Section I
Gezi Protests and Democratisation
1 Evoking and Invoking Nationhood as Contentious Democratisation

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The Gezi protests and the 2007 Flag/Republic demonstrations constitute the two major episodes of mass mobilisations against the AKP. A comparative analysis of the organisation, participation, claims and immediate responses of both episodes is critical for demonstrating the changing popular discourse of nationhood and citizenship, and indicates a democratic shift in the public definitions of these concepts. With massive historical protests in place, from a Contentious Politics approach to democratisation,1 the AKP decade might, paradoxically, be one of the most democratic periods in Turkish history; not necessarily due to the actions and policies of the party, but to the extent of increasing participation and political engagement of the population from different walks of life.

Since both waves were clearly critical of and targeting the AKP regime, and neither was centred on addressing the economic policies of the party, during both cycles of mobilisations participants voiced definitions of their collectivities as they envisioned citizenship, democratic participation and nationhood. The most significant shift is from a monolithic sense of top-down engineered nationhood to a multiculturalist sense of citizenship. These shifting patterns and multiple meanings of nationhood indicate an ongoing dialogical contestation, negotiations regarding the criteria of what constitutes Turkishness and what qualifies as the Turkish nation.

A survey of organising bodies and slogans as dialogical contestations indicate that the self-definitions of anti-AKP demonstrators radically changed between 2007 and 2013, and such change can be explained by the paradoxical processes of democracy that were in action during the AKP government. A process-oriented, relational and dialogical analysis of these

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1 Contentious Politics, as coined by Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam (2001, 5), among others, refers to collective political struggles that take the form of disruptive – rather than continuous – public claim-makings outside ‘regularly scheduled events such as votes, parliamentary elections and associational meetings’ and ‘well-bounded organizations, including churches and firms.’ This approach is significantly more dynamic than classical social movement studies, which often focus on structures and individual movements and ignore the interactive processes of claim-making among the actors.
two episodes of protests indicates an expanded and broadened popular opposition despite possible and imminent reversals of de-democratisation.

The theoretical premises of this essay in terms of democratisation, nationhood and dialogical analysis are eclectic yet complimentary. First, it is based on an understanding that democracy is not a thing to be developed by democratically-minded actors (Tilly 2007 and 2009). Similarly, no nation is to be understood as a given entity, but rather as a historical product of evoking and invoking a sense of nationhood and shifting identities of membership to a politically sanctioned institutionalized community.2 Finally, discourse is understood not merely as reflective but as a central and crucial constitutive component of mobilisations in the form of interactive repertoires of meanings that could be captured dialogically as contenders challenge authorities and express their claims (Steinberg 1999). All these theoretical debates understand democracy, nationhood and citizenship in a process-oriented and relational perspective, within which discourse constrains and confines the ways in which material conditions of social life become intelligible to the participants and acted upon by agents of social change. Centrality of discursive and interactive meaning in nationhood compels us to look at the claims articulated by the protesters and the contested qualities of nationhood call for an understanding of democracy as a process.

Following Charles Tilly’s argument that democracy is not a designed institution, but rather a product of contestation among actors who may or may not be democratically-minded social and political agents, this article argues that the shifting claims and repertoires of the anti-AKP mobilisations reveal a paradoxical process of overall democratisation during an increasingly authoritarian rule by the party. Based on a historical understanding that ‘democratization [...] never happened without intense contention’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 272.) this unique conceptualisation follows the definitions of democracy as the processes during which previously excluded populations participate in political decision making (Schwartz 2009), as contestation (Dahl 1971) and as how opposition is treated (Przeworski 1991). Envisioning democratisation as a process of expanding, broadening and protected participation of populations, and de-democratisation as the process during which certain groups’ access to

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2 For Brubaker (2005, 116), ‘nationhood is not an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact; it is a political claim. It is a claim on people’s loyalty, on their attention, on their solidarity. If we understand nationhood not as fact but as claim, then we can see that “nation” is not a purely analytical category.’
political decision-making is limited, unprotected and unequal, provides a powerful analytical framework to capture the many paradoxical predicaments of the AKP regime.3

According to the Contentious Politics perspective, ‘democracy results from, mobilizes and reshapes popular contention’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 269) and democratisation and de-democratisation are defined within a contingent continuum where a regime moves ‘toward or away from relatively broad, equal and protected binding consultations of the government’s subjects with respect to governmental resources, personnel, and policies’ (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 216). In this process-oriented understanding of popular participation, democracy is not a ‘thing’ to be built, but is the product of mobilisations and clashes between the state and its challengers. Moreover, it is not the motives, interest, intentions and policies of the actors that shape a democratic regime, but the contradictions, clashes and contentions among the actors that open spaces for democratic participation. As stated by Tilly (2009), democracy flourishes ‘on bargained compliance, rather than on either passive acceptance or uncompromising resistance’. Democracy is not a switch that can be turned on or off, nor is it a product of actions of elite experts or advocates of democratic action; democracy is more like a thermometer that operates in degrees. According to Tilly, every time rulers intervene in non-state resources, activities or interpersonal connections, they encounter resistance, negotiation or bargaining from those who are ruled. The degrees of the thermometer shift as the ways in which rulers organise themselves end in continuous negotiations between the rulers and the ruled over how (social) resources are acquired and allocated.

Democratisation ‘is not a finite and linear process and [...] various forms and processes of contention [...] can combine to produce’ democratic practices as well as detours, ‘not only because some people oppose democracy itself, but also – and probably primarily – because claims made in the name of democracy threaten their vested interests’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 268).

According to the Contentious Politics approach, public actions and demonstrations, such as the Gezi Protests – and even the 2007 Flag demonstrations –, are by definition democratic because individuals and groups transform themselves into agents of change with immediate and long-term impact on the government policies and actions, thus affecting state-society

3 Such conceptualisation is also disassociated and distinctive from substantive (how much a regime makes people happy, like UN charts), constitutional (legal/formal structures), procedural (elections, etc), ideal (normative) understandings of democracy (Tilly 2007, 7).
relationships. This relationship does not necessarily follow a gradualist evolution towards more institutionalisation of democracy, but is contingent on the processes and mechanisms of the contestation on the grounds that shape the nature, quality and extent of participation by citizens.

Nationhood is not an entity with essentialist properties. Nationhood, as argued by Brubaker, is also a contested ground of collective self-understanding of the polity. According to this understanding, nationhood and citizenship are not only legal and political designations, they are also cultural constructs that are created, supported, maintained and challenged by contending actors. Following Brubaker's argument that nation is a category of practice and not analysis, nationalism is always to be understood as an interactive product and nationhood as relational. Brubaker's work highlights the 'cultural idioms of nationhood' that express and constitute interests and identity. In other words, a nation is not a group with substantive and essential properties but 'nationalisation' is a 'political, social, cultural and psychological process' and nationhood is a groupness 'as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable' (Brubaker 2004, 54).

Collective actions and mobilisations are always resourceful fields revealing a sense of belongingness and the self-identification of the participants. Since identity is never private or individual and always public and relational, and because its deeply interactive character can be exposed in 'constantly negotiated conversations rather than individual minds,' mobilisations often constitute a good source of capturing the otherwise fluid definitions of 'us' and 'them.' Publicly stated contentious ideas of nationhood feed back into the social and political (contentious) relations where new changes take place. The anti-AKP demonstrations of 2007 and 2013, with clearly expressed and challenged 'cultural idioms of nationhood,' are the 'contingent events' that have 'their transformative consequences,' which has constituted the dynamics of nationhood.

Finally, the dialogical component of the shifting discourses of nationhood and citizenship can also be captured within the analytical framework of Contentious Politics. Following Mark Steinberg, who crafted the term 'repertoires of discourse,' based on Tilly's formulation of 'repertoires of collective action,' collective identities such as nationhood and citizenship are formed interactively, in a dialogical manner, and they are bound by the ways in which contestants articulate their claims. According to Steinberg, all social

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4 According to Tilly (1995) 'repertoires of collective action' are products of processes of group interaction among multiple contesting parties in a conflict; they are bound and shaped by the context of the contention and constituted of shared routines for collective use.
mobilisations involve discursive contestations when protesters challenge the voice of authority by questioning their interpretation of its meanings. In doing so, they do not come up with a wholesale shift in the meaning, but ‘pragmatically engage in appropriation as they find its elements become more transparently vulnerable to questioning and transformation within a specific context. Through this process challengers construct the fighting words essential to [...] collective action’ (Steinberg 1999, 17).

Dialogical meaning construction posits that ‘all challenging groups are deeply engaged in the process of creating a collective identity, which legitimizes their grievances and claims and provides license for action.’ They fashion their collective identities dialogically, developing ‘discursive repertoires from the friction of conflict’ (Steinberg 1999, 20-21). Drawing heavily on Bakhtin’s idea of dialogical struggle, Steinberg’s (Ibid., 17) work illustrates how

subordinate groups seek to subvert the power-holders’ authoritative voice, first by questioning the accepted interpretations of dominant meanings, [then] when challengers expose these as defined in the interests of power, they can attempt to appropriate and transform the genres into fighting words, which broadcast their shared sense of injustice and resolution.

As Bakhtin (1981, 293) argued, ‘the word in language is half someone else’s,’ indicating dialogue and multivocality, i.e. words carry multiple meanings, interpretations, and they themselves are contested terrains. As such, subordinate groups appropriate dominant discourses expropriating and forcing them ‘to submit’ their own intentions and accents to construct collective claims and identity.

Regardless of the nature of the claims articulated, collective actions have constitutive impacts in modern democracies; they not only reveal the political agency of the individuals and groups, but also create a relational and contingent space of negotiations between the power-holders and the protesters. Through articulation of claims during demonstrations diverse individual self-understandings emerge and merge as public pronouncements, which are communicated both among the participants and with the power-holders. In that sense, both the 2007 and 2013 anti-AKP demonstrations, along with the AKP officials, were engaged in a dialogical struggle to redefine the collectivities of nationhood and citizenship in Turkey.

Inspired by Brubaker’s suggestion that it is the political actors, policy-makers and the challengers that invoke or evoke nation as a putative entity
in order to justify the claims of the collectivity in action.\(^5\) I argue that the participants of the two episodes of protests, by describing and designating their sense of membership in a political community, are actually in the process of the reproduction of Turkish polity and nationhood. Both the 2007 demonstrations and the Gezi protests were moments of negotiation of nationhood with crowds that gathered in public spaces who were experiencing and contesting diverse meanings of national unity (i.e. what are the goals, ideals, aspirations of this collectivity), nationhood (i.e. a sense of belonging to a cultural and political community) and citizenship (i.e. culturally understood, legally acquired membership).

I argue that with the Gezi protests, a new, anti-authoritarian sense of nationhood was *invoked*, in contrast to the 2007 mobilisation, where prevailing ideas and policies of Turkishness with a state-imposed unity and uniformity were *evoked*. In 2007, the demonstrators were bringing and calling memories, images and sentiments from the past, whereas during the Gezi protests, there were earnest requests for a new collectivity, calling forth and putting into effect a new sense of community. This shift from evoking nationhood, i.e. a retrospective homogeneity and a nationalism of yesteryear, to invoking nationhood, which aims to create a new and diverse collectivity, is a product of unprecedented expansion and broadening of democratic participation in Turkey that has been taking place under the AKP, a party which was later deemed by some to have become corrupt and slipping into authoritarianism, despite immense support from almost half of the Turkish voters.\(^6\)

### 2007 – Nation-Evoking Demonstrations

The 2007 Flag demonstrations were organised by two staunchly nationalist organisations: the Association for Ataturkist Thought (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*, ADD) and the Association for the Support of Contemporary Living (*Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*). The former identifies itself as a laicist

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\(^5\) Here, Brubaker follows Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the ‘performative character’ of participants’ reification of their group, i.e. they ‘contribute to producing what they apparently describe or designate’ (Bourdieu 1991, 220). Brubaker (2004, 69) characterises this group-making practice as ‘generic to political mobilisations and representation’ and summarises this process as follows: ‘by invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being […] to stir, summon, justify, mobilize, kindle and energize’ (Ibid., 53).

(state-secularist) organisation that promotes the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, and aims to defend his reforms against the imminent threats of Sharia and separatism. The latter was created by a group of female academics who subscribe to a statist feminism, highlighting the Republican principle that incorporated and institutionalized putative political and social rights for women in Turkey. As staunch adherents of state-secularism and supporters of the military’s role as the guardian of the Republican principles, in the spring of 2007 these two urban elite organisations called for a series of protest demonstrations throughout the main urban centres with the active support and participation of a dozen other nationalist and state secularist associations – all of which were later active at Gezi – such as the DİSK, Istanbul Bar Association, Youth Union of Turkey (Türkiye Gençlik Birliği, TGB), Confederation of Public Workers’ Union (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, KESK), Union of Patriotic Forces (Vatansever Kuvvetler Güç Birliği Hareketi), Association of Women of the Republic and left and centre-left parties.

The call was actively supported by the Turkish Armed Forces when the military made its support clear by publicly echoing the concerns of the organisers regarding the possible election of one of the founders of AKP, Abdullah Gül, whose wife publicly dons the Islamic headscarf. The then chief of staff, General Yaşar Büyükanıt, stated that the election of the new head of state ought to conform to ‘the foundational values of the Republic, the unitarian nature of the state and sincerely following the laicist democratic state.’ Freedom of press was heavy-handedly undermined even when journalists from mainstream media questioned the civilian quality of the planned demonstrations and expressed discomfort about the interventionist traditions of the military.

In 2007, there were a total of ten well-organised, heavily attended and orderly ‘Republic’ demonstrations in nine Turkish cities and one German city. In Ankara, 500,000 participants marched to Anıtkabir, the memorial of the Founder of the Turkish Republic, in the aftermath of the actual demonstration with no intervention from the security forces. The most populated demonstration took place in Izmir with over a million participants.

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7 For distinctions between Turkish laicism and secularism, see Houston 2013.
11 Weekly NOKTA’s headquarters were raided, computer hard-drives were seized and the publication of future issues was effectively ended.
Donning and displaying the Turkish flag, participants’ slogans expressed three sets of concerns:

a) the threat of an Islamist takeover, evoking the Republican principle of state-secularism: ‘Claim your Republic’; ‘Turkey is Laicist, will Remain Laicist’; ‘neither Sharia, nor a coup, but a totally independent Turkey’; ‘The roads to Çankaya [Presidential Palace] are closed to Sharia’; ‘We don’t want an imam in Çankaya’; ‘Turkey sobered up and the imam passed out!’; ‘Forefather, rest in peace, we are here.’

b) protesting foreign support, evoking anti-imperialism: ‘We want no ABD-ullah as president!’ [ABD is the Turkish acronym for US]; ‘Neither EU, nor US. Totally independent Turkey!’; and again ‘neither Sharia, nor a coup, but a totally independent Turkey’ [‘totally independent’ alluding to the anti-imperialist Marxist-Leninist left of the 1960s and 1970s].

c) indicating the backward, primitive, religious qualities of the AKP in direct confrontation with the prime minister and demanding his resignation: ‘Cabinet, resign!’; ‘Tayyip take a look at us, count how many of us there are!’ [a direct reference to the prime minister’s former remark about the numbers of the protesters]; ‘Turkey sobered up and the imam passed out!’ [pun]; ‘Even Edison regrets it!’ referring to AKP’s emblem, the light bulb; ‘As the sun rises, light bulbs dim; ‘We came with our mother, where are you?’ [on mother’s day, as direct confrontation with one of the former remarks of the prime minister]; ‘The Islamic call to prayer, the peal of church bells, and the ceremony of the synagogue are all listened to with respect in this city’ [confronting the prime minister’s remark that Izmir was an infidel city]; ‘Buy Tayyip, get Aydın Doğan for free!’ [Doğan is the media mogul whose media outlets gave little coverage to the demonstrations].

With these slogans and several public speeches, the protesters identified their goal of a republican Turkey as an ‘enlightened nation-state with integrity and honour, and guided by [principles of] science’ as opposed to ‘reactionaries’ (a euphemism about Islamism), separatists (a euphemism about Kurdish nationalism), collaborators of global exploitation (alluding to the anti-imperialist foundational myths of the post-World War One era), and conspiracies that aim to establish an anti-laicist education system.

They were responding to Prime Minister Erdoğan whose populist remarks were undermining the laicist claims as elitist, by identifying him as

an ignorant religious reactionary who lacked the modern statesmanship as envisioned by the founders of the Republic. A nineteenth-century modernist discourse was apparent during the demonstrations as the participants expressed their fear of what they perceived as ‘religious reactionary’ politics, and arguing that religious social representation was not supposed to be an integral part of Turkish politics even if represented by democratically elected leaders and supported by large portions of society. The irony was that the protestors identified the ‘backward, reactionary’ AKP as the ally of the enlightened yet ‘imperialist’ Europe.

The 2007 protests were well organised, strategic mobilisations of a paradoxical elite mob-spirit that seemed to be fearful of losing its monopoly of the public discourse on nationhood and citizenship. Their understanding of Turkishness and Turkish nationhood was one of following the top-down ideals of a modernizing state, depicting the population and its ideals as designed and designated by the republican principles of cultural uniformity and anti-religious exclusiveness, guarded by the military establishment.

Gezi – Summer 2013

Contrary to the ex-nihilo explanations regarding the origins of the Gezi mobilisation, there were almost two years’ worth of long strategic organising, involving professional, neighbourhood and community organisations. The rapid escalation of protests throughout the country in the month of June is often described as a massive, spontaneous and unorganised response to indiscriminate police brutality against peaceful protestors. In fact, the original protest was a well-organised strategic action coordinated by local residents of Taksim and the TMMOB (the leading groups and active participants of the Taksim Solidarity, which would later incorporate more than 100 professional and civic organisations) against the redevelopment plans of the government and the Mayor, initiated in 2009. Since its inception, Taksim Solidarity was staunchly critical of the AKP regime, not only in terms of its economic programme, but also its social and cultural policies and its constituents’ cultural visibility.

As the protests expanded in scope and number, the original instigator, Taksim Solidarity, emerged as the umbrella organisation of çapulcus and çapulling, fully re-appropriating a formerly pejorative term that was originally used by the prime minister to discredit the demonstrators. This

re-appropriation represented the anti-authoritarian core of the ongoing uprising and turmoil in Turkey, where subtle or overt forms of authoritarianism have always been a definitive quality of the polity. Unlike the prevailing and traditional methods of power and protest in politics, the Gezi demonstrators, using methods of occupation and humour, displayed a Bakhtian sense of carnival and laughter.16 The Gezi protests were ‘not a spectacle seen by the people,’ but a carnival to be lived in and ‘everyone participate[d] because its very idea embrace[d] all the people’ (Bakhtin 1984, 7-8). Due to the particularities of a carnival setting they could operate outside the societal rules and limitations as they voiced their critique of authority, i.e. the AKP government and Prime Minister Erdoğan. The humour, or as Bakhtin calls it ‘the Rabelaisian laughter,’ was employed to undermine the stiffness of authority, parodying almost each and every quotidian encroachment statement uttered by officials of the governing party and the prime minister, such as limiting alcohol consumption, medicalising homosexuality, dictating family sizes, restricting freedom of expression and justifying police brutality. This discursive creativity and humour may be seen as the one common aspect of the protestors who otherwise had highly diverse political goals and expectations.

As in many mass mobilisations, the role of the heavy clashes with the security forces is hard to delineate among the diversity of the causes that brought participants out for the weeks-long protests. While the initial police brutality seemed to be a major triggering factor, tear gas and water cannon attacks by police forces have never been rare in Turkish street politics; indeed, the country has witnessed worse over the years, especially in the eastern provinces, where clashes and stand-offs with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, PKK) remains a fact of life. This became one of the rallying points when Kurds were openly criticized for not staging supportive demonstrations in Kurdish provinces in the East. Ironically, some protestors expressed discomfort due to the visibility of Kurdish flags and MPs during the demonstrations.17

Surveys from the summer of 2013 indicated the political and social similarities and differences of the protestors to those who participated in the 2007 protests.18 According to one comprehensive survey from early

16 Parody and inflection of irony is central in Bakhtin’s dialogical struggle, indicating subversion and irreverence to vacate the authoritarian spaces of the power-holders (Bakhtin 1984).
18 Though there does not seem to be a comprehensive survey of the profile of the participants in 2007, qualitative interviews indicate a similar urban elite background.
June, with 498 participants inside the park or around Taksim square, 58 per cent of the protestors indicated that the primary cause of the clashes was the prime minister and 13.7 per cent believed it was the government, whereas 8.2 per cent indicated that the cause was police brutality. 3.4 per cent the cutting of the trees and 2 per cent said it was the redevelopment project. 46.4 per cent of the protestors indicated that they were participating to support the resistance, 11.8 per cent said it was for freedom, 9.4 per cent to protect the park/trees, 4.8 per cent for democracy, 3.4 per cent for human rights, 2.8 per cent against the government, 2.8 per cent for the independence of Kurds, 2.8 per cent were protesting the style of the prime minister, 1.8 per cent wanted revolution, 1.6 per cent to bring consciousness to people, 1.2 per cent were protesting police brutality and 1.2 per cent were demanding an increase in minimum wages. The most indicative result was that when the protestors were asked who they loved most other than their own family members and friends, 54.8 per cent said Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 9 per cent Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK and 7 per cent said Deniz Gezmiş, a Marxist student activist who was hanged during the 1971 military coup and whose image was displayed overlooking the square alongside that of Atatürk's).

Similarly, in terms of their political identification, one third of the participants categorised themselves as Kemalists, 19 per cent as freedom-oriented, 12.4 per cent as socialist, 8.9 per cent as social-democrat, 6.1 per cent as laicist, 3.3 per cent as revolutionary, 1.5 per cent Republican and 1 per cent as nationalist. The political identifications Kemalist, social-democrat, laicist and Republican are almost exclusively used by the supporters of the CHP, the main opposition party in the parliament. It is unsurprising therefore that 74.3 per cent of the protesters who had participated in elections had voted for the CHP during the last election, 15.8 per cent for the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) and only 1.2 per cent for the AKP. One third of the surveyed protestors had never voted before. 64.7 per cent of the surveyed protestors indicated that they were going to vote for the CHP in the upcoming elections and 13.5 per cent for the BDP. According to the findings of the qualitative GENAR survey (Taştan 2013), half of the protestors were ‘atypical CHP voters’ whose secularism was different from the state-authoritarian secularism; one third of the protestors were anti-systemic radicals who did not believe in party politics and electoral processes; and the remainder were supporters of parties on the ‘left but not the nationalist kind,’ with below electoral threshold constituencies. In
addition to the majority's support for the CHP, the characterisation of the participants as urban, educated and middle class was also evidenced in the GENAR survey.

The protests at Gezi were noticeably and uncharacteristically prolific and creative in terms of the claims and demands expressed and the slogans chanted, representing the unusual bedfellows that were challenging the AKP regime and style. The images of the main building on the square covered with the banners of many diverse groups (except LGBTI groups) displayed calls for Marxist revolution, anarchist rebellion, general strike and the resignation of the prime minister. They also displayed images of executed leaders of 1970s student activism in addition to images of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag as representatives of nationalism and laicism. Protestors demanded the resignation of the prime minister and expressed their fears and frustrations regarding what they perceived as attacks on their lifestyle, from the increased visibility of religious symbols and practices in urban public spaces to limitations on laicist policies and secular practices. In addition, neoliberal policies endorsed by the government were also criticized, albeit not as widely. The visibility of symbols of LGBTI groups, Kurdish flags and the ‘revolutionary Muslims’ enhanced the ‘people's movement’ characteristic of this opposition to the AKP regime. Gezi was a cacophony of demands and polyvocality of claims; however, the boundless irreverence vis-à-vis the authorities and self-limitation in terms of demands to the government rendered Gezi a protest against existing transgressions and violations.

Conclusion

Neither democracies, nor nations are entities that can be dictated or rewarded with neatly packaged gifts to faceless masses by all knowing, all-powerful elites. The problem with absolutist attitudes towards democracy and an essentialist perception of nationhood is their inability to capture its ever-changing fluidity and comprehend its contingency. Expansion of broad and popular participation and demands for protection from arbitrary government action are crucial elements of contentious democratisation and formation of nationhood. Given the contingent qualities of political processes, there are no guarantees that such mobilisations may directly lead to democracy. However, the dynamism of claims during protests is constitutive in terms of defining collectivities and adversaries of the polity as understood by the power-holders and the contenders.
A widespread notion in Turkey, and elsewhere, always regards democracy as a product of the craftsmanship of elites with their eyes on modernisation. Framing and experiencing democracy as a messy process of contingencies and reversals, and as an outcome of strategic clashes between top-down power-holders and bottom-up contenders, is still unfamiliar territory for politicians and intellectuals alike who try to fashion a nation and citizenry befitting some idealized European capitals, or, more recently, an idealized imperial past.

The contrast between 2007 and 2013 is highly significant in illustrating the dynamism of popular claims for political participation and nationhood. The difference among the discursive repertoires of these protests indicates that 2007 was an ‘Old Turks revolt’ (Taspinar 2007), i.e. it was alarmist about Islamisation, proud of a military past, excluded differences, believed in the civilising mission of the state, supported an assimilationist national unity, was resentful of everything Western including the EU and the US in a Cold War fashion of anti-imperialism and had a specific ideal of republican womanhood that excluded the citizenship rights of conservative female citizens of Turkey. Most importantly, the 2007 protests were defensive, evoking a military, assimilationist past that upheld the state and the military as the primary engines of modernisation and civilisation.

In 2007, it was the opposition that was evoking a distant past, imagining an authoritarian, hierarchical and an exclusionary one. In that past, the ‘us and them’ discourse was loud, visible and clear as the central pillar of nationalism. Citizenship was not based on equality and nationhood; it was an elite design. Those who evoked nationhood in Turkey in 2007 seemed to be convinced that democracy was a holy grail that could be understood and accessed only by modern-looking men in tuxedos and non-conservative women with no headscarves. Therefore, they were highly critical of democracy as a regime when confronted by the actual political claims of large crowds, and they soon evoked an authoritarian past that could only be attained by military discipline.

The 2013 Gezi protests certainly involved social segments who insisted on evoking a nationhood of yesteryear. However, it left its mark as an inclusive mobilisation with a critical capacity for coalition-building among diverse segments of the society. It was a movement of individual citizens with diverse identities and interests who upheld irreverence, subversive and liberating ‘Rebelaisian laughter’ (Bakhtin 1984) as a political instrument, undermining the methods of dominant styles, authoritarian stiffness and military orders. The movement invoked the universal values and principles of the individual with rights to collective access to space and political
decision-making, rather than evoking a particular past shaped by modernizing elites. In a peculiar, yet highly dialogical sense, it seems now that it is AKP's turn to evoke a past, this time an imaginary Ottoman one, as evidenced in the prime minister's references to 'ancestors' as models for contemporary social and moral actions. Similarly, his public statements have increasingly polarised the population as 'us' and 'them,' resonating the exclusiveness of the state-secularist elites' narratives of Turkishness. Utilising the dialogical instruments of his former opposition, his narrative aims to establish public support and legitimacy based on the 'others' who are not befitting his sense of nationhood and model citizens.

In 2013, the protesters' 'us and them' discourse was mostly indicating the difference between the power-holders and the protesters, not highlighting an unequal citizenry. From a dialogical perspective, it is not surprising that now the power-holder's, i.e. the prime minister's, public statements are based on a) 'us and them' discourse and b) unequal citizenry.

The non-hierarchical resistance at Gezi invoked a sense of collectivity that did not require a top-down disciplining by leaders or elites. Rather than following pre-designed formats of mobilisation, even in the face of police brutality, they invoked individual creativity and collective solidarity. This new formation of individual expression and political unity is already leaving its mark on the Turkish polity, regardless of possible reversals of democracy and attempts at authoritarianism. At the same time, the Gezi protests became a threshold in displaying a sense of nationhood that incorporates diversity and multivocality, unlike former state-secularist and present mild-Islamist regimes, which seem to have more abundant similarities than differences.

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