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Negotiating Religion at the Gezi Park Protests

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Introduction

When the Gezi Park protests took place, Turkish society generally, and religious people in particular, were uncertain as to their exact nature. Observing developments in various media, including social media, much of the population was unsure whether the protesters were engaged in democratic action against the government and some of its policies, or whether they were objecting to the religious identity of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the religious people he represents in particular.

By the time I arrived at the park, one week after the beginning of the protests, I found it difficult to move freely owing to the many thousands of protestors in the park and square. There were a great number of stands of various organisations, mostly secular and leftist, handing out leaflets and discussing their demands, the policies of the government and the aims of the protest.

I went to Istanbul for two weeks to do fieldwork. During the day and at night, I stayed in the park, visiting every tent, talking to protesters about their ideas, their criticisms. I took hundreds of pictures and wrote down every slogan I encountered. I also carried out twenty in-depth interviews, both with protestors and with those who opposed them.

My aim was to find answers to the following questions: What were the activists protesting against? What government policies and practices were they criticising? Did religious people also criticise the prime minister or the government? If so, why were they dissatisfied? Although some religious people supported the protests by either going to the park or expressing sympathy on social media, why did most religious people withhold support? Was the huge protest movement actually about religion, religious people and the religious identity of the prime minister? What kind of impact did the Gezi Park protests have on the views of Turkish people, particularly university students, concerning religion and secularity? Is there a conflict between secular and religious Muslims in Turkey and, if there is, what has been the impact of the Gezi Park protests on this?
The Objects of the Protests

When I asked the objectives of the protests, interviewees gave a variety of answers, common complaints being the political rhetoric of the prime minister, his contemptuous attitude towards those who had not supported him in elections and some of his policies.

One of the most commonly heard expressions in the park was ‘Hayat tarzına müdahale’ (‘interfering in people’s lifestyle’). Particularly, secular informants accused the prime minister of interfering in the secular lifestyle of citizens of the country, via his speeches and his policies. There was a strong suspicion that their secular lifestyle was under threat.

There has been anxiety among secular Muslims in Turkey about this issue ever since the AKP came to power in 2002. Until the protests, the relatively few secular intellectuals who expressed anxiety about the conservative government were sometimes referred to as ‘anxious moderns.’ These people were not at the fore of the Gezi Park protests; rather it has been the generality of secular people. I asked secular people about the apprehension of threat to their secular lives.

The new regulations on alcohol were intended to ban off-licence sales between 10 pm and 6 am. The law also forbids the sale of alcohol near schools and places of worship.¹ It seems that secular citizens generally view any government move on issues like alcohol with suspicion. Nejat explains what the new regulations mean for him:

Of course, I do not want people to be drunk and disturb people on the street. But I think the government, by imposing this restriction, is using it as a control mechanism to limit the living space of people. They also dispossess the people who drink on the street of their freedom. (3rd year electrical engineering student, 11 June 2013)

The question of the place of women in society is a divisive issue among religious and secular people in Turkey. The place of women in the business, political and social spheres and their roles in the family have long been discussed in the country. Although the AKP established a women’s branch of the party this, they assert, does not imply any restriction on women in politics, economy and business. The party was primarily criticised over policymakers’ rhetoric and especially over the new draft of an abortion law.

All the women I spoke to in the park objected to the views expressed by the prime minister on abortion. All saw the law as a violation of women’s rights:

We women do not feel safe. When they discuss abortion, they imply that abortion is used as a birth control method. How does something like that happen? Which woman can decide lightly to have an abortion? (Ceyda, 4th year history student, 10 June 2013)

The words ‘authoritarian’ and ‘dictator’ were much heard among protestors in the park, mainly criticising the prime minister, rather than the government in general. According to the protestors, Erdoğan, having been elected three times and having been in power for eleven years, has been an authoritarian leader who fails to show respect for his opponents. The reaction of the prime minister to the protesters at the outset of the demonstrations was perceived as insulting. On 2 June, during an opening ceremony, he said, ‘We will also build a mosque in Taksim Square. Of course I will not get permission from the CHP [the main secularist opposition party]. I will also not get it from a few looters [çapulcu]!’

İhsan Eliaçık is a theologian and Islamist activist. People were surprised when they saw him and his friends, the Anti-capitalist Muslims Society, some of them women wearing headscarves and some bearded religious young men. The group was there to protest against the government and wealthy religious business people, particularly because of their close relationship with the capitalist economic system. Eliaçık calls the economic policies of the government ‘Abdestli kapitalizm’ (‘ritually cleansed capitalism’):

I have been criticising the religious for being addicted to money and property and having desire for prohibited ill-gotten gains (‘haram’), and also criticising the government for misappropriating the capital, and being very greedy and money-grabbing. We have come here for this reason. (9 June 2013)

Love of Atatürk and defending the father of the nation was another motivation for some protestors. In Turkey this can be another way of expressing support for secularism. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) founded the Turkish Republic. He was determined to secularise and westernise the country. Debate about Islamism and secularism in Turkey generally centres

on esteem of and opposition to him. His image symbolises secularism and the secular lifestyle (White 2010). There were a great number of flags with his face in Gezi Park and Taksim Square. These seemed to express secular anxiety and a secular reaction to conservative government policies.3

The clearest reason for these reactions was a statement by the prime minister, just before the protests, on 28 May 2013. Criticised over the alcohol regulations, he asserted that he acted with religious justification, saying, ‘When two drunkards make a law, it is respected, but why must a law ordered by religion be rejected?’4 A member of parliament from the CHP, Muharrem İnce, claimed that Erdoğan, in referring to ‘two drunkards,’ meant Atatürk and the prime minister of the time, İsmet İnönü.5 People generally accepted this interpretation. This heightened the anxiety of secular Turks and provoked reactions in the country. One concern was this slighting reference to Atatürk and İnönü; another was the reference to religion when making law in a secular state.

Another reason for the Gezi protests would seem to be the lack of effective opposition parties. The protesters saw the CHP as uninspiring and unsuccessful.

The Place of Religion in the Protests

According to my informants, the protests were not apparently about religion and religious people. Although some committed secularists in the park believed that the government aimed to turn the country into an Islamic state – and there is evident anxiety among secular people about indications of Islamism by the government – they were not against religion and religiosity itself. To understand the place of religion in the protests, it is necessary to have a clear conception of political Islamism, religiosity, secularism and secular Muslimism. The secular Muslims of Turkey are worried about political Islamism, rather than religiosity. They are not troubled by having a religious prime minister, but they are troubled by a political Islamist prime minister who aims to Islamise the country as a whole, from the legal system to education.

4 http://www.cnnturk.com/2013/turkiye/05/28/basbakan.iki.ayyasin.yaptigi.muteber.de/709778.0/.
Are the religious identities of Erdoğan and the AKP important for you?

In my view, it is up to people themselves. He might be religious, but religion should be lived in private. His religiosity is not a bad thing, but in my view, it should not be that much, like interfering with everyone's lives. (Aylin, female, 1st year medical student, 9 June 2013)

An Alevi informant, İlyas, emphasised that the Gezi protest was not about religion, much less about any particular sect. He remarked that Sunni and Alevi people lived together in the park peacefully and that Erdoğan incites his supporters using religion and by discriminating against the protesters.

I visited the ADD, which was founded in 1989 with the aim of preserving the revolution and the principles of Atatürk, and committed to the necessity of being the guardians of those principles. Tizcan is a university student and a member of the association who was in the park. He criticised the prime minister for referring to religion when making laws. He saw this as contrary to Atatürk’s secularism:

Actually, there is a significant difference between what the government tries to do and which method they use. For example, making alcohol regulations is acceptable in a social law state. Nevertheless, if you refer to religion when you do it, it means that you are doing something against the principles of a social law and secularist state. (3rd year journalism student, 10 June 2013)

I asked him if he had a problem with the prime minister’s religious identity. He said that people cannot object to him praying and carrying out religious rituals; everybody should respect his worldview. However, he must practise religion personally, as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, not as the prime minister forcing people to practise religion. Government decisions should be made from a world viewpoint, not a religious one.

On 2 June, when the police and the protesters clashed in the Beşiktaş neighbourhood, protestors running from the tear gas and water cannons sought sanctuary in the Bezm-i Alem Valide Sultan Mosque in Kabataş. Most of the protesters went in without taking off their shoes, using the mosque as both shelter and first aid post. Later a few beer cans appeared in photos apparently taken into the mosque, seeming to indicate that some protesters

may have drunk alcohol there.\(^7\) The media and others sympathetic to the government used these pictures and reports for a long time afterwards to claim the protesters were disrespectful of religion. Much was made of the incident: some claimed the muezzin allowed protesters into the mosque and no disrespect was shown, while others claimed they threatened the muezzin and entered by force.\(^8\)

When I enquired about this incident, protesters in the park denied the allegations of drinking of alcohol in the mosque and said entering with shoes in such haste, distress and commotion should be considered with understanding and tolerance. They disagreed with the claim that this proved that the protests were against religion and religious people.

Eliaçık and other members of the Anti-capitalist Muslims Society played a key role in the debate on the place of religion in the protests. This society was identifiably religious: the female members wearing headscarves, the male members having characteristically Islamic beards, while on their tent there were slogans such as ‘\(\text{Mülk Allah’ındır}\)’ (‘Property belongs to Allah’). They organised Friday prayers in the park twice during the protests. While some protesters attended, others stood guard around them in order to show respect for religion and religious people.

The \(\text{Mi’raj}\) are the parts of a night journey of the Prophet Muhammad in 621. According to Islamic belief, he went from Mecca to Jerusalem and then he ascended to heaven where he spoke to God. This journey is celebrated in Turkey every year by reciting verses from the Qur’an, praying and distributing special pastry rings consumed on holy days. The anniversary of this journey is called \(\text{Miraç Kandili}\) in Turkish. The Anti-capitalist Muslims Society organised a \(\text{Miraç Kandili}\) in the park and almost all the protesters joined the celebration. Most of my informants mentioned these events as evidence that the Gezi Park protests were definitely not against religion, religious people or religious principles; on the contrary, they were against the prime minister and particular government policies.

We, in the middle of Taksim Square, amidst a lot of (left-wing) factions and neo-nationalists, celebrated the \(\text{Mi’raj}\), recited the Qur’an and prayed. I prayed, and then thousands of citizens responded with ‘\(\text{amin}\)’ (‘amen’). The following day, we recited the \(\text{azan}\) to invite folks to the


Friday prayer. People responded enthusiastically and came. They are still coming, embracing each other and crying (with joy). These two scenes destroyed the claim of ‘anti-religious hostilities.’ People think that those who went to the airport (to welcome Erdoğan) are the (representatives of the) religious populations of the country, and those who came to the park are the ones with no religion, disrespectful to religion and willing to live a modern lifestyle (without religion). (Eliaçık, 9 June 2013)

There were reports of harassment of headscarf-wearing women by protesters. Activists I spoke to about this in Gezi Park, including women protestors wearing the headscarf, rejected reports of this kind, while some of my informants who did not support the protests said that they and some of their friends were subjected to harassment away from the park, and even in Taksim Square, on account of their headscarf. Almost all of them blamed the neo-nationalists (Uluslararası) for these harassments. Zeliha was a female protester wearing a headscarf:

A lot of people think that the park is the place of neo-nationalists. Since it seems like that from the outset, they (the religious people) are worried about coming here. Neo-nationalists also have a similar problem. Most of them identify themselves with the protests even though they have not been here yet. Therefore there are some over confident neo-nationalists who attack women wearing the headscarf outside the park. (4th year environmental engineering student, 10 June 2013)

Zeliha gave some examples, which she had heard from friends, of attacks on religious women wearing the headscarf. They ranged from teasing and swinging the Atatürk flag in their faces, to pushing and shoving and knocking them about, or banging a stick on their car. During the interview, she remarked that a friend sitting with us was the most recent example she had heard of. I asked her friend about this and she told me of being in the capital city the previous weekend, walking on one of the main thoroughfares. There were many protesters in the street. Some shouted as they passed ‘Başlarını kapatanların başlarını yolmaya gidiyoruz!’ (‘We are going to cut off the heads of the people who cover their heads!’).

Most of my informants who spoke of harassment of women wearing the headscarf accused the neo-nationalists or the Atatürkists, particularly Atatürkist women over 50 years of age. I put these charges to two of my informants who identified themselves as neo-nationalists and Atatürkists or Kemalists. They did not accept the accusations. They indicated that,
although there was some hostility between secularists and religious people during the protests, the new secularist generation is more respectful of their religious peers who embrace a different lifestyle.

It is not right to identify an organisation by its members’ personal remarks unless they are representatives of that institution. Such remarks are individuals’ own responsibility. (Tizcan, male, 3rd year journalism student, 10 June 2013)

For Turkish secularists, religiosity and political Islamism are different concepts. While they defend the right to practise religion, they are against political Islamism. Berkay says the government must not have any religion and that religion exists for people. He says that Turkish secular youth believe that every person, in the individual sense, whichever religion he or she believes in, must have the freedom to practise his or her religion.

Tizcan, like Berkay, rejected the perception of Atatürkists as irreligious. ‘Those who lump Atatürkism and irreligiousness together, I believe, lack science, culture and even religion!’ He sought to demonstrate that Atatürk was respectful, personally and as a politician, towards Islam.

The Position of Religious People in the Protests

Based on my observations, in the first days of the Gezi Park protests, there were a great number of religious people who supported the protest, either through social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, or by going to the park in person. Among them were writers, university academics, Islamist activists and university students. Initially, they were criticising the government about some parts of the new Taksim project, which included removing the park, rebuilding an Ottoman-era military barracks and constructing a shopping centre. Later, they protested against the police brutality towards the protestors in the park. This was seen as a reflection of the style of the prime minister. There had been criticism on social media by some religious people, especially about his authoritarian way of speaking and acting. Later on, most religious people withdrew their support for the protests. Only the Anti-capitalist Muslims Society and a few religious individuals remained active in supporting the protests.

In Istanbul, I also met with some religious university students away from the park. These informants criticised the prime minister for a variety of reasons, but also criticised some of the protestors’ methods and some of
the things they were saying. Certainly, support for them was becoming more muted. Sevil, as a headscarf-wearing university student, was among my religious informants who supported the protests although she never went to the park:

I still support the protest. I am one of the people who do not support the Taksim project, building the barracks on the place of the park. According to the last research I have seen, 75 per cent of people do not want it. In fact, I was going to go to the park on 31 May. I was busy and could not go there. When I went home, I saw the news that the police attacked the protesters who did not do anything wrong. It provoked the protesters. I am thinking now, if I were there I would have become very angry after the attack with tear gas. (4th year sociology student, 8 June 2013).

Sevil gave some examples of criticisms levelled by religious people at the government. According to her, there had been anger among the religious or conservative community towards the so-called ‘tenderers,’ who got rich rapidly by corruptly tendering for government contracts. Secondly, she said that religious people fumed over the prime minister’s authoritarian attitude, accusing him of acting ‘like a sultan.’ Another cause of anger, according to Sevil, was that the headscarf problem had still not been solved.

Faruk was a university student and a member of a religious group. When we talked about the complaints of the protesters concerning the authoritarian manner of the prime minister, he said he was in agreement with them about it, and that the power of the prime minister should come to an end. ‘But our only problem is that there is no one else in Turkey like Tayyip Erdoğan. That’s why he’s becoming more and more authoritarian.’

Despite their support for the protests in the first few days, and despite the criticisms of the government and the prime minister, religious people withdrew their support as time went on. The foremost reason for this change, according to all my religious informants, was the fact that the protesters did not keep their distance from violence during the protests. In their eyes, the protests, although they started ‘innocently,’ lost their legitimacy when the protestors resorted to violence. It was unacceptable to them:

Of course I did not support the attack of the police. But I also do not support the people who reacted to the attack using violence and still resist. They should have seen the situation and withdrawn from there. It was their choice. (Beril, female, 1st year psychology student, 10 July 2013)
These events strengthened the perceptions of religious people that the protestors were anti-religious. More importantly, these kinds of events reminded religious people of the period starting on 28 February 1997, during which religious Turks found themselves restricted in several ways. Thousands of female university students had to leave their schools or, as an interim solution, wore wigs at university. In addition to the government pressure, some secularists organised harassments, such as banging pots and pans and putting the lights off at a certain time in the evening. Some of my female informants look back on this as a traumatic experience:

Because of the headscarf bans, I had to wear a wig in the last year of high school and at university. I experienced many difficulties, had very big troubles. I mean, really very big troubles! It is still affecting me. Therefore, I still go through a trauma when I hear the sounds of pots and pans, and my tweets change immediately. All my thoughts, views, attitudes, keeping my balance, change! That period, 28 February, was also a trauma for a lot of friends of mine. We are a generation that experienced these difficulties. Consequently, we must not be reminded of these traumas. (Sevil, 4th year sociology student, 8 June 2013)

Erdoğan came to power after the 28 February 1997 period, largely as a result of these events. Memory of that time still inclines many religious people to back Erdoğan against the secularists, despite his faults. Some religious groups and individuals, although critical of the government privately, see public criticism of Erdoğan as dangerous for religious people.

Another factor causing religious people to withdraw support for the protesters was some of the complaints and demands made during the Gezi Park protests. According to some informants, Erdoğan urging people to have three children, for instance, should be seen simply as offering advice and not an encroachment on freedom. Alcohol regulation was also not about lifestyle, but was necessary for social order. Some of them did not accept the claim that Erdoğan has become authoritarian; they think that it is just his personality and that this was one of the reasons he was elected. Slogans like ‘Resign Tayyip!’ and ‘Government out!’ because of his style and his way of speaking were perceived by religious people as unfair to the prime minister. For them, there was no serious reason for the prime minister and the government to resign. They generally criticised the protesters for a lack of constructive criticism and only using negative arguments. According to them, there is no other politician as powerful and charismatic as Erdoğan. There is no alternative.
Lastly, one of the most important reasons given for not supporting the protests, and even for being against them, was the belief that the protests were organised by ‘external powers.’ Extended coverage by the foreign media, especially the BBC and CNN, the appearance at the protests by a German politician, Claudia Roth, and demands by some protesters to, for example, prevent the building of the third Bosphorus bridge and third Istanbul airport, were seized on as evidence by people claiming that the main target of the protests was the overthrow of the prime minister and government for economic and political reasons.

Democratisation vs. Polarisation

Although there were a confusing variety of issues during the Gezi Park protests, in my view, these protests have developed a social consciousness especially among secular people in Turkey. Based on my observations and interviews, the new generation, the university students in particular, are much more aware of the necessity to defend the rights and freedom of all segments of society. The internet, social media and the social environment at universities play a very significant role in this democratic consciousness-raising. When socialising at university, students become familiar with other worldviews, political views and lifestyles. Berkay accepts that secular people have changed in terms of social awareness in the last decade, especially through the universities.

Do you accept that secular people were not so sensitive about the difficulties of the women wearing headscarves?

Definitely I do, because we, as the folk, learn some things slowly. We learn not to be afraid of one another. I am 21 years old. I do not know what exactly went on in the period you mentioned, but people learn in time. It might have been prevalent 10-15 years ago, but nowadays, we are university students and we have female friends in our classrooms. So it would not be suitable to have such an anxiety, because we live together now. We are going to be together everywhere evermore. They are my classmates and after the university, they may be my colleagues in the future. (Berkay, male, 3rd year chemical engineering student, 10 June 2013)

Communication in Gezi Park gave young people a greater depth of understanding. They spent days and weeks eating together, helping each other, discussing and observing worldviews and lifestyles, entertaining together, even praying together and striving together for freedom for all of society. Ela, a religious female university student wearing a headscarf, spent at least ten days in the park. Despite a number of shortcomings she encountered, she said that she continued going because of the importance of the protest for the future of Turkey:

Although there are some problems and shortcomings in the park, I think Gezi Park is a very positive thing. There has never been anything like this before in Turkey. So many people with different views in a park, and nobody harms each other! I think this is definitely a positive development for both Turkey and us. I learn a lot of things listening to other people here. Others also learn a lot of things listening to others. We are going to move towards peace listening to the unpleasant experiences of the others and communicating. (1st year film studies student, 10 June 2013)

The protests raised people’s awareness of the distinction between majoritarian democracy and pluralistic democracy. Ceyda saw a difference between the previous secular generation and the new generation. She criticised as ‘sakat’ (‘invalid’) the understanding of democracy of the previous generation. For her, the previous generation only defended their own rights and freedom, while the new generation defends the rights of all members of society:

I think that the most important duty for us, as the youth, is to persuade the previous generation about the necessity of objecting to all kinds of oppression. It is not limited to my parents. I should attend to different platforms and give the message that you should reject the oppression of everyone, not only yourself. Because oppression of a section of society is an oppression of all of us; if we all object we can live happier, more freely and comfortably. (4th year history student, 10 June 2013)

I asked Nejat’s opinion on the anxiety felt by religious people about a possible return to the situation of the 28 February period. He understood their fears, but was sure that Turkey would never return to that situation. According to him, nobody in the park wanted that: even the people shouting ‘We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal.’ He explained ‘The freedom of one segment of the society is also my freedom. I think we understand this now.’
Religious students who did not go to the park and did not distinguish between the protest in the park and other, supporting protests elsewhere, tended to view the protests as the reaction of secular people unable to overthrow the AKP democratically through the ballot box. They saw the Gezi Park period as a decisive moment for the new generation regarding the future of Turkey, and supported equal rights for all in society: freedom of expression; freedom of religion; freedom of lifestyle; the right to education, etc. Emphasis was given to the importance of a pluralistic democracy, respecting the other's worldview and lifestyle and to justice in the country. Notably absent was any mention by religious students of a desire to Islamise the legal and educational system or any other areas of public life in the country. Common points in their statements were justice, freedom and respect. Bedri was among the religious students interviewed:

We need to decide first. Are we going to will to live together accepting the existence of different views and beliefs? The people who answer ‘no’ to this question are going to be regarded as the people who desire polarisation in the country. (male, 4th year management student, 28 July 2013)

Although it seems that few religious people would vote for the secular CHP, and secular people would not easily vote for the conservative AKP, the university students I interviewed were strikingly limited in their partisanship. They readily offered criticism of the political party they had voted for at the election and seemed ready to consider switching support:

I voted for the AKP but I am not a partisan person. I voted for them, because I believed they were going to do a good job. If there is an election now, I will vote for them again. But if there were alternatives working much better, realising good projects in terms of the development of Turkey, my vote would change then. I mean, I am not a fanatic. I am not a person who will be the partisan of the AKP or the CHP for life. (Mehmet, male, 4th year science teaching student, 13 June 2013)

Conclusion

Based on my observations and interviews, the protests in Gezi Park had certain objectives. People went in limited numbers to the park at first in order to stop its destruction and replacement with a shopping centre dressed-up in the guise of historic barracks. After the attack by the police
on the protesters, thousands of people went to the park to support the protesters and to protest police brutality. Later, the protests spread all over the country and developed into protests targeting government policies and the attitude and rhetoric of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The main points of criticism were interference in people’s chosen lifestyle; women’s rights; authoritarian attitudes and policies; anxiety regarding the possibility of the transformation of the country into an Islamic state; freedom of expression, especially the freedom of journalists and the media; oppressive alcohol regulation; abortion law; the Atatürk personality cult; the capitalist economy; and the lack of a satisfactory opposition in parliament.

When I asked people whether the protests were about religion and religious people, they were surprised and said that they were also believers and respectful of religion, adducing evidence such as the presence of female protesters wearing headscarves at the protests, observance of Friday prayers in the park without problem, the celebration of the Mi’raj religious festival and sharing meals together in the park. While they had no problem with religion and religious people and defended their right to believe and practise, they were sensitive about political Islam. They defended the idea of a secular country and were against Turkey becoming a religious state or the government referring to religion when making its laws. Religious protesters defended the same set of ideas. They also wanted a secular state giving equal rights to all religions and sects.

Many religious people withdrew their support after the first few days of the protest, and I asked them about this. I was given the following reasons: hate speech heard from some protesters; the failure of protesters to maintain a suitable distance from violence and extremist left-wing people; harassment of women wearing headscarves in other places where protests were held; memories of the 28 February period stirred up by the pots and pans protests of secular people in other neighbourhoods of Istanbul and in other cities; reports in the media that led religious people to suspect protesters were anti-religious, with the actual target of the protests being Islam and religious Muslims. Some religious people compared the country now to the situation of a decade or more ago, and were eager not to return to the problems with the economy and the lack of freedom of past times. They thought the protesters, although right in some of their criticisms, did the prime minister an injustice with their demands for his resignation and that of the government. Doubts were expressed about the wisdom of stopping building work on the third Bosphorus Bridge and the third Istanbul airport. Most did not see an acceptable alternative for the position of prime minister or an acceptable alternative to the AKP. And then there
were the ideas put about that foreign countries were interfering in Turkey's domestic affairs. With the exception of the Anti-capitalist Muslims Society and a number of individuals, religious people withdrew their support from the Gezi Park protests and then the protests transformed into a secular reaction movement.

Both secular and religious university student informants were optimistic about the future of the country in terms of democratic consciousness. They were against a polarisation of the country, oppressive government, the limiting of freedom of expression and they wanted freedom for all lifestyles. The main problem for all segments of society, especially for university students, is rule by oppressive and authoritarian governments, whether secular or religious.

Bibliography


