

Panel 02: **From PROTESTS to ELECTIONS: the aftermath of 2013 protests in Turkey**

Thursday 17, 11-13, Coro di Notte

Convenors: **Isabel David** (University of Lisbon), **Kumru F. Toktamis** (Pratt Institute, Brooklyn)

Discussant: **Kumru F. Toktamis** (Pratt Institute, Brooklyn)

In May and June of 2013, an encampment protesting against the privatisation of an historic public space in a commercially vibrant square of Istanbul began as a typical urban social movement for individual rights and freedoms, with no particular political affiliation. Thanks to the brutality of the police and the Turkish Prime Minister's reactions, the mobilisation soon snowballed into mass opposition to the regime. The papers for this panel are either based on our recent edited volume on the Gezi protests, entitled 'Everywhere Taksim': Sowing the Seed for a New Turkey at Gezi (Amsterdam University Press), or build on the chapters therein. The panel presents four arguments: a) The protests unveiled the authoritarian nature of the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP), shredding the image it had constructed as a liberal democratic party; b) Gezi acted as a trigger for the repoliticisation of Turkish society and especially of younger generations, until then considered apathetic; c) The protests constitute evidence of a major sociological change in Turkish society, providing the first platform for the unification of antagonistic groups, such as LGBTI, Islamists, headscarved women, Kemalists, feminists, Alevis and Kurds; d) Gezi constituted a branch of the wider global resistance and protest movements that have swept the globe of late. In this light, the panel also provides a bridge between the Gezi protests and how the so-called "Gezi spirit" materialised in the results of the June 2015 legislative elections, which put an end to JDP's dreams of absolute power and transformed the People's Democratic Party into a major actor in Turkish politics.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Kumru F. Toktamis** (Pratt Institute, Brooklyn), *Evoking and Invoking Nationhood as Contentious Democratization*

The shifting nature of the mass protests against the JDP government within last decade is an indicator of the changing quality of nationhood and citizenship in Turkey, which coincides with the expansion and broadening of democratic participation. With such historical contestations and bargainings in place, from a process oriented approach to democratization, the JDP decade might paradoxically be one of the most democratic periods in Turkish history, not necessarily due to the actions and policies of the party in power, but the extent of increasing participation and political engagement of the population from different walks of public life. Most significant impact of these changes can be seen in shifting discourse of nationhood and citizenship. Focusing on two episodes of mass mobilization in Turkey (2007 and 2013) against moderately social conservative, illustriously pro-capitalist government of Justice and Development Party to illustrate shifting patterns and multiple meanings of negotiated and contested nationhood. Many aspects of Gezi constitutes a threshold in Turkish polity but more importantly, Gezi was a moment of negotiation of nationhood with

crowds that gathered in the square 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).

2) **Ana Devic** (University of Jena), *Incentives and Actors of Protests in 'Instrumentalized Democracies': Post-Yugoslav and Turkish Cases*

The paper aims to explain the motives and goals of the participants in the 2013 protests in Istanbul and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The similarity between the two cases lies in the fact that protesters came from different class, educational, and ethnic backgrounds, and, in the Bosnian case, crossing the boundaries between the two territorial 'entities'. To address the motives for participating in the demonstrations we conducted a number of qualitative interviews, aiming to test the following hypothesis: while Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina would seem as disparate cases in terms of the first being 'an expanding economy' with a large middle class, and the latter a poor post-socialist semi-protectorate ravaged by political stalemates as vestiges of the war, the crucial stimuli for demonstrations in both cases seem to arise from the alienation of a growing number of citizens from the political process and available institutional venues of participation. As its theoretical framework, the paper tests the applicability of the two approaches in social movement studies: Political Opportunity Structure and New Social Movements analysis, seeking to unravel the (uneasy) relationship between the structure of the political space in the two countries, on the one hand, and actors' identities ('objective' indicators of allegiances and 'subjective' perceptions of one's duties and rights), on the other.

3) **Pinar Gümüş** (University of Giessen / Istanbul Bilgi University), **Volkan Yilmaz** (Istanbul Bilgi University), *Where did Gezi come from? Exploring the Links between Youth Political Activism before and during the Gezi Protests*

Political activism of young people had been quite visible and influential between 1960s and 1980s in the history of the Republic of Turkey. Nevertheless, the coup d'état in 1980 suspended all forms of political activism of young people with sheer violence. Throughout 1990s and 2000s, social scientists produced a new discourse that defined the new generation of young people who were born in the aftermath of the coup d'état as apathetic about politics. However, substantial number of this generation of young people have already been engaged with political activism, which were formerly not considered to be part of the mainstream definition of politics that social scientists have relied upon. The participation of significant number of young people in Gezi protests and their imprint on the content and forms of political activism that manifested throughout Gezi protests posed a significant challenge against the portrayal of this generation of young people as politically apathetic. This paper aims at understanding the continuities and ruptures within young people's political activism before and after Gezi protests. In order to do so, the paper relies upon two qualitative researches conducted with young people before and after Gezi protests that were engaged in political activism.

4) **Ahu Karasulu** (Yildiz Technical University, Turkey), *'We may be Lessees, but the Neighbourhood is Ours'. Gezi Resistances and Spatial Claims*

Violent police intervention against the activists at Gezi Park gave rise to an unexpected and unprecedented popular uprising throughout Turkey. The resistances were multifaceted and multilayered. This paper attempts to understand the events as the beginning of an “episode of contention”, borrowing from Dynamics of Contention framework. It also aims at exploring the significance of space in the Lefebvrian sense, during and especially on the aftermath of Gezi resistances. With special emphasis on Istanbul, it tries to find out how spatial claims regarding pharaonic projects (such as a third bridge on the Bosphorus, and a third airport to be built on the remaining parts of the so-called Northern Forest), various tones of urban transformation (in different cases, for example, Tarlabası, or Okmeydanı, or Fikirtepe, or Gülsuyu), intervention into spaces of memory (from the example of Taksim Square to Haydarpaşa Train Station, and Haliç Arsenal), or the mode of intervention itself, instrumentalizing law even further (as in cases brought to the courts, and consequent revisions in laws and regulations in almost each and every example government intervention into space) form the future basis of contention. It tries to formulate a taxonomy of government intervention in space in terms of changing socio-spatial order of Istanbul.

5) **Emrah Çelik** (London Centre for Social Studies / Gediz University), *Negotiating Religion at the Gezi Park Protests*

The paper addresses the role of religion in Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. When the protests took place, Turkish society generally, and religious people in particular, were unsure whether the protesters were engaged in democratic action against the government and some of its policies, or whether it was an objection to the religious identity of the Prime Minister and the religious people whom he particularly represents.

Based on fieldwork conducted at the park, where I did 20 in-depth interviews, both with protestors and with those who opposed them, I intend to find answers to the following questions: What were the activists protesting against? What government policies and practices were they criticizing? Did religious people also criticize the Prime Minister or the government? 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? 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?