something that can happen with our desire, but something that spontaneously happens. We saw ordinary citizens or our neighbours on the streets, too. Usually, we don’t consider them activists or political figures. This is broadening our horizon from this

perspective. Indeed, everyone is a political figure, everyone has some demands, and everyone has something to tell. We saw in Gezi that if possibilities are given, this can happen.” (Ugur, May 8, 2014, Osmanbey).

Ugur attributed new dimensions to the right to protest. Butler argues that street assemblies cannot be reduced into a singularity. What becomes important when bodies assemble on the streets is, as Butler (2012: 168) asserts, that they assert their presence “as a plural and obdurate bodily life” in public domain. “The “we are here” that translates that collective bodily presence might be re-read as “we are still here,” meaning: “we have not yet been disposed of... We have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life; we have not become the glaring absence that structures your public life” (2012: 168).

### **7.3.3. Carnavalesque in the park**

During the occupation, a new political space was created by the protesters. These fifteen days of occupation enabled a break from the state’s order. While constructing a communal life was a way to subvert the rules of authority, at the same time a mixture of laughter and humorous performances also enabled the protesters to challenge existing forms of authority. In this section, by using Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalesque, I will show how life in Gezi was turned upside down in the demonstrations. To do that, I argue that *capulcus* and their performances should be understood through a carnivalesque lens. I also argue that these carnivalesque practices can be identified as a joyful subversion of the state’s power.

Carnavalesque is a concept that was employed by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (2011) in his book *Rabelais and his World* to refer to subversive acts at carnivals that are practiced by people in order to reverse hierarchies and abandon conventions. For Bakhtin, (1984: 10) a carnival is a “peculiar folk humour that always existed and has never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes.” Examining carnivals of the late medieval and early modern period, Bakhtin looks at their philosophical meaning and argues that people change their everyday lives into a utopia during such time-spaces. Carnival goers wear costumes that enable them to suspend their social class and gender identities. Males can wear female costumes just

as women can wear male costumes. For Bakhtin, carnival is not only about physical space, it also enables people to do what they want to do, which they cannot do in their existing social world. He claims that carnival “builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state.” (1984: 27).

Following Bakhtin’s concept it can be said that Gezi turned into a carnival. The way participants performed and reacted against authority signified a critical politics of fun.

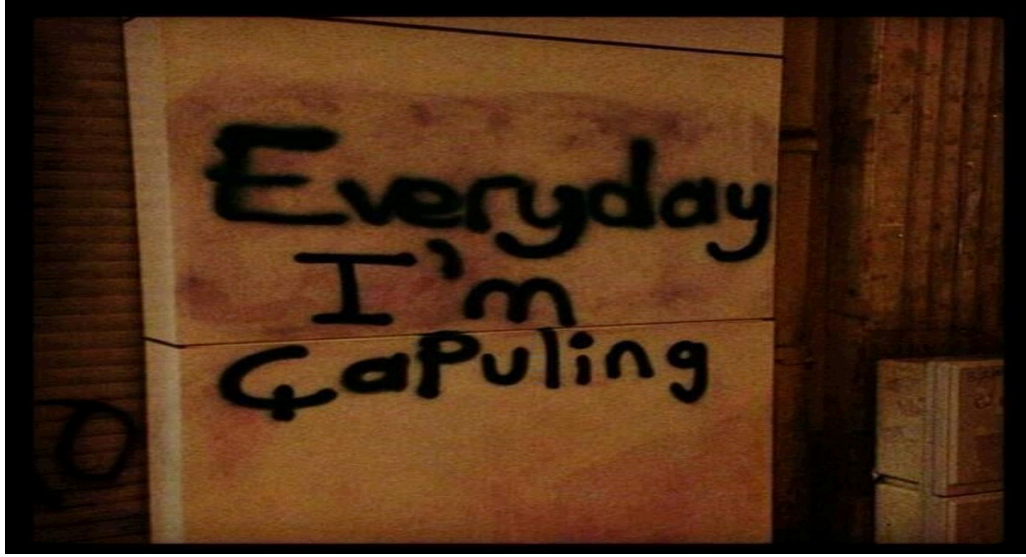
“Perhaps like Erdogan said all the *capulcu* were there.” (Buket, May 22, 2013, Findikzade)

*Capulcu* is a label that was used by Erdogan to refer the protesters as a few looters (*capulcu*) in a TV programme on 2nd June. While he used this term to humiliate the protesters in the park, everyone in the park joyfully embraced this label and started to describe themselves as *capulcu*. Thus, *Capulcu* as a bonding term for all people in the park was no longer an insulting word, but rather gained a meaning of resistance against state authority. The carnivalesque figure of *capulcu* suspended all differences between people (Bakhtin, 1984). It extinguished the hierarchies of status through the discourse of equality between all people. As Bakhtin (1984: 7) maintains:

“Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.”

As a bonding term *capulcu* started to circulate nationally and internationally. Not only those in the park but also many others – celebrities, intellectuals, and politicians - labelled themselves as *capulcu*. The CEO of Boyner Holding, one of the big corporations in Turkey, tweeted “I am neither leftist nor rightist, I am only a *capulcu*” to show his political support. Similarly, Noam Chomsky recorded a video message with a banner stating “I am also a *Capulcu*. In solidarity resist Istanbul”. Hence we can see how the Gezi carnivalesque extended beyond the physical confines of the park

and the square.



**Figure 7-1:** Everyday I'm capulling

Source:<http://everywheretaksim.net/duvar-yazilari-graffitiler-duvar-gorselleri/?nggpage=6>

By joyfully embracing the term *capulcu*, the protesters transformed the protests into a carnival defined by irony, satire, parody and the grotesque. A robust sense of humour applied to graffiti, banners, slogans, chanting, dance and music. Graffiti that was painted on one of the buildings in Taksim read that 'Every day I'm *capulling*' (Figure 7.1; see also Hurriyet, 6 June 2013), inspired by the famous rock group LMFO's hit, 'Party Rock Anthem'. Through theatrical performances, Taksim was turned into a space of 'everyday *capulling* [the verb form of *capulcu*]', which I now address in more detail.

### **7.3.3.1. Carnavalesque practices in the park**

*Capulcus* re-appropriated and re-produced many things through performing in the space. They applied humour, creativity, and joviality in their songs, dances, graffiti, slogans and chanting that turned the protests into a carnivalesque event. In this way, they produced new icons and memes associated with Gezi. The main theme was to call attention to the use of tear gas and to show the productivity of the protest. Bakhtin (1984:8) believes that "carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life. Festivity is a peculiar quality of all comic rituals and spectacles." Gezi became an event of laughing in the face of authority.

On May 31st and over the following days it, all chanting and graffiti were directed towards Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The anger expressed toward the personality of Tayyip Erdogan is very much reflected in the protests. First and foremost, his name was used without a title or his surname, which is considered disrespectful in Turkish culture. Walls and banners were covered with swear words about Erdogan. Apart from the sexist graffiti and banners, many banners and graffiti used creativity and humour to criticise Erdogan. For example, to point out that state authority was performed by the police they spelt his name ‘Recop Tazyik Gazdogan’ (truncheon, coercion and gas) (Figure 7.2). Likewise, the famous meme of Game of Thrones was replicated in English as ‘Tayyip winter is coming’ to show his time is about to finish for the protesters (Figure 7.3). Also another interesting example was Nokia’s famous tagline ‘connecting people’, which was re-produced using Erdogan’s name as ‘Tayyip connecting people’ in order to emphasise the unity of protesters thanks to Erdogan. Slogans using humour and creativity were often more effective in grabbing attention (Figure 7.4).



**Figure 7-2:** Rewriting Erdogan’s name by using truncheon, coercion and gas  
Source: <http://31mayis2013unutma.com/gezi-eyleminde-duvar-yazilari/>



**Figure 7-3:** Game of Thrones' famous meme: "Tayyip winter is coming" *in English*

Source: <http://www.haberself.com/h/958/>



**TAYYIP**  
Connecting People

**7-4:** Using Nokia's tagline towards Erdogan in English

Source: <http://everywheretaksim.net/banners-posters/?nggpage=7>

One of the most remarkable icons of the protests involved penguins and the woman in red. On 31 May 2013 when there was the excessive use of police force against the protesters, one of the mainstream channels, CNNTurk, owned by the opposition group

Dogan Media, showed a documentary about penguins instead of reporting the news. Penguins were no longer limited to the documentary. Indeed, in graffiti and banners they gained new meaning as a representation of censorship. Indeed, the name of episode, “Spy in the Huddle” that was chosen by CNNTurk could be caricatured easily in graffiti. Sometimes, with a gas mask on its face, a penguin draws attention to police brutality. Sometimes, a penguin covers its face with a fabric-mask and throws flowers towards the police. Rebellious penguins illustrate the innocence and peacefulness of the protest through humour (Figure 7.5 and 7.6). Likewise, ‘the woman in red’ who was sprayed with teargas by a riot police and captured by a Reuters’s photojournalist on 29th May, quickly became one of the icons of the movement (Figure 7.7). Soon after the image was portrayed in many banners and badges that attracted national and international sympathy. The image itself had multiple meanings. While she did not collapse quite literally in the face of police brutality, at the same time, her turned face showed innocence and civilian resistance. It also conveyed the message that ‘I am here and not going anywhere’. These two icons were widely displayed used to ridicule and criticise the state authority.



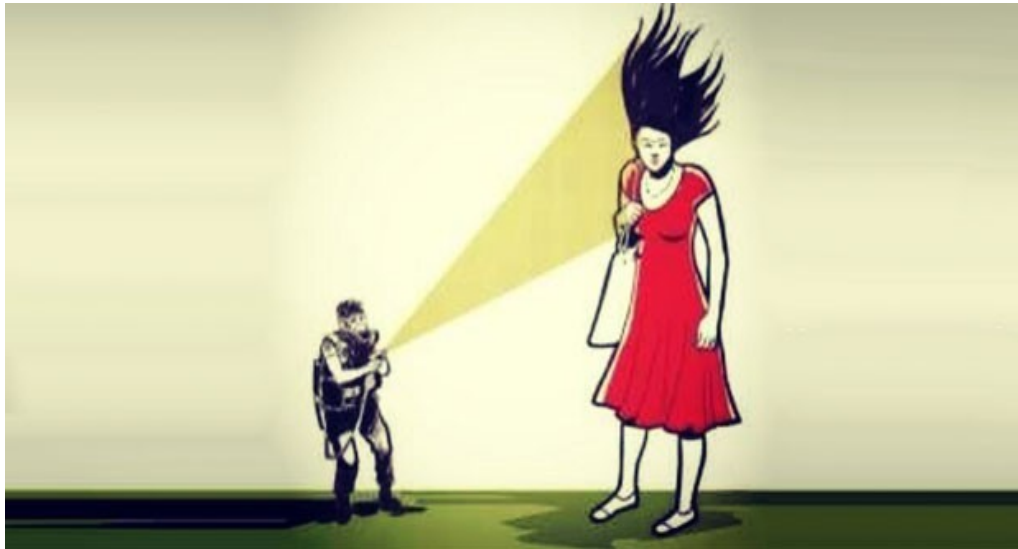
**Figure 7-5:** Penguins are resisting

Source:<http://everywheretaksim.net/tr/duvar-yazilari-graffitiler-duvar-gorselleri/?nggpage=5>



**Figure 7-6:** Penguins are resisting

Source:<http://everywheretaksim.net/tr/duvar-yazilari-graffitiler-duvar-gorselleri/?nggpage=6>



**Figure 7-7:** the Woman in red

Source:<http://t24.com.tr/haber/taksim-icin-daha-iyi-bir-proje-ve-polisin-gaz-kullanimi-yasaklansin,231141>

Throughout the protest, music, singing and dancing were important performances in the park. Not only did the protesters create new songs, they also performed modern and traditional dances containing new meanings linked to the protests. The famous Turkish rock group Duman's 'bring it on!' (Hurriyet, 3 June 2013) Bogazici Jazz

Choir's 'are you a *capulcu*, wow!' (Hurriyet, 6 June 2013) and a Turkish folklore band's 'the mood of pot and pan' (Hurriyet, 6 June 2013) were inspired by and dedicated to the protests. Another interesting example was the portrayal of the 'whirling dervish'. The whirling dervish is a dance that is practiced by the Mevlevi order<sup>49</sup>. The dance is one of the spiritual treasures of the Mevlevi tradition. More importantly, the practice itself is a peaceful and spiritual exercise that expresses the closeness of the relationship between God and the human being. The powerful message behind such a performance is "you, too, come" (*sen de gel*), a stencil referring to a phrase attributed to the saint Rumi, which was written as follows:

"Come, come, whoever you are,  
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving.  
It doesn't matter.  
Ours is not a caravan of despair.  
Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times.  
Come, yet again, come, come." (Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî)

This dance was reinterpreted in Gezi Park. A dancer in a dervish costume with a gas mask on his face performed this spiritual dance in the park. Sometimes he was half naked with black leggings and a pink skirt and sometimes in a green costume (Figure 7.8 and 7.9). The gas mask attributed an eclectic meaning to the whirling dervish: not only were these peaceful dervishes rebelling, but they also emphasise that Gezi was a peaceful protest. Transferring such a spectacle that is usually performed and/or seen by religious people to the park also showed the plurality and heterogeneity of protest: 'you, too, come'.

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<sup>49</sup> The Mevlevi order is a traditional Sufi order that was based on the spiritual wisdom of Mawlânâ Jalâluddîn Rûmî, a Muslim saint who lived in the 13th century in Konya, Anatolia.



**Figure 7-8 and 7-9:** A whirling dervish in Gezi Park

Source: <http://everywheretaksim.net/tr/category/fotograflar/gezi-parki-istanbul/>

‘Guy Fawkes’ masks were widely used in Gezi Park (Figure 7.10). The sharp, triangular, subtly smiley masks have been widely used in global protests. The Guy Fawkes mask first appeared in a ‘V for Vendetta’ comic published in 1982 in which an anarchist who wears a Guy Fawkes mask attempts to overthrow a fascist government and its collaborator, the media. ‘V for Vendetta’ and the famous mask figure have gained worldwide popularity thanks to a Hollywood-made film, ‘V for Vendetta’, that was released in 2005. Since then, the masks have become a symbol of opposition all over the world. Riisgaard and Thomassen (2016) assert that the Guy Fawkes mask is used to contest power as “the mask calls out a source of authority hidden behind the protective veil of empty, abstract principles and black suits and tie.” (2016: 12). The mask references the historical rebellion against the English government by Guy Fawkes, and hides the identities of people from state surveillance. From this perspective, mask-wearing in a collective protest has a symbolic meaning that not only challenges official forms of power, but also emphasises multiple identities behind the mask. Yet, in contrast to other protests, protesters were holding the Turkish flag or the pictures of Ataturk while wearing the masks. While the Turkish flags or Ataturk symbolised the secular Turkish state, the mask itself was a global production of anonymity. Thus, this stance was not only against the authorities but also against the particular authority that destroyed secular principles of the

modern Turkish state. Wearing the Guy Fawkes mask while waving Turkish flags or Atatürk's picture is, therefore, not a “closure but an opening, what it opens is not a predefined substance but the very realm of the sayable, made possible through an inner projection of the seeable, thrown onto the world stage of politics-in-the-making.” (Riisgaard and Thomassen, 2016: 20). It was underpinned by the support of Anonymous, a network of hacktivists and Redhack, a hacking Turkish. At the start of the protests Anonymous launched attacks on the Turkish government and hacked the websites of authorities (Hurriyet, 3 June 2013).



**Figure 7-10:** The Guy Fawkes masks in Gezi protests

Source: [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130627\\_galeri\\_eylem\\_maske](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130627_galeri_eylem_maske)

All these examples suggest that through theatrical expressions, the *capulcus* created their own world in which they inverted hierarchies and reversed binaries. Ultimately, such an experience allowed “subjects to enter a liminal realms of freedom and in so doing create[d] a space for critique that would otherwise not be possible in “normal” society.” (Bruner, 2005: 140).

#### **7.3.4. The limits of moment**

Chatterton (2006: 273) argues that although protests facilitate critical engagement with problems, they are mostly ephemeral “contact points and border crossings

between different ethics and values... [and, thus] they are far from ideal.” The same can be said for Gezi. The Gezi protests brought together those who once thought it impossible to associate. However, as Halvorsen (2015) points out, it is hard to maintain such impacts for a longer time and it depends on the moment of the protest and occupation. Since it was the first time that Turkey witnessed such an event, in many people’s minds its effect became bigger than the moment itself.

For those who spent a day there, Gezi was an immense experience that seemed and felt like a dream. It seemed that not only were the protesters making history, but it was also the end of history in Turkey. How could ultra-Turkish nationalist groups possibly come together with Kurdish nationalists, or religious people with secular people or the capitalist class with socialists and communists? How could all the problems of ninety years be forgotten in a single night? Here, the ‘Gezi spirit’ was perceived as a saviour that solved all the problems that Turkey had been facing. Protesters ate food that was brought by those they didn’t know. They united against the authority and showed what solidarity and encounter could look like. Arel, a journalist from a minority background, believes that Gezi was a struggle for civilisation. He perceives Gezi as bringing powerful feelings of effective solidarity that are still ongoing.

Arel: “Gezi is a new thing, it doesn’t look like anything. Other things look like Gezi, if we want to compare resistances around the world. Gezi, in this sense, is new and we can’t explain a new thing with old knowledge and we shouldn’t do that, indeed. With our old knowledge we have to find a political saviour or party or newspaper. But, Gezi is not that. Gezi is a rehearsal for civilisation. It is the most Europeanised resistance. It is still too early to talk about Gezi because we are still in the process. Therefore, I believe in this country such resistance with its impetus and strategies greatly contributed to our civilisation and modernity. Everyone must shape according to Gezi... We earned a lot and we’ll earn more because we are having a civilisation fight...”

Semra: What was this fight for civilisation that you described?

Arel: We collectively said one minute to the oppressive mind that has been revealed in the political language and the law enforcement officers. In this

country we had so many military coups. The Kurdish citizens, hijabi women, Armenians, minorities were oppressed but never have we resisted that strongly. Never have 4 million people taken the streets... Such an encounter that united people is important. We shall look at this glue, this Gezi spirit. No one gives up on the other in this glue. A solidarity sentiment arose and no matter what it takes no one abandons each other regardless of identity, sexual preferences or political ideology. Here it is, this is called civilisation” (Arel, June 27, 2014, Taksim).

His statement suggests that even a year after of the protests, Arel believes that there is a permanent Gezi soul to which he attributes a mystical meaning. Unlike Arel, Oznur, an LGBT member, thinks such solidarity could not continue outside of the park and outside of the period of the Gezi protests. She perceives the time of Gezi as an impossible dream. It was the first time she encountered the Anticapitalist Muslims group. Yet, she concludes that the affinity in the park was only temporary.

“It was obvious that there was a place in which an impossible dream came true. The impossible dream was 1000 people who were unlike each other and spent time together. A Gezi spirit is talked about, but I guess it was unique to the space. After leaving the space, care and diligence between people suddenly disappeared. Forcefully, I saw it in the local elections... There, people experienced it physically beyond theoretical explanations. Of course, no one thought of Gezi as a permanent house, but you know it was essential to form a common life as physically and mentally you sleep and eat in that place and you want to make a healthy environment to achieve that... There was an influence, but it didn't last longer and couldn't, indeed.” (Oznur, May 5, 2014, Taksim).

As Bakhtin (1984: 10) suggests, “carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order.” From this perspective, as in other global protests, solidarity and encounter depended on the particular space and time. The Gezi protests lasted between 27th May and 15th June. Tarik, an oral history expert, truly believes in the spirit of Gezi. For him Gezi achieved the impossible in regard to overcoming differences. He was incredibly excited to tell me how the Kurdish and Turkish nationalist groups came together. When I asked him what could

have been different in the park, he told me that problems did not really surface in the park.

Tarik: “I think almost everything was what it had to be, but there could be some more negative things. I wish there were. I wish they didn't understand each other. I mean, it would be easier to understand each other if there were some more problems. They came and they sat on a table as if nothing had happened.

Semra: who?

Tarik: As we just talked now, the Kemalists and the radical Kurds. It seemed like nothing had happened before, they sat down and they performed the folk dance together. It shouldn't be like that. They had to sit down and talk about their problems a bit harder. They talked but I think they had to discuss more in-depth. The historical problems and technical bases should have been discussed in the park, but...” (Tarik, June 21, 2014, Galata)

Tarik suggests in depth discussions were not held in Gezi. Commonality between the groups was limited to the fight against the AKP. Thus, there was an artificial togetherness between different groups. As Chatterton (2006) points out, unknowable and unrealistic aims cannot be achieved in moments of protest. “Desiring them whole scale often leads to frustrations. Victories come through subtle, slow changes. This is why a tense encounter or an angry conversation contains hope and has transformative power” (2006: 271). Since substantial discussions were not held between different groups, the ‘Gezi spirit’ arguably remains no more than a populist claim that only lasted a brief moment.

Gezi was understood as a utopian space in another way too. Protesters thought that the capitalist order was no longer valid in the park. For the protesters it was an incredible experience since there was neither the state nor its capitalist order. Buket, a leftist activists, states:

“There was no sense of individualism and private ownership. I stayed there almost for a month but never used money. There was no money. It makes you

feel like; when you have even a cup of tea, you want to share it with others... You try to communise everything that you have.” (Buket, May 22, 2013, Findikzade)

However, the needs of protesters were met through donations from big corporations as much as individuals. From the first days, Cem Boyner CEO of Boyner company, one of the biggest companies in Turkey, spoke of his sympathy with Gezi (Haberturk, 5 June 2013). Likewise, Divan Hotel, owned by Koc Holding – the largest holding in Turkey - which is right behind the park, became the infirmary of the park in which the protesters stored their medical supplies. (Hurriyet, 15 June 2013). The support of big corporations was crucial. However, Koc Holding constructed its university campus on forestland, north of Istanbul, which it had been allocated by the central government in the 1990s despite environmental concerns (Yalcintan and Thornley, 2007). The protest was ostensibly against the capitalist order, but drew donations from and was supported by, capitalist firms. Thus, the protests did not target the neoliberal order but the AKP’s implementation of neoliberalism.

Mona Abaza (2016), five years after the revolution in Egypt, questions what remains of the carnivalesque moments of Tahrir Square in 2011. She points out that although in the upheaval, the fearless citizens resisted the authoritarian state, it appears that the Arab spring has given rise to both militarism and terrorism. Likewise, while carnivalesque like protests revealed the uniqueness of Gezi, the aftermath of the massive protests did meet protesters’ goals.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

This thesis sought to comprehensively grasp the Gezi protests by examining the historical dynamics shaping the key actors. It relied on the concept of resistance in which multiple spatialities, and temporalities of the Gezi protests were explored. The thesis argued that the Gezi protests were multifaceted, fragmented, and heterogeneous and therefore cannot be reduced to a singularity. This was achieved through the presentation of diverse and multiple views in each chapter.

Each empirical chapter sought to shed light on different dimensions of the protests. Chapter three addressed the shift in Turkey's political economy and its relation to the protests. It argued that the Gezi protests were not against neoliberalism, but rather against the way in which neoliberalism has been implemented by the AKP over the last decade. Neoliberalism was refined by the AKP through adding Islamic morality and ethics. The living standards of the poor were improved and different business classes were realigned. Although the Gezi discourse projected an anti-neoliberal stance (capital is out, Istanbul is ours), some of the large businesses in Turkey participated and supported the protests. Therefore, the participation of big business firms blurred Gezi's position as anti-neoliberal. Thus, the chapter argued that the Muslim bourgeoisies have challenged the secular-oriented bourgeoisies, thanks to the AKP's neoliberal policies. Gezi revealed the dynamics of this Muslim bourgeoisies shaped by Islamic ethics and its representative, the AKP.

The fourth chapter looked at how the AKP's urban policies were reflected in the protests. Since the AKP came to power, the real estate and construction sectors have become shining economic stars. The AKP used large-scale infrastructure and urban renewal projects to prepare Istanbul and the whole of Turkey for the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic in 2023. This chapter illustrated how Istanbul has become a key site in which new strategies and techniques have been put into practice.

Not only have new laws empowered local government with extensive authority, but central government also plays a key role in the decision-making process. Through these new strategies and techniques, Istanbul's material spaces have been significantly transformed. The chapter argued that since an urban issue – saving Gezi park from destruction – sparked the protests, the protests also gave voice to dissatisfaction with gentrification, urban transformation, commodification, and the privatisation of public assets, forests and land all over Istanbul. Although the protesters spoke up about many issues related to the city, these issues were not reflected in the media.

The fifth chapter tackled the relationship between Islam, secularism, and postsecularism with regard to the Gezi protests. The chapter examined Gezi as a post-secular space. Istanbul is an emblematic space in which both religious and non-religious lifestyles are present. Since the 1980s diverse lifestyles have been represented in the public sphere, but with the rise of AKP Islam has become very powerful in the public sphere, for the first time in Turkish history. I argued that although some protesters claimed that the AKP had injected Islamic lifestyles into their private and public sphere, protesters negotiated the presence and practice of religion in the park. Using the discourses, practices, and rituals of the protesters, the chapter shows how postsecularism was manifested and contested during and after the protest. The chapter concluded that since Gezi protesters had an antagonistic relationship with the AKP and its supporters, they largely reiterated the longstanding division between secularism and religion.

The sixth chapter investigates how democracy was understood and exercised by the different actors during the protests. It argues that since the modern Turkish Republic was established, the state apparatuses have given extraordinary power to those who rule the country. Therefore, the authoritarianism that Erdogan's government was charged with took root in long-standing undemocratic state establishments. The chapter examines multiple imaginaries of democracy deployed in the narratives of the AKP government, Erdogan in particular, and various protesters. While it defined Erdogan's narrow understanding of democracy through populism, it emphasised that even within the groups of protesters, democracy was understood and practised in different ways. Some demanded a change to the centralised power that produced undemocratic practice, while others asked for more participatory democracy. Others

argued that the AKP was an illegitimate government. The chapter illustrates how a divergent range of demands could not be turned into one concrete demand, and an antagonistic relationship between the AKP and protesters turned into polarisation.

The seventh chapter is dedicated to grasping ‘the politics of the moment’ in which the mass protests occurred through various embodied actions. The chapter seeks to grasp the ways in which various bodily actions were portrayed by different actors, the media and protesters. It examines the moment of protests through three different concepts, ‘encounter’, ‘performativity’ and ‘carnavalesque’, and stresses the diversity of the practices that took place during the protests. Although different historical and geographic legacies played an important role in the rise of the protests, the protesters were also shaped in the moment. In that sense, the immediate time and space of the park and the city affected the ways in which embodied actions took shape.

This thesis set out to answer three main questions:

1. What have been the various processes driving the Gezi protests?
- 2: What specific novelties arose during the Gezi protests?
- 3: How did the key protagonists - the AKP, protesters, and media – co-constitute the protests?

Answering the first question, I took a historical approach, and showed various social, political and economic influences behind the protests. These driving forces included the rise in the visibility of Islam in the economic, political and public spheres of Turkish society, the restrictions over the use of public spaces brought about by neoliberal spatial policies, and Erdogan’s authoritarianism and move away from democracy. The first four empirical chapters examined each of these processes in detail. These were the driving forces that induced the protests, and they were interconnected with each other. Therefore, I did not reduce the protest to a single cause. Instead I traced the plurality of processes and their intersection with each other in the last empirical chapter.

In response to the second question, I argue that while Turkey has witnessed many protests in the past, the Gezi protests were a new phenomenon. It was the first time

that Turkey had witnessed an ‘occupy’ style movement and highly diverse social groups found common ground. First and foremost, a new type of opposition emerged from the protests. As a result of this opposition style many novelties that were not experienced and imagined before occurred in the public spaces across Istanbul. These included collectively and peacefully opposing construction-based economic growth and its consequences, opposing neoliberalism with capitalist firms, renegotiating religion in the park and many other neighbourhoods across Istanbul, organising public forums in various places across Istanbul, encountering new subjectivities, and opposing the authorities using carnivalesque techniques. I emphasised the creative use of public space in Taksim and elsewhere in Istanbul. Although Taksim was the main site of protests, many other urban spaces as well as social media became terrains for this new style of opposition. Since this style of opposition was new, these practices only brought temporary impacts rather than a permanent change to Turkish politics. In other respects, Gezi generated significant impacts on Turkish politics. Although these cannot be considered as novel I will briefly point them out in the next section.

With regards to the final question, I elaborated various actors’ roles during the Gezi protests. The media played an important role in the ways in which the protesters, the AKP and its leader have been perceived. The media portrayed the protests through their politically biased positions. At the same time, they helped the protests to expand and they also shaped the direction of the protests. In regard to social agents, Erdogan was the most powerful actor whose role shaped the resistance as well as its future direction. While Erdogan justified his harsh response to the protests by depicting the event as a civilian coup, his authoritarian practices were the reason protesters gave for expanding and perpetuating the protests. Other official authorities were invisible during the whole process and not subjected to criticism. The protesters, however, took different roles in different times and spaces. Various subjectivities coalesced around the trees and coexisted in the same space for fifteen days and they also gathered together after the protests on many occasions. In each chapter, I showed how Gezi created an imagined public, although in practice the bond between bodies was not well established.

The thesis sought to contribute to the literature on Gezi protests by analysing many factors. There have been many protests across the globe since the beginning of the

2010s. Both the Western academy and the media have fallen into the habit of presenting all these protests using the same narrative and monotone discourses. In contrast, this thesis sought to understand the Gezi protests as part of a wave of global protests in more nuanced ways and by taking different localities, geographies and histories into consideration. The heterogeneities of the Gezi protest through the various historical and geographical discourses and practices, and the ways in which these shaped different social agents and space were demonstrated. Multiplicity was found in who participated in the protests, what kind of impulses induced the protests and how the protesters performed, acted and reacted. The spatialities of the protests were established through physical presences in public spaces –Gezi Park, Taksim Square and many other urban spaces throughout Istanbul and the country – and virtual spaces. Spatial practices that were performed in both physical and digital spaces demonstrated what Massey (2003: 4) called ‘a global sense of place’: “different stories coming together and, to one or another, becoming entangled.” The role of temporality is important to understand togetherness, actions and performances of the protests. Thus, each chapter addressed a different dimension of the multiplicity, spatiality and temporality of the protests.

This thesis also aimed to shed new light on the Gezi protests through exploring the multiple dynamics and implications that constructed the event. By avoiding conventional generalisations the thesis offered opportunities to understand a social event in two distinctive ways. First, it sought to understand this complex and multifaceted event by evaluating and combining multiple theories – neoliberalism, postsecularism and democracy - with each other. It was shown in the thesis that each process had a different impact on the formation of space and time of the Gezi protests. The interpretation of protests requires examination from many angles. Although I laid emphasis on a single frame in each chapter, the thesis demonstrated that all these frames are interwoven with each other rather than sharply delineated. For example, without taking neoliberal transformation into consideration alongside the visibility of religion and religious life in the public sphere, people’s democratic demands and practices cannot be understood. Thus, the Gezi protests had multiple aspects, and these intertwined processes shaped the space in which the protests occurred in numerous ways. While multiple dimensions and trajectories constructed and shaped the Gezi event, the event itself also brought about opportunities to rethink and

reimagine these multiplicities, spatialities and temporalities. Through the protest movement, it was shown that space is constructed through social relations and people's material practices. As Massey (1993: 67) states,

“The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words, is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself.”

Second, the research presented encounters with different agents within and outside of the protests, to uncover togetherness, multitudes and contradictions of this encounter. The picture drawn in the thesis does not rely on a binary position – the protesters and the government. I have examined various positions and sought to illustrate the different actions taken by various groups. The discussion did not favour one side, nor did it discuss who is right and who is not. Instead, I aimed to offer an analysis of different narratives on multiple issues from various agents - the protesters, the media and the government.

Ultimately, the thesis revealed the complexities of Turkish politics in relation to economic, urban, social and cultural issues, and their intersection with each other in the protests. In this sense, it provided an epistemological contribution to the literature on the Gezi protests. Moreover, by considering the local context, we begin to understand the complexities of a protest movement that has been happening all over the world recently. The concepts like neoliberalism and democracy are very broad and general concepts. By taking localities into consideration these concepts mutate and thus gain different meanings. Consequently, their impacts on global protests bring about contested implications.

I should make clear that I have deliberately not dealt with the future implications of Gezi protests. Instead, I analysed various processes and their impacts on the formation of the Gezi protests. Although I touched on different types of activism related to Gezi after the massive protests, the consequences of the event were not

elucidated. Thus, this thesis does not provide a picture of the broader impact of the protests or their future direction after Gezi.

In summary, the Gezi protests were the biggest and most complex protests in Turkish history. The protesters were successful in saving Gezi Park from re-development and preserving it. However, it is not clear what else they achieved. That is the reason why this research has demonstrated how the Gezi protests can be understood on multiple levels and analysed using various conceptual lenses.

## **8.2. Post-Gezi politics**

It is important to touch on the post-Gezi political situation in Istanbul and Turkey. Although it might seem contrary to the multiple aims and ideals of the Gezi protests, the pluralist public sphere has been diminished and social and political polarisation has increased. A few weeks after the Gezi protests, a military coup occurred in Egypt. Most of Gezi protesters sided with the General Abdulfattah Al-Sisi, who deposed the elected president, Muhammed Morsi. Erdogan capitalised on this by inciting his supporters to believe that the Gezi Protests were tantamount to a civilian coup against him and his party. While the international media paid massive attention to the protests against Morsi's government in Tahrir Square, it barely covered the protests organised by Morsi's supporters in Al-Rabia Square. This bias strengthened Erdogan's hand in convincing his supporters that international powers are against him and his party. Support for Erdogan among the conservative masses intensified, and further accentuated the division between religious and opposition secular people.

Many people believed that there were two eras: before and after Gezi. While the former refers to politics based on the Islamist versus Kemalist dichotomy, the latter created a new pluralist political language. For example, Gole (2013: 14) claimed that the Gezi protests heralded, "the need for a new public culture based on recognition and acceptance." However, the opposite has occurred and in many ways Gezi has exacerbated political instability. Oppositional identities were identified as against the AKP. Instead of enabling plural political debates, person(s) and their stance towards Gezi became important in taking sides in a binary set of oppositions.

This post-Gezi instability arguably led to a sequence of events that challenged the power of the ruling party. One was a corruption scandal in December 2013, when the Gulenist-affiliated prosecutors detained several key people from the AKP. Another was the break with the Kurdish peace process in August 2015, and finally, a bloody coup attempt in July 2016. Although the AKP has gained power legitimately by winning elections, it is also vulnerable, and challenges to its power have produced more authoritarianism and state control, such as a ban on Twitter, YouTube and demonstrations in particular public spaces in the year after Gezi. These authoritarian practices have become 'normal' in comparison to more serious repressive practices. After the coup attempt in 2016 hundreds of journalists and academics were arrested; many members of parliament from the pro-Kurdish party, HDP were also imprisoned; many academics were fired from the state-affiliated universities; and many NGOs were shut down. In addition, a state of emergency has been enacted since last July and legal proceedings against it rendered illegal.

As the Gezi protests targeted Erdogan, the AKP's consensual party principles were abandoned after the protests. Although political Islam was originally a bottom-up movement that embraced plurality and multiplicity, and played an important role in the democratisation process in Turkey, the AKP has completely moved away from its foundational principles and Erdogan now determines decision-making. The AKP has moved from initiating reforms in order to pursue full-membership of the EU to an alarmingly fractious relationship with the EU<sup>50</sup> (TC Cumhurbaskanligi, 14 November 2013). Populism, conservatism, nationalism and anti-Westernism have become the words that define the AKP's national and international policies. Democracy has been suspended in Turkey. The presence of an opposing idea does not seem possible. Turkey is in crisis.

Nevertheless, some promising outcomes have emerged from Gezi. It showed that there is not a meta-narrative that embraces all the segments of society. There are not two homogeneous groups, i.e. the AKP and Gezi supporters, who exist in the Turkish society. Indeed, it is more complex and has plural forms, despite the Kemalist politics of the past and the AKP's exclusionary politics since Gezi. This also demonstrates

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<sup>50</sup> Although the EU asked Turkey to bring in new terror laws, Turkey rejected the proposal since it perceived the laws as validating the PKK's activities.

that, as Mouffe asserts (2005), a 'harmonious ensemble' of different and multiple views is not possible - antagonism exists in every society. The different classes in Turkey have diverse views, values, and interests, which emerge through differences in ethnicity, religious practices, gender, and class (Yel and Nas, 2013). In this sense, Gezi's approach to democracy and pluralism would be possible, as Mouffe argues, if antagonism and conflict between different ideas were accepted and negotiated.

Finally, although Gezi Park and few trees coalesced thousands of people in the park and millions of people in other places across the country, such opposition could not be harnessed to campaign against other urban development projects that might be considered more harmful. When I met Emre, a member of the Chamber of Urban Planners, he was disappointed with the Gezi movement. He asked "what happened to the millions of people who effectively protected Gezi Park?" He told me that opposition to inappropriate urban development remained weak after the protests. The Chamber of Urban Planners and the Association of Architects and Engineers raised awareness about the potential environmental damage and costs of mega projects, and formed many organisations, such as Northern Forest Defenders, but they are still relatively marginal. It appears that it is challenging for these urban environmental groups to engage with residents' groups and wider society. It is worth exploring how the post-Gezi environment shaped the AKP's urban policies, the poorer neighbourhoods' responses and the multiple interactions between all the stakeholders. Istanbul is a global city, which is mobile and highly fragmented. It offers rich case studies of everyday life, urban development and vested interests, which I will continue to research in the future.

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