

Moral Politics in Turkey

Muslim Students' Perception of the Secular State

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1. Introduction

1.1 Politics and Ethics

Religion and politics

The question of why people seek to either explain the relationship between Islam and politics or deny its existence in plain terms has engaged me for some time. Some scholars (usually sociologists or political scientists) seem to struggle with questions such as “Is Islam compatible with democracy?” or “Is Islam compatible with the West?”, delivering opinions on the assumption that Islam is a patriarchal religion without the concepts of freedom and citizenship – a view that remains pervasive in the West.¹ Accordingly, they deal with “Islam” as a political religion that supposedly enables authoritarian rule in the name of God, and contradict prejudices that perceive the popular Muslim masses as passive herds rather than subjects who interpret their religious texts. They either state that Muslims are apt to enact every word they read in the Qur’an or contradict this view that denies Muslims what Christians and Jews are perceived as having, namely the ability to freely interpret their holy texts as they wish.²

Other scholars (mainly theologians or Islamic scholars) either see no relationship between politics and religion or consider it as inconsequential to the subjects of their research. At least this is what I attribute their questions to when attempting to explain that I am using Talal Asad’s concept of Islam as a discursive tradition to explore the political debates of Muslim students. From their perspective, I am confusing profoundly theological and religious questions with essentially political ones, and wonder how the Islamic tradition (in the form of Qur’an and Sunnah) relates with political debates at all.

Although I might not have yet captured the depth of their arguments in some points, it was an asset for me to profit from the work and insights of anthropologists and Islam scholars. Based upon what I learned from them, I would suggest – as often – that concepts do not essentially fit into one category or the other, but rather overlap whilst simultaneously opposing one another. At least this is what Asad understands as the relationship between the secular and the religious.³ Similarly, the participants in my field research – a group of activist Muslim

¹ s. Bayat (2007:5)

² s. Asad (2003:11)

³ s. Asad (2003: 25)

students⁴ in Istanbul – saw the connection between religion and politics as evident, albeit distinct in many points, and thus referred to a relation that was not apparent to me at the start of my fieldwork.

While I found their understanding of politics very different from that I had held until having met them (see Chapter 2.3), I also found that they had a very different understanding of religion than I had, and to an extent still have.

Whereas religion for me had always consisted of rituals, including the regular recitation of one's prayers, learning one's prayers, and skills such as reading the Qur'an – in short, something quite detached from politics – the other part of religion, namely the morals and ethics involved, had to be hidden away from the public, the possible misunderstanding and attention of others.

For the students I worked with in Istanbul, religion was something quite different. To them, religious morals instructed their behaviour in public, formed their views on political and societal issues, and were just as prominent as rituals in their everyday life. Indeed, politics and their religious views were inseparably connected.

They found connections between subjects such as annuity insurance or salaries and their religious morals, whereas I had never consciously suspected the slightest of such connections. Whereas my political understanding largely derived from a leftist perception of politics, I had not even previously been aware of my religiously inspired views. I had never even considered the connection of fear and shame that had led me to dissimulate anything that would point to my religious background as something that could influence my political views. Given that I felt it would have been impossible to voice religious (and more importantly Islamic) views on controversial issues in Germany, I never did so, and only recently realised a difference between the views and perceptions that I would openly advocate and those that I would perhaps keep to myself – two worlds that only surfaced on contradictory issues and clearly separate my personal opinions from those I would advocate in society. Therefore, the morals I live and understand as important in my personal life are none that I would stand up for in society. It is likely that these forms of engaged personal views and disengaged views⁵ in the public made my encounter with the students conflictual for me at times.

⁴ I have used pseudonyms for all the individuals I describe.

⁵ s. Taylor (2007) In Taylor's view, the secular age is an age in which people publicly adopt a disengaged religious view, even if they are privately engaged believers.

For them, there was no such thing as a disengaged view – at least not one they somewhat tacitly endorsed. Their “disengaged view” was forced upon them, and they carried it along like a heavy suffocating mask.

Their religious views could be described as non-liberal in the sense that they had neither adopted liberalism as their doctrine nor wanted to succumb to liberal lifestyles or adopt liberal values. Their non-liberal views set them apart from mainstream Muslim society (or more concisely AKP⁶-supporters) in Turkey, and enabled them to rethink their Islamic approach concerning the AKP’s conservatism that they sought to challenge with political ideas that – in a first attempt to describe them – could be termed as leftist. What they engaged in was to challenge the established forms of society and the state of Islam (which essentially saw religion as a private affair) from the perspective of a disestablished religion⁷ seeking to challenge society and politics for greater freedom and a say in politics.

Secularism and recent politics in Turkey

For them, religion was an extremely political matter – and how could they perceive politics any differently? Given that modernisation in Turkey is largely associated with secularisation, the core concept at the centre of the Turkish modernisation project can be said to be “excessive, and even undemocratic”⁸ to say the least. The efforts to enforce *laïcité* (taking the example of France) have produced a block structure in Turkish society that has not only split the civil society in “backward Muslims” and upwardly mobile, if not “elite secularists”, but has also had a great impact on Turkey’s recent history. Often conceived as the guardian of *laiklik* (the Turkish term for *laïcité*), the military has been responsible for several military coups that have caused extreme setbacks to Turkey’s development towards a pluralist democratic country. In the last military coup, the so-called post-modern soft coup on 28th February 1997, the first pro-Islamic Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan was forced to resign by the National Security Council, which started a media campaign against the Islamists⁹, warning of a supposedly growing Islamist militancy.¹⁰ Under the influence of the National

⁶ Turkey’s incumbent Islamist party, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

⁷s. Casanova (1994: 55)

⁸ Roy (2007: xiii)

⁹ The use of the term Islamist has proven quite problematic in the context of Turkish politics and has been abundantly discussed by the Muslim student group I have worked with. For them it remained an unsolved question whether they should call themselves Islamist or not. The majority of the students thought that the adjective Muslim was more appropriate for them and dismissed the term Islamist. Regarding the fact that Islamism is often defined as “political Islam” and that the students did not pursue any politics in a traditional sense (s. Chapter 2) I have only used this term for party politics as pursued by the AKP.

¹⁰ s. Atasoy (2009:88)

Security Council, YÖK (Yükseköğretim Kurulu)¹¹ subsequently issued the headscarf ban on university campuses.¹² When the headscarf ban was unsuccessfully challenged by the AKP-government in 2008, the Islamist party had had to face a closure case. However, after the constitutional court rejected the demand for closing the AKP, political events took a turn with revelations on the so-called Ergenekon network, an organisation that had allegedly planned another military coup to save secularism from the AKP. The results of a controversial investigation into planned coups and the terrorist network are expected in spring 2013.

While the media reported extensively on the affair, for a long time most of the findings were contradictory as to what Ergenekon actually was or who profited from this movement and/or its discovery. After five years, Ergenekon is currently perceived as an ultranationalist network bringing together retired military officials, journalists, academics and assumedly a number of cooperating terrorist groups who are made responsible for a number of assassinations and other mysterious ongoing, including the planning of military coups on the government. Ergenekon is also believed to be an extension of the so-called deep state, a coalition of “invisible” military and political elites controlling political ongoing from behind the scenes, a secret state, acting parallel to the official state.¹³

High military officials and many other members of the elite were tried and imprisoned with the investigation on the Ergenekon case. Despite it being questionable whether the investigation on the Ergenekon network and its plans of military coups have truly brought relevant information to light, the fact that the Ergenekon trials have taken place is probably a success in itself. This is not only because the AKP has exposed part of the secularist elites who have always suspected the Islamists of planning to overthrow the regime, and not even because the military has been deprived of its overarching power to interfere with the democratic political processes whenever “required”, but rather because Ergenekon has given people back some sort of understanding and perhaps trust in politics. Indeed, the era of military coups seems to have ended, and there is less place for conspiracy theories than only three years ago. Due to Ergenekon, today we can speak of a changed discourse in Turkey, one led by rational arguments rather than speculation on conspiracy theories, or as Britta Ohm puts it, a “de-ideologising and re-politicisation of the mainstream”¹⁴.

¹¹ Council of Higher Education

¹² s. Atasoy (2009: 89)

¹³ s. Atasoy (2009: 90)

¹⁴ Ohm (2010:8)

In these processes, the AKP has been unable to strengthen its profile as a democratic party, and many issues, whether Islamist issues or the Kurdish claims for more freedom, have not been fulfilled, despite the political developments.

Today, the AKP is perceived less as an Islamist party than a conservative neo-liberal party striving for economic success and a compliance of EU admission criteria. In many respects, the liberalised AKP has diverged from its initial Islamist ideology, and has disappointed Muslims. The liberalisation process of the AKP within the political process is another factor that has left Muslims in a public space that is just as secular as has always been. While the ascent of the AKP has opened up political spaces for Muslims, it has subsequently left them without the strongest political party supporting their cause.

Under these circumstances, the Islam that Muslims can live in Turkey cannot be lived to its fullest. Whether the headscarf ban in the public sector or the absence of Muslims in movies and serials, their rights and identity are neither recognised by law nor society that has its “soft” strategies to exclude them from whatever representation in the mainstream and openly corners them as the unwanted. To the Muslims, secularism is nothing more than a cruel and violent oppression. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the main subjects of their discussions evolve around the power of the state and secularism. The Turkish version of state secularism (*laiklik*), which corresponds to the French term *laïcité*, has been described by Olivier Roy:

Laïcité [...] defines national cohesion by asserting a purely political identity that confines to the private sphere any specific religious or cultural identities. Outside France, this very offensive and militant *laïcité* is perceived as excessive, and even undemocratic, since it violates individual freedom. It is regularly denounced in the annual report of the State Department on religious freedom in the world [...].¹⁵

For the students, the main source of reinterpreting, learning and reforming naturally had to be sought in Islamic tradition, rather than a secular ideology that estranged them from their cultures and past, pressing lifestyles and consumer cultures on them that opposed their spiritual approach to life and society.

Heterogeneity

The years of suppression and ideological indoctrination in schools and the media have not been able to finally assimilate all Muslims; indeed, some groups of Muslims still engage in vivid criticism of secularism and the state. The modern Islamic discourses developed in

¹⁵ Roy (2007:xiii)

recent years are strongly influenced by the mainstream and subject-wise resemble debates that can be witnessed all over Europe. Accordingly, debates on ecology, homosexuals' rights and many other topics are discussed with regard to a Muslim approach.

This phenomenon of actively engaging with society has been best described by a particular concept recently established by scholars such as Asef Bayat (2007), Nilüfer Göle (2006), Olivier Roy (2004) and Gilles Kepel (2002). According to Olivier Roy "Post-Islamism means the privatisation of re-Islamisation".¹⁶

It is these discussions on secularism, democracy and the nation-state that firstly aroused my interest in the post-Islamists. The debate that Muslims engage with in the private sphere has led to a diversification of opinions¹⁷ and perspectives that now surface in the public discourse when students deprivatise their discussions and disclose them to a wider public. Moreover, the fact that their views are based on a non-western source and attempt to propose an alternative to the mainstream liberal discourse in Turkey makes discussions even more interesting. However, the subjects of their discussions are often influenced by the European discourses, which accounts for the growing power of Westernisation within Turkish society.

Another aspect that characterises the post-Islamist mindset in Turkey is an awareness not only of problems and difficulties faced by Muslims in the secular state, but also a sensitive approach towards other segments of society that are denied their rights in the secular state. Accordingly, Muslim groups take an interest in the Kurdish issue and show solidarity with the Kurdish movement.

However, this has only proved one way of explaining the students' interest in politics. By-and-large, post-Islamism can be seen as a product of changing opportunities for Muslims. The end of revolutionary ideas (with the failure of Iran¹⁸) and possibilities that have opened up in Turkey with the AKP in power, a new structure of discourse in society can be seen as enabling post-Islamism. At the same time, the heterogeneity that post-Islamism advocates (in opposition to unitarian revolutionary ideas) can also be seen in a Muslim characteristic of endorsing opponents and working against permanent splits between Muslim groups. The unity to which the students often aspired mainly consisted on the basis of an acceptance of each other's heterogeneity. Indeed, this heterogeneity often came to bear when talking to Muslims

¹⁶ Roy (2004: 97)

¹⁷ s. Göle (2006)

¹⁸ Roy (1994)

about their “negative” opinions on particular issues. I often became quite confused over their answers, as they usually refrained from saying anything negative about others (or perhaps I never got their hints), especially if they were Muslims. Instead, they always talked of each other with respect, and would even misleadingly talk of dear friends even if they did not share the same opinions or radically criticised them in other situations. This way of addressing issues and people that I have found confusing and hard to dissolve in direct questions would usually not excite the sort of clear answer I was expecting, but rather very contradictory things. The sort of answers received sometimes left me irritated, annoyed or simply confused, as I had the feeling that my questions had not led me closer to any idea of what was meant.

I have attempted to understand this particular characteristic with the concept of cultural ambiguity that Thomas Bauer (2011) suggested as central to Muslim culture. While contradictory statements as the expression of one’s opinions with this concept can be seen as reflecting an ambiguity, it is not an ambiguity that the person perceives to be troublesome, but rather simply accepts as a heterogeneity inherent to an issue not requiring any further resolution or explanation. In this sense, heterogeneity and ambiguity are being appreciated by people and cannot only be related to political circumstances that might become more favourable when discussing with people from opposite political camps, but can also be interpreted as maintaining and fostering a particular ethical behaviour that discourages disputes within communities (s. Chapter 3).

1.2 Politics and Media

The use of internet communication can be seen in a similar way when regarding the needs and functions that particular media embrace. For my research, television (as the appliance most frequently referred to) and the internet (as a means of communication and organisation) have played the most important role. Whereas television – from the students’ perspective - usually represented the hegemonic, i.e. secular version of Turkish politics and citizens, the internet was more frequently used to communicate within the group and contest the state’s ideology from a Muslim perspective. By using the internet for communication within their group and partly to communicate with the Muslim community at large, the e-mails shared by the students in their Google group helped them to form their own opinions. Their perspective on politics and efforts to cultivate distinct views on secular society and politics can be explained as a form of “gatewatching”. Although Axel Bruns’ definition of “gatewatching” largely refers to

people bringing additional and/or controversial news and opinions on subjects together on blogs or websites to create objective news, the students' efforts in sharing knowledge and news can be seen in similar, albeit ideologically distinct terms.

Despite the subversive quality of the students' internet use that diversifies national ideology, it is important to highlight that these practices of subversion have existed before the advent of internet, and have simply found a new form of expression on the internet. However, the misportrayal of the political situation in Middle Eastern countries suggests that the practices we currently encounter on the internet (contributing to democratic participation or pluralisation of opinions) are not facilities that accommodate certain techniques, but rather agency-inspiring appliances. The enthusiastic news-coverage on the liberating character of the internet that accompanied the demonstrations in Teheran's streets in 2009 as well as the revolutionary ongoings in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya can be dismissed as unrealistic. Changes in opinions, if occurring through the internet, are perhaps far too subtle (s. Chapter 4.3) to trigger revolutions and develop as slowly as in other areas of life. However, the academic discussion has not remained detached from this enthusiasm, as many scholars (Manuel Castells 2010 or Dale F. Eickelmann & Jon Anderson 1999) have predicted radical changes in the Muslim world due to internet liberation.¹⁹ In the case of the "Arab Spring", the laudation of modern technology can even be said to have devalued people's efforts and agency. From a Western perspective, it seems to be much more comfortable to rather praise (Western) technology than people's efforts, which might just as well have been the same in impetus and direction without the internet. Only a minority of scholars (e.g. Žižek) have pointed that the internet might only reinstate a virtual version of our reality. Žižek's claim that this virtual world carries all the vices and virtues that our offline world also has to deal with is underlined by the control exercised by the Egyptian regime over media freedom during the uprisings. The closure of Al-Jazeera²⁰ and prosecution of dissidents via Vodafone²¹ only show that the state remains stronger than the media. The same reality can be described for Turkey, albeit with less severe consequences, where RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) still controls all TV content and courts have ordered bans on Youtube from 2008-2011, with some of the postings having abused Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the Republic.

¹⁹ Namely the emergence of new public spheres

²⁰ s. Democracy Now (01.02.2011) Media Blackout in Egypt and the U.S.: Al Jazeera Forced Off the Air by Mubarak, Telecommunications Companies Block Its Expansion in the United States

²¹ s. Democracy Now (01.02.2011) Digital Darkness: U.S., U.K. Companies Help Egyptian Regime Shut Down Telecommunications and Identify Dissident Voices

The internet naturally has its particularities that, for the case of the student group, can be found in enabling and simplifying their habits of writing and publishing their thoughts – either within the semi-public sphere of their e-mail group or the Muslim community in Istanbul. Their written subversion of the state can be seen as undermining the “legitimate” discourse and offering new sources for finding recognition and legitimisation through internet practices for all students (rather than a few with the possibility to publish in newspapers). Therefore, the internet can be seen as a means of gaining self-confidence and a sense of empowerment by offering channels for expression and an alternative space for exchanging news within the Muslim community.

1.3 Overview

Secularism can be seen as the main subject at the core of the Muslim students’ debates, discussions and problems in Turkish society; indeed, they do not only encounter secularism in the form of the state’s laïque oppression (in public spheres), but also as a lifestyle and more importantly as a set of values quite opposite to their own. Therefore, I have considered the discussion and maintenance of their values – which were naturally more humanistic than the egalitarian and secularist guidelines of the state - as an implicit criticism of the state and its anti-religious (and/or anti-moral) views. As an advocator of anti-religious and materialist views to them, the state bore no dimension that could be regarded as accommodating human beings according to their nature and dignity as human beings. Only Islam (in the form of a moral and ethical attitude) brought politics and humanity together in the sense that it made the distinction between right and wrong and the accommodation of all groups of society possible and fair. Given that this moral and ethical attitude saw justice and humanity at their base rather than the maintenance of power and/or the economic system, it was more just to people’s needs and did not strive for manipulating or controlling them with regard to particular benefits of the state. Therefore, my exploration of the students’ debates commences with an attempt to understand their views on Islam and the particularities of their discussions and circumstances (chapter 1), later drawing attention to their attitudes of structuring their participation in politics (chapter 2) and ideas of a better society (chapter 3), and finally the kind of action that they would perhaps want to take part in their struggle for a better world, as represented by the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010 (chapter 4).

The first chapter deals with an evaluation of methodological approaches and theories used to understand and describe the field, as well as the relationship I shared with the students. I found

my relationship with the students to be very difficult at times, perhaps – as already mentioned – because I was not critically aware of my personal religious belongings (rather than convictions) at the time. The concept of Islamic anthropology, as presented by Akbar S. Ahmed as well as my interviews with some of my informants, led me to question how and what relationship the students in the group had with religion, and also what their religious approach meant to their understanding of Islam, society and politics.

Asad's approach to perceive Islam as a discursive tradition probably fit the group best, given that debate (face-to-face and written, on the internet) made an essential part of their understanding and Islam as a part of their tradition as well as contemporary society and politics. Accordingly, they could only find and maintain a vivid relationship between current secular society, life and Islamic tradition in their conversations and discussions. The constant evaluation of their *mores* and ethics with regard to current society kept Islamic tradition alive and made it meaningful to them, as the following chapters show.

The second chapter discusses the students' moral and ethical evaluation of politics, and permits insight into the criticism raised by students regarding the secular state, its ideology and lifestyle advocated. To Muslim students, secularism is something that they cannot evade; a doctrine that deprives them of certain religious rights (e.g. wearing a headscarf) and a presence in public spheres (areas and public institutions in which they are not allowed with a Muslim attire). However, the students do not only encounter secularism in its evident form of Kemalist oppression, but also by means of the temptations and opportunities the system offers to bring its citizens back into mainstream secular society. The effort to maintain, and even cultivate and improve, an Islamic view is described by means of a debate on the Constitutional Referendum in 2010. The students' attitude with regard to politics and the moral foundation for their activism in politics is described in terms of their view on the military coup of 1980 as a part of the implementation of secularism in Turkish society. Moreover, their *mores* and understanding of citizenship can be seen as a practiced criticism of secular life, its indifference to the pain inflicted on people, as well as a consumer culture opposed with their morals and views. Their perceptions of the state shows the deficiencies of secularism and the nation state and the ways in which they attempt to deal with it.

The third chapter presents discussions on the minority issues tackled by the student group in 2010.²² These discussions cannot only be analysed regarding the *status quo* of society, but

²² In the students' discussions on religious minorities I have included some material dating from 2011, after the completion of my fieldstudy. I have indicated and mentioned the reasons for using more recent material in the concerned cases.

also a better, Islamic society that they would envision for themselves and these groups. In this context, the Kurdish issue has been the most important subject for activist Muslims to deal with. In their discussions, they questioned the legitimacy of the state's actions against Kurdish separatism, thereby dismantling the foundation of the concept of the Turkish nation. Turkish Muslims' understanding and/or solidarity with the Kurdish issue can be seen as destroying the state's claim for legitimate action against terrorists, and calls for new standards in negotiations with the Kurds.

The other minority the students dealt with were Christians (namely Armenians and Greeks). Regarding the fact that Turkey is a Muslim majority country today, their views can still be described as led by a hegemonic Muslim approach to the issue; however, as secularism is anti-religious to them, they advocate multi-religious co-existence as preferable to a non-religious society.

The final and probably most difficult issue the students dealt with in 2010 was their attitude (political and moral) regarding homosexuals. To them, the subject as such appeared quite forced upon them, given that urban society at large had been dealing with the subject for some time. In contrast to the other subjects, their attitude concerning homosexuals was extremely heterogenous and still in flux, as they seemed to not have yet acquired fixed opinions on the subject (or Muslim scholars' views to refer to), yet simply were left to their basic understandings of Islam. Their discussion of the subject was led by confusion over what could be understood as a political question and in what ways were homosexuals a subject to political negotiations? The effort to understand sexual orientation not only as a private affair, but also as matter of politics, can be said to have confused them and made it difficult to discuss it as a subject of politics. Therefore, the arguments made cannot yet be seen as end points of their discussion, but rather as evolving views on a subject that will probably lead them to further enquire into the Islamic past and the treatment of homosexuals in other centuries. Simultaneously, the subject of homosexuals' acceptance and integration in society can be seen as a very modern subject acquiring political recognition for the first time and challenging hitherto unquestioned views on a new level.

Dealing with the Israeli attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in May 2010, the final chapter can be seen as showing an example of political activism imbued with the students' values (as they strongly supported the flotilla) and their criticism of the West (and its inhumanity). The international level of the Gaza incident makes it clear that they understand Turkey to be part of a state system that plays according to inhumane rules. However, these rules can be challenged by morally conscious people from all over the world by circumventing the

traditional channels of political activism. Moreover, the incident – as an issue of international media coverage – can be seen as an example of political activism based on the power of the media and the possibilities provided to raise awareness and grant legitimacy to the resistance of activists.

2. Method and Field

Anthropology of Islam and Islamic Anthropology

Despite the freedom that Turkish society has come to experience in recent years, academic discourse and media has maintained a focus on the restrictions faced by particular groups of society. This perception has certainly devalued some of the recent developments; however, the new situation and freedoms experienced by society are contradictory, half-fulfilled promises of a better future that presents a new dilemma for many groups within society. While it is presently possible to discuss issues in public that were previously tabooed, in most cases it remains impossible to bring about legal change.

The Muslims that I talked to often felt somewhat trapped between a range of new freedoms and the persisting confinements upheld by the state, and were torn between the hope for change and resignation that nothing has “really” changed. This feeling is particularly vivid among students, on one hand studying in an environment where it is possible to hope and struggle for change, yet on the other hand, it is impossible to bring about change. Their experience in university highlights that their efforts are largely ineffective concerning certain restrictions and discrimination. Probably the most prominent example of the impact of certain law on students’ university education has been the headscarf ban. Following its introduction in 1981 and reinforcement in 1997, many covered Muslim girls were expelled from university, had to interrupt their schooling, be uncovered or even chose to go abroad²³ if they pursued university education at all.

Before the headscarf ban was finally lifted in 2013²⁴ universities had already lifted the ban upon recommendation from the government albeit without a sound legal basis. This situation prompted the possibility of numerous female students continuing or taking up their education at university. For females, the possibility of studying at regular universities is surely a freedom they have long waited for; however, given that university is still pervaded by Kemalist

²³ s. Demirkol-Özer (2009)

²⁴ With the introduction of the September 2013 democracy package the headscarf ban was lifted in all public spheres excluding army, police and judiciary.

thought, the gap between their own Islamic conception of the world and the liberal environment at university is striking. The apparent differences between their understanding of the world and those taught in all sorts of (social sciences) classes prompt them to reflect upon what a university based on Islamic principles would be like. When reading “good” articles and books that they value and truly cherish, the question emerges as to what Muslim researchers could have written if provided with the position and required background to write a similar work. Many Muslim students perceive a lack of Muslim researchers²⁵, of examples who could help them to imagine a better university and a research “truer” to humanity and their own values. The students’ torn perception of academic research has not remained at the theoretical level within my work, and has rather directly affected each and every encounter with the students.

As an anthropologist among Muslim students, I very clearly felt their very low expectations from a work that was neither going to be written in the name of Allah nor from an emotional and believing perspective, but rather from a secular-agnostic standpoint. It was obvious to them that an anthropological work considering them as Muslims, albeit written by a non-Muslim, was not going to further their discussion. Accordingly, it would belong to a different world and represent part of a discussion in which they would probably not take part. An anthropological work that would have been more likely to gain their support and interest might have been something such as a theology-based Islamic Anthropology in the sense of Akbar S. Ahmed’s conception:

We may define Islamic anthropology loosely as the study of Muslim groups by scholars committed to the universalistic principles of Islam, humanity, knowledge, and respectful tolerance, and relating micro village tribal studies in particular to the larger historical and ideological frames of Islam. Islam is here understood not as theology but sociology. The definition thus does not preclude non-Muslims.²⁶

An Islamic anthropology would probably be enthusiastically welcomed by many Muslim students who wish to further Islamic Sciences as a prerequisite for an Islamic society. However, Ahmed’s particular proposal lacks persuasive power, and his fusion of Islam and anthropology is not looked upon favourably by all Muslims, with some fearing that Islam might be watered-down in a liberal fashion when fused with anthropological studies, which is a Western discipline after all.²⁷ Moreover, the first aspect that strikes the non-Muslim researcher is probably Ahmed’s surprising suggestion of adopting a Muslim mind-set when conducting research on Islam. Despite non-Muslims explicitly not being precluded from an

²⁵ The vast majority of publications in Arabic language in the field are seldom, if ever, translated to Turkish.

²⁶ Ahmed (1986: 217)

²⁷ s. Varisco (2005: 129)

Islamic anthropology, scholars have stated that they find it altogether absurd that non-believing anthropologists could possibly achieve something like a Muslim mind-set and commit themselves to the principles of Islam.²⁸ Indeed, many Muslims would also doubt that a non-Muslim could ever achieve adopting a Muslim mind-set.

As confusing as it may seem, Ahmed's suggestion hints at something very important, namely that a non-Islamic anthropology will never be true to Muslims' experiences in some sense. However, this is a dilemma that cannot be resolved. While Ahmed's proposal might aim at avoiding ethnocentrism in research and even suggest a quality of research beyond a mere avoidance of ethnocentrism, given that his ideal seems impracticable he only succeeds in drawing attention to the ideological gap between a non-Muslim researcher and Muslim informant.

As theoretical as it might initially seem, this gap has an impact and reflects one of the reasons for my discomfort experienced in the field. The poor experience that my informants can probably all relate to in the overly secularised Turkish public sphere did not exactly lead to prejudices, but certainly prompted some caution regarding non-Muslims.²⁹ Furthermore, they were doubtlessly right to be cautious when considering the general tenor in Turkish society, and likewise the academic discussion of Islam that - following Daniel Martin Varisco - has been essentialising Islam for a long time. However, it is not only the media that transmit a biased image of Islam; moreover, anthropology textbooks also declare exemplary anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1968), Ernest Gellner (1981) or Fatima Mernissi (1975) as experts on Islam. Scholars who to Varisco's mind portray Muslim societies as fixed and unchanging entities insusceptible to development.

Ahmed's claim for an Islamic Anthropology has developed from this background, illustrating the dilemma faced by anthropology concerning people who have had a hard time being accepted in their own society. Their case perhaps becomes even more virulent when they have an academic background yet dread prejudice and distorted representation and thus cannot consider social sciences as trustworthy and reliable. However, Ahmed's concept of anthropology cannot represent more than an illustration of this gap, an approach that takes account of the misdeeds committed by anthropology (and other social sciences). However, in terms of an Islamic Anthropology, Varisco is right in emphasising that:

It is absurd to argue that Islamic anthropology would "act as a corrective to the notorious ethnocentricity of much of Western anthropology." Replacing one kind of ethnocentricity with another would only perpetuate bias. [...] The correction to faults in secular

²⁸ Marranci (2008: 48) Varisco (2005: 131)

²⁹ Marranci (2008) reports similar experiences in the aftermath of 9/11

anthropology will not come from submission to a particular historical religious tradition.³⁰

There is no doubt that ideologies are inseparable from our thinking, with distortions emerging wherever ideologies are involved. However, there is no other way than to question the distortions and trivialisations caused by ideologies for each situation and issue. As suggested by Ahmed, an Islamic Anthropology would probably encourage non-critical thinking in the fear of dissociating particular groups of Muslims or fostering a superficial image of everything that is non-Islamic. Therefore, his attempt to establish an Islamic Anthropology can be predominantly considered an important criticism of secular anthropology.

Field and Science

To my mind, Ahmed writes at the crossroads connecting the “field” with the academic discourse. In a sense, his thoughts can be described as similar to those of my student informants, who also took great interest in the academic discourse and would have very much liked to influence it. Ahmed’s thoughts certainly show us how blurred the limits of a field can sometimes be, how much ideological influence the field can have on a science developed to explore it, and how blurred the boundaries of an Anthropology of Islam and an Islamic Anthropology are.

It is clear that the two are mutually influential, with the question arising from this conclusion of: “What will this influence lead to? What does it mean?” Ahmed’s work also sheds light on this interesting aspect by asking “Is good anthropology – from the point of view of the native, at least – sympathetic anthropology?” Not necessarily. Anthropologists must record society as it *is* not as it *should be*.³¹ This suggests something very important, namely that informants might be open to criticism and discussion, and that they also take an interest in discussing ideas and criticism emerging from outside.

In the context of secular societies, it is possible to say that liberal worldviews are all too well known to many Muslims, and from their perspective might only contribute something new to their discussion at second sight. Therefore, an attempt to exchange ideas and thoughts must be conducted in a sensitive manner, withdrawing from superficial observations. In this sense, an academic work might represent a good option after all for engaging in critical discussion with Muslims themselves. Within the scope of academic work, it might be possible to contribute to their discussion and integrate them in the sense that one “naturally” takes their worldviews

³⁰ Varisco (2005: 128)

³¹ Ahmed (1986: 221)

seriously (which is certainly not the case in many other contexts, and not as self-evident as might seem within academia).

It is necessary to admit that scholars in the field of Islam might not be the experts in all issues, but rather that Muslims participating in the research also have a say when it comes to refuting parts of a particular work or giving credit to others. In this sense, I understand my work as depending on the criticism and insight of my Muslim informants, whose views I am presenting through my own lens without ever expecting that things might have entirely been as I perceived them. I am certain that I cannot have a final say, that many discussions are open, and that there are many dimensions to each issue that I have not been able to grasp. Moreover, the work that I present can only be considered a starting point that has to be furthered in new discussions with informants and within academia.

It is a truth that no matter how well-immersed they might be in the field, non-Muslim anthropologists will be unable to proceed beyond a certain proximity in the field, and also that many insights will be lost when translating between two worldviews and two languages. Despite the fact that it is never possible to tap the full potential of such an encounter, the exchange of ideas taking place between informant and researcher impacts both and can help to broaden horizons.

One Islam – many Islams

The interconnections between Islamic anthropology and an anthropology of Islam can sometimes be seen as analogous to the encounter between researcher and informant, and not only provide an insight into the relationship between informants and researcher on a practical level but also delimit the field encounter theoretically when analysing the researcher's view when entering the field. What the researchers assume as Islam and what the informants consider as Islam lays the foundations for their encounter, and in the best case the researcher develops a more differentiated understanding of Islam within their exchange of ideas. In this sense, one of my key experiences in the field was to reach the conclusion that I knew nothing about Islam – or at least had grown up with an entirely different idea of what Islam is. This confusion is surely experienced by many people who have grown up in the context of a specific Islamic tradition and are bound to their social, cultural and generational background. The feeling that there are somehow many different Islams experienced as very distinct from one another is a question discussed abundantly by anthropologists. In Ahmed's opinion, the suggestion that there is not only one Islam, but rather many Islams – an approach forwarded by Muslim anthropologists and adopted by many Western Anthropologists – is wrong. He writes:

I disagree with this position. There is only one Islam, and there can be only one Islam, but there are many Muslim societies. We must not look for numerous “Islams” but attempt to place the multitude of Muslim societies within the framework of one universal Islam.³²

Bearing Ahmed’s outline of an Islamic anthropology in mind, it is possible to state that his postulate is based on the theological precept that there is only one Islam, with Varisco rightly pointing out that “A careful reading of Ahmed’s writings suggests that it is not the idea of an Islamic anthropology that he is advocating, but rather a specific kind of idealized Islam.”³³ Without doubt, Ahmed’s emphasis on the oneness of Islam adheres to Islam’s divine nature and thus does not solve the problem of what anthropology investigates when occupied with Islam. However, his argument becomes valid in a very different way when considering the different proposals made by scholars for an anthropology of Islam. Introduced in his book “Muslim Society” (1981), Ernest Gellner’s concept of Islam claimed it as a blueprint of a social order.³⁴ In the main part of his seminal essay “The idea of an anthropology of Islam”, Asad summarises Gellner’s effort as presenting “an anthropological model [...] of the characteristic in which social structure, religious belief, and political behavior interact with each other in an Islamic totality.”³⁵ In his comparison of Islam with Christianity and Judaism, Gellner concludes that all three religions are blueprints of social orders, yet Islam more so than the others.³⁶ This holistic understanding of Islam is criticised by Asad with reference to examples of Christian political endeavours. He dismisses Ernest Gellner’s Muslim Society, stating: “As an anthropologist [...] I find it impossible to accept that Christian practice and discourse throughout history have been less intimately concerned with the uses of political power for religious purposes than the practice and discourse of Muslims.”³⁷ His argument for the dismissal of Gellner’s concept of Islam as an analytical framework and Varisco’s critique of his disregard for Muslims’ agency in defining Islam³⁸ highlights why Gellner’s approach cannot be accepted as a framework for an anthropology of Islam today. Gellner’s understanding of “Muslim Society” can be seen as an anthropological endeavour that can be used to reiterate all sorts of essentialising discourses on Islam. Following Gellner would probably mean advocating an anthropology of Islam that repeats itself in repeatedly finding the same Islamic structures.

³² Ahmed (1986: 220)

³³ Varisco (2005: 125)

³⁴ s.Gellner (1981: 1)

³⁵ Asad (1996: 382)

³⁶ s. Gellner (1981: 1)

³⁷ Asad (1996: 383)

³⁸ Varisco (2005: 72)

Another proposal concerning what an anthropology of Islam should investigate is based on Abdul Hamid El-Zein's argument that many forms of Islam that equally deserve to be described as Islam and are linked by all expressing an underlying ultimate logic.³⁹ However, his structuralist approach was criticised by Asad (1996), rejecting the idea of many Islams on the grounds that anthropologists usually take Islam to be what their informants describe as their own beliefs and practices and ignore those claims terming other communities beliefs and practices as non-Islamic. The existence of "Islams" does not make analytical sense to Asad, as "it is generally impossible to define beliefs and practices in terms of an isolated subject."⁴⁰ Furthermore, he suggests that: "A Muslim's beliefs about the beliefs and practices of others are his own beliefs. And like all such beliefs, they animate and are sustained by his social relations with others."⁴¹ Ovamir Anjum joins Asad's argument, emphasising that a discussion of reform and intra-Islam dialogue, some of the most interesting questions to be asked today, are irrelevant to a research programme that considers each "Islam" as thoroughly independent.

Regarding this discussion, Robert Launay has highlighted that scholars of other disciplines – for instance, Islamicists and historians – have not discussed the diversity of Islam in the same way as anthropologists. He attributes the inclination to conceptualise Islam as "Islams" to the anthropologist's disciplinary interest for small-scale local communities and the tendency to portrait so-called non-scriptural and "traditional" religions as quasiorganic products of these communities. "However", he writes: "Islam is obviously not a "product" of any specific local community, but rather a global entity in itself."⁴² Muslims' understanding of this entity is not a naïve belief rooted in the conviction that Islam is the same everywhere in the world; on the contrary, Launay makes clear that Muslims – just as Western academics - know about the diversity within their religion and are aware of different traditions in regions (or even neighbourhoods) other than their own.⁴³ Therefore, in his view, the ambition to understand Islam as "Islams" extends beyond the range of anthropology and can be considered a theological claim that Muslims rightfully do not have to accept, and also that anthropologists have no right to make.

³⁹ s. Asad (1996: 381) A structuralist approach finally leads El-Zein to the surprising conclusion that there is no such analytical category as Islam. From this conclusion Asad draws that there is no such thing as an anthropology of Islam, which in his view is not a very helpful conclusion if one wants to define an anthropology of Islam.

⁴⁰ Asad (1996: 382)

⁴¹ Asad (1996: 382)

⁴² Launay (1992: 6)

⁴³ s. Launay (1992:5)

While Gabriele Marranci acknowledges Asad's work as a progression on Geertz's (1968) and that of the aforementioned Gellner (1981), he suggests that "it is impossible to speak of one Islam [...]" "we have to move to recognizing the existence of Islam(s)",⁴⁴ and proposes that we should focus on Muslims rather than Islam, given that the only defining criterion of Muslims is that they "*feel[...] to be [...] Muslim*"⁴⁵, independently of what others perceive them to be or their acceptance of particular religious credos.

Marranci suggests that fieldworkers should primarily focus on their Muslim informants as human beings, "to acknowledge the role that emotions and feelings have on the informant's discourse of Islam as well as the power that the surrounding environment has in its definitions. In other words, successful fieldwork is based on the capacity of the fieldworkers to develop an emotional empathy with their studied community."⁴⁶ If people's emotions and feelings are not taken into consideration, he fears that we might be unable to recognise important processes of identity formation.

Marranci's experiences of shared emotional experiences in the field, religious dreams about a Sufi teacher⁴⁷ and the like are altogether alien, if not even weird when considered from my own perspective. Indeed, emotions and feelings played a role in my interviews and conversations with informants, more so if they were "reborn Muslims" who were certainly able to bond with me in a different way to those who had never reflected the option of "not believing". Nevertheless, my ability to understand certain processes of their becoming Muslims never cast a doubt on the fact that I was not Muslim and thus did not experience any spiritual or religious transformation. When people sympathised with me and got to understand that I was not going to believe, despite the fact that I shared some of their interest in Islam, this understanding sometimes caused confusion, whilst saddening others who wished that I could also share the blessings that they are to receive. The fact that I did not believe in Islam separated us in a very essential way that was sensible almost all of the time, and was surely nurtured by the strange fact of my interest in the same subject (Islam) as them, albeit for entirely different reasons and ends. Prior to my field study I certainly had not expected this barrier to be so strong as to often provide me with a strange sense of intruding in an otherwise homogenous setting. The fact that I come from a Muslim family, that most of the Muslim traditions are familiar to me and that it would have been an easy task for me to participate in prayers might have even increased the confusion experienced by some of my informants in

⁴⁴ Marranci (2008: 8)

⁴⁵ Marranci (2008: 78)

⁴⁶ Marranci (2008: 8)

⁴⁷ s. Marranci (2008: 77)

relation to me. However, I felt that participating in any of the religious rituals would have either signalled that I wanted to convert or sooner or later would have been exposed as some sort of mockery. Therefore, I considered it much more sincere to remain distanced and see our commonalities in political issues (concerning the Kurdish conflict or disarmament). One of my informants once explained that she believed there was a small “ümme” (ummah), the believers, and a bigger “ümme”, comprising those who are in favour of a better world and can be described as moral ethical beings who would stand up against any sort of injustice. This probably built an encounter level for the students and me.

Their open-mindedness with regard to non-Muslims (be they Christians or atheists), as well as Muslims of other denominations, was very important to them. As once explained by one of the students, they wanted to invite, listen and talk to people of all convictions and mind-sets.⁴⁸ Although I never witnessed any discussions with Muslims from other denominations, their theoretical approach towards them was in theory guided by the same openness that I and other Erasmus students (who had met with the group before my arrival) had profited from. To them, Alevites or Shia were Muslims that they saw critical in some points; however, based on the students’ statements, people, wherever they live and no matter how they express their adherence to Islam, belong to those who refer to the Islamic tradition to achieve a better life and are thus Muslims. Given that the students I worked with never questioned the sincerity of other Muslims, it was more or less clear that all branches of Islamic tradition were approached as unbiased as possible.

Within the context of my work and also beyond, the experience of different forms of religiosity within one family or circle of friends, the confrontation with non-believers or adherents of other faiths can be understood as fostering an understanding of the Muslim community as a community of people referring to the Islamic tradition in some way – and not necessarily a very pious one. Therefore, Marranci’s proposal of an emotional approach based on Islam(s) as well as Ahmeds understanding of “one Islam” in an abstract, divine sense, seem to be less useful to me than Asad’s, who claims that the condition linking Muslims is that they share a tradition and a discursive field that has always been structured by different beliefs, practices and controversial discourses. Accordingly, he proposes understanding Islam as Muslims do:

Most anthropologies of Islam have defined their scope too widely, both those appealing to an essentialist principle and those employing a nominalist one. If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qura’ an

⁴⁸ Interview Ali (groupinterview)

and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition.⁴⁹

While this might almost seem to reflect Ahmed's Islamic anthropology, the emphasis on Islam as a tradition not only enables the anthropologist to grasp this "one Islam", but also opens up new perspectives on determining what Islam is and on how to investigate it. Following Asad:

A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. Clearly, not everything Muslims say and do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition. Nor is an Islamic tradition in this sense necessarily imitative of what was done in the past. For even where traditional practices appear to the anthropologist to be imitative of what has gone before, it will be the practitioners' conceptions of what is *apt performance*, and of how the past is related to present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form.⁵⁰

Asad's concept of an anthropology of Islam has incited critique from scholars, such as Marranci (2008) and Lukens-Bull (1999), who dismiss Asad's ideas as a proto-theological paradigm that favours pious Muslims over Muslims with only a limited knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadiths.⁵¹ Lukens-Bull even goes as far as claiming that Asad portrays local traditions of Islam as "corrupted" little traditions that are less valuable than the great tradition.⁵² However, a careful reading of Asad and Anjum (2007) suggests that both have misread Asad, whose concept is much broader, and according to Anjum "is not [meant] to define an orthodox Islam but to say that the fact that Islam cannot be located in a social order does not mean it is nothing more than a label for disparate and contradictory claims by various Muslim cultures."⁵³ According to his understanding, Asad's main contribution is to introduce the question of power to the anthropology of Islam within the framework of a discursive tradition.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Asad (1996: 397)

⁵⁰ Asad (1996: 398)

⁵¹ s. Marranci (2008: 42) and Lukens-Bull (1999: 4)

⁵² s. Lukens-Bull (1999:4)

⁵³ Anjum (2007: 661)

⁵⁴ s. Anjum (2007: 659)

Moreover, the focus on orthopraxy that still dominates the anthropology of Islam can be seen as one train of thought connected to the concept of “Islams” and single studies on local communities. However, isolate studies on Islamic beliefs and practices impede dialogue and discussion if not linked to other concepts. Furthermore, they constitute undisputed worlds of their own that lead to naive anthropological accounts of specific field settings, a problem that a reading of Asad, beyond “the idea of an anthropology of Islam”, takes issue with. Asad demonstrates defining the analytical investigation of Islam (as well as religion⁵⁵) and secularism in similar terms, with both in a way being traditions that have historically developed as instructive discourses and can be explained as “products of historically distinctive disciplines and forces”⁵⁶, with both said to have transcended race, class and gender.⁵⁷ However, both might be reduced to analytically invalid categories if split into a number of isolated Islams or societal developments that have nothing to do with one another. Therefore, he criticises the emphasis sometimes given to fieldwork in anthropological context by stating that anthropology is far more than the pseudo-scientific term of fieldwork.⁵⁸ Following Mary Douglas, he writes:

What is distinctive about modern anthropology is the comparison of embedded concepts (representations) between societies differently located in time or space. The important thing in this comparative analysis is not their origin (Western or non-Western), but the forms of life that articulate them, the powers they release or disable. Secularism – like religion – is such a concept.⁵⁹

The comparative analysis seen by Asad as being central to anthropology is certainly the only possibility to render anthropological accounts politically and scientifically relevant in the sense that they make us understand certain developments. An anthropology that is entirely based on fieldwork and knows nothing other than the field-setting described limits itself to only being relevant within its particular geographical or social setting.

The fact that the Muslim informants in my field study were politically engaged and built their arguments on certain discourses helped me to understand their activities within the context of Turkish politics. Their efforts to position themselves regarding political issues certainly renders it impossible to omit the implications of their engagement for others. The comparison with other political associations in Turkish society is indispensable if one wants to understand the relevance of this particular group and its work. Even though the student group that I

⁵⁵ Asad (1993: 54)

⁵⁶ Asad (1993: 54)

⁵⁷ s. Asad (2003:)

⁵⁸ s. Asad (2003: 17)

⁵⁹ Asad (2003: 17)

worked with might simply be an example for many others - thinking and working in similar contexts – its position in the field makes its relevance. To situate it in a particular political context opens up possibilities of comparison and helps us to understand in detail how people are shaped by secularism and struggle with it.

2.1 Fieldwork and the Anthropology of Media

International Experience and New Media

In the context of globalisation and more recently the internet, comparative research and analysis are being conceived in new dimensions. Accordingly, the idea of focusing on networks and connections rather than a bounded field setting directs anthropologists' search for demarcations into entirely new directions. In theory, nodes of connection are understood to open new horizons where limitations previously narrowed experience and life-worlds. The field is no longer seen as a geographically distinct area, whose connections with the exterior can be omitted without hesitation. Rather, the field's boundaries are blurred and transgressed when ideas and understandings travel and influence developments in multiple and distant places. Bearing this in mind, Marranci claims that "[...] the anthropology of Islam, today, cannot be other than global. We cannot study, for example, Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Marocco and Libya, without taking into consideration the transnational and global networks they are part of."⁶⁰

When I started my research in Istanbul, whether this was really true was one of the questions that I asked myself. Did people take part in transnational and global networks, and did their interest in Islam lead them to sources of knowledge about society and religion that come from places other than their home country?

The point that Muslims, or at least those that can be called activists, would be more interested in learning from other Muslims around the world seemed convincing to me. Their interest in overcoming the notional limitations of their own secularised horizons could be an incentive to look for other sources and interpretations of Islamic practice in the world. If it was not a serious interest in a global subject such as Islam, then what could entice people to make use of the technological opportunities provided by the internet for networking and connection?

However, when attending the first meetings of the student group on modernisation, I found that they predominantly read secondary reading in the Turkish language that criticised

⁶⁰ Marranci (2008: 5)

modernisation from an Islamic perspective, with an evaluation of the original Western work rarely taking place (outside of social sciences classes). The most accessible medium, namely books that could possibly be found in Turkish and English in almost all university libraries over Turkey, were not assessed by them. Despite their interest in the Arabic language being very strong, with many motivated to learn Arabic, they never engaged in reading literature from the Arab world. The two reasons for this are naturally that their Arabic – in most cases – was not yet sufficient to read Arabic texts, and probably more relevant, Arabic texts are seldom translated to Turkish. Therefore, access to literature other than Turkish was very limited for the students.

The same also applies in terms of internet use. While Facebook and YouTube provide masses of instructive videos from Islam preachers around the world, during my time in Istanbul I only twice witnessed that videos that did not have an immediate connection with the Turkish political and religious situation being posted to Facebook walls: one was the account of an Australian who had converted to Islam, and the other a post on the preacher Zair Naik, who related what Islam was from his perspective.

Whereas the first video was simply passed on from one user to another, the second was only posted by a single individual who had liked the video because she admired the self-confidence with which the preacher stood up for his belief. When asked where these videos had appeared from, hardly anyone could remember; rather, they had simply appeared and there wasn't anything else one could say about them. Even the video about Zair Naik (whose general understanding of Islam with some certainty is at odds with that of the students) was not further evaluated.

From my observations, any use of the internet that extended beyond the boundaries of Turkey was superficial and certainly did not excite anything but an joyful “ah” from the posters and readers/watchers. Interaction on the internet was extremely local, considering that most of the internet use was within the group, extending to other Istanbul-based organisations and to a lesser degree other organisations in Turkey. This applies to the networking that happened through the internet, as well as the content that the students talked or posted about.

Even if new media are part of all networks today, the students' world was certainly not more closely networked than those of the Islamic world of centuries passed. My observations support the idea that people still engage in the same networks that existed long before globalisation accelerated and perhaps do so less than the elites at a time when communication in Arabic was still dominant for sharing knowledge across borders.

These observations are backed by Pankaj Ghemawat's review of globalisation and new technologies, that: "while indubitably important, have clearly led to only limited cross-border integration so far."⁶¹

In reference to a survey conducted by the Harvard Business Review, he states that:

the respondents guessed an average level of internationalization of 30 percent for a subset of the measures in figure 2-1⁶², versus an actual average of 10 percent! Interestingly, experience offered no substitute for actually looking at the data: very senior or internationally experienced executives were as likely to overestimate as much as all the rest. Such overestimation characterized every group that I have surveyed so far.⁶³

Ghemawat understands our overestimation of globalisation as a consequence of our hopes and fears in this connection. Whereas some strata in society fear globalisation and focus on this threat, others envision a world in which they can be anywhere at any time and thus profit from globalisation. Overall, our enthusiasm for technology across history has often led to overstating the impact of certain technologies. Indeed, this is what Ghemawat suggests with regard to railroads, steamships, telegraphs, electricity, telephone and airplanes, which have been considered as bringing down the barriers between nation-states by David Livingstone, John Dewy, Henry Ford and others.⁶⁴

This understanding suggests that globalisation and new technologies do not have the impact and transformative power that we might attribute to them, yet they do clearly have an immense power over our imaginative world. Arjun Appadurai's (1990) idea that there are global flows that "occur in and through the growing disjunctures between ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples and ideoscaples."⁶⁵ has transformed the perception, yet largely not the way in which anthropologists' work in the field. Therefore, from the global flows he describes it is probably the ideo- and mediascaples that have the greatest impact – given that they work on our imaginations the most.

⁶¹ Ghemawat (2011: 37)

⁶² The figure includes data on mail, telephone calls, university students, immigrants, charity, direct investment, patents venture capital, internet traffic, exports, equity investment, news media, bank deposits and government debt.

⁶³ Ghemawat (2011: 34)

⁶⁴ Ghemawat (2011: 34)

⁶⁵ Appadurai (1990:301) This idea can basically be summed up as describing globalization as a new global condition in which people, ideologies, media content and technology are as much on the move and connectively related to one another as are financial and economic relations. People who are on the move bring with them a certain lifestyle, a particular understanding of economics, and a particular mindset shaped by the ideologies and the information they have been exposed to. As they move to new places, adapt to new conditions and learn about new perceptions of the world they exist in they do not only use different technological devices according to how they find them useful, but make themselves at home with all kinds of different aspects of their life.

One such ideoscapes that has had great effect on our imagination and realpolitik is secularism. Secular ideology played an impact on shaping society, long before globalisation became a subject to us. In some parts of the world, people were led to reflect religious diversity and more urgently religious wars that had to be terminated. Meanwhile, in other parts of the world, secularisation has raised fear among those who thought that religion was losing its importance to the detriment of many populations for whom religion played an important part in their lives. Secularisation raised fear in some and hope among others, who felt that religion had stood between them and political freedom. State leaders have considered secularisation to be the only way of bringing superstition to an end, enabling their countries to prosper and develop. Secularism is an emotional subject inspiring larger than life fears and desires, and has become one of the global products promoted by Western media (and politics). Media circulation informed people about secularisation processes in other countries and brought new lifestyles to the attention of broader audiences. Accordingly, people all over the world sharpened their lenses to secularism, as well as the processes of secularisation within both their own country and others. Simultaneously, flows of ideological and media influence have legitimised secular lifestyles and made secularism the strong ideology it is today.

The fact that religion in general and Islam in particular have become increasingly important in the public discourse today can be described as adding a new dimension to the discussion of secularisation in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. When considering Istanbul in particular, it might be true that the experience of secularism and religion have proceeded in new ways. For instance, the direct interaction with people of other mindsets in cities and the enlarged possibilities of travelling to Europe or Asia used by young middle-class people to encounter either the secular or Muslim with very heterogenous outcomes has added to their range of experiences and shaped their views of non-Muslims and Muslims. However, these cross-border experiences are anything but media related encounters.

The Istanbulite Muslim middle class can be described as open to encounters out of the ordinary. For the student group, these included intensive encounters with impecunious families in Istanbul who have often fled from Eastern Turkey, refugees from other Muslim countries and also encounters with Erasmus students within the context of university. Moreover, most Muslim students try to visit neighbouring Muslim countries such as Syria and Jordan to further their Arabic language education during semester breaks, with some even visiting them to learn more about Islam in other countries. Depending on the students' personality and ideological viewpoints, these encounters can be described as remaining superficial, only touching on some aspects of political conditions or going much deeper.

Accordingly, two of the girls I interviewed also had disappointing and even repelling experiences during their stays abroad. Even in the overarching context of Islam, these travels certainly do not always lead to a blissful experience of mixing and blurring practices and understandings, but are rather conflictual and likely to become subject to processes of difficult negotiation if extended. For young Muslims, the confrontation with the diversity of Islam that forces them to redefine the universality of Islam within the context of differing cultural settings where Islam has been appropriated is certainly a critical – and above all complex - experience that one can hardly imagine having on the internet.

Internet – implications for research

Marranci's second claim regarding the transformation of participant observation is less concerned with the field itself than methodological approaches in the field-situation. His observations are extremely relevant regarding that participant observation is no longer limited to a material field, but that it has also become possible to conduct participant observation online. In theory, these possibilities enable the researcher to conduct participant observation whenever desired, 24 hours a day, although in practice this is not a viable option. Given that people of different ages, interests and geographical zones accommodate the internet in different ways, it is very probable that the internet-use of the informant is of no use to the researcher. In certain contexts, when particular websites, Facebook groups and other fora are used to gather and publish users' thoughts, the researcher might be able to gain some relevant information in context through a leading research question. Otherwise, participant observation among a certain community regarding their internet use might only bring to light a range of different activities that appear as a bunch of meaningless scraps of information that are seldom, if ever, useful for reconstructing a certain matter. Mere internet research often remains very superficial, and rather than disclosing information on a certain issue it often obscures matters when circulating around the question of "authenticity"⁶⁶ – a question that often distracts from relevant issues in discussion. The insight gained by linking both online and offline research offers a better understanding of the field situation and helps to understand at least the basic parameters of living conditions and ideological outlooks on the world before diving into the confusing world of mistakable online conversations. Moreover, a combined research can also help assess if effects can truly be attributed to internet use or hint at the often overlooked thin line to overrating the impact of internet in the context of current politics in the Middle East.

⁶⁶ s. Marshall (2007)

According to Christine Hine, “to date, far more effort has been expended on predicting the revolutionary futures of the internet than has been put into finding out in detail how it is being used and the ways in which it is being incorporated into people’s daily lives.”⁶⁷ Her argument suggests that relevant information might be retrieved from detailed field-studies in cyber environments, and promises a new view on the discussion. An orientation towards the facts of everyday life might disenchant some of our technology enthusiasm witnessed and still be able to provide a perspective that extends deeper into users’ experiences yet does not entirely reject a meaningful aspect of internet use at the same time. To successfully explore the informants’ internet-use, it is certainly helpful to have an idea of the different ways of use that they take advantage of and which of those are able to accommodate the sort of information being sought. In the case of the Muslim students that I worked with, it was clear that they were predominantly using an e-mail group to discuss and further their projects beyond their weekly meetings. Whereas the e-mail group could be said to have been a more or less internal device of communication whereby the students could utter and raise all sort of questions, anxieties and debates, it is also important to note the semi-public character of an e-mail group with over 200 subscribers (with this number rising every month) writing approximately 5-10 e-mails a day. By contrast, their website was almost only for representing their views and projects to a broader audience, namely other Muslim foundations and associations or new students who might be willing to cooperate or join their group. Therefore, the website contents can be fundamentally seen as providing general information about the group, its aims and projects and a presentation of the views and opinions that the majority of students agree on. The e-mail group is a means of furthering exchange on ideas that the members of the group do not yet (and might never) agree on. Therefore, the controversial part of exchange is largely confined to the e-mailgroup (the weekly meetings are usually too structured to accommodate many controversies) and thus has provided the most interesting material for my analysis.

Despite most of the students also using Facebook and posting events on their Facebook wall, the representation on Facebook was never complete and often ambiguous regarding private comments. Accordingly, I have only seldom found useful activities to follow on Facebook, and understand it as a form of more or less private chat that was quite detached from the issues that I was really interested in. However, Facebook has proven very helpful in keeping in touch with the students and getting to know about issues and organisations they were interested in yet had never mentioned in their e-mails or personal conversations before explicitly being asked for them.

⁶⁷ Hine (2000: 2)

2.2 Communication and Culture

The Other

When I first got to know the students from the student group during a conversation round they had organised with Hayri Kırbaçoğlu (a theologian from Ankara), I was welcomed very warmly and introduced to some of the group members.

After the conversation was over one of the girls, Elif, invited me to her home, which she shared with some other girls. What I remember from this first truly “personal encounter” is that Elif⁶⁸ cooked Manti with yoghurt and showed me some of the poems she had written or lately read. I am not sure in what context - perhaps in one of those poems – the word “Şebnem” was mentioned. I explained to her that “Şebnem” probably meant “dew”, as the same or similar word “Shabnam” in Urdu meant dew. My explanation perhaps surprised her as she said she did not know what “Şebnem” meant and that I was probably right, but that this kind of knowledge about language and certain richness of Turkish language had been lost with the Turkish language reform.

To my mind this incident had some very important implications for the ways we would later find and use to interact. In this conversation I had primarily offered myself as a Pakistani, or more precisely as a person who knew or shared a part of common “Muslim knowledge”, a part of this knowledge that perhaps had even ceased to exist in Turkish common knowledge since the establishment of the Republic and the language reform in 1928.

Though my reasons to interact with Elif in this way had not been reflected at all, I would today say that as I had come to them to learn something about Islam I had instinctively switched to a part of myself that was perhaps more “Muslim” or closer to understanding and valuing Muslim culture. Nevertheless, this first encounter was not to be the one to set the rules for my interaction with the students. Usually and more often I would of course refer to the context from which I come (Germany) and the purpose (a research that was being financed by the German Academic Exchange Service) of my stay in Turkey. My identity as a “Andere Deutsche”⁶⁹ (“Other German”), a term Paul Mecheril and Thomas Teo have coined to better

⁶⁸ I have used pseudonyms for all the individuals I describe.

describe the hybrid identity of second generation immigrants and their challenge to German identity. A “andere(r) Deutsche (r)” is a German who would usually not be recognized as a German by “standard Germans” despite living in Germany and being socialised in Germany and this came into play and played an important role in a conversation I had with Ayşe. We had been talking about pilgrimage to Mecca and the experience of meeting with different people from various Muslim countries when she told me she had also seen Pakistani women with their colourful clothes in Mecca. She thought that it must be interesting and wonderful to talk to Muslims from different places and especially those places where she imagined that Islam had not yet been uprooted and refashioned according to nationalist or statist purposes. Her statements brought home to me that after all I must have been a disappointment for them. In spite of what I perhaps had seemed to be in the beginning I had not become a “Muslim” interlocutor to them, but instead someone who was perceived (and rightfully so) as playing a particular role within the power asymmetries between any people of a Muslim community and any non-Muslim/non-Turkish⁷⁰ and non-Eastern researcher in this context. Her remarks had made clear to me that the asymmetries of our encounter were visible to her and that she would wish for an “equal encounter” with a Muslim. Instead of saying that the asymmetries were visible to her, I should perhaps assume that she felt the asymmetries, without ever acknowledging them. At least the same day when we talked about Mecca we had a strange encounter with a man on the bus. I do not exactly remember what he said, but he had listened to Ayşe who at that moment had been explaining something about being a Muslim in Turkey. The man reproached her for explaining such things to me, after all a foreigner and said she did not know what would happen if she would tell anyone such things. Ayşe replied to his strange approaches by defending my being in Turkey and asking her questions and thus justified my being a researcher in her student group. When we got off the bus she told me that guys like that would not understand that it was perfectly okay that I asked her such questions and distanced herself from his racist comments. However, I also remember that I wondered at her justification of my position in her group and asked myself why she did not question that it was okay what I was doing – a feeling that was aggravated by the fact that she did not come up with a reason of why it was okay that I was doing this research.

Ayşe was one of those who supported my work in the group the most and perhaps was also the most curious about it. However, I do think that she clearly felt that there was something problematic with the fact that “I was there”. For my part I did my best to ignore these tensions

⁷⁰ It is very likely that a secularist Turkish researcher would also be perceived within the power asymmetries in Turkey and therefore would have to face problems.

as I was not ready to face any uncomfortable questions, being occupied with being unhappy in a situation I sought to change, but found no clue to reverse.

Part of my distress certainly derived from what Dorinne Kondo has described with regard to her research in Japan, as a Japanese American:

Still, for some anthropologists, the Other is not totally Other. Those in-between can identify with the violence done to the richness of human experience by the coldly distant, so-called "objective" language of social science.⁷¹

However, this identification with the violence done to the informants only lead to the fact that I was constantly unhappy, but did not make me question the reasons for the rejection that was inherent even to Ayşe's support. I never seriously questioned my "being there", but a series of further incidents engraved themselves in my memory and never made their way into any field diaries or texts I wrote. My later conversations with Ayşe, however, show how she (and as I felt also some of the others) coped with the situation: After a first interview with her she told me that she had been surprised that I had not asked any questions about her headscarf. The minute she mentioned her headscarf it came to my mind that I indeed could have asked her about her headscarf and that others in my place would perhaps have done so. However, these others must be others so far away from her lifeworld as to think that a headscarf still can be something irritating. As she had expected that I would ask her about her headscarf she had cast me as a Western researcher and perhaps has also had in mind what she could or would tell such a person. Her efforts to cast me as a Westerner even went as far as to mention that she thought that my life plans probably did not include anything such as family and children.

I never adequately replied to her remarks - that is, I told her that I had not thought of her headscarf until now and that in contrast to what she thought I was thinking of getting married. However, I always felt that my answers were not sufficient. Some underlying confusion about who I was remained unresolved and made me feel awkward. I have tried to understand this feeling with Santina Battaglia's analysis of dialogues of origin (Herkunftsdialoge) "Andere Deutsche" are usually forced to have. Dialogues of origin to her are dialogues in which "Andere Deutsche" are cast as non-German by questions such as "Where are you from?" Such questions usually are presented to "Andere Deutsche" in a different way than to Germans as they usually hint at the fact that somehow their counterpart is not German. By asking this particular question they firstly alienate (Entfremdung) the person, secondly place (Platzieren)

⁷¹ Kondo (1986: 83)

her to a different geographic (and cultural) background, “disanswer” (Entantwortung) the person, as they do not communicate with her, but a stereotype of who they imagine that person is, and fourthly “disequal” (Entgleichung) them by assuming that they are not equals (but stereotypes). These processes finally lead people to demand (Belangung) their counterparts to represent their culture of origin. They ask them about the political, cultural or economic situation of the country they have placed her in and hold her liable for the behaviour of people who represent her country.

So what happened in my conversations with Ayşe was that she alienated me by referring to me as a stereotype Westerner, who would ask her about her headscarf and as a Western woman who stereotypically would refuse to have a family or get married. She placed me not so much in Germany as perhaps in the West, a similar homogenous somewhere as Edward Said (1979) has described in his *Orientalism* for the East.

The fact that she cast me as a Westerner and interacted with me as someone who would fit her image of the West made it impossible for me to adequately answer her, as my precarious belongings surfaced:

Diese Ladung der sprachlichen Handlungen erzeugt eine Asymmetrie zwischen den Gesprächspartnern. Sie bewirkt eine charakteristische Einschränkung der Selbst-Definitionsmacht des Angesprochenen, denn der prekär Zugehörige müsste, um in dieser Situation adäquat repräsentiert zu sein (...), die Gesprächsebene wechseln. Er müsste in einer Metakommunikation die Unterstellung, die von seinem Gegenüber als unstrittig vorausgesetzte (De-)Platzierung, zurückweisen. Das würde jedoch bedeuten, in eine Situation zu geraten, in der die prekäre Zugehörigkeit zum - schwer zu vermittelnden – Gesprächsthema würde.⁷²

Kondo has described the efforts of her Japanese informants similarly when describing that they reconstructed her as Japanese, rewarded “Japanese behaviour” and would show that they would not accept “American behaviour”. “During the fieldwork experience itself, my informants often tried to recreate me as Japanese. I collaborated in this attempted recreation with various degrees of enthusiasm and resistance.”⁷³ And: “In order to reconstitute my identity as I had known it in American culture, I had to distance myself from this moment of identification with Otherness, and to resist my informants “attempts to recreate me in their own image.”⁷⁴

⁷² Battaglia (2007: 186/187)

⁷³ Kondo (1986: 82)

⁷⁴ Kondo (1986: 80)

However, my informants in Turkey did not attempt to recreate me in their own image, but in the image of the other (and potentially a threatening other). The reason for this I think was their sensitivity towards existing power asymmetries shaping the encounter between Muslims and non-Muslims. If there had been someone else in my place, a person who could or would have wanted to identify with the label “Western” the conflict, as Battaglia describes would not have evolved in the same way, as that person would have identified with the alienation and placements:

Der Akt der Belangung enthält jedoch unter der Bedingung, dass eine Situation beidseitig als „interkulturelle“ konstruiert wird, keine Ladung. Belangungen wirken daher in diesen Fällen nicht, wie in Fällen prekärer Zugehörigkeit, asymmetrisierend und natio-ethno-kulturell desintegrierend.⁷⁵

Whereas my informants tried to overcome the confusion over my identity by identifying our encounter with regard to existing power asymmetries I could not react to this placement other than by disappointing any assumptions that they made about me or my life. Thus the communications we had often ended disappointing as I refused to be liable for my being Western in stereotypical patterns and thus felt powerless with regard to shaping my own image. Moreover, as Battaglia and others have pointed out the fact that one is supposed to be or to know specific things as someone of this or that origin always points to a deficit, if one does not know or is not able to act as people expect one to do:

Die Belangung und, noch deutlicher, die Feststellung der Nicht-Belangbarkeit treibt in Gesprächen mit Anderen Deutschen die durch die Terkessidischen Kategorien⁷⁶ erfassten Prozesse der Desintegration auf die Spitze.⁷⁷

Thus I often found myself thinking that someone else who was not a Muslim interlocutor (probably their primary choice) would at least be a Westerner, a German or someone who could correct their views about the West. By identifying as a European or a Westerner that person would have been able to deal with their conceptions and imaginations of the West. However, as I did not identify with being from the West, I felt that there was a deficiency in me to make my position clear and also defend it at points. I mostly felt this deficiency in the distance that it created, as I could never be who I was:

Konsequenzen eines Herkunftsdialogs „in Interaktionen mit Angehörigen „anderer Kulturen“ kommunizieren Menschen anders als mit Angehörigen ihrer „eigenen Kultur“ (vgl. Knapp-Potthoff 1997, 1990). Die Konstruktion einer Situation als „interkulturell“ schafft Distanz. Und sie suggeriert ein (Un-)Wissen über den Anderen

⁷⁵ Battaglia (2007: 188)

⁷⁶ “Terkessidische Kategorien” here refers to Mark Terkessidis’ categorization of othering.

⁷⁷ Battaglia (2007: 194)

als Anderen, als Repräsentanten „seiner“ Nation, Ethnie und Kultur, das von nun an zur Geltung gebracht werden kann.⁷⁸

Ayşe's remarks as well as the growing distance between her and also some of the other students and me shocked me, however, I could not yet make any sense of it. My experience in Turkey had – until then – always been quite contrary to the situation I was facing. During my two stays in Istanbul in 2006 and 2008/09 I had usually been able to simply merge in the groups and circles of friends I became part of. To a degree this was still the case when I met friends and also informants who were basically friends. One of those friends once briefly visited me in Germany and told me that a Turkish friend had asked her if the friend she was going to visit was Turkish and that she had replied “yes” and then corrected herself. In these situations, however, I always was primarily a friend, not a researcher from a European country. Though something similar happened to me in the student group, too, when one of the girls told me that she thought my Turkish was at least as good as those of people from a Turkic country and another mentioned that we would have never been able to have the conversation we had just had, if we would have had to talk in English, these remarks were similar, but different in a very specific way.

One could possibly reduce these remarks to referring to linguistic competences only, however, I had the feeling that they did not refer to language skills only, they usually came along with some astonishment and also showed some bewilderment that it was possible to talk to me and make oneself understood – as if I was close and familiar to them in a sense that they would not have expected. Therefore most of our conversations did not evolve on a basic level, but if they went well, would almost turn into discussions. In these contexts I was sometimes told that I understood them better than the Kemalists. Moreover, on one or two occasions I had been somewhere with the group when the students were asked to introduce themselves. They usually introduced me as a part of the group, saying that I had joined them some time ago and was with them, rather than to explain where I came from and what the purpose of my research was.

This for itself can probably be said for many researchers who have worked with Muslims in Turkey however, what made the situation difficult for me was that I was sometimes cast as the Westerner and sometimes as a member of the group and therefore felt like the enemy within. I was not who I was or who I seemed to be, whereas as a “wholie”⁷⁹ (if he had been

⁷⁸ Battaglia (2007: 184)

⁷⁹ Abu-Lughod has introduced the term “halfie” as opposed to “wholie” to describe the different experience of researchers whose identity is in some way close to that of their informants.

able to find access to the group) in my place would not have seen a certain closeness with the group as a reason to question his identity. In my case however, this constructed sort of a double-bind which assigned me with different styles of behaviour. I was meant to be Western and therefore could behave that way and then this was – as I clearly felt – not appropriate in some situations when I did not understand (because I really did not) or felt that I was wearing the wrong clothes.

Thus the distance the students created when interacting with me and my constant withdrawal from their assumptions led to a situation that was unclear and confused from my point of view. During my field study I often thought that my relation to them was confused because I answered and related to them in a confused way. This in turn might have been a reason for their being confused. Other reasons for their confusion include my replies to their assumptions, but also confusion over “where” to put me, which category to use to refer to me. Moreover, my behaviour must have challenged their views of the Westerner. Another way of understanding their behaviour would be to understand it as their behaviour towards strangers: to be friendly and accommodate the stranger, whoever he might be, as long as he does not try to break their rules. This of course has implications that lead away from my own field experience and pose the general question of how my informants dealt with diversity and the other. How could the other become to them, and how much did they understand or try to understand the other? This is a question I will explore in chapter three.

Understanding the Other

“[...] the anthropologist is still defined as a being who must stand apart from the Other, even when he or she seeks explicitly to bridge the gap”⁸⁰ writes Abu-Lughod and challenges this assumption by referring to the “halfie anthropologist’s” perspective. In her opinion every anthropologist – like the halfie - “stands in a definite relationship with the Other of the study.”⁸¹ The anthropologist cannot be conceived as standing outside of the community or group he works with; there are certain historical formations of power and hierarchy that structure his encounter with the “Other”.

⁸⁰ Abu-Lughod (1991: 468)

⁸¹ Abu-Lughod (1991: 468)

But what was my relationship with my informants? By which constellations was it structured? And why did not the students put aside binaries of the Westerner vs. Muslim when they met with me?

The conditions that structured our encounter on a very basic level was that of a hierarchy that posits Muslims beneath secularists (in Turkey) and a global discourse in which Muslims everywhere in the world are referred to as inferior. The awareness of these hierarchies and the binary between Muslims and non-Muslims to them is omnipresent as they are constantly subjected to it. Their efforts in this hierarchical structure aim at reaching equality and in this strife for equality they have to be aware of who is on their side and who is not. The secularist Kemalists are certainly not on their side, those who can be on their side can only be Muslims. However, this binary has started to erode since the AKP has been in power - perhaps to the detriment of many identity discourses that of the secularists who are no more able to conceive the Muslims as radicals who would want an Iran-style theocracy in Turkey, and also for Muslims, as Ayşe once explained to me:

Ama bir şey oldu, insanlar artık birlikte yaşamayı öğrendiler mi, bilmiyorum. ya da birlikte yaşamak zorunda kaldılar belki de. Artık daha bir karmaşıklaştı yani kimsenin kimseyle sorun olmuyor. Tabi yine radikal fikirleri vardır, bizden de radikal fikirleri var, ben biliyorum gerçekten. Mesela bakıyorsun açık birini gördüğünde ağzı açık kalan işte kızan insanlar var. O kadar radikal insanlar var. Ama onların taraflarda radikal insanlar var. Benim hoşuma gitmiyor, açıkçası. Birlikte yaşamaya artık öğrenmeliyiz. diyoruz ki Türkiye 99% Müsülman olan bir ülke diyoruz, onlar da müsülman, ben de müsülmanım. Aramızda belli farklar tabiki olacaktır dolaysiyiyle birlikte yaşamayı öğrenmeliyiz, düşünüyorum ben.

(But something happened, people perhaps have learned to live together, I don't know. Or they have been forced to live together. Everything is more mixed, no one has a problem with no one now. Of course there are still radical ideas, our people also have radical ideas, I really know them. For example you see that people see an "open girl" (not headscarved) and they remain with open mouths and get angry. There are very radical people. But on their side there are also radical people. I don't like that at all. We have to learn to live together, we say that Turkey is a country of 99% Muslims, they are Muslims, I am a Muslim, too. Between us there will of course be differences, therefore we have to learn to live together, I think.)

Her observations clearly show that there is an awareness of societal change. Things have become different and people usually accept each others' being different, however, the dichotomy itself is still in place, there is still their side and our side and the only way she sees the gap can be overcome between them is by their being Muslim (albeit very different ones).

That this view has its problematic sides the group is still struggling with also surfaced in other issues. Others, even Turkish liberals like Ahmet Altan – though appreciated for their support and also for their ideas – were sometimes attributed a special friendly position in their discourse and on other occasions seen as unimportant for their own discourse, when they felt that issues where liberals were involved were creating problems within their community. Liberals then were clearly understood to be on the “other side”. Their main rationale for analysing and understanding societal hierarchies usually was based on the secularist/Western – Muslim binary. Liberals – and yet others – who would not fit these binaries had begun to appear at the horizons of this binary world, but the effects of this change had not yet been as pervasive as to confront the students with the question: What about those who reject these binaries? What about those who do not fit these binaries?⁸²

The attitude with regard to such “Others” was generally ambivalent and they were either cast as potential antagonists or as some sort of friendly beings who had understood something (though miraculously had not converted to Islam). Perhaps this was – after all – a sort of position that I had among them, too? An ambivalent position that was torn between friendliness and distancing.

But why did the students perceive hierarchies, politics and finally culture as operating in binaries? The hierarchies that structured their lives were those between secularists and Muslims, politics was understood to be either secularist or Muslim and culture as a world view and lifeworld people inhabited was determined by secular lifestyles or else Muslim lifestyles and corresponding worldviews. Though there were efforts to think beyond these boundaries they were not yet profound. For them there was not yet an “in-between”. Culture was a concept that was based on the dichotomy of secular and Muslim. When they referred to culture then only via this dichotomy. There was no “third space” for them, which – as Homi K. Bhabha stresses is important because it is aloof from dichotomies: “But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge.”⁸³ and “The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”⁸⁴

⁸² One of these “others” are homosexuals that will later be discussed in chapter three.

⁸³ Bhabha (1990: 211)

⁸⁴ Bhabha (1990: 211).

However, as of now the political dichotomies in Turkey still play a role that is too important to be ignored and therefore there is no room for a “third space.” But what will happen if these dichotomies dissolve? Will there be a third space then and if, what will it be like?

For many others – on the contrary – that “third space” does exist. Perhaps not in the celebratory manner that Bhabha uses to describe it, but rather as a reality. A reality that is also structured by changing hierarchies and different requirements for the persons acting in it.

What can a “halfie” learn in the field?

One of the few anthropological accounts bringing up halfie anthropologists’ experiences in the field include Kirin Narayan’s (1989) field experience in a village in India. As she had spent her childhood in the village many of the people there already knew her and made it difficult for her to assume the role of a researcher. Kondo’s and Narayan’s accounts of how they were “forced” to adopt particular “Japanese” or “Indian” roles ask for explanations. Why did the people in their particular environment not let them assume other roles than the ones of “daughter”?

In Narayan’s case the priest she mainly worked with had known her from her childhood and therefore was unwilling to acknowledge any changes of their relationship. He had a convincing reason for this, the same reason all people have who claim to know one since childhood, namely that there does not seem to be any necessity to learn about the grown-up person they now face. Kondo does not give any reason, but that somehow “American” behaviour threatened them and was clearly seen as problematic.

The unacceptable other in these cases seem to have been particular identities the researchers wanted to assume, that of a “grown-up woman” and that of a “non-Japanese”. Both identities were impossible to assume in their particular circumstances.

The unacceptable other in the context of my field research was the nationalist-Kemalist – an identity I shared some similarities with, as Kondo did with Americans and Narayan with other researchers. One of the strong similarities I shared with Kemalists was a secular life style. As the Kemalist identity is bound to the Turkish nation-state I did not have to be worried to be identified with them, however the diffuse “Western” identity I was attributed with probably came very close to the unacceptable Kemalist. This however, did not lead them pressure me to become like them (something that would have contradicted their ethics), on the contrary it created a distance that perhaps had two aspects. One being that I was not trusted and not really able to learn about what interested me most about “Muslim issues”: debates between Muslim

groups i.e the students' perception of critical points in these debates. Though I think that these kinds of issues are seldom if ever disclosed to an outsider (s. chapter 2), they are perhaps also a limit in their group imposed on my possibilities of understanding. Whereas the binary between Kemalists and Muslims was a frequent subject, inner Muslim problems were not talked about that much.

Though this limit to learn about the students' might have only derived from my being an outsider to the group there were – as I feel – more restrictions to my possibilities of learning about and from my informants that were tied to my being a “halfie-anthropologist”. A fact that Kondo has also mentioned for her research: “This location in context – though not fixed – did describe certain limits and potentialities for understanding.”⁸⁵

For Kondo the possibility of passing as “Japanese” sometimes was an advantage and sometimes a disadvantage that again taught her many things. Only by being familiar with Japanese behaviour and tradition was she able to be accepted as a part of the family she lived with at the beginning of her research. Simultaneously this closeness imposed mechanisms of control on her behaviour as she only could act as a young Japanese woman and not freely stroll around, invade and explore areas that her social status would not have allowed. Though I would question that it is necessary to break the rules the host community or society imposes on the researcher, clearly wholies⁸⁶ often do not see particular limits and learn by crossing them, whereas halfies perhaps try to sometimes challenge them by transgressing limits they already know exist, because they do not want to be accepted for the 50% they are, but 100%. Seemingly being a halfie already includes a challenge to the world views and limits people uphold.

However, I never tried or wanted to transgress any limits or boundaries imposed on me, though I sometimes realized that “not asking particular questions” (as Narayan did with Swamiji) held me from learning. When I came close to such a limit and had asked an “awkward” question I would usually wish I had not asked it all.

Obviously this might be one of the reasons why my account of the following might not seem “thick”. There is a constant distance deriving from the awkwardness I experienced. Though

⁸⁵ Kondo (1986: 84)

⁸⁶ Abu-Lughod has introduced the term “halfie” as opposed to “wholie” to describe the different experience of researchers whose identity is in some way close to that of their informants.

there are perhaps many more limits to the halfie anthropologist's possibilities of understanding I want to mention three more that structured a great part of my work.

One of them being the “disappointing dialogues” I have had with some of the students, namely those that I see as being similar to “dialogues of origin”. These dialogues destroyed every conversation. Just imagine if I had replied that I was indeed very interested in why the girls wore headscarves. Probably a very different flow of conversation would have emerged with the girls telling me about their reasons for wearing a headscarf – after all an important part of their identity that reminded them of their being Muslim in a secularist country every day. By never asking about their headscarves I have perhaps ignored a very important issue of their identity of resistance and – what is more important – refused to fit into their preconceived image of who I was. A situation that will not allow flow in conversation, like ours, is doomed to remain superficial in many regards.

The second reason directly derives from this lack of flow. Such a disappointing dialogue – from my own experience – creates a moment of confusion in which one is uncertain about what the speech act is meant to say on several levels: content-wise (proposition), with regard to what the other wants to do (illocutionary act), what he wants oneself to do (perlocutionary act) (Searle, 1969) and with respect to the relationship one has (Watzlawick). This confusion can be traced back to the non-existence of the third space for my informants, or with Paul Watzlawick to different world views:

And additional problem lies in the fact that language not only conveys information but also expresses a world view. The nineteenth-century linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt once remarked that different languages are not so many designations of the same thing; they are different views of it. This becomes particularly evident in international meetings where ideologies clash and the interpreter who speaks the languages but does not understand the ideologies finds himself hopelessly at sea. A democracy is not exactly the same thing as a people's democracy; *détente* means something very different in the Soviet vocabulary than it does in that of NATO; one and the same thing may be called “liberation” by some and “enslavement” by others.⁸⁷

One would assume that confusion just leads to people trying to make things clearer, however, as Watzlawick has stated confusion might lead to bewilderment and even anxiety:

when one of the messages is garbled, leaving the recipient in a state of uncertainty, the result is confusion, which produces emotions ranging all the way from mild bewilderment to acute anxiety, depending upon the circumstances. Naturally, when it

⁸⁷ Watzlawick (1976: 9)

comes to human relations and human interaction, it is especially important to maximize understanding and minimize confusion.⁸⁸

Relying on an experiment Bavelas conducted, Watzlawick even gives a reason to why people in such a confused situation do not try to make things clear. They usually assume that their reality is the only one and that they have the only right view of things. Therefore if they learn new things they just put them into relation to what they think they already know.⁸⁹ They usually do not question the assumptions they have had before learning new facts.⁹⁰

This I understand to be the reason why confusion and a sort of anxiety were my constant companions in the field. I can only guess how the situation felt for my informants, perhaps – as Watzlawick proposes – they just added whatever they learned about me to the image they already had and arrived at a somewhat absurd image of who I was.

In the process of the field study I also briefly studied another, socialist student group (a short description of the antikapitalist öğrenciler can be found at the end of this chapter) with whom I conducted interviews. I was as before in the Muslims student group warmly welcomed and never experienced the kind of disappointing dialogues or confusions as in the other group. Overall I had the feeling that I had come closer to them than the Muslim student group in a far shorter span of time. Somehow this experience led me to question one of my socialist informants about how they experienced the situation with me. As I had asked her if she felt any reservations or concerns about what was perhaps going to happen with the interviews I conducted she told me that she did not have any reservations as she thought that I must be a little like them, share some sort of socialist approach or otherwise I would not have become interested in meeting them. I told her that she was right and that I did see myself as a leftist, but that this was not the reason why I was there and that there were many points which I saw different from them, one of them being their belief in a world revolution. At that moment I had the feeling that something that had happened to me with the Muslim student group was now happening again. She seemingly was a little confused over what I had said, as it did not fit with the image she had had of me until then. Her confusion immediately created some distance between us, as she was not sure of who

⁸⁸ Watzlawick (1976:3)

⁸⁹ s. Watzlawick: (1976: 63)

⁹⁰ This also works vice-versa. Wrong knowledge is not necessarily questioned by the assumptions one has made before, but simply added onto what one already believed, thus constructing total nonsense.

I was anymore and I was not sure if it was acceptable to her to talk to someone who did not share her worldview as she had previously assumed.

One can perhaps assume from this situation and in the Turkish context that one can have a more familiar relation with informants if they believe that one shares their world view; and if one does not share their world view this may lead to distance and confusion.

The third limit to understanding I experienced, occurred when I was writing my thesis and yet again made me face some difficulties halfies' might encounter when writing their texts. Kondo has summarized her approach to writing and what the process of it entailed for her:

[...]fieldwork must culminate in the construction of the ethnographic text. This process is one of drawing away from the immediacy of the ethnographic encounter. Writing thus becomes a way of freezing the disturbing flux, encapsulating experience in order to control it. Writing ethnography offers the author the opportunity to reencounter the Other "safely," to find meaning in the chaos of lived experience through retrospectively ordering the past. It is a kind of Proustian quest in which the ethnographer seeks meaning in events whose significance was elusive while they were being lived. The writer, then, addresses her/himself in an attempt at self-reconstruction.

The key words in her summary for me were "encapsulating experience in order to control it", "reencounter the Other *safely*". I never had the feeling that I was in the process of controlling any experience, the writing process was always accompanied by the confusion and anxiety that I had faced during field work, I never reencountered the Other "safely". On the contrary I felt that I did not want to write about them. There was no way to do it "safely" because every encounter and every interview just brought me back to the confusion and anxiety I had experienced and that always pointed to the fact that somehow I was different from them (and also the image they had of me), and that in a disturbing manner. Rather I asked myself why we do enter fields at all, and especially if the informants in that field can write about themselves (in journalism as well as in academia)? And more specifically should I not have respected their wish for a Muslim ethnography written by a Muslim? Though this would also lead to the question of whether a Muslim anthropologist would have been able to free himself from those academic constraints that might have created different hierarchies and rifts in between him/her and the informants I always felt my position was ambivalent. I was not asked to leave, but should I better have left?

2.3 Writing Culture

The Discursive Tradition in the Student Group

The concept of Islam as a discursive tradition is particularly attractive for a work on a Muslim student group in Istanbul, because it gives prevalence to the written word and the power issues involved in discourses that they engage with. During my field research, the written word gained even greater importance regarding internet use. Varisco's and Abu-Lughod's claim for an anthropology that considers written texts gained a different dimension here⁹¹, as the students' not only read and referred to sacred and political texts, but would also write themselves. From what I could observe, the minute discussion of tradition, sacred texts and politics often took place in written form and was equally if not more important to the students' debates than practices such as prayers or fasting.

Naturally, prayers were being performed and fasting observed, yet these activities themselves were seldom subject to discussion or contemplation among the students. Indeed, when it came to the subject they usually lamented a loss of spirituality, attributed to their secular environment, and discussed means of retracting spirituality in their lives.

However, given that these discussions only reflected a very small part of their discussions, my account of the Muslim student group in Istanbul will probably succumb to the problem that Schielke describes as follows:

The first part of the problem – moral and pious subjectivity – is primarily one of balance, whereby the privileging of pious pursuits in isolation from wider paths of life has contributed to accounts of religious experience that are based more on what people argue for and less on how they actually live.⁹²

Practice or an entire account of the students' lives is not what this research is about. Rather, it is about their written texts, their efforts to deal with sacred texts, tradition and politics in their environment. Indeed, what they argue for is meant to be at the centre of this work. Their relationship to sacred texts and tradition, and the way in which their background and understanding of the discursive tradition (the Qur'an and the Sunna) shapes their outlook on politics is what I understand to be crucial about their activism.

Writing

When I first arrived in Istanbul in 2010, I was still trying to gain an overview of Muslim organisations and charities active in my neighbourhood, yet as I felt more comfortable among students than with the groups and organisations around me, I contacted Muslim students from

⁹¹ s. Abu-Lughod (1989: 297) s. Varisco (2005: 9)

⁹² Schielke (2010: 6)

my former exchange university and other universities via Facebook. One of the students who responded was Emine, a 21-year old, extremely intelligent theology student at Marmara University, who – in contrast to many others I met – never showed any reserve in terms of answering my questions or meeting me. Very quickly, an intensive message writing on Facebook evolved between the two of us. This was her preferred way of conversing, because she felt that she could express her views in a more detailed manner when writing. She answered many of my questions in her messages, and very quickly became one of the few persons I openly discussed issues with that I felt would have even been difficult to raise with others, without being insensitive or simply awkward. After having written to each other for some time, we started to meet at the university, from where she would take me to seminars and events in her faculty, and also in other places and organisations on topics that she was interested in herself or thought were helpful to answer my questions. Despite our personal meetings, we still continued to write to each other every now and then, and would restart writing on any particular issues that I had questions about. Once, when using MSN messenger to chat about tassawuf (mysticism), she told me that she was more comfortable writing emails about such sensitive issues, because she felt she could respond to my questions more accurately when given more time to think. Her frequent remarks on writing longer texts rather than talking or chatting were probably the first hints that led me to think of writing as something that was especially important to her, and as I later discovered, was also of special importance to the students in the student group.

I came to know the student group through Emine, who was mostly a lurker in the group. Despite often being on track with current discussions in the group, she had only once or twice participated in one of the group's meetings, and some time before we met. Her life on the Asian side and her interest in many topics and various organisations did not leave her sufficient time to participate in the group's meetings, although she found their work very valuable.

During the day on which I first attended an event that the student group had organised, I met Elif, a young history student who introduced me to the other students in the group and later took me to her student home, where she enthusiastically told me about the poetry website that she and some others in the group shared.

That day she showed me a poem she had recently written:

ح ...

bunlar apaçık umudun
ve imanın işaretleridir!

ح...

Bir'e Biz'i ekle
ahdine vefayı
bekle, Rabbine sadakatle
infilâk'a âh kaldı!⁹³

The poem at that time – and even today – is hard for me to understand in many respects, containing a number of allusions to the Islamic faith, and thus I only understood what she told me about the poem herself. Back then, she told me that it was about the “we” that she thought was most important in her faith: the community and shared belief.

Although some of the other students also wrote poetry and often shared them on the email group or website, most of the poetry remained hard for me to understand and could have formed an entire subject of research itself. However, what I felt to be extremely important was “writing” itself. Writing to explain things in a detached manner, as Emine did, writing as a means to transport feelings in poetry as Elif did, and in many other ways, such as blog writing (prose), as Ayşe did, and the writing of news articles, as some of the others did for particular websites. Writing, as a daily practice that connected them over the email group and helped them to share their opinions and discuss subjects in a detailed manner, giving room to every argument and thought. Accordingly, moving away from the ephemeral of conversations to the persistence of the written word.

The internet and various facilities on the web were very important for their writing. Despite e-mail being their most important facility used, blog writing and the poetry website (something like a shared blog) also contributed to their written output, next to the group’s website, which they used to express their most important thoughts on particular issues.

Writing in these different forms meant many different things to them. Firstly, their writing was a means of organisation that helped them to organise quickly and network across distances. Second, it was a means of communication that helped them to share contents within the group and the outside world. Thirdly, it was the creative expression of their writing talent in poetry, blog writing and journalistic work.

When looking at the amount of written texts, Barton and Papen (2010) are proven right when stating that:

It has been observed that much contemporary social change brings with it an increasing ‘textualisation’ of social interaction (as in Iedema & Sheeres, 2003). (...) Cultures of

⁹³ The website on which the poem was published does not exist anymore.

work and production therefore have changed and the increased use of written texts is a central element of these transitions.⁹⁴

Consequently, Barton and Papen claim that:

Examining written texts is essential for understanding how societies operate and are organized, how institutions communicate with the public, how work is being done, how individuals and social groups organize their lives and make sense of their experiences and how cultures in all their variations are produced and reproduced.⁹⁵

This assumption is certainly right when thinking of the many technological possibilities that the internet offers via laptops, iPads and smartphones in terms of organising one's professional and personal lives. Communication and organisation with these devices is mostly written, given that we use them to write emails, to-do lists, blogs, comments on websites, journal entries or simply reminder and calendar entries.

In this sense, writing is connected to the use of new media and can be said as having become very different from what it used to be only a few decades ago. Pieces of written text are no longer bound to be written by hand or typed into typing machines. Moreover, writing cannot only take place at the writing desk (and similar places), but also in public spaces, on the bus, train or the plane, when queuing at the supermarket, and also when lying in bed or while talking to someone. We no longer write with pens or only on keyboards, but have also learned to use touch screens, to type only with our thumbs (on mobiles and smartphones), and to navigate or open fields for writing with a mouse click or our fingers. Writing has become multidimensional, with Jill Walker Rettberg justified in pointing out that:

Today, new kinds of literacy are developing as the general population is acquiring new skills and the ability to both to read and navigate the Web and to publish its own words, images, videos, blogs and other content. These new literacies have been called network literacy, multi-literacies, digital literacy and secondary literacy.⁹⁶

The e-mails that the students wrote to the group bear witness to this fact, given that most of them did not only contain written texts, but also links, pictures and files. All of them made use of different writing techniques according to personal preferences and technological possibilities. Whereas some would sometimes send short messages from their smartphones that clearly indicated the effort taken them to write on these devices and thus kept their messages very short, only referring to some aspect of the discussion, others

⁹⁴ Barton/Papen (2010: 5)

⁹⁵ Barton/Papen (2010: 5)

⁹⁶ Walker Rettberg (2008: 39)

would always reply with e-mails, copy the webpage they wanted the others to read into their e-mail, or only post a link. Following Daniel Miller and Don Slater, who explored the use of internet in Trinidad, attempting to ascertain how “members of a specific culture [who] attempt to make themselves a(t) home in a transforming communicative environment”, it is important to consider “how they can find themselves in this environment and at the same time try to mould it in their own image.”⁹⁷

Therefore, the possibilities offered by new media vary and have to be described separately for each field setting. For the students, the opportunities rendered by the internet can be described as enhancing community networking over the ever-increasing distances in Istanbul. Indeed, they can now profit from a broadened access to information provided by other Islamic groups in Istanbul via the internet, which includes a range of Islamic websites engaging in political journalism, as well as those from smaller organisations (such as the IHH⁹⁸) or news webpages that do not engage in original journalism, but largely offer collections of news from other sources that have been reinterpreted according to a Muslim outlook.⁹⁹ By means of these websites (and particularly print newspaper), it is currently possible for Muslims to read news and gather information that – to them – comes from trusted resources and presents an Islamic outlook on politics and societal issues.

However, the students’ engagement is not only limited to reading news on web pages from other organisations, given they often report about their own activities and have been able to publish content on websites within their reach through contacts in the community. Despite none of them ever expressing the will to become a journalist, many of the texts published on their website (and others) were written in a sophisticated manner. Even though they (partly) broke with the rules of traditional journalism, part of their accounts provides information whereas personal accounts brought emotional dimensions to the reader’s attention.

I never asked the students whether they felt that their website was superfluous, considering the glut of information and personal accounts (in the form of blog writing) that the internet is flooded with. Certainly, some of them might have held doubts as to the degree to which their website was achieving “something”, but had they felt as sceptical about their website as I would have, they probably would not have published it. Indeed, I found that I had been overly sceptical anyway, when I later read Axel Bruns (2005), who states that:

⁹⁷ Miller/Slater (2000: 1)

⁹⁸ s. Chapter 2.3

⁹⁹ With the introduction of private television in the 1990s, the emergence of Islamic TV can also be counted among the broader access to Islamic media

Many commentators have claimed that today's audiences have become disillusioned with the news, have lost interest in the news. The astonishing level of engagement with sites from Slashdot to Indymedia and the explosion in Weblogs show a different side to the story-the disinterest may well lie not with the news as such, but with the way news is presented in the mainstream media. At least a significant percentage of modern-day audiences appear to have strong interest not only in receiving news reports, but also in evaluating and debating them, sometimes in contexts which are entirely different from traditional frames of coverage. As Herbert Gans provocatively put it, "the news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone": through collaborative open news production, news audiences have begun to reclaim their place in the news cycle.¹⁰⁰

When remembering the zeal with which some of the students hastened to publish a certain article after a particular event, I cannot help but think that what they were doing was "reclaiming their place in the news cycle". Of course, the ideological difference between them and the secular mainstream was probably fuelling this zeal, yet it also generated an issue of distrust vis-à-vis particular media. The fact that many newspapers and TV-channels are owned or financed by holdings that are known to be politically-biased has generated distrust surrounding them. Accordingly, alternative media and particularly small-scale organisations websites have gained a special status of trust within the Muslim community. Walker-Rettberg states that the advertising company Blogads conducted a survey among Blogreaders, in which 61.4 per cent of the respondents found that blogs were more trustworthy than the mainstream media, owing to the "transparent biases" the bloggers openly communicated.¹⁰¹ Moreover, she states that:

Blogs rely on personal authenticity, whereas traditional journalism relies on institutional credibility. We trust or distrust an article in a newspaper on the basis of our perception of the newspaper, which is partly shaped by the society around us and partly by our own personal knowledge of the newspaper.¹⁰² (...)Bloggers build trust individually.¹⁰³

When considering that secular institutions have little or no credibility among the Muslim strata, the success of small-scale organisations' publishing efforts on the web becomes evident. While a comparison of blogs with some of their websites might seem amiss, the personal relations and information that people in the community have about these organisations give them as much or even more credibility than blog-writers probably have. Their mutual characteristic is that they built trust individually, with each organisation

¹⁰⁰ Bruns (2005: 8/9)

¹⁰¹ s. Walker Rettberg (2008: 92)

¹⁰² Walker Rettberg (2008: 92)

¹⁰³ Walker Rettberg (2008: 93)

having its followers and sympathizers who rely on their website when searching for reliable information. Moreover, a practice connected to these websites (and the mainstream media) is the news exchange with which the students engaged in their e-mail group. By writing about particular pieces of news, posting links and asking others for their opinion or sharing their own, they created a sort of e-mail group that helped to critically evaluate media output. Even if they did not research their information, but rather only collected and evaluated information, their efforts might be considered as important *gatewatching* practices within their small community.

Gatewatching and Counterpublics

Gatewatching can be described as replacing traditional gatekeeping practices of the print media. Bruns describes gatekeeping as a three level process in which traditional media engage to limit news broadcasting. At the input level, broadcasters decide what news they want to publish (with ideological or market interest playing a role here), and on the output level, broadcasting time or space constitutes another barrier that cannot be overcome in traditional media. The third level of gatekeeping limits audiences' views. People who write letters to editors or call in to TV shows might not be published or heard at all, or only in part.

On the other hand, gatewatching is a practice in which some websites or blogs engage to order the information glut on the internet, as Bruns explains:

(...) news Websites based upon gatewatching frequently engage less in the publishing of complete, finalized news reports than in the publicizing of news stories which have become newly available in other information sources; their own news items often take the form of brief summaries or digests which combine pointers to a number of such reports and discuss their relevance, identify different angles for evaluating the same event, or make connections to other related issues. Very frequently, news items published on gatewatcher news sites also include discussion and commentary functionality which immediately enables users to contribute further material or links and thus continue their gatewatching efforts even after the publication of the initial news item, as part of the response stage.¹⁰⁴

Despite gatewatching relating to particular websites in its definition, I think that the practice of gatewatching itself might be considered as something that a closed community might also undertake – especially if there is not yet a gatewatching website accessible to them. Although the students' engagement clearly surpasses gatewatching, one of their activities to survive the information glut and manage information can be certainly seen in

¹⁰⁴ Bruns (2005: 19)

the context of gatewatching. When looking at the Muslim community's output as such, one might also think of an ideologically separated web space that constitutes a gate to a news coverage biased in a particular way, and thus offering a very neatly gatewatched content. Once one has entered the e-mail group and started reading the newspaper pages to which they refer, one can claim to have entered a different world that engages with mainstream media yet in many ways only serves the Muslim community.

However, this world does not only exist online. With the emergence of Muslim study circles (Yavuz, 2006), Muslim cafés (Kömeçoğlu 2006), Muslim dormitories (Türkmen 2006) and Islamist intellectuals (Karasipahi 2008), Muslims have gained some ground in their struggle for an Islamic life (Yavuz 2003, Göle 2006) and can be said to compose an alternative public. This alternative public becomes distinct in the ways in which online content is gatewatched and becomes accessible to particular people, and also in real institutions that have built an infrastructure for this alternative public, or as Michael Warner would propose: a counterpublic. My reason for describing the Islamic environment in Istanbul as a counterpublic derives from Muslims' efforts in foundations and associations still being perceived as small-scale activities to form an Islamic environment, which remain far from being accepted as mainstream. The Islamic discourse itself is strongly shaped by an awareness of being based on the activities of a counterpublic, and that this sort of public "lack the power to transpose themselves to the level of the generality of the state."¹⁰⁵ Just as with publics generally, counterpublics develop against the dominant discourse in society and challenge established hierarchies.¹⁰⁶ They are built on certain independent organisational structures that can be characterised as self-organising, given that they address strangers and bind them by their common attention to a certain context of interaction built on the circulation of postulates and responses.¹⁰⁷

Based upon Charles Hirschkind's description of an Islamist counterpublic, one can state that Islamists are responding to "the need for an individual and communal praxis to uphold what is perceived to be an enfeebled Muslim community."¹⁰⁸ Similar to their Egyptian counterparts, Turkish Muslims understand themselves as Turkish citizens whose loyalties and styles of public conduct no longer match the political demands, but follow a different morality based on the religious discourse with which they engage.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Warner (2002: 84)

¹⁰⁶ s. Warner (2002: 86)

¹⁰⁷ s. Warner (2002: 62)

¹⁰⁸ Hirschkind (2006: 41)

¹⁰⁹ Hirschkind (2002: 43)

2.4 Field and Environment

Community

It is probably very natural to conduct a research among students, if one is a student and in the same age as the possible informants. However, this was not the only reason for me to decide for a student group in the case of Muslims in Istanbul; another reason was that students seemed to be less hesitant to share their thoughts and ideas with me. While they feared, misrepresentation, like people from other organisations (or environments), given that they had some insight into the methodological procedure and were much more sympathetic to a research project than others, they accepted me into their group and helped me to understand their political and societal project. Accordingly, I was able to conduct participant observation during their weekly meetings and other gatherings, to interview some of them, access their e-mail group and parts of their networks on Facebook.

Most of the encounters and subjects discussed were led by the dynamic of current political affairs, with events in the political sphere shaping their discussions and also prompting questions in my mind. The controversial discussions that I sometimes witnessed and my own conversations with them helped me to become acquainted with the students and their political and societal aspirations. However, to my astonishment their aspirations not only comprised politics, but also society as such. Indeed, their activism was never only led by political thoughts, but rather clearly extended beyond this. For instance, giving to the poor (money, books and all kinds of things to support them), helping the homeless (engaging in providing shelter for them), visiting the orphanage (learning about the orphans' situation) were always part of their engagement. Their efforts of living an Islamic life were neither limited to their personal life nor the political goals that they hoped would be achieved in their country. Their concern was to consider all issues of society from an Islamic perspective, and consequently to do whatever was possible to them to improve the situation of people around them. Broadly speaking, this is what they thought their religion instructs them to do, to help people who suffer and work for a just society where everyone could live according to their needs.

Jenny B. White observed a similar understanding of politics and community in her account of grassroots Islamist mobilization within the AK party, concluding that:

It is important to remember that people involved in local network politics perceive themselves as practicing community, not just doing politics. That is the source of their movement's strength and its autonomy from political and civic institutions. Self-interest and rational choice are downplayed (although clearly never entirely absent), while

kinship, religion, and communal identity act powerfully to enforce reciprocity and communal solidarity.¹¹⁰

The will to practice community, to perceive others as part of the community and not as strangers is probably one of the strongest characteristics shared by Muslims in Turkey. Their commitment to the community helps them to interact almost independently from civic institutions, and given that their motivation for change derives from the community it effectively remains untouched by political upheavals, elections and institutional change. This independence reflects both an advantage and necessity when considering the stormy reality of Turkish politics. Under these circumstances, community support is of vital importance. To support or be supported by the community structures life, attaches importance and meaning to political activism, and somewhat contradicts the assumptions that Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera criticise, namely that Muslim youths in these structures can be susceptible to violent means of pursuing their goals in society. However, the understanding that Muslim youths today can be described as the “new proletariat”¹¹¹ illustrates the ambiguous assumptions and fears associated with Muslim youth.

Economic and status divisions

According to Bayat and Herrera, “Muslim youth are part of a “global youth culture.”¹¹² Like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, they have grown up in the post-Cold War era with the United States assuming the status of a world police, and have been witness to an accelerating neo-liberal globalisation, the geo politics of neo-liberalism and the emergence of a discourse positioning Islam in opposition to the West.¹¹³ Another factor linking youths everywhere in the world is that they are probably the first generation to have grown up with technological means facilitating a new pattern of network-building via the internet, and mobile phones connecting them with their peers.¹¹⁴ However, what makes Muslim youth different is their exposure to a world media that has portrayed Muslims as political radicals and denounced Islam as a “terrorist religion”. The ongoing geopolitical conflicts and negative discursive portrayal of Islam can be supposed as the source fuelling Muslim youth struggle for youthfulness and rights while being subjected to “media scrutiny, surveillance, a range of

¹¹⁰ White (2002: 22)

¹¹¹ Bayat/Herrera (2010: 4)

¹¹² Bayat/Herrera (2010: 10)

¹¹³ s. Bayat/Herrera (2010: 3/10)

¹¹⁴ s. Bayat/Herrera (2010: 10)

policy interventions to contain them, influence them, and cultivate in them a strong Islamic identity.”¹¹⁵

In the case of the student group, an assessment regarding the assumption that Muslim youth without perspectives are susceptible to political radicalism today is rather out of place. Indeed, most of the students seemed to be pursuing plans and aspirations for the future, although the pressure to find a job might have naturally been more imminent for males than females. However, despite the fact that the job market might not have had the capacities to accommodate them in the Muslim community, their relations and small jobs that seemed to occasionally emerge must have given them the feeling of being able to survive and continue life. Moreover, given that most of them did not seem to have materialistic aspirations yet were content with their life as it was, the surrounding consumer culture did not exert the pressure on them as on non-Muslims of the middle class.

One outward signal was probably that most of them were clothed very modestly and more or less successfully refrained from making visible differences in wealth and status. Although these differences often became evident when considering the quarters in which they lived, their families’ backgrounds and technological devices used, the fact that some had to work part-time to make ends meet only served to show that the term ‘middle class’ ultimately circumscribes a very heterogenous group of people with very different opportunities in life. Although the conflict was never addressed regarding their own group, they were aware of the problem that wealth and status had brought to the Muslim community. The slow establishment of a consumer culture, elitism and divisions within the community were facts that they referred to when stating their position.

According to White, the AKP has been living through these conflicts for some time, describing them as follows:

(...) economic status divisions within the Islamist movement have led to the development of an Islamist elitism that potentially undercuts the movement’s link with local cultural norms and the party’s populist image. Islamist elites have attempted to attach a higher social status to material styles and lifestyles, like veiling and gender segregation, that represent the movement.¹¹⁶

These types of status and economic divisions were challenged by the students who had protested a headscarf fair on the grounds that they felt their religion had to remain free of consumer culture and capitalist interests, shortly before I got to know them. Another aspect

¹¹⁵ Bayat/Herrera (2010: 10)

¹¹⁶ White (2002: 23)

differentiating the student group from other religious organisations in Istanbul was their opinion regarding gender segregation and music – an aspect that might also be related to economic and status divisions. It seemed to be greatly important to the students that they were a mixed group of males and females. Observing strict gender segregation, an organisation such as the AGD¹¹⁷ strongly resents mixed groups. However, when I asked the students why they did not have a separate group for females, one of the girls explained that she thought that men and women could only change society if they learned from one another and worked together. A very slight form of gender segregation existed in the form of females usually sitting next to one another and males next to each other, with one chair between both groups. However, neither males nor females were neglected during the discussions, with the aim of sharing one another's thoughts successfully put into practice. Moreover, from what women told me about their future plans, it is possible to say that most of them thought of working and aspired to particular professions, despite the obstacles that most headscarved women have to experience. Staying at home was not an option for most of them, for very different reasons, ranging from an interest in particular professions or constraints to earn money.

The final point that marked a great difference between the students and other groups was probably their interest in theatre, music and art, subjects that are usually difficult to deal with among Muslims. In particular, females' participation in theatre, film or music performances can be difficult when they expose themselves to the public. However, although I think that women's actual contributions could still be a subject of discussion within the group, they generally approved of theatre, film and music, and they would occasionally sit together to listen to someone performing. Furthermore, they would also share links on good music within the e-mail group. One of the girls explained to me that music is disliked by many Muslims, because there is a Hadith (narration on the prophet's life) in which the devil appeared in front of the holy prophet and stated that what he liked best was musical instruments. From this Hadith, she explained that many derived that the use of musical instruments was something objectionable; however, like the other students in the group, she did not think like that. On the contrary, their vivid interest in culture and art and desire for Muslim art typified that they thought of art as something favourable and would have loved to support or engage in Muslim art.

These three aspects, namely veiling (with chic headscarves), gender segregation and music, are not only subjects of interpretation, but also subject to status differentiations in which the

¹¹⁷ s. description at the end of the chapter

students have opted for a less distinctive approach. Differences of income and status are levelled by their anti-materialist approach regarding veiling, and also gender segregation, a practice which is certainly more strictly observed among strata that can afford women to stay at home. Finally, music as a part of popular culture might also be conceived as levelling differences between status.

Heterogeneity

Categories for describing the student group in terms of a youth or student movement do not seem viable when considering the variety of issues and importance of community for the group. Youth movements are distinctive from student movements, with the latter mostly limited to claiming better conditions for the student body, including affordable education and fair exams.¹¹⁸ The “student” group with which I conducted fieldwork in Turkey can be said to share some of the characteristics of a youth movement. Most of the actively participating students were aged 18-29, and most were enrolled as regular students in state or private universities in Istanbul. The group was first started as a student club at a private university in Istanbul in 2008, with the common interest in Islam shared by many students at other universities leading to its rapid growth. Moreover, the fact that it was later considered as a platform rather than student club and was essentially open to anyone who wished to exchange on religious or political matters.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, students from alternative Islamic institutions who had chosen these institutions over regular universities for financial reasons or the headscarf ban in public institutions also joined the group. Despite the group being considered as homogenous in some terms, the fact that the living conditions for the students from public and alternative institutions significantly varied influenced the group and their advocated views. At times, it seemed hard for many to continue working with other people who ideologically differed so greatly from them (some of whom left the group after particular debates), and it has certainly been an experience of struggle to keep the group together and let it connect different parts of society. This is a similar problem as described by White for AKP supporters: “The sheer variety of supporters and activists, however, means that there is corresponding diversity of motivations, goals, interpretations, and positions on the issues.”¹²⁰ The student group can probably be described as containing students who are in a way negotiating their terms with public institutions and are attempting to find a compromise to gain access to education and those students (especially women) who are not willing to wear

¹¹⁸ s. Cockburn and Blackburn, 1969 following Bayat (2010: 29)

¹¹⁹ Quite naturally nationalists and secularists were not part of the group – though they have access by presenting themselves and their opinions.

¹²⁰ White (2002: 22)

headgear other than their headscarves, foregoing state-education and formally recognised diplomas. Therefore, Bayat is right in saying that “these youth diverge radically among themselves in how to turn their common sentiments into action, how to respond to their status of “subordination.”¹²¹ Accordingly, the most striking feature of the platform can be seen in its capacity to overcome these differences, whether the student/non-student barrier, class differences and more importantly ideological differences. The students has always managed to keep together a group that would differ on occasions and subsequently find common Islamic grounds again. They engaged in subjects that might be seen as typical for student movements; for instance, protesting against the price increase in public transport or the prohibition of the headscarf in universities. However, the headscarf issue itself can hardly be reduced to a student issue, given that the ban pervades all state institutions at all levels and has been a barrier to many female careers¹²² in Turkish society. Therefore, the group can be best described by its inclusive character that presupposed a religious community-based approach emphasising societal involvement and encouraging political engagement.

To my mind, this phenomenon has been best described by a particular concept - Post-Islamism - which has been recently established by scholars such as Asef Bayat, Nilüfer Göle, Oliver Roy and Gilles Kepel. According to Olivier Roy, “Post-Islamism means the privatisation of re-Islamisation“.¹²³ In the Turkish context, this hints that Islam has always been banned from the republican public sphere, because it was considered a threat to Turkey’s westernised modernisation project. However, a certain form of state-enforced Islam was propagated as a means to form a Turkish national identity that was supposed to stand in for the many heterogenous Islamic practices banned by the Republic.¹²⁴ Therefore, particular forms of Islam first survived in the private sphere in Turkey, and were later revived and reinterpreted in this private sphere.¹²⁵ Bayat has linked the post-Islamist condition to disenchantment among Muslims that emerged after the failure of political Islam in Iran. Today post-Islamism:

refers to political and social conditions where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism are exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. Islamists become aware of their system’s anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to normalize and institutionalize their rule.”¹²⁶

¹²¹ Bayat (2010: 10)

¹²² s. Kavakci (2010: 107-109)

¹²³ Roy (2004: 97)

¹²⁴ Ohm (2011:6)

¹²⁵ Saktanber (2002: xxi)

¹²⁶ Bayat (2007:10)

The purpose for which it seemed necessary to me to introduce the concept of post-Islamism becomes even clearer when considering Werner Schiffauer's (2010) description, which extends further and describes what post-Islamists actually engage with:

Es ist das postislamistische Lager, in dem die intellektuelle Auseinandersetzung mit dem Westen, der Demokratie, dem Säkularismus, dem Rechtsstaat, dem Multikulturalismus am intensivsten geführt wird. (...) Sie (die Postislamisten) überlegen, welche Rolle der Islam als Religion in der politischen Öffentlichkeit spielen kann.¹²⁷

Within the student group, reflective discussions on subjects such as democracy and secularism can be said to be very intensive; nevertheless, it is necessary to say that this reflective approach is limited to certain subjects and opposed by students from a more conservative background, who would rather distance themselves from some subjects as they do not want Muslims to struggle with them. However, even these more conservative students feel that the issues that Muslims engage with in the private sphere have led to a diversification of opinions¹²⁸ and standpoints that should now surface in the public discourse. They want to deprivatise their discussions and disclose them to a wider public. The fact that their student group pursues an undefined project and does not express any set goals other than the aim to live an Islamic life and foster an Islamic culture, which they have no fixed image of yet, firmly places them among other Post-Islamists and hints at their inclusive character.

Places

During the time in which I got to know the students, they used to regularly meet once a week at a university campus, which was also accessible to people outside the university environment and is often used by families to picnic or fly kites in the large park surrounding some university buildings. Therefore, the university campus can be described as a more-or-less public space. For the students, this location was ideal to either hold their meetings in one of the classrooms – to which they had access as a student club – or to remain outside in the park in summer. Given that the campus was open to everyone, non-students (as well as girls with headscarves) did not face any problems in accessing the campus, as they would have had on other often heavily-secured campuses in Istanbul. The meetings themselves often tended to be like history or philosophy classes, because the students usually decided on a book to read and subsequently discuss it during the following weeks. Prior to the discussions, one of the participants would

¹²⁷ Schiffauer (2010:30)

¹²⁸ s. Göle (2006)

usually hold a presentation on the subject for subsequent discussion, in ways very similar to university classes.

When I joined the group's meetings, they were just about to finish a series of classes on an Islamic outlook on modernity and post-modernity, before later continuing with Aliya Izetbegoviç's book "İslam Deklarasyonu ve İslami Yeniden Doğuşun Sorunlar" (The Islamic Declaration and the problems of an Islamic rebirth, 1970). Furthermore, they discussed the situation of political Islam and later engaging in a series on debates of important Muslim personalities, mainly people who had been active in politics, such as Seyyid Kutup or Ali Şeriatî. Moreover, in Ramazan, they discussed Qura'nic terminology and particular verses and prayers.

Whereas these "real" meetings of the group usually attracted 10-20 participants every week, their communication via the e-mail group and Facebook attracted broader audiences¹²⁹ and emerged as a great platform of vivid discussion on daily politics and an important source for many young people seeking new approaches towards Islam. As an anti-Kemalist group, the students were engaged in organising demonstrations, exhibitions, discussion rounds and many more activities, with the coordination of various activities partly organised via the internet. Accordingly, suggestions and changes were discussed on the e-mail group, via MSN or the telephone, while they socialised via Facebook, using it to discuss or post their events.

Their discussions in the e-mail group reflected their engagement with similar political discussions as witnessed among both Muslims and non-Muslims in the rest of Europe. The fact that the students were no longer exposed to a single discourse but rather a multitude of (online-) discourses¹³⁰ was reflected in the bandwidth of the subjects they engaged with. The power of ideological flows¹³¹ influenced their discerning relevant matters, such as political and societal issues in Turkey (the constitutional referendum, secularism, etc.) and the world (ecology, human rights, Islam's place in society etc.), which are also discussed elsewhere in Europe. Their discussions comprised problems of Islam in Turkey's secular setting, and also addressed issues of society as a whole, attempting to propose Islamic solutions.¹³² The fact that a Turkish discourse – for that matter, also an Islamic discourse – cannot exist without

¹²⁹ At the time the e-mail group had a total of more than 200 group members. A fact that enabled users who were only known or distantly connected to some members of the group to participate once they had requested to be added to the group's list.

¹³⁰ s. El-Tahawy (2008: 11)

¹³¹ s. Appadurai (1990: 299)

¹³² A fact that perhaps made their proposals for a better society interesting to non-Muslims.

Western influence (human rights, ecology, etc.) particularly challenges Muslims to develop their own Islamic approach for Muslims living in a secular state.

The technological influence on these discussions cannot only be found on the level of discourse issues, but is also reflected in a new form of discussion. Indeed, the fact that these discussions take place online, with people writing e-mails to participate in discussions, imposes some new structures on the discussion itself; for instance, anyone can reply to anyone without taking the other discussants into account. Sometimes a part of the discussion only evolves among a few of the discussants, whereas the others continue discussing another argument of the issue. Moreover, people only participate in the discussion as long as it remains interesting to them, with those who had started a discussion sometimes no longer “present” at the end of the discussion.

The e-mails written in these discussions often do not only contain e-mail text but also videos, photos or texts from other sources, such as online newspapers, which are integrated into the communication. Indeed, even in face-to-face communication, students often mention what they had watched on TV, someone’s latest Facebook comments or videos on Facebook. Therefore, Christine Hine is right in stating that “while we might be comfortable talking about ‘the internet’ as if it were one object, it is going to mean very different things to different people. The technology is going to have very different cultural meanings in different contexts.”¹³³

As a politically interested and active group, it certainly does not make much sense to describe the platform as an isolated group within an unknown environment; indeed, it can be better described as the (Islamic) environment that shaped their position in particular discourses, influencing their attitudes and sometimes providing them with groups that were willing to cooperate with them. However, the conditions for Muslim organisations and foundations cannot be compared to the status achieved by some of their Kemalist equivalents. In a country where Muslims have long felt ‘minoritised’¹³⁴ and exposed to the pressures of an ever-accelerating Westernisation and globalisation, it is even sometimes surprising that new public spaces should have developed within the excessive and militant structures of Turkish *laïcité*.¹³⁵ The “negative accent in media headlines about Islam [still] creates a common tendency to refer to Islam and Muslims as being somewhere “over there”, in another space

¹³³ Hine (2000: 29)

¹³⁴ s. Roy (2004: 19)

¹³⁵ s. Roy (2007: xiii)

and another mind set from the so-called rational, progressive, democratic West” and its secularist counterparts in Turkey.¹³⁶

Many of the Muslim groups in Istanbul and other places are connected with the platform by means of the e-mail group, maintaining contact to exchange information on particular projects or subject-related debates. The possibilities offered by these connections can be perceived from a strategic perspective, to keep in touch, connect and hope for occasions when a political/societal cooperation will make sense. However, there is something extending beyond this in the context of a Muslim counterpublic, given the vital need for a continuous exchange among the Muslim groups to keep their Muslim approach alive. Accordingly, for the students, the continuous exchange of new thoughts perhaps was necessary to prevent their philosophy becoming diluted within the secular environment.

Consisting of prominent Islamic groups, the counterpublic’s infrastructural backbone provides study circles and other facilities that are relatively well-known all over Turkey, with most of them are located in Fatih, the quarter in Istanbul that is considered the most religious in Istanbul. Even some of the students from the platform mentioned a particular area within Fatih, Çarşamba, as being dominated by women who wear a Çarşaf, a black coat also used to cover their face. To them, the fact that they were banned from some areas, buildings and institutions for wearing a headscarf and were subsequently reproached for not covering themselves sufficiently in others such as Çarşamba, was a more-or-less schizophrenic situation. Whereas the greater part of the neighbourhoods in Istanbul can be described as hosting a secular environment, with bars and pubs where most Muslims would feel uncomfortable after some time, Çarşamba reflects the opposite, as an area that largely accommodates all sorts of Islam-related business and most of the Islamic associations in the city. One of the organisations supported by the students themselves is the İHH-İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani yardım vakfı (The Foundation for Human Rights, Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief), the successor to Deniz Feneri, a humanitarian organisation that works in many countries all over the world, essentially against famines, the aftermath of earthquakes, floods and drought. In Europe, the İHH has been denounced as supporting terrorist organisations, a claim that most Muslims hold to be untrue because they regard it as just another attack on Islam. During my fieldwork, the İHH became extremely important in connection with the Mavi Marmara-incident. The Mavi Marmara is a ship that the İHH had sent to Israel with the freedom flotilla supporting Palestine in May 2010, whereby nine Turkish citizens died during the Israeli

¹³⁶ Ernst/Lawrence (2005:xi)

attacks on the freedom flotilla, with the Mavi Marmara having since become a symbol of resistance against Israel.

Another very prominent association within the Muslim Istanbul is the AGD (Anadolu Gençlik Derneği), an Anatolian youth organisation with its centre in Istanbul. The association is fundamentally occupied with helping students from Anatolia, who have come to Istanbul to study, to help them settle in dormitories. Moreover, the association, which is clearly divided into a women's and a men's section, is related to the Saadet Partisi, a religious party that developed from the milli görüş movement. Their women's section is mainly in charge of dormitory issues and providing opportunities of the further religious education of Muslim women in Istanbul. From the perspective of many others, the AGD is extremely conservative and also criticised by the students from the platform for not giving women sufficient space within their association, as well as for having divided sections for men and women. Another issue that probably distinguishes the women at the AGD from the students is that the AGD officially pleads for women drawing back to their houses and working in only three fields: mosque, (religious) associations and universities. Although I have also met very self-confident women at the AGD who worked in the textile industry and media, the positive appropriation of work life without neglect of the family is certainly more widespread among the women of the student group/platform.

One very important organization that has probably brought forward the Kurdish issue among Muslims is Mazlum-Der (victims foundation), an Islamic association for human rights, engaging in providing legal assistance to victims of state-driven anti-Kurdish policies.

Moreover, another organisation that warrants mention is Özgür-Der (Freedom foundation), an association fighting for the right to education, i.e. a lifting of the headscarf ban and other Islamic educational issues.¹³⁷ The association publishes a journal and runs a small publishing house offering a range of publications on Islamic subjects. Given that many of these books are being read among the students of the platform, Özgür-Der can be seen as a strong ideological resource upon which they rely.

The final organisation that I want to present in the context of the students' platforms activities is another student club that is not Islamic, the "Antikapitalist Öğrenciler", which has

sometimes cooperated with the platform and reflects the same issues relevant to the platform from a socialist perspective. In contrast to the important leftist parties that still support Kemalism as a state ideology, the “Antikapitalist Öğrenciler” propose a new understanding of Turkish history and politics that from is not very different from that of the Muslim students its inception, given that both reject Kemalism and are (for the time being) in favour of changes to a liberal democracy. As with the Muslim students, they consider their work as a struggle for a better world, even if they do not yet know what exactly that world should look like. They see themselves as taking the first steps to a socialist transformation or a later ensuing revolution in society. In terms of size and importance regarding the current state of political affairs, the Muslim student platform can be compared to the “Antikapitalist Öğrenciler”, who have gained support since the Ergenekon affair yet can be described as better organised and equipped in terms of achieving an impact on politics in Istanbul. They have associated themselves with DSİP (Devrimci Sosyalist İşçi Partisi, a newly-founded revolutionary, socialist workers’ party) and have built a network of individual groups of “Antikapitalist Öğrenciler” at each university and around the party organisations in Izmir and Ankara. Weekly meetings are held in the party’s central office, and are usually attended by around 50 students who come to listen to lectures given by DSİP members or invited guests who talk about the situation in socialist countries, National Socialism, sexuality, the Left in Turkey and Europe. The party’s central office occupies a three-story building, and while the actual office is located on the third floor, the second storey can be described as a storeroom. Furthermore, the first floor is used as a café where the youths often spend time after the meetings or any other day of the week to informally talk and discuss. Whereas the weekly meetings are well attended and the possibilities of discussion and reflection with others in the café are well-received, the e-mail group only plays a subordinate role. In 2010, around 120 members received the invitations to the weekly meetings once a week, in addition to rare announcements regarding recent political ongoings.

A comparison of both groups regarding certain issues sometimes helped me to understand the difference between a “party” seeking to have an effect on politics by promoting itself and a student group that – in a certain sense - would rather stay away from politics to guard its own moral and ethical position. The fact that the Muslim students were not only led by what was politically relevant, but rather were also guided by concerns for charity, reflected only one difference between the groups. From my observations, the members in the Muslim student group entertained a greater diversity of opinions within their group. Despite sometimes reaching the same conclusions as the socialists, it can be suggested that there was a stronger

drive for conformity within the socialist student group, possibly grounded in their zeal to appeal to more students – something the Muslim student group did not aim for.

Conclusion

The question of whether an approach from an Islamic perspective or an Anthropology of Islam is more useful towards understanding Muslims is important to shed light on the conditions of my encounter with the students in respect of my research. Accordingly, their expectations and my irritation concerning whether I could provide a sensible account of their debates and political goals has led me to think that it would be fair if they themselves or an Islamic anthropologist could have a say on such issues. Although I might not be able to adopt an Islamic outlook on their debates, the attempt to rethink their understandings from a different perspective has helped to better understand the differences and their implications for our encounter and their political project. I have attempted to understand their concept of Islam by asking a question (“one Islam - many Islams?”) that many scholars of anthropology have previously asked when conducting research on particular Muslim communities and their relationship with Islam. From my perspective, which is dependent on my informants’ perspective, there can only be one Islam that builds the basis of their discussions as a discursive tradition to which they refer to discuss political and societal issues. In this regard, the reference to an Islamic tradition is important for the development of *mores* and ethics that form the basis of their engagement in politics. Given that most of their discussions took place in an e-mail group, one can state that most of their debates and discussions were produced in written form and were thus perhaps more elaborate than oral discussions. Their writing practises helped them to organise their group and its activities, and were also a means of bringing selected news to the attention of others within the group. Accordingly, by doing so, they created a community-specific knowledge about politics from an Islamic perspective. As the student group is a very heterogenous group, it has been quite difficult to characterise. By referring to the conditions under which their group developed, continues to meet and strive to be active in politics, it is possible to trace the basic reasons for their group motivation to act together. However, more specifically their moral perspective, a comprehensive approach to politics and the attention paid to immediate social needs, distinguished their political project from that of secular groups.

3. The Constitutional Referendum and Secularism

The way to the constitutional Referendum

In 2010 Muslims often judged current politics and especially those politics that came from an Islamist background with regard to the improvement these politics had brought for female students situation at university. For the Muslim community as such the headscarf issue had certainly become a matter of prestige. However, for female students the headscarf ban mostly was a source of misery, even if they also experienced their struggle with the headscarf ban as a strategically important issue within Muslim resistance against Kemalism. The AKP's unsuccessful efforts to lift the headscarf ban have therefore often been seen as an inability to change the existent system or as lacking an interest in the issue. However, the headscarf issue in a sense can be said to have laid the way to the constitutional amendments in 2010.

After the AKP's electoral victory in 2007 the government confidently proposed a lifting of the headscarf ban in universities. With the MHP's support the proposed constitutional amendment received four fifths of the votes in parliament (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM*) and for the first time since 1997 allowed female students to enter university with headscarves. On the CHP's initiative and fervent opposition the Constitutional Court subsequently annulled the amendment as unconstitutional. Simultaneously and in relation with the AKP's efforts to lift the headscarf ban the Constitutional Court opened a closure case on the AKP that was not successful, but stated that the AKP's secular credentials and constitutional legitimacy were dubious.¹³⁸

This backlash – though disappointing for many Muslims in Turkey – was followed by the gradual democratic openings (Alevi opening, Kurdish opening, Roma opening) the AKP proposed in the wake of the beginning Ergenekon investigations. However, their efforts to reintegrate former PKK members created uproar in the public and were already rumoured to trigger the next closure case on the AKP. With these rumours being discussed in the media the AKP finally proposed a constitutional amendment that would make it more difficult to close parties and included proposals for other amendments.¹³⁹ These amendments did not include the legislation on the headscarf ban, but a limited improvement of laws on workers' rights, the laws of association and storage of personal data¹⁴⁰ amongst others:

¹³⁸ s. Kalaycıoğlu (2011: 3)

¹³⁹ s. Kalaycıoğlu (2011: 4)

¹⁴⁰ A more detailed description of the amendments can be found in on page 81.

The government announced that it welcomed proposals for other democratisation measures to be included in the package. They began to tour some of the major interest groups, asking them to hand in their proposals for constitutional amendments within two to three days. When the CHP claimed the AKP was going after hoax military coup plotters while failing to try those who had actually carried out coups, such as the commanders of the military coup of 12 September 1980, the AKP moved swiftly to include the lifting of the limitations on litigation against the coup makers of the 1980 in the package. In consequence, a package of 27 articles amending the 1982 Constitution was constructed and swiftly motioned as a bill in the TBMM in April 2010.¹⁴¹

However, as the AKP was unable to win a two-thirds majority for their amendment package President Gül submitted them to a popular vote. With the ensuing referendum on September 12, 2010 27¹⁴² amendments to constitutional articles were accepted by 58% of the 72% of voters casting valid ballots.¹⁴³

In August 2010 the referendum was discussed abundantly by many groups in society and also affected the students' discussion very strongly. For a month all other subjects retreated to the background. Their critical views of the AKP as well as their strong opposition to the secular parties' arguments led to many discussions. For the students the subject of their debate was not so much related to the discussion of particular amendments, their purposes and proposed impacts, as their general attitude towards politics and in this case the secular politics of a party that seemed to have abandoned its Islamism with the ascent to power. Within this framework the students' discussion in many aspects relates to their understanding of politics and the connection between politics and religion on the whole. This approach cannot be easily summarized as it comprises a particular understanding of Muslim intellectual history, modern Qur'an interpretations and a moral attitude that informs their understanding of politics. Parts of these can be traced in the interviews I conducted with the students and in their discussions.

Inevitable Politics

Zeynep differed from the students in the student group in that she was exceptionally interested in philosophical and theological issues. Indeed, the fact that she studied Islamic Theology led her to questioning her religion and beliefs on a level that I found very rare. At the time we met, one of her future plans was to continue her M.A education in Israel. Furthermore, she wrote to me that she was interested in Evangelism and generally very interested in the history

¹⁴¹ Kalaycıoğlu (2011: 5)

¹⁴² Ciddi's (2011) figures here differ from Kalaycıoğlu's, he claims that it had been 30 amendments affecting some 23 articles.

¹⁴³ Kalaycıoğlu (2011: 1)

of religions. Many of her thoughts extended well beyond what one would expect from an average theology student. Whenever I asked her something, she would provide me with an overview of the different opinions held by theologians at her university (and others) on the matter, before proceeding to offer her own.¹⁴⁴

More than with most other students, I was able to talk and have intensive discussions with her on different subjects. Her ability to put herself in my situation and mindset as a non-believer made our conversations so valuable to me, because she would always link her thoughts and convictions to what she thought I was likely to think. Despite our conversations mainly being based on questions from my side and answers from hers, our conversations were often much more illuminating than those I had with other students. As I think the reason for this lies in that she did not see me as a Western researcher, as the others did, but simply as someone like herself: a person who wanted to know, read and learn more. This made our whole communication much easier and whenever I met her I asked her all the questions that had piled up in my mind and which I sometimes had not dared ask the other students. The difference between her approach and that of the students who attended the weekly classes of the student group was that she was much more into theology and theological discourse. So the picture she provided me with often pointed to underlying discourses I was not aware of, but that the students (to differing degrees) all were aware of.

The discourses Zeynep referred to can be outlined by mentioning some of the most important Muslim intellectuals that are being associated with them in Turkey and elsewhere in the Middle East. Sena Karasipahi's study on Muslim intellectuals in Turkey traces some of the intellectuals the students also spoke about, like Ali Bulaç, Abdurrahman Dilipak and İsmet Özel. Others she mentions, Rasim Özdenören, İlhan Kutluer, Ersin Nazif Gürdoğan – to my awareness – were never mentioned, whereas Hayri Kırbaşoğlu, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu and Hilal Kaplan often were discussed or even invited to talks. Karasipahi relates these contemporary Muslim intellectuals to an earlier generation of Turkish Muslim intellectuals like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Sezai Karakoç and their relationship with the reformist discourses in which Mohammed Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid stand out amongst others. For the students the Turkish intellectuals played an important role; the same goes for revivalist intellectuals of the Middle East, such as Muhammad Abduh, Seyyid Kutup and Ali Şeriati.

¹⁴⁴ The Turkish Islamic theology can be described as divided between the Istanbulite traditional and the Ankaran progressive theology. A general account of the developments of Islamic theology can be found in Paçacı (2006).

The Arab reformers themselves were seldom if ever mentioned. Though there will be no analysis of the students' discussion of these intellectuals it is important to know that they related to them, that they would draw on the questions they had posed, their arguments and assessments of the modern world. By doing so they would relate their teachings to their own situation and evaluate if they found their views useful for their own situation in Turkey and their approach to Islam. Especially in the section on important Muslim intellectuals some of these intellectuals (see chapter two) were focused on.

Though the students' seminars and discussions rather matched university classes than traditional reading circles, so-called *sohbet* (conversation) groups, their practise of reading and discussion can be seen as a new form of *sohbet* group or reading circle which have existed in the form of neighbourhood initiatives or conducted by religious orders. With reference to these groups the e-mail group as well as other online facilities for discussion and expression can be seen as evolving "public sites and communication networks [for][...]developing Muslim subjectivities, [...] in negotiating the boundaries of an Islamic way of life in contemporary consumer culture,"¹⁴⁵ as Ayşe Öncü has described contemporary trends. The students' independence from scholarly authority, their self-dependent selection of readings as well as the loose contact they entertained with religious communities fits Öncü's general assessment of Muslim youth in Turkey today as "They have also meant that learning about Islam, and becoming a political activist, is no longer contingent on tutelage in religious institutions, orders, and associations in Turkey."¹⁴⁶ The fact that the students draw on known discourses in their discussions therefore has to be put and analysed with regard to the current political situation and their abilities to reflect and think about Muslim intellectuals.

Thus although many of my conversations and messages with Zeynep related to theological or religious subjects, the connections to current politics were always nearby. Right in the beginning, Zeynep once wrote to me that she had always been interested in politics, and found this interest quite natural: "Siz de taktir edersiniz ki Türkiye oldukça siyasi bir ülke ve sık sık siyasetiyle gündeme geliyor. Böyle bir ülkede yaşayıp da siyasetle ilgilenmiyorum diyen kişi sayısı çok az olsa gerek."¹⁴⁷ (You will have realised that Turkey is quite a political country that often comes into question with its politics. The number of people who live in such a country and say that they are not interested in politics must be very small.)

¹⁴⁵ Öncü (2012:132)

¹⁴⁶ Öncü (2012: 132)

¹⁴⁷ Facebook-Messages: 09.03.2010

Politics in Turkey is naturally a subject that no one can afford not to consider. Regardless which strata of society or religious community one belongs to, politics have had a direct effect on people. The fact that ethnic, ideological and religious difference from the state's ideal citizen can only be expressed in restricted forms is a subject for people in all walks of life, in one way or another. Whereas Kurds fear the state's egalitarian "Turkish" citizen project, Christians fear its emphasis on Islam, and practising Muslims the pressure on becoming "secular".¹⁴⁸ The state's drive for conformity for most people (excluding the secularists) has created the shape of an "ideal" citizen that they cannot fit.

In one of her messages, Zeynep summed up what she thought about secular (leftist) politics and the statist oppression she experienced in Turkey:

bu ülke bu sol kavramından çok çekti ve çekmeye devam ediyor. Solculuk laikçilik adı altında on yıllar insanlara zulmedildi, hakları sömürüldü. Bugün bu sömürü hala ve hala devam ediyor ne yazıkki. Biz başörtüler, eşarbımızla üniversitelere giremiyor, kamu alanlarına bu halimizle kabul edilmiyoruz. Toplumda solcu kesim tarafından dışlanmaya ve ikinci plana itilmeye çalışılıyor. [...] ve bunlar solcu laik kesimin tavrının bir sonucu.¹⁴⁹

(this country has suffered from the concept of the left and it is still suffering from it. Under the name of Laicism the left has oppressed people for ten years and has suppressed their rights. This oppression sadly still goes on today. We headscarved cannot enter university with our headscarves and we are not accepted in public spaces as we are. In society, the leftists try to exclude us and force us into the background [...] and these are the results of the leftist laicist people's doings.)

Her statement makes it clear that she feels that Muslims have been deprived of their rights in the name of secularism. The suffering that she experiences in this context as a headscarved girl can be considered one example (and probably the most prominent) for the rights they have been robbed of. Even as a student of Islamic theology, there was no possibility for her passing the guards at the entrance of the Institute of Theology without some masquerade. Entering the institute, she and her class fellows had to put on a hat that they could remove once on the campus grounds. However, this is not the only form of estrangement that they experience from themselves and their lives, when masquerading for the state. What probably extends much deeper is the cultural estrangement, the lack of a culture and philosophy of one's "own", when she writes that:

¹⁴⁸ s. e.g Kaya (2012: 150)

Gerçekten Türkler son birkaç asırdır İslam'dan kendilerini soyutladılar ve İslami ilimleri, tarihlerini, geçmişlerini, ecdatlarını bir kenara itip batıya yoğunlaştılar. Batı'nın aslında İslam kaynaklı olan bilimsel araştırmalarıyla ilgilenip sadece, kendi fikirlerini kendi felsefelerini oluşturamadılar [...] Ve batı batı diye diye adeta battılar. [...] Açılım, atılım yapmaktansa taklitle yürümüyor bu işler ne yazıkki.¹⁵⁰

(And the Turks have really isolated themselves from Islam and Islamic sciences, history, their pasts, their ancestry and have concentrated on the West. By interesting themselves in the West's scientific research – that has Islamic roots – they have not been able to develop their own thoughts and philosophies [...] and in their euphoria for the West they have gone down in rituals. With regard to making openings and advancements, these things sadly do not work by imitation.)

Her statement later came to my mind whilst reading Saba Mahmood's (2005) description of ethical and ritual behaviour among women in Egypt. Her account largely revolves around a mosque movement where women sought to perform rituals in order to become pious and inculcate the associated values associated.¹⁵¹

In the Turkish context that I am describing here, rituals are often associated with senseless imitation and subject to criticism and evaluation concerning their meaning. When people considered the meaning of certain rituals and their effect on society, they typically focused on their spiritual character. For instance, they asked themselves whether traditions and rituals were still imbued with the spirit of Islamic thought or alternatively had just become ossified structures concealing misunderstandings of Islam. The political dimension of rituals was especially important for the students, as one of them explained:

Yoğunlaşmaktan ziyade ufak tefek şeylere takılıyorlar. Mesela namaz kılınırken: Hazreti Mohammed namaz kılarken ayaktayken böyle tutmuş bazen ellerini böyle tutmuş, bazen işte şöyle tutmuş, çeşitli çeşitli kılmış ki bu şart değil demek için ama insanlar, sünniler mesela [...] burdan örnek göstereyim: Kadınlar böyle kılar, erkekler böyle kılar - onun dışında bir şey kabul etmezler. Çok küçük şeylere takılıyorlar işte. Parmağın kanamasına takılıyorlar ama burada insanlar ölüyor sorun yok. O yüzden diyorum ya [...] böyle tutmuşsun böyle tutmuşsun söyle tutmuşsun- hiç fark etmez yani o içindeki o özünü anlamak lazım okuduğu dualarda ne ifade ediyor.¹⁵²

(Instead of concentrating (on issues), they get stuck on small things. For example, when praying, Hazret Mohmmad held his hands like this when standing, sometimes he held them like this, sometimes he held his hands like this, sometimes like this, he prayed in various ways to show that there is no rule. But people, the Sunnis for example [...] – I should give you an example from here: women pray like this and men pray like this – they don't accept anything else. They get stuck on very small things. They get stuck (on issues) like a bleeding finger, but it is no problem that people here are dying. Therefore,

¹⁵⁰Facebook-Messages: 09.03.2010

¹⁵¹ s. Mahmood (2005: 132/133)

¹⁵² Interview Betül 08.09.2010

I say it does not matter if you hold (your hands) like this, like this or this – it is important to understand the essence to understand what the prayers we read mean.)

In her eyes, the fact that some Muslims argue over whether a bleeding finger represents a reason to renew one's ritual washings (abdest), is exaggerated to a degree that makes them forget about the really important issues, such as that people are dying in the Southeast every day.

The students' perception of politics as something inevitable (and not to forget over rituals) was crucial for raising awareness on important yet neglected issues, and naturally for rendering Islam as a starting point for a better society. In contrast to Taylor's description (2007), the option of adopting an "engaged religious view" regarding their private spiritual world and a "disengaged secularist" concerning politics was not possible for them, as explained by one of my informants: "Müsülman olduktan sonra hayat zorlaşıyor diyoruz. Niye? Çünkü sorunları çözmek için hayat zorlaşıyor biz daha çok düşünüyoruz."¹⁵³ (We say that life becomes more difficult after becoming a Muslim. Why? Because your life becomes harder by trying to solve problems and we think much more (about issues.))

To them, the essence of being Muslim involved being concerned about what was going on around them. They would not ignore the misery and plight of other people while pursuing their private lives; on the contrary, being a Muslim meant engaging with individuals' problems in order to strive for a better society, as Betül explained:

Biz zaten toplumsal olarak özgürleşmenin yani kurani anlamda özgürleşmenin xxx¹⁵⁴ fitrat dediğimiz xxx insanın doğasına uygun olması gerekiyor ortamlar çünkü eğer senin doğana uygun bir ortam yoksa sen zaten senden bekleneni yeteri kadar yapamazsın. Allahın bizden beklediği bir takım şeyler var, biz imtihan dünyasında olduğumuzu biliyoruz bir takım şeyleri yapmak için de fedakarlıklar yapmamız gerekiyor bizi yaratana şükür göstermemiz gerekiyor [...] Bunu sağlamak için de ilk önce insanın o temel ihtiyaçlarını gidermesi lazım, giyinmek gibi, yemek icmek gibi, uyumak gibi. Temel ihtiyaçlarımız gidermemiz lazım ki bizim doğamıza uygun bir şekilde yaşayalım ve ondan sonra da Allaha tabiki Allaha olan görevlerimizi yerine getirelim.¹⁵⁵

(We are in favour of societal liberation in a Qur'anic sense. As we say fitrat (nature). The environment has to be appropriate for the nature of human beings, because if there is no environment that is appropriate for you, then you won't be able to fulfil what is expected of you. There is a set of things that God expects from us, we know that we live in a world of exam, we must sacrifice some things

¹⁵³ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

¹⁵⁴ Passages that were unintelligible are identified with xxx.

¹⁵⁵ Interview Betül 08.09.2010

to achieve other things, we have to show our creator gratitude [...] To achieve this, firstly a human being's basic needs have to be fulfilled, like clothing, eating, drinking or sleeping. These basic needs have to be fulfilled so that we can live according to our nature, and then fulfil our duties to God.)

Therefore, the fulfilment of basic needs is the foundation for everybody's ability to live according to their nature, to develop and prosper.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the importance of fulfilling these needs comes before fulfilling religious duties and has to be bestowed unconditionally on every human being. The fact that politics are responsible for people being deprived of their fulfilment of these basic needs makes politics an inevitable issue of Muslims' struggle. From their perspective, the painful experience of being deprived of an environment suitable to one's nature constitutes a problem that is not only a problem for those experiencing the deprivation, but also for those who witness people's misery. Accordingly, it is a moral obligation and inner urge for them to improve such people's living conditions and act against misery.

For the students, all of those who remain insensitive to other people's wretchedness and unjust treatment were consequently looked upon with shocked bewilderment.

In an assessment of their current situation in society, the students once expressed that neither senseless imitation of the West nor a rigid Islam petrified in rituals would match their ideal. For them, progress was not measured in terms of modernisation or industrialisation, but rather by aspiring to an Islamic ideal – in this case, a humanistic approach that would pay attention to individuals' misery and their particular problems faced.

The contrast between their perspective on individuals' struggle and misery and the state's rhetoric of egalitarian politics could not be greater, as explained by Kavakci, a former parliamentarian and victim of the headscarf ban:

The state (...) argues that it only promises citizenship rights to collectivities without any attention to their particularities. Hence it, in fact, does not promise to meet any individualistic demand based on differences of its subjects. In the eyes of the state, the citizens are abstracted from their affiliations defined by family, social, economic, political status, and culture. They are treated as disembodied entities rendered the same. As the state sees its subjects as the same, it rejects recognizing their particularities that render them different. This paradoxical situation leads to the exclusion of those who insist to stand out with their differences.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Following Kymlicka the aims of liberalism are just the same

¹⁵⁷ Kavakci (2010: 9)

The state's disregard for difference and its demand for a religiously disengaged view in the public sphere is what Muslims criticise and challenge in Turkey as immoral. They favour engaged and concerned moral politics that consider the human being at the centre of their policies and see this concern as inevitable. Their efforts and opportunities to counter the state's indifference regarding people's misery lies at the core of many of their discussions, and were also reflected in their discussions on the constitutional referendum. However, the specific conflict that they were living through with the state – although conflictual – was also a source of innovation, as one of the students told me when explaining that their situation in Turkey provided them with the opportunity to question their Muslim tradition and live them with a greater awareness than perhaps Muslims did in other countries. Therefore, their conflict with the state had a great impact on their perception of their religion, and was formed by the limits imposed on them by the state. In the sense that the students related their experiences with the state to new understandings of their religious tradition, this can be seen as a part of an Islamic discursive tradition challenging tradition as well as modernity.

With this understanding in mind, the constitutional referendum in 2010 can be seen as a first step to seriously challenge the state's unitarian ideology. At that time, people hoped that a change of the constitution would have a direct and positive impact on current politics and people's lives. The debate preceding the referendum dominated most of the media coverage in summer 2010, and formed the subject of many public and private discussion rounds. The expected effect of the constitutional referendum (and the new constitution later) on present conditions led to fierce discussions between people of opposite camps as well as those of the same camps.

Secularism and Pain

While listening to the students' during their weekly classes, I often had the impression that the state was conceived of as an entity that threatened them and denied them all of their religious being. One relevant example was given by a student who used to explain what she thought of current society and the state by referring to the Qur'an. Indeed, she said that she did not see so much resemblance between today's Turkish society and – as is often said – the corrupt Meccan society that the Prophet dealt with. In her eyes, the Turkish state was to be compared to the Pharaonic system, in the sense that today's state system itself is based on anti-religious views directed at her Islamic religion, as was the Pharaoh against the Jews of his time. By considering the prophet Moses and his struggle with the Pharaoh, she probably saw their own resistance reflected and perhaps wanted to shift the view from corrupted *mores* to the systematic aspect of the state's force.

While her comparison might seem exaggerated in points – perhaps regarding the degree of oppression – it makes very clear that the problem Muslims are dealing with is not a corruption of values and *mores*, but rather a whole state system that stands in opposition to them as religious people. Resistance and, as was explained in one of their discussions of Qur’anic terms, patience (*sakine*) was needed to endure the *status quo* of politics and work for a better future, even if this might seem hard to achieve. Only by carrying on with their cause and being patient would God reward them in some way and help them in their struggle – perhaps at a moment when they are in the most desperate need for help.

The conditions for their cause clearly seemed to be much more promising since Kemalism had become subject to scrutiny. Their resistance seemed to have reached a different level with the AKP being incumbent and having revised some of the rules of the game, according to which politics and society worked. One of the students once told me:

Biz daha yeni yeni kendi varlığımızı kabul ettirdik insanlara başörtülülerin veya müsülmanların bu dünyada bir şeylerin yapabileceğinin. Müsülman birinin de başbakan olup veya cumhurbaşkan olabileceğini veya Amerikan başbakan Obamayla görüşme yapabileceğini. Başörtülü bir first ladynin köşke çıkabilceğini daha yeni yeni insanlara gösterdik.¹⁵⁸

(Only recently have we – as Muslims and as headscarved women - been able to get ourselves recognised by people and made them accept that we can do something in this world. We have shown them that a Muslim can be prime minister or President and that he can meet with the American President Obama. We have shown that a headscarved woman can become a first lady.)

The possibilities of what Muslims can achieve in society have slowly started to change. The monolithic Pharaonic system that one could not discuss or even consider challenging has given in on some issues and allowed a revision of the rules of the game. Indeed, these new rules have become visible in the different understandings of secularism discussed before the referendum. Whereas a discussion of a Kemalist principle such as secularism could have previously caused havoc in society, the plurality of understandings, and more significantly the mere fact that secularism and its valences could be discussed in public, made clear that the AKP and the Muslim movement supporting the party had achieved something in society. Even if some of the die-hard secularists would not yet admit to the legitimacy of these changes and feel threatened by the developments observed as leading to an Iranian style theocratic regime, something had changed.

¹⁵⁸ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

In line with secularists' threat perceptions, the CHP (the AKP's secularist opposition party) perceived the upcoming referendum as "a vote on the principle of secularism"¹⁵⁹ itself, given that the idea of holding a referendum was generated in a time when the AKP had been charged of "anti-secular activities".¹⁶⁰ However, when considering the referendum process, the proposed amendments do not seem to suggest a vote for or against secularism, but rather what these amendments reflect is a strong blow against the specific Kemalist version of Laicism. Therefore, Ergün Özbudun, the head of the committee that had drafted the amendments to the constitution, writes:

The Constitutional Court refused to close down the present governing party, the AKP (Justice and Development Party), but ruled that it had become a focal point of anti-secular activities [...] In these decisions as well as in others related to secularism, the Constitutional Court defined secularism not as the simple separation of the state and religion but as a total philosophy, a way of life, reminiscent of Comtean positivism and scientism.¹⁶¹

Özbudun has also pointed out that the discussion concerning the referendum was going to take place in the shadow of the conflict between secularists and the religious and the two variants of secularism that they supported.¹⁶² In fact, the controversial discussion that started several months before the referendum can be said to have taken place along the fault lines of the different variants of secularism supported by the political opponents rather than secularism vs. theocracy, as some secularist polemics suggest. Despite secularism itself not being a subject of the debate (e.g. no legislation was involved concerning the headscarf ban), the split between the opponents could be characterised according to whether people saw secularism as a style of life, a form of civilisation, or otherwise saw secularism as a simple separation of powers between religious institutions and the state. The former understood secularism to be threatened if the AKP was able to pass its referendum, with their view best described by Jakobsen and Pellegrini, who describe secularists' perspective by stating: "If secularism represents rationality, universality, modernity, freedom, democracy, and peace, then religion (unless thoroughly privatized) can only present a danger to those who cherish these values."¹⁶³ However, the latter only considered the referendum a possibility of mitigating some of the laws that ensured secularism to the detriment of their religious freedom. With White it is possible to understand the conflict between secularists and Muslims as referring to these values in particular:

¹⁵⁹ Today's Zaman (27th March 2008) Politics ...

¹⁶⁰ Today's Zaman (27th March 2008) Politics feel the heat from mounting pressure to compromise,

¹⁶¹ Özbudun (2011: 193)

¹⁶² s. Özbudun (2008)

¹⁶³ Jakobsen/Pellegrini (2008: 9)

Turkey's tense confrontations, then, might not be examples of secularism versus religion, as these terms are generally understood, but might better be described as struggles over blasphemy of the sacred, with secularists and the pious fighting over the designation of what is sacred, what is intrinsic to tradition and inviolable, and what lies outside the boundaries of identity sacralised by tradition.¹⁶⁴

Through means of excessive media coverage, seemingly permanent discussion programmes on TV, daily articles in all newspapers and many public meetings with politicians, civil society initiatives and activists aimed at furthering awareness on the topic of the constitutional referendum. During such discussions, the opponents fought over the legitimacy of the constitutional amendments, thereby negotiating their understandings of secularism and the variants they could accept.

It was around this time that I interviewed Betül, a student of political science who can be said to have evaluated political ongoings very much regarding institutional changes and the ensuing processes. As well as that of many others, her focus did not direct itself so much towards secularism, given that they certainly did not feel secularism was going to be abolished in the referendum. What was at stake for them was not only a positivist interpretation of secularism, but rather the military's tutelage that enabled it.

According to Betül, it was time to prevent further disasters that the military's tutelage had provoked:

Temel olarak sanırım ki askeri vesayetin, yargı vesayetinin değişmesi lazım. En öncelikle değişim bu olmak zorunda çünkü TC nin en başından beri yani 85 yıllık tarihinden beri hatta Osmanlı'nın son dönemlerine kadar götürürsek bir askeri vesayet sistemini olduğunu görüyoruz ve bu çok ciddi bir sorun olarak bütün tarih boyunca, TC tarihi boyunca yansdı.

Kimi zaman bu ülkede 1960'da darbe yapıldı ve darbeye bir başbakan asıldı böyle bir ülkenin çocuğuyuz yani ya da işte bu ülkede 80 yılında yine darbeyle birlikte 17 yaşındaki Erdal isimli bir çocuk, yaşı büyüterecek 18 yapılarak asıldı, idam edildi.¹⁶⁵

(The basic thing that has to be changed, I think is the military's tutelage, the juridical tutelage has to change. This is the first thing that has to change, because the Turkish Republic for 85 years, since its inception, even in the last stages of the Ottoman Empire has been under military tutelage and this is a serious problem that has been reflected in all of the Turkish Republic's history. In 1960, there was a military coup in this country and the president was hanged. We are children of such a country. In 1980, during a military coup, a 17-year old called Erdal has been hanged, he has been executed by exaggerating his age to 18.)

The tremendous interest received by the referendum on the amendments of the 1982 constitution cannot be compared to the activism and discussion preceding parliamentary

¹⁶⁴ White (2013: 5)

¹⁶⁵ Interview Betül 08.09.2010

elections. The emotional impact of the referendum was closely related to the hope of finally coming to terms with the military coup of 12th September 1980 and ending impunity for the 1980 military coup leaders who had installed a “*regime of fear*”¹⁶⁶ to restore the state’s authority, which they perceived as being threatened by autonomous universities, student associations and workers’ right to strike¹⁶⁷.

Although it can be said that the reasons and effects of military coups have been complex, it is possible to say that the army usually acted when it saw the secular order of society threatened by pious Muslims and others who would not fit the ideal image of the secular and civilised Turk.¹⁶⁸ The amendments discussed in 2010 marked an important attempt in granting more civil rights to citizens and ending the military’s dominance and continuous interference with the democratic political processes. Moreover, for pious Muslims, the amendments also held the promise of a freer exercise of their religion and the possibility of gaining liberal freedoms that the AKP had not been able to defend in 2008, when the Constitutional Court rejected a legislation that allowed wearing headscarves in university.

In this sense, both Zeynep’s and Betül’s arguments can be seen as aspects of criticism on secularism. The neglect of Turkey’s Islamic past as well as the military’s tutelage make different aspects of secularism in Turkey, with both exemplifying the radicality with which secularism has been used to disrupt people’s lives, and to threaten and even kill them.

Contemplation of the violent ways in which secularism has been promoted and implemented in Turkey bears witness to people’s suffering. In the debate on the constitutional referendum, emotional news coverage on the victims of the 12th September 1980 coup provided some of the strongest arguments for a change of the constitution. Indeed, some of the figures on the coup d’état’s victims illustrate the military coup’s impact on society: 650,000 people were detained, 1,683,000 people were categorised as threatening the state, 230,000 people were tried in courts, 7,000 people were tried for death penalty, 517 were sentenced to death, and 51 persons were executed.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, political parties were closed down and their political leaders banned from politics, with a strong

¹⁶⁶ Atasoy (2009: 84)

¹⁶⁷ s. Atasoy (2009: 84)

¹⁶⁸ s. Schweers/Osiewicz (2008: 75)

¹⁶⁹ s Atasoy (2009: 85) Moreover, 300 people died suspiciously and 171 were tortured to death in prison, 299 people died in detention, 144 of whom died suspiciously, 43 are claimed to have committed suicide, 30, 000 people, termed *sakıncalı* (dangerous) lost their jobs as a precautionary act, 14, 000 people lost their citizenship, 30, 000 political refugees left Turkey, 3854 teachers were fired, 120 university professors were fired, 400 journalists were tried, 98, 404 people were tried for being members of associations endangering the state’s authority.

censorship executed on print and audiovisual media.¹⁷⁰ Following Yıldız Atasoy, the military regime punished ultranationalists, Kurdish activists, Islamists and acted particularly harshly on leftists.¹⁷¹

The ideal image of secularism as a guarantor of (religious) peace¹⁷² stands in sharp contrast to the reality of this coup d'état being performed for the sake of secularism and state authority. The cracks in the ideal image become visible when critically examining secularism, as explained by Asad's understanding. In his mind, it is questionable whether "the secular" is the most peaceful basis for negotiating politics: "A secular state does not guarantee toleration; it puts into play different structures of ambition and fear. The law never seeks to eliminate violence since its object is always to *regulate* violence."¹⁷³ Accordingly, the image of secularism as a peace bringer has to be evaluated with greater differentiation, and it might be sensible and legitimate to ask – as Asad does - whether secularism should be perceived as problematic and pain inflicting:

Those who think that the *motive* for violent action lies in "religious ideology" claim that any concern for the consequent suffering requires that we support the censorship of religious discourse – or at least the prevention of religious discourse from entering the domain where public policy is formulated. But it is not always clear whether it is pain and suffering as such that the secularist cares about or the pain and suffering that can be attributed to religious violence because that is pain the modern imaginary conceives of as gratuitous.¹⁷⁴

Bearing this in mind, it becomes clear that the secular logic has taught us to turn a blind eye to the pains induced by secularism. By acknowledging that secularism indeed inflicts pain, the violence with which it has been implemented in society becomes visible. Therefore, the constitutional referendum can be generally understood as challenging the mechanisms of secularism (and the military's tutelage) that inflict pain on all those who do not fit with its ideal image of the citizen. The 27 amendments to the constitution were meant to reinforce civil rights and break the power of the judiciary and army by broadening the possibilities of appealing to courts. Along with the provisional article No. 15, which would enable a prosecution of the military coup's leaders, the amendment also allowed to try military officers who had been accused of planning coups in civilian courts. At the same time, military personnel who had been expelled from the TSK (Turkish Armed Forces)

¹⁷⁰ s. Atasoy (2009: 85)

¹⁷¹ Atasoy (2009: 85)

¹⁷² Atasoy (2009: 85)

¹⁷³ Asad (2003: 8)

¹⁷⁴ Asad (2003: 11)

were meant to be able to appeal to court if accused of reactionary activities (meaning openly being Muslim). Moreover, the storage of private data was to be forbidden, and an end put to blacklisting people, with violation of these rights and misuse of personal data going to be subject to legal prosecution. Every citizen was going to be able to appeal to a more democratically organised two chamber Constitutional Court, whose members should be elected by parliament (three members) and the President (14) for 12 years (rather than lifelong). The supremacy of HSYK (Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors), a council of 7 judges that appointed the Council of State and Supreme Court of Appeal's general assembly, was meant to be ended by increasing their number to 22 and opening their decisions to legal review.¹⁷⁵ The amendments concerned in the referendum are generally divided into two categories, those that were related to a reform of the judiciary and others that can broadly be described as democratization measures (including improvement of workers' rights and abolishment of military privileges).¹⁷⁶

These major changes regarding the army's independence and juridical system were meant to empower the parliament vis-à-vis the so-called "watchmen of secularism" (army and judiciary), and in many points also aligned to the organisation of the jurisdiction in other European countries. However, most importantly, the constitutional amendments represented a first (albeit insufficient) step in acknowledging the heterogeneity of Turkey's population.¹⁷⁷

The public debate

To gain an insight into the different religious understandings that will evolve in a detailed analysis of the discussion undertaken by the students undertook prior to the Referendum, it is necessary to generally outline the main arguments of the public debate that they drew upon for their own discussion of the Referendum. The discussion was mainly led by political parties, all of whom adopted a different stance concerning the Referendum and secular order in Turkey.

The AKP, who can be said to have brought forward a new version of secularism, essentially promoted the amendments with three main arguments: 1) an ending of the era of military coups by trying the leaders of the 1980 coup (including disempowerment of the secularist army and jurisdiction; 2) guaranteeing more civil rights for democratic processes; and 3) legal approximation with other European countries.

¹⁷⁵ Şahin/Hayırlı (08.08.2010) What will the Sept. 12 Referendum bring, in Today's Zaman

¹⁷⁶ s. Ciddi (2011) & illustrations and tables

¹⁷⁷ s. Göle (2011)

The parties who campaigned against the amendments of the constitution (CHP and MHP) emphasised that a mere abolishment of article 15 would not suffice to try Kenan Evren and the other officers involved with the military coup, and thus they suggested the Referendum would not bring any change. Moreover, in its own characterisation as a “social democratic” party with strong ties to the Atatürk-heritage, the CHP generally considers itself a guardian of his principles and thus the secular order.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, the CHP’s main argument against the constitutional referendum was based on the claim that the AKP was only advocating changes in the constitution to control the judiciary and establish authoritarian rule. The claim that the AKP was striving to disestablish secularism – as earlier pronounced by CHP leaders - had already become unbelievable at the time and was not greatly invoked; rather, the authoritarian threat constituted by the AKP’s gain in power was criticised. However, the CHP’s campaign against the referendum remained unsuccessful at the time, with 58% approving of the vote. Despite profound changes within the party, with its long-time leader Deniz Baykal having resigned earlier in the same year and being replaced by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, a younger Kurdish Alevi leader, the party seemed unable to address some of the most important concerns in society. Although Kılıçdaroğlu had stated that he recognised the need for a new constitution and tried to adopt Muslims’ claims after the referendum by stating that he would solve the headscarf issue,¹⁷⁹ the party seemed to be treading water. Moreover, it is doubtful whether his promises were convincing, as they also came with the implicit message that a referendum initiated by the AKP was not acceptable simply because it had been brought forward by an Islamist party.¹⁸⁰

The MHP, a nationalist-Islamic party, can be generally characterised by the two issues in which it adopts a radical position: the opposition of approaching EU membership, and a denial of the Kurdish struggle for the acceptance of ethnic diversity.¹⁸¹ The plans for the reorganisation of the juridical system, and particularly the harmonisation with European legal systems, seemed to be alarming to the MHP, which consequently ran a campaign against an acceptance of the Referendum.

The Kurdish party BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) developed a boycott campaign in opposition to the AKP and the secularist-nationalist “Hayır” (No), based on the fact that the amendments in no way referred to the problematic situation of the Kurds in the country. The articles concerning the concepts of the Turkish citizen were not to be altered and Kurdish

¹⁷⁸ s. Kubicek (2012: 112)

¹⁷⁹ s. Cumhuriyet Portal (17.09.12)

¹⁸⁰ European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (2010)

¹⁸¹ s. Kubicek (2012: 113)

citizens' identity would still be denied. Furthermore, the Kurds criticised that the amendments were not truly changing anything, but rather only constituted a new make-up for a regime that would be able to survive a little longer with a new masquerade.

Therefore, the debate preceding the Referendum not only evolved around Evet (Yes) and Hayır (No), the two possible voting options in the referendum; indeed, there were also a considerable number of associations and parties propagating a boycott of the Referendum. Moreover, yet another option was the “Yes – but it’s not enough” campaign, an approach endorsed by many liberal yes voters to emphasise that their acceptance of the Referendum was tied to a claim for more changes, a new constitution and further liberalisation.

When considering the different groups in society, it had become extremely hard to predict who was on the Evet side, the Hayır side, or in favour of a boycott, given that the referendum had not split people into the usual blocks of secularists and Islamists or conservatives and leftists, but rather cross-cut ethnicity, religion and prior affiliations to political parties or associations. According to Ahmet Altan, a prominent Turkish journalist, this development can be seen as a positive development, a form of debate and discussion in politics that is no longer based on block building but rather a revived discussion of different thoughts:

Biz, Türkler ve Kürtler “ayrımına” alışmışız mesela. Bugün bu referandumda “Kürtler” dediğimizde hangi Kürtlerden bahsediyoruz? Karşımızda tek bir blok halinde Kürtler yok. BDP gibi, PKK gibi bu referandumu “boykot” etmeyi öneren Kürtler var. Çok sayıda “sivil toplum kuruluşları”, politikacıları, aydınlarıyla anayasa değişikimine “evet” diyen Kürtler var. Hepsi Kürt ama bir “mitoz” bölünmeyle iki ayrı hücrenin içinde birbirlerinden ayrılıyorlar. Aynı durum Sünni dindarlar için de geçerli. AKP gibi, Numan Kurtuluş’un Saadet Partisi gibi değişikime “evet” diyen Sünni dindarlar var. Erbakan ve ekibi gibi değişikime “hayır” diyen Sünni dindarlar var. İkisi de Sünni ve dindar ama iki ayrı hücrenin içindeler şimdi. [...]Bu farklılık sadece bu “referandumla” sınırlı kalmayacak. Bundan sonraki birçok tartışmada biz bu “mitoz” bölünmeyi hep göreceğiz.¹⁸²

(We have become used to the Turk-Kurd “distinction”, for example. When we speak of Kurds today, in this Referendum of which Kurds are we speaking? There is no single block of Kurds. Like the BDP and the PKK, there are Kurds who advise us to “boycott” this referendum. And there are a considerable number of “civil society foundations”, politicians and Kurdish intellectuals who are saying yes to the changes of the Constitution. They are all Kurds, but they are undergoing a mitosis separating in different cells from one another. The same state is also applicable for Sunni Muslims. Like the AKP there are Sunni believers like Numan Kurtuluş’s Saadet Party who say “Yes”. And there are Sunni believers like Erbakan and his people who say “No”. Both

¹⁸² Altan, Ahmet (21.08.10) „Bölünmek“, Taraf

are Sunni believers, but both are in two different cells now. [...] This difference will not be limited to this referendum. From now on, we will always see this “mitosis”.)

The complicated relationship between Islam and secularism has always been subject to debate in Turkey, and had previously divided society in two groups: the secularists and Muslims. However, as Altan has pointed out, the melting of these blocks first became visible during the referendum debate. Accordingly, the new perspectives on politics that opened up with the Referendum prompted people to rethink their situation and the conditions of their societal involvement in new ways. People questioned the ideologies they had previously endorsed and abandoned convictions about society and politics that they had never previously questioned.

3.1 The Constitutional debate in the student group

The leftist Boycott

The debate in the student group concerning the Referendum started on 5th August, more than a month prior to the vote on 12th September. The debate was opened through an initial e-mail (followed by another four similar ones) from a Kurdish Muslim student, with extracts from newspapers or statements of other organisations explaining why a boycott was the best response from a leftist Kurdish perspective. The first replies to these e-mails were from students who engaged in the “Yes, but it’s not enough” campaign. From their perspective, the amendments to the constitution reflected a first ray of hope, yet were not sufficient to change the political situation in Turkey. Therefore, they planned to vote for “Yes” and engage in campaigns for further changes after the Referendum. The first reply to one of these e-mails was written by a member who was very active in the group at the time: “Klasik bir “sol” demagogjisi deyip geçeceğim. Sonra da yetmez ama evet diyeceğim referendumda.”¹⁸³ (I will overlook this by saying that this is “classic” leftist demagogy. And later I will say yes, but it is not enough in the Referendum.) A second writer also classifies the e-mails as being socialist demagogy by stating: “daima her olaya her çıkan yeniliğe ya da her harekete muhalefet etmek ne kadar yapıcı olur onu bilemeyeceğim”¹⁸⁴ (I do not know how helpful it is to always oppose every movement and everything that is new.), and outlines what the students in favour of a “Yes- but it’s not enough” expected from the Referendum:

ben bu boykot çağrısına destek vermiyorum ve referanduma EVet diorum, çünkü askerini de, başörtüye yasak getirenlerinde, özgürlükleri kısıtlayanlarında yargılanmasını istiyorum...

¹⁸³ E-mails: 06.08.10

¹⁸⁴ E-mails: 06.08.10

ve bunun bir geçiş süreci olduğunu düşünüyorum ve inanıyorum ki kürt, alevi ya da başörtülü olsun çok kısa bir zamanda daha özgür daha demokratik ve daha saygın yerde olacaklar, benim inancım böyle ve hükümetinde bu niyete ulaşmak için hareket ettiklerini düşünüyorum [...]¹⁸⁵

(I am not supporting this call to boycott and I will say yes in the referendum, because I want those to be tried who brought along the headscarf ban, those who limited our freedoms ... and I think that this is a temporary situation and I believe that be it a Kurd, an Alevi or a headscarved they will be freer in a short time and live in a more respectful environment, this is what I believe and I think that the government is also acting with this intention [...])

With reference to one of the first e-mails sent from the leftist student, a counterpart highlighted that they could not look at the referendum from a socialist perspective: “sosyalist veya tutarlı demokrat olarak değil müslümanlar olarak, adil şahitler olarak nasıl bakmalıyız meseleye?”¹⁸⁶ (How do we have to look at the issue, not as socialist or firm democrats but as Muslims, as just witnesses?)

Concerning the leftists criticism, the writer also remarks that most of the reasons cited for boycotting the referendum were true yet somewhat simplified, only enumerating what the amendments would not bring. To his mind, the fact that many laws were not going to be changed did not legitimise their ignoring of the improvements that the referendum would bring. Furthermore, saying yes this time would not mean that they would also have to reply with yes the next time, and they would still be able to act as an opposition if required.¹⁸⁷

The Muslim Boycott

The arguments of the leftists were no longer important in the second phase of the discussion, as another Muslim train of thought that suggested boycotting the referendum was being proposed as the preferred choice. The arguments brought forward by that group of students were based on a different perception of current politics and an approach that attempted to draw on the Qur’an as a source of legitimacy as a core argument.

A girl writing from this perspective explained why she thought that any hope for change through a Referendum was in vain. By enumerating a number of occurrences in our times that had perhaps made us think that the political situation could have changed, she made clear that in fact nothing had changed:

¹⁸⁵ E-mails: 06.08.10

¹⁸⁶ E-mails: 06.08.10

¹⁸⁷ E-mail: 06.08.201

Zencilerin ezildiği, beyaz adamların diktatörlük merkezi olarak bilinen ABD'nin başkanlığına bir zenci olan Obama geldi. Ve İslam düşmanlığını şiar edinmiş Laik-Kemalist TC'nin başkanlığına ise daha çok Müslümanlığıyla bilinen Ak parti/Erdoğan geldi.

Eskiden zorbalık, diktatörlük, şiddet ve güç kullanarak kitleleri korkutup hizaya getirmek revaçtaydı. Bugünlerde ise tatlı dilli siyaset, toplulukların sürüler halinde akıp gitmelerini kolaylaştırdı.¹⁸⁸

(In the USA, which has been known as the centre of the white man's dictatorship, where African Americans have been oppressed, an African American has been elected President. And the AK Party/Erdoğan, who are better known for their being Muslim, have become to head the laique-Kemalist TR (Turkish Republic) that has adopted an ideology hostile to Islam.

In old times, it used to be en vogue to intimidate folks to bring them into line by using despotism, dictatorship, violence and force. However, today, sweet tongued politics have eased communities' flowingly coming in flocks.)

In her view, the referendum could not be seen as a form of political progress, but rather as a temptation that prevented people for seeing that the referendum was only a means for the state to control its people. Indeed, her argument has been invoked before when evaluating the functioning of capitalist society.¹⁸⁹ The reference concerning Barack Obama and the USA might underline that her argument derives from a specific understanding of capitalist society. However, a further explanation of her argument shows that it might extend well beyond such an understanding, when she relates these ongoings to a Hadith and the related occasion of revelation reporting a tempting offer made to the Prophet:

Velîd ibnu'l-Muğîra, el-As ibn Vâil, el-Esved ibn Abdülmuttalib ve Ümeyye ibn Halef Hz Peygamber (sa)'e rastladılar ve ona: "Ey Muhammed, gel sen bizim ibadet ettiklerimize ibadet et, biz de senin ibadet ettiğine ibadet edelim ve seni bütün işlerimize ortak edelim Eğer senin getirdiğin bizim elimizde olandan daha hayırlı ise bu hayırda biz sana ortak olmuş ve o hayırdan nasibimizi almış oluruz Yok bizim elimizdeki senin getirdiğinden daha hayırlı ise sen bu hayra ortak olmuş ve bu hayırdan nasibini almış olursun " dediler de bunun üzerine Allah Tealâ bu Sureyi indirdi

(Velîd ibnu'l-Muğîra, el-As ibn Vâil, el-Esved ibn Abdülmuttalib and Ümeyye ibn Halef encountered the Prophet (peace be upon him) and told him: "O Muhammed, come and worship with us, we will also come and worship what you worship and share all our deeds with you. If what you have brought is more beneficial than what we have already had, then we will have shared your benefactions and our fates will depend upon it. But if not, if what we have is more beneficial than what you have, then you will have shared our benefactions and your fate will be connected to it. Upon this Allah Tealâ sent this Sura:

1 "De kî: "Ey inkarcılar!" (Say: "O deniers!")

2 "Ben sizin taptıklarınıza tapmam " ("I do not worship what you worship")

¹⁸⁸ E-mail: 07.08.10

¹⁸⁹ s. Huxley (1932)

- 3 "Benim taptığıma da sizler tapmazsınız " ("You cannot worship what I worship")
4 "Ben de sizin taptığınıza tapacak değilim " ("I am not going to worship what you worship")
5 "Benim taptığıma da sizler tapmıyorsunuz " ("And you do not worship what I worship")
6 "Sizin dininiz size, benim dinim banadır " ("Your religion belongs to you and mine belongs to me")

-Kafirun Suresi-¹⁹⁰

This perception might be related to Asad's concept of seduction in Islamic societies (i.e. the first Islamic society in this case). According to him, one such difference between liberal and Islamic societies is that liberal society would only consider rape as a crime whereas seduction is not, given that no property rights are being infringed. However, in Islamic society, seduction, "the capture of someone's affection",¹⁹¹ which would originally belong somewhere else, is also perceived as a crime. Taking the subject of seduction further, it seems that the girl's analysis is not only based on the assumption that the state is seducing people into negotiations and agreements that will only prove its own power, but also that the basic principles that guide her life would become confounded if she agrees to partake in negotiations as proposed. With Asad, it is possible to explain this perception regarding its dangers posed:

Muslim theologians and jurists assumed that seduction in all its forms was necessarily dangerous not only for the individual (because it is indicated a loss of self-control) but for the social order too (it could lead to violence and civil discord).¹⁹²

Therefore, the girl's argument seems to suggest that there is a certain order, a way of living that will be disrupted if the proposals from outside should be accepted. Clearly, the outside order of society will not be disrupted, rather the milieu she lives in might open up to society and start to transform. Moreover, if led into the state's temptation, one might lose self-control (or control over one's Islamic self). Accordingly, the threat does not (only) comprise that one might be taken for a fool, but also contains a moral threat should the "sweet politics" succeed in distancing or alienating one from one's actual goals and convictions. In case of yielding to the temptation, the existing secular order might grow even stronger and finally lead to their being suppressed by the sweet politics of the market and secularism. Therefore, to her, the current political situation is a decision on monotheism versus polytheism: "Biz müslümanlar olarak önderimiz ve örneğimiz Rasulullah(s.a.v) gibi, Allah'tan başka ilah tanımıyor,

¹⁹⁰E-mails: 07.08.10

¹⁹¹ Asad (2009: 31)

¹⁹² Asad (2009: 44)

tağutları reddediyor, Referandumu boykot ediyoruz.”¹⁹³ (We as Muslims do not recognise any holiness than Allah like our leader and example the Prophet (peace be upon him), we reject anything that keeps us from worshipping God, we boycott the referendum.)

A first reply to this e-mail makes it clear that the Muslims in favour of a yes in the referendum do not consider this issue a question of moral or religious dogma, but rather as a strategic attitude that will help them to profit for their Islamic cause.¹⁹⁴ According to the second writer, the decision to be taken is not one between being a pious believer and a denier, but rather a political decision:

Gerçekçi olalım. İslami siyaset yapmaya çalışan Müslümanlar olarak günümüz siyasetini belirleyebilecek güçte ve pozisyonda değiliz.. Önümüzde iki seçenek var; ya azgın Kemalist militer ideolojinin cenderesinde kalmaya devam edeceğiz ya da hakkımızı daha rahat savunabileceğimiz, daha az baskı ve yasakla muhatap olacağımız görece daha özgür bir liberal sistemde mücadelemize devam edeceğiz..¹⁹⁵

(Let us be realists. As Muslims who are trying to make Islamic politics we are not in a position to determine today’s politics. There are two choices in front of us; either we will continue to live the mills of the paramilitary Kemalist minority ideology or we will continue with our struggle in a freer liberal system in which we will be able to defend our rights more easily and in which we will be less familiar to oppression and prohibitions.)

This very strategic and political approach does not make any reference to the underlying threat of finally being seduced by the state; moreover, there is no fear of losing one’s Islamic self. Rather, the argument supports the idea that one will be closer to being oneself, when able to struggle for further rights in a liberal system. Furthermore, he writes that:

İlkini yaşadık, yaşıyoruz ve daha gururumuzu ayaklar altına alan başörtüsü yasağını bile kaldırtamadık; ikincisinde ise en azından bir umut, bir 'açılım' var.. Neden mazoşist davranıp ikinci ihtimali geri çevirelim ki??¹⁹⁶

(We have been living the first option (Kemalism) and we continue to live under it and still we have not been able to remove the headscarf ban that is treading upon our pride; whereas in the second option there is at least hope, an ‘opening’ ... why should we act masochist and refuse this second opportunity?)

The consequences of anti-Islamic politics (and particularly the headscarf ban) have caused them to suffer, and they are not in a position to consider the issue from a distanced perspective,

¹⁹³ E-mail: 07.08.2010

¹⁹⁴ s. E-mails: 07.08.10

¹⁹⁵ E-mails: 07.08.10

¹⁹⁶ E-mails: 07.08.10

as if only a moral question. The headscarf issue directly concerns them every day, and thus has had psychological effects on the Muslim community.

To his mind, the first girl's opinions are no more than a "klasik sol refleksi" (a classic leftist reflex). However, in a second reply, the first girl stated that she (and those thinking like her) were not portraying anything like a classic leftist reflex, but rather a classic Islamic reflex that had been going on for years. Furthermore, she explains that a boycott was the middle way between becoming too liberal and doing much more than was actually needed (ifrat) and not taking part in society at all (tefrit); for example, even refraining from paying taxes.

From my perspective, the difference between both perceptions seemed to be based on different perceptions of morals, yet also on the extent to which particular students felt that they were part of society and current politics, as well as how much they saw themselves outside of the current political struggle. Therefore, it is of some importance that most of the students advocating a boycott – if women – were usually not enrolled in state universities but rather alternative institutions offering an Islamic education. In fact, their lives might have been further away from the daily struggle of a life with a headscarf in the secular environment. Their distance from the political system had not started with the referendum, but had long been part of their lives and rejection of the secular state. By contrast, the other group struggled with anti-Islamic policies every day and can be said to have been much closer to the political struggle. Consequently, this affected them in two ways: first, they did not feel any anxiety of losing their Islamic self; and secondly, the psychological impact of being Muslims in a secular environment might have been much stronger on them.

This understanding can be further explained in the context of the Kurdish boycott, with one of the students stating that the current constitution had been changed 16 times since its establishment, with each change rendering the Constitution stronger and further establishing 12th September within society. Moreover, he argued that Turkey had come to a point in history from which it was easy for the AKP to change the whole constitution and introduce a truly democratic constitution. However, the AKP and majority of Muslims seemed to forget that the amendments were not going to change the situation of the Kurds and the retired, and that those in favour of a Yes seemingly did not have the consciousness to boycott the Referendum.¹⁹⁷ One part of the argument insists that the AKP could change much more than

¹⁹⁷ E-mails: 07.08.10

they are doing (an argument in line with BDP arguments), while the other part shows angry deception, if not anguish and desperation, mixed with an irreconcilable distance.

The fact that these arguments did not only come from secular Kurdish BDP supporters but also from pious Muslims suggests that those close to the Kurdish struggle might have had to form their opinions in between opposing interests of the two groups with which they were affiliated. Therefore, the alienation that Kurds feel with regarding the Turkish state's institutions foster and increase their distance from and mistrust in the state, its institutions, elections, and in this specific case. the Referendum. Consequently, it was not only the state's secularism, but also its egalitarianism that refrained them from taking part in the referendum.

“Yes – but it's not enough”

A more pronounced version of the boycott supporters' argument was discussed in a third phase of the discussion. The writer asked the others “What has happened to Allah's authority?”, and said that “İnancımız Allah'ın otoritesinin yanında bir otoritenin meşru görülmesini "şirk" olarak görüyor.”¹⁹⁸ (In our belief, it is perceived to be a blasphemy when we recognise another authority as legitimate next to God.) The package of amendments presented to the people is – just as it always has been – one that ignores God's authority and only offers a system of values alternative to God's. Therefore, if Muslims are not to recognise any authority next to God's and have not taken part in earlier elections and struggled for their rights in this way, what has since changed? In further explanations, the same writer confronts another argument that others have put forward by suggesting that the amendments to the Constitution will help them to freely exercise their religion. However, to his mind, religion is not to be considered with the question of whether it can be lived freely or not; instead, religion is a matter of resisting blasphemy (şirk)¹⁹⁹. Therefore, there is no question of choosing between laws that would encourage or improve a free exercise of religion, but only refusal if the authority is not God's.

Despite bearing some resemblance to the first girl's argument, these explanations are even stricter, with a clear emphasis on the understanding that one would challenge God's authority if legitimising a secular constitution. Clearly, this principle cannot be subject to any negotiations, and cannot be compromised in relation to the suffering that people might experience in their society.

In contrast to this argumentation, the term of the “just witness” (adil şahit) is introduced and described as a person who tries to work for a positive future, as opposed to remaining passive.

¹⁹⁸ s. E-mails: 08.8.10

¹⁹⁹ „şirk“ refers to adopting polytheism by juxtaposing something or someone to God

Rather than fearing an effect on one's identity and self, the writer proposes that God will not change the lot of those who do not work for its being changed.²⁰⁰

To her mind, it does not make much sense to protest injustice on the streets yet refrain from supporting developments once they become subject to a vote. Accordingly, votes that could bring positive change should not be boycotted by stating that an Islamic perspective forbade that it was impossible to participate in a vote:

Bir şeyleri değiştirmek mümkünken, değişimi hangi mantıkla boykot edeceğiz? **“Darbeciler yargılansın!”**²⁰¹ diye eylemlerde slogan atarken, şimdi çıkıp **“Darbecileri biz yargılayamıyorsak o zaman yargılanmasın kardeşim! Darbeciler yargılansın derken ben bunu kasetmemiştim”** cılık de nesi oluyor? O zaman neden eylem yapıyoruz, neden siyasi taleplerimizi basın açıklamaları ile kamuoyuna duyuruyoruz, neden dernek, vakıf, platform kuruyoruz. Böyle bir beklentimiz yoksa, yaptığımız işte biraz akıldışı olmuyor mu???

(While there is a possibility to change some things, according to what logic will we then boycott the change? “Try the military coup leaders!” was our slogan when we took to the streets, and what does this mean now: “If we cannot try the military coup leaders, then let us not try them, brother! What does it mean to say when I said “try the military coup leaders” I did not mean this. Why do we then take to the streets, why do we present our political claims in press statements to be heard by the public, why do we found associations, platforms and foundations? If we do not expect something like this, does our work not become a little irrational?)

Moreover, she emphasises the thought that whether positive or negative, every political step will also have its effect on Muslims - even if they do not interfere with politics. To her mind, it does not make sense to ignore the current problems and wait for better times: “Ama varolanı yok sayarak, günün vaciplerini görmezden gelerek ve atılması gereken adımları atmaksızın armudun pişip ağızımıza düşmesini beklemek gülünç ve dahi abes olur.”²⁰³ (Ignoring the existing conditions and today's obligations without taking the steps that must be taken, to wait for the pear to ripen and fall into our mouths, is laughable and also senseless.)

In response to this e-mail, one of the no-supporters wrote that he did not think that they were making the public hear their claims, but rather that they were admonishing people, telling them that they were barbarians that they should repent. To his mind, the choice that many yes-supporters made between liberalism and Kemalism was being made too simply, given that being against Kemalism for them automatically meant that having to support liberalism (even though they did not entirely support it). He compared their choice by suggesting that their conclusion on the matter would equal the assumption that someone against the United States'

²⁰⁰ s. E-mails: 08.08.10

²⁰¹ Use of colours and other forms of emphasis are all the students'.

²⁰² s. E-mails: 08.08.10

²⁰³ E-mails: 08.08.10

politics, just as Saddam was, had to be in favour of Saddam. For the boycott-supporter, the fact that many Muslims perceived the amendments to the constitution as a first step to a civil constitution and future in which citizens could be heard, in which they would be able to raise and defend their claims, was more than laughable: “Kardesim bu da bir yanilsamadır ... düyanin hiç bir devletinde halkın talebi kaale alınmaz ... şu an türkiyede erk ve sermaye el değiştiriyor ... ka’le alınacak olan yeni andolu sermayesidir.”²⁰⁴ (Brother/Sister, you are going wrong on this matter ... there is no state in the world were the people’s claims are taken notice of ... right now, capital and power are only changing into other hands ... the one who is going to be taken notice of is the Anatolian capital.) From his perspective, they were falling prey to the secular state and adopting an anti-religious view by looking for more religious freedom.

How to change society?

Betül, a yes-supporter, once told me she felt that the boycott-supporters were acting as if there was a Muslim society, an Islamic constitution that they could vote for. While she believed that this idea was far from reality in their current situation, the boycott-supporters somehow “lived in their own worlds” and would not necessarily take into account the “real profits” from the Referendum. Their position seemed quite radical to me, given that they seemed to either want “everything” (an Islamic society, an Islamic constitution) at once or no improvements at all. In this respect, I once asked her whether she thought that those who were not going to vote for yes in the referendum would actually prefer a revolution, to which she replied as follows:

şimdi arkadaşlar diyor [...] bir dakika kuranın anayasası yoksa bu anayasaya “hayır” ama şimdi kuranın anayasası oluşturamıyoruz diye böyle bir mantık nasıl içinde bulunduğumuz sistemi iş yapabiliriz bu bir, iki bu arkadaşlar ciddi anlamda diyorum devrim falan düşünmüyorlar devrim düşünen insan bunları hesap eder [...] bir dakika ya ben diyelim devrim yapacağım hangi güçte yaparsak işte devrim yapacağız. Bu devrim nasıl olacak bir kere toplumsal bir devrim olması lazım toplumu uyandırmam lazım peki toplumu uyandırmak için benim neye ihtiyacım var bir kere özgürlüğe [...] üç kişinin toplandığı evleri basıyorlardı bundan birkaç yıl önceye kadar [...] bir sayıdan sonra evlere basıyorlardı. [...] şimdi telefonların dinlendiği gizli gizli birçok şeyin takip edildiği bir ülke burası. Eh sen devrim yapacaksın, nasıl yapacaksın senin telefonların dinlenirken, gittiğin her yer bilinirken bir yerde toplanmana bile izin verilmezken eylem protesto müsaade edilmezken sen hangi devrimden bahsediyorsun? Dolayısıyla çok inandırıcı gelmiyor bana. Sözde lafta devrim bunlar onların da eyleme geçmeyeceğini bilmek lazım yani.²⁰⁵

(now our friends say [...] one minute if there is no Qur’anic constitution then “No” to this constitution. Firstly, we are not able to develop a Qur’anic constitution right now, but how can we then do anything while being in this system? Secondly, these friends do not seriously think of a revolution, a person who thinks of a revolution takes all this into account [...] let’s say I want to engage in a revolution, where will I take the strength

²⁰⁴ E-mails: 10.08.10

²⁰⁵ Interview Betül 08.09.10

from to do it? How can this revolution come about? Firstly, it has to be a popular revolution and I will therefore have to wake society. Then what do I need to wake society, firstly I will need some freedoms [...] until a few years ago they raided houses [...] if there was a certain number of people. Now this is a country where your telephones are being intercepted [...] this is a country where a lot of things are secretly being kept track of. And if you want to make a revolution, how are you going to do that while your telephone is being intercepted, everywhere you go is being known and it is not allowed to meet in groups? Therefore, this does not sound very believable to me, it's revolution in words, it is important to know that they will never become reality.)

In her eyes, change and a different society did not depend on a revolution or any kind of radical step, but rather would come slowly:

yavaş yavaş olur adım adım olur küçük küçük şeyler bir bakmışız biz büyük bir şeye taşımışız. Bu böyledir. Hiçbir zaman zaten Allah der ki bir toplum kendini değiştirmedikçe Allah o toplumu değiştirmez ilk önce toplum kendini değiştirmeye talep edecek diyecek ya ben daha iyi bir toplum olmak istiyorum daha iyi bir yere gelmek istiyorum ondan sonra da Allah yardım eder zaten. Biz buna iman ediyoruz zaten. O yüzden çok şey gelmiyor bu söylemler bana çok doğru gelmiyor açıkçası.²⁰⁶

(It will come slowly, step by step and in small things and then we will suddenly see that we have achieved something great. It is like this. God says that he will not change a people unless that people first claims to change itself and says we want to become a better people, we want to achieve something! - Then God will of course help. We believe in this. These slogans - frankly spoken – do not seem to be right to me.)

Therefore, while the boycott supporters initially seem to endorse a more radical position and appear less accessible to discussion and negotiations, it is the yes supporters who would opt for a slow transformation of society and real change. The fact that a revolution or any sort of uprising is rather unthinkable prompts the boycott supporters to appear somewhat passive regarding societal engagement. Accordingly, the same informant (a fervent yes supporter) told me: “ben bunlari radikal olarak görmüyorum gerçekten radikal olan biziz.”²⁰⁷ (I don't see them as radical, the radicals - that's us.)

In contrast, the no-supporters entirely refuse to participate in democratic processes and thus can be said to have arranged themselves with the situation of their lives, the prohibitions that corner their possibilities and deprive them of profiting from basic facilities, such as school education and a say in politics. Indeed, a quote from one of the no-supporters illustrates how much Muslims thinking like him have become accustomed to their life in opposition to the state: “Karaman ve benzeri müslümanların savunduğu bu fikre göre islamı yaşamak ibadetleri serbest yaşamak olarak algılanıyor. Oysa ki din bu değildir. [...] Dini rahat yaşamak diye bir

²⁰⁶ Interview Betül 08.09.10

²⁰⁷ Interview Betül 08.09.10

önerme de kabul edilemez, çünkü din rahat yaşanamaz.....”²⁰⁸(Karaman and similar Muslims defend the idea that living according to Islam is the same as the free exercise of religion. However, this is not what religion is. [...] A proposal of an easier exercise of religion cannot be accepted, as religion cannot be lived easily.)

With Asad, it is possible to perceive the yes supporters as the more daring group among the Muslims, because they go public with their convictions and liberate themselves from the private sphere. However, it is questionable whether their engagement will have his proposed results for religious politics:

When religion becomes an integral part of modern politics, it is not indifferent to debates about how the economy should be run, or which scientific projects should be publicly funded, or what the broader aims of a national education system should be. The legitimate entry of religion into these debates results in the creation of modern “hybrids”: the principle of structural differentiation – according to which religion, economy, education and science are located in autonomous social spaces – no longer holds. [...] ²⁰⁹

For many of the yes-supporters, the referendum was only a position that they had garnered, and was helping them to prepare further changes and developments. The amendments themselves did not change the constitution as such; they still saw it as a Kemalist (and anti-religious) constitution and defended the “yetmez ama evet” campaign: “benim anlatmak istediğim buna şimdi evet demek ama bunu yaptıktan sonra pasifleşmemek ve görevimi yaptım psikolojisine girmemek.”²¹⁰ (What I want to say is that we should say yes to this now, but after doing it we should not become passive and psychologically be in a state of having done one’s duty.)

Their present ambitions were predominantly to keep going, while none of their actions and current plans aimed at a particular form of state, and indeed, the subject itself was seldom touched upon, if ever. I once asked another girl what sort of polity she would prefer, to which she responded at the time that she was not really sure, yet that she thought that a social democracy might be the fairest polity. In one of the group’s meetings, another girl stated that she had heard that a social democracy was often said to be closest to an Islamic polity. However, another participant in the discussion told her that a social democracy was not an Islamic polity. For instance, there were not many rules concerning what was necessary for an Islamic polity regarding its leader; however, there was no rule according to which a social democracy was the solution.

²⁰⁸ E-mails: 08.08.2010

²⁰⁹ Asad (2003:182)

²¹⁰ E-mails: 10.08.10

These brief remarks on the “perfect” state indicate that no one seemed to have the Islamic solution for a perfect state. Despite some thoughts on an Islamic polity or Islamic social democracy, these remained rather diffuse, and the “perfect” state simply did not matter to them. Perfection (the achievement of some sort of utopia) in a political sense was nothing that they aspired towards; moreover, their aspirations for the future were rather flexible and negotiable.

For now, the idea of hybrid institutions can thus be suspended. However, this suspension is quite different from the reasons for which Asad would give up the idea of hybrid institutions and new religious societies. In his opinion, it is unlikely that any society in our secularised world would undergo radical changes from a secular to religious society, as:

[...] the public [...] is notoriously diverse. Modern citizens don't subscribe to a unitary moral system – moral heterogeneity is said to be one of modern society's defining characteristics (even if the modern state does promote a particular ethical outlook). The puzzle here is how a deprivatized religion can appeal effectively to the consciences of those who don't accept its values.²¹¹

However, regarding the student group, it is unnecessary to think that they would not be able to appeal to people of other mindsets, rather they would have a hard time convincing each other of a unitarian moral system. Most of the students in the group considered their diversity in opinions positively and the status quo of their activism as very important to them, with the above mentioned informant consequently telling me: “Amacımız devrim olmamalı ilk önce. Zaten ilk önce biz toplumu değiştirelim sonra devrim mir olur sistem mi değişir, devlet mi yıkılır o ondan sonra düşüneceğimiz iş [...]”²¹² (“A revolution should not be our aim right now. First of all, let's change society and the question then is whether there might be a revolution, whether the system might change, whether the state might collapse - we will think about that later.”)

Moreover, their main and much more immediate concern is to find arguments providing the reasonability of engaging in societal change in society just as it is.

While the boycott supporters' option concerning these issues might be one of passiveness and estrangement from majority society, despite the referendum debate shedding light on the ideas of the boycott-supporters and a sort of passiveness and resignation within the group, the group is generally anything but passive. Indeed, both parts of the group, the yes and the boycott supporters, were active members and discussants of political and religious issues. When

²¹¹ Asad (2003: 186)

²¹² Interview Betül 08.09.10

considering the violence and force exercised by secular societies to protect secular structures, all of the students questioned the general assumption that secularism held promises of everlasting peace and religious freedom; indeed, they all thought that it was time and perfectly legitimate for Muslims to imagine other peaceful concepts of society. However, in terms of participating in politics, one might suggest that the fear of becoming secular by taking an active role in the secular political system deterred them from participating in the referendum. Moreover, the pain and segregation induced by the secular state might have also reflected a reason for their decision to boycott the referendum.

To gain a better understanding of the moral and ethical attitudes that underlie some of the arguments brought forward in the referendum, it is useful to consider the use of Qur'anic expressions in the debate. The characteristics described as Islamic by the students provide the fundamental basis for their criticism of the secular state. Given that the moral and ethical behaviour of the group can be seen in contrast with majority of society's secular behaviour, the accomplishment of certain moral attitudes can be seen as constituting the core of their critique regarding secularism.

3.2 Qur'anic Verses and their Use in the Discussion

Cultivating Language and Mores

White has analysed the seemingly unstoppable success of the AKP during the past decade as based on the use of an idiom that was Muslim, yet more importantly familiar and trustworthy. In her view, Islamists had succeeded in creating and penetrating interpersonal relations and intertwining local networks “united within a complex set of norms of mutual obligation”²¹³ by using a Muslim language. Her analysis and comparison with secular parties' unsuccessful efforts to win the support of Muslim masses also shows the tremendous force of this particular moral and political language. Language and the way it is used matters. The more sensitive an issue, the more important it is for people to find a way with words. While words in politics (and elsewhere) can be used to generate trust and convey a familiarity, they can also serve entirely different ends when used in disputes. For instance, words can upset people and injure, or show understanding and consent. Moreover, they can subtly hint at differences or expose them bluntly. These differences and effects are not only confined to settings in which Muslims and secularists oppose each another (although they might surface in more pronounced ways

²¹³ White (2002: 20)

in such settings), but also in “homogenous” Muslim settings. For instance, the observance of religious dogma can be a subject of discussion as one of the students explained with regard to the importance of ritual washings (3.1). The question of whether ritual washings should be given a central place in debate on religious and ethical behaviour can work as a decisive line between different Muslim understandings. Though the idiom people refer to in their discussion is Muslim as the issues in debate are Islamic, particular positions in these discussions generate different understandings as such.

The case of referring to “one idiom” and accepting it as the trustworthy, familiar and perhaps more importantly relevant idiom has been discussed in discursive psychology. An Muslim idiom would here be understood as an ideology that is every-day common sense one involuntarily refers to when talking about Islam or politics. As Michael Billig (1995) and Sara Mills (1997) have pointed out this understanding of ideology has to be distinguished from a Marxian or Gramscian understanding of ideology that sees ideology as a dominant form of rhetoric that enables to rule over the masses²¹⁴ or sees the individual as incapable of thinking beyond inherited understandings of philosophy that carry particular hierarchies in them.²¹⁵ The understanding that underlies Billig’s understanding of discursive psychology is based on Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov’s work. Bakhtin and Volosinov have argued that language should not be understood as fixed a relationship between abstract signs, but as dialogic utterances that draw on culturally and historically available terms. In this sense, Billig suggests that

Individuals, when they speak, do not create their own language, but they use terms which are culturally, historically and ideologically available. Each act of utterance, although in itself novel, carries an ideological history. As Volosinov stressed in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, social psychologists, by investigating acts of utterance, should be studying ideology. An ideology comprises the ways of thinking and behaving within a given society which make the ways of that society seem ‘natural’ or unquestioned to its members (Eagleton, 1991). In this way, ideology is the common-sense of the society.²¹⁶

However, making use of terms that reproduce the common-sense of society does not mean that a speaking person only reiterates ideology. In Billig’s words “the thinker can be represented as the slave of previous thoughts or the heroic formulator of thinking. Again, the paradox is more convincing than its theoretical dissolution.”²¹⁷

²¹⁴s. Billig (1991: 5)

²¹⁵ s. Billig (1991: 6/7)

²¹⁶ Billig (2001:217)

²¹⁷ Billig (1991: 9)

In line with this the students' use of a marked Muslim idiom was nothing incidental, yet can be said to be trained and cultivated in the group. One such example of cultivating a sense for an Muslim language use can be seen in the students' seminars on Qur'anic terms in which I participated. The discussion of particular terms was usually meant to provide an occasion for reflecting one's behaviour and attitude, and learning from the original meaning of the word to reassess one's behaviour and reflect upon it concerning its meaning.

In these examples the speakers had to depend on the common-sense and repeat ideology, but they also had the competence to question or alter ideology. This basically happens in argumentation, when speakers give their opinion on subjects²¹⁸. Giving opinions and arguing in dialogic ways is "thinking in action". For Billig "Thinking is to be observed in action in discussions, in the rhetorical cut-and-thrust of argumentation. To deliberate upon an issue is to argue with oneself, even to persuade oneself."²¹⁹ Moreover, he contends that utterances of ideology are 'dilemmatic', meaning that the maxims that are proposed in certain ideological utterances might oppose each other. The fact that these propositions may be contradictory and dilemmatic enables argumentation and discussion.

In an effort to link Asad's understanding of Islam as a discursive tradition it is possible to understand particular Islamic or Qur'anic precepts as dilemmatic and thus enabling discussion and argumentation. For instance, particular Qur'anic verses, in the students' environment part of the common-sense, at times were used to aggressively assault on others' convictions and at other times were used to patch up conflicts in the group. Both variants could be observed in the referendum debate and provide a detailed insight into how the Muslim idiom is used and regulated to maintain solidarity within the group. In this regard, the referendum debate can be considered to reveal many insights into dynamics of Muslim groups, intergroup behaviour and aspired ideals. The strategies of stating one's opinion and arguing over issues can be said to be historic and cultural and might differ with regard to the ideologies they discuss and that underly the behaviour and attitudes particular values are understood to be advocating. Qur'anic verses in this context are of special interest, as they are perceived to be the common-sense in essence. However, their dilemmatic status shows that Qur'anic verses or their use in discussion are not always commonly accepted. Moreover, the use of Qur'anic verses can stand in opposition to other values that are part of the common-sense and thus become subject of

²¹⁸ s. Billig (1991: 16)

²¹⁹ Billig (1991: 17)

negotiation and argumentation as an analysis of the use of Qur'anic verses will show in the following.

Criticism and Critique

Just as stated by Ahmet Altan, the referendum debate has touched on very sensitive issues and often divided groups that were previously perceived as monolithic ideological blocks. Tacitly ignored differences and divisions within groups now became visible over an issue that was perceived to point the way for future debates and what it meant to be Muslim/secular/Kurdish from now on. For the students, these differences surfaced in the discussions about the referendum and particularly in their use of Qura'anic verses. At some point in the debate, the use of Qur'anic verses had become central to the discussion, with the arguments backed by these verses strongly implying that particular perspectives were not derived from an Islamic understanding. One of the discussants who recognised the negative effect of this problem at the beginning of the debate wrote: “Bu nedenle kavramlarımızı kullanırken, birbirimize karşı argüman üretirken Allah'ın otoritesini yok saydığımızı ima ve de iddia eden yazılardan uzak durmanın daha isabetli olduğunu düşünüyorum.”²²⁰(Therefore, let us refrain from allusions and claims that allude to someone's ignoring God's authority when using terms and developing arguments against one another. I think this is much more appropriate.)

However, the boycott-supporters' claim of defending the only perspective in accord with God's laws grew even fiercer with some of the yes-supporters trying to defend themselves by stating that it was unfair to claim that the boycott was “farz” (a religious duty)²²¹ Some of the yes-supporters even saw the use of Qur'anic verses and Ahadith as problematic as such:

Ayrıca, arkadaşlar savunduğunuz bir şeyi ayetlerle kuvvetlendirmeye çalışıyorsunuz fakat öyle bir tablo ki herkes Kur'an'dan referans alıyor ama yüzseksen derece farklı şeyler söylüyor. İmam Ali haricilere elçi gönderirken "Onlara ayetlerle gitme, onlar da sana ayetle cevap verirler. Sünnetten haber ver." demişti. Dolayısıyla havada uçuşan bu ayetleri bağlamına oturtmak okuyucu için sıkıntılı zor bir iş oluyor, hatırlatmak istiyorum.²²²

(Moreover, friends you are trying to defend your arguments by strengthening them with Qur'anic verses, but right now our situation is that everyone references the Qur'an and states something that totally opposes someone else's statement. When Imam Ali sent a messenger to the Kharijites, he told him “Do not go to them with verses, they will also reply with verses. Tell them about the Sunnah.” Therefore, I want to remind you that it is a difficult and problematic piece of work for the reader to put the verses into context that are flying through the air.)

²²⁰ E-mails: 09.08.10

²²¹ E-mails: 11.08.10

²²² E-mails: 09.08.10

However, these admonitions only came from the group of yes-supporters, when considering the arguments of the boycott-supporters it seems clear that their main argument, which is entirely based on the authority of God, is inseparable from Qur'anic verses. There is no way of writing in favour of a boycott without this main argument and the accusation inherent to this argument that the yes-supporters are downsizing God's authority and giving credit to another authority (the state) next to him.

This conflict over the correct use of Qur'anic verses implies three difficulties. Firstly, the problem that needs to be distinguished in this context is the question of which Qur'anic verse and Hadith are applicable to the current political situation. Whereas the yes supporters clearly saw all the verses that tell the believer to be just and prevent injustice as viable, the boycott-supporters rather considered those Qur'anic verses and Ahadith as appropriate for the case that tells the believer not to accept any authority besides God's authority.

Secondly, putting aside technical aspects of applicable verses, from the discussants' perspective, the most virulent problem here was not to injure others and devalue their beliefs. The solidarity in the group and the notion that all believers should ideally act together and respect one another was important to all the students in the group, although only the yes supporters voiced concerns in this debate.

However, thirdly, as mentioned above, the use of Qur'anic verses was central to the boycott-supporters' argument, and they could not have done without it. By referring to the authority of the Qur'an, they established an uncompromising claim that somewhat removed their argument from the realm of discussion and debate, given that the alleged superiority of their argument (in its most radical version) would denounce anyone who would not follow it as acting against an Islamic obligation. Therefore, their argument as such can be regarded as problematic.

The boycott supporters' harsh form of criticism was not only very likely to provoke equally radical reactions, but also has to be pre-eminently seen as a derogatory judgment. As Asad explains, this mode of criticism can be understood as:

[...] a multitude of activities. To judge, to censure, to reproach, to find fault, to mock, to evaluate, to construe, to diagnose – each of these critical actions relates persons to one another in a variety of affective ways. [...] One should be sceptical, therefore, of the claim that 'criticism' is aligned in any simple way with 'freedom'.²²³

This concept of criticism illustrates the asymmetrical relationship suggested by the boycott supporters in stating that a boycott was "farz" and those opting for yes were acting against

²²³ Butler (2009: 110)

religious prescriptions, with accusations of the sort not far from implying someone selling their beliefs, or worse, declining them. Indeed, their use of free speech and criticism posed a threat to the group's cohesion in the sense that their claim was so categorical that it could have split the group.

For this reason, freedom of expression can be said to be an especially sensitive matter. Here, free speech acquires a quality of condemnation and denunciation that – if enforceable – could have silenced heterogenous views in favour of a monolithic and authoritarian understanding of the debate. Ironically, our understanding of free speech as opposed to authoritarian views becomes inversed here. However, the freedom of expression has always been tied to restrictions regarding obscenity, sedition and the like, which possibly enable debate itself.²²⁴ In this debate, the students also established a way of regulating the discussion by pointing to possible insults and injuries that might reflect the consequence of arguments that are too harsh. Therefore, perhaps (and because it would have become ridiculous at some point) the boycott supporters never really pointed at the yes supporters accusing them of blasphemy; rather, they were simply confined to implying that their opinions might lead them to breaking religious obligations.

When observing the yes supporters and their involvement with politics, it became clear that their arguments were based on a religious attitude that gave group cohesion a central place in their societal engagement. Their focus was not so much on a religious dogma than on the effects of the debate on their group from a social aspect. Therefore, the use of Qur'anic verses upset them: "sonra ne olacak ayetler ve hadisler üzerinden sen haklısın o haklı kavgasına gidilecek"²²⁵ (what will happen later is that we will have fights on who is right over Hadith and verses). This situation clearly endangered to the groups' cohesion, which led one of the participants to write: o zaman bende şunu mu söylemem gerekir "şer görünenlerde hayır, hayır görünenlerde şer olabilir siz bilemezsiniz, doğruyu ancak hakkıyla Allah bilir"²²⁶ (therefore, should I say that "those who seem to be evil might be the benefacted and those who seem to be benefacted might be the evil, you cannot know, only God knows the truth")²²⁷ Another writer had earlier stated that "Bu anlamda da kendisini daha fazla islama nispet etme çabalarını çok anlamlı bulmuyorum."²²⁸ (In this sense, I do not think that it makes much sense to struggle to be even more Islamic.)

²²⁴ s. Asad (2009:)

²²⁵ E-mails: 11.08.2010

²²⁶ E-mails: 11.08.2010

²²⁷ E-mails: 11.08.2010

²²⁸ E-mails: 08.08.2010

These arguments over the use of Qura'anic verses can be analysed in two ways. In a sense, the discussion seemed to have reached a point where there was no further possibility to argue for an ultimate truth with Qur'anic verses, because both parties (the yes and the boycott supporters) would not have wanted to expose their group to the danger of falling apart. One point that certainly underlined this for the boycott supporters is that they did not continue to write on the subject, with the discussion itself coming to an end after it had become clear that further words were only going to injure rather than convince others. However, a way of resolving the issue in discussion was never explicitly stated (although implied by the aforementioned reactions), as one of my informants explained that it lay in retreating to the diversity of Islam. This meant leaving the truth and falsehood of certain statements to God's judgment, which in detail means:

Bazı konular cennet cehennem, işte namaz falan, bunlar tartışılmaz zaten. Bunları hepimiz biliyoruz ama hayatın içinde olup da kuranda net bir karşılığı olmayan ama böyle yapın şöyle yapın denilen bazı konular vardır. Bunlar metod geliştirilmesi lazım. Birileri der ki biz buna nasıl bir cevap üretelim. Bizim mezhepler bundan oluşmuştur. [...] bu farz bir konu değil bu cennet cehennem gibi ya kardeşim bu tartışılmaz [...] bir konu değil. Burada ihtilaflar olabilir [...] muhalif insanlar olabilir ya ben böyle düşünüyorum bu benim metodum bu senin metodun bu diyebilirler insanlar.²²⁹

(Some subjects like paradise and hell and prayers cannot be subject to discussion. We all know these. However, in life there are some subjects that cannot be precisely referenced to the Qur'an, but there are some instructions as to what is to be done. For these cases, one has to develop a method. Some people said what sort of answer we should develop to this. Our "schools" have developed from this. [...] This [the referendum] is no matter of obligation like paradise and hell such that it could not be discussed. These can be subject of controversy [...] there can be people who oppose one another. I think this way, this is my method and this is your method. People can say this is your method.)

By explaining the ways in which a conclusion to certain problems might be reached, the student clearly refrained from judgments, yet pointed that there might be opposing opinions. This understanding of diversity and the room that the discussants offer for dissenting opinions is based on an entirely different understanding of critique and exchange of opinions than Asad's understanding, which might be based on Judith Butler's distinction between criticism and critique. To her, the distinction between criticism and critique is important, describing entirely different activities. Whereas "[c]riticism usually takes an object [...] critique is concerned to identify the conditions of possibility under which a domain of objects appears."²³⁰

²²⁹ Interview Betül 08.09.10

²³⁰ Butler (2009: 108/109)

She explains her own understanding of “critique” with reference to Williams and Adorno, suggesting that it should not be restricted to fault-finding or judgment, but should rather be a practice of questioning taken-for-granted sensibilities. While Chakravorty-Spivak considers critique as being connected to an existential condition that has to have a subject vital to our survival, Benjamin proposes that “critique [should] seek[...] the truth content of a work of art;”²³¹ Finally, for Foucault, critique is an “attitude” and an “ethos”, “orders of rationality, regimes that succeed and converge with one another.”²³²

Drawing on all such perceptions of critique, Butler concludes that:

If critique within modern critical theory requires the object whose conditions of possibility it seeks to know (Spivak), or stands in an alchemical relation to the object to which it is related (Benjamin), or is finally an “attitude” and “ethos” (Foucault), then perhaps it is not primary or fundamentally about judgment. Even in Kant, it is important to note that critique is not precisely a judgment, but an inquiry into the conditions of possibility that make judgment possible. That inquiry is, and must be, separate from judgment itself.²³³

Considering the difference between criticism and critique, it becomes evident that it might not be critique as an effort to understand and explore particular taken-for-granted sensibilities and practises that causes destructive conflicts; rather, the harsh judgments adopted by some of the boycott supporters could reflect the reason for serious conflict. The yes supporters’ fierce defence of their argument also added fuel to the flames, and although their argument did not have the exclusionary character of the no-supporters, the sensitive actions of some on both sides - remaining silent after a certain point and/or admonishing the others of taking care not to insult others - was crucial for the group’s integrity. Therefore, even if the group came close to making use of Asad’s criticism, the conflict-managing abilities of others and their efforts to restrict themselves to critique prevented a discussion that could have caused the group to fall apart.

Ethics and Silence

The room for critique and a denouncement of criticism through ideology is not the only matter of interest in this debate. Equally interesting is the students’ retreat to a “diversity of Islam” which does not come into effect by pronouncing it in the debate. Instead this retreat to a “diversity of Islam” was being pronounced by two very different strategies of protecting it. The first strategy was that of asking the fellow discussants to omit the use of Qur’anic verses

²³¹ Butler (2009: 110)

²³² Butler (2009: 113)

²³³ Butler (2009: 114/115)

and the other was to remain silent instead of insisting on a particular viewpoint. By discarding the use of Qur'anic verses a gap is created. A part of the ideology the discussants usually refer to can be imagined as a gap on the map of useful expressions they might refer to. This does not mean that Qur'anic verses might not be used in other discussions however, for the time being the common-sense is structured around certain gaps. Everyone's argumentation has to work around and with these gaps. The same happens when participants in the discussion decide to refrain from further comments. Their silence can be understood as a gap in the discussion as their silence is certainly recognised by other discussants. Given that the discussion took place in a written form on the e-mail group the contributions to the discussion were not necessarily (seen) as responding to the previous writer, but could point out any relevant argument mentioned only recently or already some time ago. This way what evolves is not so much a sequence of arguments brought forward to criticize or respond to previous arguments. Rather one could imagine the evolving idea about the discussion as the image of a tag cloud on which particular writers form a group and stick out more prominently when more people share their opinions. Time does not efface their contributions, but the e-mail group records if there have been developments or updates to particular opinions. If someone remains silent for some time his or her silence will be recognised with his particular argument retreating to the background.

Discourse analysts as well anthropologists have pointed to gaps and silences in conversation, discussion and debate before. Billig understands gaps to be made up of what is left unsaid or thought to be beyond controversy.²³⁴ Deborah Tannen has shown that silence can mean very different things in conversation. According to her "silence and volubility, too, cannot be taken to 'mean' power or powerlessness, domination or subjugation. Rather, both may imply either power or solidarity, depending on the criteria discussed."²³⁵ Billig's and Tannen's interpretation of silence do apply to the students' discussion and their abandonment of Qur'anic verses. Certainly the reasons for abandoning the verses from the discussion had something to do with the feeling of discussing something beyond controversy, as the Qur'anic verses could have easily been devalued in a discussion in which they did not seem to help appease the controversy. Moreover, by "forcing" the boycott-supporters to remain silent the yes-supporters could be said to have shown their power in the discussion. However, the boycott-supporters' retreat into silence was in accord with the yes-supporters. They did not complain over the restrictions imposed on the discussion, but accepted that a continuation of

²³⁴ s. Billig (2001: 220)

²³⁵ Tannen (2001: 159)

the discussion would have led to gross disagreements. Therefore they accepted the gap regarding Qur'anic verses in their discussion and remained silent. These gaps and silences remained palpable during the discussion and reminded the participants in the discussion of their sensitive nature and that those gaps should be avoided. The diversity of Islam in this discussion can therefore be said to be based on a particular form of silence and the creation of gaps through silence. With reference to Marilyn Strathern (1991) Pnina Werbner has described these forms of silence as "methodological silences": "As Strathern points out, no representation, however complex and apparently exhaustive, is ever complete; there are always, in principle, further gaps to be filled, described or explained. In this sense all knowledge is partial, and replete with silences."²³⁶

In line with this it was clear to the students that no truth can ever be complete since the diversity of Islamic viewpoints does not allow for one single truth. The gaps in any discussion might be methodological in the sense that particular sensibilities or argumentations might be overlooked, but they are also methodological in a different sense when silences and gaps are knowingly created given that knowledge comes along with methodological silence anyway.

As the students use silences and gaps consciously rather than inadvertently it is possible to say that these silences have an ethical quality. The boycott-supporter's silence can be regarded as ethical because their silence is valued more by the group and considered to be better than their actual viewpoint. In a sense their silence obscures their political viewpoint. One can no longer know what they actually think, but this silence might help them to articulate their viewpoint in a different way, as Bhabha proposes for Aila in Nadine Gordimer's "My Son's Story" :

The complexity of this statement will become clearer when I remind you of the stillness of time through which Aila surreptitiously and subversively interrupts the on-going presence of political activity, using her interstitial role, her domestic world to both 'obscure' her political role and to articulate it the better.²³⁷

Gaps of silence are not only "silent spots", but in fact articulate something, a particular attitude that is no longer the one that was (perhaps aggressively) articulated at an earlier point of the discussion, but a different one that can be imagined as aesthetic in its stillness and the retaining of a still composure. In this sense Bhabha's analysis of "My Sons's Story" gives some insight to the silences in students' discussion:

²³⁶ Werbner (: 245)

²³⁷ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 21/22)

The aesthetic image discloses an ethical time of narration because, Levinas writes, ‘the real world appears in the image as it were between parentheses.’ Like the outer edges of Aila’s hands holding her enigmatic testimony, like 124 Bluestone Road which is a fully realized presence haunted by undecipherable languages, Levina’s parenthetical perspective is also an ethical view. It effects an ‘externality of the inward’ as the very enunciative position of the historical and narrative subject, ‘introducing into the heart of subjectivity a radical and anarchical reference to the other which in fact constitutes the inwardness of the subject.’²³⁸

Respect and Silence

These processes of negotiating the rules of discussion within the group represent an important indicator for understanding the student group’s character and how it is shaped by Islamic understandings. In fact, many of the norms, values and Qur’anic terms discussed during their theory lessons lay at the base of their behaviour in debates. The discussion of particular terms was usually meant to provide an occasion reflecting one’s behaviour and attitude, and learning from the original meaning of the word to reassess one’s behaviour and reflect upon it concerning its meaning. In this regard, the discussion of Qur’anic verses can be seen as the students’ way of reflecting mores and ethics. Silence, as in the referendum debate, also played an important role in the discussion of intergroup ethics. For instance, in one of their theory seminars, the group discussed the Qur’anic term of *isâr*, a term that signifies solidarity and support for others (even when one is in need oneself). Regarding this term, the students discussed the conditions of solidarity and support for other Muslim groups with a differing understanding of Islam.

In their understanding, other Muslim groups also had to be supported when they were having problems or doing wrong in the sense that their wrongdoings should not be exposed to the rest of society. Even if there was a serious problem, the aim should be not to lower them in the view of others. Therefore, the main effort was to maintain silence over differences if they were not going to be sensibly discussed, even if they were annoying and disconcerting.

In her discussion of essentialism Werbner has pointed to another form of silence that might be helpful to understand the silence that is in discussion here. She calls this particular form of silence “ethnic silence”. The concept of ethnic silence in her example refers to the heterogenous, but ethnically defined group of “Asians” in Britain. To Werbner ethnic silence has to be distinguished from racial silence. Whereas racial silence is a silence of oppression through racism that essentialises particular groups in society, ethnic silence within the heterogenous group of Asians (comprising Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Indians, Pakistanis,

²³⁸ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 22)

Bangladeshis, Punjabis, Gujeratis and Sindhis) is different. The silence that the term Asian evokes by neglecting particular identities as the afore mentioned ones is not oppressive, but “Here the dynamics of fission and fusion rather than of a single dominant cleavage are the main operators, the ‘voices’ and ‘silences’ the product of relationally objectified ethnic segmentary oppositions rather than of violent, reified suppressions.”²³⁹ This form of ethnic silence can perhaps also be understood as a form of solidarity and wanted cohesion in contrast to argument and fission, as the students would have supported.

For them, at the intergroup level, the aspect of showing reserve concerning criticism (as shown in the debate) was not only meant to prevent the injury and insult of people in order to maintain group cohesion, but had gained the significance of preventing a loss of face (for either only the concerned group, or perhaps even Muslims in Turkey as such). Conflicts that would be discussed in light of the (non-Muslim) public could either distance the groups from one another (for reasons of hurt or insulted feelings in discussion) or lead to a negative image of Muslims in society.

The importance of preventing people’s being injured by remaining silent keeps together people who can share diametrically opposite opinions, and can also foster communication and cooperation between groups who would otherwise be very likely to distance themselves from each other.²⁴⁰ By avoiding estrangement and distance, the possibility of exchange on important issues becomes much easier than in cases where particular groups detest one another. The ability to recognise difference and prevent conflict is central to a close connection between Muslim groups who often perceive themselves as sharing so many values and do not want small issues to come between them.

However, the term of *isâr* and ways of supporting other groups by remaining silent about their problems and faults was not only perceived as positive in their discussion. Furthermore, remaining silent over annoying and disconcerting issues also prompted them to think about the potential problems caused if important criticism was held back. A corruption of Muslim communities due to their solidarity and silence regarding others’ faults seemed to be a crucial problem that needed to be dealt with very sensitively. It was made clear in the discussion of the term *isâr* that the difference between raising critique (thus furthering dialogue and development in the group) and insulting one another was difficult to separate, and even more so to deal with. The goal of showing solidarity with one another should not lead to muting a

²³⁹ Werbner (1997: 244)

²⁴⁰ A phenomenon that could probably be understood with Bauer’s concept of cultural ambiguity, that I have used to understand debates on ethnic and religious diversity in chapter 3

critique that could be important to upholding a vivid and positive development within the group. Therefore, from their perspective, free speech required a particular sensitivity in order not to become a threat to their unity as Muslims.

The notion that remaining silent is sometimes not as easy as one might suppose can be seen in various examples, with the most prominent being the Abu-Zayd case. This reflects an example of an incident in which a religious court had to deal with the liberal views of an Egyptian theologian who had not remained silent for the sake of group cohesion (or perhaps was not aware of the effects of his work). Nasr Abu Zayd's Phd thesis was rejected in Egypt in 1992 on the grounds that it contained ideas that led others scholars to perceive him as an apostate. Irrespective of the content of his work and the fact that Abu-Zayd considered himself a believing Muslim, Asad explains the lawyer al-Awwa's verdict on the case²⁴¹: "Freedom of belief means the right of every human being to embrace whatever ideas and doctrines he wishes, even if they conflict with those of the group in which he lives or to which he belongs, or conflicts with what the majority of its members regard as true."²⁴² In al-Awwa's opinion, "the right to think whatever one wishes does not, however, include the right to express one's religious or moral beliefs publicly with the intention of converting people to a false commitment."²⁴³ Consequently, he was declared an apostate, from which Asad concludes that "for the community, what matters is the Muslim subject's social practices – including verbal publication – not her internal thoughts, whatever these might be."²⁴⁴ Moreover:

Disbelief incurs no legal punishment; even the Qur'an stipulates no worldly punishment for disbelief. In the classical law, punishment for apostasy is justified on the grounds of its political and social consequences, not of entertaining false doctrine itself. Put another way, insofar as the law concerns itself with disbelief, it is not as a matter of its propositional untruth but of a solemn social relationship being openly repudiated ("being unfaithful"). Legally, apostasy (*ridda, kufr*) can therefore be established only on the basis of the functioning of external signs (including public speech or writing, publicly visible behaviour), never on the basis of inferred or forcibly extracted internal belief.²⁴⁵

The Abu-Zayd Case very clearly exemplifies that a person's thoughts and ideas do not have to be in accord with those of the majority society; however, in case society might not (yet) be open to particular ideas or be in conflict over particular ideas, not only criticism but also critique might be muted. While this logic might have been driven too far in the case of Abu-Zayd, the verdict shows an extreme case of what might happen when silence is not observed

²⁴¹ Asad (2009: 40)

²⁴² Asad (2009: 40)

²⁴³ Asad (2009: 40)

²⁴⁴ Asad (2009: 40)

²⁴⁵ Asad (2009: 43)

concerning specific subjects, and particularly if a certain group of scholars perceive a person's statements as an attempt to convert people to false commitments or bring up wrong ideas.

The problem posed by the concept of *isār* as discussed under this particular issue can be seen as twofold. On the one hand, it might give people the opportunity of developing very heterogeneous thoughts and still conceive of themselves as one community or society protected by its solidarity, and on the other hand, it might be at the origin of muted critique and extreme cases, and even oppression.

In case one suspected that the student group suffered from silenced critique or suppressed anger, it might be important to once again ask "what kept people from refraining to accuse each other of blasphemy in their discussion?" From my perspective and the way in which I got to know the students, the most important aspect might have been the friendship that lay at the base of their group - but perhaps more importantly, the mutual respect that they felt for each other and their ideological positions. They would naturally complain about the others' perspectives or even voice their deception once among people who shared their opinion, as I indeed observed on Facebook or in chats over the issue within smaller groups of people, yet they would never make it an issue to be raised and discussed once the conflict had become clear.

Accordingly, insult, injury and criticism would not have been accepted by most in the group, and Butler's analysis of *isā' ah* (insult and/or injury)²⁴⁶ in the context of criticism suggests something similar. Regarding secular criticism of Islam, Butler suggests that criticism – under the pretext of free speech - occurs when there is no respect between particular groups of people in society:

So the critical question that emerges is whether ways of life that are based on dispossession in transcendence (and implicit critique of self-ownership) are legible and worthy of respect. It is then less a legal question than broader question of the conditions of cohabitation for peoples whose fundamental conceptions of subjective life divide between those that accept established secular grounds and those at odds with secular presumptions [...].²⁴⁷

In Butler's view, it is important to understand that free speech is sometimes confused with violence, and she asks: "Is the freedom in free speech the same as the freedom to be protected from violence, or are these two different valences of freedom? Under what conditions does freedom of speech become freedom to hate?"²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Butler (2009: 118/119)

²⁴⁷ Butler (2009: 119)

²⁴⁸ Butler (2009: 126/127)

When considering the heterogeneity of the group and that no-one bore a grudge against the other once the referendum was over, it becomes clear that the respect for each other held them from free speech that could have been considered verbal violence. Despite people being brought close to one another in the group, the experience of heterogeneity as such is probably something that they are well-trained in, given that they constantly meet, work and discuss with people of even more heterogenous worldviews in Istanbul.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that silence and respect bring to heterogenous groups, one aspect Butler brings forward against violent forms of free speech is important to understand what free speech can do in a heterogenous group. They might - as the student group could have - fall into conflicts they will not recover from, or they might simply give precedence to authoritarian views that the majority of a group or people entertains and subsequently cannot be challenged due to being protected as free speech. Such forms of free speech can become particularly dangerous if sanctioned and fostered by the state.

The question of whether free speech is legitimate and the state has to defend provocative speech, art and even insult in a particular case should be guided by a critical observation of the state's purposes when defending certain rights to serve particular policies, thereby treating parts of the population differently from others.

Accordingly, Butler concludes that:

There may be no legal way to “manage risk,” but that is no reason why this instrumentalization should not become the focus of critical analysis and political opposition. To understand when and where the claim of free speech is robust, we have to ask, “If we point this out, and maintain a critical and public relation to this particular prerogative of state power, is our speech still protected?” If it is still protected, then free speech is an active part of democratic contestations and political struggles. If it is not, we must militate against its restriction, differential application, and instrumentalization for nondemocratic ends.²⁴⁹

In this sense, the student group can be seen as one that voices its critique and consciously debates whether certain forms of critique can be considered insult or injury. The sensitive handling of situations in which criticism and dogmatic ideals of religious obligations upholds free speech and reflects a means of management and balance-keeping to hold the group together. This attitude is not a naïve attitude that is not being reflected within the group, but rather is recognised regarding its problems and is meant to stabilise the group's heterogenous making.

²⁴⁹ Butler (2009: 132/133)

In a sense, the students' understanding of how to act in a group can be considered a critique of secularism itself, given that they maintain their standards in opposition of those displayed in majority society, where anything might be said by anyone – unless it is not anti-nationalist.

Although both their active and passive attitudes towards the referendum (and beyond) can be seen as rooted in Islamic ideals, it might be possible to suggest that they have developed in intrinsic connection with the perspectives they have on the state. Their behaviour regarding the state in its active and (more) passive versions can be seen as stating a particular form of criticism. Whereas the former can be loosely related to the concept of the state as a deep state, the latter can be seen as aiming at the current system that has been subject to liberalisation.

3.3 Perceptions of the State

Conspiracy Theories and Nationalism

The students saw the modes of action that they could take against the state in very different ways. For instance, one group of students proposed remaining detached from the politics of the state, while the other wanted to get involved and change society, even if it meant playing by the rules of a secular state. Despite both groups wanting to be part of the resistance against the state, its secularist ideology and the pain it inflicted on their community, the possibilities that they saw for resistance and change were very different. One of my informants who was clearly on the side of those who wanted to change something by getting involved in the state's politics stated that:

Hep bir şeylerin değişmesi istenir, ama hep böyle bir şey beklenir yani artık bir kurtarıcı mı bir şey mi beklenir. Biz sanki yapamayız düşünürler, ama ben öyle düşünmüyorum [...] ben vallah ben kendimi bildiğim bileli eylemlere katılıyorum.²⁵⁰

(People always want things to change, but they always wait for something, as if they are waiting for a saviour or for something. They think that we cannot do anything, but I do not think like that [...] really I have been taking part in demonstrations since I know myself.)

Another student told me that she was quite hopeless because she did not believe that Muslims could change society according to their wishes. This oscillation between hope and desperation, activism and passiveness within the student group is something reflected by the political

²⁵⁰Interview Betül 08.09.10

situation in Turkey at large, and surfaced on a different, more general level towards the end of their discussion.²⁵¹

Two days before the referendum, one of the writers within the e-mail group sent a link to the website Derindüşünce, which had published an interview with a victim of 12th September. In the interview, he describes his understanding of the political ongoings in 1980:

1980 Türkiye'si adeta bir iç savaş yaşanmaktaydı. Doğu ve Batı emperyalizmi insanımızı ikiye bölmüş sokaklar, mahalleler, köyler ve şehirler paylaşılmıştı. Her iki tarafta bizden olmayanın yaşama hakkı yok mantığıyla hareket ediyordu.[...]12 Eylül sabahına kadar insanımızı birbirine kırdıranlar yine emperyalizmin düğmeye basmasıyla bir anda çatışmaları durdurmuştu. O sabaha kadar olayları seyrederek ve hatta örgütleyerek, bir köşede duranlar, şartların kendilerine göre olgunlaştığını düşünerek müdahale kararı almışlardı. Emperyalizm, Türkiye'ye yeni bir düzen getirmek için 12 Eylül darbesini gerçekleştirmiştir.²⁵²

(In 1980, Turkey was living through a civil war. The Eastern and the Western imperialism had divided our country in two, districts, villages and towns were divided. On both sides, people were acting according to a logic that denied a person's right to live if he did not side with them [...] until the morning of 12th September, until those who had generated enmity between our people had stopped the fights by pressing the button of imperialism. Until that morning when those who had watched the ongoings, standing in a corner and even instrumentalising people had thought that the conditions had ripened to their convenience and took the decision to act. Imperialism enacted the 12th September military coup to bring Turkey a new order.

While this interview was not further discussed on the list, it reveals very interesting insights into the ways in which people conceived of the state during the Cold War, and also how people perceived Turkey's political past as an obscure arena where invisible agents simply had to push a button in the name of Imperialism to stop the wars in the streets. A further example of a similar perception of the state and its mysterious character was posted by another writer, who assumedly quoted Mustafa Islamoğlu and explained her non-involvement with the referendum by referencing it:

Ülkeyi bir gemi olarak düşünün, bu geminin biri gizli olmak üzere en az iki dümeni var... Herkesin gerçek sandığı sahte dümenin kaptanını yolcularına seçtiriyorlar. Seçilen kaptan ucu boş olan sahte dümenin başına geçiyor ve hep "...miş" gibi yapıyor; görevi bu. Gemi ahali, kendilerini istedikleri rotada, ulaşmak istedikleri limana doğru, seçtikleri kaptanın götürdüğünü düşünedursun; gizli kaptan köşkünün seçimle gelip-gitmeyen demirbaş kadrosu gemiyi istediği rotada seyrettiriyor. Eğer sahte dümenin başına "rol" icabı oturtulan "göstemelik kaptan", gemi ahalisinin iradesini geminin

²⁵¹ In line with this Yılmaz Çolak (2005: 243-244) has described passiveness as one characteristic of Turkish citizenship: "The Turkish reformist rulers formulated the profiles of "new" Turks as "civilized" and "patriotic" citizens (Üstel 1995). This is why these citizens were largely seen as passive subjects who should only perform the "duties" and "responsibilities" expected of them by the state on behalf of the Turkish nation, rather than be seen as having the right to exercise basic individual rights against the state."

²⁵² Bayraktar (2010)

rotasına yansıtılmaya yeltenirse, 27 Mayıs'ta olduğu gibi, kaptan "rol"ünden alınıp darağacına yollanarak haddi bildiriliyor."²⁵³

(Think of the state as a ship, this ship has at least two steering wheels, one of which is secret. The captain of the fake steering wheel is being chosen by the passengers. The selected captain gets behind the fake steering wheel and pretends to steer the ship – that is his duty. The community onboard the ship is supposed to go on thinking that the captain of the fake steering wheel will bring them to the port on the route they want. If the captain of the fake steering wheel attempts to adapt the ship's route to the passengers' will he will be suspended from his role as a captain and shown the limits of his power by being sent to the gallows – as has happened on 27th May.²⁵⁴)

This image of the president only being in charge of a fake steering wheel certainly reflects many people's trust in democratic processes. Although many people might consider only part of these statements to be reflected in reality, they would probably also admit that things could be altogether different from what they assumed. To them, the state is a hardly graspable institution that they have learned to fear on occasions such as 27th May 1960 and 12th September 1980. In Mitchell's words, the state "seems both real and illusory"²⁵⁵ to them. The feeling that participation in politics can only be a farce, a democracy game in which neither the real agents of politics, nor the circumstances, ends or motives for actions are being revealed prevails in majority society. It is believed that the deeds of those involved in "real politics" remain obscured and hardly comprehensible, given that they largely take place in the backstage of public politics. The powers of these "real agents" of politics are related to a combination of undemocratic practices, military interventions, assassinations and obscured political actions, and have been termed as actions of the "deep state" (derin devlet²⁵⁶). The deep state is led by these agents' motives, and strong enough to manipulate domestic and international politics.

Scholars such as Ryan Gingeras and Serdar Kaya have proposed to understand the deep state as an unlawful institution that is an "invisible" extension of the state, comprising members of the military and secret service, ultranationalist politicians and civilians who undermine the

²⁵³ E-mail: 11.09.2010

²⁵⁴ On 27th May 1960 the democratically elected President Adnan Menderes and his government were overthrown by a military coup. After a trial in which he was charged for violating the constitution (i.e being too Islam friendly) he was later executed.

²⁵⁵ Mitchell (2006: 169)

²⁵⁶ Kaya 2009 and Gingeras 2010 see the origin of the „deep state“ in a secret special organisation, the „Teşkilat -ı Mahsusa“ that had been created by the Committee for Union and Development (İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti) in the Ottoman Empire. Since 1913 the Special Organisation helped the Committee to ensure its position in power and the elimination of its political enemies. The cooperation between organized crime and politics that today is understood to be the "deep state" assumedly started with the Special Organisation. However, Jenkins (2009: 14) understands the modern "deep state" to have developed from the NATO's secret "stay-behind" forces in the Cold War. These "stay-behind" forces also known as "Gladio" were meant to fight an invasion or occupation of the Communists.

state and oppose democratic transition.²⁵⁷ Successful efforts of linking the deep state to state institutions such as the Milli Güvenlik Kurulu (MGK), the National Security Council, the Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı (MIT), The National Intelligence Organisation, the Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemesi (DGM), the State Security Courts and the shadowy Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele (JITEM), the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter Terrorist Service²⁵⁸ have led Michael M. Gunter to note that

The Deep State is probably not a specific organization with a specific leader, both of which can be identified. Rather, it is a mentality concerning what Turkey should be, namely strongly nationalist, statist, secular, and right-wing; not Islamist, reformist and/or a member of the EU. Members of the military and intelligence branches of the Turkish government in particular, but also those from any other agencies of the government such as the cabinet, parliament, judiciary, bureaucracy, etc., or for that matter outside the government such as business interests, and even religious figures or criminals – anyone who would be motivated by the vision of an ultra-nationalist state and the need to protect it even at the cost of violating the technical laws of the official State can become a member of the Deep State for particular purposes.²⁵⁹

The deep state is not only a mentality that intrigues its members, but also affects ordinary citizens' perspective immensely. Different groups in society have very different understandings of the deep state, depending on their ideological point of view. Generally speaking for Muslims the interconnections between state, the military and the deep state have been masked by the official state. The state that they could possibly oppose or hold responsible for its policies is only the visible part of the enormous invisible iceberg reflected by the "deep state". Any possible knowledge about politics to them seems obscured and therefore subjected to assumptions and guesswork. The denial of the idea that democratic participation or party politics have an impact on politics seems unbelievable when looked from the outside. In line with this Gunter notes that many observers reject the idea that there actually is something like a deep state:

Many observers dismiss the idea of the Deep State as simply a conspiracy theory. Indeed, Turkish citizens [...] seem particularly susceptible to such theories. For them, nothing is as it seems. Always there is some deeper, usually more cynical explanation for what is occurring. Only the naive fail to understand this.²⁶⁰

The cynical explanations many Turkish citizens find for political ongoings often are exaggerated and can be related to different conspiracy theories. However, the fact that safe

²⁵⁷ s. Jenkins (2009: 19)

²⁵⁸ Gunter (2006: 335 ff.)

²⁵⁹ Gunter (2006: 348)

²⁶⁰ Gunter (2006: 334)

information on political ongoingings in Turkey is very rare²⁶¹ leads to people's perception of state and politics being led by incoherent facts, assumptions and conspiracy theories.²⁶² But why do people believe in conspiracy theories? Why do they think that party politics or democratic participation as such is of no use at all? Why is politics a realm limited to secret agents and the like? Slavoj Žižek has proposed to link the belief in conspiracy theories to the particularities of our age:

„In unserem Zeitalter, in dem – in der Politik und der Ideologie wie in der Literatur und im Film – globale umfassende Erzählungen à la „der Kampf der liberalen Demokratie gegen den Totalitarismus“, offenbar nicht mehr möglich sind, ist die einzige Möglichkeit, zu einer Art globalem „kognitiven Koordinatensystem“ zu gelangen, die paranoide Erzählung eine ‚Verschwörungstheorie‘. [...] Solche Erzählungen dienen [...] als eine Art gleitender Signifikant, den sich verschiedene politische Gruppierungen aneignen können und der ihnen ein minimales kognitives Koordinatensystem verschafft. Dies gilt nicht nur für den Rechtspopulismus und den Fundamentalismus, sondern auch für die liberale Mitte [...].“²⁶³

With this interpretation of conspiracy theories (and the deep state) as part of them he points to the fact that there are conspiracy theories in every country, as the end of global narratives must have an impact on many countries. Gunter's suggestion that deep state structures can even be found in France, England and the U.S seems to support Žižek's theory.²⁶⁴ With this in mind it becomes clear that the deep state is not so much of a deviation from the “normal state” but just one form the state might adopt. However, this understanding of conspiracy theories denies that Turkish citizens might be right in perceiving politics as an obscured realm of its own. Regarding that people do in fact feel that they have no influence in politics and that their votes or protests can even be manipulated for the sake of underlying conspiracies they do not even know about, it is necessary to ask why they understand politics to be like this. What is their experience with politics and the state and what can be understood from this experience? Looking at the diverse understandings scholars have suggested of the deep state and its origins it might be possible to ask what the deep state is actually good for. What does it achieve? Why is it “institutionalised” in the first place?

Evidently answers to these questions are diverse and can point to very different reasons for the deep state's violent strategies of influencing politics. When understanding the deep state as a part of the “real state” it is possible to analyse its strategies and the violent adoption of measures as similar to other forms of state violence. Following this train of thought, the state's

²⁶¹ Taş (2009)

²⁶² s. Jenkins (2009: 24)

²⁶³ Žižek (1999:160)

²⁶⁴ s. Gunter (2006: 347)

violence can be understood with Charles Tilly, who states that the state wages wars “in order to check or overcome [...] competitors and thus to enjoy the advantages of power within a secure or expanding territory.”²⁶⁵ In line with this, the state’s employment of a deep state can be seen as warring against competitors who cannot be defeated on a battle field, given that the competitors for the state’s integrity and ideological structure are within the population itself. Therefore, its measures against its own population have to be more sublime and work on levels that hinder people from assuming identities and projects standing in contrast with the state’s ideology. In this respect, Gingeras’ work on the state considers the deep state a result of the modern state’s weaknesses, which implies that the population’s incapacitation achieved through the deep state reflects one of its main goals.²⁶⁶ Accordingly, the deep state has become a notion that helps the state to escape accountability.

Seen this way it is not so much the end of the global narratives that, as Žižek has proposed, enable conspiracy theories about the state, but it is the state itself that achieves people’s incapacitation by destroying global narratives. The narrative of democracy or the narrative of a political socialism seems absurd when taking into account the existence of a deep state.²⁶⁷ By doing so the deep state would be meant to destroy any allegiances to ideologies or narratives that might give people the possibility of thinking and reasoning about politics in a way that might empower them vis-à-vis the state and its ideology. In face of the deep state communism, democracy, liberalism and other ideologies fail to give any meaningful matrix for understanding politics. The fact that all these ideologies are unable to achieve anything against a deep state devalues them and makes them unworthy of trust as they might promise different things from what they can possibly achieve or else they will involuntarily be associated with conspiracies and manipulation.

The incapacitation that is achieved by the deep state seems impenetrable, but then it does still allow and foster one ideology, that of nationalism. Only nationalism can overcome conspiracies, only the sole allegiance to the Turkish nation can protect Turks against being manipulated against their own interests and that of their country. In Turkey nationalism’s main rival today is Islam. Muslims as in the students group reject nationalism and often seek to live Islam in a way that opposes nationalism and its nationalist variant of Islam as an ingredient to Turkish national identity. Given that most other political ideologies are perceived to be

²⁶⁵ Tilly (1985: 172)

²⁶⁶ s. Gingeras (2010: 155)

²⁶⁷ In fact Grigoriadis, Ioannis N. /Özer, Irmak (2010) have pointed out how nationalist rhetoric has reshaped the leftist movements that today are described as *ulusalci* (nationalist) i.e neo-nationalist.

manipulatively used by secret agents, how is it possible that Islam in contrast to other ideologies is not seen as an integral part of conspiracy theories? Has the end of global narratives left the stage to Islam as a main competitor to nationalism? Can this be attributed to the fact that Islam is not political in the same way as political ideologies are? Or else are the countries Muslims are sometimes supposed to be steered by (Iran or Saudi-Arabia) less powerful than those who control capitalists, minorities and communists? Why could Islam be the only relevant rival to the deep state and why could only Muslims resist the incapacitations of a deep state? The question of how it is possible to resist the deep state at all are at the core of these questions. Can this be achieved by rejecting the nation-state in a favour of an umma? Or is it the ability to escape nationalism by imagining a broader Muslim entity?

The students from the student group would certainly argue that it is their faith in Islam that makes them reject nationalism and also that Islam is superior to nationalism and other political ideologies. While these might vanish in time, Islam will remain.

Clearly the students' arguments lead to posing more questions about the nature of nationalism and its relationship with Islam. How is nationalism perceived in Turkey, what are the objectives of nationalism and what effect does nationalism have on political Islam? Can the students' rejection of nationalism be seen as a form of "ummaism", an Islamic form of nationalism that reaches out to Muslim communities rather than to a particular territory?

The idea that there is a good nationalism, one that empowers colonised peoples (or those who might be threatened by colonisation) against their oppressors is vivid in Turkey. Nationalist rhetoric as well as common sayings such as "Türk'ün Türk'ten başka dostu yoktur!" (The only friends of Turks are Turks) as well as the idea that the state is a father (devlet baba) which nurtures and cares for the Turkish people are still very popular in Turkey and also ask the people to leave everything to the state that will care for them and protect them as long as they hold together as Turks. White has noted that citizenship in this concept has always been defined as dying for the fatherland. According to this concept civilian activities have no importance; moreover, a concept of mutual obligation in the sense that there should be an exchange, taxes for state services, does not exist between the government and the citizens.²⁶⁸ However, the students perceived the state's rhetoric as a trap they would not fall into. Despite Michel Foucault's claims that "the population is the subject of needs, (and) of aspirations, but (that) it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, vis-à-vis

²⁶⁸ s. White (2013: 94)

the government, of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it”,²⁶⁹ the students knew very well what the state was doing to them, even if they did not understand and analyse the state’s impact on all aspects of their lives. The state’s efforts to control and contain people in their identities by controlling enemies such as imperialism, Kurds and Muslims via the means of a deep state was something that they clearly considered as a violent assault on their lives. Their spiritual inner world had nothing to do with the state policies and its institutions.

Though conceived for post-colonial states and the forms of nationalism that might be encountered there Partha Chatterjee’s understanding of nationalism here becomes very telling.²⁷⁰ He has adopted the view that in post-colonial states there are two forms of nationalism, a material (social institutions) and a spiritual (practices) one. He writes

The material is the domain of the ‘outside’, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. [...] The spiritual, on the other hand, is an ‘inner domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture.²⁷¹

The tension between an inner spiritual world as well as the constraints imposed by economic progress and a simultaneous imitation of the West play an important role for the students. The inner conflict that arises from these opposing standards for them largely is dissolved by emphasising that the ‘outside’ should not influence the inside and be shaped by the ‘inside’. Chatterjee has pointed out that this is not what is being achieved by nationalism, rather the inner world is being transformed and changed to support the nationalist project.²⁷² How to escape nationalist ideas and form the ‘outside’ according to the inside is what the students think most about.²⁷³ For the students community and the ideal state are largely detached from the political reality in Turkey. Their spiritual inner world requires a different state, one that is not based on the conventional modern nation state concept and matches their spiritual world, even if they do not yet know what that ideal state would look like. The pursuit of the ideal state in this sense is not that of an “ideal” state, but that of one that will develop and come into existence through their own autonomous decisions that will be in harmony with their spiritual inner world. For the students the state should not be thought separately from community, but

²⁶⁹ Foucault (2006: 140)

²⁷⁰ Examples (Nükhet Sirman, 2005) for works that use post-colonial theory for the Turkish situation can be found elsewhere.

²⁷¹ Chatterjee (1991: 26f.)

²⁷²s. Chatterjee (1991: 27)

²⁷³ A further discussion of these efforts takes places in chapter four.

the community should determine and define the state according to its needs. As community was usually not defined it remained to be asked who this community was supposed to be. How could people adopting diverse opinions work towards one 'outside' that was to resemble an 'inner' spiritual world?

According to Chatterjee the problematic of the 'inner' and 'outer' nationalism is that it requires us to think nation and community separately to grasp the underlying problematic:

Here lies the root of our postcolonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state. If the nation is an imagined community and if nations must also take the form of states, then our theoretical language must allow us to talk about community and state at the same time. I do not think our present theoretical language allows us to do this.²⁷⁴

His statement does not only refer to the fact that the nation-state has always been thought of as one entity with the "nation" and the "state" thought of as inseparable, but also to the fact that community itself has been neglected in discussions of nationalism. The ways people see the state or deal with the disruptions caused by its intrusion on their inner world need to be paid more attention.

One of the reasons why community remains in the background can of course be attributed to conspiracy theories and the form of nationalism that they foster. In Turkey nationalism and its conflictual relationship with the inner world is closely related to the fact that nationalism has not been able to successfully refashion the inner world. For the inner and outer forms of nationalism Chatterjee has said that "Each domain has not only acted in opposition to and as a limit upon the other but, through this process of struggle, has also shaped the emergent form of the other."²⁷⁵ What happened in the student group was that community was given priority over the state. The state's legitimacy and its necessity were questioned however, it was not simply disposed of. Though Muslimness was favoured over allegiance to Turkishness concepts of good governance (see chapter 4) were closely related to the idea that there would always be something like a state. In line with this the students can be described as being in favour of a different state that should be created according to the autonomy-seeking Muslim ideas that they propose for the Muslim community. Though being against the state and its concept of nation the Muslim students in this way seem to live something like the 'inside' nationalism that Chatterjee has pointed to, as they cannot escape thinking their situation and their pursuit of autonomy independently from the nation state. In line with this nationalism

²⁷⁴ Chatterjee (1991: 33)

²⁷⁵ Chatterjee (1991: 35)

can be understood as omnipresent and inevitable as even communities who would want to escape nationalism have to think according to the conditions the state proposes and be nationalist to formulate their claims. However, even though the Muslim students do perhaps have to carry along the rhetoric and form of nationalism it would be dangerous to see them as nationalists and devalue their efforts of overcoming nationalism.

Dealing with nationalism

The difficulties of becoming too indulged by the state clearly do not apply for secularist and nationalist groups in society. Their conceptions of the omnipotent deep state hail from nationalist ideology and can be said to have come into existence in interaction with the threat perceptions that constitute the core of nationalist ideology.²⁷⁶ Consequently, the nationalist students that I have met in the years prior to my field research would usually explain Turkey's situation in the world regarding the powers of the United States and their plans in the Middle East. In their view, Turkey was constantly under threat either from enemies from the outside who would use and try to manipulate Turkey in their intrigues or otherwise hand tasks over to manipulated citizens (like the Kurds or Armenians) who would subsequently attempt to subvert or divide the state. In this sense, nationalists would blame the Kurds or Muslims for being puppets of others states, who were working against Turkey being a powerful and stable polity²⁷⁷. The deep state derives its "legitimacy" from these threats and supposedly existing conspiracys that it is meant to fight.

In Turkey conspiracy theories should perhaps be understood to form part of a "banal nationalism." This stands in sharp contrast to "the banal nationalism" Billig (1995) has described in England for example. For him nationalism is constantly being flagged, in sports competitions, newspapers and politics and at the same time the general attitude is to deny that nationalism is of importance or that people are nationalist. Despite the fact that the state might call on its citizens to fulfil their duties in the army and to even die for their nation, nationalism is conspicuously absent from discussion and is seldom seen as a problematic subject. In line with this Umut Özkırımlı and Arus Yumul (2000) have examined newspapers in Turkey to show that nationalism is a subject in Turkey and has become part of the unconsciously lived every-day nationalism. In contrast to the fact that nationalism might not always be a subject of debate under the term nationalism I would contend that banal nationalism can only act out its power if there is no fissure between the outer and inner nationalism. By implying that

²⁷⁶ s. Kaya (2012: 148)

²⁷⁷ s. Kaya (2012: 153)

nationalism is of no importance nationalist violence can covertly be accepted and become even more powerful. But how does nationalism make a part of everyday life if it is not “banal” or only “banal and common” by a very striking and pervasive rhetoric of fear. How do people and how did the students deal with this form of “banal nationalism”? Abu-Lughod has suggested that nationalist ideology (and in the Turkish case, as a part of nationalist ideology conspiracy theories), pervades all state institutions, culture and society in the form of cultural artefacts and modes of ordering:

Nation states can be looked at both as cultural artifacts whose technologies of production and imagination can be analyzed and as modes of ordering everyday life that can be ethnographically investigated. (...) these technologies and modes of organization include national museums, military parades, flags, national anthems sung in every schoolyard, architecture, school curricula, bureaucracies of taxation and licensing, military conscription, security police, public companies, mosques, consumption goods, and much more.²⁷⁸

With nationalist ideology strongly based on the War of Liberation and the subsequent founding of the Turkish Republic after World War I, the historical founding of the republic surfaces in the national anthem, monuments, school books and many other institutions of the state. The threat of being colonised comes along with the institutionalised reminiscences of the War of Liberation. Colonisation, the division of the Turkish state territory and concepts of the enemy provide the foundation of conspiracy theories that repeatedly exaggerate the threat of colonisation.²⁷⁹ Therefore, the idea that Kurds and Armenians pursue a subversion of the state revives nationalist ideology and feeds the conspiracy theories used by nationalist parties and organisations to explain world politics and legitimise their agendas against minorities. This kind of rhetoric had accompanied the students all through their school life and makes one of the domains that constantly shower the citizens with nationalist ideology. The other main domain they are more frequently confronted with in their adult life are the media. Regarding the media it is possible to say that political legitimisation through conspiracy theories also accounts for an unnegligible part of television broadcasting, with 98% of households in possession of a television-set in 2012.²⁸⁰ For the students the media – or more precisely television – were a central organ for state ideology and nationalism. Part of their criticism of state ideology evolved around particular TV-shows and their own writing on the internet was meant to provide for alternative media content without secularist or nationalist tendencies.

²⁷⁸ Abu-Lughod (2006:9)

²⁷⁹ s. Kaya (2012: 148)

²⁸⁰ Mavise Database (2012)/ According to Ayşe Öncü (2004: the number of households with a television set was 11 million (60%) in 1991 and almost 99% in metropolitan areas.

Given Ayşe Öncü's statement that the "vast majority of [Turkish] audiences are semi-literate",²⁸¹ with 70% of the adult population never reading newspapers in 1990, television can certainly be considered important for society.²⁸² Considering that Barbara Pfetsch understands mass media and particularly television as a guarantor of the citizens' daily participation in political processes and consequently as a means of stabilisation and legitimisation for the political system,²⁸³ the spreading of threat perceptions and conspiracy theories can be seen as critical. As a source of legitimisation in Turkey, television can be said to foster threat perceptions that convey the feeling that politics are simply a farce. Despite broadcasting democratic processes, elections and political debates, part of the content aired can be said to have delegitimised democratic institutions with lengthy and uncritical reports on political processes and protocol.²⁸⁴

With the emergence of private television in the 1990s, the predominance of uncritical coverage by state-owned television can be said to have been diversified with reports on the Kurdish issue or the role of Islam in politics.²⁸⁵ However, the political bias towards nationalist ideology cannot be considered to have been broken (though diversified) by private television channels.²⁸⁶ While secular private channels (who are usually sponsored by one of the big holdings of the Turkish economy) can be said to broadcast extremely commercialised content according to their own agendas²⁸⁷, Islamic channels counter these channels and their anti-Islamic views by broadcasting programmes based on their own ideology. According to Ayşe Öncü, they see themselves as "civil initiatives' against the 'moral degeneracy' of infotainment channels, on the one hand, and the official 'secularism' of state broadcasting agency on the other. Their mission is to 'preserve the standards of the Muslim community.'²⁸⁸ While both categories of channels can be seen as having enriched the state monopoly over Kemalist television, they are strongly ideologically committed and tell their "own stories" about the "facts" of politics.

Moreover, the impact of Islamic channels on ideological views might not be as strong as that of the other private channels, given that they only reflect a minority of private channels and are certainly not very popular, with one of the Muslim students even claiming that:

²⁸¹ Öncü: (2004: 5)

²⁸² Öncü (2004: 4)

²⁸³ s. Pfetsch (1994:111)

²⁸⁴ s. Çatalbaş (2000: 136)

²⁸⁵ s. Çatalbaş (2000: 136/137)

²⁸⁶ s. Çatalbaş (2000: 136)

²⁸⁷ s. Çatalbaş (2000: 136)

²⁸⁸ Öncü (2000: 307)

Düşük reytingli ama bizim camiamizından olan televizyonlar izlemiyorum çünkü o kadar kalitesiz ki yani ... bizim cenahtan bizim camiamizdan televizyoncular çok az, yorumcular çok az bir kere, sinemacılar çok az dolayısıyla baktığımızda hani bir Hilal TV izleyebilmek için oturup saatlerce sabır göstermek gerekiyor.²⁸⁹

(I do not watch channels with low-ratings from our community, because they lack quality ... from our community there are only very few broadcaster, there are very few commentators, there are very few film makers; therefore, if you want to watch a channel like Hilal TV you have to sit down and be patient for hours.)

Popular programmes typically include discussion programmes involving well-known commentators – most of whom work for private secular channels. The fact that state-owned TV and secular private channels dominate the television landscape is seen as legitimising secular Turkey against the Muslim population. However, her observations also point to the fact that Muslim television, with its bad quality, lengthy and boring discussion shows, is detached from a specific capitalist culture of bright colours, short information and seemingly more interesting rhetoric. Even though the content of private and secular channels might not satisfy young Muslims, the form and appearance – as the 'outside' to such content – would perhaps be better received if it matched a particular national culture. Thus despite the fact that nationalist rhetoric is disliked its appearance and form are appreciated, though severely criticized for being anti-Muslim. Indeed, the aforementioned student considered the influence of the secular channels as very important:

medyanın çok önemli yeri var siyasette her zaman olmuştur zaten dünyanın bütün ülkelerinde medya çok önemli bir organdır Türkiyede de öyle ve bu zamana kadar medya hala daha doğrusu bu zamana kadar demeyim hala daha iktidara karşı yayınlar yapmıştır özellikle Doğan medyası NTV bunların hepsini. AKP bu medya baskılarına rağmen buraya geldi. Eğer medyayı daha demokratileştirebilirsek yansızlaştırabilirsek (...) medyanın yaptığı o kadar çok hata hiçbir kuralla uymuyor hepsini ezip geçiyor, anayasa mahkemesi gibi. ha ha)²⁹⁰

(the media have a very important place in politics – they have always had an important place in all countries and have been a very important organ in Turkey, too. Until today, or I should say still, the media have broadcast against the government, especially Doğan media NTV and all these. The AKP has come here in spite of all the pressure the media have exercised. If we could democratise the media, make the media more objective (...) the media make so many mistakes, they do not obey any rules, they just sweep all the rules, like the constitutional court. Ha ha)

²⁸⁹ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

²⁹⁰ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

Although this student saw positive developments and thought that some channels had become more democratic and changed their messages, she also felt that Muslims did not play any role in the media's representations:

İnsanlar şöyle davranıyorlar Türkiyede başörtülü insan Türkiyede yaşamıyor gibi davranıyorlar. Dizilere bak filmlere bak bir tane bile dizilerde kapalı insan - şey yoldan bile geçmez - göremezsin yani o kadar arındırılmıştı. Halbuki biz Türkiyede yarı yarıya insan başörtülü hiç te sorun olmuyor yarı yarıya insan sakallı onlar yani toplumsal hayatta yaşıyorlar ama dizilerdeki hayatlarda filmlerdeki hayatlarda asla gözüküyorlar ben bundan çok rahatsızlık duyuyorum. Bende bu hayatta yaşıyorum.²⁹¹

(People behave as if there are no headscarved women in Turkey. Look at the serials and the films, you won't be able to see a headscarved person – not even as a passer-by on the streets – it is cleansed up so much. Although half of us live headscarved in Turkey and it does not become a problem that half of the people are bearded. They live in society, but they never show up in serials and films. I am very upset with this. I also live in this life.)

From her perspective, headscarved women were not recognised by the state, but rather hidden away as if they did not exist. Within the Turkish nation-state, they seemingly did not have any legitimate place to exist and live their lives. Indeed, Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta claim that “Public cultural representations and performance of statehood crucially shape people's perceptions about the nature of the state.”²⁹² The fact that headscarved girls (and also Muslims in general) felt that they did not have any place within the country's secular order often discouraged people from even assuming that they could have a say in politics. The state pretending that they did not exist crippled them to some degree as an effect of their non-recognition.²⁹³ It also made them angry to be invisible in the televised national culture and gave them reason to oppose the state. With state policies slowly changing it remains to be seen what will remain of the students' anti-nationalism stance. Provided that they would be accepted and feel able to represent themselves, would they still be anti-state?

New Perceptions

The students neither talked about conspiracy theories nor refrained from activism, which would have been senseless according to conspiracy theories. When I listened to them, they sometimes referred to awareness; namely that Muslims had not been aware of particular problems or not even cared about certain issues in society. Ayşe once told me that Muslims

²⁹¹ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

²⁹² Sharma/Gupta (2006: 18)

²⁹³ s. Taylor (1992: 25)

had not known about the Kurdish issue until recently, and had only indifferently observed some discussions from afar and had never been concerned about what was going on. From her perspective the situation today was entirely different from just a few years ago:

biz daha çok düşünüyoruz biz daha çok kafa patlatıyoruz eskiden bu kadar kafa patlatmıyordu insanlar bırakıyorlardı tamam solcular yapsın, hiç fark etmez, socular demek nefret ediyorum ama CHP yapsın veya ne bileyim Kemalistler yapsın. Şimdi artık yavaş yavaş bizler xxx üstlenmeye başladık.²⁹⁴

(We think a lot more about issues. Before people did not think so much about issues, they abandoned these subjects for the leftists to deal with them. It did not make any difference, even if leftists meant that they hated them. The CHP should do it or – what do I know – the Kemalists should deal with it. Now slowly we have started to take care of these issues.)

Ayşe and the other students were anything but indifferent; indeed, they all hoped for change and wanted to do something. In particular, Ayşe was extremely motivated and stated that she wanted to do something in politics. In contrast to this positive attitude, she still maintained some reservations about what she could personally achieve (due to her headscarf) and what Turkish society as a whole was ready for:

Türkiye değişmeyecek, yani ben bu konuda umutsuzum. Tayyip yarın öbür gün yaşlanacak hocası Erbakan gibi bir köşeye atılacak. Belki onun peşinden insanlar gelmeyecek, gelmeyecek eminim.²⁹⁵

(Turkey will not change, I am hopeless with regard to this subject. Tayyip will be old soon and he will be discarded like his teacher Erbakan. Perhaps there won't be any people coming after him, I am sure there won't be any people.)

From her perspective, the developments that had taken place under the AKP were to be largely considered as an improvement, albeit one that was not going to last or even be furthered within a sensible period of time for her to profit from them.

However, not all the students were as pessimistic about the political situation in Turkey as Ayşe, with the achievements of the past year, the upcoming referendum and the ongoing political activism also inspiring new views on both the past and future. For Betül, the fact that people were now clearly looking through the deep state had changed something for ever. In her view, people would never accept another military coup, and the time of military coups had finally come to an end, because people today were aware of what the state was doing to them. From her perspective, it was no longer viable to think of the deep state as an all-encompassing

²⁹⁴ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

²⁹⁵ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

force. She looked through the state's representations and masks that used to conceal it by understanding the state in a very different way from how people used to in the 1980s. To her, "the state is" perhaps just as Philip Abrams has proposed:

[...]not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is. [...] The state comes into being as a structuration within political practice; it starts its life as an implicit construct; it is then reified – as the *res publica*, the public reflection no less – and acquires an overt symbolic identity progressively divorced from practice as an illusory account of practice.²⁹⁶

The capacity to consider the deep state as the state itself renders it more easily criticisable and subjects it to discussions. Accordingly, it can no longer withdraw from accountability (or at least not in the same way as before).

Both women generally seemed to think that people had changed their views on political issue: whereas they had previously been passive and unwilling to involve, they now started to think about controversial issues and would not leave everything to "others", whether other groups in society or the state. Military coups and means of coercion would no longer be accepted as before, but would rather provoke resistance. The grip of the deep state seemed to have loosened, with the lifting of the passivity that corresponded with the threats posed by military coups and invisible state. Moreover, the discussion of political issues had become more complicated and was overcoming ethnic and religious boundaries. For most of the Muslim students (in and outside of the student group), the Kurdish issue and the state's role in it was no longer discarded or considered unimportant to them as Muslims. On the contrary, efforts to understand the Kurdish issue and the problems faced by Kurds were amongst the main issues discussed among Muslims in 2010. Furthermore, even the ideological concept of Turkishness was questioned in ways that would have been impossible only a few years ago. When asking what had brought about these fundamental changes in their perception of politics and the state, allowing them to publicly – or semi-publicly - question these issues within their e-mail group, it is important to consider the changes that have recently taken place in Turkey. The first such change might be seen in the fact that an Islamist party such as the AKP has been able to remain in power for such a long time, bringing forward the so-called "openings", including the "democratic opening" and "Kurdish opening" that lifted a taboo over subjects that could not have been discussed just a few years earlier.

Moreover, the uncovering of the deep state's so-called Ergenekon conspiracy to overthrow the Islamist government has had an immense influence on reconsidering power relations in

²⁹⁶ Abrams (1988: 58)

the state. With the Ergenekon investigations, a civilian government for the first time had been able to pull through investigations on acts committed by the deep state. Indeed, earlier hints at the deep state and its acts committed or ordered, such as an unsuccessful assault on Pope John Paul II in 1981 and the assassination of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2007, had always petered out.²⁹⁷ A new image of the state had been transmitted with the conspiracy having been brought to light and the civilian government proving its metal against the army. The start of the investigation itself, especially that military personnel was being tried by civilian courts for the first time in Turkish history, provoked an evaluation of political opportunities and a new outlook on politics that legitimised democratic participation. The military's tutelage and role in conspiratory movements was called into question, as were the military coups of Republican history. After all, the state was recognised as being robbed of its "vener of consistency, systematicity, centralized control, and wholeness" that Sharma and Gupta considered as representing part of its power: "By (...) eliding the messiness, contradictions, and tensions that states congeal, statist representations play a crucial role in entrenching the borders and vertical authority of the state and in shaping resistance to the state."²⁹⁸ These developments have led to "de-emphasize the state as the ultimate power"²⁹⁹ and have shown that the system and its politics are not as impenetrable and unshakeable as had previously seemed.

Liberalism

With the discovery of the Ergenekon conspiracy, Turkey has experienced an enormous strengthening of liberal ideas within the public discourse. It is liberal journalists and scholars who write on Turkish politics and advocate a new understanding of politics, and call for a new investigation of Kemalism, the denial of the Armenian genocide or the place of Islam in society.³⁰⁰ They have sided with Muslims to protest the headscarf ban and have appreciated the disempowerment of the military under AKP rule, and often recognise that change in Turkish society can only be rendered by the majority of the Muslim population. These liberals stand up for a better integration of Islam in secular society and perhaps can be said to favour a form of Islamic liberalism. The present uncertainty concerning liberalism and what it might stand for might be attributed to its not yet being a state doctrine. Apart from neo-liberal economic measures, liberalism as a political doctrine of political rights and moral values

²⁹⁷s. Kavakci (2009: 87)

²⁹⁸ Sharma/Gupta (2006: 19)

²⁹⁹ Sharma/Gupta (2006: 9)

³⁰⁰ Most prominently the Altan brothers. Ahmet Altan, a journalist who writes for Taraf and Mehmet Altan who had only recently published his book "kent dindarlığı" (town spirituality).

remains far from replacing Kemalism. Consequently, the discussion of liberalism and the ways in which it might be accommodated in Turkish society might yet reveal what liberalism is understood to be, and also what it might become in future.

I had the most intensive discussion on liberalism with Ayşe, an 18-year old history student with many interests and plans in life. As a very ambitious person, interested in politics as well as theatre, she often encountered the many regulations enacted by the state. Resonating in her exclamation, “I want to change things”, and her hopelessness that probably nothing much would come out of her ambitions as a headscarved girl, her ambition led her to see many things from a very austere perspective. In evaluating the AKP, Ayşe once explained her thoughts concerning liberalism:

AKP liberal bir parti. Başbakan evet Müslüman kimlikten geliyor, İslamcı bir kimlikten geliyor, ama [AKP] demokrat bir parti. [...] AK partinin kapatılmamasının sebeplerden bir tanesi demokrat parti olması. [...] AK-partinin başındaki insanlar genellikle milletvekilleri İslamcı ama değiştiklerini söylüyor, değiştiler zaten.³⁰¹

(The AKP is a liberal party. The president, yes, he comes from a Muslim identity, an Islamist identity, but the AKP is a democratic³⁰² party. [...] One of the reasons why the AKP has not been shut down is that it is a democratic party. [...] Those who are on top of the AK party, in general the parliamentarians say that they have changed, and they have changed.)

While this might seem to be a surprising perception of the current state of politics, it becomes comprehensible when considering that Muslims themselves have not even been able to lift the headscarf ban, Kavakci notes:

The [...] AKP [...] government sacrificed the interests and rights of the *başörtülü kadınlar* in exchange for the larger goal of proving that they were able to work within the system. In this way they managed to persuade the disconcerted Kemalists, to a certain extent, that the AKP was not a threat.³⁰³

For the students the AKP’s transformation could be seen as alarming, despite liberals currently being in a state of conflict with the state and having had to witness a new rise of arrests of journalists and scholars. Liberals as well as many Muslims are convinced that Kemalist ideology’s days are numbered. The referendum the plans for a liberal constitution, people’s active participation in politics and their ever-stronger claims seem to anticipate the end of Kemalism with its inability to accommodate them. Accordingly, the following question haunts

³⁰¹ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

³⁰² As she never expressed any criticism of democracy as such, I am convinced that she was actually talking about liberalism, as she started off with liberalism in the first sentence and in the latter part of our conversation only referred to liberalism.

³⁰³ Kavakci (2010: 147)

those strata of the Muslim society that have resisted moral liberalisation: “What will liberalism bring for Muslims? Will liberalism suppress Islam as Kemalism has done or will people be pacified once a part of their claims have been accommodated in a liberal system?”

Muslims have already seen the transformative powers of liberalism on the Islamist movement, and the ways in which it can probably accommodate Muslims claims, yet also change them. Regarding the intricate relationship between secularism and liberalism, Muslims might perhaps suspect that liberalism will also make use of violence to push through anti-religious values, as Kemalism has. At least this is what Asad suggests when commenting on Margaret Conovan’s conceptualism of liberalism as an encroaching garden that needs to be continually cleansed:

This image is not only an invitation to adopt a mythic approach; it is already part of the myth. It fixes on (explains and justifies) the violence lying at the heart of a political doctrine that has disavowed violence on principle. [...] The liberal violence to which I refer (as opposed to the violence of illiberal regimes) is translucent. It is the violence of universalizing reason itself. For to make an enlightened space, the liberal must continually attack the darkness of the outside world that threatens to overwhelm that space.³⁰⁴

These prospects clearly have something threatening and motivated the Muslim students to oppose liberalism and hope that the efforts for an Islamic life and politics will continue- even if liberalism renders some improvement to their situation.

However, as with Ayşe, they all very well know that this will be a hard task to accomplish:

liberal olmak istemiyorum. [...] Ben İslamcıyım, İslamcı olmak istiyorum ve İslamci kimliğiyle bir şeyler yapmak istiyorum. Yani evet Allah razı olsun demokratler liberaller bizler için bizden daha çok uğraşıyorlar. Taraf gazetesi bugün Türkiyeye gelmemiş bir gazete onun gibi bir gazete daha yok. Onu yazan Ahmet Altan agnostiktir ama bizden çok savunuyor darbe dönemin nasıl berbat bir dönem olduğunu başörtüsü yasağının olmaması gerektiğini. Onlar bizden iyiler, o yüzden onlar gibi olmalıyız, diye düşünüyorum.³⁰⁵

(I don’t want to be a liberal [...] I am an Islamist, I want to be an Islamist and do things that are in accord with my Islamist identity. Yes, the democrats, the liberals – God bless them – have struggled for us more than we have. The newspaper Taraf today is a newspaper of the sort that has not existed in Turkey until now. Ahmet Altan who writes in Taraf is an agnostic, but more than us does he argue that the time of the military coups was terrible, that there should not be a headscarf ban. They are better than we are, therefore we have to become like them.)

The difficulty she points at clearly lies in the dilemma that arises from opposing the state and dealing with it at the same time. Whereas the students’ main struggle should be one for more

³⁰⁴ Asad (2003: 59)

³⁰⁵ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

Islam in politics and in the public sphere in the end it becomes a struggle about remaining Islamist at all. By betraying sort of a nationalism of the 'outside' she states that Muslims should become as successful as the liberals and therefore be more active and do more to protect themselves. Her way of putting it, however, also displays the problematic of how to retain a spiritual 'inside' while becoming like them. Being more successful, but remaining oneself here seems to be more difficult than one would expect as obviously their 'inside' spiritual world would not lead them to act like liberals. While the state brings forward particular structures for political engagement these can only be taken advantage of by changing the form of one's ambitions and giving them a different form. Moreover, her analysis of the situation with the liberals does not only betray some sort of nationalism on her part, but also a replication of the power relations that erstwhile would have only been related to the West or the Kemalists as representing the West in Turkey. In a way the Muslim empowerment she asks for and that has started to become "real" by the new perspectives Muslims have adopted after 2002 and with the Ergenekon investigations, resembles Chatterjee's understanding of nationalism in colonial states, when people empower themselves by putting forward their specific culture and the will to imitate the colonisers' politics of progress and development. While the majority of Muslim AKP adherents can perhaps be said to having endorsed a new form of nationalism that is different from the former secularist nationalism, does that also apply for the students? Are they nationalist? Can they be nationalist in spite of rejecting the nation-state? Or how could they participate in politics and advocate change in society without being nationalist?

Perhaps more important than the question of whether there might also be some nationalism involved in the students group that they cannot escape, the general idea Ayşe brings forward for being Islamist remains important. The students' reason for not simply becoming liberal is that while liberalism might be better than Kemalism, it is not Islam and thus is not the best of all options. Even if Muslims have to face fewer restrictions on religious practises, liberalism follows an entirely different logic than proposed by Islam:

Liberalleşince bir şey olmuyor, sadece akıllanınca bir şey oluyor yani. Liberalleşince sadece bir şeyler kayb olacak. Postmodern çağda yaşıyoruz. Postmodern çağ nedir? [...] postmodern çağda insanlar etnik kimliklerini çok rahat yaşasınlar diye bir söylem var ama bu söylem üstü kapalı bir şekilde insanları sömürür. Kürt bir insanın kürt kiyafetleriyle dolanması geleneksel kiyafetler ile dolanmasına karşı çıkmaz bu duruma başörtülü bir insanın başörtüsüyle kamusal alanda iş yapmasına karşı çıkmaz ama bu insan aynı zamanda McDonalds da yemek yemesini ön görür, McDonalds da yemek yemesini ister Starbucks da kahve içmesini ister liberallik budur ona göre,

postmodernlik budur. Oysa İslam da çok daha farklı bir şey var. İslamda ırkçılık diye bir şey yok. İnsanlar etnik kimliklerini çok rahat bir şekilde yaşayabilmeleri ama McDonald'sta yemeleri gibi bir zorunluluk üretmiyor postmodern çağda liberal çağda liberallerin yaptığı gibi. O yüzden İslamcılığı ben daha çok çözüm olarak görüyorum.³⁰⁶

(Nothing will be achieved by becoming liberal, only by using one's brain will you be able to do something. What is the postmodern age? [...] there is a discourse that promotes people's living their identities without problems, but this discourse implicitly oppresses them. Liberalism does not oppose a Kurd's dressing in traditional clothes, similarly it does not oppose a headscarved's working in the public sphere, but at the same time it emphasizes that this person should eat his food at McDonald's and drink his coffee in Starbucks. This is what liberalism is, accordingly this is what postmodernism is. Although in Islam is something very different. There is no such thing as racism in Islam. People should live their ethnic identities freely, but it does not create the necessity to eat at McDonald's as the liberals create in the liberal age. This is why I see Islamism as a better solution.)

One of the main aspects that she criticises here is the neo-liberal economic system and the consumerism it creates. The students' participation in a protest against a headscarf fair in April 2010 exemplified their opposition to consumerism on a more general level. They protested the fair despite those Muslims who were happy to gain some recognition and be able to hold a headscarf fair, which created quite a controversy within the Muslim community. In contrast to other Muslims, the students perceived the fair as promoting a different type of headscarf than the one they supported. For them, the fair was mocking the headscarf by reducing it (and probably the women who wear it) to an object of capitalism. Women with fancy headscarves were seemingly more interested in looking good or showing off their riches rather than wearing a headscarf to be judged for their morals and behaviour. In this sense, the students' opposition to liberalism can also be said to have a moral aspect directed against the secularising power of commercialisation.

Yael Navaro-Yashin has described the effects of commercialisation on Islam in Turkey in her book "Faces of the State" (2002), whereby young women can be encountered wearing colourful headscarves and slim-cut clothes meeting the minimal criteria of Islamic clothing practices. In her description of an Islamic fashion show by Tekbir Inc., a company producing fashionable headscarves and overcoats, Navaro-Yashin points to different forms of Islamic life style and the possibilities perceived by women of the middle and upper class to guard a class distinction with this new Islamic clothing.

The liberalizing and secularizing influence of commercialisation on Muslims was a subject of heavy critique by the students and seen as countering their moral and ethical values. Therefore,

³⁰⁶ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

the secularising power of neo-liberalist commercialisation can be seen as opposing their values, yet accommodating the interests of many upwardly-mobile, fashionable and/or elitist Muslim women of the mainstream.³⁰⁷

The moral aspect of the students' critique of liberalism could also be observed regarding TV serials, with most of them having claimed not to watch much TV (or at least not serials), often complaining about what was being displayed in serials. One serial that gained much critique at the time was "Fatmagül'ün suçu ne?" (What is Fatmagül's fault?), an adaptation of a literary classique dealing with rape. Broadcast in 2010, the serial's remake was criticised for its explicit rape scene and the portrayal of the rapists. Whereas "Fatmagül'ün suçu ne?" would probably excite also protests among non-Muslims, other serials such as *Küçük Sırlar* (Little Secrets), a story about rich school graduates and their openly-lived and constantly changing love relationships, might be regarded as harmless yet stupid by non-Muslims. However, for the students, the fact that the portrayed school graduates misbehaviour was constantly suggested as desirable and good was objectionable.³⁰⁸ From their perspective, the lack of a moral order in the liberal atmosphere allowing almost anything was subject to severe critique. Their morals and those advocated by a liberalised, consumer-oriented media were quite at odds. The morally conscious and responsible politics that they strived for were far from being featured anywhere on fancy TV serials, with morally dubious behaviour and a lack of values communicated as exemplifying the new generation's character.

Despite neo-liberal economy and modern popular culture drawing most of the critique from Muslims, liberalism as a political doctrine (concerned with equality and human rights) might also be an arena of contestation among Muslims. Moreover, the fact that liberal culture as encouraged by commercialisation and popular serials determines a great part of the conditions for the morals underlying politics also constitutes a problem for the students.

Their striving for a moral and Islamic politics concerned about human beings as individuals (in communities) rather than collectivities (with exaggerated individual autonomy) stands in contrast to what Asad describes as the areas for a liberal political and moral language in public discourse:

As a discursive space, liberalism provides its advocates with a common political and moral language in which to identify problems and to dispute them. Such ideas as individual autonomy, freedom of (economic, political, social) exchange, limitation of state power, rule of law, national self-determination, and religious toleration belong to

³⁰⁷ s. Navaro-Yashin (2002: 103)

³⁰⁸ Emails: 08.10-12.10.10

that space, not least when their meanings are debated. [...] Liberalism thus provides moderns with a vocabulary that can cover a multitude of sins – and virtues.³⁰⁹

Though the students would not reject all the values Asad enumerates they would probably also advocate others like justice, patience and community. The future prospect of being marginalised in the name of a different ideology advocating a set of non-Islamic and seemingly arbitrary values has a desperate aspect for politically-thinking Muslim students who actively protest Kemalism. Considering that liberalism is not only a subject of political rights, for the moment, the neo-liberal force of consumerism creates an environment that - from the students point of view - can be seen as diametrically opposing their values and promoting a limitless liberalism, lacking values as such. Although it might be too desperate to think that Turkish liberalism will only mimic European liberalism without considering the Muslim masses that have often closed ranks with liberals to disrupt the power of Kemalist ideology, it is clear that a liberal approach to politics will undermine part of the possibilities to promote a different moral approach.

One aspect connected to moral politics that is extremely important to Muslim students is their understanding of justice that is hardly met by the state. They desire a moral and just approach, whether in politics or in society as such.

Their desire for moral politics and a moral society can be understood as a means of reclaiming a say in politics. Asad's observation that people in Saudi Arabia criticise their government despite accepting it as legitimate or even because they consider it as legitimate also describes what many Turkish Muslims would wish for:

They say that it is precisely because they regard their government as legitimate (*hukūma shar'iyya*) and their society as Islamic that they make the criticisms they do in the way they do. But there is an interesting double sense to the adjective *shari'iyya* here. For while it connotes the general modern sense of "legitimate", it derives from the specific Islamic concept of "the divinely sanctioned law-and-morality" (*ash-sharī'a*), which does not simply legitimize the ruler but binds him. The Saudi government explicitly claims to be based on the *sharī'a*. Thus, what the critics offer is "advice" (*nasīha*), something called for by the *sharī'a* as precondition of oral rectitude (*istiḳāma*), not "criticism" (*naqd*), with its adversarial overtones.³¹⁰

This is not to say that Turkish Muslims are in favour of establishing the sharia – in fact, quite on the contrary, yet what they long for is a different moral and ethical environment. This illustrates the discrepancy between some Muslims' understanding of an ideal state of politics in which moral criticism reflects a legitimate means of critique and the somewhat formal

³⁰⁹ Asad (2009: 25)

³¹⁰ Asad (1993:212)

structures of modern nation-states that can often be criticised as preposterous or even absurd when secular structures render violence rather than the peace promised. Furthermore, it also is the gap between the promises of secularism and its real face that moves Muslims to explore secularism and propose new concepts for politics that are able to accommodate religion in politics and thus propose ideas for a society that truly matches human nature.

Conclusion

The public debate on the constitutional referendum in 2010 brought the violence exercised by the state for the sake of secular order to people's attention. With its many references to the military coup of 1980, the debate pointed to the restrictions – most prominently the headscarf ban – that Muslims still suffered from within the public sphere. From the students' perception, the state's advocacy of anti-religiousness ignored *mores* and ethics and had no compassion for the suffering of its people, whether Kurds, Muslims or liberals. They severely criticized the state's blindness for difference and hoped – even if the Constitution was to remain secular and Kemalist – that change for a better and more humane system might be close.

The student displayed varying views in their discussion of the constitutional referendum, bringing to light very different attitudes regarding whether they perceived it to be moral and Islamic to vote in the referendum, or rather almost anti-religious to do so. The ethical behaviour that the students displayed in the debate overall was guided by their understanding of Islam and an effort to stay and work together and show solidarity despite strong differences in opinions. Accordingly, this solidarity to one another and the respectful attitudes that they strived to display in their discussion derived from a conscious cultivation of Islamic values which they – in part – strengthened by discussing Qur'anic terms, such as *isâr* and *sakine*.

Moreover, the students' attitudes and moral behaviour can be seen as a form of critique of the state. Whereas solidarity, understanding and compassion greatly mattered to the students, the state displayed no such qualities regarding its citizens, preferring to disengage consumers. By enabling structures such as the deep state, the state can be said to have devalued and disempowered its citizens, who have subsequently started to question the deep state and reaffirmed their participation and respective struggles in politics. For the Muslim students, this new status quo is full of (albeit limited) possibilities to bring about change in society, with new challenges already looming. As mainstream Muslims and liberals strive for a liberal society, the students' claims and hopes for the future are being discussed in respect of new issues such as commercialisation and secularisation, which emerge through consumer attitudes, the fashion industry and televised secular lifestyles. In both fields, the students

critically questioned what they saw as challenging their *mores* and ethics, again being outraced by new secular and liberal values of consumption.

4. Toleration and Integration: Features of a better society

The Ideal Society?

Three years have now passed since the constitutional referendum, with many people complaining that its promises have only been insufficiently fulfilled. Neither have the perpetrators of the 12th September coup been tried nor is there a definite answer to the question of when a new constitution will be drafted or passed by parliament. The political progress in Turkey seems to have come to a halt or even stepped backwards, with liberal politicians and journalists being randomly imprisoned. At the same time the Ergenekon investigations have lost much of their former appeal and credibility due to irregularities in the investigations. Once again, the political ongoing in Turkey seem increasingly impenetrable, with people's engagement in politics and their hope for change receding into nowhere.

One of the students once summed up the Muslim students' view on a similar context by referring to Johanna Spyri's fictional Heidi, who mounted a tower in the city of Frankfurt in the hope of seeing the mountains, finding tall buildings instead. Indeed, just like her, many Muslims feel that their aims and hopes for the future are out of sight.

However, from a long-term perspective the hopes that emerged from the referendum process have always been "small hopes" and people and especially the Muslim students have remained sceptical about them. Moreover, from the students' perspective, not all progress could necessarily be understood as progress in an Islamic sense. Democratization or liberalisation as such had no specific value to them, unless the adaptation of these concepts and programmes seemed to lead to a more Islamic order. With a specifically Muslim approach that would have appealed to them being abandoned from politics, political projects were seen as lacking (Muslim) authenticity and the purity of a just Islamic society. The feeling that Islamic purity could not be achieved prompted them to consider their discussions as detached from volatile politics, as their engagement and aims have remained the same – regardless what turn politics would take.

Despite their clear preference for pure Islamic politics they were aware that they lacked an Islamic (state-)philosophy of their own, a distinctive life style and thinking independent from

modernity and the West. Indeed, even the thought of engaging in a revolution could not be comforting, given that they had no proposal for a different economic system capable of replacing capitalism, and no Islamic civilisation or culture that their revolution could be based upon. Accordingly, their remaining choice for the time being was between two evils: Liberalism and Kemalism. The question that remained to be answered was how to approximate an Islamic life in between these choices. How was the choice to be avoided and how were they going to develop thoughts and ideas about a society of their own?

With liberalism growing stronger, they felt that the political situation was improving; however, as mentioned before, liberalism was not what they longed for. Giving up “the revolution” did not mean that they would not engage in “small revolutions” in the form of a continuing perseverance of their aims, followed by minor changes and the development of their own philosophy, culture and forms of political engagement. In pursuing these aims, the discussion of current political issues (or rather those with relevance for the future) was of great importance to them. The solutions that they could offer for particular societal problems did not only support their claim that an Islamic polity and Islamic politics would be truer to the nature of human beings, but also prepared them for their political engagement.

However, in spite of the fact that this seemed to be important to all members of the group some would perhaps avoid to directly link their engagement with the pursuit of a change in society, as seen in the referendum debate. The question that thus underlay their efforts was perhaps as to how built and guard a distinct identity of their own. They asked themselves if this was to be achieved within a society as theirs or else was corruption all that was awaiting them? How were they to be Muslim in a secular society or else what could a good Muslim society be like?

To explore their approaches to an Islamic society, it is useful to consider the ideas that they developed regarding current issues. These ideas are still very diffuse and lack coherence, given that they are not designed to serve any political program other than their goal of a reflective search for a better society. In their context, they need not be coherent, but must have the possibility to discuss all kinds of possibilities without necessarily aiming at comprehensiveness or political viability. What is more interesting than the particular solutions they offered for political and societal problems was the variety of thoughts that existed within the group and the tensions that became visible in some of the debates as they can perhaps be seen as points that are also controversial in the societal discourse. These issues lead them to question which groups and partners in society they could trust. Who could they team up with? Who deserved to be protected? Whose claims were legitimate and for what reasons?

In the course of the political and societal discourse that influenced the students, they were automatically prompted to discuss issues that are currently important within Turkish society. One main subject that certainly touches upon their own situation in Turkish society is that of toleration and the acceptance of others' rights. The groups that they have mainly discussed regarding this subject include the human rights situation of the Kurds, and the emerging discourse on homosexuals' rights and the acceptance of other religious groups, such as Christians and Muslims of other denominations.

Before delving into the Muslim students' discussions of ethnic, sexual and religious minorities, it seems useful to consider some of their general ideas expressed when questioning the framework of current society.³¹¹ Probably the most radical approach to question their current societal framework was considered in a discussion during one of their meetings when they traced possibilities of living an independent Muslim life, led by the idea of founding a Muslim society in an independent country of one's own. Some of the students thought that it would be wonderful to have such an ideal place, given that current society and industrialisation had held them back from their true nature. Their longing for a "place of their own" gave me the impression that Nilüfer Göle was right in stating that "Islam offers a sense of "believing", yet without "belonging" either to a national community or an institutionalized religion."³¹² Some (but certainly not all) of the students even expressed regret that they had never lived in the countryside and had no experience of nature and farming. The longing for a place of one's own, where one would naturally belong to was very strong and also reflected their search for a simple and pure life from which their life in a modern city as Istanbul had estranged them.

Their particular difficulty in imagining such a place of one's own partly owes to the students not thinking of themselves as having recovered an Islamic life. One of the students once explained to me that Islam was there, yet it was just slipping by while their life was focused on very different things. Islam somehow was not where they were, and was not grasped as easily as they would have wished for. The longing for an Islamic purity that would induce the feeling of living Islam to its fullest underlay their efforts of living Islam in a secular environment. However, the purity they would have wished for perhaps was also something conceived as irretrievable within their own thinking. This can be explained with their understanding that religion was something that had to be interpreted, developed and brought

³¹¹ The following ideas were expressed during a discussion of the term *sabır* (patience) on 21.08.2010

³¹² Göle (2010: 264)

to life in many matters. Another student explained to me that this was not an easy task, even regarding politics:

Islam bir devlet sistemi ön görmez yani kuranda şöyle şöyle bir devlet kuracaksınız gibi bir şey yoktur. Islam toplumsal adalet sağlamak üzerine bir sürü şeyler vardır ki kuranda birbirinize karşı hoşgörülü olmaktan ahlaklı olmaktan toplumda işte yapılan yolsuzluklardan işte her şeye bir deşayn vardır bir düzeltme vardır bu anlamda biz kurana bakıp bir anda böyle bir sistem ah işte budur bizim sistemimiz diyemeyiz.³¹³

(Islam does not propose a polity, i.e. there is no such thing in Qur'an that tells you to found a state that is like this and this. In order to establish societal justice there are many things, like being indulgent to one another, being moral with regard to malpractice in society. For everything there is a design an improvement. In this sense, we can look at the Qur'an but we cannot look at the Qur'an and say: ah, this is our system.)

As an Islamic political vision, ready-to-use does not exist in the Qur'an, and given that there are no concise prescriptions concerning the ideal society it is difficult to imagine in what kind of context one might situate an ideal Islamic society acceptable for the students. On the one hand there is their longing for purity and authenticity and then on the other hand it is not clear what this purity or authenticity is to be measured with and how it is to be brought about. The choices that have to be made when interpreting the Qur'an reveal a certain tension with regard to their longing for authenticity. What can be deemed authentic? Are historic examples, tradition and thinking from the Ottoman Empire authentic or else only the Sunna? How far can one draw away from these sources and analyse current issues without taking into consideration either historical sources? How can current issues at all be interpreted from the background of the Qur'an or historical sources? And perhaps most importantly: Who is to interpret and understand the Qur'an correctly? Who can be trusted to have understood the Qur'an correctly? How many divergent interpretations of the Qur'an can be accepted? Though freedom of interpreting the Qur'an (and thus accessing the pure message of God) was in general accorded to every human being with the students expressing the opinion that the Qur'an was "speaking to them" and intelligible for every single person that attempted to read and understand the Qur'an, this freedom was seemingly limited by preachers and religious authorities who would only see their own interpretations of the Qur'an as justified. Though many of those preachers are accepted among Muslims and also had followers among the

³¹³ Interview Betül 08.09.10

students they would always see them critically and not accept their claim to solely know the right way, as one of the students expressed:

birbiriyle çakışıyorlar zaten genellikle mesela Mustafa İslamoğluyla Cübbeli Ahmet hiç iyi anlaşamaz yani sürekli birbirlerine atışıp dururlar bu benim çok kızdığım bir noktadır. Neden?

Çünkü ikisi din adamı ikisi insanlara bir şeyler anlatmaya çalışıyor birlik olmaları gerekirken birbirlerine sanki biri müsülmanmış öbür müsülman değilmiş gibi taş atıyorlar birbirine birbirlerine sarılmaları gereken yerde birlik olmaları gereken yerde ayrılık çıkartıyorlar [...] bütün insanların bütün hocaların eksikleri oluyor [...] herkes hata yapabilir Fethullah Gülen de hata yapıyor [...] o da müslüman biz de müslüman biz Engin Noyani severiz Fethullah Güleni de severiz Mustafa İslamoğluyu severiz ama bütün hepsinin belli yerlerde hataları var diye düşünüyorum.³¹⁴

(in general, they (the preachers) fight with each other. Mustafa İslamoğlu, for example, does not get along with Cübbeli Ahmet; they have arguments all the time – this is something I dislike. Why? Because both of them are religious men, both of them try to tell people something. Whereas they should stand together they throw stones at each other and behave as one of them was a Muslim and the other was not. Instead of embracing one another they find differences between each other. [...] all people make mistakes, all preachers make mistakes [...] everyone can be wrong, Fethullah Gülen also makes mistakes [...] he is a Muslim, we are Muslims, we love Engin Noyan and we love Fethullah Gülen and Mustafa İslamoğlu, but all of them make mistakes on particular subjects.)

What is interesting about the expression of her criticism in this context is that she does not refer to the content of these preachers' teachings. While one could understand this as a refusal or neglect to talk about shortcomings of Islamic teachings it is also possible and perhaps more valid to see her way of communicating her criticism as directed towards the unethical behaviour of the teachers. Ethical behaviour (as seen in chapter 3) was very important to the students and led them to refrain from criticism, but also made them evaluate unfair criticism as lacking moral virtue.

However, this short quote shows more than that. Quite apart from the fact that the student here expresses her criticism of the preachers themselves, her perceptions seem to lack stringency: how can she simultaneously express her love for preachers whom she thinks of as making mistakes? Does she really like one of them and if yes, which of the preachers would it be? Or

³¹⁴ Interview Ayşe 01.07.2010

else is it possible to like all of them without taking into consideration their opposite views on Islam?

She offers an explanation through stating that the preachers are Muslims and that she is a Muslim, too. From her perspective, this forms the basis for her loving and respecting them; however, whereas she emphasises that she does not consider their mistakes as being problematic for her to love them, she criticises that they do not love each other. Despite their differences, they should be able to love and respect each other, and she clearly expects them to refrain from thinking that only one of them can be a “true Muslim”. Indeed, from her perspective, they are all Muslims. However, the preachers’ drive for conformity and their efforts to universalise their teachings are at odds with her perception of correct Islamic behaviour. While the preachers’ understanding of Islam presupposes a single and in general their own conviction of what Islam is and how it has to be lived, her understanding of Islam incorporates an understanding of heterogeneity. Even though there are many ways of interpreting the Qur’an and with them very different claims to authenticity or rightfulness the students’ attitude in itself stands out with its particular acceptance of opposing interpretations.

To better understand these kinds of inconsistencies and ambiguities Thomas Bauer in his study on Islamic literature of the 10th- 16th century has proposed to understand Muslim culture as lacking a drive for universality and an interest in imposing their values on others, based on an acceptance of ambiguity:

Ein Phänomen kultureller Ambiguität liegt vor, wenn über einen längeren Zeitraum hinweg einem Begriff, einer Handlungsweise oder einem Objekt gleichzeitig zwei gegensätzliche oder mindestens zwei konkurrierende, deutlich voneinander abweichende Bedeutungen zugeordnet sind, wenn eine soziale Gruppe Normen und Sinnzuweisungen für einzelne Lebensbereiche gleichzeitig aus gegensätzlichen oder stark voneinander abweichenden Diskursen bezieht oder wenn gleichzeitig innerhalb einer Gruppe unterschiedliche Deutungen eines Phänomens akzeptiert werden, wobei keine dieser Deutungen ausschließliche Geltung beanspruchen kann.³¹⁵

According to his understanding, cultural ambiguity is a central feature of traditional Muslim societies. In this sense, ambiguity is not only linguistic to him, but also part of all speech acts and thus all actions. Therefore, all cultures have to live with cultural ambiguity; however, cultures deal with ambiguity differently, with some more likely to live with ambiguity, to seek

³¹⁵ Bauer (2011: 27)

and enjoy ambiguity or only contain ambiguity³¹⁶, and other societies hostile to ambiguity and striving for its elimination.³¹⁷

In this sense, it was no problem for most of the students' to derive their interpretation of a good life from sources that ideologically opposed one another and seemingly would not fit together. They would rarely, if ever, express devaluation of ideas that did not match their own, or at least there would always be some students who would reproach others for doing so.

In line with this, I never experienced the students questioning any of my convictions or values. Moreover, one point that sometimes even confused me was their lack of curiosity about the West, and I was seldom, if ever, asked about my life in Germany. Questions on the matter usually did not exceed some remarks or questions asked out of politeness rather than curiosity or an interest in more detailed matters. However, at the same time, the students displayed a great interest in the Muslim world, different Muslim traditions and other countries of the Middle East. This interest was closely related to an understanding and discussion of one's own Muslim culture (and the search for an 'authentic Muslim culture'), but aside from the inevitable criticism on the West (and the perpetual presence of the West in some way), there was hardly any discussion or thorough critique that only related to the West or the status quo there. While the West could have easily been figured as an enemy, it was never portrayed in that way, with solutions of the very simple kind, the West as the evil and the East as a haven of the good never expressed.

However, in this context the search for purity and authenticity seemed to be in tension with their regard for heterogeneity. A search for purity and authenticity presupposes an essential source of Muslimness that remains equally valid and accessible throughout time, whereas a

³¹⁶ Bauer (2011: 13)

³¹⁷ It is possible to link this experience to a characteristic that Bauer carves out from two historic travels reports written by medieval Muslim scholars (10th century) who travelled beyond the boundaries of the Dar-al-Islam. Indeed, both of them, Ib-Fadlān and al-Mas'ūdī, related shocking accounts of human sacrifice among a Nordic people,³¹⁷ describing the events they witnessed – and must have found abominable – yet refrained from making any judgment. Neither did they try to dissuade people from human sacrifice nor did took steps to evangelise the “barbars” they encountered.³¹⁷

Bauer is convinced that al-Mas'ūdī and Ibn Fadlāns conducts reflect generally existing patterns of behaviour among Muslims of those days, rather than exceptions. Muslims did not feel the urge to universalise their convictions or defend and explain their values among other peoples, and rather remained detached from any debates with non-Muslims. Moreover, they can be said to have neither perceived otherness as a threat or challenge; indeed, the otherness of peoples outside of their territory did not bother or threaten them. Therefore, the “other” could effortlessly continue to be different from them. The urge to defend their values only became relevant among themselves when a question emerged concerning religious prescriptions (perhaps as exemplified by the preachers themselves).³¹⁷

regard for heterogeneity does have to embrace change and might have to accept the development of new identities when primordial identities are being abandoned. Though the students would certainly have understood their positive evaluation of heterogeneity as a pure and authentic characteristic of Islam itself, the tension between the search for authenticity and purity and a positive appropriation of a tolerance of heterogeneity can be said to have been eminent and problematic as in the case of my communication with them (chapter 2).

While Bauer's characterisation of the Muslim world and its former high level of cultural ambiguity might not have survived until today (and might still be more complex when considering the territory that it is supposed to be applicable to), or else has only been applicable to known primordial identities a few characteristics might be relevant to question our understanding and our interpretations of Muslim culture today. To conceptualize and understand developments in Muslim societies today as phenomena of secularisation, westernisation or modernisation might sometimes obscure that there are logics at work that refuse to fit into all too common (Western) notions of understanding.

In spite of the fact that Muslims today are said to reinterpret and reconstruct their Islamic faith in view of modernity and secularisation, it might be helpful to look at their interpretations without immediately reconstructing them as part of "invented traditions" that only seem to be authentic, but in reality have been constructed in order to look so. The benefit of Bauer's proposal here resides in questioning common interpretations that see the West as the source of all relevant and powerful concepts. By attributing Muslims with a positive characteristic of their own, prevailing interpretations of Muslim culture and the domination of Western values and concepts is disrupted – leaving space for a fresh view on our understanding of Muslim societies.

The consequences of Bauer's approach and the danger of essentialism that might arise from attributing Muslims – again and even with a positive – characteristic have to be taken into consideration and lead to new questions. How is Muslim culture depicted here? What is it exactly said to be and for what purpose? What expectations does such a characterisation of Muslims provoke? How much of it is nostalgia and how much of it is (or ever was) real?

Returning to the Muslim students' discussion on the ideal society it is necessary to mention some more precepts that were considered principles of governance in order to understand their approach to heterogeneity.

In their view governance necessarily had to be in the hand of the people, as it would be ruled conservatively if not in the position to control society. Therefore, it is clear that they saw authority with the people. Moreover, what they certainly did not want was any form of authoritarian regime, as later explained by the same interview partner:

öyle krallıkların İslamin da kesinlikle temsil ettiğini düşünmüyorum zaten düşünmek mümkün değil zaten. Ya da diğer işte bir takım İslam adı altında iş yapan iş gören devletler var onların da öyle olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Bence daha kurani iyi anlayıp kurani iyi yorumlayıp ondan sonra toplumsal bir değişimi sağlayıp

bir devlet kurmanın bir anlamı yok çünkü o zaman sadece otoriter iki üç kişinin idare ettiği bir yer olursunuz ilk önce toplumsal bir uyanış sağlanmalı bir bilinçlenme sağlanmalı toplumda.³¹⁸

(I don't think that Islam stands in for monarchies – it is not possible to think that or a couple of states who call themselves Islamic, I don't think they are Islamic. I think we have to understand the Qur'an even better and interpret it better and then work for a societal change. It doesn't make sense to found a state, because then it will only be an authoritarian regime led by two-three people. First of all there has to be a societal awakening, a sensitising within society.)

Her thoughts emphasise that there are different ways of interpreting the Qur'an, which can lead to new interpretations that might in turn lead to better Islamic societies than those currently existing. From her perspective, authoritarian or dictatorial rule cannot be justified by good interpretations of the Qur'an that really seek to understand the holy scriptures.

In addition to that and perhaps more relevant to the subject in question here, their tolerance of ambiguity and heterogeneity was touched upon when discussing the place of people who did not like them claim or dream of an Islamic utopia. Far from imagining a society that would only have to fit their small community of Muslims, the students also brought together some thoughts on other people that they would probably have to live with in their ideal society:

“bir sistem olsa ve içinde bizim gibi düşünmeyen insanlar olacak çok doğal olarak yani ama [...] bir topluluğa olan düşmanlığınız sizi adaletli davranmaktan alı koymamalı diyor Allah”³¹⁹

(if there is a system, then there naturally will be people who do not think like us, but the enmity you feel towards any people should not hold you from being just, says Allah.)

³¹⁸ Interview Betül 08.09.10

³¹⁹ Interview Betül 08.09.10

This statement makes it clear that the idea of living with people thinking differently from the student group is something that they expect as natural, and also want to integrate in a just society.

The subject of different opinions within their own society was in general discussed with regard to moral degeneration, as they thought of themselves as founding this just Islamic society. Thus, in their discussions, the problem of moral degeneration was said to be one that they would also have to face in a society that they had founded according to their own principles. Parts of society or generations to come would probably interpret issues differently from their parents and moral degeneration would lead to the perishing of their ideal society. Consequently, a utopian society built on the ideals and convictions of its members can only exist as long as they adopt a unitarian moral and political view on society; however, time and development might lead to changes in mind and ruin the “perfect” society.

Therefore, the only way of coping with moral degeneration was to live within their societies and strive for a distinctive Muslim life in them. Moreover, the concept of the “just witness” (as explained in the previous chapter) did not encourage anything like an escape from society, but rather urged Muslims to change their own societies.

The students’ understanding of a just society can be interpreted in two very different ways. One way of looking at their ideas on integration and toleration seems to echo Taylor’s proposal of understanding our age as “a secular age” in which the belief in God is a mere option no one would follow unquestioningly today. However, from the students’ perspective this would mean that their efforts of conceiving a just society would be misinterpreted by making their ideas part of a secular world (which Taylor only sees in Europe and North America anyway). The other way of looking at their ideas for society would be to acknowledge them as Islamic and as that what they are meant to be: an Islamic answer to secularism. Though Taylor’s ideas on a secular age match their regard for ambiguity and differences and lead to the accommodation of a certain diversity in society they would challenge the idea that this is only possible in a secular state, but not in a religious or Islamic state.

It is not self-evident to them that every human being would believe in God or find his way to Islam. Though they might not be able to understand as to why people would choose to live a life “without God” the social reality of religious and ethnic minorities in their environment makes them acknowledge the optional character of believing in Islam. This understanding of Islam as a mere option to human beings among other does not devalue Islam for them, but

leads them to accepting (though not cherishing) the ambiguity of very different life concepts every human being can choose from. This acceptance of a certain ambiguity, the fact that it is perfectly acceptable for someone not to believe in God and the belief that Islam is the only way to achieve a life and society that is suitable for human beings and respects their nature is contradictory, however, valid to them. The questions that arise with regard to this contradiction between the only true religion and individual freedom lead to asking if the acceptance of ambiguity is not sometimes forced upon people. How far does their understanding of religion as an option go? How ambiguous can the world be to them? Must not the longing for individual freedom prevail and eventually undermine the idea that Islam proposes the most adequate life conditions to human beings? Or else is a religious ideology not apt to leading people to go against individual freedom? And can their ideas really challenge the idea that secularism is more capable of accommodating diversity than religion?

Their tolerance of ambiguity and diversity was limited by what they saw as the oppression of secularism or more general the West. Thus in part the ambiguity that derived from the West's influence was seen as detrimental and unacceptable. Therefore, another idea concerning the idea of progress and regress was to remain critical towards "progress" in the Western sense, and consciously use Western technology without being influenced by its philosophy. This meant using technological devices such as MP3 players, iPods and the like for Islamic purposes, like listening to religious chants instead of mainstream music. Moreover, their thoughts developed regarding retaining a culture of their own included developing an Islamic understanding of modernity and the finding of Islamic ways in the modern world to remain within Islam by giving an Islamic meaning to modern terms and terminology. In general, as they explained to me, progress in an Islamic sense was not technological or to be measured in terms of economical growth, for them it was the achievement of Islam. These considerations clearly seem to suggest that their regard for ambiguity here was limited by considerations for remaining and being Islamic. The purity of Islam (and their values) should not be negotiated for Western progress. Instead what was meant to be achieved was a measurement of progress of one's own in order to be able to develop and live independently from the West's imposed standards of development. In line with this Christopher Houston has suggested understanding the desire for purity Muslims express in Turkey as a longing for autonomy from the West:

In general, however, enthusiasm for the Iranian model has died down [...] Unhappily, Iran too has been contaminated by a nationalist logic. But this disappointment has not

dented Islamism's self-confidence in its own internal resources as sufficient to solve any problem, [...] In this regard Islamism as utopia is engaged in a search for purity, as any degree of hybridity necessitates a counter-movement toward disentanglement. This drive towards purity is simultaneously a plea for autonomy, as the sought-after and divinely-ordained order legislates only according to its own significations and principles, and not those of the West.³²⁰

This longing for purity is perhaps impossible to be fulfilled, given that the cultural framework they lived in was not self-evidently the one they wanted to follow for orientation and could not be dissociated from Western influence either. Autonomy in this sense was impossible to be recovered, therefore, an experience of fullness, described by Taylor as something that believers can receive, remained distant and mostly could not be grasped with believing and belonging remaining separate.³²¹ Therefore the students' efforts to grasp an authentic Islamic life cannot only be seen as a plea for autonomy, but also as a desire for protection from disorder and devaluation of their culture, religion and spirituality.

In line with this they worked for a distinctive culture of their own that had become a very modest struggle for incorporating parts and pieces of Islamic lifestyle and philosophy that they could integrate with modern life and society. Though at first sight producing new ambiguities, these efforts are meant to safeguard or reconstruct an Islamic purity and thus a particular lifeworld that can be trusted to be safe and homely in contrast to the secular spheres in society. Accordingly, the students can be said to be members of a culture that is consciously re-inventing itself to gain autonomy and protection. The ambiguity that their presence and their efforts in visibly living an Islamic life creates within secular spheres from their point of view is not so much something ambiguous than their claim for a Muslim life as people have lived it for centuries past. Muslim identity in this sense is seen as a primordial identity that has been passed on from generation to generation and has been disrupted by secularist newcomers. Though the secularists can no longer be seen as strangers to Turkish society the natural and most suitable way of life would be Muslim.

By understanding Muslim identity as primordial even the Muslim students revealed how much their understanding of their religion was rooted in modernity. In line with this Houston even sees this longing for autonomy as something modern:

³²⁰ Houston (2001: 166/167)

³²¹ s. Taylor (2007: 6)

And ironically, then, neither can it ever attain its own purity, at least not while the modern signification of autonomy itself remains an esteemed goal. Indeed, in desiring to be free from Western law and hence to become a law unto itself, Islamism's rootedness in modernity is revealed. Autonomy here is activated in the form of a collective subject, the rules making the rules that will rule them, as the agitating spirit of autonomy urges. For as the people become voluntarist, not traditional Muslims, the Islamic law instituted by their struggle is simply their self-legislation.³²²

Though a certain claim for autonomy might be rooted in modernity, I would rather link part of this desire for autonomy in an attempt to protect one's cultural and religious lifeworld that seems to have been enfeebled – autonomy is therefore sought in cultural and religious terms rather than political ones. Despite the students having the possibility to choose from different lifestyles, they did not yet have a cultural framework to choose from, and were still in the process of developing a cultural framework acceptable to them. This project and their confrontation with secular-liberal culture demanded a daily choice between two lifestyles: an easy accessible one and one that was sometimes hard to uphold³²³ and seemed to be unfinished and not yet sophisticated in parts. Clearly as Taylor has suggested the belief in God often is the more difficult option to live in a secular age.

In his discussion of Will Kymlicka's concept of multicultural citizenship, Jonathan Chaplin doubts Will Kymlicka's suggestion that cultural membership proposes possibilities for choice, stating that:

Cultures are not valued primarily because they enable people to choose between different ways of living but rather because they relieve people of the constant need to choose how they should live. Being a member of a culture means that we tacitly endorse a certain way of living. If we have not endorsed it we are not a member of that culture, even though we may happen to be resident in it.³²⁴

His understanding of cultural membership seems somewhat more practical if the confrontation with choices and the refusal to accept the dominant culture in the urban context of Istanbul was an exception rather than the characterisation of the "normal case". However, it is more likely that decisions between different values and lifestyles are the normal case in Istanbul. Chaplin's understanding of culture perhaps only refers to what human beings would wish to be the normal case, namely an environment that does not question them. As the students had not endorsed majority culture, they perhaps felt as not belonging to the culture (they were

³²² Houston (2001: 167)

³²³ Similarly Taylor (2007) suggests that believers in today's Europe have chosen the more difficult option by believing.

³²⁴ Chaplin (1993: 40)

already living) and endorsed the perspective of outsiders. One of them once summarised the feeling they have had within Turkish society by stating: “biz bu toplumda var olmamasi gereken insanlariz” (in this society we are people who should not exist.) Indeed, maybe this position enables them to develop concepts for society that others have not yet had the courage to imagine. Moreover, their experience of marginalisation may reflect why they have developed a different sense for others in the same position. A first point hinting at such an understanding is that they do not try to imagine a Muslim country for Muslims only. They once discussed the term “ümme”t”, reaching the conclusion that it actually only meant Muslims yet also had to include others, given that there would naturally be a heterogeneity of people in every country. One of the questions that will be asked in the following therefore adheres to whether or not their position as outsiders did influence their view on minorities. And if so, did they feel they could be more open towards other minorities or rather protect themselves by remaining among themselves? Would they want to be questioned or rather unquestioningly pursue their own ideas?

When discussing that changes can only take place if people change and become more sensitive to societal issues, my informants always talked about Muslims’ awareness, which led me to conclude that the role that non-Muslims might play in a different society has not yet been thought to an end. Some of the thoughts on religious minorities shed some light on this perception (chapter 3.2). However, the fact that the students did not have concise plans and projects for a better society seems to account for their openness to support an equal and free society in which matters can still be discussed. What role then could non-Muslim minorities play in their project for a better society? Could they be partners in this project? Could they be trusted? And in what ways were other minorities thought to influence their own group? How much influence was accorded to them and how much did they feel to have to seclude themselves for being able to remain Muslims?

The aim of the following chapter is to ascertain the attitudes of the Muslims in the student group regarding minorities such as Kurds, Christians (Armenians and Greeks) and homosexuals. Their ideas and theoretical thoughts about living together with (or apart from them) will be explored in terms of their understanding of a peaceful Islamic co-existence.

4.1 Ethnic minorities: Integrating the Kurds?

Conformity, Universalism and Cultural Ambiguity

The most discussed issue amongst the Muslim students was the nation-state. Indeed, it was the nation-state that forced them to fit into society, to abandon part of their religion and tradition, and again it was the nation-state responsible for a whole lot of societal problems that could be overcome, if there was not the nation-state's demand for the conformity of all its citizens. From a Muslim perspective, the problems that Kurdish citizens in Turkey have had to struggle with are evident. The main reason for their empathy and understanding can certainly be traced to Muslims' rejection of the concept of the nation-state and its demand for conformity that they experience as altogether alien to them and what it means to be Muslim. In an interview, one of the students explained how she saw the Kemalist drive for conformity:

TC kurulduğunda şöyle bir sorun vardı: müsülman ve islamcı halk var ve yöneten kişi yöneten kişiler Kemalist. Kemalist ne demek, din karşılıklı anlamına geliyor [...] Ve bunlar halkı nasıl dönüştüreceklerini bilmediler Kemalistler islamcılık söylemine ortadan kaldırabilmek için milli düşünüyeyi milliyetçilik düşüncesine ulusuluk düşüncesine ortaya attılar ve dediler ki Türkiyenin altı tane temel xxx bir tanesi milliyetçilik. Bunu benimseyen müsülmanlar oldu, dediler ki biz Türküz. Türküz müsülmanız dediler. Kürt müsülmanı kabul etmiyoruz.³²⁵

(When the Turkish Republic was founded there was the following problem, there was a Muslim and Islamist people and the governing person, the governing persons were Kemalists. What does Kemalist mean: It means against religion [...] And they, the Kemalists, did not know how to transform the people. To disestablish the Islamist ideology they brought forward the nationalist idea and said that Turkey has six basic precepts, one of them being nationalism. There were Muslims who adopted nationalism and said we are Turks. We are Turks and Muslims, we do not accept Kurdish Muslims.)

In line with what she said, the students perceived nationalists or nationalist Muslims as people who had adopted the state's egalitarian approaches and fused the racist dimensions of nationalism with an extremely problematic understanding of Islam. Not only did their understanding of Turkishness lower Kurds to second class citizens, but also deprived them of their right to live according to their culture. From the nationalists' perspective, the rejection of anything that did not fit into the very narrow national concept of the Turkish Muslim was unacceptable – if not dangerous. Therefore, plural affiliations, ambiguities and values opposing the Kemalist modernity project with the Turk at its centre had to be eliminated in

³²⁵ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

order to create a homogenous Turkish people. An understanding the students were perfectly aware of and that they linked to the phenomena of nationalism and the nation-state.

To understand the notion of the modern nation-state and the pressure of homogeneity it induces it is useful to look at what exactly happens during such homogenization processes. The students would generally summarize the Kurds' situation by referring to the prohibition of their customs, culture, language - in short anything that could remind of the Kurds having a separate identity from those of the Turks. According to Zygmunt Baumann, this drive for homogeneity on an abstract level can be understood as a fundamental characteristic to modernity, a notion that the nation-state is imbued with:

The other of modern intellect is polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets. Since the sovereignty of the modern intellect is the power to define and to make the definitions stick – everything that eludes unequivocal allocation is an anomaly and a challenge. [...] In both cases, resistance to definitions sets the limit to sovereignty, to power, to the transparency of the world, to its control, to order. That resistance is the stubborn and grim reminder of the flux which order wished to contain but in vain; of the limits to order; and of the necessity of ordering.³²⁶

According to Baumann, the drive for conformity in modern nation-states went hand-in-hand with modernity and led to the elimination of values, lifestyles and traditions in public behaviour. In particular, those traditions and values that would resist a new definition would be shaped anew and established in a conformed system of values and traditions preparing society's change for modernity.³²⁷

The nationalist drive for conformity and assimilation, however, is not the only source of discomfort today. Many students (as seen in chapter 3) were aware that even though power constellations were still the same the system had begun to change and that there was a sort of soft or sweet politics that seemed to contradict the state's assimilation politics. In a more recent essay Baumann has commented on this new state politics and described it as being different from the order-seeking modern politics that was in favour of homogeneity. Postmodern politics, in his view, are lead by the idea that difference is good and needs to be preserved and protected. He states that

³²⁶ Baumann (1991:9)

³²⁷ s. Bauer (2011: 360)

In an important respect, and for important reasons, ours is a *heterophilic* age. For sensation-gatherers or experience-collectors that we are concerned (or, more exactly, forced to be concerned) with flexibility and openness rather than fixity and self-closure.³²⁸

Similarly other scholars have supported this view by giving examples of a new conception and place that the stranger is now said to occupy.

Casanova has used the term of “disestablished religions” to describe those religious communities that are meant to remain in the private and not to become public. In a sense disestablished religions can be perceived in analogy to the stranger as they are not part of the system and often can be said to be minority religions that are only accepted in the private sphere. Casanova’s contention is that disestablished religions can have a positive impact on politics and society when they a) enter the public sphere in order to protect the freedom of religion and thereby strengthen all modern freedoms and rights b) question the secular spheres of lawfulness and c) protect people’s lifeworlds from administrative reordering by initiating a debate in society.³²⁹

In all these cases disestablished religions or minority religions are understood to challenge society in a way that broadens the freedoms the state accords its citizens and thus stabilize the secular society with regard to the challenges it faces. The minority religion just as the stranger in his view do not have to be perceived as detrimental to society, on the contrary he can become an asset to society. He is understood to be a positive force that strengthens societal and systemic structures by bracing societies for other challenges to come.

Bhabha can perhaps also be understood as being in favour of understanding our society as heterophilic as he even goes as far as to claim that minority views do not only trigger positive developments in secular societies, but are at the centre of the development of national cultures today:

Increasingly, ‘national’ cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities. The most significant effect of this process is not the proliferation of ‘alternative histories of the excluded’ producing, as some would have it, a pluralist anarchy. What my examples shows is the changed basis for making international connections. The currency of critical comparativism, or aesthetic judgement, is no longer the sovereignty of the national culture conceived as Benedict Anderson proposes as an ‘imagined community’ rooted in a ‘homogenous empty time’

³²⁸ Baumann (1997: 55)

³²⁹ Casanova (1994: 57/58)

of modernity and progress. The great connective narratives of capitalism and class drive the engines of social reproduction, but do not, in themselves, provide a foundational frame for those modes of cultural identification and political affect that form around issues of sexuality, race, feminism, the lifeworld of refugees or migrants, or the deathly social destiny of AIDS.³³⁰

The fact that discussions on minority issues make the rationales according to which we perceive political or societal issues today seems to strengthen perspectives on culture and policy that seem not to be directed by the majority's concerns for society. Though it is questionable whether one could therefore assume that minorities in fact have a greater influence on the production of national cultures than majority populations happen to have, it might be true that minority issues structure public discourse. Baumann would probably not concede with these views as he sees the centre of power with the state and the majority population. The stranger in his views still has to be preserved as the stranger and somewhat encounters with a false benevolence that recreates community (rather than emancipation) in opposition to the state:

It proposes only to shift the site of disablement and subordination from the universalist State to the particularist tribe. It only replaces one 'essentialism', already discredited, by another, not yet fully unmasked in all its disempowering potential. [...] there is a dangerous and easily overlooked point where re-empowerment turns into a new disempowerment, and emancipation into a new oppression.³³¹

Taking this into account it might be important to understand how the students perceive the Kurdish issue now that the state – in some regards – seems to loosen its grip on homogenization. As seen in the referendum debate they are quite critical about this new sweet politics and would not want to be deceived by it and the power relations it disguises.

However, this does not say anything about their own approach towards critical issues and their stand within existing power constellations.

Given that in Casanova's terms they would just be members of a disestablished religion that can become an asset to politics by broadening freedoms in society, would they not reject this place in society and claim to be at the centre of society? Can they really be those who structure and influence the public discourse to a degree that it questions national Turkish culture? From their point of view is the Kurdish issue being resolved, are Kurds

³³⁰ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 8)

³³¹ Baumann (1997:57)

really being given the rights they need to be recognized and accepted members of society? Or else is their rhetoric oppression with an emancipatory face, as Baumann would suggest?

The Kurdish Issue

The state's efforts to eliminate heterogeneity in order to create a homogenous nation state as well as its war against the PKK reflect one part of the discussion on the Kurdish issue. However, this perspective is not the only relevant part, given that many civil society organisations currently deal with the Kurdish issue and advocate a view that extends beyond simple dichotomies that consider the Kurdish issue as a war between the state and terrorists. The Kurdish issue has in this respect become a matter of debate that by many people is understood to be crucial. Crucial with regard to Turkey's economical and social development, but also as a matter from which the state's capacity to value and respect its people are being judged. In this regard the Kurdish issue has in fact become a subject through which national culture is negotiated not only for Kurds, but for all in society. When looking at the student group, the interesting question is thus not whether the students saw the Kurdish cause as justified at all, but "in what sense did they see it as justified?" Was it more to them than an issue that simply symbolized their own fate within the state and gave them the opportunity to raise their own issues by referring to the Kurdish minority? Or did they seriously deal with the Kurdish issue trying to understand what the current political situation meant to them and how it had affected them over the years?

The fact that the Muslim community was torn over the issue (with nationalist Muslims having adopted the statist discourse) hints at the fact that the debate on the Kurdish issue still is a controversial one and that there are very different perspectives on the issue that might vary with regard to their aims. The students' efforts were thus mainly directed at discerning their views from those other Muslims advocated. A statement that makes this very clear was written by one of my informants the year after I had conducted my fieldwork. I include it here as it shows exceptionally well what conflicts the students discussed with regard to the Kurdish issue:

islam adına türklüğü üstün birşey olarak algılayan sapkınlar ya da onu yapmasa bile kürtlerin hak arama mücadelesini islami kardeşliğe vurulan bir darbe olarak algılayarak, kendi dillerini keyfince konuşan türk müslümanları, kürtler ağzını açınca onlara kardeşliği hatırlatarak susturmuyor mu?³³²

(Are there no deviant opinions that see Turkishness as something superior and that in the name of Islam? And, if they do not do that don't they see the Kurdish struggle for

³³² E-Mail: 17.09.11

rights as an attack on the Islamic brotherhood – those Turkish Muslims who happily speak their language, but mute Kurds by reminding them of their brotherhood?)

Owing to the state's efforts to impose a homogenous Turkish identity, distance and closeness between Kurds and Turks can be difficult issues to tackle, as the writer states. Indeed, the pressure exercised on Kurds to force them into a "Muslim brotherhood" that has denied their identity is something he considers very critical. From his perspective, Islam has been discredited by the fact that it has been used to force the Kurds to become part of a Turkish nation. As a common denominator for Kurds and Turks, Islam can thus only be used with some caution, given that Islam itself might be used as a means to exercise oppression.

Religion – from his point of view – cannot longer be seen as a pure and innocent concept, rather the shared history and present of Turkish assimilation efforts has added aspects and connotations to the concept of political Islam that are perceived to have not existed in it before. Religion is no longer independently overarching society and believers, but is in midst of a struggle over legitimate claims to identity and rights. Aspects of the political past and present, histories of oppression and assimilation here come together and with regard to the group have formed an Islam that is free from the concept of Turkishness, but not untouched by the effects of national ideology and ethnic appropriation. In a sense this perception of religion can be linked to Bhabha's concept of culture "in the beyond":

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.³³³

For the Kurdish issue space and time can be said to have crossed as the oppression the Kurdish people has had to witness in Turkey somewhat seems to belong to the past with the Turkish majority population having gained a certain consciousness on the subject, but then it is as acute as ever with military operations going on in the Southeast and new ways of negotiating rights opening up in society. The same – and perhaps more distinctly in Bhabha's sense - accounts for Islam which has been attributed a hybrid identity in the student's statement by being perceived as the pure religion, but also as a means of oppression. This hybrid identity that Islam is attributed with might be traceable and distinguishable with regard to the two originary points (religion and statist oppression) in which Islam is being perceived by the

³³³ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 2)

student. However, just as Bhabha states for culture it is possible to see here that religion as a part of culture is meaning that “is constructed across the bar of difference and separation between the signifier and the signified [...] [and therefore] denies the essentialism of a prior given original culture or originary culture, [...] we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.”³³⁴

Therefore the student in this specific situation understands Islam as ambiguous or hybrid – something third that had not been in any discussion that I had witnessed before and according to Bhabha could claim a new importance. The importance of hybridity for Bhabha lies in the new meanings and positions people acquire through hybridization:

But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.³³⁵

These other positions that seemed to emerge with regard to the debate on the Kurdish issue clearly seemed to withdraw from originary cultures or identities. In this sense the Kurds in the group (or most of them) would rather see themselves as part of a Muslim ummah than a nationalist state project, there was something like a “we” that distanced itself from the Kurdish nationalist discourse and added another layer to the complexity of the identity claims being negotiated in the group.

The same holds for the Turkish students, most of whom had distanced themselves from something like a Turkish identity in favour of an Islamic identity; moreover, many of them experienced their Turkish identity as something very questionable. One of the students once told me that her father – a Turkish nationalist, in her opinion – and family had recently had a confusing experience when their grandfather, an old and slightly confused man, admitted that their family was in fact of Kurdish origin. For her – as she also refrained from all kind of nationalism – this revelation was not so much of an ideological problem than an interesting fact illustrating the senselessness of the Turkish state’s identity politics, whereas for her father it was a catastrophe. Her story is certainly no exception, even though it is no secret in most families, but rather openly known that parts of the family are Kurdish.

³³⁴ Rutherford/Bhabha (1990: 211)

³³⁵ Rutherford/Bhabha (1990: 211)

The admittance to a certain complexity that denies originary identities here makes way for a more differentiated approach. However, one could claim that the originary identity of the Turk is only being replaced by another pure and originary identity, that of the Muslim. Though Bhabha does believe that hybridity and the possibilities of a third space can overcome any form of hierarchy³³⁶, in the given context it is clear that one originary identity might just be replaced by a counter identity that in turn might have also transformed into a solid entity after experiencing a moment of hybridity in the beyond.

The students' claim that Muslim identity as such was more natural³³⁷, less fixed and more fluid than Turkish identity would certainly be supported by Bauer whose concept of cultural ambiguity can be understood as a characteristic that enables openness and toleration vis-à-vis strangers. For him the diversity of Muslim creeds, the acceptance and recognition of different cultures, customs and languages within Muslim culture would prove that Muslim culture was (at some point) not only more tolerant towards ambiguity, but open towards other identities. The question that he does not ask is whether this toleration only applied for identities that existed in primordial terms or else for hybrid identities, too? And do not all identities at some point refer to primordial identities or transform into primordial identities again?

To better understand the capacities and implications of hybridity and cultural ambiguity a comparison between ambiguity and hybridity at this point might help to clarify effects of toleration of ambiguity and hybridity. Bauer sees the toleration of ambiguity as distinct from toleration as such, because tolerance requires the recognition of one's own values and being with regard to those that one tolerates, whereas tolerance of ambiguity does not presuppose a clear distinction between one's own values and those of someone else. The difference of another person here can remain different though undistinguished and without a clear line separating one's own identity and values from those of someone else. To a degree the same accounts for Bhabha's hybridity concept as hybridity might be referred to originary elements, however the distinction from them though pronounced as to the fact that there is a distinction remain unclear with regard to the ways and degrees of its distinction. Moreover, hybridity is based on the interstitial and translational character of culture itself and therefore produces a

³³⁶ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 5)

³³⁷ Though perhaps not more "natural" Muslim identity clearly is more open than Turkish national identity. Whereas the latter presupposes Sunni Islam and Turkishness as prerequisites for its members, the former depending on particular circumstances presupposes some degree of Muslimness only.

subjectivity that is in pursuit of innovation itself and in Bhabha's thinking is somewhat superior to the elements of its origin:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'inbetween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.³³⁸

The fact that Bhabha praises hybridity as antihierarchical, however, does raise some suspicions. As it is somewhat unclear which cases definitely fall in the category of Bhabha's hybridity it is clear that its outcomes might be developing into very different ways within specific circumstances. At least in some conversations that I witnessed among the students it can certainly be claimed that Muslimness was simply replacing an originary Turkishness. At least in the confrontation between nationalist ethnic identities Muslim identity sometimes simply seemed to be the counter identity as I found in an interview with one of the students:

bozulmamış Türkler vardır, Türkmen denir bunlar. Kerküklü Türkler de.

Babam benim Türkmen. Bu İstanbuldaki Türkiyedeki Türklerin hiçbiri Türk değil zaten birisi Çerkes, birisi Laz, başka yerlerden Rumlar falan, Ermeniler bir süre insan var yani. Hepsi kendine Türk diyor halbuki hiçbiri köken olarak belki de Türk değil.

İşte bunu söylemek gerekiyor ben insanların gözüne sokup ben Türküm Türküm diyemem yani niçin bu Türklük şeyi. Bu Türk kimliği müsülman kimliğinden ötesine geçiyor ben bunu anlayamıyorum.³³⁹

(There are "unspoiled" Turks, they are called Turkmen. The Turkmen from Kirkuk belong to them. My father is a Turkmen. The Turks in Istanbul, in Turkey, none of them is Turkish anyway. One is Circassian, one is Laz, there are people from other places, Rum and so forth, Armenians, there is a whole lot of people. All of them call themselves Turk, even though none of them by origin might be Turk at all. This is what has to be said, I cannot confront people by saying I am Turkish, I am Turkish. Why this Turkishness thing? The Turkish identity surpasses the Muslim identity, I cannot understand this.)

Though the student's explanation can be understood in very different ways and interpreted with regard to the dynamics of the discourse that favour creating a solid Muslim identity in opposition to a unitarian Turkish identity, this might yet be too simple an explanation. The

³³⁸ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 2)

³³⁹ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

rhetorical question the student asks when she says that she cannot understand why ethnic identities are able to surpass religious ones clearly is in favour of hierarchy, though for a subverted one. Therefore here it might be questioned as to whether hybridity might recreate new hierarchies or even fall back unto solid primordial identity categories when given the opportunity.

In line with this Chaplin has explained human beings longing for stability to be stronger than their desire for choosing from culture to develop new identities. His argument might be useful here to reject Bhabha's idea that hybridity leads to innovation and newness. Hybridity might just be a point in time and subsequently develop into originary identities that tend to subvert hierarchies for their own purposes

Though even if there are particular circumstances in which people recognize and live a certain hybridity they might not necessarily strive for innovation. Bauer's concept of cultural ambiguity that does not necessarily include openness for change and development, but rather a psychological stability that accepts ambiguity and newness without moving from the stable points of one's identities seems more applicable for the case of the students. However, as he does not explore the hierarchies that might develop while tolerating cultural ambiguity it might be possible that cultural ambiguity only works if stability and control are set by clear hierarchies. Bhabha's examples which largely derive from post-colonial literature and extreme experiences of oppression and neglect on the other hand can be seen as portraying individuals that strive for change because the present is simply not viable. They strive for hybridity from the standpoint of the weaker who clearly is more susceptible to others' oppression.³⁴⁰

Given the circumstances and the discourse in which the Muslim students expressed their claims for change and Islamisation it is important to ask in what sense the changes and the democratisation they favoured were in for innovation and newness.

At least their ability to think outside of nationalist ideology seems to point at what Bhabha has described as the end of Anderson's homogenous time of the nation-state. In this regard

³⁴⁰ The experience of oppression might of course lead to people seeking revenge rather than justice. However, Bhabha's literary subjects usually tend to live through traumas in which traumatic experiences are being processed. Their silence and inactivity in Bhabha's terms then leaves space for hybridity. However, as in the case of Rushdie's "Satanic Verses" one might question that what is at stake here really has to do with hybridity or with racism, as Asad would claim for example.

the actions and developments the students favour can be understood within the framework of what Bhabha claims to be a result of hybridity.

The students' willingness to recognise the existence of the Kurdish people (and its hybrid character as Turkish, Kurdish and Muslim) might lie in the fact that the emphasis on the Kurds makes everybody else Turkish, even though this does not reflect the Turkish reality (and particularly the reality in Istanbul), as the student claimed. The diversity of the student group and the hybrid identities of its member sometimes played a role when people dug up their family histories, and can be perhaps considered an important reason for them to reject the Turk-Kurd dichotomy. The recognition of their own hybridity "as Turks" might have had a positive effect in fostering an awareness and subsequent recognition of the Kurdish issue as a struggle for identity and culture. At least it seemed as if something third that so far had not yet occupied any space was in the making and that its recognition to a degree was already inducing a rethinking of relations and understandings. Political issues as well as earlier convictions were being traced again and seized from the collective amnesia³⁴¹ of the nation. Thus the same student who saw Muslim identity as opposed to Turkish identity also stated that:

şöyle söylebilirim demokratik açılım yaparak bir kere [the AKP] Türkiyede bir Kürt sorunun var olduğunu bütün dünyaya haykırmış oldular. Bu zamana kadar 7 yıl öncesine kadar Kürt diye bir şeyden biz hiçbirimiz bahs etmiyorduk çünkü zaten bilmiyorduk yani biz daha yeni yeni öğreniyoruz gerçekten müsülmanlar yeni yeni öğreniyorlar.³⁴²

(I can explain it this way, with the democratic opening they [the AKP] have shouted at the whole world that there is something like a Kurdish issue. Until today, until 7 years ago none of us talked about something like the Kurds, because we did not know anyway. We have only recently started to learn about the Kurds, really, the Muslims have recently learned about the Kurdish issue.)

The Muslim community's delay in recognising the Kurdish issue for my informants primarily lies in the pressure exercised over decades by the state to deter people from actively assuming a role in the political discourse. At that time ordinary identity as such existed in a homogenous time that assumed that there was no such thing as diversity among the people of one country.³⁴³ Collective amnesia can perhaps be said to have distracted Muslims from assuming other identities than that of the Turk or being aware of the identity struggle the Kurdish people went through. Accordingly, one of the students told me that Muslims had only recently started to

³⁴¹ s. Gellner (1987: 6)

³⁴² Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

³⁴³s. Bhabha (1999: 217)

learn about the Kurdish issue. However, from the students' perspective the unwillingness to learn about the Kurdish issue in their parents' generation stemmed from an unconsciously lived Islam. Though this statement largely would not apply for their "real parents" the generation of their parents was largely seen as having been unaware of one of the most pressing issues in Turkish politics. Though sometimes there would also be remarks that would indicate some understanding of the situation that that generation had lived through with the state's pressure as well as respective biographies and fears being mentioned the students tended to see it as the features of an unconscious Islam that had led them to ignore the Kurds plight.

To them, the situation in the Southeast is a scandal, and something that they would not have imagined existing in their country.

arkada belli insanlar, bazı insanlar, bunlar Kemalistler oluyor Güneydoğu ve Doğu bölgelerinde kısıtlı olarak şey yapmışlar ekonomik yönden güçsüz bırakmışlar kısıtlı olarak ama hani biz diyoruz işte oraya istihdam sağlarsak onlar aç kalmayacaklar dolayısıyla o kadar da kavga görültü kopmayacak halbuki oraya yani kısıtlı olarak insanlar ekonomik yardım götürmediler oradaki insanları aç bıraktılar oradaki köyleri Kürt köylerin adları değiştirdiler. Bir bakıyorsun mesela tarihten bakıyorum hani kayıtlara şu köy şu zaman yanmış. Türkiyede yaşıyoruz İstanbulda veya Karadenizde böyle bir şey olmazken, Egede, İç Anadolu'da böyle bir şey olmazken niye Güneydoğuda oluyor niye köyler yakıyor niye çocuklar ölüyor. Kısıt var burda bu kısıt daha yeni yeni insanların kafasına soktu ah böyle böyle şeyler varmış ya kürtler varmış acı çekiyorlarmış diye insanlar öğrenmeye başladılar.³⁴⁴

(In the back certain people – these people being the Kemalists – have forced the southeast and eastern regions into a poor economic state - forcefully. We say if we can provide employment there, they will not be hungry and therefore there will not be as much trouble and fights. However, they intentionally did not provide any economic assistance there, they left the people there hungry, they changed the Kurdish villages' names. You can see, for instance, I look at it from a historical perspective, the records say that that village burned down at that time. We live in Turkey. Whereas in Istanbul, in the Black Sea region things like that are impossible, whereas in the Aegean region, in inner Anatolia such things are not happening why are these things happening in the southeast, why are villages burnt, why are children dying? There is a force behind it. People have just recently learned about these constraints ... ah, there are things like that, there are Kurdish people and they are suffering, that is what people have started to learn.)

³⁴⁴ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

This of course does not only point at the fact the Kurdish issue had been disguised from the view of the Muslim community by some sort of amnesia, but also at the fact that for the Muslim community there is a clear answer as to who is the perpetrator in Kurdish history. Despite referring to the fact that Muslims had earlier ignored particular issues and not felt responsible with regard to the Kurdish issue the overarching dichotomy that structures all political debates here again can be seen as an impediment to think in between the clear oppositions of the secular and the Muslim. In what sense then do the Muslim students support the Kurdish cause? As something that they have been able to claim for their agenda, basically something like a political issue that they have been able to occupy in spite of Kemalist efforts of demonizing Kurds? Or in what regard do they explain their current efforts to support the Kurdish issue? What do they actually do to defend Kurds' rights in Turkey?

The Muslims (in the student circle, yet also many other conscious Muslims) presently engage in activities to support the Kurdish cause and stand up for freedom. Indeed, I have been with them to peace demonstrations, where they shouted Kurdish slogans (that they had learned by heart) and listened to many people beyond the student spectrum who reject the army's course of action. These developments can of course be traced to the lifting of statist oppression and some effects of the Kurdish opening on society. However, what it also shows is that homogeneity is no longer the only rationale of perceiving others. Difference in identities can now be recognised and discussed. Moreover, the feeling that one can assume agency and play a part in diminishing state oppression comes along with these developments.

One of my informants told me that they wanted the Kurdish issue to be resolved, adding:

[...] bunun herkes çözülmesini istiyor bir anlamda da. Kürt milliyetçileri de istiyor, bizim Türk milliyetçiler de istiyor - bizim değil gerçi ya - ama onlar işte Türk milliyetçileri diyor ki biz bunları asalım keselim, öbürleri diyor ki biz iste ayrılalım bölelim falan. Biz böyle değil tabiki.

Niz hani daha İslami perspektiften olayı yorumladığımız için diyoruz ki İslamda ırkçılık yoktur ırk temeli yaklaşım yoktur.³⁴⁵

([...] everyone wants it [the Kurdish issue] to be resolved in some way. The Kurdish nationalists want it to be resolved, our Turkish nationalist – in fact not “ours” – want it to be resolved. However, the Turkish nationalists say let's hang them, butcher them, the others say, let's separate, let's parcel up the country, and so forth. We do not think this

³⁴⁵Interview Betül 08.09.10

way, we interpret the situation from a more Islamic perspective and therefore say there is no racism in Islam, there is no race-based approach.)

Therefore, the Islamic perspective is quite detached from the nationalist perspectives that Turks and Kurds respectively endorse to resolve the issue. According to the students, the Muslim perspective is one that cannot be grounded in the difference of races. In their view, the ideal solution for the Kurdish issue would be a third way based on the commonality of Islam. In the case that the majority of Kurdish Muslims would stand up for freedom first and see Islam as more important than Kurdish nationalism, a Muslim solution would be possible.

However, even in the context that there will not be a Muslim solution, many Muslims support certain first steps and show that their claim for diversity is robust.

First steps for such a solution thus involve the end of any military action by the Turkish army, the release of political prisoners, an apology from the state for the crimes it committed against the Kurdish people, and an end to the banning of the Kurdish language, in the sense that it becomes an official language taught in school, the end of the repetition of nationalist slogans such as “ne mutlu Türküm diyene” (Happy is he who says “I am a Turk”) and their erasure in the public space, new school books and new official books that do not contain any racist and exclusionary expressions, the renaming of the Kurdish villages, and the beginning of a real dialogue between the AKP and BDP.³⁴⁶

The aforementioned informant explained how this solution could ideally look by expressing what kind of society could be considered Islamic:

İslamda ümmetçilik vardır yani toplu halde bir arada huzur içinde yaşamayı biz savunuruz. Onun dışında işte bir takım ırkçı o Türk o Kürt o Laz o Çerkez ayrımlarına gitmiyoruz. Böyle de çözülmezsin istiyoruz. Tabiki Kürt kimliğinin üzerinde yatılan bir baskı zulüm olduğunu görmezden gelmiyoruz. Onların kimlikleri yüzünden baskı ve zulüm uğradılar bunun aşılmasını tabiki talep istiyoruz.³⁴⁷

(In Islam, we have the concept of Ummah. This means that we defend peacefully living together. Apart from that, we do not refer to a couple of racist distinctions, those are Turks, those are Laz, those are Cerkez. We do not want it to be resolved that way. However, we do not ignore the pressure and the oppression the Kurdish identity has been subjected to, they have been subjected to pressure and oppression because of their identity and of course we demand that this be surpassed.)

³⁴⁶ These proposals were made during an annual forum on the Kurdish issue, organized by Özgür-Der Diyarbakır. (<http://www.haksozhaber.net/kurt-sorunu-forumu-son-oturumu-ve-sonuc-bildirisi-15744h.htm>)

³⁴⁷ Interview Betül 08.09.10

While this shows that she would prefer a solution in which groups of different people peacefully live with one another, regarding the Kurdish aspirations for an own state and the history that they have shared with the Turks, the denial of their identity and the violence they have been subjected to must be taken into account.

Nevertheless, the Kurdish members of the student group sometimes reminded the others that Turks (or all who are considered to be Turks) are treated differently and that most of the non-Kurdish members only theoretically had an idea of what it meant to be Kurdish in Turkey. Maybe through these discussions and the rising awareness and interest in the Kurdish language (with language classes being established at university) and tradition has made it clear to them (as far as it is possible to understand a life situation that one does not share), as stated by Taylor:

our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.³⁴⁸

Therefore, the general insight developed by the Muslim students was based on their rejection of the nation-state and an understanding of the injuries through denied recognition. To some degree, both are experiences they have lived through, too. However, what stands between them and Kurdish activists for a state is probably their positive appropriation of nationalism.

Moreover, even if they criticise the nationalist attitude of Kurdish activists and would prefer people of different ethnic backgrounds to peacefully live together, there is some openness for a Kurdish state of its own, even if that state might (as does the Turkish) incorporate all the features that they are critical of, as stated by one of the students:

Türk milleti bölünmezdir bu tür söylemlerde bulunmam ben, ama PKK'yi asla tasvip etmiyorum, mutlaka PKK başarılı olacak çünkü çok az destekçisi var bizim. İnsanlar PKK'yi şey gibi görüyorlar halbuki bak PKK sosyalist bir gruptur İslam dinine yani devlet olduğu zaman bir Kürt devlet kurulduğu zaman sosyalist bir devlet olacak ve Türkiye gibi sekülerist bir devlet olacak. Orada da asimilasyonlar olacak kendi halkını da assimile edecekler yani. Orada devlet olduğu andan itibaren - her zaman olmuştur -

³⁴⁸ Taylor (1992: 25)

zlm bařlayacak yani ben devletin olmasını istemiyorum ama olacak byk ihtimalle bir elli yıl sonra benim grřm byle.³⁴⁹

(The Turkish nation cannot be split – I do not use that kind of expressions, but I will never accept the PKK. The PKK will definitely be successful because we [the Muslim community] only have very few supporters. The people see the PKK as something, however, if you look at it the PKK is a socialist group. The religion of Islam, i.e. when they will have a state, the moment they will found their Kurdish state this state will be a socialist state and like Turkey it will be a secular state. There will be assimilations there, they will assimilate their own people. The moment there will be a state – and it always was like that – the oppression will start. I do not want there to be a state, but it is very likely that there will be one, that is what I think.)

The fact that a possible Kurdish state would be a secular socialist state places some distance between Muslims and Kurds. After all, an important part of the Kurdish population, or at least its spokesmen, are rather secular and nationalist in contrast to the Muslim supporters of the concept of ummah. Accordingly, the point that makes the Muslim students understand the Kurdish issue might be related to the fact that they can reject Turkish nationalism, yet also accept that the Kurds might in fact be in favour of a nationalist and very un-Islamic solution. What was generally discussed or sometimes surfaced in discussions was the question whether Kurdish nationalism is “better”, “understandable” and “defendable” in contrast to Turkish nationalism. With the Turkish state and army’s war against the Kurdish identity, is it understandable and “good” when Kurds become nationalist to defend their ideas?

There were differing opinions regarding this question, with some people assuming the idea that Kurdish nationalism is not as evil as Turkish nationalism, whereas others defended the idea that the responsibility for the Kurdish issue lies primarily with the Turkish state; however, this does not mean that Kurdish nationalism is a good thing after all. According to this line of argument, the Turkish army is a perpetrator responsible for the Kurdish conflict having evolved as it has. In contrast, the PKK is a result of the state’s politics and cannot be considered responsible in the same way as the Turkish army, although it cannot be acquitted of its misdeeds either.

With her insight gained into the matter and the support that the PKK still receives, one of my informants explained that she did not think that it would be possible to have Kurds and Turks living side-by-side in Turkey:

³⁴⁹ Interview Betl 08.09.10

bence onlar bağımsız olmadan çözülmeyecek, mutlaka bağımsız olacaklar. Bende burda çok milliyetçi bir söylemde bulunmam tabiki. [...] PKK'yi tasvip etmiyorum yaptığı kesinlikle en büyük barbarlıklardan bir tanesidir.Ama büyük ihtimalle yapılan istihdamlar Kürtlere yetmeyecek bir elli yıl sonra muhtemelen bağımsız olacaklar yani artık bu Kürt sorunun var olduğunu insanlar anladılar bir kere ama çözülmeyeceğini anlamıyorlar çözülmeyeceğini da anlayacaklar [...] Bu benim istediğim bir şey değil kesinlikle yani birilerini öldürerek yok ederek bir yere gelinmez demokratik şeylerle gelinebilir ya işte kardeşim biz devlet kurmak istiyoruz falan bu tür şeyler hadi konuşulur.³⁵⁰

(I think the issue will not be resolved without them becoming independent. They will definitely become independent. I do not use nationalist expression [...] I do not accept the PKK, what they are doing certainly is one of the most barbaric things. However, the probability that the opportunities that will be provided will not suffice the Kurds. Approximately 50 years later they will be independent. The people now have understood that there is something like the Kurdish issue, but they do not yet understand that it will not be resolved, but they will understand that it cannot be resolved [...].)

Therefore, it is clear that the Muslim students do not necessarily expect or hope to win the Kurds over for their own societal project. However, the fact that the Kurds might not support a Muslim solution does not mean that Muslims will not support their cause.

In the words of another informant who expressed her attitude concerning the oppression of students' attitudes regarding people opposing their values:

İslama göre herkes adil yaşamak zorundadır yani bir ayette der ki Allah size başkalarına olan düşmanlığınızı başka bir topluluğa olan düşmanlığınız sizi adaletli davranmaktan alı koymasın yani başka bir topluluğa düşmanlığın olabilir onu hiç sevmiyor olabilirsin yani gerçekten nefret ediyor olabilirsin ama bu seni adaletli olmaktan alı koyamaz dolayısıyla ne olursa olsun biz böyle yaklaşmak durumundayız.³⁵¹

(According to Islam, everyone has to live justly. In a verse, Allah says that your enmity for another people cannot retain you from behaving justly. That means there might be enmity between you and another people, you may not like them at all, you might even really hate them, but that cannot hold you from being just. Therefore no matter what happens we are bound to approach the issue like this.)

It is not important in this context whether the people oppressed are Muslims or perhaps secularists:

Mesela zalimlik nerede varsa zulüm nerede varsa ona karşı durmak zorundasın. Bunu ister müsülman yapıyor olsun zalimliği ister kafir münâfik herhangi biri yapıyor olsun hiç fark etmez ya da bir yerde zülm gören bir halk varsa bir topluluk varsa, bir grup

³⁵⁰ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

³⁵¹ Interview Betül 08.09.10

varsa, ya da bir insan varsa onun dini dili ırkı seni ilgilendirmez. O zülm görüyorsa ona yardımcı olmak zorundasın. Bunua da yine Hazreti Musanın örnekleri var kuranda anlatılır Hazret Musanın toplululuğu firavun tarafından ezilen bir toplum ve hakir görülen aşağılanan köle yapılan bir toplum. İsrail oğulları ve Hazreti Musa onları mesela ilk önce islah etmeden önce ilk önce onları firavunun zülmünden kurtarmıştır. Yani, mesela bunlar daha - bir dakika ben Allahın sözünü bunlara daha yerleştirmeden bunları kurtarmayım falan dememiştir. Bu anlamda eğer bir toplum zülm görüyorsa bir zalim varsa ya toplumda birileri acı çekiyorsa onlara yardım etmek zorundayız toplumsal düzen zaten ancak böyle sağlanır yani adalet ancak böyle sağlanır diye düşünüyorum.³⁵²

(For example, when there is an oppressive system or oppression you have to stand up against it. It does not matter if the oppression is committed by a Muslim or by a non-believer or a münâfik, or if there is a person who is oppressed, a group of people who are being oppressed or a human being – his religion, his language, his race is none of your business, if he is being oppressed you have to help him. With regard to this there are the examples of the prophet Moses, they are related in the Kuran, Moses' people was a people that was being oppressed by the Pharaoh, a person who was very humble and degraded. The sons of Israel – the prophet Moses saved them from the Pharaoh's oppression before he reformed them. He did not for example say: one moment, before saving them I should firstly fit Allah's words into them. In this sense, if there is a person who is being oppressed, if there is an oppressor or if there are people who are suffering, you have to help. Societal order can only be established that way, justice can only be established that way, I think.)

Therefore, from the students' point of view it is clear that "İslamda ırkçılık diye bir şey yok. İnsanlar etnik kimliklerini çok rahat bir şekilde yaşayabilmeleri."³⁵³ (There is no racism in Islam. People must be able to freely express their identities.), as one of the students said.

However, it is impossible to reduce this issue to an aversion only against racism. With Bauer the fact that the students would neither go for the unitarian nationalist ideology of the Turkish state nor the Kurdish nationalists alternative shows that they would always opt for a societal solution that integrates Kurds and prefers diversity. To them, diversity seems to be an asset rather than something they want to contain or level off. The Kurds might be different from them or prefer political solutions that might not be theirs however, there is no clear line that divides Kurds from Turks as Muslims. It is possible to accept and tolerate their opinions and not even always clearly distinguish them from "Turkish opinions" as Turkish as well as Kurdish students would often support them same opinions or divert on certain issues without clear fault lines becoming visible. Indeed, this becomes clear when considering the future

³⁵² Interview Betül 08.09.10

³⁵³ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

prospects of the Kurdish issue, which might result in the Kurds founding a state of their own. Despite Turkish Muslim students preferring a solution of diversity and different ethnic communities living side-by-side, they would also accept a separate Kurdish nation state. In a sense they would not dissociate them from themselves, but consider them as Muslims still, as belonging to their community even if they decided to bring about their own state. Therefore, the students would not insist on their solution, but rather give way to other solutions that might be distinct from an “purely” Islamic solution. In case “secularist” or “nationalist” Kurds would want to live in ways different from their own, they would rather let them go than force them into an Islamic brotherhood. Interestingly they would not opt for forcing the Kurds to adopt an “Islamic point of view” or favour such a viewpoint over a nationalist Kurdish viewpoint. Things would of course change after the establishment of a secular Kurdish state that assimilates its own citizens, the limits and borders nation-states impose would then certainly have to be accepted. However, the fact that they would now still see Kurds (no matter if secular or not) as part of their own society and concern shows that there is no clear distinction between an us and a them. Rather the ambiguous double reference the Kurds bring with them is accepted and understood to be part of their own issues. In this sense Bauer’s proposal of using the tolerance of cultural ambiguity as a means to understand Muslim culture seems to hold. However, as the students would directly link their approach to the Kurdish issue with their understanding of the relationship between tyrants and subjects as well as with regard to their duties of defending oppressed people there seems to be still a different dimension that should be looked at more closely. The distinction between us and them does not become valid here, rather the main aspect of evaluating the Kurdish issue is that of going back to basic moral values that remain valid or even supersede distinctions imposed by the nation-state. Their common values and ethics here are the main reference point for their evaluation of the Kurdish issue and a toleration of the nationalist project some Kurds might engage in. As Bhabha never mentions values themselves or never elaborates on what becomes to values in states of hybridity the aspects the students mention in a sense cannot be understood as being innovative. They are of course innovative with regard to the fact that for decades Muslim communities have not supported the Kurdish issue, however, it is not the kind of innovation that a continued hybridity could bring about. Hybridity’s limits are clearly reached when people refer to their past and primordial identities again – when Islam again becomes the pure religion that has advocated the same values for centuries and centuries. Even a whole generation of Muslims who has ignored the Kurdish issue in this logic can only be unconscious Muslims who had not interpreted the holy scriptures or never sought to correctly understand them. In this sense

the particular places of mores and values seem to be aloof from anything negotiable. They are clearly inherited values that are supposed to never change and to never have changed.

In the students' view values themselves cannot be flexible and fluid, however the applicability of certain values to particular situations can be debated. Therefore religion at its core seems to harbour a great instability that has to be denied, even if the negotiation of values and ethics is a reality of discourse and cannot even be denied from the brief part of history the students dealt with. The conscious cultivation of a heterogenous approach towards ethnic minorities here reaches a limit as particular values and ethics themselves cannot be openly debated the moment they are perceived to be part of the pure Islam that – in their understanding - commands heterogeneity.

How could hybridity here possibly challenge the applicability of pure Islamic values? How could the students discuss reasons for which at some point some value had to be dismissed? Clearly, in cases in which claims can be uttered in terms of pure values or primordial identities and thus confront state oppression, hybridity itself might be deemed invalid and weak to achieving certain goals. The strength of innovation thus might not be in need of hybridity, though religious values might reach their limits in being applicable.

4.2 Religious Minorities as Strangers: the Armenians and the Christians

The Armenian Genocide

According to Bauer (2011), it is possible to state that Muslim cultures have undergone a development from a very high level of tolerance to extreme intolerance in the past centuries.³⁵⁴ In broad terms, his explanation of this development is the emergence of an ambivalent mindset that Muslims have developed towards their own culture.³⁵⁵ The West's military and economic progress, as well as the Western image of Muslim culture as decadent have turned Muslims against their own culture and generated a self-hatred that has since pursued erasing ambiguity.³⁵⁶ Westernised Muslims' contempt for cultural ambiguity derives from a perception of Muslim culture with Western standards in mind, where the non-tolerance of ambiguity – as part of modernity and the modern nation-state – plays an important role.

³⁵⁵ s. Bauer (2011: 15 ff.)

³⁵⁶ s. Bauer 2011: 53

The development of primordial identities is a good example to show how ambiguities have been erased and provided for pure and authentic identities. The treatment of Kurds in the Turkish Republic certainly supports the idea that ambiguities had to be erased in the newly-formed Turkish nation-state. However, as shown in chapter 3.1, this general assessment of the nation-state's contempt for ambiguity does not necessarily influence Muslims' positive approach towards heterogeneity. Differentiated views on the Kurdish issue can be presently encountered among Turkish Muslims who distance themselves from nationalism and prefer a diversity-friendly Islamic approach. However, as the Kurds might be seen as a Muslim minority that could perhaps count on a more friendly treatment by Turkish Muslims, it is interesting to question whether this preference for diversity also accounts for religious minorities.

For the student group, the Turkish state as well as the nationalist movement in the Ottoman Empire that set off the genocide is a subject of severe critique. In this sense, the students had made efforts to build empathy with the sorrow that the Armenian people had to go through, as one of my informants told me:

Ermeniler büyük bir katliama uğratılmış, yani yollarda işte ne bileyim ölüme mahküm edilmişler. Bir anlamda sürgün edilmişler, ki sürgün çok acı bir şeydir. Bugün biz bunu filistin konusunda da görüyoruz.³⁵⁷

(The Armenians have been exposed to a big massacre. They have been exposed to death on the roads. In a sense, they have been exiled and exile is such a painful experience, we see this today in Palestine.)

The reference and comparison with the situation of the Palestinians today certainly highlights efforts to relate to the historical experiences, and these experiences are not underestimated when compared to the situation of the Palestinians, given that the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel is one of the most difficult and sorrowful subjects for Muslims today (as will be shown in chapter 5).

Moreover, the students have published an essay on the subject of the Armenian genocide on their webpage that hardly refrains from calling the massacres against the Armenians a genocide. The essay can be seen as an extremely bold piece of writing when considering that

³⁵⁷Interview Betül 08.09.10

the liberal journalist Ahmet Altan (certainly one of the most daring public figures in Turkey) has called for questioning the Armenian issue in similar ways.³⁵⁸

A discussion amongst the students on the anniversary of the Armenian genocide and a visit of orthodox Greeks to Istanbul helps to understand their views on religious difference.

Even though the discussion on the Armenian genocide took place a few months after I had already left Istanbul. I have included it here to provide a broader view on the subject of religious minorities and to better introduce the following discussion on the Hagia Sophia. The main participants discussing the first writer's statement at this time still used to be the same as in 2010.

The discussion on the Armenian genocide was very short and evolved around a call to demonstration on 24th April, the day on which the deportations of the Armenians began in 1915. The demonstration was meant to show solidarity with the Armenian people and involved the recognition of the atrocities that they had to live through.

Owing to the critical outlook shared by the students on the subject, the discussion concerning whether one should take part in the demonstrations was not as significant an issue as it could have been in other (namely nationalist) contexts. The first and foremost argument proposed by the only person who felt that a participation in the demonstration should be irrelevant to them as Muslims went as follows:

Ermenilere bir haksızlık yapılmışsa ya da hali hazırda yapılıyorsa bunu görmezden gelelim demiyorum. sadece bir öncelik öneriyorum ve önerdiğim öncelik dine bağlıdır. bir Müslüman olarak Ermenilerin sorunlarıyla ilgilenmekten önce Müslüman Azerilerin ve Müslüman Kürtlerin sorunlarıyla ilgilenmek gerekir diye düşünüyorum. Temel önceliğimiz Müslümanlık olmalıdır yani. daha sonra başka önceliklerde eklenebilir belki ama temelde müslümanlığı öncelememiz gerekir. Kaldı ki söz konusu olayda Ermeniler Müslüman Kürtlere verdiği zararlar ya da vermesi muhtemel zararlardan dolayı öldürülmüş yada sürülmüştür³⁵⁹.

(I do not say that we should ignore it if the Armenians have been treated unjustly or are even being treated unjustly today. I only recommend a priority and this priority is connected to our religion. Before caring about the Armenians' problems, as a Muslim I think that we should care for the Muslim Azeris' and the Muslim Kurds' problems. Our basic priority should be the Muslims. After that, other priorities might be added, however, as a basic we should give priority to Muslims. It remains to be said that the

³⁵⁸ Altan (2010) Soykırım

³⁵⁹ E-mails: 21.04.11

Armenians on the subject we are talking about have been killed and exiled for the harms they did or were likely to do to Muslim Kurds.)

What makes this understanding of the Armenian issue interesting is perhaps his proposal of “recommending a priority”. For him it seems to be clear that there will be Muslims who will want to show solidarity with the Armenians however, this might be a wrong priority as long as Muslims are still suffering somewhere else in the Middle East. In his eyes showing solidarity with the Armenians themselves might not even be wrong, but on the list of priorities they come after Muslims. His understanding reveals interesting insights into a particular understanding of equality (or lack thereof) that can perhaps be said to be shared by many of those Muslims who would not see the point in showing solidarity with the Armenians. Regarding the shared history of Armenians, Kurds and Turks it seems that he clearly sees Armenians as relevant to his own perception of history and also as relevant to Muslims and they should not be ignored. However, the group of Armenians does not belong to the “we-group” as Kurdish and Turkish Muslims do, they belong to a different group that – though closely related – does not have the trustworthiness that would entitle them to become the subject of Muslims care and responsibility in the same way as Muslims would. He sees their legitimate right to help or support not as pressing as it would be in the case of Muslims. Only after Muslims have taken care of fellow Muslims their misery might be taken into consideration. In the last line the Armenians are even vilified by supposedly having planned to attack Kurdish Muslims.

This statement was responded to by three people, all of whom answered in the sense that 1) they had to take part in the demonstration for justice’s sake, and that justice to them had to be independent from any considerations regarding the ethnic or religious affiliations of the people who had been subject to these atrocities; 2) the fact that the Armenian nation-state had committed crimes against Kurds was no justification for ignoring the Turkish nation-state’s wrong statements; and 3) that it was impossible to hierarchically organise crimes and forms of oppression. By referencing the workers’ cause (which the Muslims had not until recently dealt with), the writer said:

Bu zamana kadar müslüman abilerimiz ablalarımız sendikalaşma ve işçi haklarını korumada hep şu endişeyi taşıdılar: **"bu soruna marksistler sahip çıkıyor, o zaman biz çıkamayız hem bizim önce ümmet davamız var."**

Bugüne geldik ve görüyoruz ki hata yapmışız, işçi meselesini Ümmet DAVASI içinde doruğundaydı İslamiyet. Peygamber "zaten benim davam var siz gelmeseniz de olur" dememişti görmeliydik. Kürt meselesini de, ermeni tehcirini de, ucu bir müslümana

dokunan ya da dokunmayan tüm zulümleri de...Çünkü tüm zulümlere karşı durmamızı emreden bir dinin üyeleriyiz. [...]Bugün bizler kendimizden başkalarını ve onların davalarını küçümsüyor, Kurani yaklaşmıyor, kendi sorunlarımız dışında çok şeye karşı bencil davranıyoruz.³⁶⁰

(Until today our Muslim brothers and sisters have had anxieties on the subject of protecting workers' associations and workers' rights: **“the marxists are taking care of this subject, that means that we cannot care about it and after all we have the cause of the ummah in front of us.”** And today we see that we have made a mistake, the workers' issue is within the CAUSE of the ummah. We should have seen that the Prophet did not say “I have my cause, it does not matter if you come”. The Kurdish issue, or the Armenian relocation - if it touches a Muslim or not like all issues have to be important to us because we are members of a religion that obliges us to stand up against all injustice (...) Today we are belittling other people's issues, we are not close to the Qur'an and we are egoistic, considering nothing but our own problems.)

Upon these very clear arguments from the others, the student who started the discussion replied that he felt that they were living in a time where it was not always possible to trust someone who said they were Muslim, which reflects why he probably felt insecure towards people who were not even Muslims. In line with Bauer's argument his reasoning seems to alternate between feelings of security and insecurity. As he attributed feelings of security to the Muslim “we” in his first statement and feelings of insecurity or even enmity to the Armenians he latter claims not to feel secure even among Muslims. By referring to this insecurity he is referring to the insecurities ambiguities evoke. Not even Muslims are all the same and not all of them are trustworthy in the same way as others. Some Muslims might have even drifted away from the real and authentic Islam thus exposing other Muslims – like him – to humiliation or danger. Even as the Muslim identity for him seems to be more important than ethnic affiliation the clear reference to Kurdish and Azeri Muslims shows that ethnicity still makes an important part of his thinking. What if Azeri Muslims or Kurdish Muslims would become enemies of Turkish Muslims? Would they then be considered within the framework of those Muslims which cannot be trusted? And which role would Armenians then play if they – in contrast – could be trusted, but were not Muslim?

The logic according to which he proposes his arguments can probably be considered as situated in a worldview that sees enemies everywhere – a worldview quite in unison with the nationalist Kemalist ideology. From a Muslim perspective within the Kemalist system, his friends are Muslims and enemies Kemalists. What applies for the Armenians could possibly

³⁶⁰E-mails: 21.04.11

be described as the status of a stranger, given that the Armenians do not clearly fit into the systematic anti-Muslim stance as the Kemalists do, but rather they are somewhat different: Christian and Armenian. In this context, Baumann's claim that modern nation-states are based on the antagonism between friends and enemies becomes very telling. According to Baumann's theory of sociation, the re-grouping of more-or-less "random" people as a congruent group of friends (a people) only works if there is a way of defining the outside, the enemy.³⁶¹ In this world neatly divided between friends and enemies, there is only one distracting variable: the stranger. "The stranger threatens the sociation itself – the very possibility of sociation. He calls the bluff of the opposition between friends and enemies [...]."³⁶² He draws attention that this distinction is an artificial one, and that the identities nationalists appropriate are random and consequently insecure. The student's insecurity can therefore be attributed to his fear of dissolving demarcations between Muslims and Christians, but also to his anxiety that Muslims themselves might not be trustworthy by deviating from authentic Islam. In case Muslims themselves start questioning the demarcations that have divided Armenians from them, they open the door to insecurities and perhaps become unworthy of trust.

Moreover, Baumann even claims that the stranger questions the viability of oppositions themselves; indeed, as an in-between, he confronts the whole logic of conformity inherent to modernity and the nation-state.³⁶³ He is an ambiguous variable that cannot fit into the nation-state's logic of order. Consequently, the best solution according to modern nationalist logic would be the elimination of the stranger – at least that is what the nation-state attempts, if the opportunity and power to eliminate him exists.³⁶⁴

The student's proposal to perceive the Armenian issue as less important than other "Muslim issues" seems to suggest that their existence as human beings is less important than that of Muslims, and is in line with other solutions to keeping the stranger at bay. Here Baumann mentions making the stranger an "untouchable": kept out of the regular ways of social interaction, seen as culturally different and being de-ethicalised³⁶⁵, and prohibited from marriage, trade and close relationships with friends.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ s. Baumann (1991: 53)

³⁶² Baumann (1991: 56)

³⁶³ s. Baumann (1991: 59)

³⁶⁴ s. Baumann (1991: 63)

³⁶⁵ s. Baumann (1991: 62/63)

³⁶⁶ s. Baumann (1991: 66/67)

Moreover, the stranger's status in the nation state is fixed, with no possibility for the stranger to become a friend. Even naturalisation only underlines the ambiguity of the "stranger", who should now be a native and integrate – yet awkwardly never manages to do so.³⁶⁷ Therefore, even after almost a century has passed, the Armenians remain what they always have been - strangers.

However, the writer's last statement about the importance of prioritising Muslim issues was met by a very sarcastic response from one of the students, asking what he could have possibly experienced to feel insecure regarding the Armenians, as he must be over 60 years old to be able to say anything like that. With this remark the author of the e-mail strongly questioned the "Muslim we" as being superior or more trustworthy than any other "we-group". From his point of view results of evaluations of history should remain in the past and should not influence the present. What he refuses to accept is that any part of national history could make a part of their present identity and be referred to the rootedness of primordial national identities in national histories.

In terms of Muslims' experiences in the secular world, and particularly considering the ways in which they are depicted in the media, as "terrorists", "backward" or sometimes even as stupid, the fears that the student expresses become very understandable and show how much they fit the nationalist logic of enemy and friend that appeal to Muslims, too. This logic clearly structures the student's thoughts with regard to the Armenians and probably could be supported with a lot of evidence as to why Muslims should only take care about fellow Muslims. Therefore Muslims who take actions that ignore the divisions between enemy and friend are those who might cause a breakdown of defences and sweep away all demarcations and thus cause insecurity.

Taking into consideration the conditions of the students' position in secular Turkey the fearlessness the other students have displayed in contrast is astonishing. From my encounters with them, I would say that they were all but free from anxiety. They still were very young and often had only recently finished school, where nationalist ideology plays a big role. However, nationalist fears seldom surfaced in their religious and political approaches. Their resilience concerning nationalist ideology and the fears it induces can probably be attributed to a reconsideration of their faith as well as a conscious separation from Kemalism.

³⁶⁷ s. Bauer (2011: 358/359)

When trying to look at their resilience concerning nationalist ideology, an angle emphasising their religious and cultural background might be useful in gaining a more profound understanding of their rejection of nationalist ideology.

When travelling in the Middle East today, as a stranger to language, culture and customs, one seldom, if ever, meets the distrust that a stranger from the Middle East is likely to experience in Europe. From my practical experience, most European travellers to Turkey (and Iran) have been welcomed to the respective countries of their visit by people they had never previously met, who helped them over difficulties such as finding their way, housing and friends. Usually people helped and hoped that the stranger would soon feel at home, and tried to warn them of the imposters, confidence tricksters and all kinds of criminals that they might encounter and whose tricks they might not be used to, coming from a different country. Whether people's hospitality, concern for one's safety or the facility of making friends – tourists – regardless how ignorant of culture or language they might be will experience all, provided they accept it.

According to Bauer and his analysis of Baumann's concept of the stranger, Baumann's specific understanding of the stranger is bound to the Western nation-state and its intolerance towards ambiguity. However, the stranger in the Middle East has to be understood in a very different way.

In terms of the historical Middle East, Bauer explains that strangeness was not related to characteristics such as origin, race or language at that time, but was usually considered an emotional condition that was perceived to be a very hard and difficult state of mind and thus required the native's help to overcome.³⁶⁸ Accordingly, when encountering a stranger, the natives of a place would feel empathy regarding their anguish experienced upon being separated from all their relations. In this sense, strangeness was not sought to be overcome by "naturalisation" or "assimilation", but rather by making friends and helping the stranger to establish ties with the natives of the place.³⁶⁹ Therefore strangeness, the individual anguish of a person, is usually overcome by natives actively trying to help and befriend the stranger.

Both Baumann's and Bauer's approach can be seen as portraying two extreme poles of behaviour. Whereas Baumann describes a case in which the stranger is clearly being perceived as a stranger and there is no possibility to see him as a part of any we-group at all, Bauer

³⁶⁸ s. Bauer (2011: 351)

³⁶⁹ s. Bauer (2011: 347)

basically relates to a friendliness that is seriously meant to be friendly, but also superficial as people when befriending a stranger often do not yet know him at all. Later on if friendship develops between the stranger and the natives of a place the superficiality might be overcome and the question of hierarchy or equality might never become a subject of discussion as friendship by definition and at its best should be void of both. However, when speaking of collectives rather than individuals, do they become friends? Can they be seen as part of the “we-group” without any restrictions on equality? Or does the friendliness a stranger might encounter always lead to friendship? What if the relationship – though friendly – remains superficial? Does the toleration of ambiguity still hold if friendship never develops? And are superficial relationships between collectives developed on an equal basis?

When thinking back of the priority the student recommended in his e-mail it is possible to discern that the stranger is not only seen as a stranger, but as a part of those peoples that Muslim Kurds and Turks share a difficult history with. In this sense the Armenians do make part of a we-group, however, this group is valued less than that of the Kurds and the Turks. The priority of Muslimness that can be attributed to them puts Christians in the second row. The closeness (historical and perhaps also geographical) that is expressed here does not translate into equality and is on a slippery slope of complying with Baumann’s concept of the stranger.

But what can this Muslim priority be accorded to? Is it part of what we understand to be the nation-state’s influence on how people perceive “we groups”? And why do not Kurds fall into a category of secondary importance? Was it because Kurds were meant to assimilate whereas Christians were meant to leave the country? Or else does the toleration of ambiguity after all have a hierarchical dimension in which Christians might only come in second after Muslims?

As most of the students would not share his opinion, the statement quoted above of the other students in response is perhaps even more interesting than the first student’s clear cut differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims. The student’s response points at something very important, namely the distinction between issues that are ours and issues that are others’. Until recently the Muslim community as such had not perceived many issues to be issues that concerned them in some way. The cause of the ummah had been reduced to a concept that only concerned Muslims and Muslim issues. There had been a clear line between “us” and “them” and even though she does not mention why this line at some point had been understood to be a valid distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims she says that this distinction has been a mistake and that many subjects as diverse as the workers’ cause or the

Armenian genocide had to be seen and perceived within the cause of the ummah. The concentration on one's own issues and troubles, the clear focus on Muslim issues (and if possible only Turkish Muslims issues as in the case of the Kurds) earlier was perceived to be authentic Muslim behaviour that would foster and promote Muslims development. However, this understanding of an Islam that is pure by purely engaging with Muslims is strongly questioned by her.

The line separating Muslim and *per definitionem* "non-Muslim" issues here is no longer limited by a religious approach that favours Muslims (analogically to some ethnicity) over another, but as an Islamic approach that refers to certain values that apply to all human beings. The trick by which she achieves to be convincing is that of using the example of the "worker" and thus evading the use of examples that would have referred to primordial identities like the Kurds, the Turks or the Armenians. She also refrains from talking about the Armenians as Christians. The "worker" here becomes a substitute for an ambiguous identity as it might refer to Muslims, to Christians or to Kurds, Armenians and Turks, to some of them or to none. Instead of using "worker" she could have also used the term "human being", however, that would have been less convincing as being to general, whereas the "worker" questions the priorities and hierarchies that exactly refer to his status of equality. In her statement equality is nothing that should only be accorded to some, to Muslims, Kurds or Turks, but to all including the Armenians. The support the students had earlier shown for workers engagement in labour unions here refers to their struggle for equality and rights. Just as the Armenians they are people who until recently have had no relationship with the students. Their position in society and their legitimate claims to equality are reflected in the claim that Armenians have the same right to equality as other people.

Within her explanations, the key word to me seems to be "egoistic". From her perspective, it is wrong to only look at one's own issues and matters without showing concern for the problems and hardships that others might experience. The fact that the Armenians are Christians does not have any importance to her, rather only that they were in a situation in which they experienced hardship. In this instance, the question of the Armenian genocide becomes solely a human issue that has to be dealt with on the grounds of justice and without being egoist. Efforts to overcome egoism and be interested in the stranger here can be considered a first step to befriending the stranger. Moreover, it can also be seen as a step away from the understanding that purity and authenticity come about if Muslims only deal with Muslims and Muslim issues. On the contrary the value of understanding hardship clearly

replaces purist notions of authenticity. Authenticity in an Islam that can be understood as the Prophet's Islam is an Islam that is open for understanding and feeling with all people. Authenticity here again is reinterpreted and stated to be non-egoistic, emphasising the value of compassion and justice.

In this sense, strangeness can be said to be dealt with very differently from what is described by Baumann. The ambiguous identity of the stranger can be perceived within the "we" identity. However, the limits of this perception as well as the problems associated with being someone who is associated with the group on a doubtful basis pose some difficulties Bauer does not examine in his sources. Moreover, the material disclosed here cannot offer more than hints at particular understandings rather than insights.

Certainly, when looking at the historic experience of nationalism, the Armenian genocide, the population exchange with Greece or even the Kurdish issue offer a whole range of violent conflicts resulting from the intolerant ways of managing with strangeness and otherness; the fact that these have to be seen in the context of the state's efforts to create a homogenous nation show that the clear cut definitions between us and them wreak havoc. These efforts have surely had an impact on the whole country and shaken the traditional order, yet such measures were taken top-down, and it is evident that the parts of society have guarded an ethical and moral attitude towards strangers that remains very strong.

The Hagia Sophia: Museum, Mosque or Church?

The students' discussion was set against the backdrop of a broader debate concerning the reopening of church museums to worship. In 2010 the Ministry for Culture and Tourism had given Orthodox Christians the permission to hold a liturgy in Sümela monastery, which has been repeated once a year in the following years.³⁷⁰ Similarly Catholic Christians had been given permission to hold a mass in Akdamar Church in Van the same year.³⁷¹ The government's approach to secularism and religious freedom seemed to facilitate a new openness towards religious expression in formerly secularised spaces. The Great Union Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi, BBP) a nationalist and Islamist party therefore demanded that the Hagia Sophia museum be opened to public worship at the end of Ramadan in September 2010³⁷² and even went to court to get a permission granted.³⁷³

³⁷⁰s. Özdemir (2012)

³⁷¹ s. Strittmatter (2010)

³⁷² s. Strittmatter (2010)

³⁷³ s. Yeni Şafak (2010)

However, as the Hagia Sophia is not only a church that has been turned into a museum, but is one of those churches that had been converted to mosques after the Muslim conquest and later had been turned into secular museums the BBP's claims cannot be seen in analogy to the opening of the churches in Trabzon and Van and is very controversial. In contrast to Muslim nationalists, secularists want the Hagia Sophia to remain a secular museum and part of the few Orthodox Christians in Istanbul want the museum to be a church again. These opposing claims concerning the Hagia Sophia shed light on a controversy that has been going on for some time and provoked strong emotions among the groups taking sides in the debate.

Therefore the news that a group of some 200 Greek American Orthodox Christians had announced their visit to Istanbul to perform a rite in the Hagia Sophia again triggered debate.³⁷⁴ The group that was headed by Chris Spirou the founder of the International Hagia Sophia Coalition planned to come to Istanbul only a few days after the BBP had voiced their demands in a tense climate.³⁷⁵ Moreover, the International Hagia Sophia Coalition which endorses radical views itself did not ask for permission to perform their rite and after much diplomatic effort between Ankara and Athens was persuaded to abandon plans of a visit to Istanbul.³⁷⁶ The Istanbul Patriarchate in this case also sided with the government and disapproved of the group's plans.³⁷⁷

The students discussed the group's visit to the Hagia Sophia before it was clear that the visit would be stopped. They never discussed any details about the visit or the International Hagia Sophia Coalition's aims. Their discussion was more general and treated the subject as if some Christian group from Greece (without any particular characteristics) was planning to visit the Hagia Sophia. The discussion start a day before the group's planned visit on 17th September 2010, and did not resemble their previous dialogue, with the issue at stake to them being a very different one.

The subject of strangers and religious minorities is certainly more complex than the discussion on the Armenian genocide might suggest. Accordingly, another excerpt from the Muslim

³⁷⁴ s. Huffington Post (2012)

³⁷⁵ s. Güsten (2010)

³⁷⁶ s. Güsten (2010) & Hürriyet Daily News (2010)

³⁷⁷ s. Radikal (2010)

student group's discussions might shed light on a very different problematic that the students had to deal with when discussing the situation of strangers in a Muslim majority country – which was how they perceived Turkey.

On the occasion of a group of 200 American-Greeks visiting the Hagia Sophia on 17th September 2010, the students had a discussion that did not resemble their previous dialogue, with the issue at stake to them being a very different one. A day before the rite was to be performed one student wrote to the group, asking whether nothing was going to be done against this group performing a rite in Hagia Sophia mosque. This question was met with three answers that all expressed that the Hagia Sophia was not a mosque but rather a museum, and rightly so, based upon their views that the Hagia Sophia's being turned from a church to a mosque was in itself unacceptable. Clearly the majority of students understood the transformation of the church into a mosque as a violation of Christians' right to practise their religion.

One student expressed her empathy in writing that she could understand the sorrow that Christians felt concerning a church that had been transformed to a mosque, when thinking of mosques (e.g. in Spain) that had been transformed to churches and the sorrow that she experienced over this. Another student said that there might be spiritual significance for some people regarding the Hagia Sophia, and thought that respect should be shown for this.

In contrast to the debate on the Armenian genocide here the students showed empathy with the religious feelings that might have brought the visitors to Istanbul. By doing so they also expressed that they did not see their own religious feelings as superior to those of the Christian visitors, on the contrary just as they felt in sight of demolished mosques other could feel when visiting demolished churches. The capacity to empathize here seems to suggest that Christians' religious feelings and their claims to practise their religion are seen as legitimate.

The first writer, who had asked for something to be done against the rite being performed, replied in a sarcastic tone that they had finally been liberalised in the way that people wanted them to be liberalised and thus indicated that from her point of view the realm of authentic Islam was being transgressed by the other students. Just like the student in the debate on the Armenian genocide, for her authentic Islam meant to concentrate on Muslim issues and Muslim rights only. Moreover, the claims to rights of others had no possibly legitimacy at all. The claims, rights or feelings of non-Muslims did not matter to her. Rather Muslims who

showed empathy or understanding for non-Muslims to her had become liberalised, deviating from authentic Islam. However, this was met with a very severe critique:

insanlar arasında adaletle hükmetmek liberallik değildir. direk islami bir duruşun simgesidir. Ali bayramoğlunun tesev araştırması var, laiklik ve din diye, orda kendisi müslümanların son on yıldır hak, hukuk, adalet gibi "çağdaş" kavramları liberallerden öğrendiğini söyler. ben de ali bayramoğlunun tam aksine, hak, hukuk, adalet gibi "islami" kavramların bizden liberallere geçmiş olabileceğinden şüpheliyim.)³⁷⁸

(It is not liberalism to govern people justly. It is a genuine symbol of Islamic attitude. There is a Tesev-research by Ali Bayramoğlu "Secularism and Religion". In this research, he claims that in the past ten years Muslims have learned the terms right, law and justice from the liberals. In contrast to Ali Bayramoğlu, I suppose that the liberals have learned "Islamic" terms like right, law and justice from us :))

By highlighting that any sort of tolerant and just behaviour is usually attributed to liberals or said to be something that Muslims have learned from liberals, she criticises the attitude that some scholars and even Muslims have developed in calling everything considered positive behaviour as "liberal":

dengeli ve adaletli olan tüm yaklaşımlarımız sonunda liberalleşmekle suçlandığında şöyle bir imaj çıkıyor, "adaletli davranmak liberallere has birşeydir. müslümanlarsa sadece kendi hakları söz konusu olduğunda seslerini çıkarmalılar" dolayısıyla bu söylemin kendisi müslümanlara karşı bir duruşu ifade ediyor bence.³⁷⁹

(If all our balanced and just approaches allegedly are liberal the image that emerges is "to behave justly is genuine to the liberals. Muslims in contrast only have to raise their voices if their own rights are concerned", this is why this expression itself expresses an attitude against the Muslims.)

With this argument, she shows that Muslims are themselves responsible for the way in which they present themselves. If they themselves advocate that being just (towards non-Muslims) is not Islamic, but liberal they themselves undermine their values by attributing them to the wrong sources, as – from her perspective - the first writer did. Rather than defending her "liberal ideas" she claimed that in fact her point of view was the authentic Muslim view. Drawing away from the first writer's specifically nationalist Muslim discourse that considers authentic Islam to be concerned about Muslims and only Muslims she questions what authentic Islam itself is understood to be. If Muslims claim that being concerned about

³⁷⁸ E-mails: 16.09.10

³⁷⁹ E-mails: 16.09.10

Muslims only is Islamic than clearly values such as being just will be attributed to liberals only.

From her point of view the confusion over what Muslim values are and how they can be distinguished from liberal values prompts people to think that Muslims have “liberalised” when they learn about the attitudes and opinions displayed by Muslims in public. For Muslims (even if in the midst of Muslims), it has certainly also become hard to distinguish between their own values and those presented by the liberal mainstream. With their fear of liberalism in mind and the constant endeavours not to become liberal but rather to maintain a genuine Muslim attitude, it has become increasingly difficult to define one’s own identity and political outlook.

When looking at the strategy she uses to show that the first writer’s understanding of an authentic Islam is wrong ultimately something similar happens as in the discussion of the Kurdish issue. The value of justice is used to argue against an authentic Islam that is in favour of inequality. Instead she brings forward the idea that authentic Islam in fact is something else. By disguising her argument as referring to a pure and authentic Islam and thus attributing it the value of a Muslim value that has been the same through history (but has been interpreted wrongly at particular points) she simply establishes as a part of Muslim history and values without giving any proof as to whether this is true or not. Basically the value of justice here is flexibly adapted to a circumstance in which it was not clear what justice exactly was. Though the first writer never claimed that, would it not have been more appropriate for the Christian visitors not to perform a rite in the Hagia Sophia? Or else if they wanted to visit the Hagia Sophia accept that it now is a museum? Would it not have been just to say that for the sake of all religious groups that have some claim on the Hagia Sophia it would be better not to perform any Christian rites in it?

Clearly this is not what the proposed concept of justice is meant to be. Justice in the sense as proposed by the second student is meant to be generous and empathic. By accepting the Christians visitors’ wish to perform their rite in the Hagia Sophia in a generous and empathic mood they can be said to be treated on an equal level with Muslims. Quite apart from the assumption that authentic Islam proposes a justice that has to be bestowed with generosity and empathy to create equality or else if it can be some sort of limited justice that is just to Muslims firstly or both the claim to authenticity is what makes it valid.

With the discussion on the Armenian genocide in mind and the discussion on the Hagia Sophia, it is possible to claim that the fear of liberalism and the fears induced by the nation-state pose the greatest threats to a self-confident, tolerant and composed Muslim attitude. By discussing what Islamic authenticity is they discuss the place of justice and the legitimacy of claims to equality. Given that the majority of students in the discussion would have opted for treating Christians as equal and accept their claims on the Hagia Sophia for a short time, it is interesting to question whether they would also accept a permanent agreement according to which Christians could perform their rites in the Hagia Sophia.

What would the students' attitude be provided they had the power to rule over the country or the possibility to create an Islamic ummah? What would they like to do in case the chance for a more Islamic political framework came into existence? For this case, their discussion offers two proposals, the first of which is in favour of a multi-religious solution for the Hagia Sophia:

Bence Ayasofyada işlevsiz seküler bir çözüm öne süreceğimize daha İslami bir çözüm düşünmemiz gerekir. Mesela mekanın tüm dini topluşmalara açılması çok daha güzel olurdu. İçerde biz namaz kılariken başka bir köşede de birilerinin ayin yapması, hatta arada mekanda karşılaştıkça diğer dinden insanlarla felsefi tartışmalara girmek çok hoş olabilirdi.

Çok hayali gelmesin, Kudüste böyle bir kiliseye gitmişim kilisenin 4 ayrı köşesinde 4 ayrı mezhepten ayin yapıyordu gayet de hoş bir ortam vardı.

Yurtdışında birkaç kere cami bulamayıp kiliselerden namaz kılabilceğimiz bir yer ayarlamalarını istediğimiz oldu annemle ve her seferinde tüm imkanlarıyla namazımız geçmesin diye uğraştı hristiyan din görevlileri. hoşgörü bizden birşey eksiltmezdi kültür bakanı izin verseydi, ancak dinimizin yüceliğini gösterirdi.³⁸⁰

(I think we should find a more Islamic solution than the secular idle solution. For instance, it would be much more beautiful to have the building opened for get-togethers of all religions. When we pray inside, others can perform a rite in another corner, moreover, every now and then when crossing roads with people from other religions it could be very nice to have philosophical discussions. This should not sound too dreamy, I have been to a church like that in Jerusalem, where people from four different cults performed their rites in a church. This was a very nice atmosphere.

My mother and I have sometimes prayed in churches when we could not find a mosque abroad. Every time the Christian functionaries strived to help with all their possibilities for our prayer times not to pass. Tolerance does not take something from us if the ministry of culture would allow this, on the contrary it would show the supremacy of our religion.)

³⁸⁰ E-mails: 17.09.10

The suggestion to have a place which would neither be a church nor a mosque, but something unnamed third which would not be secular but multi-religious seems to have the innovative character of something hybrid. The idea to have philosophical exchange, to learn from one another in an environment where every religion would be given the same value seems to go beyond a toleration of ambiguity, but suggests a hybridity, something innovative in the sense that the religions engaging in the interreligious dialogue will reflect themselves and be influenced by the encounters with others. The fact that the members of the different religions in this utopian framework would meet each other on equal terms suggests a closeness, but also a new “we” that would evolve through the specific exchange taking place in the religious building. The only people whose place would be unclear would be atheists or agnostics.

An alternative proposal for a new use of the Hagia Sophia was very different from that suggested above, and basically expressed that if there was an Islamic framework that allowed the Hagia Sophia to be a mosque, it should be transformed to a mosque again. As the writer explained, the idea behind this was that the main church or mosque of a town represented who was in charge of the city, and consequently not every church, but rather the most important church of the city, should be a mosque. However, the historical reference and hint that this might have been standard practice in ancient times among both Christians and Muslims did not convince all of the writers, with three of them replying that they felt quite uneasy about this idea. The main reason for their feeling uneasy can be seen in the violence involved when a church is transformed to a mosque, or vice versa. However, the reasons for their uneasiness with the solution were never really spelled out. In contrast to the first proposal the second one clearly saw Christians as strangers as they were not accorded the right to define or discuss what they wanted. They would not be asked to exchange their thoughts, but simply put at a distance from where they would only have to accept particular solutions or proposals the majority of Muslims would put into practise. According to what Bauer has described and the general idea that groups would be responsible for integrating new individuals (strangers) the idea of transforming the Hagia Sophia to a mosque clearly aims at disintegrating Christians. They would perhaps still be accorded rights, however, only at a distance from the “we” group who would establish the rules of the game. Though the distance implied here might still be within the frame of toleration of ambiguity (by according the Christians other churches and ways of exchange with Muslims) it clearly proposes a hierarchy.

These two proposals are very different from one another, and once more show the heterogeneity of solutions and ideas that Muslims offer for a better society. Based upon this

example, it is possible to say that they range from an “Ottoman” concept of religious authority to a yet utopian peaceful cohabitation of different religions. However, both proposals are seen as Islamic solutions, tied to an understanding in which authentic Islam would be lived as something like a state-religion – or at least provide the framework for a multi-religious society. Given that the first proposal does not necessarily propose a hierarchy of Islam as a state-religion it could perhaps also be considered as being an approach that takes into consideration minorities’ difficulties to enter public debates on equal terms with the majority population.

In a sense, this proposal even implies a multi-religiousness that is otherwise said to be only possible within a secular framework. The dominance of Islam in this concept should not distract from the fact that such proposals can challenge secularism, given that it is possible to consider secularism as dominated by Christianity, as Asad does:

I take the secular to be a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life. To appreciate this it is not enough to show that what appears

to be necessary is really contingent—that in certain respects "the secular" obviously overlaps with "the religious." (...) The "religious" and the "secular" are not essentially fixed categories. (...) I assume, on the contrary, that there is nothing *essentially* religious, nor any universal essence that defines "sacred language" or "sacred experience." But I also assume that there were breaks between Christian and secular life in which words and practices were rearranged, and new discursive grammars replaced previous ones.³⁸¹

To say the least, the discussions on the Armenian genocide and the Hagia Sophia controversy suggest that tolerance and the integration of strangers and others is not threatened by the Muslims students – even though their fears of the other, as well as those of liberalism can be an obstacle and certainly are in other groups of society.

In a way my situation (as described in 2.3) within the group can be referred to the way Christians are perceived within the we group. There is an effort to see them within the we-group, however, this effort is not totally successful as there are particular fears some people might be talked out of or not. In any case the ambivalent feelings of seeing the strange person as part of the we-group would perhaps create a strange situation for Christians as it did for me. Though the group would in general be open to integrate me, share their events and discussions degrees of a certain closeness would be evaded. The question here is whether

³⁸¹ Asad (2003: 25)

tolerating ambiguousness is always possible and if this does not perpetuate some sort of problem here

4.3 Sexual Minorities: Muslims on Homosexuals

Identity and Sex

At first sight, the topic of homosexuals' (eşcinsel³⁸²) rights might be altogether uninteresting to a Muslim student group, given that they neither share the same values nor seem to fight for the same freedoms. However, the Kemalist system has denied both groups their respective freedoms and has thus created similar experiences between both groups. For instance, while Muslims have invested years in fighting for covered women being accepted to university, homosexuals have struggled for the public recognition of a certain identity and the recognition of their relationships – in this sense, both groups have challenged the state by making supposedly private issues public.

Homosexuals have found an environment to raise and discuss their problems in the leftist milieu, where the protest against the Kemalist establishment has risen in recent years. As Muslim and socialist groups have often found reason to protest against the state on common grounds, Muslims have long been indirectly dealing with homosexual groups themselves.³⁸³

Moreover, topics such as abortion, homosexuality, drug consumption and prostitution are discussed publicly today, forcing Muslims to also address them.³⁸⁴ Although Muslims' interaction with homosexuals is probably minimal, that might change, as illustrated by public debates in which Muslim intellectuals and politicians discussed the subject of homosexuality in 2010.

The topic of homosexuality was first raised within the student group in a private meeting with some of the girls from the Muslim student group, with one of them sharing that there had been several coming-outs of lesbian girls at their university. Moreover, it had even emerged that a girl in their circle of friends was lesbian. The discussion subsequently did not abide by the topic of homosexuality, but was rather discussed in the context of religiously unacceptable behaviour of (non-Muslim) friends and how to react to it. One of the girls related the story of a friend who had started drinking alcohol in her presence, despite knowing that she was not

³⁸²The students only used the word eşcinsel in their discussion which can be translated to homosexual.

³⁸³ e.g on conscientious objection

³⁸⁴ s. Roy (2010: 178)

comfortable with it. Another girl claimed that one of their lesbian friends was “actually” kissing the other girls as a greeting, whereas normally one was rather “pretending” to kiss the others’ cheek, yet hardly touching each other.

Both stories were considered examples of situations in which non-Muslim friends were transgressing a thin line that made it hard, if not impossible, for the Muslim girls to meet them again. Drinking in a club or kissing other (non-Muslim) girls itself was no problem insofar as they were not made witnesses to these transgressions and tempted to make similar experiences. However, the experience of proximity to these phenomena triggered an anxiety in them that might be explained within the context of their living in an enfeebled Muslim society, as they felt there was no standard way or any guideline of reaction regarding such phenomena.³⁸⁵

When looking at the reported incidents from the perspective of Bauer’s concept of toleration of ambiguity it seems that they would have still advocated heterogeneity, but would not have wanted to be witness of a particular behaviour that - for them – would clearly belong to “them”, the secular others. A person who would generally drink alcohol, but refrain from doing so when in company with them would probably not have had a problem of being accepted in their group. However, the ostentatious display of a particular behaviour would lead to the students evaluating this particular person outside of the we group. As long as they would not be forced to see certain behaviour that they evaluated as unislamic there was no restriction as to perceive a particular person as within their group. However, this particular way of evaluating and reacting to visibly different and – in their understanding - problematic behaviour seems to question their tolerance of ambiguity. Can ambiguity only be accepted if it is silent and invisible? Thinking back of Kondo’s experience in Japan, in which she had described her host family as willing to reshape her in their constructed image of her as Japanese, does that imply that the students would clearly prefer people who are similar to them? Or perhaps pressure them to become like them? Though I do not think the last possible, what if a group of people claims visibility and recognition with regard to characteristics that seem to be problematic to them? Would they be accepted or shunned?

³⁸⁵ Another reason for their anxiety can be seen in the religious prescription to stay away from places (bars etc.) where non-religious behaviour is displayed.

As the same issue was raised in the e-mail group only two weeks later and discussed with regard to the students' behaviour towards homosexuals' visibility in public some of these issues have been discussed with regard to these question.

In the particular case of the following discussion, the topic was not intentionally raised as such, but was rather brought up in the context of a call to protest in Ankara in which a Muslim human rights organisation, a socialist student group and other associations forming an initiative for freedom were organising a large protest in front of Ankara University, to be held on 25th December 2010. The purpose of the demonstrations was the enduring headscarf ban on university campuses and a call for freedom on mother tongues (essentially referring to the Kurdish language). When the call was first posted on the list, a member from a similar Muslim group in Ankara invited all the members from the Istanbul group to Ankara and explained that their coming was especially important, given that a ruling for or against the headscarf ban was to be soon expected and tensions were running high between Muslims and secularists.

One day later, one of the girls from the Muslim group pointed out that the socialist student group had posted the call to protest on their website containing the following sentence:

“Üniversitelerde başörtüsü, anadili, cinsel yönelimi, kimliğe nedeniye nefret söylemine maruz kalan öğrencilerin “özgürlük” talebi için sokağa çıkıyoruz!”³⁸⁶ (We take to the streets for the freedom of those students who have been victims to hate speeches at university because of their headscarves, mother tongues and sexual orientation.)

She told the others that she did not consider it acceptable for their group to participate in a protest that was advocating freedom on sexual orientation. In her opinion, this was not one of their slogans (as a Muslim group), and would never be so. However, she added that individual participation (not within their Muslim group) might of course be acceptable.

Again the idea of “silently” participating in the demonstration was thought of as ethical however, visibly taking part as a Muslim student group was seen as problematic. Did this suggest that the student group's participation as a Muslim group would have been problematic to their image? Or else that advocating rights for homosexuals could not have been part of an authentic Islam? Regarding that individual participation as such was not seen as unethical or problematic, how come the understanding of mores and ethics was suddenly dissociated from the group and left to the individual? Once more the relation between silence and ethicality

³⁸⁶ E-mails: 17.10.10

seems to point at the fact that the issue in discussion could be located in the cultural beyond, the past-present which leaves individuals devoid of community support (such as in the novels Bhabha discusses), but in a situation where past and present intersect to leave space for rethinking a given situation. At least the nature of the subject implied that making a decision would not be as easy as in the case of Kurds or Christians. Not because their perception of homosexuality or issues of sex and gender as such were against acknowledging equality and justice to people who would not follow the norm of heterosexuality, but simply because homosexuals seemed to be so much inbetween everything. Whereas Kurds and Christians clearly had had to face state oppression with part of the secular state ideology being built on these groups' assimilation, displacement or assassination, homosexuals as such could not be defined ethnically or religiously as victims of the political system. They would not fit in any of the categories that the Muslim students had discussed before and to none of the groups that they would defend against state oppression. Their identity was more than diffuse.

In the first stage of the ensuing discussion, the term "hate speech" was discussed. Many found that there was no such thing as "hate speech" against homosexuals at university³⁸⁷ and consequently thought that the protest was trying to claim further rights for homosexuals. Accordingly, five people supported the idea proposed by the writer of the initial mail and said that this was not a protest they could have a place in, citing the following reasons:

1. A protest based on entirely Islamic slogans would have had no support from other (leftist or liberal) groups. Conversely, an entirely liberal protest advocating such slogans was excluding them.
2. They always emphasised that no Muslim would want homosexuals to be exposed to violence or hatred. However, given that most homosexuals would probably not support the idea that wearing a headscarf was the right thing to do (simply because they did not believe in Islam), in the same way they could not support homosexuals as doing the right thing (because they did not think that it was a good lifestyle).
3. Given that nobody was prohibiting homosexuals from attending university, they asked themselves what injustice they were actually facing to protest it on the university campuses.

³⁸⁷Even though there might be no hate speeches against homosexuals at university, it is common knowledge that the police regularly assault homosexuals and transvestites on the street. Following Klauda (2008:110 ff.) these assaults can be attributed to the new Western concepts of masculinity that have been introduced with the foundation of the Turkish Republic and that are especially virulent in army and police.

4. Taking place in the protest would make it impossible to explain that they were actually not supporting homosexuals (and their rights) but rather only standing up for them against their injustice faced (violence and hatred).
5. Others (e.g. the media) might portray them as Muslims who had sold their convictions for the homosexuals' support in the fight against the headscarf ban.³⁸⁸

Many of their points reflected insecurity regarding the subject and brought forward arguments that had earlier been rejected in the debate on the Christians and had now suddenly become acceptable. Whereas they had supported the Armenian cause despite doubts that they might have planned attacks on Kurdish Muslims, in the case of the homosexuals they advocated countering their lack of support on the headscarf issue with a disregard of their problems. Homosexuals' right to justice was not mentioned as was their subjection to hate speeches.

However, the discussion did not abide by these arguments, but rather evolved in different stages as the discussion was renewed with the introduction of new arguments or pieces of information. Consequently, the second stage of the discussion started with a girl from the socialist student group writing to the Muslim students that the call to protest on their website was actually intended as a call within their own group, and that the official flyers did not contain the discussed sentence.

However, only one of the respondents was satisfied with this explanation, while a second was unsure of which stance to take, and a third respondent considered that the fact that the official flyers were different did not change the matter. At this point of the discussion, some of the students referred to the Qur'anic character of Lot to find guidance in his example, discussing how homosexuals should be treated by Muslims. Indeed, one of the girls stated the words he had used against the spoilt society of his time:

“Gerçekten ben sizin bu yaptığınıza nefretle karşı olanlardanım.”³⁸⁹ (Şuara/168) (I am one of those who hate your doing this.) Moreover, another writer added that apart from Lot and his daughters, who had warned people from their doing, all people (and there must have been others who had been unhappy about the corruption of their society yet had not raised their voice) had been killed by God. However, another girl pointed out that this statement did not really help them to understand what to do in this situation, given that Lot had only warned the

³⁸⁸ E-mails (17.10-19.10.10)

³⁸⁹ E-mails: 19.10.10

others with words; he had not done anything, but left everything to God. Drawing on the example, one should tell people about another way of life yet not interfere with their lives in any other form. In her opinion, Lot did not hate those people, rather he only hated what they did, thus clearly separating people's acts from their identity. Accordingly, what they do does not change their identity. In line with this logic, they do not become "homosexuals", they are still what they are, although what they do is not correct.

According to Bauer, this understanding of homosexuality (or its non-existence) opposes the Western correlation of identity and sex, where a certain form of sex is correlated to a certain identity. From his perspective, only the correlation of sex and identity can bring about situations as paradox as a person having the wrong form of sex.³⁹⁰ Given that Middle Eastern views on homosexuality are not based on a correlation between sex and identity, sex as such has not been classified or analysed, but has rather simply remained what it was, namely an ambiguous practice. In contrast, the will to determine people as heterosexual or homosexual is a form of fighting against ambiguity.

The fact that modernity somewhat poses questions that people have to answer left the students with no choice as to whether or not they should form an opinion on the subject.

The question that had now forced itself upon them was very difficult to deal with and perhaps took them by surprise, as they found it hard to determine a clear guideline that would make sense to them. Consequently, their discussion was extended to a more general level, enquiring about the treatment of homosexuals in an ideal Islamic environment. Were they to be left alone? Alternatively, should they be reproached for their doing, and if so, with what means? Was it permissible to jail homosexuals in order to limit their influence on mainstream society?³⁹¹ All such statements were proposed as open questions, reflecting the confusion on how to deal with the subject. The reason for their confusion might reflect their lack of knowledge on current discourses, yet also that the drive for classifying and analysing sex is quite opposed to how Muslims would deal with homosexuality, as Nilüfer Göle explains:

For instance, the gay culture. It doesn't mean that we have less gay culture in the Mediterranean area, or in the Middle East, in Turkey; but being outspoken about it, making it explicit in public, is a Western behavior. This is confessionalism - just

³⁹⁰ s. Bauer (2011: 307)

³⁹¹ Traditionally there is no such thing as jailing or punishing people for the „wrong sexual“ practises. Even though some practises are forbidden according to the Qur'an, sexual acts have to be attested by at least three witnesses – which in practice led to the fact that there were hardly any convicts of homosexuality in Islamic history.

confessing your most private feelings in public, so as to be in conformity between your true self and your public self, like novels.³⁹²

This discussion was cut short by an official statement of the platform's board that had taken a decision regarding the group's participation in the demonstrations. Firstly, they felt that their identity was not being represented on the flyers. While it seemed to them that various groups had met on a democratic-liberal ground and negotiated their terms for a tolerant approach, a Muslim approach had not been taken into account. Secondly, they refrained from participating in the protest because it was going to legitimise a homosexual lifestyle. Overall, they felt that the increasing liberalisation of society was not only influencing Muslims, but also confusing them. Making a good Muslim decision had become hard as an increasingly liberalised society was trivialising homosexuality and portraying it as a normal way of life; moreover, as an identity choice that was even being discussed under the question of freedom and rights.

Despite this statement implying a very strong judgmental approach, what still seems to confuse the writers is that "homosexuality" can be an "identity" (choice) and that people of this "identity" struggle for freedom and rights. Furthermore, what probably rendered the whole situation even more confusing was that the categories of "identity" and "freedom" overlapped with their own issues. To them, fighting for a Muslim identity and freedom of religion had become something natural, as they were Muslims with their whole personality; however, how could sexual orientation be an identity? To them, their issue could not be discussed on the same level as the homosexuals' claim for rights. Their claim to visibility and for recognition was in a sense denied through dismissing the mere idea that an identity based on sexual orientation could at all be considered valid. Whereas the students had recognized the Christian and Kurdish identity and supported their claims for particular customs and traditions, homosexuals were not even understood to be a group that could possibly have a claim to rights. In contrast to the primordial identities that the students had known for years the homosexual identity as a political group identity would not fit into anything they had known. To a great deal their confusion has to be attributed to homosexuals' inbetweenness, the fact that they possibly were Christians, Muslims, Kurds or Turks, but would opt to fight for their rights in the name of a third identity that had to be recognized as equal to the others. The students' inability to recognize this inbetweenness, their difficulties in thinking beyond ethnic or religious identities posed the greatest difficulty to them, as they were not able to determine what homosexuals' role in the conflict between Kemalists and Muslims was. As

³⁹² s. Göle (2011)

their own situation was structured by the opposition between Islam and Kemalism they would only think in these categories and evaluate others within the discursive structures of this opposition. A potential third identity, an inbetween simply is not recognized.

One of Bhabha's claims, however, is that the recognition of inbetween spaces, of new identities and subject positions can bring about something new and innovative:

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'inbetween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.³⁹³

Bhabha generally expounds on the possibility of innovation that hybridity brings about, however, what probably is more frequent in society is that such hybridity is not recognised, understood or thought of as being valid in any way. By refusing to acknowledge that homosexuals could just as Muslims have identity claims (based on different categories than their own) and could want to be visible shows that the students who had had no difficulties acknowledging primordial identities such as the Kurdish or the Christian identity here were at a loss to understand homosexuals' identity claims. They seemed to be confused enumerating pretexts in order to control the situation. Moreover, my own experience with them as described in chapter 2.3 hints at the students having problems with hybrid identities as such. However, the political dimension of the homosexuals' claims to rights and visibility added a different dimension to their evaluation of the situation. As the students generally were open to see everyone as part of their we group, was it that they felt they had to see homosexuals' as part of their we group with the defining criteria of sexual orientation? Their questions regarding the treatment of homosexuals in a Muslim society seem to hint at that. How could they be part of a Muslim society, how could the existence of their group be thought within terms of hierarchy?

³⁹³ Bhabha (2004 [1994]: 2)

After reading the board's statement, one of the members from the Ankara group congratulated the group on taking such a stance, whereas shortly afterwards a member on the list who had not previously raised his voice stated that they were making a big mistake in his opinion. He emphasised that the protest was ultimately taking place against a common adversary, the Kemalist system, which was going to triumph if able to show that the claims for freedom were only supported by a minority. Furthermore, he added that Ankara University still was one of the institutions where Kemalist thinking was extremely dominant and that Muslim girls still could not enter the campuses covered. In his opinion what mattered was that homosexuals were in the same group with them against the Kemalists. Whatever their particular identity, the fact that they also protested against Kemalism made them allies. Two writers further supported his opinion and another three supporting the board's decision wrote to sum up their concerns. One of the concerns from the group in Ankara appears to relate to the protest seeming to say "freedom for everyone and everything at universities", and especially that the media was not going to perceive a difference in supporting homosexuals' rights and only protesting against their being mistreated. Clearly the visibility of an alliance with the homosexuals' group here seems to have been the main problem again. Another reason that seems to have troubled the group in Ankara and later the group in Istanbul was that Mazlum-Der Ankara, a prominent Muslim group, was obviously organising the protest with the other leftist groups and side-by-side with homosexuals, thus supporting their claims. This "erring" of another Muslim group seems to have pushed some of the youth to adopt a hard line on the issue, as they did not want to assimilate. A final excuse for not taking part in the protest was also found in the comforting information that headscarved girls were no longer banned from Ankara University.³⁹⁴

Here the issue of authenticity seems again to have come in the students' way to affirm their toleration of heterogeneity. The fear that they might venture too far away from some essential Muslimness seems to have kept them from rethinking the issue. The idea of an Islamic authenticity and purity that perhaps could be threatened if one opened up to ideas from the outside again was felt to be a threat. To venture beyond particular discursive oppositions to them felt like advocating something of which they did not know where it might lead. At the same time the idea of what could be a Muslim approach to the subject remains unclear. To refrain from taking any action at all in this case seemed more correct to the majority, whereas the other seemed not to be able to answer as to why homosexuals' could also be supported

³⁹⁴ However this does not seem to have been an enduring situation, as female students later faced problems at Ankara University again.

within a Muslim agenda. Therefore their only reaction was to say that it was wrong not to participate. Reasons regarding the issue as such, however, were hardly brought forward.

The discussion took another turn in the final stage of the discussion, following a conference with other Muslims who had initiated and were participating in the protest. After that conference, the first writer stated that she did not think that it was an Islamic solution to ignore a whole group of people whose number was not going to decrease, as it seemed. Indeed, saying that these people were “ill or abnormal” only showed that Muslims in fact did not know how to deal with the subject and did not have a clear approach or a policy regarding this phenomenon. She drew attention to the fact that homosexuals were not only homosexuals, but also Kurds, Turks, socialists, Armenians and even Muslims. Being homosexual did not go with being Muslim, although of course the same applies for drinking alcohol, yet people who drank were not being excluded from the community. In her opinion, most Muslims did not even know what being “homosexual” meant as this was only a general term for all kinds of people in the Turkish language: bisexuals, transgendered and many more. Moreover, they were all supposed as being either “ill” or to have wilfully chosen the wrong path, or they were supposed to do things in favour of a certain identity politics.³⁹⁵ Ironically, these aspects might have brought to light some similarities between the homosexuals and the Muslims after all, given that they have also faced accusations of having chosen the wrong path and engaging in dangerous identity politics.

Her first comment still draws away from seeing homosexuality as an identity question. Just as someone who occasionally drinks alcohol can still be a Kurd, Muslim or Jew, a homosexual can be all this, with sexual orientation not reflecting the defining criterion for their being someone. Evaluated in this way homosexuals could be seen as part of the we-group by being recognised in terms of primordial identities. However, by mentioning all these primordial identities she also points at their being insignificant for the issue in discussion. It does not really matter if a homosexual is Kurdish, Turkish, Jewish or Muslim, any reference to a primordial identity does not make clearer who a homosexual might be, but then a homosexual might be all this and therefore just like any Muslim, Christian or Kurd. Moreover, by saying that people did not even know what the word homosexual referred to, she claims a niche in the beyond where identities cannot yet be perceived as having been understood. There is some

³⁹⁵ E-mails: 21.12.10

more space for people to develop their identities and assert who they are before other people place them in some category which might or might not fit them at all.

Furthermore, the writer also questioned the fear that homosexuality was being imposed on Muslims by society or the media, and wondered what these fears were actually meant to say.³⁹⁶ By addressing the fear of being drawn away from authentic Muslimness she finally questions one of the most problematic questions that hold Muslims from endorsing a self-confident attitude with regard to society. Accordingly, she ended her e-mail by proposing a new discussion on the subject.³⁹⁷

Seven other people replied to her e-mail (among them five who had not participated in the discussion earlier) supporting the writer in opening a new discussion and also proposing further investigation into the matter, suggesting a consideration from a psychological perspective. This change in the discussion is partly due to their taking part in the aforementioned conference, during which a much more tolerant approach was proposed, which had shown them a way of guarding their Islamic identity without having to be too strict. Moreover, some of the students who had previously thought differently now felt that they could raise their voices, whereas many others who had uttered conservative views no longer wrote on the subject.

The students' discussion can be understood by looking at very different debates of understanding Muslims' views on homosexuality. One of them being centred on an understanding Olivier Roy has described by saying that Muslims take on homosexuality is developing in similar lines to that of Christians or Jews. From his point of view what happened first was that homosexuals had started to fight for their recognition within their respective religious group. However, they usually achieved that religious authorities would adopt a medical point of view rather than a theological point of view.³⁹⁸ The other debate on Muslim culture and homosexuality is being represented by scholars such as Georg Klaua (2008), Thomas Bauer (2011) and Joseph A. Massad who have questioned the idea that Muslim culture is homophobic "by nature" and advocated that Muslim culture indeed has a specific approach to homosexuality, however, not a homophobic one. They point to the genealogy of homophobia in Western societies and that homophobia had been exported to Muslim countries. Bauer for example states that the prudery Muslim culture is generally associated

³⁹⁶ E-mails: 21.12.10

³⁹⁷ E-mails: 21.12.10

³⁹⁸ s. Roy (2010:185)

with can be dated back to the 19th century, when middleclass Muslims started to adopt the prudish anti-sex views spread by the West.³⁹⁹ Within this context Klauda and Bauer question the idea that a claim for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights will lead to more tolerant views on homosexuals in Muslim countries. The idea of thinking sex and identity together as Westerners do might just as well lead to negotiations of homosexuals' rights creating a hetero-normalisation of society by defining homosexuality against heterosexuality.⁴⁰⁰

In spite of the fact that Western NGOs should perhaps not take part in the discussion of homosexuals' rights in Turkey, it is necessary to acknowledge that identities that might need the support of LGBT NGOs have already come into existence in Turkey and formed their own Turkish LGBT groups accommodating sensibilities that cannot be ignored once they have come to the fore. The hybrid identities that have shaped and become visible in the public sphere need to be given recognition and space to voice their concerns and difficulties in society. To silence or negate particular sexual differences in order to be an accepted member of society today does not seem to be a viable option. Whereas in ancient times it might have sufficed to be able to live as one wanted and credit homosexual relationships as friendships, the oppression that homosexuals have been subjected to can only be thought of as a matter that has to be rethought in the past-present and acknowledge the hybridity of homosexuals as persons who would not fit in either or categories. In Bhabha's terms it is the past-present, the history that people have lived through and the possibility of the present to rethink and evaluate their situation in order to bring about something which will fit in no category that has hitherto existed. However, the students' approach of perceiving homosexuals in given categories shows that the acknowledgement of hybrid identities is a challenge that cannot be met by simply remaining silent. Whereas ambiguousness might be dealt with by being silent, hybrid identities claim an innovation that cannot be ignored, but has to actively be dealt with. Bauer's and also Klauda's proposal to refrain from "teaching" the Muslim world on LGBT rights is right insofar as the aggressive rhetoric of Western LGBT organisations aggravates situations. Klauda for instance has reported on violence of homosexuals in Turkey against one another which he attributed to their difficulty in dealing with the public image of the identity they were forced to acknowledge in the new discourse. However, Bauer's almost nostalgic view on the toleration of ambiguity that he supposes to have existed in the Middle Ages cannot be deemed a Muslim way of dealing with homosexuality that has to be preserved as it was

³⁹⁹ s. Bauer (2011: 302)

⁴⁰⁰ s. Bauer (2011: 310/311)

superior to ours today. This view betrays some nostalgia and can be criticised as promoting a particular almost fixed view on Muslim culture. The current hierarchical situation should prevent any western scholar from attempting to say or suggest what Muslim culture should be like, because his assessment has the danger of becoming a normative assessment of culture, by implying that Muslims should be tolerating ambiguity (for example) and in case they do not might again become an instrument of depreciating them.

The students' steps to understanding the psychological dimension and homosexuals' claim for rights can perhaps already be considered a beginning acknowledgment of the LGBT struggle that has grown increasingly stronger in recent years.

Private and Public

An issue connected to the discussion of homosexuals' rights is the reconfiguration of the notions of public and private within the discourse of toleration. The current phase of toleration has been characterised by challenging the separation of public and private (which had earlier made a first step to toleration) by groups in society who feel that their rights have not been recognised. According to Michael Warner, feminists have strived for a redrawing of borders between the private and the public in order to challenge male domination.⁴⁰¹ Moreover, the same can be said for homosexuals who have fought for their acceptance within their religious communities and were no longer ready to disguise their sexual orientation.⁴⁰² The private sphere has been weakened in these processes, and is currently subjected to public scrutiny.⁴⁰³ By raising issues of the private, sexual orientation, domestic abuse and the like become public. A similar redrawing of borders was highlighted by a girl from the Muslim group approximately two weeks after the discussion on the protest in Ankara, when a scandal on the filming of a pornographic film had rocked Bilgi University in January 2011, leading to the film department's closure. The long discussion of issues such as pornographic films and homosexuality had made her anxious that discussing the corruptions of society might lead to this corruption becoming normal for them, or even corrupting them. She thought that engaging with the outside world's problems might lead to drawing a curtain of shame, and the use of a modern language to address all such issues was only disguising that these words maintained the same old meanings and might corrupt them.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ s. Warner (2005:33)

⁴⁰² s. Roy (2010: 1985)

⁴⁰³ s. McKinnon/Castiglione (2003: 2)

⁴⁰⁴ E-mails: 05.01.11

These remarks do not only reflect how much the group and its chosen topics for discussion were influenced by the outside world that was not sharing their values, but also the fact that something this girl considered that one should not talk about, something that should be confined to the private, was openly discussed within society and their group, which had suddenly come to resemble the public. In her admonitions, she also mentioned that she did not consider it their duty to comment on everything and to publicly announce their views on every issue. Indeed, non-involvement seemed much more virtuous to her.⁴⁰⁵

Her claim can be seen as directed against something Bauer has criticised regarding the Western attitude (and recent efforts of LGBT groups to make their issues public) of discussing everything:

Doch es genügt nicht, dass Sex eindeutig ist, er muss auch *wahr* sein, also mit der Identität des Betreibers übereinstimmen. Aus diesem Grund muss er *bekannt* werden. Die Bekenntnispflicht ist eine Folge der westlichen *Wahrheitsobsession*. Und schliesslich müssen alle Möglichkeiten, an der Wahrheit der eigenen Vorstellungen zu zweifeln, dadurch ausgeschaltet werden, dass man sie als universell betrachtet und bestrebt ist, die ganze Menschheit zur Übernahme dieser Vorstellungen zu bewegen.⁴⁰⁶

Despite homosexuality and pornography possibly being realities of social life, she could not see the need to discuss them in the public sphere, and evidently the understanding that homosexuals' rights have to be discussed and their identity acknowledged did not play any role for her. Perhaps the understanding that particular issues have to be public and known to be considered as being accepted did not make any sense to her in this context.

Another aspect that she emphasised was that they were not discussing anything face-to-face, with discussions on the Internet probably even facilitating discussions on such topics among males and females. However, her concerns about the discussions within the e-mail group were probably intelligible to most of the other writers, with one replying that he could understand her very well, but did not think that they were starting to see the corruption in society as normal or starting to change themselves, as long as they discussed things in a serious manner. To his mind, the importance of discussing these issues (as others were discussing them) also lay in the task to develop a *Fikih* (canon law); indeed, Islamic scholars historically engaged with all relevant issues for the same reason.⁴⁰⁷ In a second reply to the girl's e-mail, another girl explained about her own experience in a similar context. When

⁴⁰⁵ E-mails: 05.01.11

⁴⁰⁶ Bauer (2011: 311)

⁴⁰⁷ E-mails: 05.01.11

she had first read an interpretation of the Qur'an with her grandfather she had found it very embarrassing to read out the paragraphs discussing Qur'anic verses on menstruation, and she attributes this shame to the tradition and emphasises that all issues of life are mentioned and discussed in the Qur'an – whether homosexuality or women's issues. In her opinion, it is also a part of their religion to discuss everything with the ultimate reason of generating Fikih.⁴⁰⁸

In terms of the first girl's doubts whether a discussion on homosexuality or pornography might have taken place if they had faced each other, it might be possible to suggest that it might indeed have been much easier for some of the participants to voice their considerations in a context in which it was possible to think and write about a sensitive issue without having to face the others and their immediate reactions. In this context, Internet communication might be able to facilitate the discussion of difficult issues by enabling people to participate actively in discussions or alternatively to lurk and enter the discussion when they feel ready to do so. Being a member of an e-mail group bears the possibility of becoming acquainted with new subjects and being informed about news that one would not otherwise hear about. Even if subjects are traditionally meant to remain in private, the possibility of learning about them presently exists via the Internet, and offers ways of learning about them in a cautious manner.

Moreover, for those students who would not want to discuss such issues but ponder over them in silence or those who refused to discuss controversies over such subjects because silence and non-involvement seemed more virtuous to them although adopt a position that is visible to the others in the e-mail group. Just as in the referendum debate, their position is against creating controversies and escalate conflicts. In the discussion on homosexuality their silence probably also meant to say: Why interfere if undecided about the issue of homosexuality? However, the urge to talk and problematize subjects such as these within the group seemed to have become a space for rethinking the ethics of discussion. Rather than dealing with problematic subjects individually the students' e-mail group provided the possibility of an in-between space that was neither public nor private or individual. In the discussion on homosexuality this space provided them with the opportunity to discuss a sensitive issue among peers who were willing to question the ethics of discussion involved here. Rather than solely understanding the individual as being capable of pondering over a

⁴⁰⁸ E-mails: 05.01.11

subject and to ultimately remain silent if his or her conscience should guide him towards an opinion that might not be in accord with that of the community, the semi-public discussion of such subjects seems to be legitimate to many in the group. Thus the e-mail group can be understood to be an in-between space where something new can emerge from through discussion with peers, but also by questioning a particular ethics of silence.

The fact that something new can be said to have emerged from this discussion can be understood by comparing the discussions on the Kurdish issue and the two discussions on the Christians. A comparison shows that in those previous debates there was no real controversy that was being discussed. The majority of the students had already adopted a particular point of view and defended these against some students who had endorsed a more nationalist (but almost out-dated) opinion – perhaps for the lack of being able to discuss this kind of issues with peers before. In the case of the homosexuals however, most of the students had not yet taken part in any discussion on the subject, the problematic itself was new to them and it was not clear what the collective as such, or the members of the e-mail group at large would think about the subject. In this case all those who were not sure if their opinion was being looked upon favourably by the majority remained silent. Was this because of their form of community ethics? Did they stand up for Christians and Kurds because there was a community consensus? And in case such a consensus does not exist does one generally have to assume that individual ethicality will be expressed by silence rather than dissenting voices?

The fact that modernity brings forward the identity claims of homosexuals, Muslims and others also forces people to discuss issues that they would rather not engage with. Here, traditional taboos are broken and as a space where one does not have to look into the faces of others, the Internet can be an in-between space seemingly facilitating speaking about difficult issues.

Conclusion

Kurds

From the students' perspective, the Kurdish issue is discussed on two levels. Firstly, they acknowledge that Kurds have been subject to oppressive politics of homogenisation, depriving them of the possibility to live their traditions and cultures freely. Secondly, they consider the Kurdish issue as a part of the Muslim struggle and would wish for a peaceful and friendly co-existence; however, given that Kurdish nationalism seems to be in favour of a separate secular and socialist state, they would also accept their claim to this.

Christians

The students' view on Christians can be generally said to be based on an Islamic hegemonic understanding of the exchange between people of different religions. In this context, it is clear that the religious feelings and/or history of their oppression in Turkey have to be acknowledged. However, these perspectives are sometimes being threatened by views that are influenced by Kemalist threat-perceptions and their fear to fall prey to liberalisation. In these cases, individual students, whose opinions were not representative for the group as a whole, proposed only looking for the advantages and rights of the Muslim community.

Homosexuals

This discussion on homosexuality revealed some insights into how particular circumstances can shape and foster a discussion on a sensitive issue. Whereas the first part of the discussion was structured by the group's efforts to make a political decision and consequently included the views of the outer world, the ensuing discussion was detached from what others thought. Despite the students' initial reluctance to understand the identity issue of homosexuals on equal terms as their own, some of them did not display any problem in terms of cooperating with them in the second phase. In the third phase, the fact that a group of people – whose number was not going to decrease – was something they had to take into account helped them to discuss the issue on new terms, proposing a new approach that promised to look at homosexuals' issues from their perspective.

5. Epilogue: Perspectives on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and the Gezi Park Protests

In the majority of cases, the criticism that the Muslim students voiced on secularism and the nation state can be said to have been limited to the Turkish state and society. Despite Turkey was often implicitly mentioned as being within a system of nation states with similar systemic characteristics, the students' involvement with activism beyond Turkey's boundaries or even a discussion of such activism was very rare. Around the time when I first got to know them in May 2010 they took a very strong interest in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, an NGO-led effort to challenge Israel's blockade of Gaza with a ship convoy that was meant to bring humanitarian aid to the Gazans in May 2010. As I did not know them very well at that time I did not ask many questions and later felt I had missed an opportunity to get to know more about an incident that could have told a lot about what the students think on the Israeli-Palestinian issue or as to why this issue was so important to them. At that time they were involved in many

activities, meetings and demonstrations and I felt that a lot was going on and that a lot was being said. When looking back, I either did not record a lot of what had happened or many events that they took part in were less designed for talking and discussing than for demonstration and reiteration of indignation. The protest against the Gaza Flotilla raid is the one event that stands out with regard to the minimal amount of discussions that I witnessed. Obviously most of the time it seemed apparent to the students as to why one would support the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, they took it for granted that every Muslim in Turkey was going to feel the same and would want to protest the ongoings.⁴⁰⁹ Where did this unanimity come from? How much did the students know about the Gaza conflict and why was everything so clear to them? Not a single doubt was uttered on the activists' actions.

The air was full of excitement, but also despair. From the excitement surrounding me it was hard to tell whether people were excited in a positive way and saw the Freedom Flotilla as successful in its aims, or whether they were in fact desperate after getting news about the attack on the flotilla. Was it triumph or despair? By elaborating on these specific questions in context with the Gaza Freedom Flotilla I would like to bring together some of the thoughts and key topics presented in previous chapters to look at them through an incident that transgressed nation-state boundaries and gave the students the opportunity to think and act beyond the nation-state. While the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was the most striking event at the time when I had just begun my field work (and in my view was only surpassed by the longer-lasting excitement the Referendum provoked) I would also like to have a look at the ways in which the key topics that I have identified for my work in 2010 still have an influence in current Turkish politics and tell something about the protests that have risen against President Erdoğan in May 2013. Three years after the Gaza protests and for the first time in Turkish history have people witnessed large-scale and almost peaceful protests against an incumbent government and its authoritarian grip on society's development in Turkey. Initially the protest was directed against yet another urban planning project the government had intended for the Gezi Park, one of the very few Parks that exist in Taksim square, the heart of the European part of Istanbul. After the environmentalists who had organised a sit-in against the

⁴⁰⁹ The students later discussed the approach of the Gülen Movement (which they strongly criticized, without evaluating particular arguments), whose leader Fethullah Gülen had criticized the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and its strategy of challenging Israel. Gülen had expressed that the deadly raid on the flotilla was "ugly", he also specified his arguments in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, which reported his words as follows: "Mr. Gülen said organizers' failure to seek accord with Israel before attempting to deliver aid "is a sign of defying authority, and will not lead to fruitful matters".⁴⁰⁹From Gülen's perspective, the activists would have done well to avoid the deadly confrontation, and diplomatic efforts should have been taken to find ways to deliver the goods without confronting Israel.⁴⁰⁹

construction project had been violently driven out of the park by the police, outrage over the government's authoritarian course of action provoked another sit-in in Gezi Park. With the increasing police violence and the outrage over the government's rhetoric of labelling the protestors as *çapulcus* (looters) and statements that the protests had been orchestrated by foreign powers the AKP demonstrated how much it had inculcated the very nationalist rhetoric it had meant to disrupt by disempowering the military and starting the Ergenekon investigations. Simultaneously the protests grew and in most major Turkish cities public spaces were being jointly occupied by protestors with different and sometimes opposing political views. Nationalists, Muslims, leftists, liberals, environmentalists, secularists and socialists showed their discontent with President Erdoğan's politics and demanded his resignation. Though I have very little knowledge about what the students did during these protests and have only talked to a few people in Istanbul at the time, the general approach that they have discussed on the e-mail group sheds some light on how the protests were analysed by them and the ways in which it contrasts with the protests following the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. Once more (and as I later learned on the e-mail group) for the last time the group struggled over whether one should take part in the protests or whether one would end up supporting Kemalists and nationalists (who were said to call for another military coup to restore secularism) by doing so. Shortly after this debate the group itself dissolved and in this very moment only exists as an e-mail group for news and exchange without a common project, plan or regular seminars anymore. I can only guess as to why the group has dissolved (as there was no discussion regarding that matter), however, the students' lives in the last three years have moved on, many of them have started their first jobs, married or have had their first children. Though the student group as such might not be an active platform for a specific student group anymore the students mostly have continued in their efforts for a better Muslim world and are still active in promoting other events, or organizing projects in other associations or individually. In a sense they can perhaps be said to have retreated to a different kind of politics that Bayat has termed "street politics". Street politics are characterised by the fact that people are not organised in a particular way or pursuing a particular kind of protest, "but [politics] of practice, a politics of redress through direct action."⁴¹⁰ Bayat has described method of contentious politics as a way for middle-class women, but also urban youth to challenge authoritarian systems and ossified mores through practices of everyday life, just as the women in the student group did by wearing their headscarves, appearing in public spaces

⁴¹⁰ Bayat (2010: 19)

and visibly being Muslim in places where they would be rejected by secularists. This strategy can also be encountered in other small practices youth endorse:

Youths instead forged collective identities in schools, colleges, urban public spaces, parks, cafés, and sports centers; or they connected with one another through the virtual world of various media. Thus, theirs was not a deliberate network of solidarity where they could meet, interact, articulate their concerns, or express collective dissent. Rather, they linked to one another passively and spontaneously – through “passive networks” – by sensing their commonalities through such methods as recognizing similar hairstyles, blue jeans, hang-out places, food, fashions, and the pursuit of public fun. In sum, just as with women and the poor, theirs was not a politics of protest, but of practice, a politics of redress through direct action.⁴¹¹

The transformation of the student platform and their future engagement with politics is unpredictable, however, the traits of a politics of practice that they had already lived does not seem to subside with changing life circumstances.

With regard to the Gezi Park demonstrations it would be interesting to know if these protests had an influence in the group’s break-up, but also in what ways the Gezi Park protests challenged the students’ views and attitudes with regard to politics. By looking at some key events of the discourse during the Gezi Park Protests I would like to recast some of the problems that have already surfaced in the protest on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla protests, but perhaps so in less pronounced ways than during the Gezi Park Protests. Moreover, some of the questions that evolve from previous chapters here become relevant again: How do the students oppose the AKP government? Which ways would they use to oppose the government? Where do they see the pitfalls of becoming “nationalists” or supporting nationalists? How do they define their goals in politics? Do they see a chance of following their aims at all? How do they estimate their situation and future as Muslims from now on?

The Mavi Marmara Incident

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla was co-organised by the IHH with the Free Gaza movement, a Cyprus-based alliance opposed to the Gaza blockade⁴¹². Their joint venture consisted of six ships (three of which were provided by the IHH), carrying supplies from more than thirty countries and international passengers including politicians from European countries⁴¹³ when Israel intercepted them on the morning of 31st May. An Israeli commando squadron attacked the flotilla from sea and air, killing 9 activists on the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara⁴¹⁴, the only

⁴¹¹ Bayat (2010: 18/19)

⁴¹² Migdalovitz (2010: 3)

⁴¹³ Pope (2010a)

⁴¹⁴ The flotilla also included the ships Defne (registered in Kiribati), the Challenger I and II (registered in the USA), the Sofia (Greece) Sfondoni (Togo) and the Rachel Corrie (Cambodia) that arrived late. During the

ship that had supposedly tried to resist the attack.⁴¹⁵ Whereas the IDF has claimed that armed terrorists had been on-board the ships, investigations later proved that some of the activists had used parts of the ship and equipment to fight the soldiers boarding the ship.⁴¹⁶ Although it is true that some of the soldiers had been disarmed by the activists who had beaten them (and seriously hurt one of them), some of the activists who had been shot by the IDF were found to have been hit by bullets from behind. Moreover, Bülent Yıldırım (the IHH President) stated that one of the activists was shot while taking photos, and that his early effort of waving his white shirt as a surrender flag was ignored by the IDF, who continued their attack.⁴¹⁷

Israel's official justification of the blockade and the attack on the flotilla were based on the fear that terrorists or the Hamas could use humanitarian supplies to construct weapons, and consequently they had always led all ships carrying humanitarian aid to the port of Ashdod, where they were searched for particular items. However, from NGOs' perspective, Israel was enforcing an unlawful blockade by starving the Gazans and subjecting them to collective punishment.⁴¹⁸ Therefore, 600 international pro-Palestine and humanitarian activists hoped to

seizure of 3 of the other ships the UN human rights council has stated that the Israeli Defence forces had made use of disproportionate force.

⁴¹⁵ s. Tarrow (2011: 1) and Pope (2010b) who refers to the UN Human Rights Council's report, stating that the activists had not brought any weapons onboard, but tried to resist by making use of equipment on the ship.

⁴¹⁶ Pope (2010b)

⁴¹⁷ Pope (2010b)

⁴¹⁸ The allegations of starving the population in Gaza have been rejected by Israel and Israeli scholars (with some US scholars), who have upheld the opinion that the blockade and raid on the flotilla were lawful.⁴¹⁸ This assumption in the case of the attack on the freedom flotilla is based on a different perception of the international law of the sea; whereas most countries accept that no state is allowed to board, arrest or attack ships of other states on the high seas (12 nautical miles beyond the state's coast), the United States and Israel claim an exception if it is suspected that terrorists are on-board a ship on the open sea.⁴¹⁸ Migdalovitz states that "Israeli officials refer to those killed on the Marmara as "terrorists",⁴¹⁸ and given that Israel had already outlawed the IHH for its open support of the Hamas in 2008,⁴¹⁸ this would in fact have been an argument justifying their actions. However, allegations that either the IHH or activists participating in the freedom flotilla could have been terrorists seem far-fetched when considering the diversity of the passengers on the ships.

Another train of thought follows the argument that Israel could lawfully enforce a blockade because it was at war with Gaza.⁴¹⁸ However, even in such a case a lawful blockade has to allow humanitarian aid, and cannot starve the population and be excessive or disproportionate regarding the advantage that the blockading country can expect for the war.⁴¹⁸ Moreover, while a state enforcing a lawful blockade can search humanitarian aid arriving on ships from other states, it has to allow the supervision of a third party to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the population behind the blockade.⁴¹⁸ At least this is the reasoning suggested by most non-Israelian experts on law.⁴¹⁸ Therefore, given that Israel never allowed the supervision of a third party, they consider the blockade to be unlawful.⁴¹⁸ However, this understanding, as well as Turkey's support for the Palestinians, is suspicious from an Israeli perspective. Some scholars argue that Turkey's support for the Palestinians has nothing to do with humanitarian aid, and they believe that Turkey's change of strategy towards Israel can be explained by the fact that Turkey has grown Islamist under the AKP and favours good relations with Iran and other Middle Eastern countries over its relations with the West.⁴¹⁸ However, others regard Turkey's efforts as a means to stabilise the Middle East by engaging Iran in international relations to guarantee peace in the Middle East.⁴¹⁸ Consequently, they have defended Turkey's actions in accord with its "zero problem" foreign policy that has led to a closer cooperation with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Libya by imitating the European example and establishing a visa-free zone, for instance. This advancement in cooperation has not been limited to Middle Eastern countries, but also includes Russia and Greece, and thus cannot necessarily be subsumed as a form of Islamic policies.⁴¹⁸ Concerning the goals and motives for Turkey's involvement in humanitarian issues, Hugh

break the blockade that had destroyed Gaza's economy since 2007 and prevented the Gazans from access to items other than food or medicine, such as construction materials (needed for rebuilding destroyed buildings after the Gaza War 2008/09), fertilisers, metal, computer chips, and at times also consumer products including light bulbs, candles, matches, books, musical instruments, crayons, clothing, coffee, tea, cookies and shampoo.⁴¹⁹

The Students' Reaction

On 30th May, one of the girls in the student group wrote an e-mail containing the information that the freedom flotilla was being followed by Israeli war ships:

23:00: İsrail Gemi Filosunu takibe aldı. 5 Gemi ile Gazze'ye doğru yoluna devam eden Özgürlük Filosu şimdiden İsrail donanmaları tarafından takibe alındı ve arkadan kuşatmaya alındı. Filo kaptan köşkü ile İsraili yetkililer görüşmeler yapıyor. İşgalci İsrail donanmaları kaptan köşküne nereye gittiklerini sordukları belirtildi. Sabah saatlerinde saat 7:00 de Gazze sahillerine ulaşılacağı belirtildi.⁴²⁰

(23:00 Israel has started to follow the flotilla. The freedom flotilla that is on its way to Gaza with 5 ships is now being followed by the Israeli navy and being surrounded from behind. The captain of the flotilla is talking to the Israeli officials from the command bridge. It has been conveyed that the occupying Israeli navy is asking the captain where they are heading. They have confirmed that they will be reaching Gaza's shores at 7:00 a.m.)

This e-mail was written on 30th May at 23:58, some hours before the IDF attacked the flotilla. However, the ship's crew was still able to communicate with the outside world at the time, as the same writer in the student group informed the others:

23:15: İsrail gemi ile dünyanın bağlantısını kesmeye başladı. Gemiden bildirilenlere göre eğer bağlantı kesilirse bilinki israil müdahale etmiş olur.⁴²¹ (Israel has started to cut the ships links with the outside world. According to the statements from the ship, if the connections are cut, know that Israel will have attacked.)

Most of the e-mails that followed (like the one above) were not written by the writers themselves, but rather involved pieces of news that they had collected from the Internet being sent to the group. The students' close observation of the ongoings started around midnight on the 30th and continued at 7:23 a.m. the next morning. Simultaneously, a group of students had already started to protest the ongoings in front of the Israeli consulate, with more to follow after 8 a.m. and also at 12.30.

Pope suggests that: "Yes, Turkey is trying to change western policies, especially those that turn a blind eye to the human consequences of the Israeli blockade of Gaza. But it is using legitimate channels, such as its hard-won seat on the UN Security Council."⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁹ s. Tarrow (2011: 2)

⁴²⁰ E-mails: 30.05.10

⁴²¹ E-mails: 30.05.10

In the following days, most of the students were busy taking part in demonstrations, meeting up at symposia and trying to develop new ways and strategies to protest Israel's actions. One such suggestion among the students was to protest Israel in creative ways, making poetry for their protest in front of the consulate. Later, others suggested that one should protest Israel on a more profound basis by making short films and caricatures. In similar ways to the Gezi Park protests (though on a smaller scale) students considered new ways of protest, taking photographs of their protests and publishing a statement on their website: "Israel insanlığı tanımaldır" (Israel has to respect humanity.) However, they never thought of violent means to express their outrage, with the limit of their actions described by one of the informants stating the misbehaviour of nationalist activists:

Dışe dış kana kan intikam intikam diye sloganlar attılar [...] böyle bir şey olmaz biz hep evet tepkimizi sokaklarda dile getiriyoruz, Hamasi da destekliyoruz can gönülden destekliyoruz, başbakanın söylediği gibi her zaman Hamasın arkasındayız müsülmanlar olarak.”⁴²²

(A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, revenge – that's the slogans they screamed (...) something like this is not okay. We do of course show our reactions on the street, we support Hamas and support them wholeheartedly and as Muslims we will always be behind Hamas, as the Prime Minister says.)

As in most other discussions before, the students explained their own situation as opposed to that of the nationalists. Even if they were standing up for the same issue as the students themselves were their own position was carefully explained and distinguished from that of the nationalists. However, considering the usual debates that would surround each and every issue, it was perhaps astonishing that there was no discussion of the events as such. There was no doubt that the IHH members had been peaceful activists on a humanitarian mission of utmost importance and that they had been forced to defend themselves against the far more powerful IDF. The question that I later asked myself is that why were all the students of the same opinion? Could it really be true that this issue was lacking controversy and therefore was not made to be discussed at all? Were they all sure that the activists were right in acting the way they did? How could the students have so many differing opinions regarding issues that could be linked to Turkey, but have only one single opinion regarding Israel and the Gaza Freedom Flotilla?

⁴²² Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

The students' perception of the incident can probably best be understood by means of a caricature⁴²³ that appeared on the cover of the journal *Penguen*, showing a fully armed Israeli soldier saying: "Önce insanlık saldırdı" (Humanity struck first).

The *Penguen* caricature shared by the students in the e-mail group clearly shows what the students thought about the Israeli state's actions. In their view Israel stood for inhuman and unjust actions, while the activists embodied humanity. An encounter with one of the students at one of the anti-Israel demonstrations provided me with an insight into the desperation that the students experienced regarding the injustice they were witnessing. With tears in her eyes, she told me that she would want somebody do something against Israel and that she was willing to send her younger brother and father to fight for Gaza, if necessary.

Her anger – as she told me - cannot be explained by the fact that nine Turkish citizens had been killed on the Mavi Marmara; on the contrary, she later once told me that "orada sadece 9 tane Türk ölmedi orada yıllardır bir süre Filistinli ölüyor"⁴²⁴ (not only 9 Turks died there, for years Palestinians have been dying there), and distanced herself from the approach that the victims' nationality was of any importance to her. What made her feel powerless and miserable was that people she felt connected to were suffering there without being able to defend themselves, and that no-one was effectively preventing their deaths and acting against the sorrows that they were forced to experience.

But still I could not really understand as to why she was so extremely desperate. In what way did this incident touch on her life and why did this one event make her angrier than all the things that have been happening in Israel for years? Moreover, in what way could she possibly feel connected to the Palestinians, what made them stand out among other victims of war and injustice elsewhere in the world?

Clearly the Palestinian issue in global media is always cast as an issue concerning the Muslim world beyond Palestine and Israel itself. Therefore the students also saw their support of the Palestinians or in this case of the Gaza activists as Muslim activism. Even if nationalists took part in the protests or protested Israel's course of action the issue as such would always be understood as a matter of Muslim outrage against the state of Israel. The students never seemed to ask themselves if this was a Muslim issue or if it could have been a nationalist issue. The fact that they were cast as opposing Israel, did not raise any questions in the group, on the contrary as they probably felt that the Palestinians as well as other Muslims supporting the Palestinian issue would certainly be cast as the victims and Israelis as the perpetrators, the

⁴²³ See illustrations

⁴²⁴ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

black and white understanding of the issue seemed to fit with their own understanding of who they were and what they wanted to represent. As there was no conflict between the ways in which they would be cast and in the way they wanted to be seen there was no reason to doubt that there would be a confusion over their being cast as nationalist. Moreover, the fortunate overlap of self-perception and reflection by others seemed to limit contrasting perspectives on the issue. Quite in contrast to other subjects they had discussed after the Gaza issue there was no effort to think beyond. With regard to the difficult situation, the raid on the flotilla and the ensuing diplomatic chill between Israel and Turkey this reaction might be understandable, but the way in which the students awaited the freedom flotilla's confrontation with Israel shows that there was no interest in reflecting a different insight to the problem. On the contrary their position was clear from the outset of the conflict, there was no need for reflection, as every party in the conflict was only taking their particular positions to re-enact what they already knew about each other.

One main point that the students made however, was that Jews should not be equated with Israelis or as a matter of fact with those Israelis supporting their state in the actions taken. The fact that the Israelis predominantly are Jews was of no importance to them⁴²⁵; on the contrary, an e-mail sent by one of the girls some days after the raid shows that the students regarded it as positive that not all Israelis seemed to share the same opinion on the raid. Her e-mail contained a link to a CNN Türk news report about Israelis protesting the IDF's raid of the flotilla and the occupation of Gaza.⁴²⁶ What remains to be asked however, is as to why this insight was never used to think of different ways of protesting particular actions of the Israeli state and simultaneously retreating from the overt dichotomy that is explicit in the greater part of the discourse.

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla can be said to have been only another stage on which the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was restaged by (in part) other parties than the usual ones. However, for the students this particular incident was different, as it also involved Turkish activists and opportunity to support Palestinians in Turkey. Ayşe the girl I had met during the protests later wrote to the list and expressed her regret that the students had not been part of the Mavi Marmara's crew and had the opportunity to show the world what Israel was really

⁴²⁵A similar attitude has also been expressed by the activists themselves. For instance, IHH President Bülent Yıldırım appreciated that there were also Jews among the freedom flotilla activists - which has been important in emphasising that the actions taken by activists were against the IDF, and against Israel as an occupier, rather than against Israelis or Jews as such.

⁴²⁶E-mails 06.06.10 and

<http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/dunya/06/06/israil.halki.sokaga.cikti.hukumeti.protesto.etti/579046.0/index.html>

like. The feeling that one would have wanted to be there to have taken part in the activities on the Mavi Marmara was very strong among the students. It astonished me to hear that they would have wanted to have been part of the Mavi Marmara's crew. With the opportunity to participate in the flotilla having passed and some of the activists being dead I would not have expected them to still wish to have been part of this particular group of activists. However, obviously this particular group of activists and their activism seemed to mean much more to them than I could imagine. But what was it exactly that made them feel they would have wanted to be part of this group of activists? Why would it have been important to show the world what Israel was really like? What would it have meant to them to show that Israel was indeed playing the evil part in this conflict?

In order to understand the students' attitude with regard to the raid on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla it was important to see how they defined their own position against that of nationalist activists who also took part in the protests against Israel, as one of the students explained:

İsrailin yaptığı bütün saldırılara müsülmanlar karşı çıkarken bir defa ülkücüler karşı çıkmadılar bu zamana kadar Mavi Mara gemisinde ne zaman 9 tane Türk öldü o zaman çıkıp kalkıp vay efendi niye Türkleri öldürüyorsun diye İsrail başkonsolosluğunu yamnaladılar yumurta fırlatılar taş fırlatılar müsülmanlıkta böyle şeyler yoktur.⁴²⁷ (Whereas the Muslims have always protested Israel's attacks, the nationalists have never protested them – until now, when 9 Turks died on the Mavi Marmara. They raised "Sir why do you kill Turks?" and burned the Israeli consulate, they threw eggs and stones – there is no such thing in Islam.)

In terms of the situation in Gaza and the injustice the Palestinians were facing, the students not only experienced desperation, powerlessness and anger, but also questioned the nationalists' actions in front of the consulate. Their reasons to protest the raid on the freedom flotilla seemed to be very different from those of the nationalist activists; whereas the Muslim students supposed that the nationalists felt that their national identity was being humiliated by the Israeli attack, they did not see any problem in disrespect for the Turkish nation. What was at stake for them seemed to be something else. In an abstract sense what they deemed to be under attack was justice and humanity. However, in a more practical sense the people that were under attack were not Turks (as the nationalists had thought), but the particular crew on the Mavi Marmara. This particular community of which they would have wanted to be a part was being attacked. A community that seemed to be making the sort of moral politics that the students would have supported against nationalist politics. In this sense their allegiance went

⁴²⁷ Interview Ayşe 01.07.10

beyond the nation state and had could be seen as being linked to a community whose efforts and also whose members could not be related to one nation state.

However, the constraints that nation states impose obviously had a force from which they could not liberate themselves. Therefore they saw the main problems they were facing in their support for the Mavi Marmara's crew in the system of nation states itself, as highlighted by another statement of one of the students:

Bu sistem Nasıl bir sistemdir ki ondan bağımsız hareket edebilen tek bir devlet dahi yoktur!! Şimdi neden İsrail'e savaş uçakları gönderemiyoruz? Çünkü uluslar arası Hukuk'a aykırı! Peki İsrail'in yaptığını hukuk dışı muamele nedir? [...] Bu hukuk denilen aptal şey keyfe göre olağan üstü hale dönüşüyorsa; [...] Her şeye alışacağız artık katliamlar bile gerekçeli ve hukuki olacak...⁴²⁸

(What kind of system is this, in which there is not a single state that can act independent from it!! Why cannot we send warplanes to Israel now? Because that would be against international law! But what about Israel's unlawful course of action? [...] This stupid thing called law changes to something superior according to its pleasure; [...] we will get used to everything from now on, from now on even massacres will be necessary and lawful ...)

The student who wrote this statement attributed the injustice they were witnessing to the system of states that Turkey was part of. Moreover, the perception that international law had nothing to do with justice and did not ensure the observance of the right and good illustrates the moral expectations that most of the students would have from a just world order. To them, international law was an instrument that was only useful to particular countries, such as Israel, yet did not apply when concerning the Muslim world's interests or mores and ethics themselves. However, in a sense the student – perhaps inadvertently – also expressed something like a “banal nationalism”. The way she asks “Why cannot we send warplanes to Israel now?” refers to the nation-state instead of the Muslim community and it betrays deception over the Turkish nation-state that seems powerless and bound by a system of nations that prevent the nation's acting in the way it would want to act. Nationalist thinking in this sense imposes a barrier on them that they cannot easily overcome. As they perceive and think their resistance against Israel in traditional methods of warfare they reveal how much they are bound to the nation state, but also how difficult it is to think beyond the nation state. What options could they possibly have thought of to circumvent the nation state? In a way the creative protests (by writing poetry and drawing caricatures etc.) was one of the few ways that gave way to a negotiation of the issue that went beyond simple protest, anger and indignation.

⁴²⁸ E-mails: 01.06.2010

In a way it can be said that after all in this issue nationalists and Muslims have shared some sentiments. Notwithstanding the differences that the students articulated and the ways and strategies they adopted to voice their protest, the dimension of powerlessness and in particular the state's powerlessness in a world of nation-states is at the centre of their anger and deception. Efforts to be on a par with other nation-states do not finally lead to the Turkish nation's being integrated in a way that would not lead other nations to ignore their interests and perceptions on certain issues. The aims of a nationalism of the 'outside' in this sense are not fulfilled, but only perpetuated on a different level responding to felt colonisation by the West. The interests and even feelings of the Turkish nation are not deemed as important as are those of Israel, therefore it seems that there is no possibility of breaking colonial power in the region.

What the Mavi Marmara incident show is that in spite of the fact that the students want to think beyond the nation state, nationalism is also always a part of their thinking that creates a tension they cannot dissolve. The ways in which they can add new perspectives to the conflict remain very limited and to themselves seem ineffective with regard to the injustice that is happening. Desperation and anger than finally lead them to see the state as their main problem again – whatever they do, the Turkish state or the state system as such seems to come in their way.

The feeling of powerlessness that is at the root of the students' perception of the Gaza conflict is a feeling that at times can clearly be linked to nationalism and to Islam in the sense that Islam represents the spiritual inside of the Muslim world.

On one occasion I had an interview with a young journalist working at the AGD. At the time we met a video of a young Australian who had converted to Islam and described his journey to Islam⁴²⁹ in a very funny manner was being shared on Facebook and other social community websites. Almost everyone knew this video and liked it as some of the students also did. When I asked that journalist why everybody was sharing this video and why everybody liked it so much, as after all the young Australian lived in another country and probably never was to have an impact on their lives she said that she did not know, but that the video might appeal to a feeling of finally vanquishing.

A similar feeling of victory can perhaps be related to another video that was widely shared after the Gaza War in 2008/09 when President Erdoğan attacked Simon Peres's defence of the Gaza War at the Davos World Economic Forum in early-2009. Erdoğan confronted him by stating that they all knew very well that Israel was good at killing human beings, and – with

⁴²⁹ s. youtube (15.10.2010) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcxzIE4xxrI>

reference to the audience – added that it was inhuman to applaud those committing such crimes. The YouTube video of the sequence later became a viral hit⁴³⁰ and was appreciated by many Turks, who felt that Israel for once had to face some sort of official criticism from Turkey, with most other European countries remaining silent on the events.

Put into context with the students' rejection of nationalism it appears that being nationalist – to some degree – is not only the only way of challenging the state or confronting it with the image of what a better nation and a better state should be like, it is also impossible to totally reject nationalism as the nation-state matrix seems to be the one frame wherein one can claim more rights and a full equality with comparison to other citizens in the world. Moreover, the deep deception that I witnessed among some of the students also pointed out to me that the feeling of inequality that they experienced could not be ignored it was a constant reminder of their situation.

Activists' Perspectives and Aims

While participating in demonstrations with the students and observing their reactions regarding the flotilla raid, as well as witnessing their anger and disappointment over the flotilla's failure to break the blockade, the few interviews of Bülent Yıldırım (the IHH president, who had been on-board of the Mavi Marmara) and the texts written by Hakan Albayrak (a very popular Şafak newspaper journalist, who had also been on the Mavi Marmara) represented the activists' view for the students. They read these texts to learn about what exactly had happened on 31st May and send them to the e-mail group. A discussion of the writers' opinions was seemingly not required, given that they wholeheartedly supported the activists and seemed to consent with their motives and aims. The activists' writings reveal the activists' ideas that not only aimed at bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza. Before the raid on the flotilla, while approaching Gaza, Hakan Albayrak wrote:

Yarın ve sonraki günlerde başımıza nelerin geleceğini bilmiyorum. Ama yeni bir dünyanın şekillenmekte olduğunu ve "Gazze'ye Özgürlük Filosu"nun bu sürece önemli bir katkı teşkil ettiğini, Cenâb-ı Hakk'ın bizi büyük bir devrimde enstrüman olarak kullandığını iliklerime kadar hissediyorum. Filistin'in meşru başbakanı İsmail Heniye'nin dediği gibi: "Gemiler Gazze limanına ulaşsa da ulaşmasa da kazandık."⁴³¹
(We do not know what expects us tomorrow and in the days to come. But I can feel it to my bones that a new world is about to take shape and that "the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza" is contributing to something important at this moment, that God is using us in a big revolution. Just as Palestine's legitimate President Ismail Heniye said: "We have won, no matter if the ships reach the shores of Gaza or not.")

⁴³⁰ s. youtube (29.01.2009) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHZusFgq3QU>

⁴³¹ Albayrak (2010)

The vision of a new world that Hakan Albayrak describes during the hopeful outset of the journey reveals different things. For instance, it reveals an excitement, yet also the political dimension that the flotilla stands for. As a humanitarian operation, it was meant to bring aid and supplies to the Palestinian people, yet it was also meant to break the naval blockade and overpower Israel.

For him, overpowering Israel meant to change the world, as the logics according to which the Gazans had suffered from Israeli occupation and the blockade would be exposed to an international public and thus disrupted. However, as Albayrak says, from a certain perspective, both a successful breaking of the blockade and an unsuccessful trip to Gaza would have meant disrupting or at least questioning the existing order and would thus entail success. This idea of reshaping the world, of making people all over the world acknowledge that Muslims can stand up for their rights and are equal to all the others was perhaps what he envisioned for this new world.

The success, the new world that he envisioned had already been able to achieve also becomes clear when considering Bülent Yıldırım's description of the activists:

Dünyanın dört bir yanından aktivistlerin katıldığı bir organizasyon gerçekleştirdik. 50'den fazla ülkeden aktivist vardı. 35 milletvekili, bir çok siyasetçi, aydın, gazeteci, basın mensubu arkadaşlarımızla beraber toplam 9 gemiyle yola çıktık. [...] Gemimizde bir yaşında çocuk, kadın, yaşlılar, Hristiyan, ateist ve Yahudi vardı. Her görüşten insan vardı.⁴³² (We had built an organisation with activists from all corners of the world. There were activists from more than 50 countries. We set of with our friends among them 35 members of parliament, numerous politicians, intellectuals, journalists and members of the press. [...] On our ship, there was a one-year-old child, women, old people, Christians, atheists and Jews. There were people of all persuasions.)

With regard to the activists, Hakan Albayrak relates that they first met with the Greek ship and activists who showed that they wanted to march shoulder-to-shoulder with Turkish activists for Palestine.⁴³³ Moreover, not only were old enmities between the Greeks and Turks being overcome, but people were also busy praying and singing together, and getting closer to one another on-board the ship. For Albayrak, this image of a multi-cultural activist group that showed solidarity both with one another and the Palestinians' cause had a special meaning. In his view, these activists from different parts of the world and with different convictions could perhaps be understood as the forerunners of a new world.⁴³⁴ In a way though

⁴³² İslamigündem (2010)

⁴³³ s. Albayrak (2010)

⁴³⁴ s. Albayrak (2010)

the message the activists from the IHH wanted to spread was political and Muslim the community that was going to challenge the state-system was multi-national, multi-religious and multi-cultural. The state in his view did not play any role, the crew of the ships was multi-national, but what they shared seemed to be a universal wish for justice and a better world. In this sense the activists can be seen as clearly going beyond nationalist perspectives and forming a community that blurs nation-states borders. However, the formation of this community only works by defining the community against Israel. The community on board of the ships of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was mainly bound together by their common adversary, Israel. Otherwise many of the people did not have much in common. Still the students saw this community as the one they would have wanted to be a part of. This community was the one they would have defended against Israel or any other enemy. In support of this community they would not hear anything about alternative possibilities of negotiating with Israel (as one discussion showed), they would not question the goals and the reasons and effects of what they were doing. For instance, they did not discuss whether it would have been more helpful for the Palestinians if the humanitarian aid had been brought to Israel for checks first, they did not discuss whether it would have been better if the activists had not used any violent means when the IDF soldiers boarded the ships and they did not question Israel's motives for her actions at all. In a sense the community they were supporting and the "blind" fervour they were supporting this community with does point at something that also became evident in their discussion on homosexuals: in spite of the students own position as Muslims, as the unaccepted – they would not necessarily contemplate the problems of "others". The students did not fit neither the category of the conservative Muslim (as according to the secularist stereotype Muslims have to be conservative), nor that of the liberalised Muslim (as embodied by the AKP-followers), but still they would not easily recognize or want to deal with the in-between, the uncategorized, the insecure – everything that exists in between two clear oppositions. Though in many points they would argue for a position in between (as in their own case) the world could easily be seen in dichotomies of evil and good. Israel the evil and the multi-cultural community onboard the Mavi Marmara, the good.

The Gezi Park Protests

Before the Referendum in September 2010 Ahmet Altan had already pointed to the phenomenon that the rifts between particular ideological groups were being questioned and rethought in ways that would have been unthinkable only a short time ago. The Gezi Park Protests seem to hint at a similar development with Ohm (2013) describing the atmosphere in

the Gezi Park Protests as accommodating all kinds of ideological groups who oppose – in part – very different things. Some of the people took part in the protests as environmentalists who opposed the destruction of one of the last green spots in the centre of Istanbul. Others were there to oppose Erdoğan’s anti-secular politics and a transformation of Turkey, and yet another group of people was there to protest Erdoğan’s authoritarian grip on the state. The fact that all these groups have found a common reason, namely the destruction of a park, to protest, shows that this park has come to symbolise very different things for the people taking part in the demonstrations. Simultaneously it seems that the rift between particular ideological groups has decreased or is not as big as to deter them from coming together and protesting together for something they deem valuable.

In fact the Gezi Park Protests seem to have been another milestone on a road that might lead to overcoming the Islam versus secularism rift in Turkish society. Muslim groups as the anti-capitalist Muslims have supported the protests, as have seculars and nationalists. With regard to the Muslim students in particular and some of my other (predominantly female and headscarved) informants the issue of the Gezi Park Protests in the course of the events turned out to be a more painful than positive experiences. Some of them witnessed that Muslim were being harassed by nationalists during the protests and felt that it was very problematic to protest together with people who were effectively calling for another military coup to topple the government. As many of the group members reported what they had experienced on the street and as mainly those wrote, who - after some bad experiences on the road - had stayed at home (the protesters probably were busy elsewhere in town) the e-mail group developed into a hideout (rather than an organizational headquarter, as during the Gaza protests) from the outside world, where rare news from outside was discussed, but usually did not incite anyone to take part in further protests. Despite their criticising the government’s policies and Erdoğan’s growing authoritarianism what they feared most was another military coup and a comeback of the Kemalism of earlier times. This is not to say that that none of them took part in the protests. Certainly many of them did, however, it turns out that now that the opportunity has come to pronounce a Muslim viewpoint distinct from that of the AKP things are not as easy as one would have presumed. The fact that society has not yet come to terms with Kemalist oppression and nationalist violence does have a deterrent character.

Other than those Muslims who clearly support Erdoğan and also thought it possible that the protests against Erdoğan might be orchestrated by foreign forces, Muslims who reject the nationalism of conspiracy theories do have a hard time pointing out their position with regard to the protests. Though many of them went to have a look at the protests or else clearly

supported them, it seems to me that their position is again the most sensitive. By supporting the protestors they fear supporting nationalist-secularist rhetoric and by staying at home they cannot do anything against the authoritarianism Erdoğan is in favour of. Moreover, by fostering conspiracy theories and retreating to the kind of nationalist rhetoric that the AKP government seemed to be interested in dismantling, Erdoğan's strategy seems to be the same as that of nationalist or secularist elites: subduing protest and democratic participation by delegitimizing it with nationalist rhetoric. What works for a great many AKP followers does not work for many people who think like the Muslim students. Once more nationalism stands in their way to articulate their political opinion and adopt positions that go beyond known dichotomies. A passiveness that was mostly rejected during the referendum debates might capture them again. The lack of positive examples as the Mavi Marmara activists shows that the current situation does not allow for heroes and simple messages that could appeal to the Muslim students and makes their forlornness visible. Regarding these difficulties and their rejection of either Muslim nationalism (as the AKP advocates) or secular nationalism it remains to be seen what young Muslim can articulate and achieve in the changing political atmosphere.

Conclusion

The Palestinian issue has always been a very important subject to the students, based upon their perception that it epitomised the West's unjust treatment of the Muslim world and showed that equality, freedom and democracy were terms that the West only used to impose restrictions on Muslim countries. The attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla exemplifies this very tellingly, given that the Freedom Flotilla's humanitarian goals were loaded with perceptions of a better world, the hope of being able to act against global injustice and set an example for a change. However, the attack on the Freedom Flotilla thwarted such hopes, even if the activists on the flotilla themselves considered their goals as achieved, because people had become aware of Israel's real intentions when the IDF attacked activists. The media war over the legitimate version of the ensuing attack and an investigation of the incident brought to light the activists' awareness that the IDF was going to forcefully act against them. This shows that the activists' purpose might not have only been to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza, but also to challenge Israel in the eye of the media, and to seek solidarity and understanding for the Gazans and Muslims everywhere in the world, who are often misrepresented as terrorists and extremists. For the students, the activists were heroes who had dared to challenge the logics of international bargaining between states by introducing a different perspective – namely that of activists seeking to

establish a better world order. Other Muslims in Turkey, namely the Nurcus, saw the freedom flotilla very critically as they felt anguish over the fact that human lives had been sacrificed. From their perspective, it would have been better not to challenge Israel, but rather to seek diplomatic solutions for their aim of delivering humanitarian aid. Whereas the activists wanted to challenge the Israeli state and thereby question the legitimacy of the order according to which states act, the Nurcus would rather not challenge statist power.

6. Conclusion

The Muslim students seemed cautiously optimistic in 2010, with many of them stating that the political situation had changed (although perhaps not to the extent they had initially hoped for), and was further changing. Despite much more that people could still ask for, most of the developments already felt tangible, with one of my informants stating that: “AKPnin yaptığı çok iyi şeyler var Kürt sorunun konusunda bir kere insanların gözüne gözüne soktular.” (The AKP has done very good things. With regard to the Kurdish issue, the AKP has drawn people’s attention to it.) This positive evaluation of the Kurdish issue was followed by a second remark that could have accompanied any development being spoken about in 2010: “bir yandanda yaptıkları demokratik açılım çok ta fazla işe yaramadı gibi görünüyor” (From one side, it seems as if the democratic opening has not really led to anything.) The acknowledgment of developments was always accompanied by a deception that changes were not so profound.

The fact that many changes have been insufficient can probably best be understood when considering the developments that the referendum was thought to bring about. Back in 2010, the referendum itself had been perceived an important step towards democratisation and held high promises, as one of my informants told me:

bir adım ileri atladık gibi duruyor. Bu referendum süreci de iyi geçerse biliyorsun sivil bir anayasaya ilk adım olacak. Şuana kadar TC tarihinde darbe anayasası olmayan bir anayasamız olmadı. Sivil bir anayasanın olması önemli bu anlamda belki taleplerimizi daha fazla dinlendireceğimiz bir ortam doğar diye düşünüyoruz

(It seems like we have gone one step forward. If the referendum process will go well the first step to a civil constitution will be taken. Until today, there has not been a civil constitution in the history of the Turkish republic. A civil constitution is important because we think that there will be an environment in which we will be able to make our claims heard.)

When looking back at the referendum process in Turkey in 2010, people's expectations and hopes seem to have been since deceived. The government has grown increasingly authoritarian, with people complaining about a political situation in which various journalists and academics have been imprisoned over doubtful allegations of being members of terrorist organisations. The Ergenekon case (which was previously perceived to dismantle the military's tutelage) is currently perceived by a large segment of society as serving the AKP as an excuse to get rid of its opponents.⁴³⁵ The slow investigation into the Ergenekon case and that people have been arrested on fabricated or worthless evidence has prompted a part of society to believe that the Ergenekon network might not have existed at all, and rather is an invention of the AKP serving the party's purposes. Serdar Kaya has suggested that this evaluation of the Ergenekon case might be due to an overexertion resulting from people's incapability to reconsider their concept of the enemy:

The politically conservative response to that meaning threat is to ignore or deny all of the expectancy-violating experiences, and to strive to revert back and maintain the status quo. Based on some of the misconduct involved with the administration of the Ergenekon case, these responses sometimes go as far as claiming that the whole organization does not really exist, and everything associated with the case is, in fact, a political tale told by the incumbent party with the objective of seizing or crippling the state institutions. The solution to the problem is thus to do away with the case and its findings, and make things as they were before.⁴³⁶

These findings suggest that the political climate for conspiracy theories has had a strong revival, as had seemed less likely in 2010. Moreover, Yaprak Gürsoy suggests that democratisation is actually becoming more difficult to achieve, given that large segments of society do not consent on the basic precepts of how society and politics work.⁴³⁷ Whereas conservative secularists believe that the AKP is undermining the system under the pretext of acting against conspirators, Muslims and liberals are convinced that the Ergenekon case (although not flawless) is a way of coming to terms with the military's tutelage. Consequently, the split between secularists and Islamists, which had seemed to grow smaller, has gained new fuel through the polarised debates between the CHP and AKP.⁴³⁸

In this political climate, the two parties have assumed seemingly irreconcilable positions. Whereas the CHP remains in favour of the Kemalist ideology and has been unable to reinvent itself,⁴³⁹ the AKP has gained a monopoly over democratic change in Turkey and interprets

⁴³⁵ Çınar (2011: 114)

⁴³⁶ Kaya (2012: 154)

⁴³⁷ s. Gürsoy (2012)

⁴³⁸ s. Gürsoy (2012: 20)

⁴³⁹ Çınar (2011: 116)

democratisation according to its own convenience.⁴⁴⁰ The AKP sees itself as the sole party able to bestow democracy on people when the time is ripe for it, and does not convey much sense of understanding in terms of what democratisation actually means when refusing to collaborate with parties such as the BDP to resolve the Kurdish issue.⁴⁴¹ According to Menderes Çınar, Erdoğan's authoritarian view aims at reducing ideological conflicts by delivering goods, with his approach based on convincing Kurds and dissenting groups in society through economic growth and rescue from poverty.⁴⁴² Çınar concludes that:

Facilitated by the past and present absence of an equally democratizing force, the AKP's tendency to monopolize the task of democratization resulted in its ownership of the democratization process, which ran contrary to the nature of democracy as a collective good and, thus, produced somewhat paradoxical counter-democratic manifestations.⁴⁴³

Similarly, the plans for a new constitution also suffer from the AKP's authoritarian attitude, resulting in their discreditation of other parties. This might prove problematic as the AKP has not gained enough seats in parliament to propose a constitution for referendum, yet has to collaborate with the CHP to write a new constitution.⁴⁴⁴ In the process of drafting the new constitution, the strong presidency proposed by the AKP has been criticised as enforcing the government's existing authoritarian character.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, the elimination of Kemalism as an ideology from the constitution is rejected by the CHP.⁴⁴⁶ The CHP's opposition to writing a constitution that does not consider Kemalism as its basic ideology can still be seen in their opposing the Islamisation that they perceive as threatening to secularism, whilst also opposing democratisation.

Therefore, the only hope for greater democratisation seems to be tied to the AKP and currently Erdoğan, the *kabadayı*⁴⁴⁷, as Hakan M. Yavuz has described him. However, one neglected factor in the struggle for democratisation might be Muslim and liberal groups in society that are very similar to the student group I worked with in Istanbul. Their ideas, as well as those of the Islamic movement that has brought Erdoğan to power, can be seen as supporting a democratic change. Their support of Kurdish claims for diversity and Muslims' religious rights can only be achieved through more democracy; however, their struggle for these rights

⁴⁴⁰ s. Çınar (2011: 118)

⁴⁴¹ s. Çınar (2011: 125) / one reason of course might also be that the AKP feels that they cannot further challenge the Kemalists by growing closer to a Kurdish party.

⁴⁴² s. Çınar(2011:123)

⁴⁴³ Çınar (2011: 118)

⁴⁴⁴ s. Çınar (2011: 125)

⁴⁴⁵ Economist: Turkey's future: Presidential Dreaming (2013)

⁴⁴⁶ Amani (2013)

⁴⁴⁷ s. Yavuz (2009: 118ff.) a *kabadayı* can basically be described as a gangster who also is a courageous protector of the needy.

is not tied to simple understandings of democracy and/or secularism. Rather, they question and challenge assumptions that have structured and fostered secularism from an anti-Kemalist perspective. With their reflections on democracy and secularism still in the making, their ideas might change and develop in the future and come to surprise secularists and other groups in society. Even though the Gezi Park Protests have decisively split Muslims in Erdoğan supporters and Erdoğan critics the realm for political expression beyond dichotomies of secularism and Islam might have broadened at the same time. Confronting and criticising nationalist ideology or nationalist politics from now on will not only go against secularists, but also be directed against Muslim variants of nationalism that only reinterpret the Turkish Islamic synthesis instead of fostering and allowing democratic participation.

However, in terms of the student group and the outcome of my research, what might be more important than the content of the students' or other groups' critique is their manner of dealing with each other, and the ways in which they talk about politics. The detailed and sensitive approach with which the Muslim students regarded their opponents' views always helped them to maintain cohesion within their group – and perhaps could have also prompted them to extend hands to others in society.⁴⁴⁸ Their ability to integrate people with diverse opinions and their efforts to work with other groups in society (whether Kurdish or leftist) exemplify a potential way of overcoming the conflict between secularists and Islamists.

However, quite apart from the fact that not all Muslim groups resemble the student group in this regard, the radical secularists' openness for a dialogue with the Islamists long seems to have vanished (indeed, if it ever existed). When considering the latest publications regarding Turkey's societal negotiations of the Ergenekon investigation and news that the *ulusalcı* (neo-nationalist) movement (which can be seen as one of the movements in which the Ergenekon network has taken roots) is gaining popularity, a dialogue between both sides seems impossible.⁴⁴⁹ The *ulusalcı*s societal engagement stands in sharp contrast to that of the Muslim students who tested secular values concerning their capacity for peace-bringing and humanity. The nationalists' understandings of society and politics are based on a nationalist ideology and favour conspiracy theories over approaches that investigate and rethink structures and understandings in society. Whereas nationalists stand for loud paroles and an unquestioned support of their ideologies, many Muslims – like the student group – are more likely to question nationalism and conspiracy theories.

⁴⁴⁸ Something the AKP has unfortunately not been able to do as the party has deterred all those secularists who perhaps were about to change their views on Islam when the Ergenekon conspiracy was first uncovered.

⁴⁴⁹ s. Grigoriadis/Özer (2010)

Accordingly, the situation between Muslims and secularists seems to have come to a deadlock. Indeed, this observation and the need for change can be related to what Göle has stated, having expressed that concepts such as modernity and secularism, with their call for more individualism, might have reached a limit and that the conspiracy of messages of progress and development are consequently being questioned by Muslims. Whereas the Muslim student group – perhaps as other groups in society – saw continuous economic progress and an exaggerated individualism as problematic, it is possible to say that nationalists’ over-confident affirmation of their identity heads towards the opposite direction by ignoring anything that could question them or their ideology. Regarding the hostile blocks in society, it seems evident that the room for more egoistic or even narcissistic ways – as Hans Joachim Maaz would put it - of affirming one’s opinions in Turkish society seems limited. A narcissistic society⁴⁵⁰ in which everyone is only there to loudly “claim” their right or advocate their ideology should perhaps consider new concepts in which people could sensitively address issues and question taken-for-granted sensibilities of nationalism.

Given that the only approaches to possibly bring Turkish society to reflect their current problems regarding nationalism come from Islam friendly strata (liberals and Muslims) of society, their challenges formulated might be derived from religious perspectives. This does not *per se* classify them as anti-secularist; rather, it is important to question what implications religious questions on nationalism and secularism might have if they can be successfully brought to the attention of majority society.

Charles Taylor, whose book “A Secular Age” has been criticised (Mahmood (2010), Casanova (2010), Göle (2010)) for being centred on a Christian and Western understanding of secularism, has stated that his understanding of secularism might contribute to the understanding of secularism and/or interreligious dialogue, despite revealing his (Catholic) faith.⁴⁵¹ While Mahmood doubts whether his positions (neglecting those of non-Westerners and conceptualising secularism as a European/American experience) can contribute to a new understanding of secularism by giving justice to other cultures and civilisations involved, the students’ example for a re-assessment of secularism (and with it the nation-state) can be said to be contributing to a discussion that scholars engaging with post-Islamism (Göle (2006) Schiffauer (2010) understand as extremely relevant. Göle even thinks that a questioning of

⁴⁵⁰ Maaz (2012)

⁴⁵¹ s. Mahmood (2010: 296 ff.)

modernity – as Muslims provoke - is necessary to broaden modernity and its character of being a criticisable concept.⁴⁵²

Regarding the fact that the students' (as perhaps other Muslims') criticism of secularism and modernity takes place under very different conditions of power than Taylor's account of secularism, Mahmood's criticism of Taylor's book as remaining "ideologically impervious to its others"⁴⁵³ might not apply to the students. Whilst predominantly centred on their own experiences in Turkey, their discussions can be mainly seen as questioning existing power constellations. Moreover, although their views do not resemble that of mainstream Turkish Muslims, it is interesting to ask where their way for a better society is leading them. Göle has suggested the following:

Because when you look carefully to Islamist movements today, they speak more to modernity than to traditional religious rules. That's the interesting thing. The majority of these people who take place in Islamic movements, so many people would reproach them, criticize them, for not knowing enough Islam, because they are not, I would say, religiously defined. They have maybe less knowledge of religion, but they have a lot of knowledge on what's going on in modern society. They are more social science students than coming from schools of religion. They have both references, I would say -- both religion and secular knowledge. But they are more in dialogue with modernity.⁴⁵⁴

Indeed, her understanding of young Muslims today might also be valid for the Muslim students' I worked with. The perspective from which I could best understand their claims and cause was perhaps the part in which they evaluated, discussed and rethought issues like social sciences students rather than spiritual Muslims. However, for them, they were Muslims first and everything else after that. Therefore, it might indeed be possible to consider their discussions as both part of an Islamic discursive tradition (as suggested by Asad) and the current political/social sciences discourse. The importance to the political discourse and an Islamic discursive tradition of contributions like theirs can be currently considered essential for thinking about problems and challenges in Turkey. Indeed, without these reflections and new proposals for evaluating and understanding current politics, society and philosophy a grassroots movement for greater democracy and fairer living conditions might be impossible.

Nonetheless, how might the students' complicated views and claims for a moral politics translate into societal change? For the time being, their arena is that of alternative media (e-mails, writings and discussions), protest (on the streets) and arts (in the form of

⁴⁵² PBS (2001): Interview Nilüfer Göle

⁴⁵³ Mahmood (2010: 299)

⁴⁵⁴ PBS (2001): Interview Nilüfer Göle

exhibitions, written texts and visuals), yet it is questionable whether their understandings of society will reach others parts of society. Nevertheless, it could be regarded as positive if they were able to convey an understanding of a political culture paying attention to people's sensibilities.

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8. List of Interviews

List of Interviews in the group

Interview (recorded) Ayşe (01.07.2010)

Interview (recorded) Ayşe (15.08.2010)

Interview Merve (13.07.2010)

Interview (recorded) Betül (08.09.10)

Interview Zeynep (17.03.2010)

Interview Zeynep (20.06.2010)

Interview Zeynep (15.10.2010)

Interview Zeynep (23.11.2010)

Elif (no Interview)

Cemile (no Interview)

Esmâ (recorded group interview⁴⁵⁵)

Hilal (no interview)

Ali (recorded group interview)

Yavuz (recorded group interview)

Sinan (recorded group interview)

Umut (no interview)

Serdar (no interview)

Interviews with students/professionals loosely connected to the group

Interview (recorded) Hava (03.09.2010)

Semiha (20.05.2010)

Sedef (30. 03.2010)

Melek (09. 06.2010)

Interview (recorded) Kübra (09.10.2010)

⁴⁵⁵ This interview was conducted by a journalist in a discussion round in which I took part. I only mention it in connection with the group's self-portrayal.

Interview (recorded) Fatma (09.10.2010)

Interview (recorded) Dilek (15.10.2010)

Interview (recorded) Hatice (15.10.2010)

Interviews in the socialist student group

Alev (08.09.2010)

Özgür (03.09.2010)

Tayfur (11.09.2010)

Leyla (25.09.2010)

Kaan (03.10.2010)

Ünal (16.10.2010)

Recorded Discussions

Discussion I: Conscription issues with guest speaker: Enver Aydemir

Discussion II: Film and Muslim art with guest speaker: Semih Kaplanoğlu

Discussions and group meetings mentioned in the text

Modernity (April 2010)

Aliya Izzetbegović (May 2010)

Series on important Muslim Personalities (September – Dezember 2010)

- Seyyid Kutup
- Bediüzzaman Said Nursi
- Afgani
- Ibn Teymiyye
- Kadizadeliler Movement
- Abduh

Bismillah Tefsir (July 2010)

Qura'nic Terms (Sakine, Sabir, etc.) (August 2010)

Discussion of the film “Baraka” (July 2010)

List of E-mail discussions and Facebook-Messages

List of E-mail discussions used in the text (and to be found on the enclosed CD)

Referendum debate (05.08. – 12.09.2010)

Kurdish Issue (15.07-17.07.2011)

Armenian Genocide (19.04-21.04.2011)

Hagia Sophia Controversy (16.09-21.09.2010)

Homosexuality debate (16.12. – 04.01.2010)

Gaza (30.05. - 06.10.2010)

Serials (09.10.2010)

Facebook-Messages and MSN conversations with Zeynep were related to the following topics

Tasavvuf (mysticism) (2010)

Headscarf politics (2010)

Elections and Muslim attitudes (2011)

Muslim intellectuals (2010)

9. Illustrations and Tables

Figure 1 Proposed Constitutional Amendments

| Amendments to the 1982 Constitution | |
|--|--|
| Article # | Description |
| 20 | Privacy of Information |
| 41 | Protection of the Family: protect children from sexual abuse and violence |
| 51 | Allowing workers to belong to more than one trade union |
| 53 | Collective bargaining and agreement rights to state employees |
| 145 | Military Law: Criminal activity by personnel to be tried in civilian courts |
| | Military courts can only try cases related to service related matters |
| | Civilians cannot be tried in military courts in times of peace |
| 146 | Constitutional Court: Increase of members from 11 to 17 |
| | 14 to be appointed by President (with restrictions) |
| | 3 to be appointed by TBMM (National Assembly) |
| | Term limited appointments: 12 years |
| 147 | Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (SBPJ) |
| 148 | Minister of Justice and the Permanent Secretary = permanent members of the board |
| 159 | Increase of members to 21 actual and 10 auxiliary |
| Prov. 15 | Repeal of constitutional protection against 1980 junta members |

Table 1: Proposed Constitutional Amendments (highlights)¹³

Extracted from Ciddi, Sinan. "Turkey's September 12, 2010 Referendum", *Gloria Center Global Research in International Affairs*, <http://www.gloria-center.org/2011/12/turkey%E2%80%99s-september-12-2010-referendum/> (retrieved 19.12.2012)

Figure 2 Penguen Cover following the Mavi Marmara incident



Extracted from Yarınlr (04.06.2010) Penguen'den katliama tepki, <http://www.yarinlar.net/turkiye-haberleri/penguen-den-katliama-tepki-once-insanlik-saldirdi.html> (retrieved 19.12.2013)