RETHINKING POLITICAL HUMOR:

A DIALOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TURKEY

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to explore the nature of political humor and its relation to politics through a dialogical analysis of three online political humor pages on Facebook which differentiate themselves from each other within the humor field by taking different positions, and of their engagement with politics in Turkey. Following the phenomenological approach and Ranciere's theory of the distribution of the sensory/sensible as a theoretical framework, this study understands political humor as a specific political and aesthetic worldview of a particular group, as a particular mode of constructing, perceiving and sensing the social world which in fact stems from the distribution of the sensible. In this regard, Barthian semiotic analysis of these three different online political humor pages demonstrates how political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse is both subversive in terms of exposition of the state's role in determining, constructing, shaping and regulating the individuals' sensibility and perceptibility, their imagination, and reproductive in terms of reproduction of their imagination constructed and shaped by the state. By showing the contradictory nature of political humor, this thesis argues that in contrast to the main sociological understanding of humor as a form of resistance, political humor functions not merely as a weapon against the state and its distribution of the sensory, but also as a means of reproduction of that very distribution of the sensible, and that it is in essence intrinsic to the distribution of the sensory.

ÖZET

Siyasi Mizahı Yeniden Düşünmek:
Türkiye'deki Sosyal Medyanın Diyalojik Analizi

Bu çalışma, farklı pozisyonlar alarak mizah alanı içerisinde birbirlerinden ayrışan Facebook'taki üç farklı siyasi mizah sayfasının ve bu sayfaların Türkiye'deki politikayla kurdukları ilişkinin diyalojik analizini yaparak politik mizahın doğasını ve politikayla olan ilişkisini keşfetmeyi amaçlıyor. Teorik çerçeve olarak fenomenolojik yaklaşımı ve Ranciere'in duyusalın dağılımı kavramını izleyen bu tez; siyasi mizahı belirli bir grubun özgül, politik ve estetik dünya görüşü, duyusalın dağılımından gelen sosyal dünyayı belirli bir algılama, hissetme ve kurma biçimi olarak tanımlıyor. Bu bağlamda bu üç farklı siyasi mizah sayfasının Barthesçı semiyolojik analizinden çıkan sonuç; siyasi ve estetik bir söylem biçimi olan politik mizahın bireylerin anlayış ve algılayışının, tahayyüllerinin devlet tarafından belirlendiğini, kurgulandığını, şekillendiğini ve düzenlendiğini ifşa etmesi açısından nasıl yıkıcı; lakin aynı zamanda devletin kurguladığı, belirlediği bu tahayyülleri yeniden üreterek siyasi mizahın aslında nasıl yeniden üretici olduğunu gösteriyor. Politik mizahın çelişkili dünyasını açımlayan bu tez; mizahı bir direniş biçimi olarak algılayan temel sosyolojik yaklaşımın aksine, siyasi mizahın sadece devlete ve onun duyusalın dağıtımına karşı bir silah olarak kullanılmadığını, aynı zamanda bu dağılımın kendisini yeniden üretme işlevi gördüğünü ve aslen duyuların dağıtımına içkin olduğunu tartışıyor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Humor has accompanied human society from the very beginning, changing form, content and style in response to cultural, social and technological trend. Since its existence is associated with human beings, it is difficult to write a history of humor, to trace back to its essence. According to Barry Sanders (2001), history of laughter can never be written but it can only be reestablished; in this light, in *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History*, he writes a history of attitudes towards laughter by following Torah, Bible; Ancient Greek, medieval and modern philosophy; and literature etc. He tells, for instance, that while women were the ones who vitalized laughter in the Jewish world, humor was held by men in the Ancient Greece where there was a common idea on humor that it should be surveiled, that it must be under control. He continues the issue of surveillance of humor with the medieval world in which laughter was forbidden, describing how, as Bakhtin (2014) mentions, carnivals intervened in the severity of the Middle Ages and how they liberated laughter, thus reinvigorating humor.[1]In the present era, he argues, this conflict between humor and the sovereign still continues. Both Bakhtin and Sanders define humor in relation to politics, therefore they write a history of different sovereigns, religions and intellectuals' attitudes towards humor.[2]

[1] According to Bakhtin (2014), carnivals are "the temporary suspension of the official system with all its bans and hierarchical obstacles" (p. 109).

[2] The relationship between humor and politics is one of the popular fields of study in sociology. There are lots of studies on humor as a form of resistance: Astapova (2015), Branders (1977), Obrdlik (1942), Oring (2004), Pi-Sunyer (1977), Sosa-Abella & Reyes (2015) and so on.

1.1 The history of humor in Turkey

Nevertheless, even though humor is universal, it is local, regional and cultural since all societies have their own social, cultural and political codes of humor and laughter. In this sense, in Turkey, which has a long tradition of humor since the pre-Ottoman period, there is a different understanding of humor. Most of the humor studies begin the history of humor in Turkey with *Nasreddin Hoca* (Nasreddin Hodja) (Avcı, 2003; Cantek, 2011; Öngören 1998). It is believed that *Nasreddin Hoca* lived during the thirteenth century in Akşehir, near Konya, a capital of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum during the interregnum, the period of time between the dissolution of the Seljuk and the foundation of the Ottoman (Öngören, 1998, p. 46-47). He is considered as a populist philosopher and a wise man, remembered by his funny jokes, stories and anecdotes. Even though his face and silhouette, is unknown, it is known that he had a donkey and *kavuk* (quilted turban) which bore different meanings: While the former was regarded as an opposition of horses[3], the latter represented a symbolic power in the village since during this period, *kavuk* was used by high state officials such as *ulema* (ulama), *sadrazam* (grand vizier), *kazasker* (judge of the army) etc. In this regard, *Nasreddin Hoca* was a crucial figure in his village as he helped people perform prayer, taught them how to read and write, and in conflictual situations, he served as a *kadı* (an Islamic judge and ombudsman). This explains why he addressed not only religious problems but also judicial issues in his jokes.[4] Because of the interregnum and the fact that his jokes were simply oral, *Nasreddin Hoca* jokes were difficult to control. Nonetheless, in the seventeenth century and afterwards, his jokes, especially those on sexuality and religion, were intervened, the language of the jokes

[3] Horses were then the symbol of wealth, nobility and celerity because they were used by soldiers and different sovereigns (Cantek, 2011, p. 28).
[4] He is known for his sexual jokes as well.

were expurgated while they were being put on paper. Thus, his censored jokes, stories and anecdotes have survived until today (Cantek, 2011, p. 31).

Oral humor continued in the Ottoman Empire with *Karagöz and Hacivat* (the traditional Ottoman shadow play), *Meddah* (the traditional Ottoman storyteller) and *Ortaoyunu* (the traditional Ottoman theatre performed in the open air) in the sixteenth century and onwards. They relied on performance and were performed in public places such as coffeehouses, public squares and as such (Georgeon, 2000, p. 83; Öngören, 1998, p. 59). Hence, we see a shift from oral humor to spatial oral humor which is defined as *collective laughter* (Fenoglio & Georgeon, 2000, p. 10) since people then gathered and watched these performances together. Even though they complained about a repressive government, made fun of certain religious and military figures such as admirals (*paşa*), viziers etc., these figures were not displayed with these titles on the stage (Nicolas, 2000, p. 67). However, due to social and political satire and obscenity in the performances, the places where they were performed were intervened by the authority. Coffeehouses, for instance, which were then the meeting place of people, the janissaries and the rebels, were raided, closed and forbidden to run (Cantek, 2011, p. 34).

The nineteenth century is significant in Turkey's humor tradition as with *Diyojen*, the first Ottoman humor magazine published between 1870 and 1873, which was issued by Teodor Kasap,[5] humor transcended the realm limited to the audiences who gathered around a storyteller (*meddah*) or in a square to watch a *Karagöz and Hacivat* play, and for it began to communicate with large-scale readers; humor became invisible, thus more out-of-control and dangerous (Georgeon, 2000,

[5] Even though we know that the magazine was published by Teodor Kasap, we do not have any information about the producers of the caricatures since they were published as anonymous (Balcıoğlu, 1987, p. 5). *Diyojen* was first published in Romaic, Armenian and French, then began to be published in Turkish (Yazıcı, 2011, p. 1301).

p. 91). *Diyojen,* as an epitome for other humor magazines like *Hayal* (1873-1877), aroused interest, got extensive reactions, and even led the government to propose a draft of law on banning humor. These initial humor magazines focused on Abdülhamid the Second (and his nose), the conflict between modernity and tradition, the modernization projects and their malfunction or ever-function (Öngören, 1998, p. 60-63; Georgeon, 2000, p. 92). Thence, in 1877, humor-focused media was banned – until the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.

However, it is crucial to note that this transition (from oral humor to written humor) period and onwards, as Ferit Öngören (1998) defines it as "Constitutional Humor," was mostly nourished by the traditional humor types: In terms of content, humor magazines made use of *Nasreddin Hoca*, *Ortaoyunu* and *Karagöz*. Aiming to reach illiterate people as well, *Karagöz* as a common sign, which was especially important since it represented the illiterate but straight forward public, was mostly used in caricatures by decontextualizing, exaggerating and changing the traditional meanings (Brummett, 2000, p. 140; Georgeon, 2000, p. 91; Öngören, 1998, p. 67). The precise break from traditional oral humor, Ottoman humor, occurred in 1922 and afterwards: *Akbaba* as the largest running humor magazine during the Republican era, published between 1922 and 1977, was indifferent to politics, remained loyal to whichever political party was in power (Özgür, 2012, p. 3), and focused mostly on the relationship between Turkish men and women, *alaturka* (Ottoman style) and *alafranga* (Western style) (Öngören, 1998, p. 86). In this regard, even though it was a publication with a low circulation, *Akbaba* was significant for nation-building as in terms of content; it represents the break from the Ottoman and sets a precedent for other humor magazines (Cantek, 2011, p. 140). For instance, the magazine named *Karikatür,* issued by Salih Ermez at the end of the 1930s, made fun of the past by

mocking the Ottoman ways of spending and enjoying time, the Ottoman style of having fun, and exalted the Turkish Revolution and its consequences (Georgeon, 2000, p. 94-98).

Nevertheless, in 1946, the relationship between humor and politics was prompted with and reinvigorated by *Markopaşa* which was a humor magazine with the highest circulation published between 1946 and 1949 by Sabahattin Ali and Aziz Nesin. It was (and still is) considered as the first political humor magazine during the Republican era, targeted the one-party rule, Republican People's Party (CHP) (Cantek, 2001, p. 182; Öngören, 1998, p. 91). *Markopaşa*, which was relied less on visuals than other magazines, used folk poems, folk ballads, anecdotes and slang words in order to critique sharply; thus, because of its language, it was then defined as "*aşağılık nükte, bayağının aşağısı*" (an inferior wit, below than coarse) by the sovereign (Cantek, 2001, p. 51).[6] In this sense, it can be said that the magazine was carnivalesque in Bakhtian terms.[7] Due to its aggressive language and its high circulation, printing houses that published the magazine were closed, its writers were sued, Aziz Nesin was exiled, and Sabahattin Ali was murdered by unknown assailants. The magazine's circulation was prevented and protests supported by the government were organized against the magazine. On the other hand, it was used as a sine qua non of democracy: With a view to showing that CHP was a democratic party, the government emphasized that even *Markopaşa* was being published (Cantek, 2001). Although it was imitated by some other magazines such as *Alay*, *Lalapaşa, Mazete, Boşboğaz* and so on, *Markopaşa* did not leave lasting examples of

[6] For example, the magazine wrote directly to the deputies of CHP and called them "dwarf", and addressed directly to the prime minister (Cantek, 2001, p. 45).

[7] According to Bakhtin (2014), in carnivals, fools become wise, kings become beggars, and unaccepted behaviors are welcomed. In other words, there are no rules, no taboos in carnivals. *Markopaşa* is carnivalesque in the sense that insulting and targeting the sovereign directly, using slang words were welcomed and accepted in the magazine. This is why it was then regarded as "inferior wit, below than coarse".

humor because its arrows of criticism were limited to the one-party regime, CHP; thus, when the one-party system was changed, the magazine disappeared as the reason of its existence was removed. Yet, *Markopaşa* left one legacy: Political humor as a weapon against the sovereign (Cantek, 2001; Öngören, 1998).

The vital moment after *Markopaşa* occurred in 1972 when *Gırgır*, the best-selling and most influential Turkish humor magazine of the 1970s and 1980s began to be published by Oğuz Aral. The magazine was visual-weighted and colloquial, and "featured aspects of everyday life through depictions of sexuality, obscenity, slang, curses, scatological images and languages" (Özgür, 2012, p. 3). The reason behind its high circulation was that *Gırgır* mostly focused on the life struggle of people who migrated from rural to urban areas, formerly Istanbul, their problems in the city, and dreams about becoming rich etc (Öngören, 1998, p. 103).[8]

Gırgır was a milestone in many respects. Firstly, it was the first magazine that used the offset printing technique instead of line engraving (Öngören, 1998, p. 118). After *Gırgır*, all magazines started to implement the offset technique. Secondly, *Gırgır* was not merely a humor magazine, but also a school, "Gırgır School", since Oğuz Aral encouraged the young and potential cartoonists to send him their amateur drawings: Young people from Istanbul and other cities were sending their works and learning how they could improve their technique. Hence, humor, which had been limited to Istanbul since then expanded its scope by reaching more drawers and Gırgır School led its graduate students to publish new humor magazines: *Leman, Limon, Çarşaf, Atom, Penguen, Uykusuz...*[9] New magazines were proliferating (Cantek, 2002; Cantek, 2011, Öngören, 1998; Özgür, 2012). Thirdly,

[8] With its idiosyncratic character in its caricatures, the magazine added a new word named *maganda* (lout) to Turkish language and a new kind of man who lives in the city to Turkish society. *Maganda* was then a popular subject of analysis in sociology in Turkey (Öncü, 2012; Öncü, 2013; Tunç, 2001).
[9] Some of them are still being published today: *Gırgır*, *Leman*, *Penguen*, and *Uykusuz* which has the highest circulation since 2010 (Cantek, 2011).

Gırgır's highest circulation transformed illustration, or drawing, into a prosperous profession in terms of salary. Cartoonists were being transferred for higher salaries from one magazine to another (Cantek, 2011, p. 53-54).

And lastly, *Gırgır* was not solely an epitome of its successors, but also of different kinds of humor magazines: This fertile period also gave way to the publication of several Islamic humor magazines like *Dinozor*, *Cingar*, and *Ustura* (Özgür, 2012, p. 4). Even though these magazines were extremely short-lived and did not reach many people, they were crucial since they came out as a reaction to their secular counterparts, demonstrating that another way of "making humor" was possible, thus encouraging religiously conservative boys and girls to engage in humor. In this respect, *CafCaf* is significant: In 2007, a group of religiously conservative Turks who identify themselves and their humor as Islamic, and "engage in humor that esteems and upholds what they consider to be Islamic norms and principles" started to publish the magazine which "condemns impropriety and eschews jokes on drinking, illicit sexual relations, and immoral social behavior" (Özgür, 2012, p. 2). *CafCaf* is still in publication and continues to be a precedent for other humor magazines in this genre.[10]

To put it in a different way, the fact that *Gırgır* reached the large masses, mostly high-school teens, in terms of producer means that the magazine caused a democratization of the humor field by extending the producer realm which was limited to a group of intellectuals and artists such as Aziz Nesin, Orhan Seyfi Orhon and Mustafa Mim Uykusuz until then. Furthermore, Islamic humor magazines which came out as a reaction to their secular counterparts proved that "there is an audience for 'clean' humor on the cultural landscape of a historically secular country" and

[10] A new Islamic humor magazine named *Hacamat*, for example, started to be published in 2015.

have changed humor in Turkey, which is perceived as "a Western cultural genre formerly associated with the secularists in the country" (Özgür, 2012, p. 2-3).

The Internet, which has a major role in the production and distribution of humor today, brought a new dimension to this democratization of the humor field and altered the perception of humor: In October 2003, an English language, image-based, message board called 4chan[11] was established. 4chan is a discordant bricolage of humor, geek cultures, fierce debates, pornography, in-jokes, hyperbolic opinions and general offensiveness, and has a very straightforward design: Users post images and comments under themed boards, and because there is no registration process or login required, the vast majority of posts fall under the default username – anonymous (Knuttila, 2011). In the website which defines itself as the "asshole of the Internet", there are no individuals but anonymous users and there are no rules – everything can be discussed (even child pornography).[12] In this regard, 4chan is the carnival of the Internet in which everyone can participate and where unaccepted behaviors are welcomed.

4chan is very crucial in many respects. First of all, it is the beginning of Internet humor or online humor, which is a part of participatory culture in which the traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers are severely blurred, if not eradicated, and the architect of meme genre. The word meme is an intellectual reduction of Dennett's theory of memes (1990), implying the social reproduction and cultural transmission of ideas and concepts (Wagener, 2014, p. 2489), referring to an idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture and/or between cultures (Figure 1.). Memes are "part of a technological and cultural shift towards a 'participatory culture'" (Miltner, 2014, p. 3), and intertextuality and

[11] 4chan.org
[12] Due to its lawless philosophy, the website is forbidden in Turkey from the very beginning.

juxtaposition of incongruous texts are key elements of meme humor since "memes are not isolated discrete units, but building blocks of complex cultures, intertwining and interacting with each other" (Miltner, 2014, p. 10). Thence, 4chan gave way to new types of humor,[13] and led individuals from all around the world to participate as both producers and consumers and to communicate with each other via humor.



Figure 1. An example of a meme[14]
Source: [Board Game Geek, January 10, 2012]

Second of all, 4chan sets a precedent for other humor websites: Created in 2008, the website named 9gag gathers users from all over the world, and allows them to post pictures, movies and brief stories that are accessible to all. It is a community focusing on productions ("posts") which may contain pictures, memes, rage comics, and are almost always produced in English (Wagener, 2014, p. 2488). 9gag mostly shares posts which are produced mainly in 4chan. Thus, 9gag as the distributor of 4chan posts has given way to the popularization of 4chan.[15] Besides, since everybody from all around the world can be a part of the 4chan community, the website is

[13] It is crucial to put an emphasis on the fact that online humor does not only generates new humor types but also functions as a carrier of old humor types such as jokes and cartoons (Shifman, 2007, p. 187).
[14] The image is an example of a meme named "lolcat" which is a compound word of the acronymic abbreviation for LOL (laugh out loud) and the word cat. The term was introduced by 4chan in 2006 and became so popular that the word entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2014. Retrieved from https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/747775/doctor-who-funny-picture-thread
[15] Because 4chan is banned from the beginning in Turkey, many people know and familiarize with 9gag which helps people meet with 4chan.

imported and localized, and new 4chan-like websites are developed in many countries.

In Turkey, for instance, in December 2009, a website named *İnci Sözlük* was created by Serdar İnci and İsmail Alpen. Looking at its design, structure and philosophy, we can say that it is the local version of 4chan; thus, it is the first Turkish version of carnival on the web. However, it is important to note that its carnivalesque style, which is very masculine and pornographic, lasted until March 2010 when a visual which contained Zübeyde Hanım, the mother of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, was posted under a theme called "headscarf porn". The visual provoked so many reactions that *İnci Sözlük* had to establish some rules: No posts related with religion and politics are allowed. *İnci Sözlük* is significant in terms of localization of 4chan and its meme culture since it has a major role on popularization of a new type of humor in Turkey: Caption or "caps" which is based on a picture, a real or photoshopped image, supported by a caption that is written in bold white letters and framed with a red background (Figure 2.).



Figure 2. An example of caps[16]
Source: [SosyalMe, December 26, 2013]

[16] It is an example of what is called "caps" (a meme like lolcat) which is the image of Devlet Bahçeli, the president of MHP, under which "not funny" is written. Retrieved from http://www.sosyalme.com/adim-adim-egemen-bagis-esprileri-sorunsali/

This type of humor spread and became popular in 2010 through *İnci Sözlük*. Caps gave way to the constitution of several humor-focused pages on Facebook such as *Milli birlik ve beraberliğe en çok ihtiyaç duyulan şu günler, Dinci Caps, Caps* and the like. In this respect, it can be noted that the increase in humor-focused pages on Facebook, humor-focused profiles on Twitter etc., demonstrates that online humor has led to another democratization of the humor field by expanding the scope of humor: Since new humor types (like caps) do not require certain talent as caricatures, everybody can become a humorist.[17] Furthermore, this democratization has caused the ramification of the above-mentioned humor perception. Because everyone can become a humorist, several different humor pages exist concomitantly on Facebook: In addition to the pages which are formerly associated with the secularists and leftists, which are dominant in the humor field (such as *Zaytung, Faiz Lobisi, Milli birlik ve beraberliğe en çok ihtiyaç duyulan şu günler, Dangerous Turkish Minds*), there are Islamic humor pages (like *Dinci Caps*) and Kurdish pages (*Tolaz,* for instance) which are not isolated discrete units, but ones that are constantly interacting with each other, engaging with politics differently but dialogically.

1.2 Outline of the chapters

[17] I must accentuate the fact that humor revives especially during certain political crises, events and situations. For instance, during the Gezi events in Turkey, types of opposition, slogans, songs and images were created through manipulation of popular advertising slogans, song lyrics, movie names and lines, and tabloid journalism materials; and were distributed via social media. This humorous language was called as "disproportionate intelligence" by the protesters, opposing to disproportionate police brutality inflicted by the authority (Emre, Çoban & Şener, 2013, p. 6-8). Humor that emerged around the Gezi resistance was incessantly celebrated by the conventional press and in new media. Thus, due to lively political moments in 2013 and onwards (Gezi, bribery and corruption operations, local elections, presidential elections and so on), not only the existing humor magazines (e.g. *Uykusuz*, *Penguen*) and humor-focused pages on Facebook (e.g. *Zaytung, Dinci Caps, Tolaz*) have gained popularity, but also new magazines (*Hacamat*, *Püff*) and Facebook pages (*Faiz Lobisi*, *Dangerous Turkish Minds, Ak Partili Değilim Ama, Büyük Oyunu Bozuyoruz*) have been proliferated.

Nonetheless, new types of humor in the Internet are different than other humor types not only in terms of technique, but also in terms of content: They are very much agenda-based or agenda-specific, hence, generating a type of humor which concentrates on solely the (political) agenda, a kind of online humor that is very topical and produces an immediate online humorous reaction or response to the political agenda. In this regard, the Internet not merely democratized and thence, expanded the scope of the existing humor field in terms of production, but also specified the scope of its content which appears as more parochial and colloquial than other types of humor. In other words, in the case of the Internet, democratization is in fact limiting humor in general both in terms of form and content.

Following the democratization led by the Internet, I am interested in three different humor pages on Facebook, namely *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*, their online political humor, and their parochial, colloquial and immediate reaction or response to the political agenda: How do they engage with politics through online humor? How do they approach the sovereign and different political parties? How do they react to social and political events, and how do they view the government's and political parties' reaction to these events? What are the similarities and differences between them in terms of their engagement with politics? How is the dialogical relationship between them established? Through Barthian semiotic analysis of the posts created by these online political humor pages, and by making use of the phenomenological approach which takes humor as a specific outlook or worldview of a group, and Ranciere's conceptualizations of politics and aesthetics and his concept of the distribution of the sensory/sensible, I demonstrate that *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* use similar narratives but take different positions in order to construct a similar-yet-different East-West dichotomy, engaging in dialogue with

each other by problematizing certain but mostly unrecognized ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving, knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not feeling, not perceiving and not knowing that I call in my thesis "imagination." By depicting these different imaginations as *maganda* through different metaphors and motives, the online political humor pages expose the sovereign's role in constructing, shaping, framing and regulating these different imaginations, hence, impinging upon the individuals' epistemological, emotional and psychological worlds, distributing those imaginations among the individuals and deciding who can and can not enjoy them. In this regard, my thesis argues that there is an economy of imagination between *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*, which is constantly problematized by these online political humor pages that incite their followers to acknowledge, to talk about and to criticize the problematic, constructed, exclusionary and unrecognized "nature" of these different imaginations; discussing that they, nevertheless, cause a reproduction of certain dichotomies (such as modern-traditional, urban-rural, secular-religious), a reproduction of another imagination which is also constructed by that very distribution of the senses, which is exclusionary, taken for granted and as natural, thence, remain unrecognized and unproblematized; and concluding that online political humor as a specific political and aesthetic worldview of a group is both subversive and reproductive since the truths of that group obfuscated by the sovereign, constructed outlooks, perspectives, perceptions and representations are exposed while the distribution of the sensory which produce that group's worldview is reproduced by going without recognizing and problematizing.

In the following chapter, the chapter on methodology, I provide information about the online political humor pages, explaining why I have chosen to use the word online rather than the term virtual, what kind of a realm Internet (and Facebook) as a

medium is (are), and how it is different from other traditional mediums, how humor is theorized, how it is studied both in general and in Turkey, and how my thesis differs from them and contributes to the humor studies in terms of the phenomenological approach and Ranciere's theory of the distribution of the sensory. In addition, I describe how I have made an analysis of the posts shared by the pages through Barthian semiological analysis which consists of two layers of meaning (denotation and connotation) that have particular questions of analysis, and how I have fulfilled the gaps in Barthian semiotic analysis in terms of intertextuality and interview.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that taking an anti-colonial position, the Kurdish online political humor page *Tolaz* makes a political and aesthetic disruption of what I describe as Turkish imagination by making fun of the dominant discourses of glory and wealth (both in terms of culture and underground treasure); and through the animal metaphor and the ignorance motif, the page depicts this dominant imagination which is constructed by the Turkish state and which shapes the epistemological, psychological and emotional worlds of Turkish individuals who take them for granted and as natural, and hence, which remains unrecognized and unproblematized, as *maganda*. By exposing the truths, counter-memory, counter-history, counter-knowledge, counter-sense perception obfuscated by the Turkish imagination, *Tolaz* prompts its followers to realize, to discuss, to critique, to question the unnatural and constructed "nature" of this dominant, official imagination.

In Chapter 4, I show that by using an anti-colonial narrative but taking an Islamic position (similar with, yet different than *Tolaz*), the Islamic online political humor page *Dinci Caps* intervenes in, politically and aesthetically destroys both the representation produced by CHP through its neutrality claim and the appearance

created by AKP (Justice and Development Party) through the discourse of victimhood, and reveals political hypocrisy and political dishonesty behind these appearances and the *as-ifness* of these appearances; demonstrating that through the depictions of two conflicting female figures (as both *maganda* and victim), the page discloses the unnatural as well as socially, politically, historically and aesthetically constructed "nature" of what I call secular imagination which was established by the Kemalist regime during the formation of the Turkish state and which disregards the Muslim community. However, I also highlight the reproductions of another dominant and constructed representations and imaginations that occur at the same time with the page's expositions and that are actually very intrinsic to the official (Turkish) imagination which is a product of the distribution of the sensible, and how *Dinci Caps* fails to recognize these taken-for-granted reproductions.

Chapter 5 elaborates that the secular (and leftist) online political humor page *Faiz Lobisi* takes a Westernist and "human-first" position despite both the West and the religious conservative AKP government; exposing the state violence against certain (but mainly secular) people, the violence associated with religious conservatism; showing how religious conservatism leads to state violence, leads the state and society to recede from (Western) progress, and leads other nation(-state)s to *misimagine* and *misrecognize* the Turkish society through the figures of Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the page depicts an *AKPli* (a person who supports AKP) figure as *maganda* through non-humanity, compassion and stupidity with a view to exposing the AKP government's role in constructing what I define as Islamic imagination which is based on the exclusion of the secular groups and revealing the violent, aggressive, exclusionary, unnatural and unacknowledged aspect of this imagination. Nonetheless, I accentuate the

reproductions of certain constructed dichotomies (like modern-traditional, urban-rural, secular-religious), another exclusionary representations, perspectives and imaginations that occur at the same time with and behind those expositions, and that are also very immanent to the sensible or sensory distributed by the authority; and how *Faiz Lobisi* fails to grasp the entity of these reproductions and their problematic aspects.

The sixth and concluding chapter discusses the relationship between political humor and politics through the relationship between aesthetics and politics, demonstrating that there is an economy of imagination, a dialogical relationship between those different online political humor pages through imagination and the depiction of it as *maganda*. I argue how (online) political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse can be both subversive and reproductive at the same time, how a dialogical analysis of *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*, and the phenomenological approach and Ranciere help us grasp this contradictory nature of political humor; accentuating the fact that (online) political humor as a specific worldview of a group is politically and aesthetically destructive in the sense that it exposes the excluded truths, histories, memories, knowledges, sense experiences of that group that the sovereign endeavors to deem invisible, and politically and aesthetically reproductive in the sense that the group's humor discourse fails to grasp the constructed, unnatural and problematic (in terms of exclusion) aspects of its own specific worldview which, in fact, derives from that very imagination and to recognize the fact that its own worldview is essentially a product of the distribution of the sensible.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The Internet as a technical infrastructure of computers and other digital devices permanently connected through high-speed telecommunications networks consists of the forms of content, communication, and information sharing that occur through these networks (Flew, 2002, p. 12). Because interactivity, participation and the development of networks are the key features of the Internet, its usage involves person-to-person communication, group communication, global and local publishing, and information provision.

The Internet which functions both as a developer of unique forms of digital media and as a carrier of traditional media forms has led to a decentralized network of communications which also has paved the way for blurring the traditional dichotomies like producer-consumer and public-private: Since participation is the key, Internet media has generated a participatory culture which refers to "the ability to create and produce" (Horst, 2012, p. 70). This means that a much wider range of people can become producers as well as consumers of content. In this regard, the humor pages on Facebook I have chosen to analyze, and Internet humor in general, are a part of this participatory culture since they do not only produce political humorous contents but also publish contents their followers create and share contents of other humor pages.[18]

[18]*Dinci Caps* has a distinct Facebook album *Sizden Gelenler* (Coming From You) in which the admins gather what their followers have sent them while *Faiz Lobisi* shares the posts of other pages like *Dangerous Turkish Minds*, and *Tolaz* publishes *prezes* that their followers send after voting among the admins of five (personal interview, September 6, 2016).

Furthermore, social networking facilities like Facebook lead us to question what is public and what is private: Facebook is an online social media and social networking service which helps people to find friends and make new friends, to upload photographs and/or links and share them with other people; to create a personal profile to display; to organize political, social and/or cultural events; and to create online groups and/or to be a part of some online groups etc. Because people have different motivations, expectations, reasons and purposes to benefit from this social networking service, it can be said that there is no such thing as Facebook but that there are only the particular genres of use that have developed for different peoples and regions (Miller, 2011, p. x).

In this respect, there is no single public on Facebook, but many publics where some people are included and others excluded. In other words, Facebook is not a community in any singular sense, but rather functions "as social venues in which many different communities may form" (Parks, 2011, p. 105). As we will see below and in the following chapters, online groups/communities have in-group language, references and inside jokes which symbolically connect a private sphere; thus, *Dinci Caps*, *Faiz Lobisi* and *Tolaz* are publicly private online communities in which it seems as if everybody can become a member but in real, some people participate whereas others do not.[19]

Before moving to the pages themselves and the methodology I have chosen to analyze them, it is crucial to accentuate the choice of using the word online instead of virtual: In Internet or digital media studies that generally focus on virtuality as the

[19] There are no rules to follow, or "like," these pages. However, to understand the jokes, you must share the same cultural and symbolic codes. And although you comprehend, you may resent what or who is laughed at. For instance, the admins of *Dinci Caps* told me that they have been receiving certain complaints from some kemalist organizations and even one day they have started a campaign against *Dinci Caps* due to a caps about Atatürk that they actually have not published (personal interview, August 13, 2016).

defining feature of Internet media, a distinction is made between virtual and real, virtual world and real world, virtual communities and real communities (Castells, 1996, 1997 and 1998; Turkle, 2011). Nevertheless, this separation assumes that virtual is opposed to and disembedded from real, and misses the fact that the digital, online, world is as mediated, framed and constructed as the non-digital, offline, world; therefore, there is no reason to privilege one over the other (Miller & Horst, 2012; Miller & Slater, 2000). The real world is virtual and the virtual world is real; they can not be regarded as distinct or separate even though they have different structures, economies, understandings of boundary, relationship and friendship etc. In other words, both virtual and real are two differently-yet-not-separately evolving, developing, framed, constructed and mediated worlds. Thus, following Miller and Slater (2000), I am going to "treat Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces, that they happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform" (p. 5).

With a view to avoiding the virtual-real dichotomy and the illusion it causes, I am going to treat the political humor pages I have chosen to analyze as online groups/communities which, I am going to argue below, represent the tensions in the society, the physical world, such as religious-secular and Turks-Kurds, and engage in dialogue not only with each other, but also with the offline, physical, world. In other words, the virtual-real dichotomy regards these two worlds as distinct, and fails to grasp the dialogical relationship and intertextuality between them whereas the online-offline separation treats them as different but not separate, maintains the fact that online worlds have their own integrity and intertextuality, and avoids to privilege one over the other by emphasizing the dialogical relationship between online and

offline worlds. In this light, the reasons behind my choice of these three pages are very much related with this issue.

2.1 General information about the pages

In humor studies, there are three main humor theories: the hostility-superiority theory which understands humor as generated by a feeling of superiority that people have over others, thus, as a matter of power relations between a joking subject and a joked subject, so called "victim"; the relief theory which suggests that humor provides relief for psychic or mental/nervous energy; and the incongruity theory that claims humor derives from an unexpected encounter between two incongruent components (Keisalo, 2014; Kuipers, 2008; Morreall, 1987 and 1997; Nijholt, 2015; Ridanpää, 2014; Shifman, 2007; Sosa-Abella & Reyes, 2015 and so on).

According to Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes, the initial representatives of the former theory, people laugh from feelings of superiority over other people, thus, constructing a power relation with the joked subject (Kuipers, 2008, p. 363; Morreall, 1987, p. 5; Morreall, 1997, p. 8-23). This theory which assigns a negative meaning to humor is mostly evident in humor studies on stupidity jokes: In her comparative study of jokes about stupid groups told in different countries, Christie Davies (2008) has found that the joketellers have economic and cultural dominance over, hence, have an asymmetrical relationship with the groups joked about who, living on the edges, are generally either an immediately neighboring people or a group of long established and accepted immigrants. However, this kind of study fails to transcend that humor establishes a power relation between the joketeller and the joked, therefore, fails to assign a positive meaning to humor, and fails to see it as a

political means for resistance used by disadvantaged, oppressed groups. In contrast, the analysis of *Dinci Caps* and its stupidity jokes refutes this thesis by demonstrating how (online) political humor disrupts this power relation between the culturally and economically dominant groups and the dominated groups, and showing that *Dinci Caps* uses stupidity jokes against what it calls "Kemalists" and/or "white Turks" which are regarded as the representation of the educated, civilized (thence, culturally and economically dominant) people who are consolidated in Western metropolitan areas in Turkey. In other words, my thesis demonstrates that online political humor functions not as a generator of power relations, but as a strategy of destroying the image of the dominant groups and exposing the truth obfuscated by that image.

The relief or release theory formerly associated with the writings of Santayana and Spencer treats humor as depending on nervous excitement, venting of excess nervous energy. According to Grotjahn (1957), humor is based on guilt-free release of aggression which makes individuals more capable of understanding one another. This therapeutic sense of humor leads to studies on the healthful and/or healing effects of humor. The most notable one belongs to Fry: He has studied the clinical use of humor and its effects in psychotherapy (Fry & Salameh, 1987), and has argued that what he calls "mirthful laughter" is the increase in arterial blood pressure followed by pressure decreases below resting pressure (Fry & Savin, 1988). In this regard, the relief theory which mainly focuses on the therapeutic aspect of humor remains more psychological than sociological.

The latter, incongruity theory, found in Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and many since, holds that the formal object of humor is "the incongruous": What is humorous is some object of perception or thought which clashes with what we would have expected in a particular set of circumstances (Kuipers, 2008, p. 363; Morreall,

1987, p. 6; Morreall, 1997, p. 24-31). Incongruity-based theories virtually dominate contemporary psychological research into humor since they are concerned with the stimulus, that which the joked text is about, with the nature of humorous texts, or with the mental operations involved in processing these texts (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Raskin, 1985; Ruch, 1998). Thus, incongruity-based studies locate humor in the incongruity itself, concentrating only on the humorous texts, hence, disregarding the social relations within these texts. In contrast, my analysis focuses on the online engagement with politics and the reconstruction of the sovereign through the exposition of truths obfuscated by the sovereign in the jokes; thus, concentrating on what these three online political humor pages problematize and incite to talk about rather than the incongruity in the jokes; interested in the dialogue between different groups in the society established through humor; hence, aiming to explain the social relations between these groups, and the relationship between political humor and politics.

There is a general tendency in sociology which understands by humor a form of resistance that gains more visibility and "popularity" during political turmoils and fascist regimes (Astapova, 2015; Oring, 2004; Pi-Sunyer, 1977 and so on). There are humor studies as such in Turkey: Cantek (2001), for instance, has studied the history of *Markopaşa* (1946-1947) which is conceived as the first political humor magazine in the Republic of Turkey, and its significance in Turkey's political context. However, his study is historical and descriptive, telling us what happened to the writers of the magazine, how the one-party government reacted and so on. He has several works on the history of humor and its use in Turkey (2002 and 2011). Moreover, there are recent studies on Gezi humor which view it as carnivalesque (Emre et al., 2013), yet can not go beyond the truism that humor as a form of

resistance is always at the end of the day is political. However, Ayşe Öncü (2012 and 2013) and Aslı Tunç's (2001) works on *Gırgır* and İren Özgür's study (2012) on *CafCaf* are crucial in the field of sociology since Öncü and Tunç demonstrate how the figure of *maganda* represents the people who migrated from rural to Istanbul in the 70s and 80s, and how it turns into an urban narrative to describe the ongoing situation of Istanbul; explaining how *Gırgır* can not be regarded apart from the socio-political environment of Istanbul then, and how the moral and ideological discourses leak to everyday lives through such words whereas Özgür explains the transformations in Turkey's Islamic communities in relation to the general cultural changes in Turkey, and how a group of Muslim youth responds to the changing outlooks and lifestyles of Turkey's Islamists through an analysis of an Islamic humor magazine called *CafCaf*.

Despite the fact that studies on *Gırgır* are period-dependent, hence, unable to explain the present socio-political context, my thesis argues how the *maganda* figure, even though the word is not expressed by the pages, has been metaphorically referred, has gained new meanings and representations through the animal metaphor and the ignorance motif (in the case of *Tolaz*), through bigot and conscience (in the case of *Dinci Caps*) and through compassion and stupidity (in the case of *Faiz Lobisi*), and has been indirectly used by the pages with a view to describing the ongoing socio-political situation of Turkey. Moreover, the analysis of *CafCaf*, concerned with the Islamic communities, fails to grasp the dialogical relationship between different groups (i.e. Islamic groups, secular groups and leftist groups). On the contrary, my thesis aims to fulfill the need of a dialogical study on humor and to explain how different communities or different positions interact with each other

through humor and what this interaction, or dialogue, displays in terms of the relationship between political humor and politics.

In contrast to the above-mentioned classical humor theories which remain limited and more psychological than sociological, I am going to follow the phenomenological approach which understands humor as a specific outlook, worldview or mode of perceiving and constructing the social world (Kuipers, 2008, p. 376). To put it in a different manner, humor in general

> originates in the process of social interaction and bears marks of the particular group by which it was created and accepted . . . [and] changes its content . . . in accordance with the character of the group and the social events to which it reacts. (Obdrlik, 1942, p. 716)

However, in my thesis, by following Ranciere, I take (online) political humor not merely as a specific outlook, worldview or mode of perceiving and constructing the social world, but also as a political and aesthetic discourse: Ranciere (2004) argues that police and politics are very much related with aesthetics since police is, in essence, a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity which determines in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution, which he calls "the distribution of the sensible/sensory." In other words, how to feel, how to perceive, what to do (in common spaces) and when to do are always distributed among the particular individuals, meaning that some are excluded from this distribution. Thus, politics, which is specifically opposed to the police, always concerns the mobilization of the excluded individuals who aim to overcome the problem of exclusion by reconfiguring the way that spaces, senses, perceptions, and forms of activity are distributed. Therefore, a struggle for reconfiguration is both a political and aesthetic matter.

In this regard, my thesis demonstrates how because senses and perceptions are distributed, worldviews or modes of perceiving, sensing and constructing the

social world are also affected by this distribution of the sensory, and online political humor as a specific worldview is not external to this distribution, but a result, a product of it as the specificity derives from the distribution of the sensible. Thus, online political humor is not solely a specific outlook, but a political and aesthetic worldview, a political and aesthetic struggle against the distribution and/or a political and aesthetic reproduction of that distribution.

However, it is crucial to accentuate the fact that this reproduction stems from the imposed forms of classification or distinction that Ranciere seeks to overturn, the norms of representation that might allow for the stable differentiation of one class of person or experience from another because the political aspect of the pages' political humor is associated with identity politics which (re)produces these forms of distinction that Ranciere aims to subvert. According to Ranciere, there is politics as long as "the people" are not identified with a race or a population, as long as the poor is not equated with a particular disadvantaged sector; instead, there is politics inasmuch as "the people" refer to subjects inscribed as a specific figure of those who have no part in the distribution of the sensory (Ranciere, 2007). To put it in a different way, the essence of politics is to disturb this distribution by the ones who have no part without any classification, without any distinction and without any norm of representation.

As we are going to see in the following chapters, the online political humor pages identify themselves with a particular group in the society (Kurds, Muslims and seculars) and endeavor to show how they have no part in the distribution of the sensible which, in essence, produces these classifications. In this respect, their online political humor is not merely a political and aesthetic struggle against this distribution and its imposed forms of classification, but also a political and aesthetic

reproduction of that very distribution of the sensory, its norms of representation. In other words, as we are going to see in the analyses of the online political humor pages, the phenomenological approach and Ranciere help us recognize the fact that (online) political humor as a specific, political and aesthetic worldview of a particular group functions both as a form of resistance (because it makes political and aesthetic disruptions of certain images, representations, discourses and imaginations which disregard and exclude that specific worldview, thence, disregard and exclude the entity of that particular group) and as a form of reproduction (because that particular group fails to grasp the unnatural, constructed and exclusionary "nature" of their specific worldview, failing to make any self-critique).

Using both the phenomenological approach and Ranciere's emphasis on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, I designate three different humor pages, thus, three different online groups, three different political and aesthetic sensations or perceptions on Facebook in terms of the date of establishment, the way they look at the social and political issues, the way they engage with politics, and the way they establish a dialogue with each other: *Dinci Caps*, *Faiz Lobisi* and *Tolaz*. Thence, through an analysis of these pages, I intend to transcend the truism mentioned above, to explain the dialogical relationship between different online communities (different online outlooks or positions), to give information about the relationship between political humor and politics, and to explore the nature of this political agenda-specific humor.

According to my observation of these Facebook pages and field notes, the former, *Dinci Caps*[20] defines itself as "*photoshopu beş din kültürü ve ahlak bilgisi dört olan caps sayfası*" (very successful at photoshop and successful at culture of

[20] It was created in March 2013 and 52 478 people are following the page; however, the numbers are constantly changing.

religion and knowledge of ethics), generally makes and gets credit (or in digital discourse gets "likes") for caps about, and critiques on the main opposition party CHP and its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Kemalism as the main ideology of CHP,[21] the ruling party AKP and its relation with the West (especially about the Palestine issue), Kemalists and/or white Turks that mainly refers to the urban middle classes consolidated in the Western part of Turkey. As we are going to observe in the chapter of *Dinci Caps*, the online political humor page differentiates itself from both *Tolaz* and *Faiz Lobisi* by taking an Islamic position which has a historical basis and a certain imaginary of East and West, and brings a particular critique for the political parties restricted with the Muslim population.[22] Therefore, it can be concluded that *Dinci Caps* is the online representation of Islamic humor, Islamic position and its discourse.

The secondary, *Faiz Lobisi*,[23] founded in June 2013, was defined as "*Mihraklar aleminin en seksisiyiz*" ("We are the sexiest of the world of foreign forces"), publishing caps and being critical about the AKP government and its policies, its followers (both urban and rural, religious section of the society), the intellectuals, musicians, actors who support the government, the social and political events (Gezi, Soma, Roboski, Madımak, Suruç);[24] supporting the protests against the government both in local and global (Gezi, Ferguson, Labor Day, Brasil etc.), and

[21] It is the ideology implemented by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and defined by sweeping political, social, cultural and religious reforms designed to separate the new Turkish state from its Ottoman predecessor and adapt a Westernized way of living, consisting of democracy and secularism.
[22] It is crucial to note that some of the favorite caps, or the caps with the most likes, are about Necmettin Erbakan and his favorite quotes, Palestine and the Palestinians' struggle against the Israeli state. Thence, it might be concluded that Erbakan, whose ideology is defined by strengthening of Islamic values in Turkey and turning away from what Erbakan perceived to be the negative influence of the Western world in favor of closer relations to the Muslim countries, appears as one of the crucial political figures who takes an Islamic position in *Dinci Caps*.
[23]The page followed by 74 825 people was created during the Gezi events (June, 2013). However, after I had finished my analysis, the page was closed; thus, I could not have an interview with them. Because lately it was sharing the posts published by another page called *Dangerous Turkish Minds*, I wrote that page to have an interview and learnt that they have actually created *Faiz Lobisi*.
[24] These are mostly the events in which lots of people had died, and that had been remained as unsolved. *Faiz Lobisi* regards them as state terror, the massacres committed by the government.

commemorating the intellectuals and leftist activists who were generally murdered by unknown assailants or executed (Uğur Mumcu, Deniz Gezmiş, Hrant Dink, Tahir Elçi, Erdal Eren). The posts they have published demonstrate that *Faiz Lobisi* which takes a "human-first" position, a leftist position based on neutrality (Ünlü, 2016, p. 402), claims to represent the Gezi humor, the dominant humor genre formerly associated with the secularists and leftists. In other words, it is the online representation of the secular leftist humor, "human-first" position and its discourse.

The latter, *Tolaz*, is the "oldest" among them, created in March 2012.[25] Unlike the above-mentioned pages, it functions as "fake newspaper"; thus, it is more textual than visual. *Tolaz* is seen as the Kurdish *Zaytung* which is the online satirical newspaper, the Turkish equivalent of *The Onion*. The online political humor page mostly generates satirical, ironic, fake news, *preze* (white lie) in Kurdish,[26] about the ruling party AKP, the main opposition party CHP, MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), their policies on and attitudes towards the Kurdish-weighted regions, their followers (white Turks[27], idealists[28]), conflicts (between the police and Kurdish people) and protests in those regions. The *preze*s and the discourse used by the page indicate that *Tolaz*, which is interested in the Kurdish everyday life, distinguishes itself from the above-mentioned Facebook pages by restricting the posts with the Kurdish regions and by taking an anti-colonial position. In this regard, it might be

[25]43 012 people follow the page whose motto is "*Preze hayat doxri yaşanmaz*" (False life can not be lived right). It shows that the page use two different languages, Kurdish and Turkish, both separately and mixed.

[26] The *preze*s are generally limited with the regions in which Kurdish population is the majority such as Diyarbakır (or Amed in Kurdish), Cizre, Tunceli (or Dersim), Mardin, Gever, Hakkari, Şırnak, Kobanê and so on.

[27] White Turks, in this case, not only represent the urban, secular, Western section of the society, but also they are the representation of urban, well-educated, Turkish nationalists. In this sense, kemalism formerly related with "white Turks" has a significance in terms of secularism and Turkish nationalism.

[28]Idealists refer to *ülkücüler*, the supporters of MHP (and recently AKP). Idealism (*ülkücülük*) is the official ideology and movement of the party which emphasizes on the Turk-Islam ideal and Turkish nationalism. In terms of the Kurdish question, the movement which represents the rural, religious and conservative section of the society is based on the complete denial of the Kurdish population and Kurdishness.

said that the online political humor page as an online community is the online representation of the Kurdish humor, anti-colonial position and its discourse.

Dinci Caps, Faiz Lobisi and *Tolaz* are the online display of the tensions in the offline world in terms of secularism and nationalism. Those tensions, polarizations between religious and secular groups on the one hand and polarizations between Turks and Kurds on the other, which are elaborated historically in the following chapters have a historical and material basis, have different imaginaries and different understandings that stem from the distribution of the sensory in Turkey. These secular and nationalist tensions in the offline world can be seen in online political humor as well since critiques and expositions are made by those Facebook pages according to the different imaginaries and understandings. Thence, *Dinci Caps*, *Faiz Lobisi* and *Tolaz* are the online representatives of these offline tensions. In this respect, they do not solely engage in online dialogue with each other, but they also display the offline dialogical relationship between them. Even though anyone can become a follower of these pages, he/she must be a member of these sections or groups they represent, partaking the symbols, codes and imaginaries to understand the humor, sharing the laughter.[29] This is why they are publicly private online communities or positions.

2.2 Barthian semiotic analysis

Dinci Caps and *Faiz Lobisi* are visual-oriented caps pages whereas *Tolaz* is mostly a verbal-oriented Facebook page. Nonetheless, it is significant not to fall into error as in the case of the virtual-real dichotomy: Visual and verbal can not be treated as

[29] For example, according to *Tolaz*, *Zaytung* is quite funny as long as they are able to comprehend the jokes (personal interview, September 6, 2016).

separate or distinct since the visual is never pure, never comes pure, always touched by texts and discourses; thus, the visual is always, at the end of the day, languaged (Heywood and Sandywell, 2012, p. 26). On the other hand, the verbal contains imagination, it leads one to picture a certain image. It is always already visual. Thence, not merely the visual but also the verbal help one choose "*the correct level of perception*", permitting one to focus both one's gaze and understanding; both of them have a "*repressive* value" (Barthes, 1980, p. 275). In other words, textuality is a foil to imagery while imagery is a significant other of textuality (Dikovitskaya, 2012, p. 75). We are going to see in the following chapters how caps posted by *Faiz Lobisi* and *Dinci Caps* are supported by captions which reveal the preferred meaning by limiting all other possible meanings, and how *preze*s published by *Tolaz* come along with an image, an imagination, that restricts our imagination.

Preserving the relationship between visual and verbal, I make use of Barthian semiology in order to understand what representations include and exclude, what they prioritize and make salient, and what differences they construct between different people, places, things in the caps and *preze*s. In Barthian visual (and verbal) semiotic analysis, the key idea is the layering of meaning. There are two stages of layering. The first is the layer of denotation: What or who is being depicted here? What or who is in the image? What does/do the image or/and the text say? What is happening in the image/text? The denotative meaning which is already established is constituted by the act of recognizing who or what kind of person is depicted there, what he/she is doing. The second one is the layer of connotation. On this second stage, the analyst asks what ideas and values are expressed through what is represented and through the way in which it is represented. In other words, the connotative meaning, which is an ideological one, consists of broad and diffuse

concepts, ideas and values which condense everything associated with the represented people, places and things (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 94-97). Nevertheless, the main limitation of Barthian semiological analysis is the issue of intertextuality. Caps and *prezes* can not be regarded as isolated discrete constructs like advertising images since intertextuality and juxtaposition are key elements of Internet humor. Instead of being isolated discrete units, caps and *prezes* are building blocks, intertwining and interacting with each other. Hence, it is important to consider how these three pages respond to each other through humor. In this sense, I have endeavored to make a dialogical analysis as well within the boundaries of semiology.

Before engaging a semiological analysis, I have looked at and observed every page and its profile separately, taking fieldnotes. During my observation, I have clicked everything displayed in the profiles in order to see what kinds of caps and *prezes* were uploaded since their dates of foundation. Since I am interested in (online) political humor (how the online political humor pages engage with politics), I have divided all the related posts into themes in terms of (social and political) event, political party, social group and/or class since they are the major themes mentioned in the pages. There are thousands of images and texts, thus I have chosen the favorite ones, the ones with the most "like," among them.[30] Then I have started to analyze them in a Barthian way, asking specific questions. For instance, at the denotative level, I was interested in the questions as such: Who/what is being depicted in the image or in the text? What is he/she doing and/or saying? What is happening? In which context the person or the thing is being depicted? At the connotative level, I asked what kind of person/group is represented, how that person/group is being constructed, what concepts, ideas and values are being

[30] 100 images and texts approximately. And I have paid attention that they have 100 likes and more.

produced, associated with that person/group, and what kind of metaphors, patterns, dichotomies are being used in the association of those concepts, ideas and values.

In the light of these questions, I have determined the general motives, metaphors and dichotomies repeatedly used by the online political humor pages to describe the political parties, the people and imagination associated with those parties; thus, I have chosen ten caps and *preze*s from each Facebook page among the most-liked caps and *preze*s to do a semiotic analysis and to explain what these metaphors, motives and dichotomies expose in the following chapters. In addition to the semiotic analysis, I have interviewed the admins of the pages because Barthian semiological analysis fails to explain the motivations of the producers, their expectations from humor and their pages, their thoughts about humor in Turkey and about other humor pages and magazines. In this light, I asked who they are, when and how they have decided to create such a Facebook page, how they produce and whether there are some rules in the production process, what kind of reactions they get from the followers, how they view humor in general and what they think about humor in Turkey, why they have created such a humor page and so on. My aim of using interview as a methodology is to fulfill the gaps in the semiotic analysis of the online political humor pages, expecting that these interviews would lead me to understand how they view politics, political parties and the people and imagination associated with them and how they view each other within the humor field.

Nevertheless, I could not achieve my objectives since I could have a face-to-face interview only with *Tolaz*, not with the other two pages: I had to write my questions to them via Facebook, waiting for them to respond me. Their responds remained too short, limited and general. When I wanted them to elaborate the answers, they either wrote me that they did not want to give elaborative information

(*Dinci Caps*) or gave me the same answers in every question, avoiding to give any detail (*Dangerous Turkish Minds* or *Faiz Lobisi*). Thence, I could not collect detailed and useful data as I could in the interview I had with *Tolaz*. This supports the fact that even though both offline and online worlds can not be regarded as distinct or separate, they are different from each other, and that the online world, the online field, has its own limitations in terms of academic research. In addition, as we are going to witness in the following chapters, the fact that I could not make an interview with *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* has influenced my analysis which could not be enriched with the narratives of the admins of the pages, thus, could not overcome entirely the limitations of Barthian semiotics and remained partially restricted with the caps and *prezes*.

Gathering the conclusions drawn from my analysis and the responds given by the admins together, I have featured the similarities and differences between these three pages in order to assert a theory about the nature of political agenda-based online humor and its relation to politics. Thus, at the end, I have focused on the question "What do these similarities and differences between them tell us about the relationship between (online) political humor and politics?"

CHAPTER 3

THE ONLINE POLITICAL HUMOR OF *TOLAZ*

The political humor Facebook page *Tolaz* concentrates on the political parties in Turkey, their supporters (idealists, nationalitarians, AKP's youth section) and certain groups (environmentalists) in terms of engaging with politics and the sovereign. These mainly used topics are always associated with certain regions; thus, the political parties and their supporters are being depicted in *preze*s in relation to those regions which are limited with Hakkari, Şırnak, Cizre, Dersim (or Tunceli), Diyarbakır (or Amed in Kurdish) and which have a long political history since the formation of modern Turkish state. These cities in which the Kurdish population is the majority are crucial in the sense that they show the boundaries of *Tolaz*'s political humor, and show how the page focuses on the Kurdish region, the Kurdish life, their relation with politics and the sovereign. As one of the admins of the page tells about their political humor which remains limited with those regions:

> We wanted to look from a Kurdish perspective . . . Our political humor completely addresses the lives of Kurds . . . We need this because there has been no production in terms of Kurdish humor . . . There are already pages which do the other [Turkish humor]. (personal interview, September 6, 2016)[31]

In this narrative, the page puts itself in a certain position and differentiates itself from other humor pages by concentrating solely on Kurdish lives and Kurdish regions, thus, limiting its online political humor. The choice of the name for the page also demonstrates how it differentiates itself from other online political humor pages: *Tolaz* is a Kurdish word for *serseri* (drifter), referring to mischief in a positive sense.

[31]For the original passage of this translated text, see Appendix B, 1.

Children who behave as such are called as t*olazi* which is approved by the elders (personal interview, September 6, 2016). Hence, through *tolaz*, a word regarded as sympathetic, the online political humor of the page is sympathized, *childized*, thus, made innocent. The child and hence innocence reference are also used in the construction of Kurdishness which is going to be analyzed below. In other words, by emphasizing its difference in terms of online political humor, claiming that the page represents Kurdish humor, *Tolaz* paves a way for itself in the humor field, criticizing that the existing field mainly focuses on the Turkish lives, therefore, excluding the Kurdish aspect, and hence, aiming to fulfill the gap in the field.

Then how does the page approach the above-mentioned topics differently than *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*? What do they tell us about them and how do they construct a language in their narratives? What do they expose and destroy? In the light of these questions, it may be said that the online political humor of *Tolaz* functions to destroy and reverse certain dominant discourses such as the discourses of glory and wealth, the dominant representations associated with them, and makes use of the animal metaphor and ignorance as motif in order to disclose and transform what I call Turkish imagination which is dominant in the society, and exclusionary in terms of the Kurdish entity into *maganda* which is a caricature figure created by the humor magazines in the 1990s.

3.1 Magnificence/glory and wealth as dominant discourses

To begin with the political parties, the main motif used by the page is visit: The political parties' visits of these regions in order to canvass. Even though those political parties are ideologically different from each other, all of them always

accentuate the magnificence of their meeting, how they are welcomed by the habitants, and how they are proud of the crowd's enthusiasm: The meetings are always represented in media, especially in television channels, with an enthusiastic crowd that is bearing the Turkish flag, chanting slogans, with a crowd that is delighted at the visit. The online political humor page makes fun of this magnificent discourse and its representation, which, in essence, obfuscates the fact that there is no crowd interested in those meetings and/or visits, no enthusiasm, no glory in the above-mentioned regions by using the dominant discourse with a view to revealing the truth behind it. As an example, Figure 3 demonstrates an image in which we see a few people gathering in a garden, and the image is supported with a caption: "Explanation from Davutoğlu: We did a magnificent public demonstration in the garden of our provincial head of Tunceli."

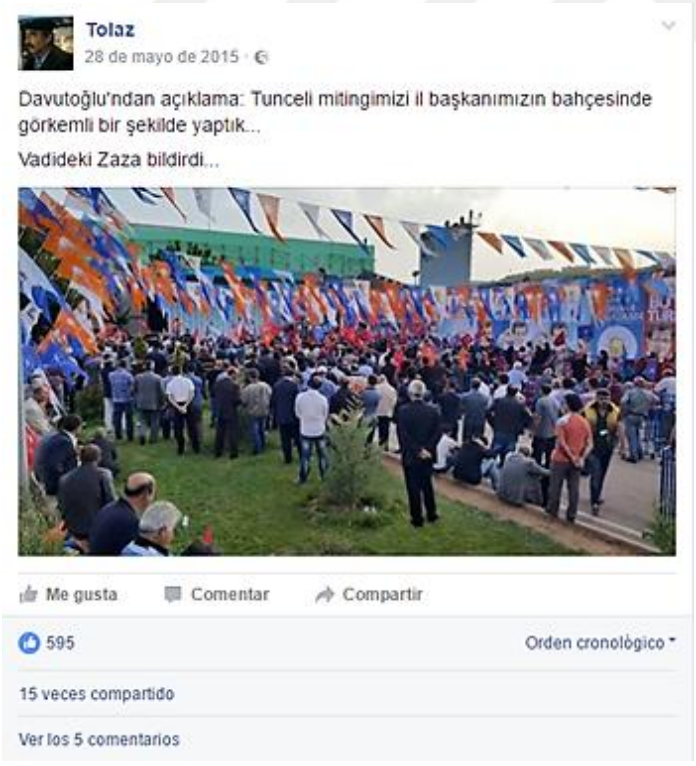


Figure 3. Davutoğlu in Tunceli[32]
Source: [*Tolaz*, May 28, 2015]

[32]All the screen-shot figures inserted in that chapter were retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/tolazorg/?fref=ts on May 16, 2016.

Davutoğlu, the prime minister then, a deputy of AKP which is the ruling political party that prides itself on organizing magnificent, glorious public meetings, visited Tunceli in order to demand votes for general elections in June 2015; however, the image conflicts with the prime minister's statement: Magnificent signifies the impressive magnitude, yet the magnitude here is restrained with the garden of the AKP building in Tunceli (since there are only few people who have come to the meeting). In addition, the public meetings are pre-prepared, pre-organized meetings, which mean that AKP organized the meeting in the garden because it knew there would be only few habitants of Tunceli. In this regard, political humor functions here to disclose the story of glory which is constantly constructed by AKP and which obfuscates the fact that this story of glory is actually a misrepresentation; showing that even though AKP itself knows their meeting will not be crowded, it draws a veil over this truth through the discourse of glory. In other words, through the incongruity between the glory discourse and the garden image, *Tolaz* reveals and destroys the so-called sovereignty, the parochially glorious sovereignty and its discourse of glory by using the government's own discourse against it.

In this respect, humor in this *preze* is not merely political, but also aesthetic in terms of destruction: Glory or magnificence as a dominant discourse which is always supported with the representation of the enthusiastic crowd in media also leads us to imagine, to perceive the impressive magnitude of the Turkish state. This imagination, like the imagination of the nation or the state, or "imagi-nation" as Marc Redfield defines, is an aesthetic matter as well since it is related with our senses, with sensing the nation, sensing the state: According to Redfield (2003), aesthetics which seems disinterested in politics is in fact very entangled with the latter; thence, it is "always in principle and at the end of the day a political discourse," "a discourse

fundamentally *about* modernity" (p. 1 & 10). He sees this relationship between aesthetics and politics in what he calls "imagi-nation": Since a nation-state, a nation, is fundamentally and irretrievably faceless, "it can only be visualized, imagined, through the mediation of a catachresis, an arbitrary sign" (2003, p. 49). In other words, because we can not touch, hear, see, feel or taste a nation or a nation-state, aesthetic discourse allows us to imagine, to sense it through flags, anthems, monuments, architecture, geography, and foods and minerals etc. produced in the land and so on.

In terms of imagi-nation, the glory discourse is not only a political discourse but also an aesthetic one. Here, aesthetically, the nation is (expected to be) perceived as a glorious, enthusiastic crowd through the glory discourse. Therefore, by using the garden image incongruous with the discourse, *Tolaz* does not only reveal the truth behind this discourse but also destroys the dominant image (the image of enthusiastic crowd) and intervenes in the general imagi-nation, in our senses. In other words, Figure 3 signifies both a political and aesthetic destruction. This kind of joking is not limited solely with AKP, including also CHP and MHP. For instance, the online political humor page makes fun of Devlet Bahçeli, the president of MHP, who puts an emphasis on the state, its power, its magnitude and its Turkishness, and his entrapment in the state building during his visit to Tunceli. What is significant here is that although these political parties are ideologically different from each other and they address to different groups in the society (e.g. CHP is an urban-oriented political party and dominant in the Western cities whereas MHP remains formerly as rural-oriented), they are taking the same exclusionary position in terms of the Kurdish identity: They are based either on the total exclusion of the Kurdish entity or its partial recognition. Therefore, their visit to the Kurdish regions which is represented

as limited with the state building and/or the party building in the *preze*s is associated with the (Kurdish) struggle against this (Turkish) exclusion.

In order to understand this relation and the way *Tolaz* makes fun of the political parties as such, one must know the political history of the regions mentioned above and their relation with those political parties, the history which prepares the ground for political and aesthetic destruction in the *preze*s, makes this disruption possible. The regions mentioned here have a history of violence, thus representing a geography of violence, a geography of revolt, a geography of death, a geography of war and a geography of massacre: Tunceli (Dersim), for instance, is one of the regions in which the Kurdish population is the majority and which has witnessed certain revolts in the political history of Turkey. Like Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 and Ağrı Revolt in 1926, Dersim Rebellion in 1938 was a Kurdish "revolt"[33]against the Turkish nationalism, the Turkification of the modern state which was established in 1923, and resulted in massacre, executions, forced migration of the "dangerous" groups to the Western part of Turkey, placement of Turkish population in these forcedly left terrains (Ünlü, 2014). These revolts were perceived and expected to be perceived as backwardness, banditry and foreign provocation (Küçük, 2015, p. 66; Yeğen, 2006, p. 130), and after these rebellions, the existence of the Kurdish entity started to be denied (Beşikçi, 1991; Zürcher, 2012, p. 255). The history of the Kurdish population and its engagement with the Turkish state is not limited to these revolts: The armed struggle between PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the Turkish state which was started in 1984 (and still continues) led to a forced migration

[33]Şükrü Aslan (2010) problematizes the word "revolt" which was resulted in massacre and displacement, questioning whether it was a revolt or a massacre planned by the Turkish state; for him, because Dersim has witnessed, throughout history, state terror, state intervention, massacre and displacement, it signifies a social and cultural entity imprinted on its habitants' memory due to the deep social destruction caused by the Turkish state's political and military intervention, a region which has witnessed the most violent assault of modern history (p. 9-10).

of millions of Kurds to the Western metropolitan areas of Turkey in the 1990s, led to a tension and polarization between Turkish and Kurdish populations: Until 1990s, the state generated a discourse on Kurdishness that was based on the denial of Kurds, excluding the Kurdish entity by not using the word "Kurd" and restraining Kurdishness with reaction (*irtica*) and regional backwardness (Yeğen, 2006, p. 20). In the 1990's (the decade remembered as "the murders of unknown assailants," the decade of JITEM, the agency of Turkish Gendermarie which is responsible for these "unsolved" murders) when the Kurdish civilian movement became powerful,[34] the state developed a discourse on terror which was mainly nourished with the former discourse, describing the issue as a problem that indicated Kurds pose a problem to the Turkish national unity,[35] defining PKK as a separatist terror organization, hence gathering Kurds around terror and separatism.[36] In other words, the Kurdish identity was represented as separatist, terrorist, thus as a threat to the Turkish national unity and security.

In this respect, *Tolaz* is depicting these Kurdish regions as a geography of (Kurdish) struggle, a geography of (Turkish) state violence and a geography of (Turkish) state intervention. In order to construct such a region that the page mainly calls "Kurdistan" in the *preze*s and to disclose this violent history which is constantly being obfuscated by the Turkish state, the online political humor page makes use of wealth as a dominant discourse and means of riot control used by the Turkish state. Figure 4 is the same as the former figure in terms of political and aesthetic destruction:

[34] In the 1990s, Kurdish civil activism was evolved into a voiceful social movement through a series of *serhildan* (civil commotion) which consists of shutting down the shops, various boycotts etc (Güneş, 2015, p. 63).
[35] The issue has been (and still is) treated as *Kürt sorunu* (Kurdish problem/question).
[36] The mainstream media was using the words traitor and separatist instead of Kurd (Somer, 2005, p. 599) and there were several Turkish TV series which describe Kurds as smugglers, bandits and terrorists (Çeliker, 2009, p. 92).



Figure 4. *Preze* on Turkey's underground treasure[37]
Source: [*Tolaz*, October 3, 2012]

By using the state's own discourse (the discourse of wealth) against it, *Tolaz* does not merely reveal the Turkish state's historical wealth in terms of violence, massacre, murder etc., but also destroys the imagi-nation associated with this wealth discourse. The discourse of wealth as a dominant state discourse has two meanings: cultural and material. The former depicts Turkey as multicultural, as the host of different cultures throughout history, thus as cultural wealth whereas the latter depictures Turkey as wealthy in terms of minerals, thus as underground treasure. While the former multiculturalizes the Turkish nation-state, the latter nationalizes in terms of geography. Despite their different functions, they both stand for the strategies of sustaining the imagi-nation. Even though the cultural wealth discourse puts an emphasis on multiculturality which seems as if it stands in contrast to nationalism and nation-state, claiming the state as neutral and equal to all cultures and identities, it nevertheless denies or partially recognizes the Kurdish entity (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2015, p. 5). In other words, the denial or the partial recognition of the multicultural discourse forms the basis which makes the dominant identity, the Turkish identity in this case that centers on the imagi-nation, invisible (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2015, p. 6).

[37] "İdris Naim Şahin [the minister of internal affairs then] talked about the human bones founded in the ground of new governor's building in Hakkari: 'These are all Turkey's underground treasure!'"

Whether cultural or underground treasure, the wealth discourse as a political and aesthetic discourse has a pedagogical aspect since it is effectively used in the education system to teach the individuals how to imagine, how to sense the nation, the homeland, the state as such. Therefore, by using the state discourse of wealth against the Turkish state itself, *Tolaz* makes fun of this dominant discourse. In other words, through online political humor, the page destroys the aesthetic, beautiful image of the land, the state and the nation, transforming it into an ugly, disgraceful image, turning both the multicultural wealth and the underground treasure, the praised wealth into a wealth of death, massacre and violence, into a shameful wealth by referring to the unknown assailants and the revolts resulted in massacre through the discourse of wealth. Joking with the wealth discourse, Figure 4 reveals how Hakkari, like the other Kurdish regions, is a region of state violence, full of human bones which represent the murders of the Kurdish people committed by the Turkish state, disclosing the violent history which is being obfuscated by the Turkish state. Hence, online political humor functions here as intervening in and ruining the official discourse, the official history and the official imagi-nation.

Furthermore, the Kurdish regions are not solely depicted as the regions of massacre, violence and death, but also the regions of (the Kurdish) struggle against the Turkish state. They are the regions of intervention as well as the regions of struggle. With a view to demonstrating the combative aspect of these regions, *Tolaz* makes use of means of riot control as a general motif. Through *Pepperosphere* (*İsotosfer*), for instance, Figure 5 makes fun of the everlasting situation of these Kurdish regions, the Turkish state's everlasting attempt to control them and the habitants, and the everlasting struggle of the Kurdish habitants against the Turkish state:



Figure 5. *Preze* on Cizre[38]
Source: [*Tolaz*, October 10, 2013]

There is another political and hence, aesthetic destruction here: As it is mentioned above, the Kurdish revolts against the Turkish state, thus, the regions, are (expected to be) perceived as backward, banditry and so on. Nonetheless, through Pepperosphere, the online political humor page transforms the representation of backwardness and banditry into a representation of the Kurdish struggle for freedom, legal and human, rights against the violent, exclusionary and interventionist Turkish state. Thence, it destroys the negative depiction and turns it into a positive representation. In this regard, it might be said that on the one hand, *Tolaz* reveals the Turkish state's violence against the Kurdish population, its intervention in their lives; on the other hand, through struggle, self-celebration is involved here: The reason for the formation of Pepperosphere above Cizre is not only because of the Turkish state's intervention, but also due to the Kurdish people's struggle. In other words, Pepperosphere is a product of both the Turkish state violence and the Kurdish fight, a product of the combative Kurdish people who do not submit, giving the message that there will be struggle as long as there is intervention.

According to these depictions of the Kurdish geography and the Turkish state, it might be indicated that *Tolaz* is making use of the anti-colonial discourse, taking an anti-colonial position, an anti-colonial narrative to reveal the obfuscated truths,

[38]"Kurdistani scientists explained that due to the use of pepper gas, they named the new layer formed above Cizre as 'Pepperosphere'."

the covered history through online political humor. In other words, the online political humor page makes use of the Colonial Kurdistan thesis which was generated in the mid-1970s, a radical thesis which argues that Kurdistan is an international (interstate) colony, divided and shared by Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Çağlayan, 2012; Küçük, 2015, p. 66; Ünlü, 2016, p. 401); therefore, depicting the Turkish state as imperialist and violent, and Kurdistan as a colonial geography, a geography of violence, death and imperialist intervention and as a geography of struggle against it. In this sense, the anti-colonial position that *Tolaz* takes makes the page's online political humor radical and destructive as well since it reveals and incites to talk about the colonial history of the Turkish state which endeavors to destroy any kind of (Kurdish) struggle and how it denies the entity of Kurdistan as a geography and puts an emphasis on the geography's backwardness. It is destructive in the sense that it intervenes in and disrupts the history of the Turkish state which is based on the struggle for independence against the imperialist Western states.

To put it differently, through online political humor; minor and counter-language, and micro, anti-colonial, hence, counter-memory of the geography depicted by *Tolaz* come into existence and intervene in the official imagi-nation, the official language, the official memory and the official history. In Rancierian terms, online political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse here intervenes in the state's distribution and regulation of spaces, senses and perceptions which exclude the Kurdish population to participate, and exposes this exclusion through the dominant discourses of glory and wealth and by making use of the counter-sense experience of the Kurdish geography.

3.2 Child versus animal

Since geography has a significant role on the formation of subject, the depiction of the Kurdish regions is formerly involved in the construction of Kurdishness, the Kurdish identity and the Kurdish subjects. In this sense, the online political humor page uses struggle as the main motif not merely in the depiction of the Kurdish regions, but also in the construction of Kurdishness. The motif of struggle is supported with the child metaphor, as well; in Figure 6, *Tolaz* introduces us to a Kurdish child which is excluded and politicized due to "*Ez li virim*," which is a Kurdish phrase of "I am here":



Figure 6. The depiction of Kurdishness[39]
Source: [*Tolaz*, September 10, 2012]

The phrase represents Kurdishness, the politicization of Kurdishness, represents a subjectivation process of Kurdish people, and thus, the exclusion of the Kurdish people, Kurdishness and the Kurdish identity from the (Turkish) public arena. Like Althusser's example of "Hey, you there!" as a scene of interpellation, a scene of subjectivation, a Kurdish individual becomes a Kurdish political subject through Kurdish language and its exclusion: In Althusser's scene of interpellation; in a street, or in any place, the police, or anybody, calls a person "Hey, you there!" and the

[39] "It has been learnt that 66-month Şoreş [Revolution] who started the school goes on milk strike for two hours after he got kicked out from the class because he said 'Ez li virim' [I am here] during the class attendance."

hailed person turns around. According to him, by this, the hailed person becomes a subject because "he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed'" (Althusser, 1971, p. 174). As such, Şoreş does not respond, consciously or unconsciously, in Turkish as required, but in Kurdish; thus, even though he has recognized that the hail was really addressed to him, "*Ez li virim*" leads him to become not a subject but a misrecognized subject, a Kurdish subject, and leads him to be excluded from the public arena (the class in this case). In other words, the hail or the call does not merely mean to become a subject, but refers to take a certain subject-position which has been projected to the individual by the call (Macherey, 2012, p. 13); thence, the Kurdish phrase is the moment when the individual becomes an excluded, misrecognized subject, taking an excluded, misrecognized subject-position, i.e. the Kurdish subject-position.

The name of the expelled child, Şoreş (which refers to revolution), is also crucial in the sense that Kurdishness, Kurdish language, and the name Şoreş mean both an instrument of exclusion for the sovereign and an instrument of (not merely political but also aesthetic) struggle for Kurds against the sovereign. "*Ez li virim*" (I am here) is the voice of struggle, the voice of reminding of his/her existence even though he/she is pretended to be not "here," it is a political and aesthetic attempt to reconfigure the distribution of spaces. What is funny is that a boy who is just 66 months old is going on a strike, a milk strike, when he is expelled from the class as he has spoken in Kurdish. In other words, what is humorous about this *preze* is that a 66-month-old boy is conscious of his politicized and excluded identity, aware enough to revolt against this exclusion. It demonstrates how a geography's political history, social memory and sense perception (in relation to the sovereign) play a significant role in the subjectivation of its habitants, how they are a knowledge and

(sense) experience which are inscribed into the geography and its habitants' bodies. Political humor in this *preze* is destructive in the sense that it does not merely disclose the fact that the Kurdish entity is denied, excluded from the Turkish public scene, politicized and exposed to violence by the Turkish state, but also it opens the path for making fun of this political subject position, thus, destroying the romanticization and sentimentalization of this struggling position by caricaturizing the image of Kurdish child (turning the Kurdish child who throws rock at the government officials like the police into a child who refuses to drink milk).[40] To put it in a different manner, the *preze* creates a new sphere for a possible representation of Kurds by destroying the dominant representations of Kurds in the (Turkish) public arena (Kurds as separatist, Kurds as terrorist, Kurds as piteous).

Moreover, child signifies innocence, purity, devoid of any kind of ideology, ignorance of racism etc., and hence, it is generally used in terms of political opposition. With a view to underlining an important issue, child as an innocent figure is used in politics: For example, child sexual abuse is more controversial than female sexual abuse, or the figures of babies named Aylan and Ümran are more affective and mobilizer in order to point to the cruelties of war, to the tragic lives of refugees. That is why, people are more affected by the images of Aylan and Ümran, thus, sharing those images in social media to show how their innocence is beslimed by and a victim of the "evil" politics. In this regard, in Figure 6, the innocence of Şoreş metaphorically refers to the innocence of claiming the right to speak in one's mother tongue, one's native language, the right to participate in the common spaces. This demand is demonstrated as a natural claim rather than a political claim. Claiming

[40] The stories or narratives about being a Kurdish child, for instance, are mostly constructed in terms of violence and pain (Akın & Danışman, 2012). Those kinds of narratives generally aim to establish an empathy which may lead to a self-critique; however, they also pose a threat of romanticization of the Kurdish identity which may prevent any self-critique and can not transcend the situation of being "sorry for Kurds."

one's right is primarily natural like milk. Therefore, it might be said that here, there is, through the innocent figures (child and milk), a representation of a political issue as a natural and pure issue, a representation of Kurdishness as a natural and pure identity instead of a political identity, and that there is a transformation of a figure that is throwing rock into a figure that resists drinking milk.

In contrast to the innocent Kurdish figure that is exposed to violence, to exclusion from the (Turkish-dominant) public, thus, self-conscious of his/her (excluded) Kurdishness, and struggling against this exclusion and violence; the online political humor page depicts a Turkish figure that is unaware of his/her problematic subject position, aggressive, obedient, *un-self-conscious* and ignorant by using the animal metaphor and the motif of ignorance. To start with the animal metaphor, both Figure 7 and Figure 8 are depicting MHP, its president and its supporters as wolf (and dog) which is the emblem of the party.



Figure 7. *Preze* on the idealists[41]
Source: [*Tolaz*, January 28, 2014]

[41] "The initiative of Kurdistani doctors calls people for being vaccinated [getting a rabies vaccine] against the possible idealist attacks."



Figure 8. *Preze* on Devlet Bahçeli[42]
Source: [*Tolaz*, November 26, 2014]

The reason why the party is associated with attacks is that the Kurdish people have been attacked, and their shops and houses have been overrun by *ülkücüler* (the idealists) several times. Thence, there has always been a tension between the Kurdish people and this group called idealists. Nonetheless, the animal metaphor transcends the aspect of aggressiveness: According to Turkish Language Association, wolf or dog refers to an animal which is both loyal and aggressor, having no self-conscious but an improved sense of smell and being used for hunting and watchman services, and the word is metaphorically used for the people with misconducts who ingratiate themselves into someone's favor with low and *aşağılık* (inferior) purposes. In both figures, the dog or wolf metaphor transgresses the meaning of the emblem of the party which is believed to represent freedom of the Turkish nation and a conductor of the Turkish nation during the threatening situations, accentuating racism and the racist attacks against the Kurdish population on the one hand, and putting an emphasis on its inferiority in contrast to the above-mentioned innocence on the other.

In other words, there are two opposing figures: A Kurdish figure as an innocent child, as self-conscious of his/her Kurdishness due to exclusion whereas a

[42] "'Kutik esto' [beware of dog] banners are being prepared for Devlet Bahçeli who has informed he is coming to Dersim today."

Turkish figure as an aggressive animal, serving to the sovereign, ingratiating himself into the sovereign's favor, as unconscious of his racist, exclusionary and constructed Turkishness. In this sense, the emblem of the party and its meaning are destroyed through these *preze*s and turned into a shameful meaning which represents serving (thus destroys the meaning of the Turkish nation's freedom and the meaning of conductor) and inferiority (because of the above-mentioned metaphorical meaning in Turkish language). Here the page makes another political and aesthetic destruction and intervention of the dominant representation and imagination and the meaning of, sensing and perceiving Turkishness.

Furthermore, the animal metaphor and the aggressiveness are not only used for the group called idealists. Figure 9, for instance, addresses to the attack on the building of HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), a political party which is formerly associated with the Kurdish population in Turkey, before the local elections in March 2014:



Figure 9. The people of Fethiye[43]
Source: [*Tolaz*, March 10, 2014]

[43] "Kurdistani people are mobilized for the people of Fethiye who have eaten the flag of HDP due to the starvation in order to help them."

The people of Fethiye organized a protest against the opening of the HDP building in Fethiye, stating that they would not allow any terrorist organization in their city and overrunning the building, burning the party's flag. The so-called protest was not intervened by the police that allowed them to overrun the building and to burn the flag and it was celebrated by the mayor since the people of Fethiye looked after their city. Here, *Tolaz* makes fun of the racist attack by animalizing the issue, regarding the issue, thus, racism, as if it is an issue of hunger: People are attacking the building and burning the flag not because they are aiming to protect their city from the terrorist Kurdish people but because they are starving so they are eating HDP's flag. To put it in a different way, the racist attack which is demonstrated as heroic saga, hence, signifies self-celebration, a celebration of Turkishness sustains a political and hence, aesthetic destruction: The perception of those kinds of attacks as heroic saga is transformed into a representation of an animalistic starvation, a representation of inhumanity. The heroes of Fethiye turn into the animals of Fethiye; thence, heroism turns into a shame. The mobilization of the Kurdish people to help the habitants of Fethiye, in this sense, connotes "white man's burden": Kurdistani people have the burden of feeding the hungry people of Fethiye, i.e. the burden of teaching humanity to them. In other words, the habitants are not starving due to lack of food but lack of humanity. Here the animal metaphor not solely goes beyond the MHP figure by including the people of Fethiye but also develops the above-mentioned opposing figures (a Kurdish figure as innocent, self-conscious and humane while a Turkish figure as aggressive, unaware and inhumane), and draws our attention to the fact that Turkishness, its sensation, perceptibility and imagination as a whole is exclusionary and violent by constructed "nature." On the other hand, in Figure 10, ox as a metaphor is representing AKP's youth section:



Figure 10. AKP' youth section as ox[44]
Source: [*Tolaz*, September 10, 2012]

Lifting the parliamentary immunity of the political parties is a way of preventing them to participate in the assembly and to do politics, thus, preventing them to represent the people who vote for them. In the political history of Turkey, there are several periods as such in terms of the mostly Kurdish-oriented political parties. The reason behind selecting an image of ox for such a representation is not related with "walking," but associated with the meaning of ox: Turkish Language Association defines ox literally as an animal which is made use of its meat and its strength with a view to ploughing and driving cart, a male animal which is emasculated, castrated; and metaphorically as a person who is lummox, uncouth, inconsiderate and talentless.

In this regard, it might be said that by making use of this description, the online political humor page has given a new meaning and representation to the word

[44] "The youth section of AKP has given support, by walking, to Burhan Kuzu [a deputy of AKP] who said they would lift the parliamentary immunity of BDP [old name of HDP]."

maganda (lout) by creating an animal-like figure: *Maganda*, created by the cartoonists in the 1990s, was representing and caricaturizing a village-oriented male who basically makes city life unbearable for others, making life miserable, who have no respect for the rights of others; a person who is believed responsible for all the crimes in the city, symbolizing the uncivilized people (Tunç, 2001). The production of this figure is mainly associated with the migration from rural to urban areas (Öncü, 2012 and 2013; Tunç, 2001); thus, it was also used for Kurds who were forced to leave their terrains and to migrate to the Western metropolitan cities (Cantek, 2002, p. 275). In this regard, the animal metaphor is used to represent an animal-like figure which is not limited to village-orientation, an animal-like (Turkish) male who makes life miserable and unbearable for (Kurdish) people, who have no respect for the rights of (Kurdish) people; thus, who is believed to be responsible for all the crimes in the Kurdish-related places (shops, towns, villages, cities, workplaces, neighborhoods etc.), symbolizing the uncivilized person.

According to the above figures, the animal metaphor has several functions: First of all, through the animal metaphor, *Tolaz* monopolizes humanity, morality, intelligence, civilization, self-conscious here by exposing how certain dominant ways of being (a kind of Turkishness which is based on the exclusion of the Kurdish entity, a racist and exclusionary Turkishness in this case) are problematic since they lack self-consciousness, ethics and insanity; thence, they are based on misrecognition. Secondly, the animal metaphor reverses the imperial discourse which animalizes the natives and represents them as savages, inferior and ignorant of civilization, and uses it against the imperial sovereign, thus, turning the sovereign into *maganda*. Lastly, and in relation to the second aspect, the metaphor turns the aesthetics of this kind of discourse, the imagination, perception and sensation of the

natives upside down: Who is civilized, humane, self-conscious and innocent is, in fact, the native, Kurds in this case.

The exposition of certain and mostly unrecognized states of seeing, hearing, perceiving, feeling, knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not perceiving, not feeling and not knowing, that I am going to define as imagination which is dominant, taken for granted and as natural, thus, remain unproblematized (in the case of *Tolaz*, the exposition of the Turkish imagination through the animal metaphor), is supported with the ignorance motif: Figure 11 cites to the day when a person in Lice (a Kurdish-populated region) hauled down the Turkish flag in order to protest the Turkish state and the day when the Turkish Consulate in Mosul was invaded by ISIS. These events have incited other certain events such as the attacks on the Kurdish-oriented places.



Figure 11. The depiction of the ignorant *Alperenler*[45]
Source: [*Tolaz*, June 11, 2014]

However, the page emphasizes the other aspect of the above-mentioned imagination rather than its animal-like (aggressive, un-self-conscious) aspect: Through *Alperenler*, that are the group called idealists, that are proud of their Turkish homeland, their Turkish history etc., the figure discloses certain states of being

[45] "*Alperenler* [the group called idealists, the supporters of MHP, and also AKP today], who is planning to go to Lice on Friday to plant the Turkish flag, are trying to find the location of Mosul, in which the Turkish Consulate has been invaded, on the map."

ignorant, making fun of the fact that these groups, that put an emphasis on the Turkish nation and homeland, essentially do not know where and/or what their homeland is. The joke, the irony, about the ignorance depicted in Figure 11 may be associated with lack of education, information and knowledge. Nevertheless, *Tolaz* is not limiting the ignorance motif, just like the animal metaphor, to the idealists, but expanding the scope of ignorance and hence, making a reference to its another crucial aspect – such as Figure 12:



Figure 12. *Preze* on the ignorant environmentalists[46]
Source: [*Tolaz*, June 7, 2013]

Through "environmentalists," Figure 12 addresses to the educated urban class which is mostly consolidated in the Western part of Turkey and transcends the meaning of ignorance as lack of knowledge and education by demonstrating the fact that even the educated people do not know the Eastern part of Turkey in which the majority of the Kurdish population lives, even the environmentalists, the mainly educated people in the society, endeavor to find the location of Erciş on the map like the idealists who try to find Mosul and Lice's locations. By accentuating this tragicomic fact, *Tolaz* points that the "not-knowingness" here does not derive from lack of education, information and/or knowledge, but it is an active ignorance, an active ignorance

[46] "The environmentalists, who have learnt that two hundred millions of trees in Erciş (a Kurdish-populated sub-province) would be cut, are trying to find the location of Erciş on the map."

about the Kurdish entity which is very much associated with what I call Turkish imagination. As Charles Mills (2007) defines the ignorance of whiteness:

> Imagine an ignorance that resists.
> Imagine an ignorance that fights back.
> Imagine an ignorance militant aggressive, not to be intimidated,
> an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly –
> not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated
> at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself
> unblushingly as knowledge. (p. 13)

It can be said that through the animal metaphor and the ignorance motif, the online political humor page exposes the Turkish imagination, or Turkishness as Barış Ünlü (2014, 2016a and 2016b) defines, Turkishness as certain patterned but mostly unrecognized states of seeing, hearing, perceiving, knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not perceiving, not knowing; and discloses how the active ignorance of Turkishness leads to indifference to the Kurdish entity, the Kurdish region and its violent political history; thus, problematizes the exclusionary, indifferent and ignorant aspects of Turkishness which are taken for granted and as natural, hence, are not problematized, recognized and acknowledged. In other words, through the motif of ignorance (by caricaturizing the – active – ignorance), the online political humor of *Tolaz* destroys the meaning of ignorance as "not-knowingness" and transforms it into an active ignorance which signifies the choice of remaining ignorant despite the information, the knowledge and the knowingness. Thence, the page turns the representation of ignorance as bliss into a representation of ignorance as a shame since the Turkish imagination signifies the active choice of remaining ignorant and indifferent to the exclusion of and the violence exposed to the Kurdish entity.[47]

This unrecognized, unproblematized and unacknowledged Turkish imagination is also related with the way the page defines Turkish humor: Turkish

[47]Similarly, as we are going to see in the next chapter, *Dinci Caps* calls these environmentalists as kemalists and makes a similar-yet-different exposition of active ignorance towards the Muslim community through conscience.

humor as unaware of the facts, as a state of seeing oneself beyond what it actually is, which becomes chronic, unconscious of the inconveniency of what it does (personal interview, September 6, 2016).[48] In this respect, the page differentiates its online political humor from Turkish humor, claiming that *Tolaz* is aware of the facts and able to see the actuality, and takes them into consideration. In addition, the page views Turkishness as constructed by the Turkish state in contrast to Kurdishness and as actually restricting the Turkish individuals:

> Sırrı Süreyya [a deputy of HDP] was saying that you have not given any other option to Turks beyond the option of being hostile towards Kurds . . . I mean the state gives this message very clearly, the message that "I am limiting the things you can do and if you transcend this boundary you will be punished" . . . This shows clearly the boundaries of Turks' roles deliberated by the state. And this is really not a good thing. A piteous situation . . . The tradition of opposition to the state has not developed in Turks. And this, I mean, is not a thing to be proud of. In the politics of Turkey, there is not just Kurdish issue, but a general issue. Everyone should revolt but is not doing it. The state can not be criticized, it is a sacred thing. And this is pathetic . . . Our [Kurds'] reason of becoming conscious is national struggle . . . But there is none in Turks . . . and he is never aware of this lack.[49] (personal interview, September 6, 2016)

As the narrative shows, *Tolaz* monopolizes self-consciousness, self-awareness, self-recognition and struggle (by using the animal metaphor and the ignorance motif); disclosing how Turkishness is being constructed and framed by the Turkish state, how it functions to shape and to restrict the Turkish individuals' lives, expectations, political choices, imagination and their emotional, psychological and epistemological worlds, how it prevents them to struggle against it, and how they regard the life and truth imposed by the Turkish state as their own life and truth (Küçük, 2015, p. 70). Thence, the page destroys the heroic representation of Turkishness and turns it into a shameful, piteous representation of Turkishness.

[48] "Gerçeklerden bihaber . . . Kendisini olduğu şeyin ötesinde görüyor . . . Gayet kronikleşmiş ve yaptığının bir sakıncasının olduğunun farkında değil."
[49] For the original passage of this translated text, see Appendix B, 2.

Furthermore, the above narrative is related with the distribution of the sensory: The Turkish state distributes and regulates the senses in such a way that the Turkish individuals can feel nothing but hatred towards the Kurdish individuals. The Turkish state has distributed senses, feelings, perceptions, spaces, times and forms of activity among the former, and has excluded the latter. The Kurdish individuals are not only excluded from and/or partially included in the (Turkish) public arena, not only excluded from and/or partially included to have certain rights, but also they are excluded from and/or partially included to have senses and feelings towards the Turkish people. In other words, the narrative indicates that what Ranciere (2004) defines as "police" rather than politics is not only a distribution of spaces and forms of activity, regulation of such distribution, but also a(n aesthetic) distribution and regulation of senses and emotions, and *Tolaz*, in this narrative, exposes this political and aesthetic distribution and regulation which is essentially exclusionary.

Nonetheless, monopolization of struggle in the narrative is very much associated with that distribution of the sensible as well since the Turkish state has distributed struggle among the Kurdish individuals and excluded the Turkish individuals to own it. To put it differently, the former can do nothing but struggle, and the latter can do nothing but obey the distribution and regulation (just like the animals). This is why *Tolaz* depicts Kurdistan as a geography of struggle and Kurdistani people as combative. While Turkish people have no other option than hatred, active ignorance, indifference and obedience, Kurdish people have no other option but struggle and self-consciousness. In this sense, it might be said that the way *Tolaz* differentiates itself from Turkish humor, and Kurdishness from Turkishness is problematic since it fails to overcome the distribution of the sensory, spaces and forms of activity (failing to transgress this activity of struggle), and fails to bring

another way which may demonstrate that another distribution is possible. In other words, the online political humor of *Tolaz* is not external, but actually intrinsic to this distribution; therefore, it is both disruptive because it intervenes in and exposes the distribution, and reproductive since it does not transcend the boundaries of this distribution, hence, reproduces that very distribution of the sensory.

To conclude, the online political humor page *Tolaz* which takes an anti-colonial position opens the path for both political and aesthetic destruction of and political and aesthetic intervention to the dominant Turkish imagination which constructs and shapes the epistemological, psychological, emotional and aesthetic worlds of the Turkish individuals by using wealth and glory as the dominant state discourses and through the animal metaphor and the motif of ignorance. By exposing the obfuscated truths behind this imagination, *Tolaz* incites us to realize, talk about, criticize and problematize this unnatural as well as socially, culturally, politically and aesthetically constructed imagination.

CHAPTER 4

THE ONLINE POLITICAL HUMOR OF *DİNCİ CAPS*

In the previous chapter, I have analyzed that from an anti-colonial perspective, the Kurdish online political humor page *Tolaz* makes both a political and aesthetic disruption of what I describe as the Turkish imagination by making fun of the dominant discourses of glory/magnificence and wealth (both in terms of culture and underground treasure); and by depicting (through the animal metaphor and the ignorance motif) this dominant imagination which is constructed by the Turkish state in order to shape the epistemological, psychological and emotional worlds of the Turkish individuals, taken for granted and as natural by them, and thus, remains unrecognized and hence, unproblematized as *maganda*. By disclosing the truths obfuscated by this imagination and revealing the hidden (counter-) history behind it, *Tolaz* incites the followers of the page to recognize, talk about, critique and question the unnatural and constructed "nature" of this dominant, official imagination.

The political humor Facebook page *Dinci Caps*, on the other hand, focuses on the political parties (mainly CHP, and then AKP and HDP), the ideologies and groups associated with those parties (Kemalism and Kemalists and/or white Turks, and leftism) in terms of engaging with politics and the sovereign. These formerly mentioned topics are always associated with certain issues (Muslims, their lives, and the East which is formerly related with them); thence, the political parties and their ideologies (and their supporters) are being depicted in caps in relation to those issues which are limited to Muslimness, to the ummah, and have a long political history since the formation of the modern Turkish state as well. These restricted issues are

crucial in the sense that they demonstrate the boundaries of *Dinci Caps*'s political humor, show how the page concentrates on the geography, in which the majority of the Muslim population lives, the Muslim life and their relation with politics and the authority. In this regard, the page explains why they have created such a page:

> I remember particularly that we have created this page in order to break the monologism in our circle . . . People do not have to think like the mainstream. We may have our own principles and through them, some people can be criticized in humorous ways. (personal conversation, August 13, 2016)[50]

In this narrative, the mainstream and the circle refer to both the existing humor field, the media in general and to the Muslim community which, the page believes, remain limited and exclusionary in terms of different and/or oppositionary thoughts. To put it in a different way, the page critiques on both the exclusionary aspect of the humor field that disregards the Muslim population and their relation with the sovereign, and on the lack of opposition in the Muslim community and in its media. In this sense, the page aims to demonstrate the possibility of an Islamic humor which is not necessarily pro-government like the other Islamic humor magazines, and which can be as critical as other humor magazines and other humor pages.[51] By focusing on solely on the Muslims' lives, their engagement with politics and the sovereign, and the geography associated with the Muslim population in a critical way, the page takes a certain position and differentiates itself from all other humor pages, hence, limiting its online political humor but creating a space within the current humor field, which was distributed in such a way that groups formerly associated with secularism were dominating the field. The choice of the name for the page (Religious, or Pious, Caps) also shows the way *Dinci Caps* differentiates itself from other online political humor pages, claiming that the page represents Islamic humor. In other words, by

[50]For the original passage, see Appendix B, 3.
[51] In her study on the Islamic humor magazine *CafCaf*, İren Özgür (2012) tells how the magazine is viewed as pro-government (and hence, not humorous) by other humor magazines because it does not criticize the government.

putting an emphasis on its difference in terms of online political humor, claiming that the page represents (critical) Islamic humor, *Dinci Caps* also paves a way for itself in the humor field, criticizing that the existing field remains exclusionary in terms of Muslim(ness) and that the existing Islamic humor magazines remain uncritical in terms of the government.

Then how does the page approach the above-mentioned topics differently than the others? What do they tell us about them and how do they construct a language in their narratives? What do they expose and destroy? As a response to those questions, it might be said that the online political humor of *Dinci Caps* functions to destroy certain dominant appearances, representations of the political parties in relation to the East which is constructed here as the geography of the ummah, and depictures two conflicting female figures (as both a violent and exclusionary figure and a victim of violence and exclusion) with a view to demonstrating the violence and exclusion exposed by the dominant ideologies (namely Kemalism and leftism) against Muslims, especially the Muslim women.

4.1 The as-if appearance in relation to the ummah

To start with the political parties, the initial goal is to expose political hypocrisy and political dishonesty of the ideologically different political parties. CHP, in this regard, is the political party formerly criticized and associated with political hypocrisy: Figure 13 is a photograph of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the president of CHP, which is a political party centered on "neutrality claim" that signifies that the party is neutral and hence, equal to all religious and ethnic groups in the society (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2015, p. 6).



Figure 13. Caps on Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu[52]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, December 29, 2013]

We can understand from the image that he is visiting African Muslim community, disbursing aid provided by *Kızılay* (Turkish Red Crescent). In the image, he is posing to the camera while giving the aid package to the official. The page here discloses that the pose of Kılıçdaroğlu is not solely for the camera to take his picture, but also for his appearance (that *Dinci Caps* views as as-if) which aims to represent his care for and his neutrality to the Muslim population in his country and in the world. Photographs may function as a proof since they carry a meaning of "has-been-there" (Barthes, 1993); however, they can represent a constructed image as well. The page here refers to this constructedness of this image rather than its "has-been-there" meaning by supporting the image with a headline, "Picture me as the lover of the ummah, bro". The phrase ("Picture me as…, bro") is formerly used for joking with the person who endeavors to sail under false colors. In this respect, by posing to the camera, Kılıçdaroğlu tries to give a caring and neutral pose in order to demonstrate his neutrality, and to show that he has been there to help the Muslims and hence, to be associated with the ummah. *Dinci Caps* deconstructs this representation by

[52]All the figures of this chapter, the screen-shots, were retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/dincaps/?fref=ts on May 3, 2016. For the uncut versions of these screen-shots, see Appendix A, 1-10.

making fun of his endeavor of giving a pose and reveals the fact that he actually tries to sail under false color, thus, destroys his "neutrality," and discloses his as-if appearance obfuscated by the exact photograph. In other words, *Dinci Caps* aims to expose political hypocrisy and political dishonesty, and to reveal that CHP has always disregarded the Muslims and that it views them as potential votes.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note here that there is a reason behind the page's constant depiction of this as-if appearance and political hypocrisy of CHP, and the page's exposition of this kind of truth, a reason which has a historical basis since the formation of modern Turkey. To put it in a different manner, there is a historical context which forms the basis of Figure 13: Right after the formation of modern Turkey, there was a secularization process which aimed to separate the new state, the Republic of Turkey, from the Ottoman Empire. The period between 1925 and 1945 is important in this sense: The one party system was declared by CHP, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's party, and the Kemalist ideology, defined by sweeping political, social, cultural and religious reforms designed to separate the new Turkish state from its Ottoman predecessor and adapt a Westernized way of living, was put in the party's program (Tunaya, 2003, p. 161; Zürcher, 2012, p. 269).[53] These Kemalist reforms on secularization of the state and the society were resisted by people as they were intervening the daily lives of the Turkish people (Tunaya, 2003, p. 157). Those people were put on trial and executed in the Independence Tribunals then.[54] In this

[53]In terms of Kemalist reforms, madrasas were removed and imam hatip schools were replaced instead; dervish lodges and zawiyas were closed; law was secularized by removing the sharia law, the religious marriage ceremony and polygamy; tariqas were abolished; tarboosh and veils were banned and replaced with Western style hats; and so on (Aksoy, 2005, p. 95-135; Zürcher, 2012).

[54]The Menemen Incident, also called the Kubilay Incident, in 1930 was an example of those kinds of resistances which were seen and expected to be seen as backwardness: A Dervish named Mehmet, a member of the Naqshbandi Tariqa, organized a protest against the secular oppressive policies of the government, demanding a restoration of the sharia and the Caliphate. One of the soldiers who were sent to quell the demonstration fired upon the protesters. The protesters then killed and beheaded the commanding officer, Mustafa Fehmi Kubilay, and placed his severed head on a pole with a green flag

regard, secularism was not merely based on the separation of government institutions and people mandated to represent the state from religious institutions and religious dignitaries, but also based on the state control over religion, religious institutions and religious way of life. Thus, secularism in Turkey refers to the extraction of the Turkish society from the Ottoman traditions, the traditional East and its adaptation to the modern West.[55] Hence, religion is seen as a threat to modernization of the society and the individuals, a threat which needs to be under state control (Zürcher, 2012). In other words, through Kemalist reforms, spaces and forms of activity were reconfigured, redistributed and regulated in such a way that religion and the people, who were formerly associated with it, were strictly excluded from the common spaces and activities. The Kemalist, thus, secular redistribution was aiming to disrupt the Ottoman distribution.

The online political humor page invites this violent history to the stage and reminds its followers of it through the creation of the caps related with CHP, its ideology, and the people associated with it. In this respect, the page makes both a political and aesthetic destruction as *Tolaz* does, however from a different perspective. In Figure 14 as an example of this kind of disruption, *Dinci Caps* makes a distinction between them (the page refers to the Muslim societies through Palestine) and us (the so-called Muslim society for the page) exposes this violent history:

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before parading through town with it. The Incident was resulted in state of emergency, imprisonment and execution (Tunaya, 2003, p. 163-164; Zürcher, 2012, p. 266).

[55] The historical, political, social and cultural separation of modern Turkey from its Ottoman predecessor is used as a way of creating jokes: The incongruity between Kemalism and Ottomanism, the mutually exclusive relationship between them, is one of the general motives of the page. For example, *Dinci Caps* makes fun of the people who endeavor to unite these conflicting imaginaries through the symbols of Atatürk and sultan's signature. Figure 13 is related with this incongruity as well: CHP, Atatürk's party, is incongruous with Muslim(ness); thus, what is funny also, in that caps, is Kılıçdaroğlu's so-called effort of destroying this incongruity.



Figure 14. A critique of the Kemalist secularism[56]
Source: [*Dinci Caps,* May 30, 2014]

The first image in the figure is about the Palestinian children who are performing salaat in the school whereas the second one tells how Uğur Dündar, a journalist, has caught the children in the act of performing salaat, and depicts as a success story of catching someone in committing a crime. Relating Dündar with Kemalism, i.e. the Turkish secularism, the page here reveals how secularism, associated with Kemalism, sees religion and performing it as a crime, and hence, exposes the above-mentioned violence committed by the Kemalist sovereign that tries to bring the Muslim people, their religious lives, their religious performances and their religious rituals under control. Similar with *Tolaz,* the online political humor page uses the image of children and through this image, it tries to show the innocence of the religious performance and the innocence of performing salaat like the children in the

[56]In this first image, "A school in Palestine" is written on the left edge and under the image "them" while in the above of the second image, "Another journalist success from Uğur Dündar!" is written, and at the middle, "He caught the students in the act of performing salaat!", under the image "us" is written.

caps, how this innocence is disrupted and politicized by the Kemalist violence. In other words, by making this violent history visible, *Dinci Caps* intervenes in the imagination of modern Turkey and transforms it into a shameful imagination, turning the praised imagination, Turkey as modern and secular, into a shame, into an imagination which is filled with violence, exclusion, intervention. While the success story of Kemalist secularism becomes a story of shame, "them" as the Muslim societies (Palestine in this case) in this caps stands as object of desire (to become as such).

On the other hand, the exposition of the as-if appearance, political hypocrisy and dishonesty of the political parties is not restricted with CHP: AKP, the ruling party, which differentiates itself from CHP and hence the Kemalist regime through a discourse of victimhood (of the Muslim people), which claims it represents the victims of the Kemalist violence and exclusion (mostly the Muslim victims) (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2015, p. 10), is also politically hypocrite in terms of the Palestine question. *Dinci Caps* depicts Palestine as a country where Muslim brothers live, a part of the ummah, a Muslim territory that Israel, thus, the West, tries to reign over the Palestinian territory by killing the civilians. In this sense, the page criticizes that AKP, which generally accentuates the exclusion and victimhood of the Muslims in Turkey and in the world, and critiques the Western countries that do nothing regarding the Palestine question but merely condemns the Israeli state. For example, Figure 15, which was published right after the Israeli state attacked on the Palestinian territory in July 2014, demonstrate this fact, the irony, that a political party which seems to defend the Muslims' rights, their freedom etc. seems as if it is taking a firm action against the Israeli state that tries to establish a dominance over the Palestinian

territory by condemning the Israeli state – just like the man in Figure 15 who seems as if he is cutting the ribbon:



Figure 15. Caps on AKP[57]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, July 18, 2014]

Here *Dinci Caps* points another pose, disclosing the fact that condemnation of AKP is solely a pose, a constructed image, another as-if appearance in front of the public. In this sense, the online political humor page makes another political and aesthetic disruption, intervening in and destroying the representation, which is produced by the ruling party through the discourse of victimhood, by associating it with the man in the caps who pretends to cut the ribbon. The above caps also shows what the page expects from AKP: A political action against the Israeli state and to take sides with the Muslim community instead of condemnation.

Furthermore, by criticizing the political parties, the page also constructs East and West as dichotomous: The former is constructed as traditional, Muslim and

[57] "When Davutoğlu [the prime minister then in 2014] gets angry at Israel... What I think... What is actually happening"

moral, and as a geography of war, violence and death whereas the latter is depicted as modern, secular, non-Muslim, immoral, high-handed and intervening. In order to reveal the imperialist aspect of the West, *Dinci Caps* uses the motif of democracy: In Figure 16, the online political humor page discloses how these Muslim states were ordered and peaceful before democracy which has transformed them into a geography of war, a geography of chaos and a geography of violence. Thus, here, the page exposes the fact that democracy is not a government by the people, not a rule of the majority, but a means for intervening and establishing the Western sovereignty over the East, a government by the West.



Figure 16. The depiction of the East-West binary[58]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, September 22, 2015]

In other caps like the figure as such, *Dinci Caps* defines democracy as taking in partnership with God (*şirk*), making laws in the name of God, hence as ignoble while Islam is identified with honor and dignity. In other words, by constructing the non-Muslim West as modern, secular, democratic, thus, immoral, ignoble and honorless;

[58] The images on the left represent the countries, respectively Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria, before democracy while the pictures on the right represent their situations after democracy.

the page takes humanity, morality, honor, dignity and struggle from the Western hands, and monopolizes them under the Muslim East. Here we witness another kind of *maganda* which makes a political and aesthetic disruption of modernity, secularism and democracy, in other words, civilization: An educated, modern, secular, democratic, non-Muslim West that makes life miserable, unbearable for the Muslim East, that has no respect for the rights of the Muslim people, and that is believed responsible for all the crimes in the Muslim East.[59]

According to the way the page critiques on the political parties and constructs the East-West dichotomy (the democracy motif, for instance), it might be said that *Dinci Caps* has been using a similar narrative, an anti-colonial narrative, with *Tolaz*; however, from a different position, an Islamic position which has a historical basis in the Turkish history: Islamism is one of the movements of thought (other than Ottomanism, Occidentalism and Turkism), suggested as a solution for resurrection of the Ottoman Empire. The intellectual and mental basis of its struggle against the Western states stems from the East-West dichotomy: According to this thought, the weakness of the West is associated with its lack of spirituality and morality; the more its technology develops, the more its morality disappears since politics has been deprived of religion, hence, ethics, through secularization of the state and politics in contrast to the East (Tunaya, 2003, p. 62-64). Furthermore, Islamism argues that the West constructs a fantasy of justice and equity, and endeavors to colonize the East through so-called civilization which creates this fantasy of justice and equity (Tunaya, 2003, p. 63).[60] In contrast to the West which is deprived of ethics through secularism (*ahlaksız Batı*), what the thought demands is a theocratic state in which

[59] As we are going to see below, this *maganda* figure is not merely associated with the West, but also with Kemalists and/or white Turks regarded as Westernists by *Dinci Caps*.
[60] As we have seen in Figure 16, *Dinci Caps* makes a similar point, revealing what is hidden under the mask of the Western democracy.

religion and state would not be distinct, a civil society based on religion and Islamic values, and a complete purification of the state and society from secularism which is believed to be the source of immorality (Oba, Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014, p. 570; Tunaya, 2003, p. 155; Zürcher, 2012, p. 198).

Mehmet Akif Ersoy, who is the poet of the Turkish national anthem, for instance, is an example of the well-known intellectuals of Islamism, inviting all Muslims to fight together against the imperialist oppression of the non-Muslim West (Oba et al., 2014, p. 568). In his poem, *Independence March*, which then became the Turkish national anthem, Ersoy puts his chest filled with faith in contrast to the "civilization" which is a monster with one tooth. This does not merely construct the East-West dichotomy, but also differentiates Turkey from the Western states, thence, functions to imagine the nation and the state in contrast to the imperialist West(ern states). As we are going to see below, *Dinci Caps* also makes a similar distinction with Ersoy through compassion and conscience.

4.2 The female figure as both *maganda* and victim

As it is mentioned above, secularism in Turkey signifies the political and aesthetic reconfiguration of the Turkish state and society, the separation of government institutions and people mandated to represent the state from religious institutions and religious dignitaries, the state control over religion, religious institutions and religious way of life. To put it differently, it refers to the extraction of the Turkish society from the Ottoman traditions, the traditional East, and its adaptation to the modern West; thence, it is about creating a new imagination of Turkey, Turkey as secular, Western and modern. Kemalist reforms made between 1925 and 1945

functioned to help the construction of this new imagi-nation; thus, they were not merely political but also aesthetic reforms. In this respect, Kemalist reforms (especially on everyday lives such as clothing) were not solely about the state control over the religion, but also about the creation of a new Turkish figure in contrast to the old, traditional and Eastern figure: A modern, secular, educated, thus, Western Turkish figure was being constructed. Modern Turkey was (and expected to be) imagined through this new type of Turkish figure.

Dinci Caps calls the groups associated with this figure as Kemalists and/or white Turks which mainly refers to the consolidated urban classes who "have identified with a particular image of 'the West' and ideologies of Westernization... and adopted arrogant attitudes towards those unable to pass as 'Western'" (Altan-Olcay, 2011, p. 50). In depicting those groups, the online political humor page makes use of conscience, compassion, and reversing the discourse of *yobaz* (bigot): Figure 17 belongs to a photo of what is left from Turkish coffee taken by a woman who sees Atatürk in the coffee and understands that Atatürk, like Jesus, is eventually resurging to save the country from the bigots that, in this case, refer to the religious people who support the AKP government.



Figure 17. The depiction of the bigot Kemalists[61]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, March 17, 2014]

According to Turkish Language Association, bigot means a) a person who goes to the extremes in terms of religion and who leads to pressure others, b) a narrow-minded person who is extremely dependent on a thought or a belief, and c) an earthy, barbaric person. In this sense, bigotry is formerly associated with religion due to the people who are fanatically bonded to religion, thus it is a dominant discourse used by these above-mentioned groups in order to point to the threatening aspect, dogmatism of religion in contrast to science. It can be said that bigotry as a discourse is a discourse fundamentally about modernity; a discourse which functions to celebrate reason, intelligence, civilization, thus, modernity; a political and aesthetic discourse

[61] "Comrades!!!!! Are you seeing what I see as well!!!!! Believe me, I am very excited right now!!! This is a coffee fortune-telling! Of almighty ANCESTOR ["*ATAMIN*" means Atatürk]! It shows he is thinking of recoming from Samsun!!!!! Now it is time for the bigots to cry now!!!! How happy is the one who follows the almighty ANCESTOR!!" This image is posted with a headline called "Allaaaaaahuaaaaakbaaaaaaarrrr!!!"

which functions to imagine modernity through an imagination of the opposite of the modern.

In this figure, *Dinci Caps* destroys the bigot discourse used by the woman in the image and reconstructs it by showing how Kemalism, which is associated with secularism and modernity, has turned into a kind of religion and Atatürk into a prophet, and how it puts a (secular) pressure on other (religious) people, and hence, the page reveals and makes fun of the bigotry of Kemalism.[62] In other words, what is funny, ironic, here is the fanaticism of the Kemalist ideology which views religion as orthodoxy, and the stupidity of viewing Atatürk as the messiah, thence, the stupidity of the bigot Kemalists and/or white Turks. The general analysis of stupidity jokes in humor studies results that these kinds of jokes are cracked by the economically and culturally dominant groups in the society against the groups who live on the edges (Davies, 2008). In this regard, it might be said that the caps about bigotry destroys this analysis by constructing white Turks and/or Kemalists (who are mainly consolidated urban educated classes, and are seen as economically and culturally dominant in the society) as bigot, and revealing not merely their bigotry but also their stupidity. To put it in a different way, *Dinci Caps* demonstrates how bigotry is not necessarily related with religion by exposing the fact that the modern, educated and civilized person can be bigot, thus, barbaric as Turkish Language Association defines as well. Therefore, through bigotry, the page intervenes in and makes a political and aesthetic disruption of the representation and the imagination of modernity.

The ironic fanaticism of Kemalists and/or white Turks is exposed through compassion as well. Figure 18, for instance, was published right after the accident in Soma, in May 2014, where more than three hundred mineworkers were dead due to

[62] In his book, Zürcher (2012) also mentions how Kemalism has been gone to the extremes, becoming like a religion.

the explosion. The government declared national mourning and cancelled the ceremony of May 19 (the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day), which was the day when Atatürk went to Samsun, the day that is viewed as the starting point of the War of Independence.



Figure 18. Caps on Soma[63]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, May 16, 2014]

Kemalist Aysun in the figure complains about the cancellation, tweeting that (Recep) Tayyip (Erdoğan), the prime minister then, has cancelled the ceremonies just to prevent people from celebrating the date (which means, for her, commemorating Atatürk), and that she is feeling sorry for the decedents but she has been well-prepared for the ceremony. *Dinci Caps* shares the screen-shot of her tweet, identifying as "sick," which is metaphorically defined by Turkish Language Association as fanatical and devotee. Here, again, the online political humor page demonstrates the fanaticism, the bigotry, hence, the barbarism of Kemalism and the people attached to it, and how, because of it, they lack compassion, humanity and imagi-nation since they do not have mercy on the decedents who were a part of the nation. In other words, *Dinci Caps* problematizes Kemalism as an ideology and the imagination produced by it, which, here, are represented as a source of polarization in the society, by showing the dominant and mainly unrecognized states of seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving, knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not feeling,

[63] "Taking advantage of the Soma incident, Tayyip cancelled the May 19 ceremonies just to prevent people from celebrating. Okey, we are sorry for the decedents but I have well-prepared for the celebrations."

not perceiving and not knowing, that I have called in the previous chapter the Turkish imagination, which create indifference and ignorance, which construct and shape the Turkish individuals' emotional, epistemological, psychological and aesthetic worlds.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to note here that even though what the page problematizes has similarities with what *Tolaz* problematizes, the imagination exposed here is different than what the latter reveals: The latter demonstrates us the problematic "nature" Turkish imagination, which is taken for granted and as natural by all Turkish groups despite their ideological differences, their different economic backgrounds etc., whereas the former questions more specific imagination taken for granted and as natural by particular groups (Kemalists and/or white Turks as *Dinci Caps* describes). Therefore, with a view to differentiating them from each other, I am going to define the imagination disclosed here as secular imagination because the page formerly problematizes it through secularism. Both imaginations form the same basis for indifference and ignorance: indifference and active ignorance to the sorrow of other groups than themselves. *Dinci Caps* describes this indifference and active ignorance as "Kemalist conscience." Figure 19 demonstrates certain images of dying, suffering people of respectively Myanmar, Gaza, Afghanistan and Syria, and the reaction of a Turkish actor who is regarded here as Kemalist:



Figure 19. The Kemalist reaction to the sufferings of the Muslim population[64]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, July 17, 2014]

Those images belong to the ummah that is in pain and exposed to the Western imperialist violence (as indicated in the previous part of this chapter). His reaction to those images can be identified as sad; however, when the images of the suffering or dying ummah turn into an image of tree which is about to get cut, his reaction correlatively changes: Sad face is transformed into an angry face which leads to a protest. The online political humor page refers here to the Gezi Park protests, demonstrating how they are exclusionary, ignorant and indifferent in terms of the Muslim community. Through conscience, *Dinci Caps* incites its followers to question the above-mentioned secular imagination which is based on the exclusion of the Muslim entity, transforming it into an imagination which is shameful since they disregard the sorrow of human beings yet attach importance to trees. Like *Tolaz*

[64] Posted with a headline, "Kemalist Conscience (representative)," the caps shows respectively the images of dying and/or suffering people of Myanmar, Gaza (Strip), Afghanistan and Syria, and at the end, the image of tree.

which depictures them as environmentalists (in Figure 12), the page monopolizes humanity, compassion, conscience, morality and intelligence but by taking a different position, an Islamic position, which takes inspiration from anti-colonial narrative: Like Mehmet Akif Ersoy, *Dinci Caps* puts his chest filled with faith in contrast to a monster with one tooth called "civilization."

To say it in a different way, from an anti-colonial Islamic standpoint, *Dinci Caps* exposes the unnatural as well as politically, historically, culturally, socially and aesthetically constructed "nature" of the Westernized and secular imagination by politically and aesthetically destroying it, visualizing it through bigotry, compassion and conscience. With a view to supporting the unnatural and constructed "nature" of this imagination, one of the admins of the page tells me that they have been getting many complaints from some Kemalist organizations even though they do not insult Atatürk and tells how these people, Kemalists, live by rote (personal interview, August 13, 2016).[65] His statement not solely demonstrates how humor can be exasperating, obtrusive and disruptive for the secular dominance, but also puts an emphasis on the rote, the unrecognized, thence, unproblematized "nature" of the secular imagination.

It might be said that through the exposition of this imagination, through the depictions of CHP, its ideology (Kemalism) and the people associated with it (Kemalists and/or white Turks), the online political humor page constructs a different kind of *maganda* as a person who basically makes life miserable and unbearable for others and disrespects the rights of others, depicturing, differently than *Tolaz*, a city-oriented *maganda* figure who has no respect for the Muslim population, no respect for their way of living though she/he is well educated: Figure 20 can be associated

[65] "Şu âna kadar şikayet edilen capslerimiz genelde Atatürkçü Facebook sayfalarının organizasyonlarından ibaret. Halbuki kendisine hakaret ettiğimiz bir paylaşımımız olmadı. Çok ezbere yaşıyorlar."

with political hypocrisy, political dishonesty and the so-called neutrality claim of CHP. Nevertheless, the women in the figure, who seem as if they are neutral to the woman with abaya, that, here, represents the Muslim population in general, actually disrespect her religious, thus, sacred outfit (abaya) by tearing it (by perpetrating violence against the sacred), emphasize on another crucial point: The secular imagination as *maganda*. An imagination, which tears abayas and headscarves, labels Muslims as bigot; lacks compassion, empathy, conscience and insanity; hence, it is responsible for all the crimes committed against the Muslim population. In other words, like *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* opens a path for new possible meanings and representations of *maganda* by visualizing it as an educated, city-oriented, inhumane, and mainly female figure through CHP and Kemalists.



Figure 20. CHP before and after the elections[66]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, July 6, 2014]

At this point, it is important to accentuate the fact that in constructing a *maganda* figure, the online political humor page formerly chooses to use female figures, and that this choice of the page has a historical basis, a historical background since the

[66] "CHP BEFORE THE ELECTIONS... CHP AFTER THE ELECTIONS"

creation of a new Turkish figure, the creation of a new Turkish state (different than the Ottoman state) through the above-mentioned dichotomy of East (as traditional, religious, thus, backward) and West (as modern, secular, thence, progressive) formerly affected women in Turkey: In order to create a new, modern, secular and Westernized state in contrast to the old, traditional, religious and Eastern state; new, Western and "free" women with pleated skirt and high heels were created, juxtaposed to and challenged the Ottoman women with abaya, the Eastern women estranged from public (Bozdoğan, 2001, p. 97). In other words, women and female bodies had a central place in Turkish modernity, having a significant role of being objects of national modernization project (Bozdoğan, 2001, p. 97): While the females with abayas were acknowledged as the symbol of the Ottoman backwardness, as the symbol of the imagination of the Ottoman Empire, the new women was created as the symbol of the Turkish republican modernity by extracting them and their bodies from the symbolic elements, the Islamic elements such as veil and abaya (Aksoy, 2005, p. 101 & 104). In this respect, the new woman was the symbol of the disengagement from the Ottoman past, from the Ottoman tradition; the symbol of the imagination of modern Turkey.

Nonetheless, symbolizing the new nation(-state) and the new Turkish republican woman was different not solely from the Ottoman, traditional and Eastern woman but also from the Western woman: By putting the modern but modest Turkish woman in contrast to the Western woman with an almost obscene outfit and with too much make-up on her face, her modest modernity was being extolled (Aksoy, 2005, p. 108). In other words, female bodies had (and still have) to be modern by not losing her national and cultural values, hence, were (and still are) put in conflict between too-traditional or too-Eastern, and too-modern or too-Western.

This is formerly associated with the imagination of the new Turkish state, hence, with imagi-nation. The new Turkish state functions as a bridge between the East and the West: It is neither too-Eastern nor too-Western, neither too-traditional nor too-modern; it is always at the center of these two, and has a fantastic location (Küçük, 2015, p. 67). Because modern (the West) and traditional (the East) are imagined as mutually exclusive, the modern-traditional or East-West dichotomy appears as a conflict which must be resolved to become properly modern in the nationalist imaginary of Turkey (Akınerdem, 2005, p. IV). In this regard, women, and thence female bodies, as the symbols of this new nation, as the political and aesthetic means of imagi-nation, endeavor to (and are forced to) position themselves at this very fantastic center: They have to avoid to become too-traditional or too-modern, and they have to merge them in their every decision in their daily lives, hence, to resolve what Feyza Akınerdem (2005) calls "tragic conflict."

In this respect, since headscarves are more salient than the women's individual features (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 95), and hence making Muslimness (traditionalism) of women more visible than the women themselves, they were (and still are) seen as religious, traditional, old, Ottoman and Eastern. Thus, headscarves are understood as both a threatening material in terms of Turkish modernity and secularism, and a political and aesthetic symbol of failure to become modern. Therefore, women with headscarves were banned to study in public universities and to work in public sectors, i.e. excluded from the public sphere, for the sake of secularism (until the AKP government) and they were seen (and are still seen) as backward and traditional, and as unable to become modern, thus, Western.

To put it differently, similar with the embodiment of Turkish way of modernization, secularization and Westernization of the state and the society; the

violence against and the exclusion of the Muslim community, which were resulted from the secular redistribution of spaces, forms of activity etc., become concrete in female bodies. Consequently, there are two conflicting, juxtaposed female figures in *Dinci Caps*: a (Kemalist) female as violent, exclusionary, hence, as *maganda*, and a (headscarfed) female as exposed to violence, excluded, thus, as victim. Thence, the female body becomes here an object of exposition, an object of critique, an object of making a point, an object of political and aesthetic disruption, an object of (online) political humor, and as a result, becomes an object of, as Feyza Akınerdem describes, the tragic conflict. In this regard, it is crucial to note here that the two conflicting women depicted by the page do not merely function to expose the violent and exclusionary aspect of the secular imagination, but also to reproduce this tragic conflict; thus, they are both the means of exposition and reproduction. Nonetheless, the female figure as both *maganda* and victim is not restricted with Kemalism. *Dinci Caps* points to this issue through HDP, a leftist-oriented (Kurdish) political party as well. In Figure 21, we see women with abayas, who are handcuffed, seem to be slaves:



Figure 21. HDP's view on Muslims[67]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, May 18, 2015]

The online political humor page endeavors to demonstrate how HDP, and leftism associated with it, views Islam as degrading and enslaving women, as patriarchal,

[67] "Peoples' Democratic Party's look at Muslims." The image was published with a headline, "HDP's activity called 'Islam's Look at Woman.'"

and hence, degrade and exclude religion; tries to reveal that a political party, which emphasizes on women's rights, is essentially regarding the Muslim women as slaves of Islam, and degrading the Muslim women, and that leftism talks about particular women's rights – just like Kemalism. To put it differently, *Dinci Caps* problematizes leftism, arguing that it is not outside the secular imagination by depicturing a female figure (with abaya) as a victim of this exclusionary and violent imagination. However, through Figure 21, the online political humor page also refers to the Kurdish movement which has a double mission: The civil movement aims to both de-colonize the nation and transform the social relations of Kurdish society which means the transformation of the conditions of social inequality and exploitation that characterize the kinship based tribal feudal structures (Çağlayan, 2012). The second goal, i.e. the democratic aspect of the Kurdish movement, is significant in the sense that it requires the Kurdish women's participation in the struggle. Women's active participation in the struggle, mobilization of the Kurdish women, is one of the distinctive characteristics of the movement (Alp, 2015; Çağlayan, 2012).

Referring to the issue through the image of handcuffed women with abaya, *Dinci Caps* extracts the goal of the movement from the issue of transformation of the kinship based tribal feudal structures, and reduces it to the issue of degradation of Islam and Islamic values. Although it is true that leftism in Turkey is mainly a part of the secular imagination, regarding the nationalist leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the first example of anti-imperialism in modern world history (Ünlü, 2016, p. 402), mostly viewing religion as a threat to secularism, hence, it is unable to recognize and problematize this imagination; the way *Dinci Caps* approaches to leftism here is problematic. Its approach is very much related with the position the page takes, the Islamic position: Islamism argues that with a view to being able to

settle in and then to dominate over a country, communism, thus leftism, tries to destroy the national and religious values of that country; in this sense, Islam is the great source for a struggle against this aggressive leftism and because the latter denies family and family life, a Muslim can not be a communist (Tunaya, 2003, p. 184). According to Figure 21 and the other caps about leftism as such, it can be said that *Dinci Caps* makes use of this Islamic thought of leftism, which here manifests not solely the limitations of the online political humor of the page, but also the problems and limitations of political humor in general: While political humor functions to destroy and expose certain myths, judgments, perspectives, stereotypes and mainstream representations and imaginations, it also functions to reproduce, thus fails to unproblematize another particular judgments, perspectives and mainstream representations and imaginations.

The problematic approach of the online political humor page, the mainstream representation reproduced by the page can be seen in its depiction of Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-president of HDP, through separatism as well: Published in September 2015 after the struggle between PKK and the Turkish state restarted, Figure 22 associates Demirtaş with the state of makeup-free Öcalan who is depicted as terrorist and separatist in other caps.



Figure 22. The image of Demirtaş[68]
Source: [*Dinci Caps*, September 1, 2015]

[68]*Dinci Caps* published with a headline that says "Makeup-free Celebrities: Abdullah Öcalan."

The above caps demonstrates how the Kurdish movement, hence, claiming the rights of the Kurdish people and claiming equality with the Turkish citizens, is treated as a separatist (thence, leftist) and terrorist movement, which is a threat to the Turkish nation, its security and its unity. In other words, in depicting a Kurdish-related political party, the online political humor page makes use of the discourse of terror, which was developed in the 1990s and which describes Kurds as posing a problem to the Turkish national unity (Yeğen, 2006), and makes use of the dominant representation of the Kurdish identity in media which uses the word separatist (Somer, 2005).

However, it is important to underline the fact that both the media representation and the terror discourse support the Islamic thought of leftism which argues that Kurds are a part of the ummah, thus, a part of the Muslim fraternity; however, the leftist organizations like PKK and HDP endeavor to separate Kurds and Turks from each other, hence, threaten both the national unity and the unity of the ummah. In this sense, the depiction of Selahattin Demirtaş demonstrates that certain representations and discourses are reproduced by *Dinci Caps* through online political humor and they go without problematizing. In essence, Figure 22 demonstrates not solely that the representation of Kurds as terrorist and separatist is a part of the distribution and regulation of senses and perceptions, created by the Turkish state since its formation, but also shows how the senses and perceptions, which have created such caps, is actually a part of this distribution and regulation; thus, how this distribution of the senses and perceptions is so embedded in Turkish people's minds, their bodies, their psychological and emotional worlds that it goes without recognizing and hence problematizing. To put it in a different manner, the figure of Demirtaş here indicates that (online) political humor is actually a part of this

distribution and fails to transcend it, to suggest another distribution; thence, it reveals the reproductive nature of political humor. In addition, this kind of depiction is formerly associated with the present socio-political context: The caps was produced right after the ceasefire between the Turkish state and PKK ended, after the AKP government "reawakened" the terror discourse which has become the inseparable part of the state and media – again. Reawakening the terror discourse means reawakening of people's perceptibility and sensibility of Kurds in relation to terror. In this regard, it might be said that if the ceasefire and the Kurdish initiative continued, there could not be any caps such as Figure 22. To sum up, on the one hand, *Dinci Caps* problematizes and exposes a dominant imagination in the society, the secular imagination, which is based on the exclusion of the Muslim entity, and on the other hand, it reproduces and hence, fails to recognize and to critique another imagination which is a part of the Turkish imagination that *Tolaz* tries to reveal.

The online political humor page which takes an Islamic position that has an anti-colonial tendency (as we have understood from the way of its expositions, its constructions of the East-West dichotomy and its problematizations of certain political issues in relation to this binary) politically and aesthetically disrupts the appearances that the ideologically different political parties endeavor to create, and reveals political hypocrisy and political dishonesty behind these constructed appearances, and transforms them into as-if appearances (in terms of neutrality and victimhood). Furthermore, through two opposing female figures (as both *maganda* and victim), *Dinci Caps* incites us to recognize, talk about, criticize and problematize the unnatural and constructed "nature" of the secular imagination, which is based on the exclusion of Muslim entity and formerly related with Kemalism and leftism in Turkey. Its incitement manifests that although the academic analyses argue that the

Kemalist ideology has been nearly dissolved, especially from the political society, and that both civil society and political society have been transformed with the AKP government's redistribution (Tuğal, 2011), the imagination associated with the Kemalist ideology is still dominant in the society, thence, a part of the culture. Nevertheless, it can also be observed from the semiotic analyses of the caps that (online) political humor also reproduces another dominant, constructed (thus, unnatural) and exclusionary (hence, problematic) representation, imagination and discourses etc., which are related with their Islamic position and leaves them as unrecognized and unproblematized. In other words, it makes both a political and aesthetic destruction and a political and aesthetic reproduction at the same time.

CHAPTER 5

THE ONLINE POLITICAL HUMOR OF *FAİZ LOBİSİ*

In the previous chapter, I have endeavored to demonstrate that by using an anti-colonial narrative (similar with *Tolaz*) and taking an Islamic position (but different than *Tolaz*), the Islamic online political humor page *Dinci Caps* intervenes in, politically and aesthetically destroys both the representation produced by CHP through its neutrality claim and the appearance created by AKP through the discourse of victimhood, and reveals political hypocrisy and political dishonesty behind these appearances and the as-ifness of these appearances; to show that through the depictions of two conflicting female figures (as both *maganda* and victim), the page exposes the unnatural as well as socially, politically, historically and aesthetically constructed "nature" of the secular imagination, which was constructed by the Kemalist regime during the formation of the Turkish state and disregards the Muslim entity in the society. However, by disclosing the violent, exclusionary, indifferent and ignorant aspect of this imagination in terms of the Muslim entity, *Dinci Caps* reproduces at the same time what Feyza Akınerdem calls the tragic conflict, which is an uppermost conflict to be resolved in order to become properly modern in the nationalist imaginary of Turkey, the conflict which is related with the new imagi-nation constructed during the formation of the new (secular) state and society, through these conflicting female figures. There is a similar exposition and reproduction observed in other caps about the Kurdish entity. To put it in a different way, the position of the online political humor page exposes and makes a political and aesthetic disruption of the problematic "nature" of the secular

imagination; however, it also reproduces certain dominant and constructed representations and imaginations (Kurds as terrorist and/or separatist, for instance), hence, fails to recognize and problematize the unnatural "nature" of these representations and imaginations.

The online political humor page *Faiz Lobisi*, on the other hand, concentrates formerly on the AKP government and the supporters of the government, i.e. the ruling party, in terms of engaging with politics and the sovereign. These mainly used topics are always associated with certain issues (police violence in the protests, religion and conservatism); hence, the ruling party and its followers are being depicted in caps in relation to those issues, which are mostly limited to the political events (such as protests) and the reaction given by the sovereign to those events, in relation to those issues that are approached through a certain imaginary of East and West which has both similarities with and differences from the other two humor pages mentioned in the previous chapters. The restricted issues are crucial in the sense that they show the boundaries of *Faiz Lobisi*'s political humor and its difference that are concrete in the name of the page and the date of its establishment: Created in June 2013 (during the Gezi events), *Faiz Lobisi* refers to the interest lobby which was used by the Prime Minister then Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who believed it was responsible for the events, for interfering in the internal affairs of Turkey, and aiming to intervene in the growing economy of Turkey.[69] In this regard, the page makes fun of Erdoğan's explanation by pretending to be the interest lobby, which is

[69] The events began as a protest against the AKP government's project to reconstruct Taksim Square through pedestrianization of the square, transformation of Gezi Park into artillery barracks and demolition and reconstruction of Atatürk Culture Center (AKM). Nevertheless, the protests turned into an anti-government rally that included more general claims and demands, a resistance against the government's intervention in the individuals' lives (such as banning alcohol after 10 pm, prohibition and/or restriction of abortion and birth control pills etc.), against the AKP government's redistribution of spaces, times and forms of activity which mainly excludes the secular groups in the society.

believed to give financial support to the protesters. Figure 23 is one of the many examples of this pretention:



Figure 23. Caps on pretension[70]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, June 21, 2013]

The image represents a screen-shot of an SMS message which informs the recipient that the money has been transferred by the interest lobby in order to be used in the protests, and reminds the receiver of damaging the developing economy of the world leader Turkey. The discourse of interest lobby, embraced by the AKP government in order to explain the Gezi Park events, creates a fantastic story which tells how the foreign forces endeavor to intervene in the internal affairs of Turkey and to create a chaos to prevent the Turkish economy to grow and to prevent Turkey to become one of the leaders in the global stage; thence, the discourse of interest lobby produces a fantasy which obfuscates the fact that the Gezi Park protests, in fact, are people's resistance against the interventionist politics of the AKP government. By pretending

[70] It appears as SMS written by the so-called interest lobby: "1000 Turkish liras was put into your account to be used for your riot today. Do not forget to damage the developing economy of the world leader Turkey." All the figures in that chapter were taken from the Facebook page *Faiz Lobisi* on May 27, 2016. For the uncut screen-shots of the figures, see Appendix A, 11-20.

to be the interest lobby and by using the same discourse against the government, *Faiz Lobisi* tries to disrupt this constructed fantasy and to expose the hidden truth behind it. In other words, the online political humor page destroys the hollow discourse, the hollow representation and the hollow image through pretention which makes that hollowness visible, concrete and hence recognizable. Moreover, by pretending to be the so-called interest lobby, the page takes a certain position and differentiates itself from the other humor pages, hence, limiting its online political humor. It can be said that *Faiz Lobisi* claims it represents the humor produced during the Gezi Park protests and affected by the Gezi and following events, and that it paves a way for itself in the humor field.[71]

Then how does the online political humor page approach the topics mentioned above apart from the other pages? What kind of narrative and language constructed in the caps? What do they expose and destroy? In the light of these questions, it might be said that the online political humor of *Faiz Lobisi* functions to expose police violence during the protests and the religious conservative (Islamic, for the page) aspect of this violence, hence, functions to demonstrate the so-called democratic aspect of the government and to expose the conservatism of the government, which disregards and excludes certain but mainly secular groups in the society and intervenes in their lives. These expositions are demonstrated in relation to the West in terms of backwardness; however, as we are going to see below, an ambivalent imagination of the West, which has a historical basis, can be observed in the caps: The West is imagined as both progressive and imperialist. Furthermore, the online political humor of *Faiz Lobisi* depicts the supporters of AKP as *maganda* through "non-human" females and stupidity, endeavoring to demonstrate how they

[71] Nonetheless, the position and the language of *Faiz Lobisi* demonstrate how its online political humor is a part of the secular humor which is dominant in the existing humor field in Turkey.

are indifferent and ignorant to others' lives, sufferings and their rights. In other words, the page problematizes and incites to talk about, recognize and criticize another imagination which is related with, but different than the imaginations mentioned in the previous chapters.

5.1 Westernism despite both the conservative AKP and the West

To begin with the ruling party, the page mostly relates it with police violence through which how the government excludes certain but mostly secular people from certain rights, how it violates their right to protest, for instance; and religious conservatism that the page views as very much associated with police violence. Figure 24, in this regard, is an example of exposition of the relationship between police violence and religion, exposition of the as-if appearance of the AKP government in terms of democracy:



Figure 24. The religious aspect of police violence[72]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi,* October 9, 2014]

[72] The image is supported with a headline which says "Are you, valiants, going to the Battle of Malazgirt to fight against the Godless Byzantine?"

In the image, we see that the police are raising their forefinger, which represents "Allahuekber," and pointing "four" that represents Rabia, which stems from the coup d'état in Egypt in 2013 (at the same time with the Gezi events) and from the protests against the coup in which hundreds of people have died. Rabia is significant in the sense that the page constantly points to how AKP and its followers view Rabia as violence committed against (Muslim) people and as massacre whereas they completely disregard Gezi and the people who have died during the events in this respect. Rabia demonstrates how the AKP government determines who can and can not be mourned for, which forms of activity can and can not be regarded as a legitimate protest that can be supported, how it justifies the (police) violence committed against particular people, and shows (as we are going to see below) how the ruling party distributes the senses and perceptions which lead indifference and active ignorance towards the various individuals and how AKP creates a dichotomy between people and deepens the tension in the society through Rabia and Gezi, how it regulates the individuals' perceptibility and sensibility through the Rabia-Gezi dichotomy.

In this respect, in Figure 24, *Faiz Lobisi* tries to demonstrate how the sovereign does not only commit violence against particular people, but also distinguishes people in terms of Muslimness (by circling the fingers in red and identifying the police intervention with the Battle of Malazgirt, the fight against the Godless Byzantine), reveals how these particular people are labeled as non-Muslim and/or Godless (by identifying the protesters with the Godless Byzantine), hence, excluded and exposed to violence not merely because they protest but also because they are and/or seem as non-Muslim, they "deserve" to be exposed to violence, "deserved" to be debarred from the rights and from the mournings. In other words,

the forefingers circled in red connote the religious exclusion, violence and polarization. Thus, it might be said that the page makes a political and aesthetic disruption of the appearance of the ruling party (which, as I have argued in the previous chapter, differentiates itself from other parties, mostly CHP, through the discourse of victimhood and which, as one of the victims of the Kemalist regime, claims to represent all different victimized groups in the society and understands their situations), a destruction of its representation as victim and transforms it into *maganda* through the police figure: The so-called victim, the AKP government, the religious sovereign, is depicted as *maganda* which represents the formerly rural-oriented male who essentially makes (city) life miserable and unbearable for certain people, who have no respect for their rights; the person who is believed responsible for all the violence perpetrated against these particular people, symbolizing the uncivilized, religious, conservative, violent and mostly rural-oriented male person. To say it differently, this *maganda* figure is associated with the rural-urban dichotomy as it was used by the humor magazines in the 1990s: Rural as uncivilized, disrespectful, violent, conservative and religious in contrast to urban. Through the police figure, *Faiz Lobisi* intervenes in and disrupts the victimhood of AKP; nonetheless, it also reproduces the urban-rural dichotomy and imagination of urban and rural constructed by that binary.

Religion, and hence conservatism, is not solely used with a view to demonstrating how it is associated with violence against certain people, with their exclusion, but also used to show the AKP government's intervention to the secular ways of life, thus, secularism through its redistribution of the sensible. Figure 25 is an example of making fun of this kind of intervention:



Figure 25. AKP's conservativeness[73]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, November 4, 2013]

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the prime minister then, stated, after the Gezi events, that boys and girls have been living together in the houses and there have been neighbors complaining about it, and that an inspection must be conducted. Erdoğan's controversial emphasis on "boys and girls together" was used as both a way of making fun of the government and its conservatism, and a way of critiquing on its religious and conservative intervention to the secular ways of life, or in Rancierian terms, as a way of critiquing on its exclusionary redistribution of the sensory (such as prohibition of drinking alcohol after 10 pm, restricting abortion and so on). In other words, "boys and girls together" refers to, firstly, the conservatism of the government, which is mainly associated with rural, since in other caps, there is an emphasis on Kasımpaşa where Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was born and lived, a district where people who migrated from rural to urban live, thus, a district of poor, rural, hence, mostly uneducated and uncivilized people. Therefore, it signifies a way of making fun of rural-orientedness of the government, reproducing the urban-rural dichotomy.[74] Secondly, it refers to the government's intervention to secularism and the secular ways of life and the secular life styles; therefore, "boys and girls" here

[73] "Girls and boys are hanging out together... This hurts my understanding of conservative democracy"
[74] The arrogant attitudes that are formerly related with white Turks can be seen in those depictions as well.

intervenes in, destroys and transforms the "victim face" of the government into an "interventionist face." And lastly, it connotes self-celebration: Through "boys and girls together," people struggle against the government and its intervention to their lives, thus, "hurting" (which is written on the caps) the conservative understanding of the government. Thence, it is also a way of (political and aesthetic) resistance against AKP's reconfiguration of spaces, times and activities here. In other words, there is a celebration of secularism here in contrast to religious conservatism. Therefore, in the caps as such and in the caps posted by *Dinci Caps*, it can be seen how the terms secularism and religion are understood as concepts in contrast which need to be rethought together (Balta, 2014, p. 36), and how their online political humor, despite their differences, reproduces this understanding instead of inciting their followers to rethink and to problematize these concepts.

Conservatism of the government is not merely used to make fun of the government and to expose its interventionist, exclusionary and violent aspect, but also used in order to make a comparison with the West, thence, to show the government's backwardness due to religious conservatism. Figure 26 makes a comparison between the West(ern states) and Turkey, depicts the former as progressive in terms of space technology and demonstrates how it has been developing its technology and science, thus, continuing to make a progress in those fields; and, in contrast, depictures the latter as religious conservative that rejects abortion, Valentine's Day and red underwear, and allows child marriage; and shows how the country has been going towards backwardness and receding from science and technology due to the AKP government:



Figure 26. The West versus Turkey[75]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, November 28, 2014]

Through this comparison, *Faiz Lobisi* not only aims to disclose the backward development of Turkey, but also aims to make a political and aesthetic disruption of the representation of Turkey's development, i.e. the imagi-nation, which is constantly constructed by the AKP government through advertising videos of the bridges and new subway lines etc. that accentuate the growing development of Turkey and the Western envy against the Turkish nation, and hence supports imagi-nation. According to Figure 26, it might be said that the West here stands as an object of desire, the desire to become modern and progressive as such. In this regard, the online political humor page reminds its followers of Atatürk who is perceived here as the leading figure of modernity, progression and secularism in Turkey, and how as the follower of science he had always chose science and scientific development in contrast to the AKP government.

[75]The image above writes that NASA (America) spends 16,6 billion dollars to improve space technologies and to go to the planets, and that CERN (Europe) spends 1,5 billion dollars to work on the Hadron collider whereas the image below states that Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs spent 2,5 billion dollars last year to produce ideas that abortion is forbidden by religion, there is no Valentine's Day, to marry the foster is permissible, wishbone is forbidden by religion, and to wear a red underwear is sin.

Nevertheless, the West is also depicted as imperialist, thus, has a negative connotation which accentuates how the West has transformed the East into a geography of war, a geography of violence, a geography of ruin and a geography of death: In Figure 27, we encounter with a ruined building in which people endeavor to live, someone's house ruined due to the war.



Figure 27. The depiction of the East[76]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, November 4, 2015]

The headline of the caps ("Have you ever seen such a view in the West?") represents the Western intervention to the Eastern geography, demonstrating how the Western states ruin the Eastern people's houses, their lives and their land. In this respect, the children on the image signify the innocence of living, the innocence of life, the innocence of right to live, the Western intervention to this innocence and its attempt to ruin it and to make it political. Figure 27 and other similar caps about Syria and Palestine demonstrates how the West is imagined as imperialist, how it transforms the East into a geography of war, a geography of ruin, a geography of violence, a geography of death and a geography of struggle. In this sense, Atatürk is not solely depicted as the leading figure of modernity, progress and secularism in Turkey, but also extolled as the first anti-imperialist figure in Turkey.

[76]*Faiz Lobisi* shared the caps with a caption, "Have you ever seen such a view in the West?"

However, it is important to note here that the caps is not merely about the Western, thus, imperialist, intervention to the Eastern geography and the Eastern lives, but also AKP's intervention to the Eastern region of Turkey in which the Kurdish population is the majority since the caps was published in November 2015 after the ceasefire between PKK and the Turkish state was ended in June 2015. Thus there is a double connotation in this caps: The West's imperialism, the Western terror, and AKP's imperialism, AKP (thence, state) terror which, for the online political humor page, is due to Erdoğan's desire to become the president of Turkey. The way *Faiz Lobisi* approaches to the Kurdish issue is problematic in the sense that the association of state terror on the Kurdish region with the AKP government disregards and, in fact, denies or partially recognizes the violent history of the Kurdish geography and its relation to the Turkish state that *Tolaz* constantly exposes and incites to talk about. The partial recognition, which essentially leads to denial, or the association of state terror in the Kurdish geography only with the AKP government is also related with the fact that the online political humor page does not invite the violent history behind Figure 27 to the stage. Here the history is demonstrated as if it has begun with the AKP government.[77]

This denial and the ambivalent imaginary of the East-West dichotomy have a historical basis, associated with the Turkish imagination and the position the online political humor page takes. To start with the ambivalence, on the one hand, *Faiz Lobisi* depicts the West as progressive and Turkey as moving towards tradition, religion, thus, as receding from progression through the modern-traditional dichotomy; on the other hand, it imagines the West as imperialist by making use of

[77]*Faiz Lobisi* engages in dialogue with *Tolaz* through the image of a ruined building whereas *Dinci Caps* establishes a dialogue with *Tolaz* through the discourse of separatism and terror. It can be concluded that they both fail to transgress the boundaries of the discourse on Kurds or the Kurdish issue determined by the state, hence, the distribution of the sensory. In other words, they can not overcome the limits of perceiving and sensing the Kurdish issue.

an anti-colonial narrative (similar with *Tolaz* and *Dinci Caps*). By East, the online political humor page understands not merely tradition, religion and conservatism, but also struggle against imperialism whereas by West, it understands modernity, secularism and progression yet imperialism as well. To put it in a different way, being an ambivalent construct in the history of modernity in Turkey, the West simultaneously stands for an "object of desire" (as it is depicted in the first part as progressive) as well as a "source of frustration" (as it is depicted later as imperialist) (Suner, 2011, p. 142). This ambivalent imaginary of the West has a significant role on constructing and shaping the imagi-nation in Turkey and the Turkish identity, thence, has a significant role in constructing and reproducing, as Feyza Akınerdem calls, the tragic conflict, which is the essential conflict to be resolved with a view to becoming properly modern. Therefore, this ambivalence signifies "a historical identity shaped not only by a grudge against the imperialist Christian-West ... but also simultaneously by a deep and unfulfilled desire for their ways of life" (Ahıska, 2007, p. 157). Ayşe Kadıoğlu describes it as "Westernism despite the West" developed during the founding years of the modern Turkish state: "The unwanted 'imperialists' who were the enemies in the War of Independence were at the same time the Western role models whose civilized way the Turks were encouraged to emulate" (Kadıoğlu, 2007, p. 290). By looking at the above-mentioned figures, it might be said that *Faiz Lobisi* fails to go beyond this imaginary, which forms Turkish imagination, and thus reproduces it.

Because the online political humor page reproduces the ambivalent construct of the West and the Turkish imagination whose history begins with the War of Independence and the struggle against the imperialist Western states, it also fails to recognize the violent history of the Kurdish geography, thus, the history of Turkish

imperialism that *Tolaz* endeavors to reveal. Even though there are some caps in which we can see a partial recognition of this history which can be viewed as due to the Gezi events that not all but some people who were participated in the protests began to realize the Kurdish issue, the page does not disclose the history, thence, does not incite its followers to talk about. Therefore, state terror on the Kurdish geography exposed here remains mainly associated with AKP terror, thus, remains problematic. In addition, the partial recognition stems from *Faiz Lobisi*'s position: The page puts an emphasis on humanity of the people who suffer from the Turkish state terror and/or the Western state terror, arguing in other caps and in the comments of the caps that despite their ethnicity, people are first and foremost human beings. In other words, the online political humor page makes use of the leftist position which is based on neutrality and which argues that it is ethnically neutral (Ünlü, 2016, p. 402).[78] In this sense, this "human first" position and its neutrality claim support the problem of recognizing the unnatural, constructed and exclusionary "nature" of the Turkish imagination.

It might be said that according to the caps mentioned above, *Faiz Lobisi* puts itself in an ambivalent position of "Westernism despite both the conservative AKP government and the West" which exposes the Western violence in the East and the conservative violence in Turkey but also extols the Western progress. Figure 28, for example, is an image of street writing which says "If you have the (religious) sect, we have the barricade":

[78] Here the leftist position is also supported with an understanding of Atatürk and its ideology as progressive which leads the page to fail to recognize the Kurdish issue as well and leads the position to remain problematic.



Figure 28. Us versus you[79]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, September 12, 2013]

Here "you" and "religious sect" refer both to the AKP government and its religious aspect and to its supporters and their religious, thus, conservative aspect. Through "barricade," *Faiz Lobisi* takes a position which struggles not solely against the conservative, exclusionary, religious and violent government and its supporters, but also against the imperialism of the West. In other words, by monopolizing struggle, the page distinguishes itself from the sectarians and taking a position of "Westernism despite both the conservative AKP government and the West" which, however, is ambivalent in itself. As we are going to see below, the monopolization of struggle and the Westernist position are embodied and become concrete in the depictions of *AKPli* figure through stupidity and non-human, the depictions which expose another kind of imagination associated with religion (Islam) which is unnatural, constructed, exclusionary and unrecognized, and which produces indifference and active ignorance as well.

[79] "If you have the (religious) sect, we have the barricade"

5.2 The *AKPli* figure as *maganda*

Non-human appears as the main motif in *Faiz Lobisi*'s depiction of the *AKPli* figure; however, the motif has a double connotation: a non-human thing (such as alien and furniture) and a human being who is deprived of human values. With a view to referring to the first connotation, the online political humor page makes use of mainly the figure of Emine Erdoğan and secondly the figure of Hayrünnisa Gül. Those women are one of the First Ladies in the political history of Turkey and represent the first examples of headscarfed First Ladies of Turkey.

First Lady is a crucial figure in terms of imagi-nation since they represent the state, the nation and the women of that nation(-state). Like national anthems, national flags, monuments and so on, First Lady is one of the political and aesthetic "objects" which helps not only the citizens but also peoples from other nations and nation-states imagine that particular nation(-state). Hayrünnisa Gül is significant in the sense that she is the first covered First Lady; thus, she is a controversial figure of imagi-nation in Turkey. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, women in Turkey are the essential bearers of the tragic conflict because as the symbols of imagi-nation, they have to maintain a properly modern stance in their everyday lives, a stance which can not be too-traditional or too-modern. In this regard, Hayrünnisa Gül fails to become properly modern due to her outfit. Figure 29 represents a joke about her failure to maintain such a stance, making an analogy between her and a character from Star Wars:



Figure 29. The image of Hayrünnisa Gül[80]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, November 8, 2013]

Here the joke is "funny" as long as she continues to fail to provide an image expected from her, a properly modern image. She does not only resemble a character from Star Wars, hence she does not solely fail to become a modern Turkish subject, but she also leads other nations and nation-states to misimagine and misrecognize the Turkish state and nation because of her misrepresentation of imagi-nation in Turkey. This is why she has been criticized due to her outfit which causes this *misimagination* and misrepresentation of Turkey. There is a similar caps with Figure 29, about Emine Erdoğan such as Figure 30, which also makes an analogy between Emine Erdoğan and the furniture whose colors are the same with Emine Erdoğan's outfit, thus, turning her into a(n unaesthetic) furniture:

[80] It was published with a headline, "Is she a First Lady or a character from Star Wars?"



Figure 30. Emine Erdoğan[81]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, November 27, 2013]

Based on the modern-traditional dichotomy, the analogy also here represents Erdoğan's failure to become properly modern in the national imaginary of Turkey, her failure to maintain a proper stance. In this sense, Erdoğan's and Gül's bodies do not solely point to the tragic conflict, but also the traditionalism of AKP and its followers, thus, their failure to become modern. In these figures, because headscarf is ostensible, thus, represents a colossal sign (Balta, 2014, p. 39-40), both Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül are not a mere woman, not a sole First Lady, but a covered First Lady who is depicted here as a disrupter of the representation of Turkey as properly modern (and secular). This kind of depiction demonstrates us how women can be used as a means of joking, as a means of production of jokes, and hence, how they become an object of critique of the sovereign in political humor.[82]

Nonetheless, female figures as objects of political humor are not a new thing in the history of political humor in Turkey. For instance, the feminine stance of

[81] The page shared the image with a caption, "Fashion is danger".
[82] The similar disputes have been made when Binali Yıldırım became the Prime Minister of Turkey. People made fun of his covered wife's physical appearance, emphasizing her ugliness, thus, arguing how she does not suit in terms of imagi-nation, like Erdoğan and Gül. According to these kinds of jokes, it might be said that they signify unaesthetics, representing the political but unaesthetic objects which, hence, lead to misimagination and misrecognition of the nation(-state).

Adnan Menderes was mainly used by the humor magazines in order to make fun of him and his sovereignty since femininity in contrast to masculinity means being devoid of sovereignty; in this sense, these kinds of jokes indicated that Menderes, due to his femininity, could not be a statesman and did not carry any characteristic to become a leader (Cantek, 2011). In other words, through Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül as an object of political humor and an object of political humor insult, *Faiz Lobisi* does not only endeavor to demonstrate how the (extreme) traditionalism of AKP destroys the political and aesthetic imagi-nation, and to criticize it by supporting Figure 30 with "Fashion is danger" which connotes the fact that a covered female is still regarded as a threatening, dangerous figure against the imagination of Turkey as progressive, modern and secular, but also it reproduces the tragic conflict of this imagi-nation, mainly the tragic conflict of women in Turkey who are the political and aesthetic symbols of this imagi-nation, who are the objects, thence, the bearers of this imagi-nation, thus, this tragic conflict, and the online political humor page reproduces women as objects of exposition, objects of critique, objects of making fun, objects of imagi-nation and objects of this tragic conflict by taking a Westernist position, which is based on the modern-traditional dichotomy.

Thence, it might be said that there is a similar usage of female figures, a similar reproduction between *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* that, nonetheless, take different positions. While in the former, the female figure depicted as Kemalist and/or white Turk signifies the threatening figure which rejects her Ottoman, Eastern, hence, traditional, ethical and moral past; in the latter, the depictions of Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül put an emphasis on the threatening aspect of the too-traditionalism of the government. The former favors East, tradition and religion (thus, ethics) whereas the latter underlines the importance of modernity and

secularism.[83] This is another caps that we confront the problems and limitations in (online) political humor: The problem of questioning one's own position, the problem of reproduction which goes without recognizing and hence, problematizing, and the problem of gender.

In addition to the exposition of traditionalism through the first connotation of non-human, *Faiz Lobisi* uses the main motif with a view to depicting an *AKPli* figure deprived of human values, deprived of humanity. The second connotation is formerly used by the online political humor page to demonstrate how the supporters of AKP have disregarded the police violence against people during the Gezi events and instead, have adopted Rabia. Figure 31 points to this comparison between Rabia and Gezi which creates tension and polarization between the different groups in the society, representing this split between them:



Figure 31. The *AKPli* figure as merciless[84]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, August 20, 2013]

In her tweet, Sibel Öztürk recognizes the Gezi protester as Godless and thence, through her recognition as such, she justifies her compassion to Muslim people in Egypt who were killed by the military and her indifference to the people exposed to

[83] Here it can be understood that both *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* engage in dialogue with each other through female figures. Thus, the female figures form the basis of the dialogical relationship between these online political humor pages.
[84] In the tweet, it is written: "If a Godless in my country and a Muslim in Egypt are dying, then my heart will only hurt for the one in Egypt, I will be sorry only for that in Egypt #R4BİA." The page shared it with a headline: "There are [non-human] creatures as such"

and killed by the police violence during the Gezi Park events. According to Turkish Language Association, Godless signifies not merely a person who has no belief, but also a cruel, merciless and uncompassionate person. Here, *Faiz Lobisi* takes the word and points to her, thus, the followers of AKP, who identify themselves as Muslim, in order to show how they themselves are Godless, hence, merciless, cruel and uncompassionate. Godless here accentuates how the AKP government determines and regulates the individuals' perceptibility and sensibility, thence, their imagination, and creates indifference and active ignorance towards particular people. In other words, the online political humor page makes a political and aesthetic disruption of this identification and exposes indifference and active ignorance of the supporters of AKP to certain groups, indifference and active ignorance, similar with what the other online political humor pages problematize, that are being produced by certain, dominant but mainly unrecognized states of seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving, knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not feeling, not perceiving and not knowing which refer to similar but different than other imaginations mentioned in the earlier chapters: While *Tolaz* and *Dinci Caps* accentuate the unnatural and constructed "natures" of different imaginations, that I describe as respectively the Turkish imagination and the secular imagination, *Faiz Lobisi*, however, puts an emphasis on an imagination that is mainly associated with religion (Islam in this case), constructed by the AKP government through the secular-religious dichotomy, that shapes the (mostly religious) Turkish individuals' epistemological, psychological, emotional and aesthetic worlds, and that is based on the exclusion of other (mainly secular) people.

By describing the woman, who has written this tweet, as a non-human creature deprived of human values and destroying her identification with religion,

which is based on love, tolerance, ethics and values etc., the online political humor page monopolizes humanity, compassion, ethics and conscience. In this regard, we have another *maganda* figure here which represents another group in the society (*AKPliler*) and their imagination (the Islamic imagination), a non-human figure that is mostly rural-oriented, making (mostly city) life miserable and unbearable for others, disrespecting the rights of others and hence, is believed to be responsible for all the tension, polarization and crimes in the society.[85] This *maganda* figure is not solely non-human, uncivilized, aggressive, violent, exclusionary, ignorant and indifferent, but also s/he is *dingil* which signifies a stupid and rude person according to Turkish Language Association – like in Figure 32:



Figure 32. *Dingil AKPli*[86]
Source: [*Faiz Lobisi*, January 12, 2015]

[85] For example, *Faiz Lobisi* underlines that due to the AKP government, the understanding and the imagination associated with it, more women has been killed by their husbands, their boyfriends and families, by men in general. It is, however, ironic that the online political humor page draws their followers' attention to the issue of femicide and women's rights while, at the same time, using covered female figures as an object of critique of the government, an object of making fun and an object of political humor insult.

[86] Below the image, it is written: "The cousin of the man who bought coke with money and spilled it." The caps was posted with a headline, "*ehl-i dingil*" (the community of stupid and rude).

It was published after the Charlie Hebdo incident in which some of the cartoonists of the humor magazine were attacked and killed by two gunmen because of the controversial cartoons of Muhammad the Prophet. The brutal attack led to a massive manifestation against terrorism in which almost all the presidents of various countries participated to call for respect for freedom of thought. After the attack, the AKP government that participated in the protest emphasized the fact that this is not the real Islam because Islam is a religion based on tolerance and love; hence, it should not be formerly associated with terrorism.

In the image, we see a man who is recognized not as a sole male, but a religious male because of his beard and his outfit, a religious man who is protesting Charlie Hebdo by tearing the humor magazine. *Faiz Lobisi* makes fun of his way of protesting the magazine by describing the man as the (*dingil*) cousin of the (another *dingil*) man who bought coke with money and spill it to protest. He is stupid because he does not know how to protest and he is rude because he does not tolerate other thoughts different than his. To put it in a different manner, the online political humor page disrupts the representation of Islam as a tolerant religion and depicts an *AKPli*, Islamic, figure as *maganda* (uncivilized, uneducated, hence ignorant, rural-oriented, conservative, rude, stupid, intolerant, violent and indifferent) through stupidity. By depicting *AKPliler* as *maganda*, *Faiz Lobisi* problematizes, exposes and incites to talk about and criticize the violent, exclusionary, unnatural and constructed "nature" of the Islamic imagination which goes without recognizing and causes polarization, tension and split in the society because it stems from AKP's (exclusionary) distribution of the senses and perceptions. By mainly associating this Islamic imagination, AKP and its supporters with rural, the online political humor page is not only nourished from the modern-traditional dichotomy, but also reproduces the

urban-rural dichotomy, which also shapes the general Westernist position in Turkey, the position that the page puts itself.

The online political humor of *Faiz Lobisi* functions to reveal the police violence and hence, state violence against particular people during the Gezi Park events, the relationship between that kind of violence and religion, conservatism, thus, to disclose how religious conservatism of the AKP government excludes and commits violence against certain (but mostly secular) people, how it intervenes in their (everyday) lives and how its traditionalism leads the state and the society to recede from (Western) progress, thence, to fall behind the Western states. Furthermore, the page tries to expose both the Western imperialism and the imperialism of the AKP government in terms of the Eastern geography; demonstrates how the West turns the East into a geography of war, a geography of conflict, a geography of death, a geography of violence, a geography of (Western) intervention and a geography of (Eastern) struggle while AKP transforms the Kurdish, Eastern, region of Turkey into a region of war, a region of (state) terror, a region of intervention, a region of (Kurdish) struggle. To put it differently, it might be said that *Faiz Lobisi* embraces Westernism despite both the religious conservative AKP government and the West, an ambivalent and problematic perspective.

In addition, through the double connotation of the word non-human, the online political humor page shows how the AKP government and its (extreme) traditionalism misrepresent imagi-nation in Turkey, thence, lead other nations and nation-states to misimagine and misrecognize the Turkish nation(-state) by using the figures of Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül, and demonstrates how AKP, hence the state, constructs and shapes the individuals' emotional, psychological and epistemological worlds in terms of what I call the Islamic imagination, how AKP and

the Islamic imagination constructed by it lead its followers to be indifferent and ignorant to the sufferings of others in the society. In this regard, through compassion and stupidity, *Faiz Lobisi* depicts an *AKPli* figure as *maganda*: A non-human figure that is mostly-rural oriented since s/he is conservative, religious and intolerant to others and their thoughts, uneducated, violent, indifferent to others' sufferings, aggressive, uncivilized, disrespectful to others' rights, stupid and rude; that makes life miserable and unbearable for others and hence, causes all the polarization, tension, split and crimes in the society.

In all these expositions and depictions, the online political humor page takes a Westernist and neutral stand, making use of both an anti-colonial narrative that puts an emphasis on the fact that human beings are suffering and dying because of (Western) imperialism, and the discourse of progress that lays stress on modernity, democracy and secularism. According to this stand which is nourished by both anti-colonialism and progressivism, it might be said that *Faiz Lobisi* considers itself as neutral to people in terms of ethnicity, nation, culture etc. due to its emphasis on "humans first" and views the figures like Atatürk as progressive in contrast to the figures like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Nevertheless, this leftist neutrality and progression claim (Ünlü, 2016) is problematic in the sense that by taking the West both as a source of frustration and an object of desire, the online political humor page reproduces the ambivalent construct of the West which forms the basis of the Turkish imagination, the Turkish modernity, which causes a tragic conflict that must be resolved with a view to becoming properly modern in the national imaginary of Turkey, and which leads women to become both as objects of imagi-nation (thus, objects of representation) and objects of critique (hence, objects of political humor). In other words, by putting itself in this tragic conflict, *Faiz Lobisi* not merely

reproduces this Turkish imagination, but also fails to recognize this ambivalent construction, hence, its unnatural "nature" which goes without recognizing and problematizing.

Therefore, the page's political and aesthetic expositions incite to talk about and criticize (Western) imperialism, which intervenes in peoples' lives and homeland, which makes peoples' lives miserable and unbearable, which disrespects peoples' rights (like *maganda*), and the AKP government's role in constructing, shaping and restricting the (mostly religious) individuals' imagination that leads to active ignorance and indifference to others' (formerly the secular people's) lives whereas the page's political and aesthetic reproductions in terms of modern-traditional, urban-rural, secular-religious dichotomies maintain the problematic aspect of the Turkish imagination that *Tolaz* endeavors to reveal, and leads the historical, political, social, cultural and aesthetic construction of the Turkish imagination to go without recognizing, and hence, problematizing.

The next chapter, the concluding chapter, demonstrates the similarities and differences between *Tolaz*, *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*, the problems and limitations of their online political humor, and relates these issues with humor studies, tells what their online political humor contributes to the definition of political humor, to the humor studies in general, and shows what they show about the nature of (online) political humor and its relation to politics.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse

The relationship between political humor and politics resembles the relationship between aesthetics and politics; thus, with a view to understanding the former, we need to look, first of all, at the latter. According to Marc Redfield (2003), even though the word aesthetics claims to be disinterested in politics, they are very entangled with each other since it is "always in principle and at the end of the day a political discourse" (p. 1). He sees this relationship in what he calls "imagi-nation": Because a nation-state or a nation is fundamentally and irretrievably faceless, "it can only be visualized, imagined, through the mediation of a catachresis, an arbitrary sign" (2003, p. 49). To put it differently, since we can not touch, hear, see, feel or taste a nation(-state), aesthetic discourse allows us to imagine, to sense it through certain figures such as flags, anthems, monuments and so on.

By the relationship between aesthetics and politics, Ranciere (2004), on the other hand, understands "the distribution of the sensible/sensory" which signifies "a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution" (p. 12). Therefore, at the core of politics, there is an aesthetics since this distribution of the sensory, i.e. distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity is itself aesthetic and by aesthetics, he understands "sense experience" (2004, p. 13). In other words, politics is an aesthetic matter, "a reconfiguration of the way we share out or divide places and times, speech and

silence, the visible and the invisible" (Hallward, 2003, p. 203) and in this division, there is always an exclusion of some individuals, always a "having-no-part" of some individuals; therefore, politics always concerns the mobilization of those who have no part in this distribution.

What might be concluded from both Redfield's and Ranciere's arguments is that (nation-)state constructs, shapes and frames the individuals' epistemological, psychological and emotional worlds by constructing certain states of seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving and knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not feeling, not perceiving and not knowing, and that (nation-)state distributes these states among the individuals, regulating their sensibility and perceptibility, deciding who can and can not be a part of this imagination; and therefore, the distribution of these states, i.e. the distribution of this imagination, is not solely a political matter, but also an aesthetic one. In other words, the state determines, constructs, shapes and regulates our sense experience, our sense perception and our imagination. The distribution of the senses is taken for granted and as natural by the individuals so that it goes without recognizing its constructed "nature," without acknowledging its relation to politics and thus, aesthetics. In this respect, the political arena is a stage of a(n aesthetic) struggle of the individuals who are excluded from, who are denied to have a part in this distribution.

In this regard, (political) humor is always in principle and, at the end of the day, a political discourse as well because it criticizes, problematizes, intervenes in and disrupts this unrecognized imagination which is constructed by the state and taken for granted and as natural by the individuals', and discloses the truths and the history obfuscated by that very imagination which stems from the distribution of the sensory. Therefore, being critical and subversive, political humor is not merely a

political discourse in terms of destruction and exposition, but also an aesthetic discourse. In this respect, humor is mainly viewed as a form of resistance, as a weapon against the sovereign, against state and formerly studied as such in the academy (Abe, 1998; Astapova, 2015; Avcı, 2003; Brandes, 1977; Cantek, 2001; Cantek, 2011; Emre et al., 2013; Oring, 2004; Sanders, 2001; and so on).

Even though political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse is universal, it is local, regional and cultural since it is nourished essentially from geography and the culture, history, memory and knowledge of that geography, i.e. from the sense experience and sense perception of that geography. Thence, because the relationship between humor and politics differs according to geographies and their history, culture, knowledge and memory, Turkey has a long history of humor since the pre-Ottoman period which begins with *Nasreddin Hoca*, which is believed to have lived in the thirteenth century and was considered as a philosopher and a wise man, and his jokes which critiqued the religious and judicial systems of his period. Oral humor dominated by jokes germinated and transformed into spatial oral humor in the sixteenth century and onwards by the plays called *Karagöz and Hacivat*, *Ortaoyunu* and *Meddah* performed in coffeehouses and public squares, the performances which mainly made fun of certain religious and military figures. The shift from spatial oral humor to written humor occurred in the nineteenth century with the first humor magazine of the Ottoman Empire, *Diyojen*, which was an epitome for other humor magazines.

Nonetheless, the written humor continued to be nourished by the traditional figures such as *Karagöz* until 1922 when the stage was taken by the largest running humor magazine during the Turkish Republican era, *Akbaba*, which represented the break from the Ottoman tradition and set a precedent for other humor magazines who

started to make fun of the Ottoman ways of spending and enjoying time, and to exalt the Turkish revolution and its consequences. *Akbaba* and its followers were challenged by the most subversive humor magazine of Turkey between 1946 and 1949, *Markopaşa*, which is considered as the first political humor magazine during the Republican era due to its aggressive language and its critiques on the one-party regime. However, the great challenge and change came with *Gırgır* in 1972: The best-selling and most influential humor magazine of the 1970s and 80s not solely changed the printing technique, gave more importance to visuality, thus, transformed written humor into visual humor, but also "democratized" the humor field and hence, expanded the scope of this field, which was limited with the artists and intellectuals, by encouraging the young and potential cartoonists from not only Istanbul but also other cities to send their drawings. *Gırgır* also gave way to the publication of several Islamic humor magazines which came out as a reaction to their secular counterparts and which encouraged religiously conservative boys and girls to engage in humor.

Visual humor was mainly dominated by the humor magazines and their caricatures until the 2000s when the Internet humor germinated the humor field: Online humor both carried the traditional humor types such as caricatures and jokes and paved the way for new types of humor such as caps. In addition, it led the individuals from all around the world to participate as both producers and consumers, and to communicate with each other through humor. In other words, online humor did not merely blur the traditional boundaries between producer and consumer, but also led to another democratization of the humor field through new types of humor which do not require any talent that caricatures require, hence, encouraging the individuals to create a humor website and/or a humor Facebook page. Nonetheless, these new types of humor focus very much on the (political) agenda, thence,

generating a kind of (topical) humor which remains more parochial, colloquial and immediate than other humor types. In this sense, democratization of the humor field through the Internet means also a *parochialization* of humor through online humor types, restricting humor both in terms of form and content.

In this light, my thesis which stems from this democratization led by online humor is interested in three different online humor pages on Facebook in Turkey (*Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*), their (parochial) ways of engaging with politics, their (parochial) struggle with the state, and the dialogic relationship between them. In other words, my thesis is limited with online political humor which is concentrated on the political agenda in the sense that through Barthian semiotic analysis,[87] aiming to understand and explain how those Facebook pages bring criticism to the authority by humorously engaging with different political parties, the groups associated with those parties, the social and political events and the government's reaction to them, what kind of unrecognized and obfuscated truths they expose through their online political humor, how subversive their online political humor is and how they engage in dialogue with not merely the authority but also each other.

6.2 The dialogical relationship between the pages

The semiological analysis of these different online political humor pages determines certain similarities and differences in terms of the East-West dichotomy and imagination. In order to understand the similarities and differences between them, we must, first of all, look at the positions they take because these similarities and

[87] With a view to fulfilling the lack in Barthes's analysis, I have taken the intertextuality between caps and prezes produced by these pages into consideration.

differences derive from their positions, the perspectives and discourses of those positions. To start with *Tolaz*, the page as a publicly private online community (or position, outlook, worldview) restricts itself with the Kurdish regions in Turkey, the Kurdish life, the Kurdish people and their relation with the Turkish state; thus, the page claims to represent the online Kurdish humor. According to the page's political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse, we understand that *Tolaz* have made use of an anti-colonial narrative, which argues that what the page calls as Kurdistan is a colony divided among Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. In this respect, the publicly private online community depicts the East (which is considered as Kurdistan) as a geography of war (between the Turkish state and the Kurdish population), a geography of death and a geography of violence whereas the West (seen formerly as the Turkish state) as imperialist, interventionist, violent and exclusionary by using the state's own discourses of wealth and glory against the state itself and the means of riot control as a main motif. The political and aesthetic discourse used in this depiction and the page's usage of the word Kurdistan are subversive in the sense that *Tolaz* exposes the counter-history obfuscated by the official Turkish history, hence, intervenes in and disrupts the story of the formation of the Turkish state, i.e. the imagi-nation and the sense perception constructed by the Turkish state.

Even though we can observe the same kind of depiction of the East-West binary in the other online political humor pages, there is no relationship between the Kurdish community and these depictions. For instance, the publicly private online community *Dinci Caps* denies or unrecognizes the anti-colonial narrative of *Tolaz* and the counter-history revealed by that page, and constructs the Eastern region of Turkey as a geography of war by using the Turkish state's own discourse of terror not against the Turkish state but *Tolaz* itself. Thence, the online political humor page

reproduces the state's narrative of terror which obfuscates the truth behind that narration. Nevertheless, *Dinci Caps* which restricts its online political humor with the Muslim population, the Muslim life and their relation with the authority (formerly with CHP), thus, which claims to represent the online Islamic humor depicts the East (that is generally considered as a geography of the ethical ummah) as a geography of war (between the Western states and the Muslim population), a geography of violence and a geography of death while the West (regarded generally as a geography of the immoral non-Muslim) as imperialist, violent, interventionist, exclusionary and immoral by using civilization and democracy as a main motif. This kind of representation of the East-West dichotomy stems from the Islamic perspective and its anti-colonial narrative which can be clearly observed in the Turkish national anthem, written by Mehmet Akif Ersoy, who is considered as an Islamic intellectual of his period, who depicts the Western civilization as a monster with one tooth and the East as filled with faith. The political and aesthetic discourse of *Dinci Caps* is both subversive in the sense that it exposes the obfuscated violent history of civilization and modernity, and reproductive in the sense that it makes use of the Turkish state's own narration which supports the imagi-nation in Turkey and which obfuscates the Turkish state's own violent and imperialist history.

In contrast to *Dinci Caps*, *Faiz Lobisi* which restricts itself with the secular population, their life and relation with the AKP government, hence, which claims to represent the online secular humor, partially recognizes the counter-history revealed by *Tolaz*: The publicly private online community depicts the East (viewed as both the Middle East and the Eastern region of Turkey) as a geography of war (between both the Western state and the Middle Eastern people, and the AKP government and the Kurdish people), a geography of violence and a geography of death but a geography

of tradition and a geography of backwardness whereas the West as imperialist, interventionist and violent but progressive and modern through an image of a ruined building and a comparative caps between the West and Turkey. Similar with *Dinci Caps*, the online political humor of *Faiz Lobisi* as a political and aesthetic discourse is both destructive in the sense that it discloses the imperialism of the West, the imperialism of the AKP government, the violence committed against the Middle Eastern and the Kurdish people, and reproductive because it makes use of the ambivalent construct of the West that is historically based on the imagi-nation in Turkey (Westernism despite the West) and because it unrecognizes, thence, unproblematizes the violent history of the imperialist Turkish state in relation to the Kurdish community by associating the issue merely with the AKP government and by not exposing the hidden counter-history that *Tolaz* incites to talk about.

In other words, both *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* are two sides of the same coin, meaning that the national imaginary of Turkey is based on the ambivalence of the East-West construction. For instance, in the classrooms, we encounter two crucial symbols of imagi-nation in Turkey: The portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the founder of the Republic of Turkey, the leader of modernity, secularism, hence, Westernism in Turkey) and the national anthem written by Mehmet Akif Ersoy (the symbol of Turkey's uniqueness and Turkey's difference from the imperialist West in terms of tradition and religion). I believe, both *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* represent this two ambivalent symbols of the national imaginary of Turkey, the former (and its position) is associated with the national anthem, thence, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, and the latter (and its position) with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, hence, modernity and secularism. This is why their online political humor is reproductive as well since it is, in fact, a part of the imagi-nation in Turkey. To say it differently, these depictions of

the East-West binary, in essence, stem from the distribution of the sensory, the distribution of spaces during the formation of modern Turkey: The East and the West are distributed in such a way that the former (whether in general or as the Kurdish region) is a geography of tradition and religion, yet a geography of struggle against the Western imperialism whereas the latter (whether in general or as the Western part of Turkey) is a geography of modernity and secularism, but a geography of imperialism. In this regard, the positions the pages take (i.e. their worldviews, their modes of sensing, perceiving and constructing the social world), whether they are an anti-colonial position, an Islamic position or a neither-West-nor-East position, derive from that very distribution of the East and the West; thus, even though they expose the obfuscated counter-truth, counter-history, counter-memory, counter-sense experience, they also reproduce that very distribution of the sensible. Their online political humor is reproductive since their similar-yet-different anti-colonial discourses produce their positions as justifiable and victim, helping the pages take a legitimate position (in terms of political struggle) within the distribution of the sensory. Because the anti-colonial discourse or narrative whose basis is formed by the East-West binary is productive, we confront the East-West dichotomy not as a conflict which needs to be resolved, but as a productive dichotomy. Therefore, the online political humor pages have no goal to resolve that very binary due to its (re)productiveness.

The positions of these publicly private communities and their political and aesthetic discourses (or modes of constructing, perceiving and sensing the social world) do not solely reveal the violence and imperialism behind the East-West dichotomy, but also incite their followers to recognize the above-mentioned imagination imposed by the state and to problematize the state's role on constructing,

shaping and framing the individuals' emotional, psychological and epistemological worlds, the state's role on distributing the senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving, knowing as well as not seeing, not hearing, not feeling and not knowing) and on deciding who can and can not enjoy these (privileged) senses. In other words, in spite of different metaphors and motives used by the online political humor pages, the imagination in which they claim they have no part, depicted as *maganda,* is the dominant theme which leads them to engage in dialogue with each other, through which the dialogical relationship between them is established; hence, there is an economy of imagination which disrupts its unnatural, constructed, exclusionary and violent "nature" that goes without recognizing and problematizing, there are different depictions of imagination through various metaphors and motives which prompt the individuals to recognize and problematize it. Nonetheless, as we are going to see below, those depictions function here as both a political and aesthetic subversion, and a political and aesthetic reproduction.

To begin with *Tolaz*, although imagination can vary according to ideologies, political stances of the political parties, thus, differ according to their reconfiguration of the individuals' imagination, the online Kurdish humor page does not make any distinction between the ideologically different political parties (AKP, CHP and MHP) and/or between the ideologically and economically different Turkish groups in terms of the Kurdish entity. Through the metaphor of animal and the motif of ignorance, *Tolaz* discloses how the Turkish imagination (which is constructed by the Turkish state and based on the exclusion of the Kurdish entity) is aggressive and violent (like animals) towards the Kurdish people, and ignorant and indifferent to the violence committed by the Turkish state against Kurdistan and its habitants even though Turkish people know what is going on that region (ignorance not as "not-

knowingness" but as actively choosing to remain ignorant). To put it in a different way, by depicting Turkish imagination as *maganda* through the animal metaphor and the ignorance motif, the online political humor page shows how the Turkish imagination not only prevents the Kurdish people to become a part of it, but also disrespects their right to become a part of it, making life miserable and unbearable for them. This kind of depiction here is subversive since it turns the Turkish imagination which is glorified through heroic saga (the War of Independence) into a shameful image which is filled with massacre, violence, death and indifference by revealing the counter-history, counter-memory, counter-knowledge, counter-sense experience that are embedded in the Kurdish geography (Dersim/Tunceli, Diyarbakır/Amed, Şırnak, Cizre, Hakkari, Ağrı and so on), embedded in its habitants' minds and bodies. It is disruptive because it exposes how the Turkish state has distributed the senses, perceptions, spaces, times and forms of activity (which produce active ignorance and indifference) among the Turkish individuals in such a way that it has excluded the Kurdish community to become a part of it and prevented them to participate through intervention, massacre, violence, and how it has justified this exclusion in such a way that the Turkish individuals has remained ignorant and indifferent to the exclusionary aspect of this distribution. However, it might be noted here that *Tolaz* fails to transgress the boundaries of this distribution by merely fulfilling the role of struggle given as a result of this distribution, and hence fails to offer another way of distributing ways of doing, making, sensing, being and perceiving.

Dinci Caps, on the other hand, is concerned with another imagination in Turkey. Through the two conflicting female figures (as violent and victim of violence), the publicly private community prompts its followers to recognize the

violent "nature" of the secular imagination, which was constructed by the (Kemalist) CHP government during the formation of the new Turkish state mostly through female figures and which is based on the exclusion of the Muslim entity. By depicting this secular imagination as *maganda* through the female figure associated with Kemalists and/or white Turks, *Dinci Caps* exposes how this Westernist imagination prevents the Muslim people (especially the Muslim women) to enjoy it, disrespecting their right to become a part of it, making life miserable and unbearable for them, remaining ignorant and indifferent to the violence committed against the Muslim population, to the discrimination and sufferings of the Muslim people; and the page demonstrates how even though CHP is not the ruling party anymore, the secular imagination continues to become dominant in certain people's emotional, psychological and epistemological worlds, thus, leading to exclude the Muslim community. This kind of depiction here is disruptive in the sense that it makes the violent and exclusionary aspect of secular imagination visible and transforms this imagination which is represented as progressive, as something to be proud of into a shameful representation which is filled with violence, exclusion, discrimination, active ignorance and indifference by revealing the counter-history, counter-memory, counter-knowledge, counter-sense perception that are embedded in the Muslim community. However, it is reproductive as well because it fails to problematize and transcend the modern-traditional and the secular-religious dichotomies which are, in fact, intrinsic not merely to the secular imagination in Turkey but also to the Turkish imagination, and it reproduces the female figures as the bearers of imagination, the political and aesthetic objects of imagination and the political and aesthetic objects of humor discourse. Furthermore, by not talking about the exclusion of the Kurdish population from imagination and concentrating solely on the Muslim aspect, the

publicly private community unrecognizes the fact that the imagination that the page associates with secularism, thence, with CHP, is essentially a part of and immanent to the Turkish imagination, which disregards the Kurdish entity, ultimately reproduces the Turkish imagination; and by concentrating solely on the Muslim aspect, the page constructs an Islamic imagination (that *Faiz Lobisi* endeavors to problematize) in contrast to the secular imagination, an imagination of the ummah which, in fact, excludes the secular groups considered as Kemalist and/or white Turk and leftist, and the Kurdish people considered as terrorist by the page; thence, it reproduces an imagination which is, in fact, internal to the Turkish imagination and which produce another exclusion that leads to polarization and tension in the society, and fails to recognize the fact that its own imagination actually derives from that very imagination produced by the distribution of the sensory.

Lastly, through stupidity and compassion, the online secular humor page *Faiz Lobisi* "responds" to *Dinci Caps* by demonstrating how the Islamic imagination, which is constructed by the religious conservative AKP government and based on the exclusion of the secular people, is intolerant to their way of living, violent, ignorant (both in terms of "not-knowingness" which is shown through stupidity and in terms of actively choosing to remain ignorant which is demonstrated through compassion) and indifferent to the violence committed against the secular people, their discrimination and sufferings. To put it differently, by depicting the Islamic imagination as *maganda* through stupidity and compassion, the online political humor page discloses how this imagination prevents the secular people to become a part of it, hence, disrespecting their right to become, making life miserable and unbearable for them, and how it leads to polarization and tension in the society by excluding the others. Furthermore, *Faiz Lobisi* not merely incites its followers to

recognize the problematic, exclusionary and violent aspect of this imagination, but also demonstrates its conservative and traditional aspect in order to prompt the followers to see how it misrepresents the secular and modern society, and how it leads other nation(-state)s to misimagine the nation(-state). In this regard, the page makes use of the figures of Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül, the first covered First Ladies of Turkey. Similar with *Dinci Caps*, the online political humor page can not transgress but reproduces the modern-traditional dichotomy which is the tragic conflict to be resolved in order to become properly modern and reproduces the female figures as the bearers of this tragic conflict, the political and aesthetic objects of imagination and the political and aesthetic objects of humor discourse. In addition, this kind of depiction is here also both subversive and reproductive: It is subversive because it exposes how the AKP government constructs, shapes and frames the individuals' emotional, epistemological and psychological worlds, their sensibility and perceptibility, and how it distributes this imagination among them by excluding certain people. It is reproductive since it fails to recognize the problematic constructs of particular dichotomies such as modern-traditional, urban-rural and secular-religious by reproducing the tragic conflict through Emine Erdoğan and Hayrünnisa Gül. This reproduction demonstrates the fact that the tragic conflict does not appear as a conflict which must be resolved; on the contrary, it is productive since these binaries produce the positions of the pages, maintaining them as ethical and legitimate positions, allowing the pages to monopolize humanity, ethics, morality, intelligence, civilization etc.

Moreover, by putting the secular imagination (that *Dinci Caps* endeavors to problematize) in contrast to the Islamic imagination, *Faiz Lobisi* unrecognizes the fact that the secular imagination is itself exclusionary and violent, a part of the

Turkish imagination, hence, fails to see the fact that this imagination is also based on the exclusion of the Muslim and the Kurdish populations, ultimately reproducing not only another exclusion, but also the Turkish imagination itself which are both the products of that very distribution of the sensible. Both *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* fail to acknowledge the fact that they themselves represent the Turkish imagination, which is based on ambivalent dichotomies such as East-West, modern-traditional, secular-religious and so on. Therefore, like *Tolaz*, they are unable to transcend the distribution of the imagination by fulfilling merely the roles given as a result of this distribution, and fail to suggest the possibility of another imagination, thence the possibility of another distribution. In other words, the reproductiveness of their online political humor derives from their engagement not with politics, but identity politics which in fact (re)produce all the imposed classifications or distinctions such as Kurdishness, Muslimness and secularism with their significant others, which (re)produce the distribution of the sensory.

According to the analyses of the online political humor discourses of *Tolaz*, (but especially of) *Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi*, both political and aesthetic subversions and political and aesthetic reproductions occur at the same time. What does it mean? What does it demonstrate us? It shows the fact that online political humor as a political and aesthetic discourse, which remains topical in terms of the political agenda, is both disruptive and reproductive: It is destructive since it exposes the truths, counter-histories, counter-memories, counter-knowledges, counter-sense experiences and counter-perceptions obfuscated by the official truths, histories, memories, knowledges, sense experiences and perceptions which are taken for granted and as natural, thus, remain unrecognized and problematized. Nonetheless, it is reproductive because the groups who make use of political humor discourse fail to

recognize the fact that their perspectives, their positions and the distinctions with which they are identified are determined, constructed, shaped and regulated by the distribution of the sensory and go without recognizing and problematizing since they themselves take them as natural and for granted, i.e. the fact that they are actually immanent to the distribution of the sensory since these positions, these distinctions are, in essence, a result, a product of this very distribution. In other words, in contrast to the humor studies which takes humor as a form of resistance, thus, fails to recognize the reproductive nature of online political humor, the phenomenological approach which considers humor as a specific outlook or worldview of a particular group, and Ranciere's conception of the distribution of the sensory/sensible help us recognize the contradictory nature of this topical humor, recognize its tragic conflict: *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* are the online representations of specific political and aesthetic worldviews of particular groups different from each other and they expose their own truths, memories, knowledges, histories and sense perceptions that are believed to be excluded from, to be invisible and obfuscated by the distribution of the sensible. However, they also reproduce their political and aesthetic worldviews which generally exclude each other's outlooks and which is taken for granted and as natural by them, thence, goes without problematizing and recognizing. To put it in a different manner, (online) political humor is subversive and reproductive at the same time since as a specific mode of sensing and perceiving the social world (whether it is excluded or included), it is, in essence, not external but intrinsic to the distribution of the sensory/sensible (because every distribution includes an exclusion), a result of this configuration of sensibility and perceptibility, seeming as if it is external to this distribution. It is crucial to note here that not merely the phenomenological approach and Ranciere's theory help us realize the reproductive nature of (online) political

humor, but also a dialogical analysis of these online political humor pages makes it visible: Without the dialogical analysis, it might be difficult to see the reproductiveness of this kind of humor which mainly goes unnoticed. This dialogical study through the phenomenological approach and Ranciere demonstrates that online political humor both exposes the sources of exclusion, sources of indifference and active ignorance which lead to tension and polarization in the society, and reproduces another and/or same sources of this exclusion, this active ignorance and indifference, hence, inviting to rethink (online) political humor through the relationship between politics and aesthetics in contrast to the general sociological tendency which regards humor as merely a form of resistance.

With a view to overcoming the reproductive aspect of (online) political humor, is it possible to create a kind of humor as a political and aesthetic discourse that problematizes not merely the constructed, unnatural and exclusionary imaginations and representations etc., but also its own position and the imagination associated with it? Can *Tolaz, Dinci Caps* and *Faiz Lobisi* produce such caps and *preze*s that they also disrupt their taken-for-granted positions, perspectives and worldviews which derive from the distribution of the sensory, that they destroy all the imposed forms of classifications or distinctions, all the imposed norms of representation, hence, destroy that very distribution of the sensible as well?

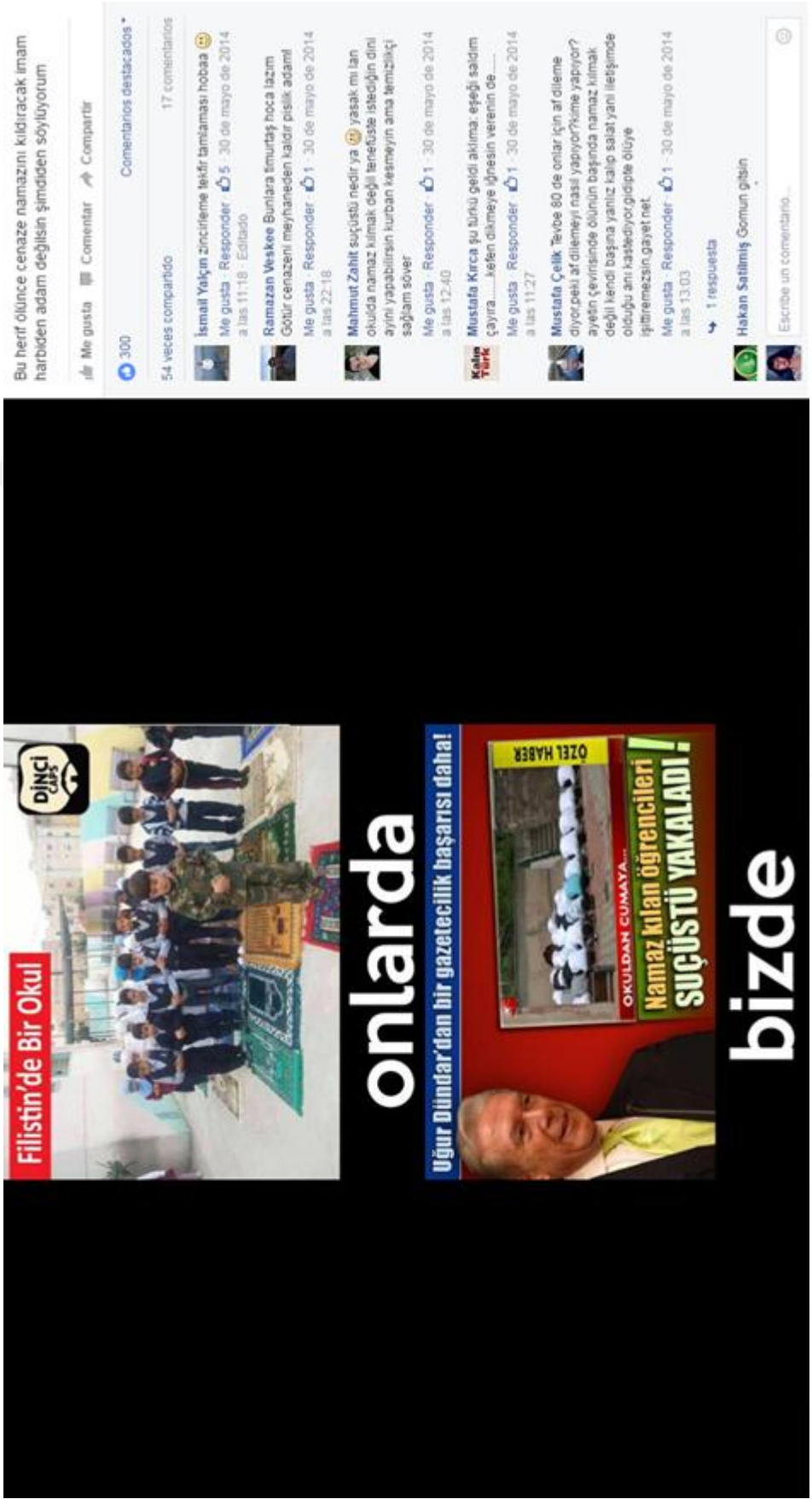
APPENDIX A

ORIGINAL VERSIONS OF CAPS

1. Figure 13. Caps on Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu



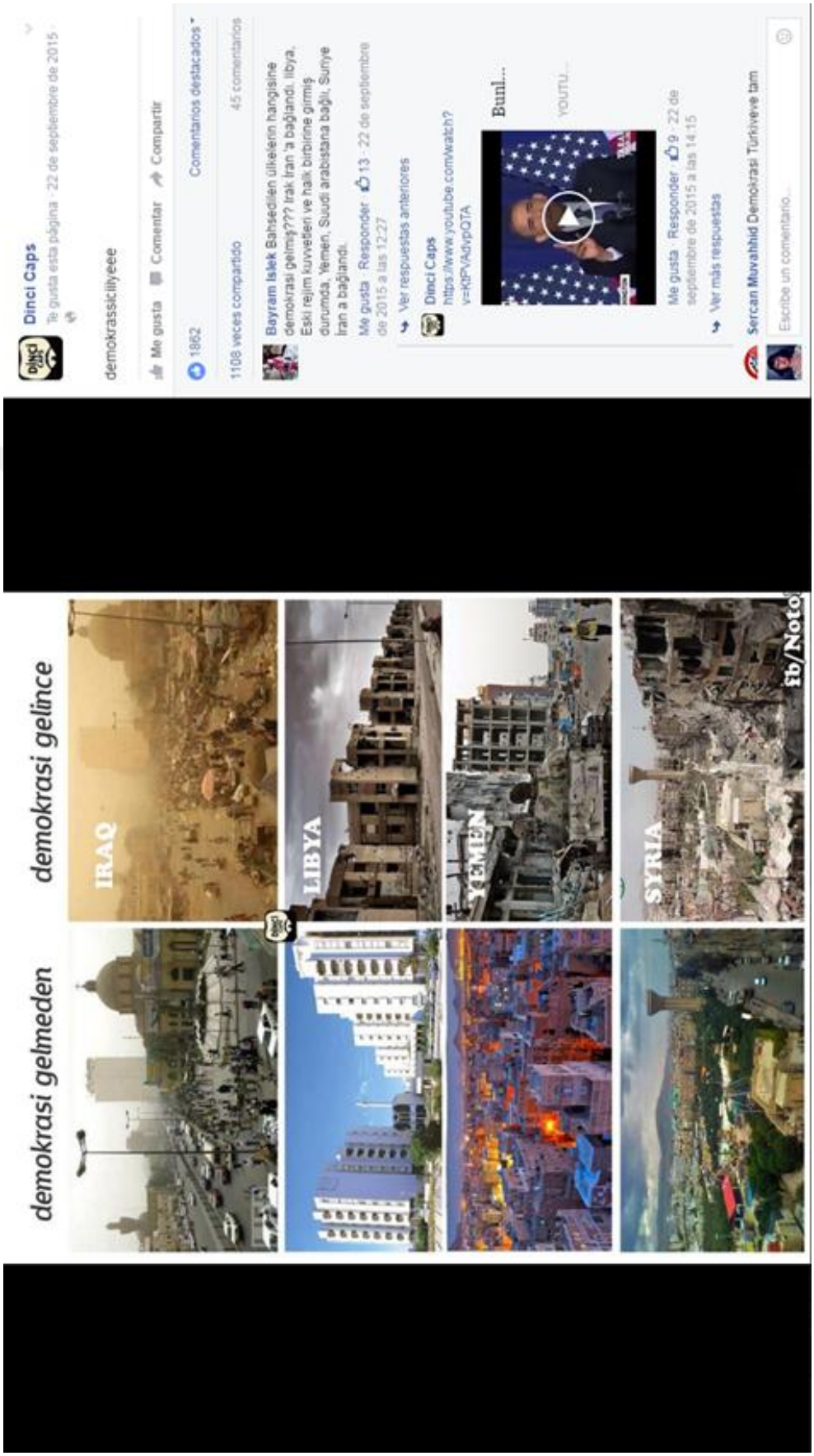
2. Figure 14. A critique of the Kemalist secularism



3. Figure 15. Caps on AKP



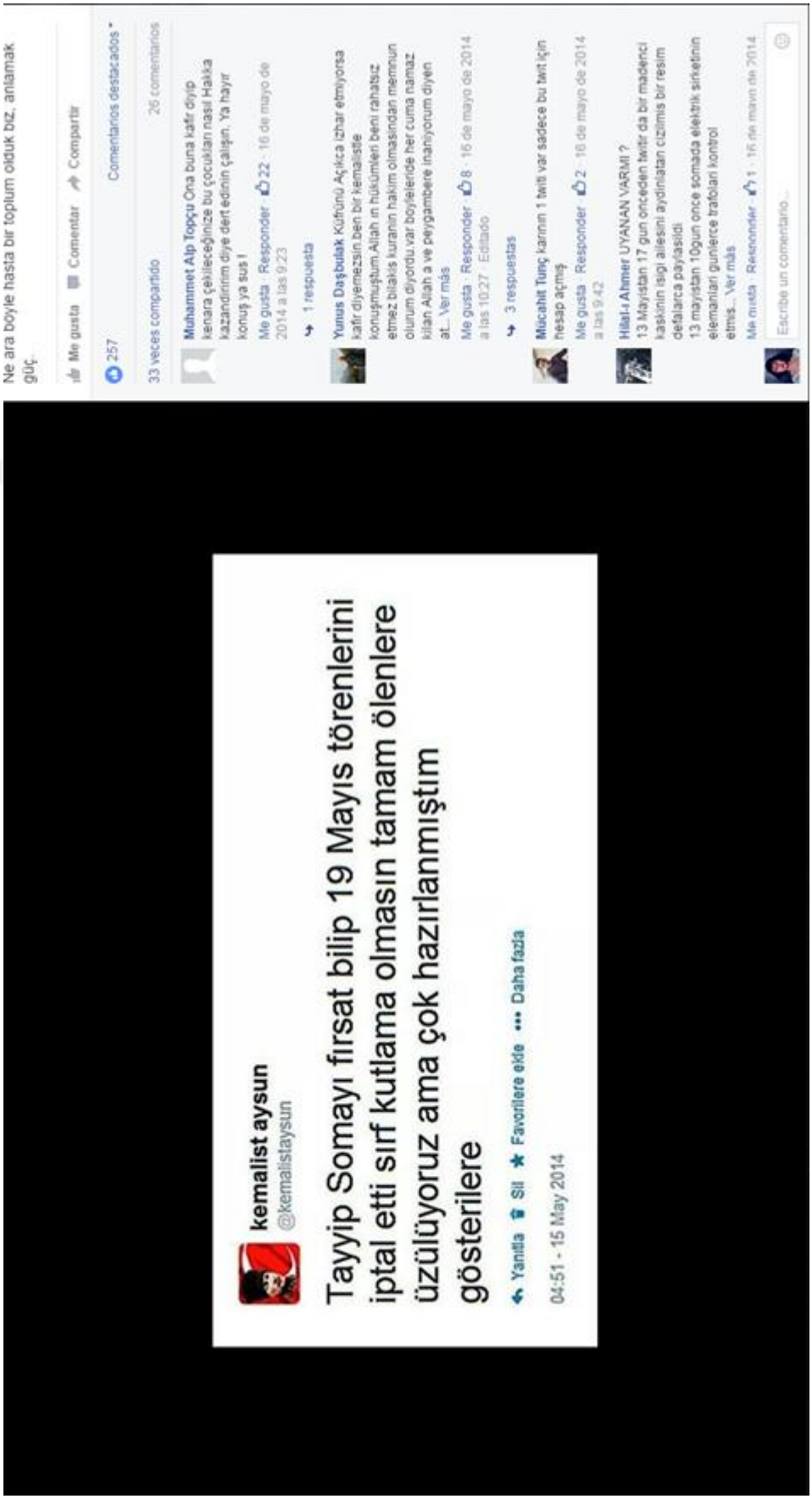
4. Figure 16. The depiction of the East-West binary



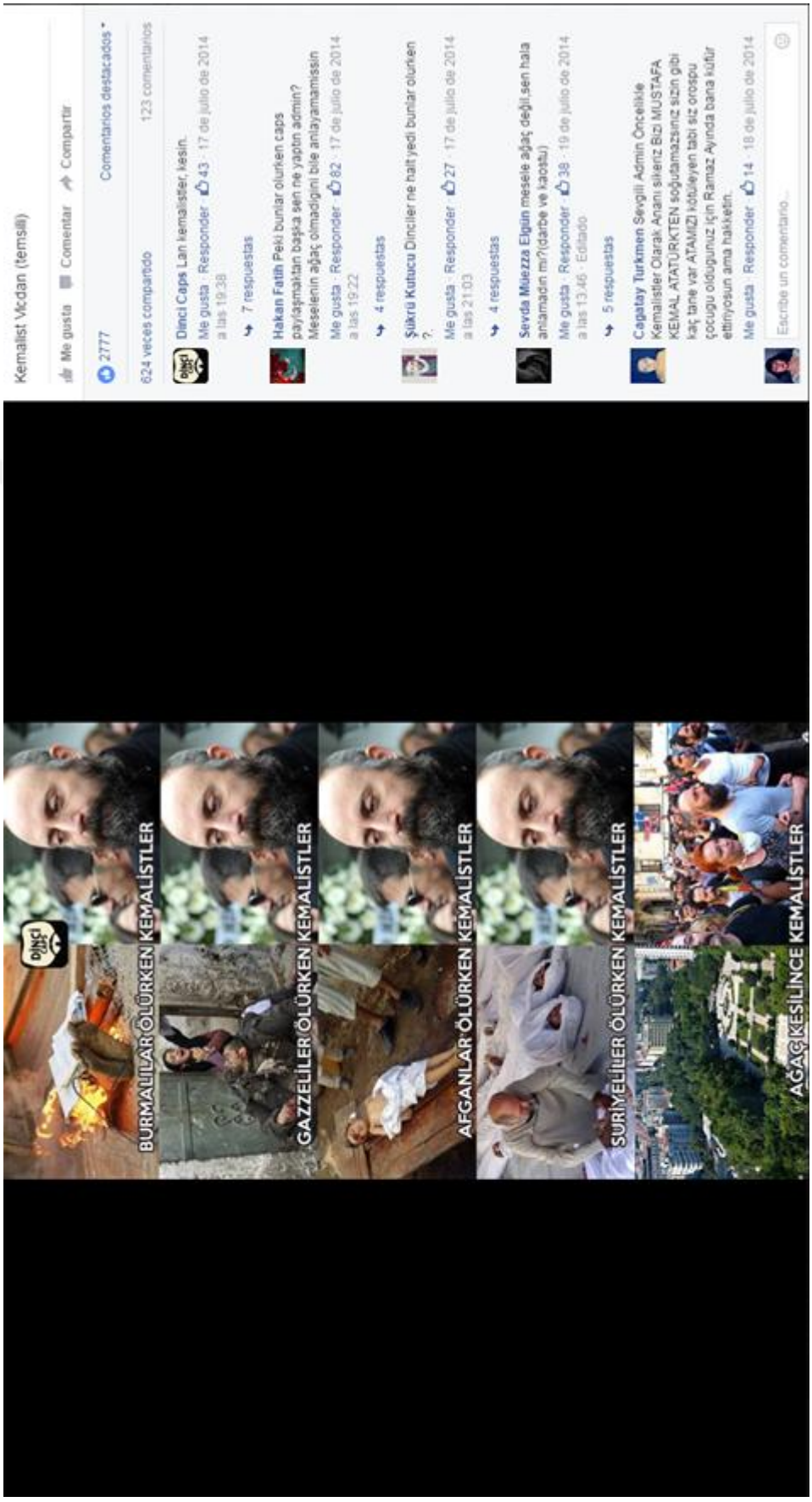
5. Figure 17. The depiction of the bigot kemalists



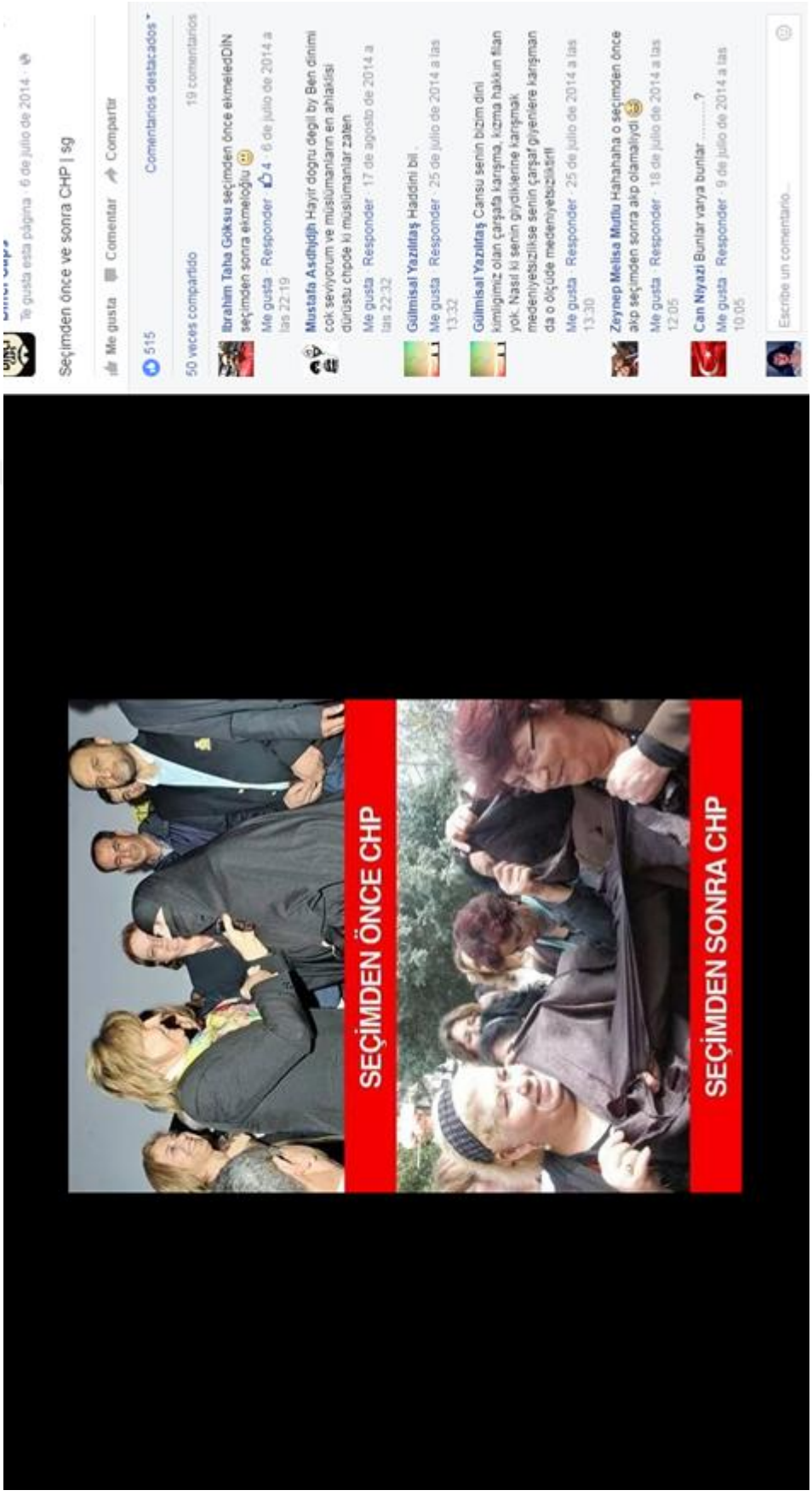
6. Figure 18. Caps on Soma



7. Figure 19. The Kemalist reaction to the sufferings of the Muslim population

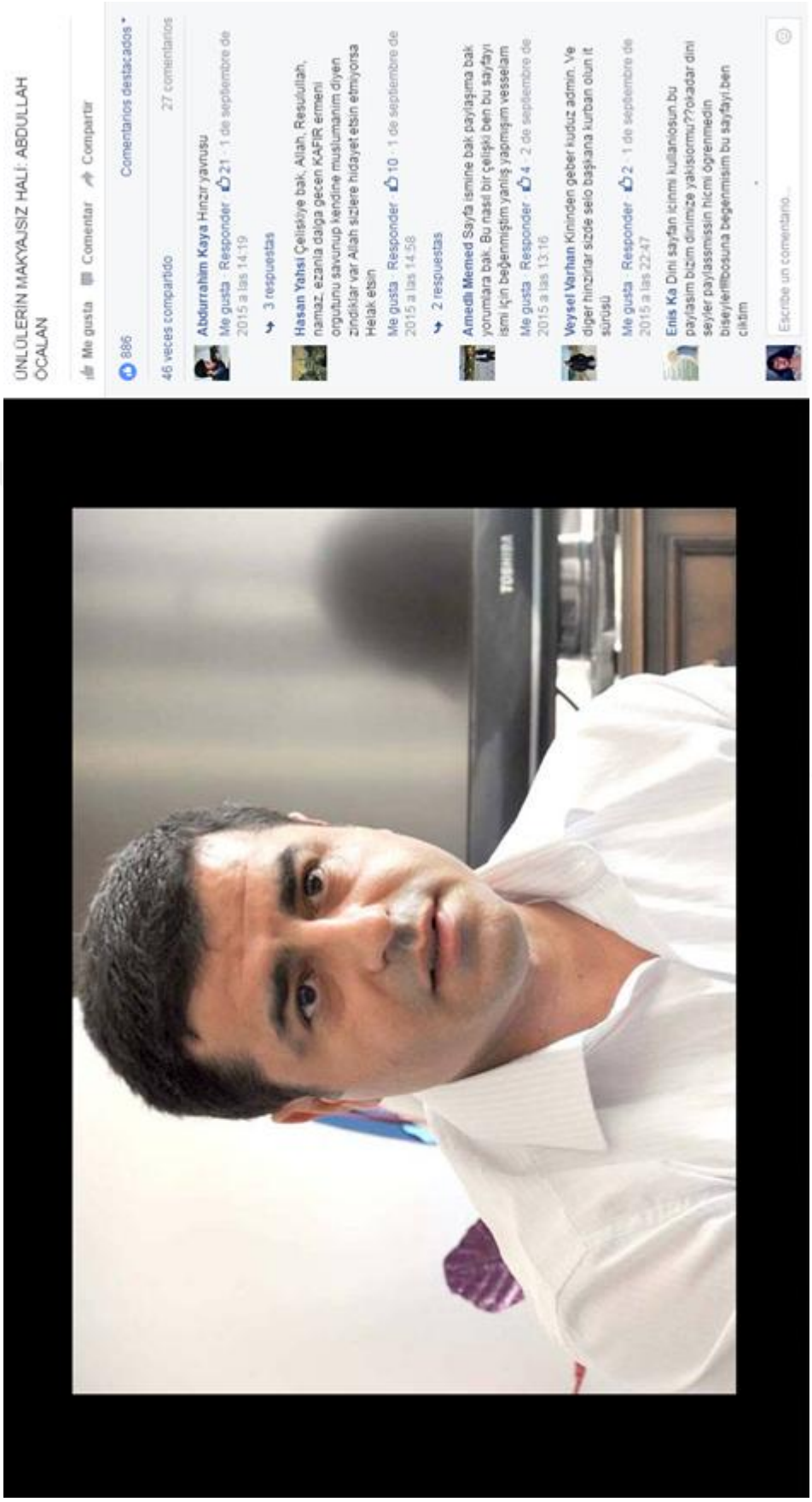


8. Figure 20. CHP before and after the elections

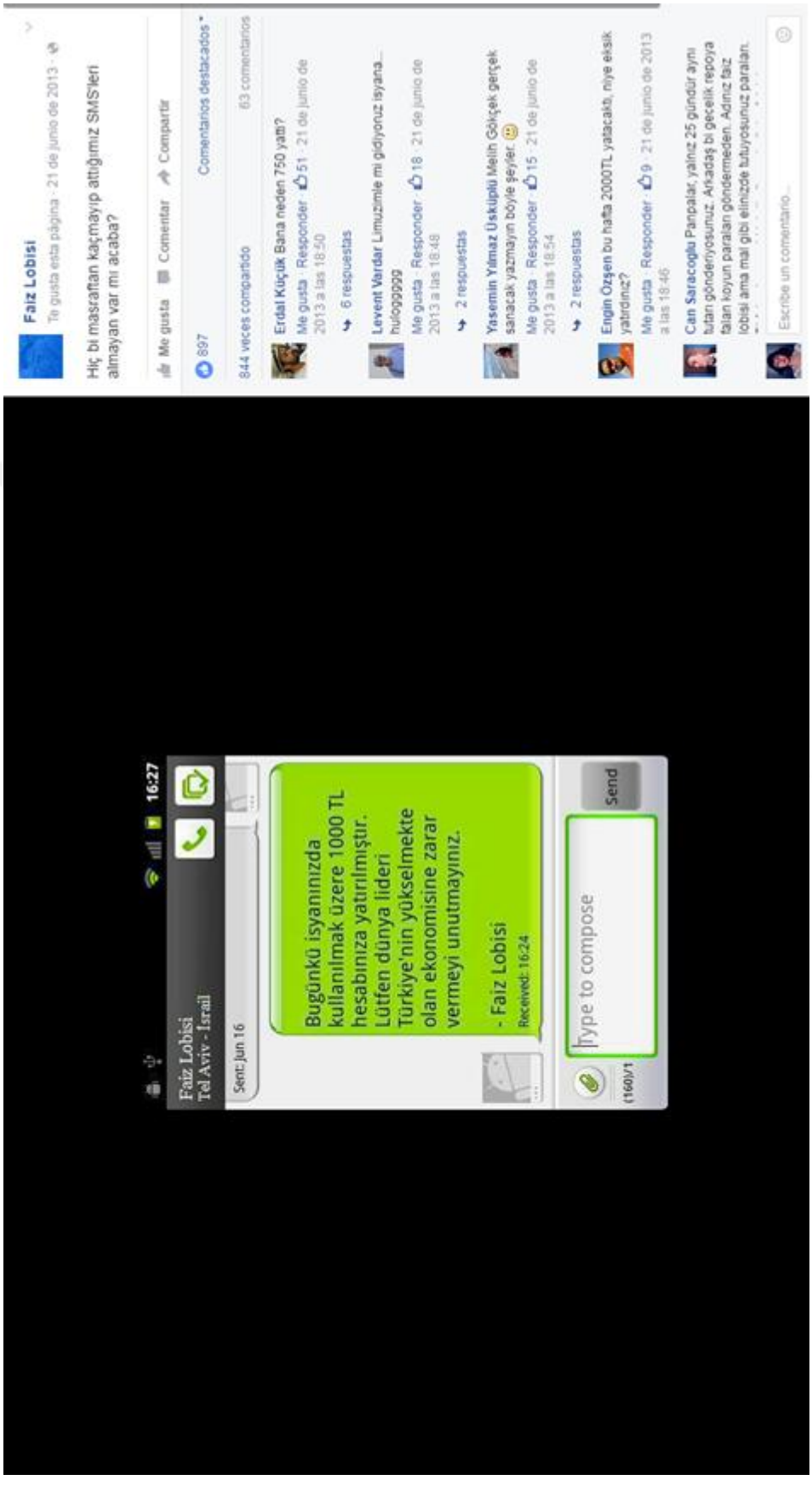


9. Figure 21. HDP's view on Muslims

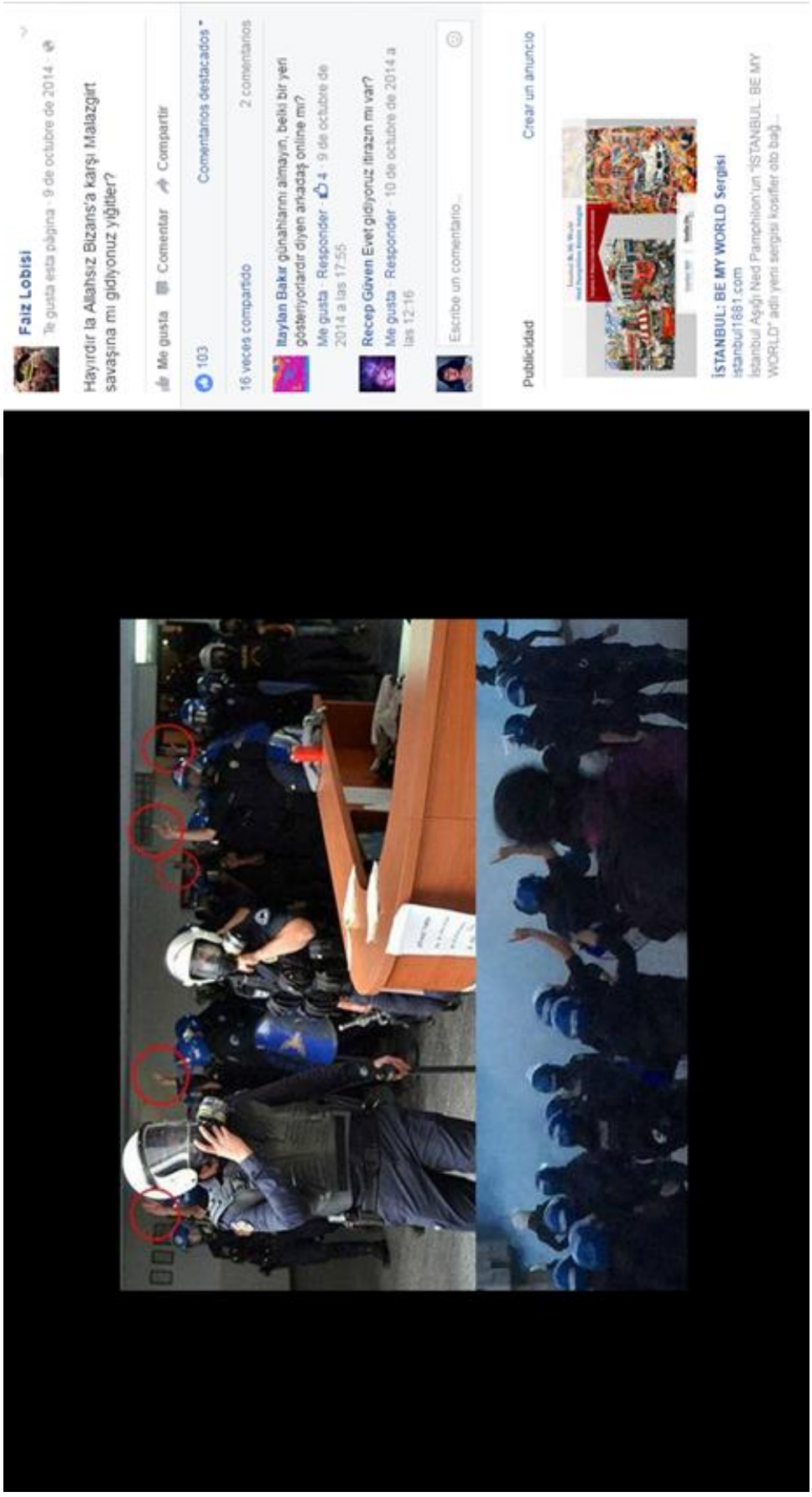
10. Figure 22. The image of Demirtaş



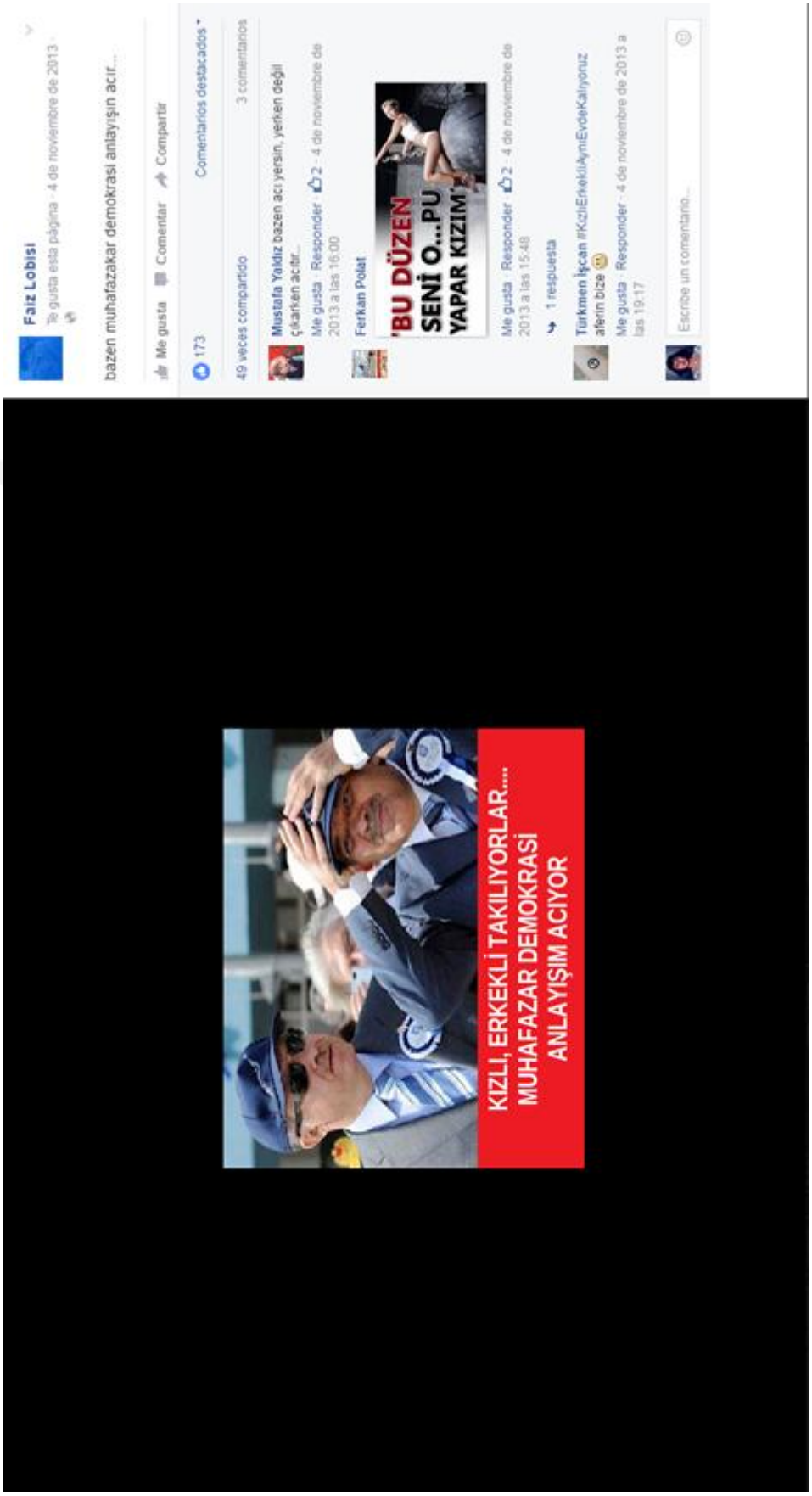
11. Figure 23. Caps on pretension



12. Figure 24. The religious aspect of police violence



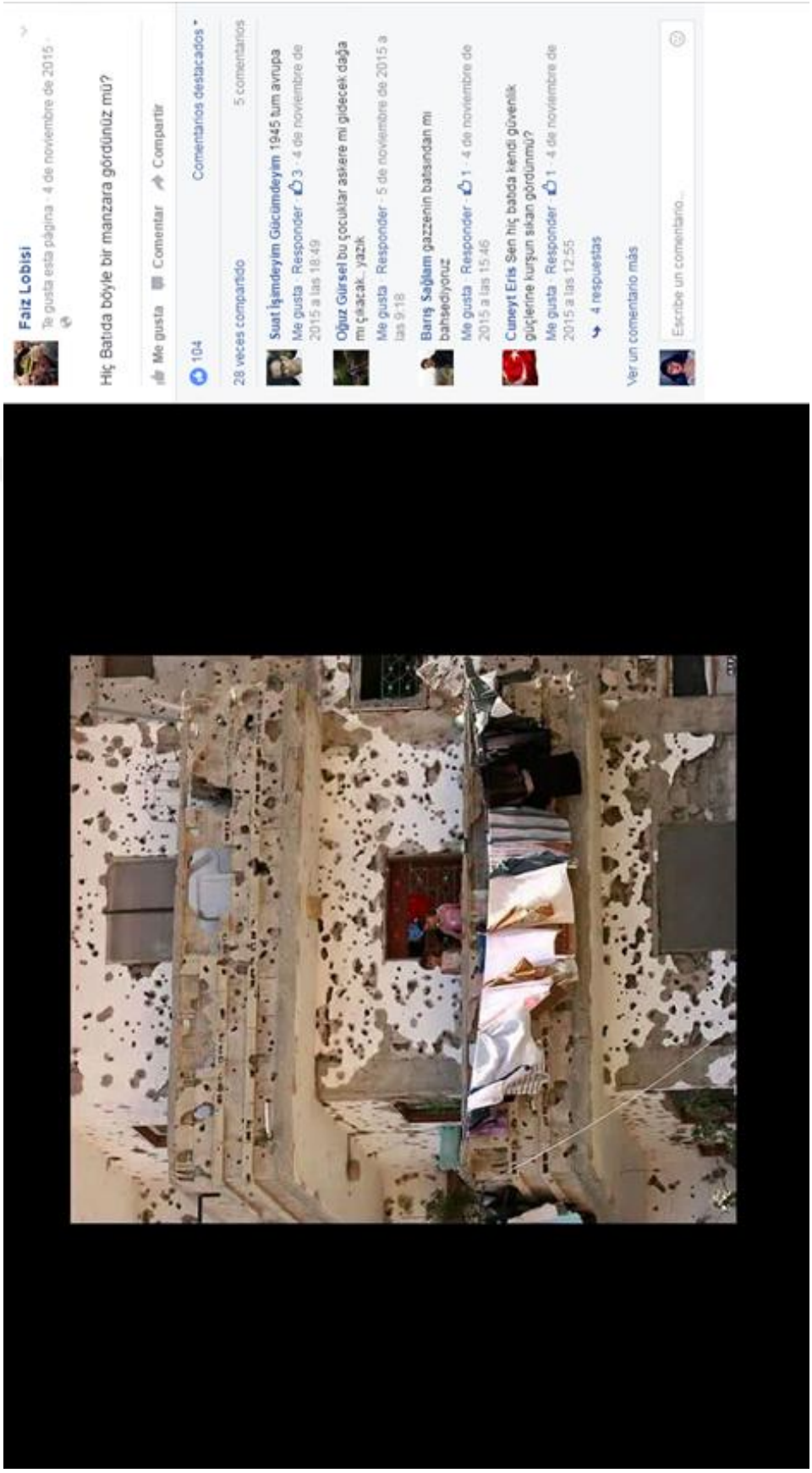
13. Figure 25. AKP's conservativeness



14. Figure 26. The West versus Turkey

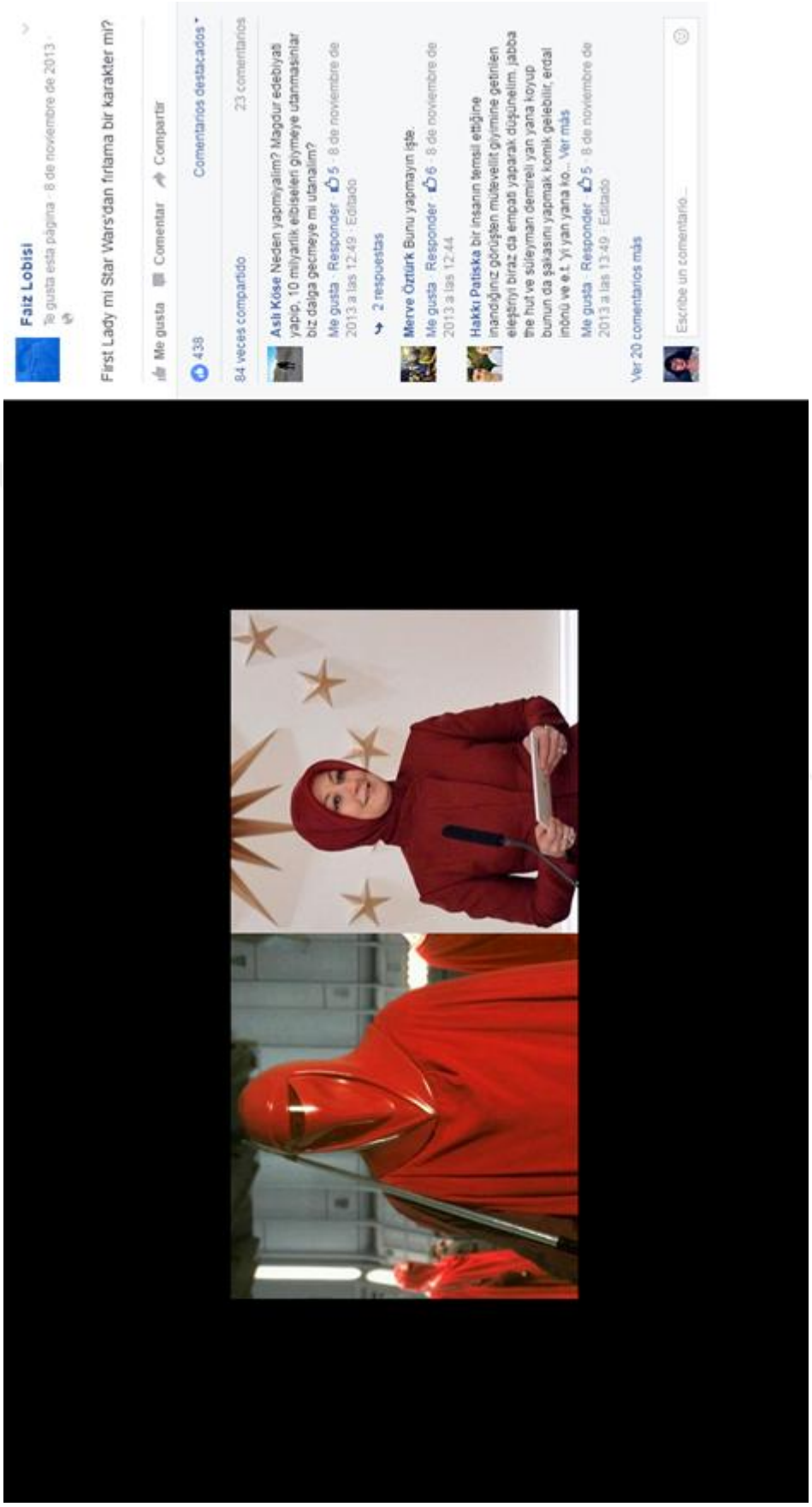


15. Figure 27. The depiction of the East

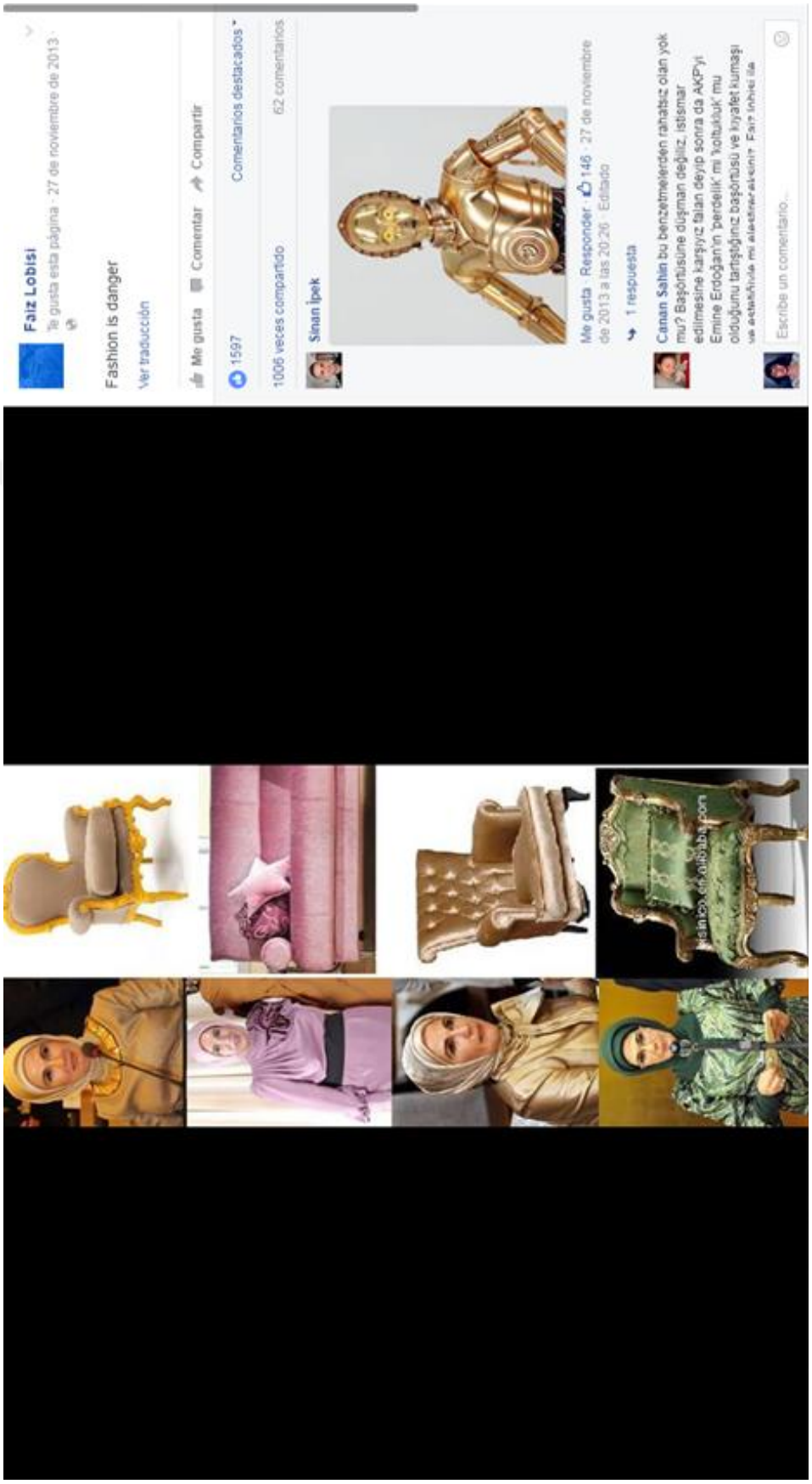


16. Figure 28. Us versus you

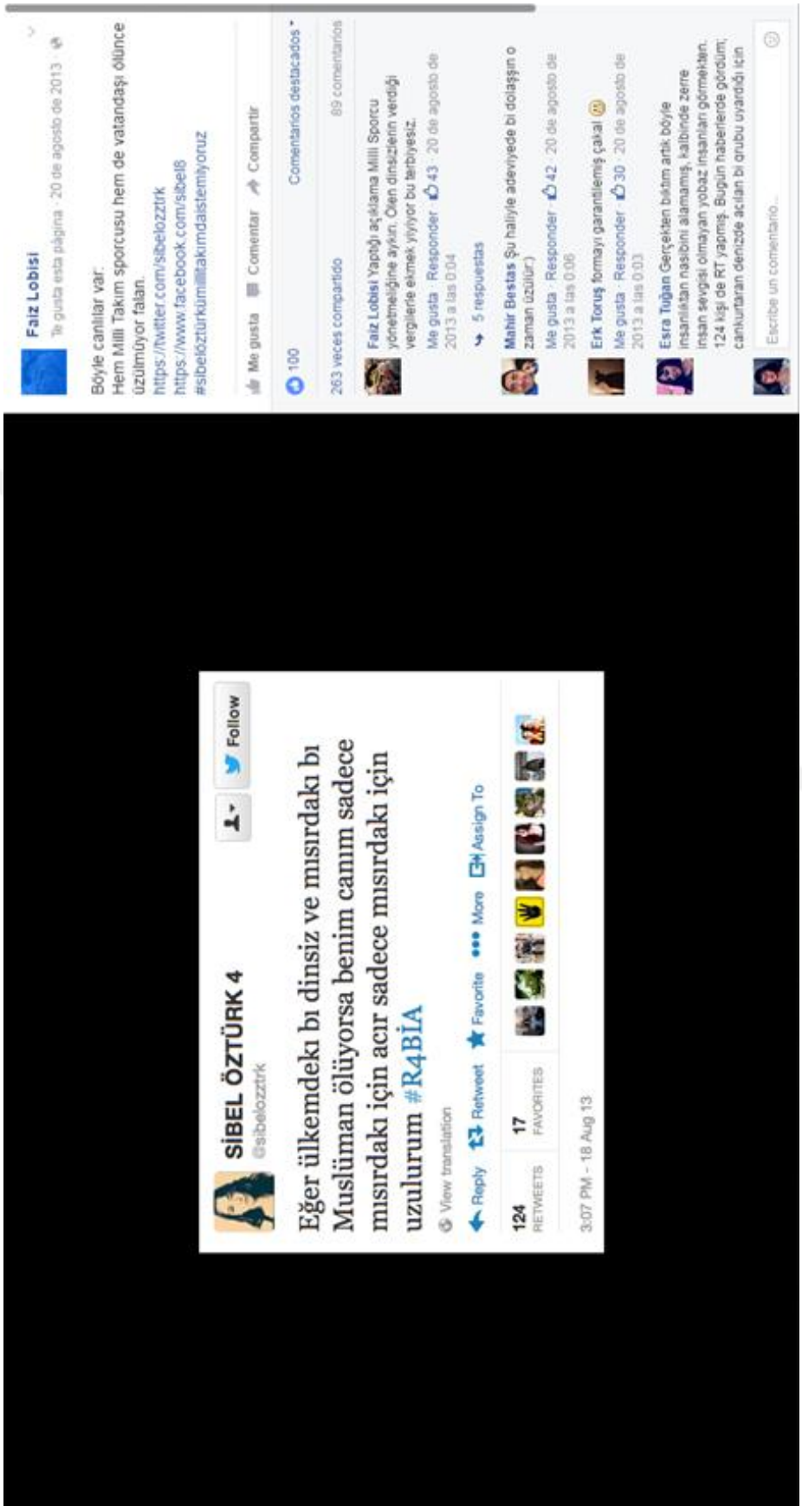
17. Figure 29. The image of Hayrünnisa Gül



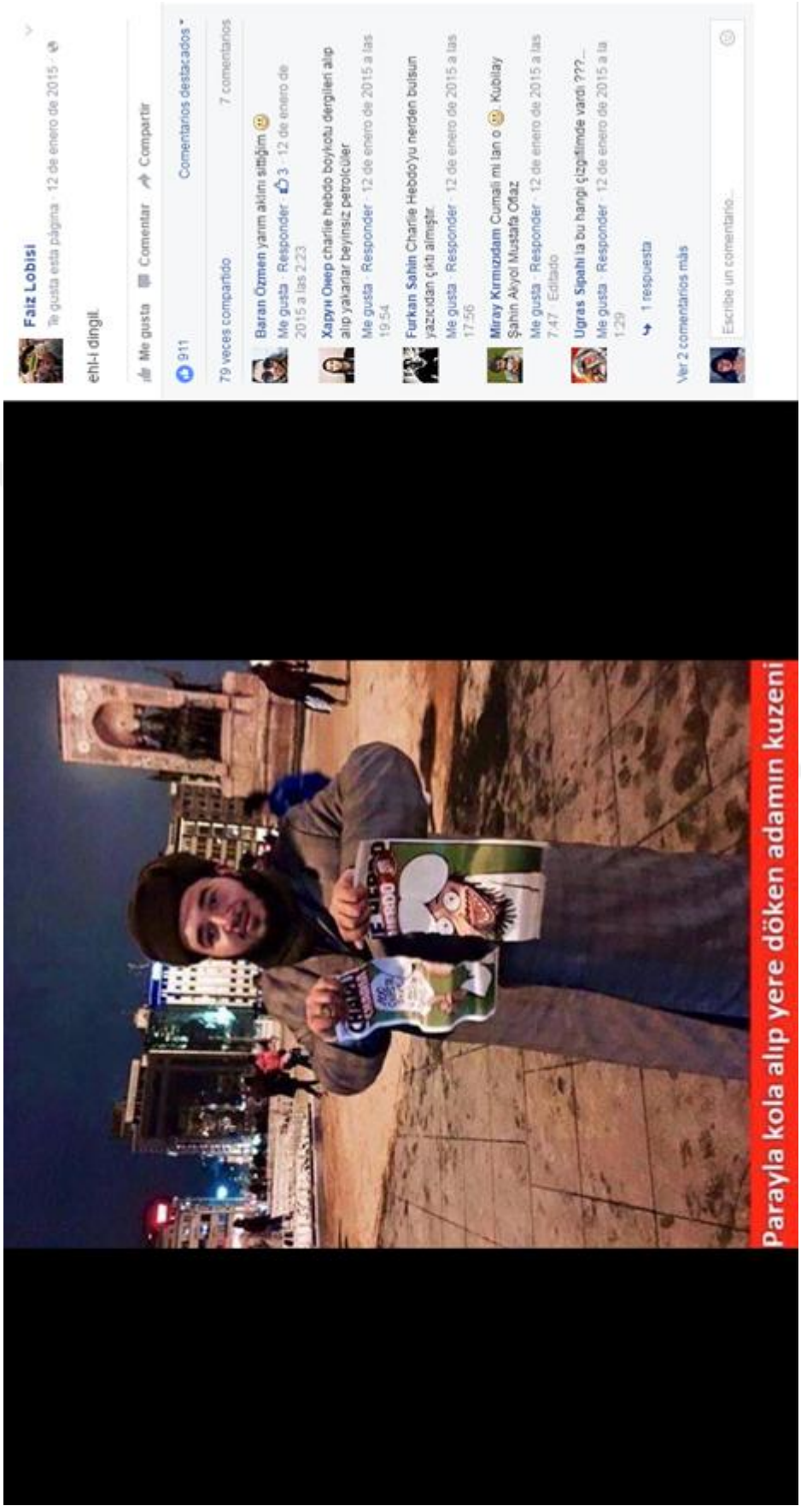
18. Figure 30. Emine Erdoğan



19. Figure 31. The *AKPli* figure as merciless



20. Figure 32. *Dingil AKPli*



APPENDIX B

ORIGINAL PASSAGES OF TRANSLATED TEXTS

1. Kürt penceresinden bakacaktık . . . Bizimki de tamamen Kürtlerin yaşantısına hitap edecek . . . Buna ihtiyaç duyuyoruz çünkü uzun zamandır Kürt mizahı üzerine bir üretim yok . . . Yani diğerini [Türk mizahını] zaten yapan var.
2. Sırrı Süreyya Türklere Kürtlere düşman olmaktan başka bi seçenek bırakmadınız, diyordu . . . Yani devlet veriyor bu mesajı, "Senin yapabileceğinin sınırını ben çiziyorum, bunun ötesine geçersen cezalandırılırsın" mesajını çok net veriyor . . . Bu devletin Türklere biçtiği rolün sınırlarını gayet iyi gösteriyor. Bu da hakkaten iyi bi şey değil. Acınası bi durum yani . . . Türklerde devlet karşıtlığı geleneği gelişmemiş. Bu da yani gurur duyulacak bi şey değil. Halbuki Türk siyasetinde yalnızca Kürt sorunu yok, herkesin sorunu var. Herkesin baş kaldırması gerekir ama kaldırmıyor işte. Devlet sorgulanamaz, kutsal bi şey. Ve bu da acınası bir hâl . . . Bizim bilinçlenmemizin sebebi ulusal mücadele . . . E Türklerde bu yok . . . [V]e hiç onun eksikliğinin farkına varmıyor.
3. Bu sayfayı özellikle bizim camiamızda bulunan tek sesliliği kırmak için açtığımızı hatırlıyorum . . . Herkes anaakıma göre düşünmek zorunda değil. Bizim kendi ilke ve prensiplerimiz olabilir ve bunlar üzerinden birileri mizah yoluyla eleştirilebilir.

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