Fight “acceptable” with “acceptable:” Football, cultural battle in Turkey and the story of two “doxas” over an old military song

Football has become a politico-cultural battlefield in Turkey since the early 2010s, as the Islamist-populist Prime Minister (and then President) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan launched a new project called the “New Turkey” (Carney 2019, 140) aiming to create a cultural domination of “pious, vengeful generations,” (Pekerman 2017,310) after having eliminated his Kemalist rivals within the State. This campaign openly targeted secular lifestyles that dominate sociocultural activities in metropolitan cities like Istanbul or Izmir, which envisaged policies like the restrictions in alcohol sale and the abortion ban (Özdemir 2015, 250), as well as the suppression of free speech, press freedom and Internet freedom (Kemahlıoğlu 2015, 447). These autocratic tendencies triggered an outrage among urban, secular, middle classes, who have traditionally been the cultural capital owners within the country. The growing discontentment among these groups reached its climax in 2013, as millions took over streets because of the police violence and media gag orders that were caused by the protests against an urbanisation project at Gezi Park, downtown Istanbul. Football fans proved to be instrumental in the popularisation of the Gezi Protests, as thousands of otherwise anti-political Istanbulites participated in the events, donning jerseys of their favourite football clubs. The biggest football clubs of the city, Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, are each based in the secular middle-class neighbourhoods of Istanbul, and have been intertwined with the Turkish modernity, even before the Republic of Turkey was founded. These clubs, founded by the “Young Turks” in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, have always represented founding elements of modern Turkey (Irak and Polo 2018, 660), even though their popularity has since expanded to all over the country and the diaspora communities abroad, having reached people from all walks of life. Furthermore, the fandom practices of these clubs' fans have been dictated by the lifestyle in the cosmopolitan and secular neighbourhoods of Istanbul that engendered the clubs. These practices, including football chants repurposed as anti-police violence slogans, functioned as the humorous, popular facet of the anti-governmental movement (Turan and Özçetin 2019, 209), also legitimising protests in the eyes of thousands who had never joined a political protest before, as participation to active politics by ordinary citizens has been socially unwelcome since the political violence period in the 1970s.

The Erdoğan regime attempted to employ several measures to the vocal dissidence of football fans after the Gezi Protests. The measures included the creation of pro-governmental fan groups (which were short-lived), support to pro-governmental clubs financed by the ruling party-run municipalities, and putting fan leaders who participated in the protests on trial, accused of “staging a coup d’état” (Human Rights Watch, 2014). However, the most efficient of those measures was the implementation of an electronic ticket scheme called Passolig, which has been run by a private bank close to the Erdoğan family, that made surveillance possible, especially against fans shouting anti-governmental slogans in the games. These slogans were particularly undesirable for the government, as they could have been easily heard on television that was heavily controlled by the regime. Therefore, the league and national cup broadcasters started to cut the sound off during the slogans. The fans eventually replaced the slogans with the “Izmir march,” an old military song that described the Turkish Army capturing the city of Izmir in 1922 that had been occupied by the Greek Army.

This paper, which is part of a special issue that investigates different aspects of the relationship between music and sport, aims to explain why an old military song that has no apparent ties to the current political situation in Turkey has become the symbol of public dissidence in a country where almost all sorts of criticism against the regime has been gagged. In doing that, we will draw upon
the tools of the Bourdieusian sociology, especially the concept of “doxa” in order to show the intersection between football, politics and urban, secular middle-classes. Methodologically, the article is a socio-political analysis of historical events concerning the relationship between football and politics in Turkey, and the use of music within this context. We will conduct our analysis by establishing links between the social history literature of Turkey, the sports studies literature and the historical events, revealing the context of how musical protests in football stands play a role in politics of the country.

Our article contributes to the special issue, and to sport studies more broadly, by offering a conceptualisation of the relationship between popular culture and everyday politics using a remarkable case study that involves protest, sport fandom and music. While, the case may seem specific to Turkey, the existence of a middle-class doxa or the use of music and/or sport for political protest are hardly unique to Turkey, and they continue to appear in different places and in different forms. Nevertheless, Turkey, especially in the last two decades, has a rather exceptional setting regarding everyday politics; in this country where participation to institutional politics is often frowned upon, all elements of everyday life, including and especially popular culture, are politicised. Football is not an exception to this rule, on the contrary, as a popular entertainment born into the rise of Turkish nationalism and modernism in the late Ottoman period, it has been intertwined with politics for decades (for a detailed history of football and politics in Turkey, see Irak, 2019). Therefore, tracing everyday politics and the protests against the Erdoğan regime in football stands are undeniably relevant.

The socio-political function of chanting in football stadiums

The relationship between singing in the football stands and creating a common identity among fans is established by several scholars. According to Schoonderwoerd (2011, 122), chants in stadium have a social function (among others) that “present issues of concern into the public arena, aiding media attention around slogans and displaying a united front of the vox populi (or voice of the people) to one’s political leaders.” Collinson (2009, 17), referring to Small’s Musicking concept (1998), argue that chants “produce identity through their ritualised performance in public spaces.” While building this identity, the song can “reconstruct the stadium as political place, …, layered over sporting place” (Power 2011, 104). This is possible as chanting can be considered as “a meaning-producing activity involving the production and exchange of signs which generate meaning” (Benkwitz and Molnar 2012, 484). Tamir (2019, 10) draws attention to the possibility of chanting playing a dual role as an in-group criteria and out-group differentiation agent. Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001, 267) conceptualise these two roles as semantic-centred and syntactic-centred respectively and claim that “the underlying logic of football as a cultural form tends to privilege the syntactic over the semantic, through the creation of oppositions at all levels.” Ashmore (2017, 32) connects the architectures of stadiums to oppositional chanting, as different sets of fans are clearly segregated.

The particularity of our case is that, in Turkey, the chants are not aimed at the immediate opposition that is the other teams’ fans in the stadium, but rather to the political power who is not present at the venue. In doing that, they even reach out to the rival team, since they may share some other supra-identities, as football fans whose liberties are being restricted by the government, and more importantly, dissidents against a new doxa dismantling the old one. Therefore, a new, syntactic-centred political alliance is being sought, defined over whom the fans are not (not proponents of the new regime and its doxa), in a way that may exceed many differences, including being fans of rival teams. That sort of alliance appeared before,
spontaneously during the Gezi Protests, under the moniker of “Istanbul United” (Irak 2016, 99). In that regard, the performances are also more akin to the one described by Power (2011, 104) in the Liverpool fans’ case, as the fans’ goal is “also to reach the national and international audience for the game and to thus sonically and ideologically colonize space well beyond the stadium.” Using football stands as a mediated political platform is more common in settings where other channels of democratic expression is blocked, as fans in Iran and Egypt also use political chants to the extent that sometimes forces broadcasters to cut off sound to block the political message (Warren, 2016), a practice also used by broadcasters in Turkey.

**Chanting in Turkey’s football stands**

The history of chanting in stands, or rather of its rise to popularity, has a similar trajectory with the one in the UK, except for the period it took place. In the British example, especially Liverpool fans’ adaptation of popular songs to Liverpool chants started a nationwide trend in the mid-1960s, as the BBC TV started broadcasting match highlights in 1964 (Williams et al. 2001, 102-103). Television played a similar role in Turkey, however due to the late arrival of the technology, it could reach its peak in the 1980s. Similar to the role that the Kop stand played in the Liverpool example, Beşiktaş’s Çarşı fan group was instrumental in adapting popular songs to chants in that period, only to be followed by rival fans groups who paid good effort to catch up with this new trend. By the 1990s, where the football in Turkey went through a massive transformation in terms of economic capital due to broadcasting deals (Irak 2019, 69), sounds from the stands have become a performance act of its own for fans, as well as an important aspect of the product for the football industry. Accordingly, preparing new chants has become an inseparable part of fans’ weekday preparations (Nuhrat 2017, 30). The widespread use of the Internet in the 2000s and the foreign league broadcasts in Turkey also helped fans follow worldwide practices and adapt them into their own context. Fans’ chants played a major role in shaping the anti-government Gezi Protests’ visibility in 2013, as humorous chants adapted from football chants helped popularise the movement to become the biggest mass protest in the history of Turkey. One of those chants, “shoot if you will” (“Sık Bakalım”) that was introduced in the Istanbul Labour Day rally by the Çarşı group against violence, also became one of the symbols of the Gezi Protests, one month later in June 2013 (Irak 2017, 7). The football fans also collaborated with feminists and LGBTI+ activists for a workshop about creating non-sexist chants during the Protests (Tuncel 2017, 137).

While the role that the football chants play in the political protests is established by several researchers (Turan and Özçetin, 2019; Eder and Öz, 2017; Battini and Koşulu, 2017 among others), chanting and its socio-political roots in Turkey have rarely been the centrepiece of a research. In one of the few exceptions, Nuhrat (2017, 26-27) shows the gendered nature of chanting in stands in Turkey, claiming the chants are used to present masculine gendering of positive characteristics, like fairness. This argument is compatible with our core argument, as militarism-oriented masculine domination has been an important part of state-imposed doxa in Turkey, in the old Kemalist one and the new one alike. In a similar fashion, Kytö (2011, 82-83) argues that, in Turkey, the lack of the predominantly Christian tradition of singing together has been filled with singing military anthems (marches), imposed by the State through schools and the compulsory military service, explaining the fact that a good number of team songs are actually marches. While this argument is contestable since adaptations of pop songs have been dominating the football chants at least since the 1990s in Turkey, it is true that military songs constitute a safe repertoire to resort to, in case of need, especially when a political message that transcends team colours is in order. The case we chose is an example of that. The word “safe” that we chose on purpose refers to the “doxa” that we will explain thoroughly below, the universe of acceptable and unquestionable beliefs.
Turkish middle-class and the “Republican Doxa”

Doxa is one of the key concepts of Bourdieusian sociology. According to Bourdieu (1977, 164), “Every established order tends to produce...the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” which make “the natural and social world appear as self-evident.” This experience, called doxa, draws the borders of the social reality, and the knowledge within these borders functions to reproduce the self-evident and undisputable nature of the social world as constructed by doxa. In other words, doxa creates an incessant loop of reproduction of reality, to such an extent that its contestation would appear unnatural.

The foundational myths of modern Turkey have constituted a doxa that reaches beyond the pronounced official ideology of any given period. This doxa that is called according to different researchers as “republican cosmology” (Akdeniz and Göker, 2011) or “Turkishness contract” (Ünlü, 2014) is essential particularly in the construction of an urban, secular habitus; however, some of its elements, such as nationalism and militarism, are more widespread and extend to a very broad social stratum that also includes conservative, rural parts of the society. The widespread acceptance of these elements creates a tense consensus between otherwise opposite social poles, one of which is largely represented by the Kemalist opposition, and the other by the ruling Justice and Development Party and its populist-Islamist leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The Republic of Turkey was born in 1923 over the remains of the Ottoman Empire that faced a slow and tortuous death between the Treaty of Karlowitz where the Empire began losing territories until the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 where all the remaining territories were shared between European powers. The Turkish nationalism movement, rejecting the severe conditions imposed by the Treaty of Sevres, also mostly rejected the Ottoman heritage. Except for the Ottoman debts that the new Republic had to pay, Turkey as a nation-state envisaged a rupture with the Ottoman heritage from day one. This meant the repositioning of the Turkish civilisation as part of the European community, even at the expense of proposing creative interpretations on the history of civilisations that put the Turkish culture at the heart of the Western civilisation. The modern Turkish key, as a post-imperial nation-state, also had to create a new identity for its citizens that had no experience in citizenship. Therefore, the first years of the Republic mostly aimed at the creation of a new society which entailed the creation of a new doxa. The modernist cadres of the Republic mapped out an urban, modern, secular society for Turkey, which was quite ambitious bearing in mind that the urban population diminished dramatically, due to the human losses in wars of the early 20th century and the non-Muslim Ottoman communities having left or been eliminated. Turkey was a predominantly rural nation at the period. While the Republican project was aiming for the sky, it was still aware of the fact that the nation had no considerable industry, nor an established working class; and the Ottoman bourgeoisie, comprised of non-Muslims, no longer existed (Zürcher 2010, 219-221). As a result, establishing a modern society with social classes in the traditional sense was quite a tough task. Therefore, the Republican cadres laid out a social engineering project based on the creation of a society “without classes and privileges,” through a certain doxa that defines the limits of thought for the “acceptable citizen.”

The “Republican Doxa” (Irak 2019, 137-160) that aims to shape the universe of perception of urban, secular, middle classes is largely based on Kemalism and its founding “Six Arrows,” however it is not limited by those principles as different social and political conjunctures have dictated other social control mechanisms through the course of history. Whereas the scope of the principles has changed over time, they have continued to define how the State, citizens and the relationship between these two should ideally be. Thus, this officially sanctioned doxa not only framed how the
Republic should be governed, it moulded the “acceptable citizen” who abides by these principles with a great sense of allegiance to an extent that individuals and groups that strayed from that definition should be marginalised, if not criminalised. The “Six Arrows” from which the Republican Doxa originated, were introduced by the single-party government and incorporated into the Constitution in 1937 (Ciftci 2013, 150), in a period where the founding President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was terminally ill and the young Republic was searching for a model abroad to define its path from then on. These principles, namely Republicanism, Nationalism, Revolutionism (Reformism—Modernism), Secularism, Populism and Statism, became basis for indoctrination reinforced by a mostly post-mortem cult of personality around Atatürk, despite its lack of appeal, especially in rural regions (Zürcher 2004, 182). These principles basically dictated a heavily state-controlled corporatism that replaces the social classes with a unified nation, both institutionally and socially. As Ahmad (1993, 64-65) underlines the principles were instantly put under discussion by different factions within the single party. After Turkey became a multi-party democracy, the negotiation about the content of Six Arrows ideology continued and its direction varied per period. As Aydin (1999, 171) argues, these vague set of keywords did not exclusively define Kemalism, but “represent(ed) its pillars.” The introduction of the Six Arrows into the Constitution also initiated the Armed Forces as the safeguard of the ideology (Ciftci, op. cit.) which started the military tutelage over the political life in Turkey. The protectionist approach of the soon-to-be-opposition single-party just before passage to multi-party democracy, while framing a regime to protect, also defined its internal/external enemies to protect the regime from. Islamist conservatism was directly integrated into this “other” (Durán and Veiga 2017, 36), as well as Kurdish nationalism (Gencoglu 2019, 6) whereas the pro-Western alignment of post-WWII Turkey also included communism at the top of the list.

The Kemalist project heavily relied on the urban population, whereas the regime was already facing hardships in keeping the rural areas on the same page with the citizenship idea. In order to keep the seams of the new Republic together, it had to make major concessions to the feudal landowners of the era who were given seats in the Parliament. After the passage to the multi-party system after the Second World War, these concessions proved fatal for the Kemalists, as the landowner MPs blocked the agrarian reform that could put an end to the feudal system, founded a breakaway party and took the power over with the support of rural masses that the founding fathers of the Republic had always failed to address convincingly. The Kemalist social engineering project thus failed, however left a major mark in the society of Turkey. With the emergence of the Democrat Party (DP) and the transfer of power in the 1950 elections, a long-lasting dualism emerged; between the rural, traditional majority with social capital built around mosques and township structures, and the urban, modern minority with cultural capital.

The role the football fandom plays in this dualism is also interesting. Football is the national pastime of Turkey, where football fandom is endemic and passionate. This means that football fandom reaches across the political divide and is embraced by millions. However, the cultural production of fandom, its rituals and expressions which include chanting, is extremely lopsided. An overwhelming majority of football fans in the country support the “Big Three” of Istanbul, namely Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, rather than their local teams or alongside them. These three teams have millions of fans each, however their fandom practices are still pretty much limited to secular Istanbulite neighbourhoods (Beşiktaş, Beyoğlu/Şişli and Kadıköy respectively) that they were born in. These three neighbourhoods are still strongholds of Turkish modernism and the fandom practices are built around them. Therefore, even though these three teams have fans from all walks of life, their fandom venues are places where secular lifestyles are observed. Therefore, stadiums and other places where fans gather in Istanbul not only set the standards for
fandom, they also hold prominent expressions of secularism. This proved to be very important, when the Erdoğan regime has increased its efforts to dismantle secular practices since the 2010s, especially when Istanbulite football fans spearheaded the anti-government Gezi Protests in 2013.

**Today’s dualism and beyond; the old Republic, Erdoğan regime and other possibilities**

The aforementioned dualism persists today and underlies the cultural battle between the Erdoğan regime and the urban, secular middle classes. The latter, still loyal to the Republican principles, is the heir-apparent to the Kemalist social project. Completely subject to the Republican doxa that we will analyse thoroughly below, these middle classes are not defined through modes of production but the relations with the urban space, constituting a derivative of the “classless society” ideal of the Kemalist cadres. Until recently, these classes had had a privileged status in the society due to this relationship with the Republican project, as the democracy in Turkey under tutelage of civil and military bureaucracy that were loyal to Kemalist. However, with the arrival of the Islamist-populist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) in power, their status became contestable. With the 2010 Constitution referendum that eliminated the Kemalists in powerful appointed posts within the State, the ruling party launched its own social engineering project called “New Turkey,” which featured the Islamisation of society through education, refusal of Western cultural norms, reintroduction of (a selective version of) Ottoman culture as reference and the prioritisation of rural social classes over urban ones. This project evidently threatened the status of urban, secular middle-classes as cultural capital owners, as the regime that evolved into a party-state started to create its own urban middle-classes through conservative urbanisation projects and the establishment of a seamless crony-capitalism network (see Buğra and Savaşkan, 2014). Foreign-language teaching public high schools called Anadolu Liseleri that had been the backbone of institutionalised cultural capital acquisition for urban middle-classes were rapidly replaced by Imam-Hatip (clerical) Vocational Schools that were once founded for training religious officials but mostly served as the strongholds of Islamist ideology and human resources for the new bureaucracy (Vannetzel 2018, 55-58). The objectified cultural capital also went through a major transformation as vast majority of the media taken over by the regime through coercive capture (Yeşil 2018, 249-253) started diffusing content in line with the values approved by the Erdoğan rule. Despite these attempts, the urban, secular middle classes continued to contest the regime, mostly depending on the embodied state of cultural capital that they transferred from generation to generation. Since then, the cultural battle between two sides have also produced political consequences, like the Gezi Protests in 2013 or the Istanbul local elections in 2019 where the opposition heavily beat the ruling party’s candidate following an annulled election whose outcome was contested by Erdoğan (Ozerdem, 2020). Football, where fandom practices were crafted in the emblematic secular neighbourhoods of Istanbul in a connected manner with the Western world, was particularly hard for Erdoğan to command, despite his total control of the Turkish Football Federation and the club boards. On the other hand, it should be noted that these political events could occur due to broader alliances between anti-Erdoğan forces, which, as a result, pushed the “Republican Doxa” to be renegotiated between participating parties.

Meanwhile, through the course of time, the vagueness of Six Arrows, as well as changing political conditions, also necessitated the revision of the “Republican Doxa,” inclusion of some new elements and the transformation of some original ones. For example, the safeguarding role of the Army promoted militarism as a latent, yet overwhelmingly dominant part of the official ideology. Despite the early Republic’s reformism on women’s rights, militarism also reinforced masculine domination, since the compulsory military service has become a sine-qua-non for being considered as a citizen. The nationalising and militarising role of the military service existed even before the Six Arrows, as it was designed to be a school for acceptable citizenship (Altinay 2004, 69-70). It also
ensured the domination of heterosexual men over homosexual men and all women (ibid, 80-81), as a point of reference for manhood and citizenship by extension. Militarism and military service also created a bond between nationalism and religion, even going beyond the scope of secularism that reduces the visibility of religion in public sphere. The Army is often called “the Prophet’s hearth” and the slain soldiers are called “martyrs who do not die but glorified” (Kaya, 2015). As opposed to the Turkish model of secularism that allows a state-sanctioned version of Islam confined to private sphere, militarism aims to reach all walks of life through military service, in order to convert devout Muslims disillusioned by secularism into acceptable citizens. Paradoxically, the openness of militarism towards religion, made this part of Republican Doxa a suitable element to be appropriated by the Erdoğanist Doxa that would try to replace the former after the arrival of the Justice and Development Party into power. No matter how paradoxical it may seem as doxas appear as unegotiable, the Republican Doxa is under two sets of revision today, one through its appropriation by the Erdoğan regime, and the other as part of a broader alliance of anti-Erdoğan forces that include communists, Kurds and dissident Islamist, all of whom has traditionally been considered as threats by the Republican Doxa. At this point, it is fair to question whether a doxa under negotiation is still a doxa, however, it is too early to declare the Republican Doxa obsolete, as most of its elements are still robust and as we will discuss below, they have an important role in the consolidation of the new doxa.

The Erdoğanist Doxa, in turn, has equally been vague and still under transformation, especially due to the fact that the main objective of the political movement behind it is to preserve Erdoğan’s (electoral) power which entails sudden political shifts and different types of populism the volatility of which keeps the doxa from being consolidated. It should be underlined that Erdoğan’s party in 2002 emerged with a pro-European, pro-democratic agenda that aimed to replace the old regime with principles that complied with the EU’s Copenhagen criteria that Turkey had to fulfil in order to become a member state, as opposed to the Army-backed Kemalists that were fairly sceptical against certain points of these reforms, such as the emergence of a vibrant civil society (Gogus and Mannitz 2016, 5-10). The AKP, despite its conservative agenda, followed this path through its first term and faced backlash from both the civilian Kemalists and the Armed Forces which published “e-memorandum” against the candidacy of AKP member Abdullah Gül to Presidency in 2007. The party managed to overcome this adversity through popular support which brought a landslide electoral victory the same year. However, the need of eliminating Kemalist bureaucracy became clear for the AKP, which made an alliance with the Gülen religious group that had steadily infiltrated into the State since the 1960s, in order to battle the common enemy. As a result, a major facelift for the 1982 Constitution passed through a referendum in 2010, which paved way to the substitution of appointed posts held by Kemalists by government-assigned posts, often given to Gülenists, who ironically staged a failed coup d’état against Erdoğan in 2016 (Esen and Gumuscu 2016, 5). The elimination of Kemalists also meant the elimination of checks and balances, which diverted the AKP government towards an authoritarian path (Öniş 2014, 7). Since 2010, most civil liberties have been regressed, the vast majority of media outlets has been taken over, the justice system has been filled by former members of the ruling party. The rising fears of autocracy triggered the Gezi Protests of 2013, which took millions of people (mostly urban, secular, middle-classes) into the streets against crony-capitalism fuelled by urbanisation projects, police violence and media censorship. Erdoğan responded to the protests by launching a cultural battle, often accusing the protestors of disrespecting Islam (Hürriyet Daily News, 27 June 2013) and/or the State (Bianet, 19 February 2020). Since then, Turkey has been through a roller-coaster of elections that include another referendum in 2018 which made Erdoğan the executive president and reduced the role of Parliament, effectively creating a one-man rule. However, especially after the breakup of peace negotiations between the State and the Kurdish national movement in 2014, Erdoğan’s
electoral power has gone into peril, which forced him to make an alliance with the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – MHP) (Sözen 2019, 292). The Kurdish peace negotiations was probably the last piece remaining of the AKP’s “Muslim-democrat” era. Along with the MHP alliance, after the hung parliament of June 2015 elections that nearly cost the AKP the power due to the rise of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP), Erdoğan took up an ultra-nationalist-populist narrative, donned with anti-Kurdish and anti-European elements. While nationalism had never been a very dominant part of Islamism and often contradicted with the Ummah (Muslim nation) principle of the ideology, Erdoğan’s cult of personality made a makeshift fusion of Islamism, Turkish nationalism and a very selective interpretation of neo-Ottomanism possible. After the failed coup attempt in 2016, this narrative has completely become state ideology, and nationalism, as well as militarism, has become a permanent fixture in the new doxa.

**Erdoğan’s doxa and its ambiguities**

While it has been crafted not according to an ideology but to the need of preserving power, the doxa imposed by the Erdoğan regime has still distinguishable characteristics, which oppose, overlap or contest the Republican Doxa.

Regarding modernism, Erdoğan’s movement has never appeared as anti-modern, instead it has advocated a non-Western, Islamic version of modernity. In the recent years, nationalism was infused into this idea, creating the motto “yerli ve milli” (domestic and national) (Bora, 2016). Erdoğan’s modernism draws upon the argument that Turkey has its own culture and conditions, therefore its modernity should be fit to the uniqueness of the country. This argument is quite utilitarian, as it is often brought into table when Turkey’s European counterpart criticizes the country about its recurring human rights violations. It can be said that, while Erdoğan massively strays from the pro-Western modernism of the old regime, the new modernism has still overlapping points with the old one as it does not reject modernity completely.

Secularism is one of the most intriguing points of discussion, when comparing the old regime to the new one. In the old regime, an original version of secularism was created, modelling the French version, but with important differences. As in the French model, the Turkish secularism model is heavily controlled by the State and not much is left to social negotiation. However, as opposed to France, in Turkey secularism has never been the separation of religion from state affairs; instead, through a Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), the State created an acceptable, moderate version of Sunni Islam and imposed it to all citizens, leaving all other belief systems from other interpretations of Islam to atheism as not desirable (Akgönül 2005, 35-37). In the Erdoğan regime, despite a very aggressive campaign of Islamisation in the education system, secularism kept its place, even after two referendums that heavily changed the Constitution. However, the new regime started using Diyanet, which was originally designed to keep the citizens away from Islamism, to promote religious lifestyles. Schools and Diyanet have become the most important state apparatuses that have been used to create the “pious and vengeful generations” that Erdoğan dreamed of. However, secularism keeping its place, even symbolically, in the Constitution, is an indicator of Erdoğan’s cultural domination not being completely established, especially in domains that concern lifestyles.

Another point of compromise for the Erdoğan regime is Kemalism and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself. Despite being quite open regarding his feelings about Kemalism, Erdoğan has not been able to contest Atatürk overtly, except for a few implied remarks that caused uproar, like calling Atatürk and his second man İnönü “two drunkards” (Sözcü, 28 May 2013) without mentioning their
names in 2013, which featured among the reasons that made people protest Erdoğan in the Gezi Protests a few days later. Kemalist principles and Atatürk keep their place in the Constitution and also partly in the education system.

Regarding nationalism and militarism, the old regime and the new regime have quite a lot in common. However, this is mostly because Erdoğan had to make an alliance with the ultra-nationalists and embraced that line of politics for electoral gains. Despite imprisoning thousands of Kurdish civilians including the HDP leaders, Erdoğan is still accused of being treacherous by his nationalist opponents due to the peace negotiations between 2009 and 2014. His nationalist opponents, like the secular ultra-nationalist Good Party (İyi Parti – İYİP), still consider him as an Islamist disguised as a nationalist. However, in an intriguing fashion that is quite unique to Turkey, his nationalist and militarist moves have still been revered by the nationalist opposition, like the Operation Peace Spring against Syrian Kurds in 2019, which was approved in the Parliament by a great majority that included the main opposition Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP, Kemalist) and the Good Party. We can explain the paradox of nationalists devoted to the old regime not believing but still supporting Erdoğan’s militaristic-nationalistic moves, even at the expense of their own political power against him, with the power of these elements within the old doxa. As the Good Party chairwoman Akşener said, "Our national unity defined by our national interests cannot be exploited by political interests. We have one party, the party of our red national flag” (TRT Haber, 15 October 2019).

As the President of the Republic, keeping nationalism and militarism at hand, creates an upper hand for Erdoğan, as he can easily change the agenda with a military offensive or a crisis with a foreign power to his own advantage, due to the fact that these two elements are essential to the Republican Doxa, in a way that contesting Erdoğan’s moves in line with these elements seems wrong and unthinkable, as seen in the recent example of Erdoğan’s military operation against the Syrian Kurds, supported by the major opposition party, the CHP, “out of respect for soldiers” (Anadolu Agency, 8 October 2019). Politically, this is almost a cheat code that freezes the opposition any time. However, nationalism and militarism never belonged to the ideological tradition that Erdoğan came from. As a matter of fact, the Armed Forces had considered the Islamists as a major threat until very recently. Therefore, it is very doubtful that Erdoğan can keep on using these elements in case he loses his seat as President and Commander-in-Chief. Also, it is unknown if his supporters would still be as loyal to these principles if they were not represented by Erdoğan. Therefore, we should still consider the elements of militarism and nationalism as contestable by both sides.

“İzmir March”: Between two doxas

As seen from this analysis, Erdoğan’s rule is still far from being a complete domination, at least culturally. Despite creating its own doxa, imposed to the newly created conservative middle-class through media, schools and other state apparatuses; the Erdoğan regime could not replace the old doxa with the new one. Both doxas still exist; while the new one is imposed through the state apparatuses, the old one is through family and cultural products. Furthermore, Erdoğan’s doxa has borrowed a lot from the Republican Doxa, making it even feebler and more contestable, to the point that one simple old military song may be employed to contest it. That song is the İzmir March, as known as “Yaşa Mustafa Kemal Paşa Yaşa” (Live Mustafa Kemal Pasha Live), sung in the recent years in sports venues as a way of protesting the government and showing allegiance to the old rule.
The Izmir March is a military song about the liberation of the city of Izmir (Western Turkey) from the Greek Army in September 1922 during the end of the Turkish Independence War. The actual composer of the song is under discussion, while the march is also known as the Caucasian March, with lyrics about the Caucasian Front in the First World War (Aktoprak 2017, 48). The Izmir version of the song is basically an homage to Mustafa Kemal, the commander-in-chief and future founder of the Republic.

The first verse of the Izmir March, sung in sports venues, is as below:

Flowers blossom in the mountains of Izmir
Golden Sun sparking its rays
Retreating enemies blown like a wind
Long live Mustafa Kemal Pasha long live
Your name will be carved on a precious stone

As it may be understood from the lyrics and given the song’s date of emergence, the verse bears no overt references to today’s politics in Turkey. The verse rather mentions how the Turkish Army commanded by Mustafa Kemal took over Izmir and forced the enemy to retreat. So, it may be argued that the singing of this song in the stadiums may not be politically motivated. However, some details pertaining to the song may suggest some political references. First, since the AKP’s rise to power in 2002, Izmir has been one of the very few cities where the ruling has never managed to win in any elections, including the landslide win in 2007 where the AKP won all but six cities. Therefore, the city, sometimes pejoratively called by conservatives as “infidel Izmir” due to the city’s Greek-Orthodox past and predominantly secular lifestyle, has become a symbol as an opposition stronghold against the AKP domination. Furthermore, while the full song details the Greek occupation of Izmir, the popularly sung first verse only mentions an “enemy,” which may not necessarily mean the Greeks, but any anti-Kemalist opposition when sung in different contexts. Therefore, in broader terms, it is possible to argue that singing the song implies an emerging Kemalist opposition aiming to replace the Erdoğan rule. However, the verse, as it is sung, offers no evidence to fully justify this interpretation. According to Aktoprak (op.cit., 49), the vagueness of the lyrics as they are sung today may refer to a search for a different, modern and secular Turkey, both for Kemalists and non-Kemalists. Türkölmez (2020, 27-30) also agrees that the collective singing of the Izmir March is a form of protest that the Erdoğan government is uncomfortable with, which makes the march the epicentre of a new type of opposition that exceeds Kemalism. However, as things stand, it may also simply be claimed that the football fans sing a popular military song that has been sung in schools and military barracks for decades.

In order to better investigate the current political meaning of the collective singing of this song, we should take a look at how sports venues in Istanbul and other opposition-dominated big cities reacted against Erdoğanism, since its autocratic turn in the early 2010s. Even before football stadiums, the first anti-government incident took place in 2010, after the World Basketball Championships final game in Istanbul where then President Abdullah Gül and then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were whistled by the crowd when invited to present the medals. The government accused the protesting spectators of being “provocateurs,” (Radikal, 17 September 2010) even though the tickets were sold to a select crowd as in most world championships. Two years later, in another elite event of global scale hosted by Turkey, this time ministers Binali Yıldırım and Fatma Şahin were booed when presenting the medals at the WTA Tennis Championships. Between these two events, football also witnessed its own anti-government protest, once more in a special event with a select crowd. In the inaugural match for Galatasaray’s new stadium, built by
the government’s Public Housing Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi – TOKİ), between Galatasaray and Ajax which was only open to season’s ticket holders, the crowd protested the Prime Minister Erdoğan and the then TOKİ Chairman Erdoğan Bayraktar, who accused the club’s late president Özhan Canaydın of incompetence (Yıldırım 2017, 14). The two government officials had to leave the stadium, as the protest did not wane. The common feature of these three events is that they were all reserved to an elite crowd who obtained their tickets after some kind of selective pre-sale. Basketball and tennis in Turkey are popular among upper-middle classes, while the Galatasaray game was reserved to season’s ticket holders which suggests that the audience was also mostly middle and upper-middle class.

In 2013, these protests reached its climax as millions of predominantly urban, secular, middle-class citizens took over streets in Istanbul and other big cities during the Gezi Protests. Football supporters played a massive role in these protests as both organised fan groups and independent fans donning football jerseys confronted the police and lent their chants and slogans to the protest movement (see Irak, 2019). As a result, the left-leaning Çarşı fan group of Beşiktaş was put on trial, accused of “staging a coup d’état against the elected government.” Also, the Law No. 6222 introduced in 2011 that regulated crowd disorder was enforced to curb fans’ political expressions in the stadiums, especially after fans started to shout anti-government and pro-Gezi slogans in the “Big Three”’s home games in Istanbul. Moreover, a controversial e-ticket scheme called Passolig was introduced after Gezi, which entails the private details of every single spectator attending the games to be kept by the government and the pro-government bank that ran the system (see Erturan-Ogut, 2019).

The singing of the İzmir March in stands took place for the first time in Istanbul, where visiting Adana Demirspor’s fans were rumoured to be sanctioned by the Turkish Football Federation for singing the song in November 2016 (Oda TV, 3 November 2016). This rumour, albeit refuted on the TFF website, created a wave of supporters starting to sing the song in sports venues. The first incident took place in January 2017, according to the documented incidents that we have come across online. The oldest video documenting the song being sung is dated 2 January 2017, during the Fenerbahçe – Anadolu Efes basketball game (Çivicioğlu, 2017). After the first incident, Beşiktaş basketball supporters sung the song the same week (Tik Tak, 2017). The first appearance of the song in a football stadium took place in a Galatasaray home game at the end of the same month (Sessiz Adam, 2017), followed by Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş and Trabzonspor fans the same week (Yüksel, 2017). The fans also shouted well-known Kemalist slogans “We’re the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal” (Arslan, 2017) and “Turkey is secular and will remain as such” (Halk TV, 2017) after singing the song, leaving little room to any interpretation that would discard the political nature of the performance. However, no direct protest against the government was observed. While the performance spread to other stadiums nationwide, some club boards close to the government started to take measures against fans singing the song, such as the Antalyaspor board, which closed the ticket sale for the game against regime-backed Başakşehir club to public, after fans chanted the song in the home stadium (Sözü Skor, 9 May 2018). The Konyaspor president, Ahmet Şan, also drew negative reaction from the opposition when he said, “unfortunately all the stadiums in Turkey sing the İzmir March today, except for Konya, where its fans Nalçacılar act with the motto of ‘one flag, one state, one motherland’ [Erdoğan’s slogan]” (Spor Arena, 16 July 2017).

Discussion and conclusion
When the context of the events is considered, it seems obvious that the singing of the İzmir March in the stands holds political meaning that should be interpreted of anti-regime nature. The song and the sporadic accompanying slogans suggest an allegiance to the old doxa by the football fans,
or least dissidence to the new one, especially in Istanbul and other big cities where there is a sizeable opposition against the Erdoğan rule. While this nature is rather evident, it is more noteworthy to discuss the evolution of protests in sports venues and the role of the İzmir March in this timeline. When the protests started in 2010, they were direct and left no room to any other interpretation, since Erdoğan and his ministers were whistled or booed. These protests were later followed by anti-regime slogans. Meanwhile, civil rights and liberties continued to regress in Turkey, any attempt of openly criticising Erdoğan often leading to being accused of “insulting the president” or even “supporting terrorist organisations.” Especially, since the failed coup d’état attempt in 2016, publicly criticising the President has been heavily criminalised and led to detentions and arrests in hundreds of cases. While the aggravating crackdown continues, the dissidents of the regime have been forced to curb down their public protests. In the stadiums, the Passolig scheme (Erturan-Ogut 2019, 7-8) and the severe policing measures that include plainclothesmen and CCTV cameras to detect spectators that shout dissident slogans also silenced the protest wave in 2013 and 2014.

In this regard, the singing of the İzmir March in the stadiums should be interpreted as a subtle way of anti-regime protest, without being criminalised, in a country where many forms of expression are already gagged. The song constitutes a well-crafted way of contesting the new regime and defending the old one, taking advantage of the aforementioned gaps that the new regime left while in transition, due to not being able to conclude the ongoing cultural battle with a decisive domination. Not being able to discard Kemalism out of the Constitution, being dependent on nationalism and militarism to preserve power, keep some remnants of the old regime and its doxa alive and legitimate. The supporters using the İzmir March as a form of protest are almost instinctively aware that an old Kemalist song is undesirable by the regime, but still perfectly legitimate as far as the Constitutional rule of the country is concerned. İzmir March and the ideological elements that it represents in this context is positioned in the grey area between the old “acceptable” and the new “acceptable,” like an old banknote no longer minted but still holding currency value. Even in a setting that almost all forms of dissident expression is gagged by the current regime, the performance of an old military sung cannot be directly contested as it would lead to the questioning of the new rule which would eventually reveal its fragilities, as it was the case during the Gezi Protests of 2013, when the electoral support for the ruling party was still much stronger. Therefore, the İzmir March slips through the cracks of a newly established regime that has not yet succeeded in instituting a cultural domination. Also, the absence of a response by pro-government football fans with an equivalent song suggests two likely possibilities; the domination of football stands in popular football clubs by urban, secular, middle classes that are predominantly anti-regime, and the lack of cultural capital in the regime camp sufficient to contest the anti-government use of cultural products, including music, although the Ottoman war hymns have been attempted to be used by directly or indirectly (through pro-regime sponsors or public entities) regime-sponsored football clubs like Başakşehir and Osmanlıspor. It should be noted that despite their successes in recent years like back-to-back European Cup qualifications, these teams have never become popular, even when influential political figures like the former Ankara mayor (AKP) Melih Gökçek became Osmanlıspor honorary president and Erdoğan himself openly declared himself the founder of Başakşehir (Skorer, 18 March 2019).

To conclude, the İzmir March incident shows the different aspects of the ongoing cultural battle between the ruling Islamists and the urban, secular cultural capital owners, that combine music, sports and politics. The political tug of war in Turkey between two camps cannot be fully understood without taking cultural products and their socio-political value into account. These cultural products, even an old military song, may be so influential from time to time, to reveal the
strong and feeble points of the two camps, or emergence of a third camp renegotiating the doxas already in place. The syntactic-centred protests in the stadiums of Turkey may be intriguing indicators of what is yet to come in the country regarding the emergence of new democratic alliances, and also constitute an emblematic example of how everyday politics is intertwined with sports and fandom.

Bibliography


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