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‘Rejecting the Legacy, Restoring the Honor’: The Anti-Capitalist Muslims in Turkey

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Abstract: Post-Islamism as coined by Asef Bayat in 1996 laid the framework to analyze rapid and fundamental changes in social and political life of the Muslim world. However, this paper argues that the scholarship around post-Islamism disregards neoliberal structuration introduced and expanded by post-Islamist parties and movements (such as the Justice and Development Party of Turkey). This structuration, coupled with the legacies of anti-left sentiments in preceding Islamist movements, stifles the Muslim youth in the region whose frustrations and aspirations are left silenced. Based on my ethnographic study between 2013 and 2017, the paper introduces the group of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims in Turkey as an internal challenge to the legacies of Islamist ideologies and the neoliberal politics of post-Islamism.

Keywords: Islamism; post-Islamism; anti-capitalism; solidarity; youth movements

1. Introduction

Post-Islamism as a term coined by Asef Bayat in (Bayat 1996) gained great prominence, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. Post-Islamism signals both a “condition” and a “project” (Bayat 2013, p. 8) that stretched from Turkey to Tunisia, from Egypt to Iran. More importantly, the term has a potential to critically engage with transnational projects of the so-called democratization in Muslim majority countries like Turkey. Democratization packages in the region, after all, from the Bush administration’s justification of the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan to the campaigning for the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the region, as the “moderate-Islamist” state model, were ideological projects, that nurtured if not created the post-Islamist condition. However, what falls short in the scholarship on and around post-Islamism, I argue, is to diminish these projects as simply mergers of Western liberal rights and freedoms and Islamism to create the post-Islamist condition. Especially for the case of Turkey, some scholars celebrated the AKP’s ascension to power as “among the most important successes of the post-Islamist movement” (Dagi 2013, p. 74) and others considered the AKP as “a model of democratic governance in the Middle East” (Bayat 2013, p. 11). While I acknowledge scholars who diverted from this trend (Tugal 2013, 2016; Mahdavi 2019; Yenigun 2016), this tendency in scholarship by large continues to overlook, if not disregard, the global neoliberal capitalist restructuration that was introduced or expanded by post-Islamist parties and movements such as the AKP and deeply affected the daily lives and the politics in the region. In fact, the growing youth and student movements in the region against these neoliberal tendencies and the following popular uprisings from Egypt to Turkey should be centered in scholarly engagements of Islamism and post-Islamism today more than ever.

In line with this critique, in this paper, I briefly introduce what I find to be a new, unique social movement that emerged in Turkey after 2008, a Muslim youth group, the “Anti-Capitalist Muslims”. On 1 May 2012 in the Labor Day demonstrations in Istanbul, the group first made it to the public

scene under the banner of “Faquu Ragabe!”¹, and with the slogan of “Allah, Bread, Freedom” they gained great media and popular attention. Between 2013 and 2017, I maintained close contact with members of the group and their mentor, Ihsan Eliacik, via internet and in person. In all, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with group members in different cities along the lines of institutional ethnographic methodology (D. Smith 2006a, 2006b; G. Smith 1990; Holstein 2006) and these interviews have been supplemented by my own participatory observations and field notes as well as by collecting and interpreting other texts, such as photographs, written statements, videos, and slogans. Based on my larger research, in this paper, I argue that the group began a conversation which exceeds and transcends the discussions on Islamism and post-Islamism as they challenged both Islamist politics and post-Islamist conditions by centralizing neoliberal capitalism and solidarity across multiple axes of oppression.

2. The Anti-Capitalist Muslims: What Is in a Name?

Before I delve into providing a glimpse of the group’s ideological grounds, organizational structure, and the impact on culture of resistance in Turkey, it is important to start with their “name” and naming process. Following their first public appearance on May Day 2012 and the great popular attention they received, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims institutionalized their organization into the form of associations, which had chapters in many cities.² The naming process of these associations is prominent in terms of its references in the Turkish political history. The group announced the “official” name of their association as “the Association of Struggle against Capitalism”. In order to fully appreciate the depth of this title, it is important to mention, alas briefly, the political history of Islamism and the left in Turkey.

The political history in Turkey, specifically between the 1960s to the 1980s, is a much violent one. In the midst of the Cold War era, state sponsored “Associations of Struggle against Communism” were established during the mid-60s with a base mostly in Turkish nationalist youth organizations, and in the newly emerging Islamist groups. As the title suggests, these associations were founded against and held responsible for many attacks on leftist organizations and demonstrations. One of the notorious events of this period, which is the most often noted by the Anti-Capitalist Muslims in their statements in relation to their self-identification, is *Kanlı Pazar* or Bloody Sunday.

Bloody Sunday refers to the 16 February 1969 protests of the United States fleet, commonly referred to as the Sixth Fleet, anchored in Istanbul at the time. While more than 30 thousand mostly leftist students gathered in Beyazıt Square in Istanbul to protest the presence of the fleet in the city and more broadly US imperialism, the demonstration was first attacked by the police sweeping the crowd towards Taksim, where they were met with another large crowd, mostly affiliated with the Associations of Struggle against Communism and targeted once again leaving hundreds injured and two workers, Ali Turgut Aytac and Duran Erdogan, dead.

While there are many similar examples in the political history of Turkey, Bloody Sunday is especially significant not only for the imagination of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims in their self-realization, but also for understanding the alliance between the nationalists and the Islamists of the time. Bloody Sunday constitutes a significant moment since it revealed that although Turkish nationalism and Islamism were otherwise irreconcilably divided in terms of world views and political organizing, the so-called struggle against communism could become a common ground. Anti-communism had the potential to bring them together in action and, in fact, it later paved the way for nationalists and Islamists to borrow from one another, both discursively and ideologically.

¹ (Trans) Freedom to the slaves. The slogan was adapted from the Qur’anic verse of al-Balad (12–18) “And what can make you know what is [breaking through] the difficult pass? It is the freeing of a slave. Or feeding on a day of severe hunger. An orphan of near relationship. Or a person in need and misery. And then being among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right.”

² Forcing institutionalization on grassroots organizations in the forms of associations as the only “legitimate” form of civil society is yet another example of neoliberal conditions in Turkey and around the world. This forced institutionalization, and professionalization of contentious politics, is discussed largely as *NGOization*. See for example: (Choudry 2010).

For instance, the Islamist grassroots student organizing was based on Necmettin Erbakan's doctrine, which was introduced in 1969, the same year as Bloody Sunday. On the other hand, the Nationalist Movement Party put forward a slogan in 1969 convention which paralleled Turkish and Muslim identities: "The Turk [stands] like the Tanrı Mountain, the Muslim [stands] like the Hira Mountain", signaling a new direction in the nationalist movement (Akgun and Calis 2008).

Moreover, the Bloody Sunday incident was also significant to the extent that the right appealed to Muslims by calling "communism as an enemy of the religion", although this convergence was promoted openly before Bloody Sunday. A well-known article of the Islamist writer Mehmet Sevket Eygi written the day before Bloody Sunday is still widely considered as one of the reasons that incited crowds to attack the protests that day. Eygi wrote, "Oh the People of Turkey, oh virtuous Muslims. Everybody, get ready for the fight against the obscenity of communism. Your faith is in danger. Your religion is in danger. The mosques are in danger. Rise up of *ehl-i Islam*. Get ready for action" (Taskin 2008, p. 618). Later, on Sunday, a group of youth performed salat in front of, and most importantly, towards the fleet before the attack on the protests.

By naming their group directly in relation to that history, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims made an acknowledgement of this violent history as a Muslim youth organization for the first time in the country while also making clear that they reject what was bestowed upon them from this history. They call this relationship to their ontological ground "rejecting the inheritance, restoring the honor" (in Turkish, "Redd-i miras, iade-i itibar") and utilize it as a slogan. As an observer, I witnessed the anger and frustration that members of the group still hold against that article and image, as well as Bloody Sunday in general. They highlight specifically that, in line with anti-capitalism, they also self-identify as anti-imperialist: "It is unacceptable that millions are murdered, raped, uprooted and displaced for the sake of the new resources and new markets for capitalism. Against the imperialist siege, the anti-capitalist Muslims supports unity of the peoples and revolutionary struggle of the oppressed".

Most importantly though, when the group decided to organize in the form of associations, they picked the title "the Associations of Struggle against Capitalism" to highlight the rejection of the Associations of Struggle against Communism. It was a gesture of acknowledging this history and legacy that the group flourished from, while also reclaiming a Muslim youth identity that is antithetical to it. As Ihsan Eliacik argues:

What is significant here is that these associations are established by the people who come from religious circles. This is a first in Turkey. Also, in my opinion it is a milestone, and it needs to be highlighted. This is not something that the youth of the left is doing, on the contrary, these are the kids or even grandkids of those rooted in the Associations of Struggle against Communism (Yavuz 2012).

The rejection of the Associations of Struggle against Communism and their legacy by the Anti-Capitalist Muslims also manifests in their perception of the roots and expression of the ideology and practice of political Islam. In that sense, the rejection of this legacy also points at a discursive divorce. In other words, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims do not identify with any of the terms or conditions such as Islamism, political Islam, or post-Islamism for that matter. Derived from the political history in Turkey, and the trajectories of the political Islam in the country, they in fact *reject* political Islam. They argue that any form of political Islam in Turkey ended in what Ihsan Eliacik calls "abdestli kapitalizm" or, "capitalism purified by ablutions". In fact, Sedat Dogan one of the core members of the group expressed in an article, "we left political Islamism and became Muslims again. No one should expect from us a discourse that would create camps and marginalize the peoples in poverty" (Dogan 2014, p. 74). Thus, they utilize Muslimhood as an identity which signifies not the religiosity in terms of faith and rituals and ummah as the community but as a positionality which centers a historical understanding of revolutionary struggle against oppression and allies with "whoever self-identifies as anti-capitalist" (Anti-Capitalist Muslims 2012).

They are, however, known for their popular name "the Anti-Capitalist Muslims". As one of their members voiced in an interview with me conducted in Ankara in 2013, their popular name is

not intentional as their official name because it was given to them by one organizer of the May First demonstration in 2012. This organizer asked for the group's name for the welcoming ceremony at the demonstration, however at the time the group had not put much thinking in it. Someone from the group just said "Muslims . . . We are Muslims, and we are against the Capitalists". When the organizer, being very busy and hectic, introduced them, "the Anti-Capitalist Muslims!". The group accepted that name and they are still known publicly as the Anti-Capitalist Muslims.

3. Anti-Capitalist Muslims: Identity or Alliance Politics?

The Anti-Capitalist Muslims as a Muslim youth organization started their activities in 2008 as an informal reading group around a prominent independent Islamic scholar, Ihsan Eliacik. Eliacik is a well-known thinker who has published various intellectual works over the past 30 years in Turkish, such as *Revolutionary Islam* (1995), *Tell me about Religion* (2011), and *The Justice State*. As someone who has been a young member of the Islamist circles in the 1970s and the 1980s and one of the most vocal opposers of the AKP government, Eliacik also had great popularity with the Turkish public. His egalitarian, social *tafsir* of the Qur'an named *The Living Qur'an* (2006), for instance, has been a bestseller, especially in 2013–2014 right after the *Gezi Protests*. Following three years of this reading group on Eliacik and other reformist or revolutionary Muslim thinkers, in 2011, the group decided "to put the Qur'anic verses to action" (Ozvaris 2012) and started to organize towards street politics.

The epistemological ground of the group is inspired deeply by a wide range of Islamic thinkers/revolutionaries from Ali Shariati to Malcolm X. Especially Shariati, who is a "chief influence" (Nurtsch 2014) on the group with his analysis on "religion vs. religion" (Shariati 1987) or understanding religion both as a revolutionary kindle and a pacifying force. According to Shariati, while the "revolutionary religion" gives an individual "the ability to criticize life in all its material, spiritual and social aspects" (Shariati 1987, p. 31), "the religion of legitimation" frames all suffering as destiny and fate to legitimize the *status quo*. He sees reduction of the "heart of the heartless world" (Marx [1843] 2009), or the revolutionary potential of the religion, into an "opium" that pacifies masses and traps them into a logic of predetermination, fate, as well as a system of punishment and reward. This analysis of religion operating in multiple ways is indeed clearly an influence on Ihsan Eliacik and the Anti-Capitalist Muslims. While Eliacik frequently refers to the AKP's Islamism as "the palace religion" (which refers to both Erdogan's Presidential Palace and Shariati's "Ummayad Sunnism"), the group utilizes "revolutionary Islam" and "the heart of the heartless world" in multiple occasions in their writings.

Similar to Shariati's revolutionary religion, the group argues for an egalitarian understanding and praxis of the Qur'an and Islam in general. Qur'anic verses such as "Those who, when tyranny strikes them, they defend themselves with the help of each other" (42:39), "there is not for man except that for which he labors" (53:39), and "of His signs is the creation of (. . .) the diversity of your languages and your colors" (30:22) are repeated frequently in the group statements and banners. They claim that the Qur'an should be read on one main principle—there has always been one conflict that shaped the world, the conflict between the oppressor (*zalim*) and the oppressed (*mazlum*). They argue that from the first day the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad to this very day, the social, political, and economic structure of the society is based on this conflict. This principle constitutes the foundation of the group's organizational practices. They build their alliances on the principle they derived from the Qur'an, "the identity of the oppressed (or the oppressor) shall not be questioned." This approach gives the potential to a Muslim group to be able to ally with traditionally rejected groups such as the LGBTQI in Turkey.

The demographics of the group has an utmost heterogeneous character. While it changes drastically from one city to another, most of the members come from religious conservative families. Some have had religious education and started their political life in youth organizations of Islamic groups or parties. On the other hand, many members have deep personal-historical ties to leftist organizing. They are more experienced in terms of the leftist organizational practices such as self-criticism and

some are more keen on socialist or anarchist ideas of self-governance and autonomy. Regardless of this heterogeneity, in terms of group operations, these diverse backgrounds do not clash to a point where they nullify each other. In fact, my conversations indicated that the group acknowledges and celebrates these differences and considers such diversity as a positive attribute to their activist work.

The group's decision-making process reveals much about their internal affairs. Their decision-making is based on an Islamic principal of *shura*, or consultation. The word *shura* in relation to socio-political relations is mentioned in two places in the Qur'an in two different contexts. The first one (Qur'an, 3:159³) refers to the consultation process between the leader (Prophet Muhammad) and the people. Most commonly among the Qur'an scholars, the verse is interpreted in the way that person(s) holding power (be it a prophet, a state leader, or a leader of an organization such the Anti-Capitalist Muslims) in a socio-political relation is obliged to take consultation from everyone that would be affected by the decisions the leader makes. The second context in which the word consultation was used in the Qur'an (42:38⁴) is not related to leadership but social relations among the followers. This specific verse is interpreted mostly in relation to day to day social relations among Muslims as equals.

According to these interpretations, mutual consultation is an obligation for Muslims in their conversations with one another. More importantly though, it is believed that sharing whatever is provided by God (such as wealth or responsibility to the community) must be shared equally through mutual consultation. The Anti-Capitalist Muslims, following Qur'an scholars of more socially egalitarian interpretations, understand and follow this principle as their base of organizing. They see *shura* as one of many examples from the Qur'an for an egalitarian, even communal society, or *dar-ul salaam* (the land of peace). In that sense, all decisions regarding the group's activities including day to day routines or their activist work is organized around the principle of *shura*.

In that sense, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims strongly reject "conventional" modes of top-to-bottom organizing. Instead of a leader, they use a system they call "spokespersonship" which rotates two or three times each year and is selected through *shura*, mutual consultation. After each public appearance of the spokesperson, feedback from the group from all the members is collected and processed collectively via social media channels. In case of general discomfort in the group, the spokesperson is well-aware that it is their responsibility to step down with as little as possible personal engagement with the rest of the group.

The *shura* principle also defines the group's day-to-day activities. All group-related tasks, such as physical labor (i.e., doing the dishes after hours long meetings), writing media or public statements, attending demonstrations, or publishing a journal, are organized and managed by group members on a voluntary basis. They give utmost care not to push or force anyone to get work done while also making it clear that attendance at the meetings (which can be considered the least labor-intensive work in a dissident political organization) is mandatory to those who want to have a say in the *shura* process. The economic relations of the group (i.e., running costs of the centers ranging from as much as rent to as little as tea and publishing costs of the flyers and posters) are also handled through a system based on *shura*. The costs of each city are announced on a closed Facebook group and everyone is called to make contributions based on their income. I must note here that when there is an unexpected expense (such as a larger *shura* meeting in one city in which all members from all cities need to travel), the group uses two expressions interchangeably—it is either "to make *shura*" or "to make *commune*". While the two words come from two distinct worlds of meaning, Islamic discourse and leftist practice, respectively, in their daily conversation, the group members can utilize them without any difficulty.

³ "So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]."

⁴ "And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] mutual consultation among themselves, and from what we have provided them, they spend."

It is possible to argue that this is yet another example of how they celebrate the diverse ideologies as they add depth and richness to their group.

The Anti-Capitalist Muslims have organized many demonstrations, sit-ins, and short-term hunger strikes mostly in solidarity with other dissident groups in the country: leftists, Kurds, or Alawis. They are extremely active on the street distributing pamphlets, spray-painting slogans, and/or Qur'anic verses and putting up posters all over the cities as well as on (social) media platforms, including their own online TV channel (*La TV*) and journal (*Ehad*).

Their appearance in the May Day demonstrations prior to the *Gezi/June* uprising in 2012 and then in 2013, which is a predominantly leftist space in terms of history and discourse, has not only marked a unique experience in the Turkish leftist political history but also demonstrated a discursive and active divorce from neoliberal conservative Muslims. Considering the country has been ruled by a religious conservative majority government for almost two decades, their divorce from conservatism and instead their presentation, or even embodiment, of a new interpretation of Muslimhood is critical. In that sense, they not only grew solidarity praxis within the left but also challenged the image of a Muslim youth organization in Turkey. While May Day demonstrations have symbolic value in the group's relationship with the political dissidents in Turkey, their biggest impact has been within the *Gezi Park Movement*.

4. *Gezi Park Movement/The June Resistance*

The *Gezi Park Movement* began with a small group of environmentalists protesting the decision of Istanbul municipality to cut down approximately 100 trees in *Gezi Park*⁵ as a part of the Taksim—city center of Istanbul—Pedestrianization Project. The project included a ground parking lot, expansion of the roads for overgrowing traffic, as well as a shopping mall built on top of *Gezi Park*. The tents and signs of this small group of protesters were violently attacked by the police on the night of 30 May 2013. Footage on social media showing the protesters beaten down and their tents burned by the police ignited a country-wide solidarity movement demanding, first, the withdrawal of the Pedestrianization Project, and second, the resignation of the authoritarian Turkish government, which had been in power for more than a decade at the time. In the afternoon on June 1st, police started to fall back from Taksim and *Gezi Park* after two-day long clashes with the protesters and the park was occupied by the protestors. For two weeks, the groups from diverse political backgrounds—socialists, nationalists, environmentalists, feminists, and LGBTIQI—held a commune in the park. In this small commune, which was mostly described by the attendees as “a heaven”, exchange of money was not allowed and the responsibilities for the daily activities from cooking to organizing workshops were shared equally and collectively. At the end of the second week, however, on June 15th, the riot police brutally attacked the park once again evacuating the commune once and for all.

The protests exceeded the limits of *Gezi Park*, and even Istanbul for that matter. Following the inception of the *Gezi Park* protests, Turkey witnessed the largest demonstrations in the country's history, as well as an escalation of police interventions. In 80 of Turkey's 81 cities, protests continued for approximately two months. The excessive use of tear gas, water cannons, as well as physical violence by the police resulted in 8 deaths and over 8000 injuries ([Amnesty International 2013](#)) all over the country. As *Gezi Park* was occupied in June 2013 and other cities around the country took to the streets and city centers, the initial reaction from the government and the mass media which was (and still is) wholly dependent on the government ([Corke et al. 2014](#)), was to first ignore the uprising and later smear the protests as “a radical secularist, or even an atheist attempt to overthrow the government” ([Eygi 2014](#); [Kaplan 2013](#)). It was an effort to represent the *Gezi Park* protests as a religious–secular conflict where the secularists violently tried to overthrow a religious government. While the chants in the demonstrations clearly signaled the conditions created by the AKP government's neoliberal policies—privatizations,

⁵ A larger part of *Gezi Park* was an Armenian cemetery till 1939.

deforestation for mega construction projects, outsourcing of labor, gentrification, and mainstreaming subcontract work among others—the government-aligned intelligentsia revived the anti-left reflexes of Bloody Sunday. Yet, there was one group that challenged this rhetorical attack on the protests merely by attending the protests—the Anti-Capitalist Muslims. Their very presence in the *Gezi* was enough to refute the smearing campaign against the protests.

The group entered the park on May 31st putting up a huge banner reading “Sovereignty/Commodity⁶ is of Allah, capital get out!” From the very beginning, the group was extremely active in all cities that they were organized in from Izmir to Ankara. They held a Friday prayer for those who lost their lives to workplace “accidents” (“labor martyrs”), for those who are on the ground at the moment fighting against police brutality, and for strength to the protesters all over the world to bring the fall of the oppressors. The prayer was *protected* from the police by fellow protestors in the park.

Although the Anti-Capitalist Muslims share a great deal of history and tradition with the AKP government as they mostly come from conservative families who are active members of the party, their revolutionary stances in Islam, as well as their activism and solidarity praxis with other dissident groups on the ground, rendered them another target in the eye of the AKP government. The group was mentioned in the police report presented to the Ministry of Internal Affairs among “the marginal groups, parties and organizations that took part in violent acts during the Gezi Park demonstrations” (Bursadabugun.com 2013).

In the following part, I will provide an example in which this conflict between the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and the religious conservative AKP government becomes most crystallized, while the solidarity praxis got most ossified with the diverse dissidents.

5. The Holy Month of Resistance: *Iftars on Earth*

The Holy Month of Ramadan arrived, while the *Gezi* resistance was still ongoing. Ramadan is a time when the relationship of the state with religion makes itself most visible in Turkey. Especially in metropolitan cities like Ankara or Istanbul, municipalities and government agencies set up tents to serve free meals for a month for *iftar* (fast-breaking dinner), especially for those in dire need. While the idea comes from “good deed of sharing in Islam”, it is one of the most prominent spaces where the religion is operationalized as a mediator between the state and the society, and this is particularly the case under the Justice and Development Party (AKP). As Cihan Tugal argues,

fast-breaking tents have become sites of collective consumption. The AKP-controlled municipalities began to organize nightly Ramadan festivities that went on till daybreak, where people of all classes would go to enjoy Sufi music along with pop and rock, nargile, stand-up shows, and a wide variety of food. While some of this was free, merchants and shopkeepers also participated on a cash basis ([Tugal 2013](#), p. 125).

While the scene described by Tugal is common in the case of city centers and historical neighborhoods with much “tourist potential”, it is also important to note the nature of the *iftar* tents in the “out of sight” neighborhoods. For example, in these neighborhoods, it is always made sure that the names of the sponsors are at clear sight, turning the tents into a political advertisement campaign. The people attending the fast-breaking dinner are disciplined to get in line and wait patiently for their turn.

In these tents, the Qur’anic verses regarding calmness and patience are frequently recited. Given the fact that the attendees of these *iftars* come from the most impoverished neighborhoods of the cities,

⁶ In Turkish: Mulk. “Mulk is of Allah” repeated in many places in Qur’an. The word Mulk in Turkish means both sovereignty (the context of Qur’anic meaning) and commodity or property. The Anti-Capitalist Muslims use this verse as a slogan on their banners and flags referring to both meanings of the word.

it is significant that the organizers of these tents do not advise patience for just hunger and thirst during fasting, but for poverty, disempowerment, and marginalization.

For this reason, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims criticize these *iftar* tents arguing that these tents do not promote sharing but dependence and obedience of the oppressed. As an alternative, the group initiated a people's *iftar*; namely *yeryuzu iftari (iftar on earth)*. The idea was to bring everyone to break bread together; a dinner table that is collective, non-hierarchical, and equitable. It was open to everyone regardless of their background or whether they fast during Ramadan or not. It was collective in the sense that everyone brought something if they have anything at all to share. It was called "on earth" because literally everyone was sitting on the ground on this makeshift dinner table promoting a non-hierarchical setting. It was also "on earth" to highlight that it was for all and by all. It was decided that groups in each city would pick the place they wish to initiate the *iftar on earth* on the basis of their cities' most dramatic location for protest. As the Ankara group, for example, we decided to have it in front of what is popularly referred as the "VIP Mosques"—the Mosques that government officials frequently attend for daily and Friday prayers.

The Istanbul group wanted to have their first *iftar* on the first day of Ramadan in Taksim Square, a historically symbolic place for the Gezi as well as the preceding leftist demonstrations. However, they were banned from the square as the municipality *occupied* it for their own *iftar* tent. So, the group took to Istiklal Street, arguably the most important shopping and entertainment street in Istanbul, which stretches from the Square to Tunnel (the subway, linking the shopping district to the banking center). The turnout was more than anybody would have expected. The makeshift dinner table went all along the street, feeding approximately ten thousand people.

In a statement released after their "iftar on earth," the Istanbul group pronounced:

Our job is to struggle against the oppression and exploitation whomever these come from. Our solidarity with the people from different beliefs, different ideologies is the unity of the views that we bring from different positions against the same injustice. This unity conduced that the people who were divided due to hegemony's divisive politics meet each other and paved a way to a new social model. 3 weeks long Gezi Park process was indeed another form of the iftars on earth. A place where money doesn't mean a thing, and no one's status isn't worth anything is close to the imagination of heaven in the Qur'an ([Anti-Capitalist Muslims 2014](#)).

The focus on the concept of hegemony is significant in their statement. In fact, the *iftar* was minutes' walk from the city municipality's (the mayor of the city was a governing party member) *bureaucratic iftar*, in which a full course meal was catered on decorated tables, Sufi music and dance were performed, and there was a sitting chart set up on the basis of a non-official VIP list. The officials were so close to the Anti-Capitalist Muslims' event that they could hear quite clearly the slogans against them being chanted by thousands. That was an open challenge to the hegemony that operationalized the religion.

Shortly thereafter, the demonstrators were met with a harsh reaction. The street, at the point where it meets with the square, was closed down by the riot police who brought in a water cannon. Although the police did not attack the event that day, photos showing them threatening the crowds and ordering them to leave the people's *iftar* all the while protecting the state *iftar* made the public furious. People reacted to the police intervention by initiating their own *iftars* in their own cities or neighborhoods for the rest of the month of Ramadan, including neighborhoods of religious minorities such as Gazi (Istanbul) and Tuzluca (Ankara) (Figure 1). In fact, this praxis established a new tradition, which would also highlight the popularity of the group. Since the Gezi, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims, as well as other groups of dissidents, have been organizing people's iftars every Ramadan till this day.



Figure 1. *Iftar on Earth*. July 7 2013, Istanbul [source: unknown].

6. Reinventing Post-Islamism?

While further articulating his imagination of post-Islamism after a decade of his original coinage of the term, Bayat (2013, p. 8) argues “Islamism becomes compelled, both by its own internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but it does so at the cost of a qualitative shift”. The cost of this reinvention, I argue at least for the case of Turkey, has been further neoliberalization disguised as democratization. Especially after 2010, with Erdogan’s growing authoritarianism, many scholars who were previously ardent supporters of the AKP’s model of post-Islamism started to shift their focus from the “Turkish model” to “Muslimhood model” (White 2012). However, from this imagination of Bayat, would it be safe to ask if it is post-Islamism now that is in need of reinvention? Interestingly, Ihsan Eliacik discusses the trends of political Islam in a similar vein. According to him, political Islam’s historical route, with the in and outside forces, ended up in a marriage of capitalism and religion. As Eliacik comments frequently, “[P]olitical Islam has reached its intellectual limits” with this marriage. To this I would add, post-Islamism as embodied by the AKP has also reached its intellectual limits with the grand costs of their qualitative shift towards neoliberal structuration. It is urgent to employ an understanding of post-Islamism, which refocuses itself on how “playing within the rules of global capitalism by abandoning the Islamist rejection of globalization” (Dagi 2013, p. 98) translated into everyday lives of Muslim (and secular) youth in the country and the region.

In other words, it is significant to centralize how neoliberal capitalism that has deepened in the Islamic world with the post-Islamist turn affects the everyday lives of the people, as well as the street politics in the region. Neither the “fusion of religion and responsibility” of Islamism nor the “religiosity and rights” of post-Islamism (Bayat 2013, p. x) offers a social, cultural, or political project that speaks to aspirations or the frustrations of the youth in the region. This becomes especially evident considering the cycles of popular uprisings and massive demonstrations from Egypt to Lebanon, from Iran to Turkey. The post-Islamist turn was not only to merge Western liberalism with religiosity but to introduce and expand the neoliberal restructuring of the countries in the region.

Moreover, through the case of Turkey, this paper provides a glimpse into how the anti-communist sentiments of the 1950s and the 1960s have been at the ontological root of Islamist politics and governance in the country, which is also not highlighted in the scholarship frequently. It is safe to argue that this legacy of Islamism is well-alive in the current post-Islamist AKP government’s neoliberal conservative rule. The Gezi Park uprising was significant in the sense that it was a signal for

frustrations of the youth in Turkey, not in the sense of a cultural clash between seculars and Muslims in the country as the AKP government strived to describe and dismiss. In fact, it was a massive show of frustration of the youth whose lives are marked with draconian conditions of neoliberalism expanded by the AKP government. However, for the Muslim youth of the country, the legacy of Islamism, which renounces left wing politics such as anti-capitalism, leaves no space to express resentment and thus stands as the grandest barrier between their lived experience, analysis, and rejection of the conditions.

The case of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims of Turkey, in this sense, challenges this stranded condition for the Muslim youth of Turkey. The novelty they bring into the dissident politics as a Muslim youth organization does not fit in any pre-conceived ideas and practices of Islamism or post-Islamism since they reject anti-left legacy of Islamism as much as neoliberal capitalist structuration of post-Islamism. Their praxis of solidarity, their rejection of Islamist legacy, and efforts to restore the honor of struggle for an equitable life creates a challenge to think ideologies and politics only in relation to the conflicts of the oppressed and the oppressor, regardless of whoever the oppressor or oppressed may be. Time will tell if the politics they represent will be the new reinvention of post-Islamism.

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