

The Impossibility of Society: Beyond Center-Periphery Relations in Turkey

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Abstract: Built on a critique of Serif Mardin's center-periphery approach, this study offers a discursive approach to the study of Turkish politics. Resting on the belief that the society is transparent to itself, Mardin asserts that society can exhaust the social and is always composed of a center and a periphery. By deploying Ernesto Laclau's discursive account of society, this study claims that society is not self-transparent; there is always a surplus of meaning in the social. Therefore, society consists solely of a center and its fate is tied on its success to monopolize the control of the center in the social. The advent of the political as a result of the emergence of alternative society-claim may threaten the existing social reality by revealing its contingency in representing the metaphorical totality of society. So from discourse theory perspective, political analysis should focus not on what society is but what prevents it from being. With this account of society, this study seeks to examine the rise and expansion of the Kemalist "society" as well as its dislocations owing to the emergence of other society-claims till the 1980s.

Keywords: Center-Periphery Relations, Discourse Theory, Ernesto Laclau, Kemalism, Hegemony.

Öz: Şerif Mardin'in çevre-merkez ilişkileri yaklaşımının eleştirisinden hareketle bu çalışma, Türkiye siyasetinin söylemsel bir analizini sunmaktadır. Toplumun tam anlamıyla kendini temsil ettiği fikrine yaslanan Mardin, toplum ile toplumsal olanı eşitlemekte ve toplumun bir merkez ve bir çevreden oluştuğunu iddia etmektedir. Ernesto Laclau'nun söylemsel toplum teorisini kullanan bu çalışma, toplumun kendini tam anlamıyla temsil ettiği fikrini reddetmekte ve mevcut toplumun toplumsal alandaki tüm anlamları kapsayamayacağını iddia etmektedir. Bu sebeple, toplum sadece merkeze sahip olabilir ve toplumun kaderi de toplumsal alandaki bu merkez üzerinde kontrol tekeli kurmasına bağlıdır. Başka bir toplum-iddiasının ortaya çıkışıyla sahne alan siyasal olan, mevcut toplumsal gerçekliğin, toplumun metaforik bütünlüğünü temsil etmede olumsuzluğunu ortaya sererek onu tehdit edebilir. Hâlde söylem teorisi perspektifine göre, siyasi analiz, toplumun ne olduğuna değil, toplumu toplum olmaktan neyin alıkoyduğuna odaklanmalıdır. Bu toplum anlayışından hareketle, bu çalışma, Kemalist "toplum"un ortaya çıkışı ve genişlemesini ve aynı zamanda farklı toplum iddialarıyla birlikte 1980'lerde kadar ki dönemde yaşadığı krizleri analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Merkez-Çevre İlişkileri, Söylem Teorisi, Ernesto Laclau, Kemalizm, Hegemonya.

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Introduction

Based on a critique of Şerif Mardin's center-periphery approach, this study offers a discursive approach to the study of Turkish politics (Mardin, 1973). Mardin presupposes that society is transparent to itself which means it can exhaust the social and is always composed of a center and a periphery. Resting on Ernesto Laclau's discursive account of society, this study asserts that society is not self-transparent for there is always a surplus of meaning in *the social*. Hence, it presupposes that society consists *merely* of a center and it must monopolize the control of the center in the social in order to reproduce itself. The advent of *the political* which is triggered by the emergence of alternative society-claim may threaten the existing society or social reality for it reveals its contingency and limitedness in representing the metaphorical totality of society. All in all, from discourse theory perspective, political analysis should focus not on what society is but what prevents it from being.

My case is limited with the Kemalist "society," from its rise in the 1920s to its gradual decline in the 1980s onward. The rise of Kemalist society is made possible by its gradual hegemonization of the Turkish discursive field by offering a new "order" in the aftermath of the *War of Independence*. However, as alternative society-claims in the Turkish *social* appeared, the Kemalist society faced serious dislocations. In the following, I outline at what point my study diverges from the center-periphery approach. Then, I illustrate Laclau's postfoundationalist view of society. Then, based on this view of society, I analyze the rise and fluctuations of the Kemalist society in the years between 1920s-1980s.

Center-Periphery Relations and Beyond

Mardin's center-periphery approach¹ offers a general theory of politics that locates the interaction, including both cooperation and confrontation, between the forces of center and periphery at the core of political life. This social ontology claimed to be applicable to both pre-modern "traditional" societies such as pre-modern Europe and Ottoman and Safavid Empires and "modern" societies for every society has to build up a center in order to exist (Mardin, 1973, pp. 169-170). Be that as it may, Mardin's study (1973) is concerned primarily with the effects of political modernization or the construction of a modern state, which is characterized with political, economic and institutional centralization, on center-periphery relations in Turkey: "The confrontation between center and periphery was the most important social cleavage underlying

1 Mardin derives his approach from Edward Shils' theory of society, (see footnote 1 in Mardin, 1973, p. 187), Shils, 1961.

Turkish politics and one that seemed to have survived more than a century of modernization" (Mardin, 1973, p. 170).

In essence, Mardin's approach seems to embed the state into society. Namely, society consists of both the ruling group or the state (center) and the social forces and elements outside the ruling group (periphery). For instance, during the period of modernization, the center stands for the "modernizing" state whereas the periphery represents the "traditional" society including "primordial groups" and "counter-official culture" (Mardin, 1973, p. 187). He, therefore, suggests viewing modern Turkish politics through the prism of interaction, including both conflict and cooperation, between these two segments of society.

For my study, the most striking aspect of the center-periphery approach is that it views society as transparent to itself. In other words, this social ontology equates the existing social *reality* with the idea of society, or the social *real*. This facilitates Mardin to assert the center and periphery are two pre-existing elements of society. Hence, the demarcation of society into a center and a periphery is admitted to be timeless and indissoluble. This is the point that foundationalism permeates Mardin's approach. Indeed, there are historical epochs in which this situation proves to be solid (such as periods of social dislocation); yet at other times, it may not be the case (such as periods of hegemony). Yet Mardin seems to treat this empirical fact as an ontological truth by arguing "every society has a center" (emphasis added) (Mardin, 1973, p. 169) and also a periphery.

I argue, in contrast, every society is itself *the* center: society comes to being as this center is erected and raised to the status of universality. It thus can include solely a center, not a periphery. As noted above, Mardin takes society as self-transparent which denotes that society or the social reality exhausts *the social*. On the contrary, the social cannot be exhausted by society or the social reality; the social transcends the boundaries of any society or social reality. Namely, society is by no means self-transparent and only comes into existence as societal differences in the social are fixated through discursive acts around one single center. Society exists as such insofar as a center is erected and alternative centers within the social are made politically neutralized and absent. Society, therefore, cannot be viewed as a binary opposition of center and periphery, or rather having two politico-societal locations (one is hegemonic, the other is subordinate) competing for representing the metaphorical totality of society. Yet this process cannot generate a full-fledged and completed society; no social reality or society can exhaust the social. Accordingly, political analysis should emphasize not what society is, but instead what prevents society from being (Laclau, 1990, p. 44).

However, since society cannot fully exhaust the social and there is always a surplus of meaning, the "periphery" (just speaking of Mardin's language) exists outside the

society but within the social. More specifically, as it remains in a scattered and disorganized form, its presence does not have any political importance. In such a situation, the “periphery” does not politically exist and thus theoretically not important. Be that as it may, once developed into an alternative social formation, it begins to have a political existence in the social. Then, the “periphery” starts to threaten the universality of social reality or society by revealing its contingency, limitedness and impossibilities. This indeed marks the surfacing of *the political*, which purports the absence of a societal homogeneity and the intensification of societal differences to the point of *political* importance; that is, the enemy-friend distinction (Schmitt, 2007). This illustrates the eclipse of society. In this situation, the social is occupied by two opposing centers or society-claims (even if they may not be equal as to power), not a society. Apparently, society is reinstated as the political disappears off the scene.

All in all, looking from this perspective, Mardin’s approach, which underscores that “the confrontation between center and periphery... seemed to have survived more than a century of modernization” (Mardin, 1973, p. 170), seems to claim that Turkish society has been constantly dislocated for the last 150 years. What this means is that during this time span there was no “society” at all. As we look at this history, there were periods in which a “society” or a social reality was successfully erected in the Turkish social but has never come to completion. To recapitulate, society is necessary but contingent and impossible.

Discourse Theory and Society

My study rests on Ernesto Laclau’s critique of foundationalism in social sciences. Foundationalism suggests that society is grounded on principles that are undeniable and immune to revision, and located outside society and politics (Herzog, 1985, p. 20). In contrast, Laclau’s discourse theory argues the foundations of society are contingent and undecided as well as they are in a discursive form, made up of relational differences. These two dimensions of the social put forward a specific type of politics which involves hegemonic struggles among political actors over fixing the meaning of the social, bringing about a society. The analysis of construction and dislocation of political hegemonies, then, constitutes the crux of discourse theory’s political analysis.

First of all, the idea that foundations – meaning and identity that is – are relational is borrowed from linguistic structuralism. A leading figure in structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, argues language is a formal system of differences. This view rejects the referential theory of language, which asserts objects are given to us as coherent entities. It rather puts forward a relational understanding of language, which indicates the relationship between a concept and a sound-pattern – a signified and a signifier - is arbitrary. What this reveals is a signifier for a signified can be replaced

with another signifier (Saussure, 1966, p. 10). Moreover, the principle of arbitrariness underlies language constructs the reality. Every language organizes objects by categorizing and dividing up in order to make them as a structured and coherent totality. Here, arbitrariness of language stems from the fact that extra-discursive plays no role in this process (Saussure, 1966, p. 113). For instance, there is no necessary relationship between the concept of “a grown male human being” and the sound pattern of “man.” In different languages, the same concept has distinct sound patterns. Language therefore not only constructs linkages between the signifier and the signified but it also constructs the signified in a process in which extra-discursive plays no role (Barthes, 1990). More specifically, the signified does not get its meaning from what it contains. Its meaning rather comes from what it leaves outside – from its *constitutive outside* (Derrida, 1981). The constitution of meaning is rendered through negativity. The concept of “man” for instance gets its meaning from what “man” is not, which is “woman.” The meaning of “man” is constituted through its relative differences with ‘woman.’ In a language thus there are merely relational differences.

Discourse theory asserts that society is structured like language (Lacan, 1993). Hence, the social is coextensive with the discursive, and extra-discursive does not have a constitutive effect on the social world. The society does not have an objective being; it needs to be articulated in order to exist (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp. 105-114). This process of structuration by all means involves power relations. This implies differential relations between concepts are rather hierarchical and lead to exclusion of some in the socio-political domain (Derrida, 1976). For instance, Michel Foucault contends who is “normal” or “sane” is constructed on the basis of particular and dominant understanding of “abnormality” or “madness” of the time (Foucault, 1979). As the “normal” changes, so does the “abnormal,” or vice versa.

Secondly, however, discourse theory diverges from structuralism by highlighting the issue of all symbolic systems such as language and society, are characterized with the impossibility of closure and nonfixity. All attempts to fix the meaning and identity are to remain partial, contingent. Jacques Lacan, for instance, reformulates Saussure’s understanding of relations between the levels of signifier and signified, which gives account of the openness or impossibility of the objective – the “outside” world. He rejects the isomorphism between signifier and signified, which together constitute meaning. Saussure contends the domains of signifier and signified are equal and independent. Yet, the signifier and the signified establish a unity and in that case meaning springs from the signified to the signifier. This schema favors the signified and implies the existence of an independent and objective reality (Stavrakakis, 1999). Lacan disagrees with this schema and puts forward the domains of signifier and signified are separate and in that case meaning springs from the signifier to the signified (Lacan, 1977). This formula clearly opposes the idea of the existence of an independent and

objective reality “out there,” there is no transcendental signified. Accordingly, the signified disappears and what remains is its *locus*, which is characterized by its constitutive lack: “Our starting point, the point we keep coming back to, since we shall always be at the starting point, is that every real signifier is, as such, a signifier that signifies nothing” (Lacan, 1993, p. 185). The process of signification then attempts at filling this lack but since the signified is beyond the symbolic or lost, meaning produced here will be contingent. This absence of ultimate meaning and the impossibility of closure mark exactly the contingency of every meaning and identity.

Laclau (and Chantal Mouffe) concurs with Lacan: “There are not *two* planes, one of essences and the other of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing *ultimate* literal sense for which the symbolic would be a second and derived plane of signification” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 98). He (and Mouffe) draws attention to the ultimate contingency of meaning and social identity in their conceptualization of the objective field: “[W]e must, therefore, consider the openness of the social as the constitutive ground or ‘negative essence’ of the existing, and the diverse ‘social orders’ as precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp. 95-96). However, this contingency never leads to “anything goes” type of relativism. Instead, the fixation of meaning is both possible and necessary: “Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 98). This quasi-transcendental stance implies then the process of grounding, which refers to *presencing/absencing* of societal foundations, is central to politics. As such, the focus of analysis is to be put on various attempts or “moments” of grounding – the ongoing emergence and dislocations of grounds (Marchart, 2007). Equally, it should focus on what prevents society from being.

In sum, according to discourse theory, society is not a pre-existing element; it exists in a form of relational differences. And it is arranged around only a “center” – not around a center *and* a periphery – which organizes and makes differences coherent by limiting the play of differences (Doty, 1997, p. 378). This center represents the metaphorical totality of the society; however, it is contingent, open to dislocation since any articulation of society – or fixation of differences in a social realm – cannot exhaust the social.

The Emergence of the Kemalist Myth in the 1920s

The myth is a limited space within a social field and a metaphor of fullness aiming at generating an effect of order, unity and thus society (Laclau, 1990, pp. 60-62). It usually comes into scene as society is significantly dislocated. Hence, it aims at suturing the dislocated social space through the constitution of a new space of representation and functions as a surface for various social demands and dislocations. It engages in reart-

iculating dislocated elements into new objectivity or a social reality: “[A]ny objectivity, then, is merely a crystallized myth” (Laclau, 1990, p. 61).

Kemalism emerged as a mythical space in the dislocated political space of the Ottoman Empire. This mythical space engaged in filling the structural void by fixation of meaning around empty signifier “order” in its attempt to construct not only a new society, but also a new polity. In this sense, it had striking similarities to Hobbes’ theory of state:

[I]n a situation of radical disorder “order” is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of this absence. In this sense, various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function (Laclau, 1996, p. 44).

The concept of empty signifier is developed on the background of an idea that the social realm is impossible to be symbolized completely and resists attempts of closure. Meanwhile, the partial fixation is possible and necessary. In this sense, political actors always attempt to fill the lack in the social through discursive practices. More, society is structured around this ideal of achieving fullness; universality becomes the name of the lack in the social (Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000). However, this lack needs to be shown by particular political forces, which aim at presenting their particularistic political projects as the incarnation of the universality in their attempt to hegemonize the society.

This is particularly the case in times of structural dislocation since the lack in the social is most obvious and political conditions are most favorable. Thus, so as to show the lack in the social and fill it with a particular content, political actors constantly attempt to produce empty signifiers, which are defined as the signifiers without the signifieds (Laclau, 1996, p. 36). The category of empty signifier thus operates as the locus of the articulation of political projects. As a constitutive gap, it plays the role of a center in the fixation of meaning that is characterized with emptiness, which is essential or very condition of hegemony (Laclau, 1996, p. 43). Different political projects attempt to hegemonize the empty signifiers of the absent society.

The Kemalist empty signifier of “order” made possible constructing a new social reality, “secular-nationalist” society or political community (Çelik, 2009, p. 227). There was a considerable consensus among societal groups over the lack of “order” but there are significant differences over its content, there were alternative articulations of this new social reality (Zürcher, 2004). This led to a radical societal polarization and a series of hegemonic struggles or rather civil wars between various societal groups. Hence, there was by no means a society or social reality in this period, 1920-1931. Be that as it may, the Kemalist actors won these struggles and achieved to cleanse the remnants of imperial order and in the following sideline their (Islamist and Kurdish) coalition partners.

The first hegemonic struggle was between the representatives of the old regime and its challengers, which was led by the Kemalists. In the absence of a society, the social was shaped by an antagonism between the supporters of dynastic and national (popular) sovereignty. The Kemalists engaged in cleansing the remnants of the old regime by emphasizing their collaboration with foreign occupiers and highlighting therefore the inability and particularity of the Istanbul government (representative of the imperial rule) in representing the society or nation during the *War of Independence* (1919-1922) (Criss, 1999). In addition, in opposition to the dynastic sovereignty, they constantly emphasized the principle of national sovereignty in the post-WWI international discursive environment (Berkes, 1974, p. 292). After erecting a center of (state) authority, the popular sovereignty was officially introduced with the short but very important Constitution of 1921 (Özbudun and Gençkaya, 2009). Accordingly, they decided to delegitimize and eliminate the imperial rule such as the Ottoman dynasty, which increasingly became an impediment as an alternative sovereign center in enacting a new order, kept the Caliphate for maintaining the counter-hegemonic coalition till 1924 (Lewis, 1961, p. 257). As the coalition won the struggle, the empire legally ended and the members of the Ottoman dynasty were forced to leave the country in order to secure the new polity: the *Republic* of Turkey. In 1924, the Grand National Assembly adopted a new Constitution that maintained the concept of national sovereignty and reconfirmed, in Article 4, that the Assembly was the sole representative of the Turkish "nation" (Kili, 1992). This process was later narrated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in his famous speeches (*Nutuk*)²:

Sovereignty and kinship [Sultanate] are never decided upon through discussion or academic debate. Sovereignty and kinship are taken by strength, by power and force. It was by force that the Ottomans seized the sovereignty and kinship of the Turkish nation and kept them for six centuries. Now the Turkish nation has rebelled, has put a stop to these usurpers, and has effectively taken sovereignty and kinship into its own hands. This is an accomplished fact. The question under discussion is not whether or not we should leave kinship and sovereignty to the nation. [...]—the question is merely how to give expression to it. This will happen in any case. If those gathered here, the Assembly, and everyone else could look at this question in a natural way, I think they would agree. Even if they do not, the truth will still find expression, but some heads may roll in the process (Mateescu, 2006, p. 231).

After the extermination of the old regime, a society in the Turkish social field not readily came into existence. This time, the societal groups making up the coalition fell into an implacable disagreement over the content of the empty signifier "order." The coali-

2 *Nutuk* (Speech) was a speech delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to the Grand Assembly of Turkish Parliament from 15 to 20 October, 1927, which laid clearly the Kemalist account of the war of independence and the vision of new order. See, Korkmaz, 1984.

tion had established rather over shared principles, which had been referring to a set of common Islamic values and respecting ethnic differences within the coalition (Toprak, 1981, pp. 61-63). However, after deflecting the foreign invaders and the dynasty, the Kemalist elite decided to abandon those constitutive principles of the Republic, which were materialized in the first two constitutions (the constitutions of 1921 and 1924) and construct a homogenous secular and national political community. So the second hegemonic struggle involved Kemalist policy of sweeping aside the coalition partners – Islamists and Kurds – during the *War of Independence*, due to their firm reluctance in embracing the so-called Kemalist ideals of secular, modern, Western, and homogenous society.

In their attempt to sideline the non-Kemalist elements of the coalition, the Kemalist forces established a “new” equivalence, which sets the limits of the social,³ between those subject positions – differential positions that actors are identified with within a discursive system. Specifically, the dichotomy of “reactionary,” including Islamists and Kurdish nationalists, and the “progressive” modernizers, that is, Kemalists. Hence, the coalition, which had been established in opposition to the foreign occupiers around the antagonism between “occupiers” and their collaborators in Istanbul and “nationals” – during the War of Independence, had to be crushed in order to realize those Kemalist social demands and ideals (Özoğlu, 2011). For this reason, the Kemalist actors, which gradually obtained the control of the state, engaged in drawing new limits of the social around a new antagonism.

Accordingly, having a superior position vis-à-vis their rivals, they embarked on securitizing the Islamist, liberal, and Kurdish social demands (besides other ethnic and religious minorities) and to pass the so-called *Takrir-i Sukun Kanunu* (The Delivery of Calm Law), which was giving extraordinary powers to the government headed by the second powerful figure of the Kemalist elite, İsmet İnönü (McCally, 1956). Nevertheless, the government failed to pass the law, which proclaimed to aim repressing religious obscurantism in Anatolia. In a way, this law sought to make the religious opposition as the *symptom* (Zizek, 1993, p. 116), which prohibits Kemalists in their desire to integrate Turkey into the modern Western civilization. Less than a year after, the *Sheikh Said Rebellion* (1925) in the Eastern provinces erupted because it was now obvious, especially after the promulgation of the Caliphate in 1924, that the Kemalist elite was determined to eliminate their ex-coalition partners (Zürcher, 2004, p. 169). The rebellion provided an excuse to the government in passing *Takrir-i Sukun Kanunu* in the Grand Assembly in mid-1925. The law gave widespread powers to the government to

3 The “logic of equivalence” engages in creating equivalential identities, which show a pure negation or unfixity of a discursive system. In this situation all positivity of identity is dissolved and it is defined in reference to something opposite. Identity has come to be purely negative. See, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 125.

mobilize the army in order to repress the rebellion and try the rebels at the notorious *İstiklal Mahkemeleri* (Independence Tribunals), which were established particularly to get rid of the rebels and the political opposition (Zürcher, 2004, p. 171).

After a year, the so-called *Menemen Hadisesi* (The Menemen Incident), in which it was claimed that political opposition plotted a suicide to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, gave pace to the elimination of the opposition (Cruikshank, 2004, p. 174). During and after these two incidents, most of the members of the political opposition were tried and sentenced to death or had to flee the country. Besides, starting with the abrogation of the Caliphate in 1924, the Kemalist elite sought to de-legitimize and limit the role of religion and customs that used to constitute the fabric of the Ottoman society with an excuse that Islam or tradition was the obstacle for “progress” (Yalman, 1973). Those policies included closing the traditional religious seminaries in favor of a unified educational system in 1924; banning the Sufi orders in 1924; prohibiting the fez and the veil in 1925; adopting European criminal, civil, and commercial codes in 1926; replacing Arabic script with Latin in 1928; and removing Islam as the state religion in 1928 (Yavuz, 2003, pp. 48-49). However, despite the new regime’s understanding of laicism envisioned the separation of the state and religious affairs, the Kemalist regime established *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (The Presidency of Religious Affairs) in 1924, primarily in order to control religion through the state.⁴

The Expansion of the Kemalist Myth in the 1930s

After preparing the ground for establishing a new social reality and a polity by emptying the locus of power from the Ottoman dynasty and Islam through crushing their last representatives, the second step was that of filling that “absent locus” with a “particular” Kemalist society-building project, which could now claim “universality” within the new political space. Harvested legitimacy from their role and leadership in the *War of Independence*, the Kemalist elite reiterated that salvation of the people and maintenance of national existence lay in the establishment of a modern, secular, Western and rational “order” (Tachau, 1963). They set up a goal or a social fantasy of “progress” or catching up with and integrating into the modern Western civilization – which was now claimed by the Kemalist elite to be the only “civilization,” the “center” of the globe, the supreme and the only legitimate form of organizing social life – that sustains the consistency of our socially constructed reality by instituting an order and harmony at the face of the irrepressible lack in the objective field (Zizek, 1997, p. 118).

They kicked off the construction of a new social reality within that emptied location under a single-party regime around the so-called “six arrows” of the republic.⁵

4 For different forms of relations between the state and religion, see, Kuru, 2009.

5 Notwithstanding the shared discursive ground, as the Kemalist myth marched towards the imagi-

They underscored the Kemalist ideology and hegemonic political project. These principles were first enumerated in the party programme of *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası* (the Republican People's Party, CHP) in 1931 and incorporated into the constitution in 1937, are republicanism, nationalism, populism, revolutionism, statism, and laicism (Zürcher, 2004, p. 182). In short, *republicanism* was thought to be the form of the new regime, which emphasized the sovereignty of the people, in contrast with the late monarchic regime. *Nationalism* suggested a new form of identification around Turkishness, which was bereft of religion and tradition that used to be the primary sources of social and political unity and legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire. *Populism*, in parallel with republicanism, stressed the fact that the people was the holder of sovereignty and underlain the modern mythical idea of imagining people as a homogenous, united, and harmonious entity. *Revolutionism* envisioned the replacement of religious and traditional institutions and concepts with the modern institutions and concepts. It was also a strategy of a social change, which rested on rapid and fundamental transformation of the society. *Statism* stressed the role of the state in transforming and shaping the society along the lines of a secular modern rational form from above. Finally, *laicism* envisioned the separation of the state and religion on the one hand, and saw the formation of social life around science, technology and rationality as in the modern societies on the other (Parla, 1992). In a nutshell, Kemalist social fantasy sought to break up radically with the past and generate a modern, secular, and rational society. These ideals constituted the Kemalist myth and helped generate a secular-nationalist objectivity or identity.

In the years between 1930 and 1945, Kemalism appeared as a mythical space representing a new order. This new order rested on a social fantasy "progress," which was shaped around the goal of creating a secular-national objectivity, or society (Çağaptay, 2002). Since the insurmountable gap within the objective field, the Kemalist political project projected the Ottoman and Islamic past as a symptom that preventing Turkish society to become a modern society. Starting from the late 1920s, these years witnessed a cultural crusade against social institutions and cultural practices of the past. The single-party regime passed a series of reforms that annulled those institutions and practices and replaced them with modern Western ones in its attempt to establish equivalence with Turkish society and the modern West (Zürcher, 2004, pp. 179-181). For instance, in 1931, *Türk Tarih Kurumu* (Turkish History Foundation), TTK, which engaged in rewriting Turkish history based on a secular past), *Türk Dil Kurumu* (Turkish Language Association), TDK, which strived to purify Turkish language from Arabic and Persian and to create a value-free Turkish language), and *Halkevleri* (the

nary status in Turkish domestic political space, a serious friction between the *Ülkü*, the *Kadrocu*, and 'conservative-modernist' articulations of Kemalism became apparent within Kemalist discourse, see, Aydın, 2004; Ciddi, 2009.

People's Houses, which aimed to educate the adults in rural areas according to the Kemalist ideology) (Çolak, 2003, p. 7). This buttressed the expansion and consolidation of the Kemalist mythical space within the Turkish social space. As a result, the Kemalist myth came to be representing the Turkish society or nation as a homogenous and harmonious totality. In other words, the Kemalist mythical space became a metaphor of fullness for Turkish society. Accordingly, while this mythical space legitimized the one-party regime on the one hand, it constituted a surface on which social dislocations could appear on the other.

The Challenge of Democracy in the 1950s

As a result of rising internal criticism within the CHP, the popular dissent outside the Kemalist "society," and Turkey's desire to advance its identification with the "democratic" West, which came out triumphant against the "authoritarian" West, with the end of WWII, the transition to multi-party regime was carried out in 1945 by President İsmet İnönü, who was the leading figure of the Kemalist elite after Atatürk (Vanderlippe, 2005). *Demokrat Parti* (The Democratic Party, DP), established by two important and discontented figures of the Kemalist elite, Adnan Menderes and Celal Bayar, challenged the CHP by using a right-wing populist discourse: "Enough! Now the people have their say" was the motto of this new moment (Zürcher, 2004, p. 217). The DP mainly articulated the demands of the excluded social groups under the single-party regime and carried rural values to the center of the political system by resting on the democratic discourse that was on the rise in the international realm after WWII. This precipitated the release of Islam from the grip of Kemalism, which used the Islamic past as a symptom for the establishment of a secular-national society. In a nutshell, it lifted and formed an alternative "society." As a result, this deciphered the heterogeneity of the (Kemalist) "society" and made visible the distance between the Kemalist myth and the social order. This meant the Kemalist myth was unable to represent the totality of the society; it was now disclosed that it was incomplete in its representation of the society.

The DP can be best portrayed as a political movement that sought to channel popular grievances against the single-party rule and Kemalism's top-down modernization project to its own desire for a more democratic society. It attempted to roll back the Kemalist hegemony through antagonism between "democratic" and "authoritarian" forces. In its struggle against the CHP, owing to the absence or weakness of liberal-democratic social demands in Turkey at that time, it had to resort to Islamic and rural values in order to expand the burgeoning democratic myth in order to establish a modern democratic society (Lewis, 1973, p. 184). However, despite DP's willingness to lift the pressure on the religious and cultural values and demands, it did not envision

an establishment of an Islamic society (Sunar and Toprak, 1983). The distance between Islamism and the secular counter-Kemalist parties led to emergence of distinct Islamist parties in 1960s onward (Yıldız, 2003). The DP was as much secular as the CHP in its political and ideological orientation. It attempted to rearticulate dislocated elements, which the Kemalist myth was unable to articulate to its chain of equivalence, around the nodal point “democracy.” In other words, it tended to articulate the empty signifier “modernity” around liberal democratic discourse. In a nutshell, it proposed an alternative, or a more liberal way to modernize the society. The years under the DP rule, 1950-1960, then witnessed the emergence of an alternative myth, the “democratic myth,” which aimed at suturing the social.

This paved the way for the split of the political space between two antagonistic forces: Kemalists and the democrats. Indeed, this brought the Kemalist political project into a deep identity crisis. Notwithstanding, this did not result in the establishment of a democratic society. The Kemalist elite reacted against this development with ferocity through expanding the Kemalist mythical space by articulating and hegemonizing the signifier “democracy” into their discursive chain of equivalence. In this process, firstly, the army intervened in 1960 to the political life, ended the DP rule as the military manifesto proclaimed to protect democracy, the state and the Kemalist reforms (Heper and Keyman, 1998). The Kemalist discourse was not denying democracy primarily because democracy was a key term in maintaining identification with the West in the post-WWII period; this was rather a move to find a way to integrate democracy into the Kemalist discourse. This also made it clear that Kemalism was the foundation of the state, and the state and particularly the army was there to consolidate democracy (Karpas, 1988, p. 141). It was now clear that the Kemalist modernization project and democracy were linked and identified with each other.

In this respect, the Constitution of 1961, which was tailored under the guidance of the army, aimed at preventing the centralization of power in political parties by introducing the system of checks and balances. In a way, it introduced a series of institutions – “protection belt” – by empowering the civil and military bureaucracy at the expense of the elected governments after seeing the troubles generated by DP rule. Accordingly, the 1961 Constitution introduced *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council, MGK), *Hakim ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu* (High Council of Judges and Prosecutors, HSYK), *Anayasa Mahkemesi* (the Constitutional Court of Turkey), *Danıştay* (The Turkish Council of State), and *Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı* (The State Planning Organization, DPT) (Tanör, 1994). More, the Constitution attempted to regulate every aspects of social life through expanding individual rights, civil liberties, and associative freedoms in order to canalize the rising demands of the periphery to the center and alleviating the reactions of the democratic West. However, Article 153 of the Constitution was proclaiming that these new laws and provisions could not be interpreted as negating the so-

called “laws of revolution,” which were those specific laws that passed in the Atatürk’s era (Heper, 1988, p. 7). This marked a significant continuity between the Constitution and the “laws of revolution,” and showed that Kemalism was still the unquestionable foundation of the Turkish polity.

These two aspects of the Constitution clearly indicated that the Kemalist myth of modernized, westernized, secularized and rationalized society transformed into an imaginary (Çelik, 2000, p. 197). Indeed, if a myth succeeds to an extent that it becomes the horizon of inscription of every social demand and possible dislocation, at this instance it evolves into the *imaginary*. The imaginary is thus a horizon: “it is not one among other objects but an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility for the emergence of any object” (Laclau, 1990, p. 64). The imaginary then represents the very form of fullness; it is beyond the precariousness and dislocations. The Kemalist myth outlasted the democratic antagonistic forces by absorbing the signifier “democracy” into its discursive chain of equivalence. It came to represent a higher degree of fullness than the previous era of the single-party rule. The “democratic” Kemalism was now the unquestionable metaphor for the totality of the Turkish society; yet it remained as an “illiberal” democratic regime vis-à-vis the liberal democratic West (Mousseau, 2006).

The Kemalist Imaginary and Its Crisis

Hegemonization of the discursive field by the Kemalist discourse led to the emergence of various differential positions over the Kemalist ground, center. The primary dividing line among those subject positions was the right-left antagonism in parallel with the Cold War conditions of the international realm. However, those subject positions were all attached to the Kemalist identity, which determined the discursive structures of the time. This common denominator, Kemalist identity, facilitated to tame and repress the dislocatory forces within the domestic realm. However, starting in the late 1960s, the Kemalist hegemonic center started to lose its unity and specificity with the proliferation of articulations around so-called Kemalist identity. As a result, Kemalist identity became rather an empty signifier, losing its original content and became ambiguous and indeterminate (Çelik, 2000, p. 198). As a result, the hegemonic center lost its determinative authority in controlling the field of discursive and incorporating fully the political and social spheres. Kemalism lost its universalizing role and the dislocatory forces, therefore, appeared once again in the domestic political realm. This failure was evident in the emergence of political parties associated with radical movements such as Islamic fundamentalism, ultra nationalism, and radical Marxism in the late 1960s. Between the years of the late 1960s to 1980, the liberal environment of Turkish politics witnessed an eruption of violence and “civil war” among these groups in line with the

international hegemonic struggle between capitalist and communist blocs (Landau, 1974). This “civil war” furthered the erosion of the self-certainty of the hegemonic center, abolished its totalizing effects, and disclosed its radical contingency.

In 1980, the military intervention took place once again in order to restore the decaying Kemalist order and redesign the Kemalist center. The years in 1960-1980 showed that relative liberation of the society resulted in the eruption of the political and therefore dissolution of the Kemalist center. On the backdrop of this experience, the 1982 constitution showed the reincarnation of the totalitarian tendencies of the single-party regime of the 1930s which was severely restricting political participation despite the military’s claim that it intervened to politics in 1980 in order to save democracy (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1997). The new military regime sought to arrest and to repress the political, and strongly emphasized national unity, harmony, and the significance of the state at the expense of democracy (Heper, 1988, p. 5). Beside, the Kemalist establishment continued to strengthen the “protection belt” through the 1982 constitution by introducing *Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu* (the Board of Higher Education, YÖK) and increasing the powers of the MGK, especially with regards to domestic security and foreign policy matters, and the President by promoting it to be the head of the state with certain powers to dissolve the parliament, preside over cabinet meetings, and appoint higher state officials (Karabelias, 1999).

This envisioned a harmonious society, devoid of ideological differences – a solid unity of the center and the absence of the periphery – around Kemalist principles. However, the Kemalist elite took an important step after the coup: they attempted to redefine and fix the social objectivity without digressing from the secular-nationalist identity. Due to the rising tide of Islamist discourse inside and the region after the Iran Islamic Revolution in 1979, and primarily influenced by the so-called “Yeşil Kuşak” (the Green Belt)⁶ strategy of the US, which envisioned forming a barrier alongside the southern flank of the Soviets through mobilizing Islamists after the eclipse of the *détente* in the 1980s, Islam, produced as an empty signifier, was articulated and integrated into the Kemalist discourse (Saylan, 1987). This integration was carried out around the so-called “Turk-Islam synthesis” project. In this project, Islam was articulated in a way that it conformed to the Kemalist principles (Ocak, 1999, pp. 161-163). It rather became a “rationalized” Islam within the Kemalist discourse’s chain of equivalence. Nevertheless, this maneuver led to unintended consequences and furthered the process of empowering Islamic discourse which would be more visible in the 1990s (Shankland, 1996).

In short, democracy was divorced from the Kemalist discourse. The new constitution strictly limited political participation and increased the role of the army in the

6 The policy which envisioned forming a barrier alongside the southern flank of the Soviets through mobilizing Islamists after the eclipse of the *détente* in the 1980s.

executive branch of the state. Although Islam was articulated and integrated into the Kemalist discourse's chain of equivalence, the new constitution emphasized the secular and rational nature of the Turkish state and society. All these produced the military regime, which was based on a depoliticized and harmonious society.

Concluding remarks

The Kemalist "society" was made possible insofar as its internal coherence was sustained and the emergence of an alternative "society" was barred. In other words, due to the impossibility of society, it never became a finished, completed totality. Indeed, it started off as a myth in the 1920s and after the 1930s it gradually expanded to the level of the *imaginary* – it represented the metaphorical totality of the Turkish social space. It survived the dislocatory challenges of the discourse of democracy in the 1950s which threatened the Kemalist society by bringing an alternative society in the social. It also successfully alleviated the centrifugal social developments of the 1960s and 1970s that hurt the coherence of the Kemalist society. The Kemalist society was restored in 1980. Yet, a new tide of challenges was about to knock the door in the 1990s – the rise of Islamist and Kurdish nationalist discourses which appeared as alternative myths and Kemalism's loss of monopoly over the articulation of a significant empty signifier "modernity" with the rise of the discourse of neo-liberalism in Turkish discursive field.

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