



## The Crisis of Representation and Authority

by Dinçer Demirkent

*A research paper developed in the Summer School “Teaching the crisis – Geographies, Methodologies, Perspectives”*

The crisis perceived after the influential protests against police attacks to the environmentalists can be read as an institutional crisis or a political crisis of institutions. Turkey witnessed the politization of a nonpolitical critique in a full flood which reminds us the story of overturning the 18th century absolutisms told by Reinhardt Koselleck in *Critique and Crisis*. During Gezi Park protests we faced with a politization process spread around football fans, apolitical families, secondary school canteens, village coffees, universities, etc. Such unusual synergies and protest forms emerged that there is no similar instance in the history of Turkish Republic. These synergy and protest forms revealed a range of practice that neither conventional opponent political organizations, opponent social movements could contain nor government bodies could identify and repress. The protests which began for saving the trees of Gezi Park transformed a civil commotion in an unpredictable way. Therefore it is hard for the political organizations and people thinking of politics in Turkey to make sense of and to posit what happened. How did this movement emerge? Who is the subject of this movement? In what way the subjectivity processes occurred? And the most importantly ‘what will be and what will change after this movement?’

Some responses were given to these questions in certain conceptual models. The liberal thesis conceived the movement as a reflex directed to save people’s existing lifestyle habits. They saw only ‘middle classes’ in the streets and they saw only the authoritarianism and a more conservative regime. The basic subject of the problem for the liberal intellectuals was Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s increasingly raising authoritative and Islamist tone of voice. Even a liberal intellectual said that if Tayyip Erdogan gave up his angry attitudes there would be no problem (Oran, 2013). Liberals did not see a structural problem particularly in the beginnings of the issue and they thought that the crisis could be prevented by ordinary negotiating models.

It is no less troublesome to explain what happened in June for the orthodox version of Marxism in Turkey. People in the streets did not remind of a classical working class or a radical petit bourgeoisie. Their protest and politization forms were very different from classical forms. There is no pioneer political party or social class. Even unions couldn’t take a decision of a general strike because they didn’t believe that they have such a power. Likewise the protests that unions led were the weakest of the June days. But the prevalent ambiance was anti-systemic. However the Marxist analysis tried to explain the crises via familiar conceptual tools. The basic problem was the neo-liberal Islamist exclusionist policies of AKP and the subject of the movement was the foreclosed classes of neo-liberal Islamist system of Turkey (Boratav, 2013: 15-20).

The nationalists taking part of the protests got stuck in laicism and Kemalism. However the militarist slogans didn’t come forward and there was no pro-army demonstration during the uprising. We saw a different use of the Turkish flag in the demonstrations.

The pro-government writers and journalists applied the conspiracy theories that have been invariably used by conventional right-wing politicians. They hid behind conventional defense mechanisms. According to them the uprising organized by the internal and external enemies of

Turkey (Türk, 2013: 49-55). The discursive strategy based on the expression that AKP is the only liberating power in Turkey but it is obstructed by the sovereign bureaucracy is once again wanted to operate. Pro-AKP journalists continuously wrote that the uprising is an operation of the pro-coup mindset people. In that strategy the activists named as the 'innocent young people' who are under the impact of internal and external powers. Then they try to divide the activists. The government and the pro-government press stated that there were 'innocent youths' but the uprising is the operation of provocateurs, marginal political groups and 'çapulcu's'<sup>1</sup>. All these names are semantically transformed by the activists so the strategy of the government was frustrated by the creative intelligence of the activists. One of the impressive banners of the uprising days is express that perfectly. It was written that 'in the first day we were terrorists in the second day we were provocateurs, in the third day we were demonstrators and in the fourth day we became a people'.

So many analyses occurred in the process out of those cited above. Negri and Hardt's thoughts, which political thinkers in Turkey have been discussing since the beginning of 2000's, are also used as a frame of explanation. Through this way of thought the people who are in the streets of Turkey were the potential democratic constitutive power that was described by Antonio Negri in *Insurgencies*. Gezi uprising was the appearance of the Multitude. They had come together through the common notions while preserving their singularities and they no more need the parasitic power operating over them.<sup>2</sup> Another remarkable idea based on some French political philosophers' thoughts particularly Alain Badiou and Jacques Ranciere. Their works created a profound influence in Turkey in the second half of 2000's. In this respect the Gezi uprising is the unpredictable, unnamed event which will transform the whole situation. Or with Ranciere's concepts the uprising will create a new census.

Some political thinkers including cited above also wrote about uprising and translation of these work contributed to the discussion. For example Alain Badiou evaluated the uprising as awakening of history and warned the activists: Not to want to resemble the West! (Badiou, 2013, 140-147). Slavoj Zizek's approach was inclined to think the uprising in the crisis of global capitalism and in the relation with Arabic World and Latin America (Zizek, 2013). Chomsky related Gezi uprising with Occupy movement.<sup>3</sup> Tariq Ali suggested to the Turkish activists to create a new political organization like Syriza of Greece<sup>4</sup>. All of these suggestions have been already discussing in the park forums all over the country.

However the questions cited above are still standing unanswered. And we did not try to account for the event totally. But to understand the crisis created by the uprising we have to focus on two main themes. One of them is 'the crisis of representation' in Turkish political institutions. Other one is the crisis of 'authorities'. Focusing on these themes provides some answers to question of politization of the apolitical critique in relation to crisis of representation and authorities.

### **The Crisis of Representation**

The concept of political representation signifies simply to act on behalf of somebody. In Ancient Greek and Rome there is no similar use of this concept. The concept of representation is subjected to a political investigation in Hobbes' works firstly (Hobbes, 2009). Then it had been discussed by the Federalists in United States and by the struggle of general suffrage it completed its evolution (Pitkin, 1989: 132-155) Hobbes' theory of representation that based on the distinction between natural person and artificial person has not been overcome by that evolution. In fact the democratic

---

<sup>1</sup> Tayyip Erdoğan used this word to defame the activists. But the activists transformed the semantic of word and make the word one of the slogans of the uprising.

<sup>2</sup> These ideas were defended in the journal called Otonom in Gezi protests.

<sup>3</sup> He broadcasted a video message on youtube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7nBzUACUNY>

<sup>4</sup> Tariq Ali broadcasted a video message too. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2ROeqtPlpY>

deficit in the representative democracies is based on this form of political representation. In the case of Turkey the crisis showed us clearly how this logic of representation led a so called democracy. The habitat of people is made benefits available to the proponent capitalists by the government, by the municipality which are the institutions purporting that they act on behalf of the people. Prime Minister whose claim is to act on behalf of the whole nation, talked on how many children women must give birth, on abortion, on the women's hemline. The Ministry of National Education, the institution that decides on behalf of the whole nation, supported compulsory religious classes ignoring parents' beliefs. The establishment based on that the government acts on behalf of the people or nation in a deep crisis. In Turkey parliament, government, governors, judges are reflecting this crisis clearly. Therefore the discourse of numerical superiority is being continuously kept on the agenda by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Further to that the crisis of representation is not restricted to the governmental body. The whole institutions organized in this logic of representation experienced the crisis in the Gezi uprising. The political parties, the unions, the local self-governments experienced the crisis all at once.

### **The Crisis of Authority**

The other thing the uprising showed is the crisis of authorities. As Arendt's very appropriate expression "the greatest enemy of authority, therefore, is contempt, and the surest ways to undermine it is laughter" (Arendt, 1970: 45). This unexpected situation could be created by different activism forms of protestors. Turkey had experienced an occupy activism in 2009 Tekel Resistance. It had a crucial effect on city life. The sovereigns were so afraid that after the resistance they suppressed all occupy initiatives by the most violent methods.

What Gezi resistance created in this regard is another mode of coming together out of capitalist mode. The resistance did it not only occupying an open public space but also creating a cheerful resistance. What the authorities couldn't stand is that cheerful form of resistance. So the first things the authorities applied for suppress the resistance were violence and lie. A serious crisis began for the government, governors, police, media, liberal intelligentsia, conventional left and the apolitical families with the Gezi uprising.

## References

- Kosseleck, Reinhardt (1988), *Critique and Crises: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts.
- Oran, Baskın (2013), “Paranoyak Olmak Şart mı?” *Radikal*, 7.7.2013.
- Boratav, Korkut (2013), “Olgunlaşmış Bir Sınıfsal Başkaldırı” *Gezi Direnişi Üzerine Düşünceler*, ed. Özey Göztepe, Nota Bene Yayınları, Ankara.
- Türk, Bahadır (2013), “‘Yedirmeyeceğiz...’ AKP, Komplo Mantığı ve Siyasal Paranoya”, *Birikim*, vol. 291/292.
- Badiou, Alain (2013), *Direnişini Düşünmek: 2013 Taksim*, Monokl Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Zizek, Slavoj (2013), *Dünyadaki İsyenların Anlamı*, Agora Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Arendt, Hannah (1970), *On Violence*, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, New York.
- Hobbes, Thomas (2009), *Leviathan*, Seven Treasures Publications, USA.
- Pitkin, Hannah (1989), “On Representation”, *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr ve Russell L. Hanson, Cambridge University Press, New York.