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From Tarlabası to Gezi and beyond: The 2013 Event in the Conjunction of Neoliberal times

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FROM TARLABAŞI TO GEZI AND BEYOND:
THE 2013 *EVENT* IN THE *CONJUNCTURE*
OF NEOLIBERAL TIMES

ABSTRACT

Drawing on ethnographic material from Istanbul prior and during the Gezi uprising of 2013, the present article examines the mass demonstrations that broke out in more than 90 cities in Turkey and lasted for about a month as an event in the sense of the short duration of history (évènement) informed by historical processes of medium length duration (conjoncture) marked by authoritarianism and protest; an event bearing the inevitability of rupture that long-term authoritarianism carries to the present and also the future; a product of a culture of protest traced back to the 1980s and the neoliberal restructuring of the Turkish economy. Furthermore, the paper discusses the rise of the electoral influence of the Democratic People's Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) as a symptom of the same historical conjuncture.

Keywords: *Gezi uprising, évènement, conjuncture, neoliberalism, protest*

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Αιμιλία Βουλβούλη

ΠΡΙΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΟ ΓΚΕΖΙ:
ΤΟ ΣΥΜΒΑΝ ΤΟΥ 2013 ΣΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ ΠΛΑΙΣΙΟ
ΤΗΣ ΝΕΟΦΙΛΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΗΣ ΣΥΓΚΥΡΙΑΣ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το άρθρο είναι βασισμένο σε εθνογραφική έρευνα που πραγματοποιήθηκε κατά την διάρκεια της εξέγερσης του Γκεζί το καλοκαίρι του 2013, καθώς και σε υποστηρικτικό εθνογραφικό υλικό που συλλέχθηκε πριν αλλά και μετά την εξέγερση. Αντλώντας θεωρητική πλαισίωση από το θεωρητικό σχήμα του Φ. Μπροντέλ, η εξέγερση του Γκεζί προσεγγίζεται ως ένα 'συμβάν' (event) σύντομης χρονικής διάρκειας αποτέλεσμα ιστορικών διαδικασιών 'μεσαίας χρονικής διάρκειας' (conjuncture). Ένα ιστορικό γεγονός το οποίο φέρει τη σφραγίδα δεκαετιών αυταρχισμού που οδήγησε στο ξέσπασμα του καλοκαιριού του 2013 με παρελθοντικές αναφορές στην κουλτούρα των διαμαρτυριών της δεκαετίας του 1980 και της απαρχής της νεοφιλελεύθερης αναδόμησης της τουρκικής οικονομίας αλλά και με μελλοντικές προεκτάσεις που σχετίζονται με την ανάδυση του αριστερού, προ-κουρδικού κόμματος της Δημοκρατίας των Λαών (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) ως σύμπτωμα της συγκεκριμένης ιστορικής συγκυρίας.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Εξέγερση του Γκεζί, συμβάν, μεσαία χρονική διάρκεια, νεοφιλελευθερισμός, διαμαρτυρία

INTRODUCTION¹

Social protests in Turkey about issues of environmental and cultural heritage interest (Bartu, 1999; Arsel, 2003; Voulvouli, 2009), as well as issues concerning the right to the city (Voulvouli, 2009; Yalçıntan and Çavusoğlu, 2009), the privatization of the commons (Warner, 2012), and gentrification projects (Bartu, 1999; Lovering and Turkmen, 2011) have played a crucial role in shaping the political² discourse. An example of how influential their role has been, is the Gezi demonstrations that took place nationwide during the summer of 2013 and gained worldwide attention due to their mass character and also because they were recorded as the first challenge to the hegemony of the Justice and Development Party that had been ruling for more than a decade. The demonstrations initially took place as an opposition to the demolition of Gezi Park, a small park in the middle of Taksim Square, as part of an urban regeneration plan to reconstruct the Ottoman military barracks that existed in the area until the middle of the 20th century and the construction of cultural centers: an opera house as well as shopping facilities (Radikal, 2011). However, in the course of the days that followed the initial protests it became evident that the cutting of the trees that triggered the initial demonstration was not the only reason for this massive uprising.

In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate that the Gezi uprising was the ‘product’ of decades of campaigning against neoliberal policies. Even though those campaigns have been less visible - as they were much smaller and localized – they involved meanings, values and claims much wider than their displays. In addition, their rhetoric resembles the rhetoric that we have seen articulated during the 2013 uprising. Within this framework, the Gezi outburst should be examined as an *event* in the Braudelian sense of the term of short duration of history (*évènement*) informed by

1. Note on transliteration: The Turkish alphabet is derived from the Latin alphabet with a few modifications that alter the pronunciation of the letters ç, ğ, ı, ö, ş and ü. In this paper, I choose to use the Turkish letters rather than replace them with their Latin originals in order to be in accordance with the phonetic requirements of the language of my informants. The reader should be aware that the pronunciation of the above letters is as following: *c* is pronounced like the English –j, *ç* is pronounced like the English –ch, *ğ* serves to lengthen the vowel preceding it, *ı* is pronounced roughly like the –er combination in some English words, *ö* is pronounced like the vowel in the English word ‘bird’ but shorter, *ş* is pronounced like the English –sh, *ü* is pronounced as the vowel –i but with rounded lips (Rona, 1999).

2. See also the documentary ‘Kent Suçları, Kent Düşleri’ <http://www.mimarist.org/vid-eo-galeri/video/latest/kent-suclari-kent-dusleri.html>

historical processes of medium length duration (*conjoncture*) concerning recent historical processes marked by authoritarianism and protest.

I employ the Braudelian three-tiered model of historical time (Braudel, 1972) and his analysis of *événements* as results of *conjonctures* not so much as opposed to the analysis of *événements* that Morin, Lefort and Castoriadis (1968) construed regarding the May 1968 events in France, as a breach, an interruption in the supposed linearity of time. On the contrary, I too, as other scholars who have reflected on Gezi, believe that the events of those days were not planned or pre-organized (Yıldırım and Navaro-Yashin, 2013). However, I claim that the events of Gezi can be construed historically on the basis of an anthropological attempt for an interpretation based on the connections of the past that the activists of such mobilizations chose to create³.

In other words, the Gezi uprising, as much as being a ‘surprise’ (Navaro-Yashin, 2013a; Ercan and Oğuz, 2014) due to its spontaneity, heterogeneity, creativity and potential, was also an event bearing the inevitability of rupture that long-term authoritarianism carries in the present and also in the future as the product of a culture of protest traced back in the 1980s when the neoliberal restructuring of the Turkish economy began.

In this paper, I will attempt to exemplify this culture of protest by using ethnographic material from my fieldwork in Istanbul concerning an urban struggle against the construction of the third Bosphorus bridge, by drawing on similar cases of protest as well as on ethnographic material produced during the Gezi demonstrations. Finally, I suggest that the rise of the electoral influence of the Democratic People’s Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP*) is also a symptom of this historical conjuncture.

THE TURKISH CONJUNCTURE

Between 2002 and 2004 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Istanbul with a group of activists protesting against the construction of a bridge crossing over the Bosphorus strait. ‘Have you heard about Bedrettin Dalan?’ asked me one of my informants during one of our discussions. ‘No, I have not’, I replied to him. ‘He was the Mayor of Istanbul in the 1980s. He destroyed the city’. ‘What did he do?’ I asked. ‘Many things, you can search the Chamber of Architects archive. You will find interesting materi-

3. On the connection of Gezi protestors with the past see also Navaro-Yashin (2013) and Abbas and Yiğit (2014).

al about his time in office'. During my fieldwork, this name came up many times as a synonym of the 'destruction of the beauties of old Istanbul', in the words of another informant.

Bedrettin Dalan was the Mayor of Istanbul between 1984 and 1989 in the aftermath of perhaps the cruelest and most bloodshed military coup in the history of the country, which took place on September 12th 1980. During the coup thousands of people were imprisoned and hanged and all the leaders of the political parties were incarcerated or banned from politics. As new political parties were formed, 20,000 out of 38,354 NGOs were closed down (Şimşek, 2004) and the remaining unions, voluntary organizations, and institutions were depoliticized (Beşpınar-Ekici and Gökalp, 2006). It paved the way for the implementation of the neoliberal dogma of the so-called Chicago school of economics⁴ under the guidance of the World Bank and the IMF (Öniş, 1997). Some of the characteristics of this policy were the privatization of public spaces, the construction of huge architectural structures, such as apartment blocks and shopping malls⁵, as well as mega-structures, such as hydroelectric dams (Voulvouli, 2009) and nuclear power plants (Martin, 2000), which is still what is occurring in the country.

It is important to further investigate the period of the Evren⁶ coup for two reasons. The first is that Turkey, along with Great Britain, were the two countries in Europe that first adopted the neoliberal dogma, the results of which generated a prolonged dissent that escalated in 2013 during the Gezi uprising. The second is that during that period the beneficiaries of these policies played a major role in the rise to power of the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* –AKP) and its hegemonic consolidation, which was targeted and challenged during the 2013 demonstrations.

4. The Chicago school of economics is associated with the neoclassical economic model, which rejects the Keynesian economic policies that were implemented as a response to the Great Depression of 1929 and favored state investments in order to stimulate the economy. On the contrary, the economic doctrine of the Chicago school, also known as the neoliberal dogma of economy, favors 'free market' economy with no, or minimal state intervention.

5. Istanbul ranks fifth in the world in terms of the number of shopping malls that exist in the city (<http://www.aktifhaber.com/istanbul-avmde-dunya-5si-oldu-782560h.htm>.)

6. Kenan Evren, who passed away recently (May 2015), was an army officer convicted to life imprisonment on account of his leadership in the military coup of 1980 and his subsequent Presidency of the Republic of Turkey during the junta, a period also known as the 'September 12th coup'.

As Ziya Öniş (1997) writes, the strengthening of political Islam in much of the Middle East – Turkey included – is intrinsically linked to neoliberalism. In the 1980s, during and after the coup Turkey experienced the creation of a new bourgeoisie, the so-called ‘Anatolian bourgeoisie’, which in the 1990s evolved into what came to be known as the ‘Anatolian tigers’, a group of conservative entrepreneurs that backed the electoral success of the Islamist oriented Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi - RP*) (Öniş 2001) which is considered to be the predecessor of *AKP*. It is the same constituency that backed the rise in power of *AKP* not only financially, but also through an ideological framework, which involved a ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’, that is a ‘mixture of nationalism and Islam, as a firm barrier against potential sources of instability’ (Öniş, 1997, p. 750).

As it is recorded, during the junta the Quran has been used as an ideological reference by the dictators. Kenan Evren himself, delivered speeches with the holy book in one hand (Karaveli, 2008) advocating for a kind of Islamic Protestantism⁷. This image of Evren with the Quran in his hand and the free market policies of his successor Turgut Özal who was also overtly expressive of his Islamic identity (Heper, 2013) brings to mind a version of the Weberian ‘protestant ethic’ that is, the use of Islam as an idiom prompting people to engage in financial activity within a framework of ‘disenchanted’ Islamic values.⁸

Hence, neoliberal restructuring, combined with this kind of Islamic Protestantism, paved the way for the ascendance to power of a political party that had the characteristics of what its president until recently, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had described as a conservative party along the lines of the European Christian Democratic parties. At the economic level the victory of *AKP* did not change much. Flexibility of production and a new strain in the relationships between capitalists and the working class (Çelik, 2013; Ercan and Oğuz, 2014) were some of the changes that the Erdoğan administration pushed for. Furthermore, a new wave of privatizations and

7. For a detailed analysis on the ‘protestant ethic’ of Islam and its relation to colonialism see Turner (1974). For a study on the Turkish version of Islamist Calvinism see European Stability Initiative (2005) and also McLean (2014). In anthropology, for an analysis of Islam as a protestant kind of religiosity see Tsibiridou (2015) also Willis and Mohammed (2010) on how capitalist wage labourrelations are framed by Islamic “spirits”.

8. As historian Rifat Bali (2001) describes, during an official visit to Tunisia, Turgut Özal, while presenting a copy of the Quran to the prime minister of the country suggested that “rich Muslims are better than poor Muslims”.

state withdrawal from public services came to be added to the previous similar policies of the 1980s and the 1990s (Ercan and Oğuz, 2014).

Nevertheless, as much as the strengthening of Political Islam can be studied as a result of neoliberal restructuring, so can the rise of a constituency that had no place in mainstream politics but on the street, in the neighborhoods, in small local initiatives and protests with seemingly NIMBY⁹ origin. Such activism encompassed groups such as those reacting against the ‘Tarlabaşı Demolitions’, against the construction of mega structures in the heart of Istanbul, against the Bergama goldmine, the dams of the southeastern Anatolian part of the country, the Bosphorus bridges, especially against the third bridge and many more (Sachs, 1997; Öncü and Koçan, 2001; 2002; Arsel, 2003; Özdemir, 2003; Beşpınar-Ekici and Gökalp, 2006; Voulvouli, 2009).

The narrative of Murat, one of the anti-bridge activists, helps us form an idea of the character of such collectivities. At the time of my fieldwork Murat was 60 years old; A left-wing intellectual, who had experienced ‘too many *coup d’ états*’, as he once told me. ‘The last one, the one of September 12th (the *coup d’ état* of 1980) was by far the worst. I left Turkey then, I was living in exile and I only came back when I felt safe. I watched my country being taken away and this is exactly how I feel now. It’s like my place is being taken away. This time I am not going anywhere. I will stay and fight’. Such narratives reveal that these protests, which occurred over the span of the last four decades were not issue-specific mobilizations. On the contrary, these mobilizations situated their claims in the framework of wider societal issues such as the opposition against military authoritarianism, neo-liberal policies, human-rights protection, feminism, sexuality and ethnic minorities rights, environment as a social issue and a public good, the right to the city and democratization (Voulvouli, 2009).

FROM THE ‘TARLABAŞI DEMOLITIONS’ TO THE ‘TAKSİM COMMUNE’

The conflict over the urban regeneration of Taksim did not start with the plans to demolish Gezi Park in 2013. The conflict dates back to the 1980s when the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul and the Chamber of Archi-

9. NIMBY is an acronym standing for Not In My Back Yard that describes the situation in which residents of an area oppose a development because they find it damaging for their place and propose its construction elsewhere (Wolsink, 1994).

pects clashed over, the so called, ‘Tarlabaşı Demolitions’. The Municipality had planned the transformation of one of the main streets of the Beyoğlu district of the city, İstiklal Caddesi (Independence Street) that extends from Taksim Square to the Galata neighborhood, into a pedestrian street and the opening of a parallel artery, which would ease traffic congestion. For this construction to occur, a large number of 19th century buildings would have to be demolished, as it finally happened. The project was part of the urban renewal policy of the neoliberal era that Turkey had entered in the 1980s. As (Bartu, 1999) describes in her work regarding the ‘Tarlabaşı Demolitions’, the objections related to the realization of the project did not merely represent a clash between conservationists and modernizers, but involved more complex and multi-layered meanings. It was a debate between the left and the authoritarian governance of the 1980s, a debate even between leftist circles, between those who considered themselves the real Istanbulites and the outsiders, between the cosmopolitans and the nationalists, the Islamists and the secularists.

What makes the story of the urban renewal of Beyoğlu (the greater area in which Taksim belongs) more interesting for the purpose of this paper is the fact that the debate regarding the regeneration of the area continued over the course of the next decade when the Mayor of Istanbul was none other than Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who in 1994 supported the Islamist oriented Welfare Party’s proposal to construct a Muslim cultural center and a mosque pretty much where the reconstruction of the military barracks and the new shopping mall was supposed to be constructed in 2013. That project was abandoned after the shutdown of the Party and the removal of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from office¹⁰.

The ‘Tarlabaşı Demolitions’ is one of the cases on which this paper draws. Some further characteristic examples will be mentioned below for the sake of the economy of the discussion. The reader however, should bear in mind that these cases represent only a small percentage of the grassroots groups that have been and are still active all over the country¹¹.

10. On February 28, 1997, a military intervention was staged in order to put a halt in what the Turkish Constitutional Court later defined as violations of the government against the secular constitutional order of the Turkish state (Öniş, 2001). The intervention was characterized as a ‘velvet coup’ due to its peaceful resolution after the resignation of the Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan who was leading a coalition government between the Welfare (*Refah Partisi*) and the True Path (*Doğru Yol Partisi-DYP*) Parties, widely known as *Refahiyol* government.

11. See Voulvouli (2009) and Knudsen (2015). Also see <http://www.dw.com/en/protests-as-turkey-builds-first-nuclear-power-plant/a-18383884>; <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/>

One of these groups is the one formed during the 1990s in an Aegean community of the country, which is known by the name ‘Bergama Protest’. The case concerns the conflict between the residents of the Bergama area near Izmir and the Normandy Mining Corporation. It centers on the project for the establishment of a goldmine whose method of gold extraction involves the use of cyanide, an element dangerous for public health. The opposing residents reacted in various ways and they even managed to get the case to the Turkish Constitutional Court, which temporarily revoked the company’s license. The Bergama case has been examined as a case of multi-layered governance, as a human-rights protest and as a case of environmental activism (Öncü and Koçan, 2001; 2002; Arsel, 2003).

Similar issues form the basis of other conflicts such as the ‘İlisu Dam’ case (Warner, 2012) that concerns the governmental decision to construct a dam that would flood the city of İlisu, which is of historical and archaeological significance and that would constrain the relocation of a great number of people. According to those who opposed the building of the dam, the results of its construction were threatening to the local cultural heritage (KHRP, 1999). Like the Tarlabası and the Bergama cases, the İlisu Dam opposition, involved more issues than environmental and cultural heritage protection, as the area, populated mainly by Kurdish people, is a symbol of Kurdish culture and resistance against the Turkish state. A similar case is the ‘Tunceli Anti-dam’ case, which is also a protest in a mainly Kurdish-populated area (Voulvouli, 2009). The Tunceli province is known for its socialist and anti-government groups, a fact suggesting that the opposition to the dam was part of a wider, in terms of claims, opposition. In fact, it is the first province in Turkish history that in 2014 elected a Mayor in the town of Ovacık who is a member of the Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Kömünist Partisi - TKP*). Similarly, the Arnavutköy anti-bridge campaign is a conflict involving much more than the objection to the bridge construction.

THE ‘THIRD BRIDGE’ PROTEST

The ‘Third Bridge’ case bears similarities with the ‘Tarlabası Demolitions’ as until 1997 the debate of whether or not a third Bosphorus crossing (3. Boğaz Geçisi) was necessary, was limited to the Ministry of Public Works

turkey-suspends-contested-gold-mine-project-after-protests-1280935, as well as the documentaries ‘Ekümenopolis: Ucu Olmayan şehir’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maEcPK-BXV0M>) and ‘Anadolu’nun İsyanı’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmi33j5MXZM>)

and Settlements and certain bureaucrats such as Bedrettin Dalan (see above) on the one side, and the Chamber of Architects on the other. The former claimed that the crossing was necessary whereas the latter claimed that not only was it not necessary, but that it was harmful as far as traffic congestion was concerned (Voulvouli, 2009).

In November 1998, newspapers reported that the Ministry of Public Works and Settlements was planning the construction of a third bridge which would connect the European with the Asian sides of Bosphorus. The bridge would rest in Arnavutköy (European side) and Kandilli (Asian side). Almost immediately after the construction of the third bridge had been announced an initiative by residents of Arnavutköy was formed, namely the Arnavutköy District Initiative (*Arnavutköy Semt Girişimi - ASG*). Ever since, weekly meetings have been taking place, press releases have been printed, festivals (*panayır*) have been held as well as dinners, tea-parties and educational panels on the effects that the bridge would have on the neighborhood's life. In addition, a project about the oral history of the area has been launched. All these activities aimed at increasing awareness of the area's important cultural and architectural history as well as of the destructive effects of the construction of the bridge. The arguments supporting this claim revolved mainly around the effects that the construction of the bridge would have on the environment. However, within the context of this discourse ASG involved issues of natural and cultural heritage preservation as well as demands for democratic participation and human rights protection (Voulvouli, op.cit).

In this sense, the anti-bridge protest was not just an environmental protest, but a transenvironmental one. That is, 'collective action that goes beyond the narrow environmental definition of the issue at stake allowing the environment to carry with it more meanings than just the narrow one of doing something good to nature' (Kousis and Eder, 2001, p. 11)¹². Over the course of its life ASG involved collective consumption demands, promoted community culture and connected with the wider society through media, professionals and political parties. Furthermore, it rendered the issue public by having issued press releases and launching an Internet website. Foreign newspapers published articles on the ASG struggle, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) listed Arnavutköy as HERITAGE @ RISK, national and foreign NGOs were supportive of the campaign, and

12. About environmental protests that transcend the environmental issues at stake see also Arsel *et al.* (2015).

scientists, politicians and celebrities declared their opposition to the construction of the bridge (Voulvouli, 2009).

In the context of the ‘Third Bridge’ protest, the encounters that took place were multifaceted and multileveled. Leftists, secularists, social-democrats and right-wing individuals, along with liberals, conservatives, straight, LGBT, upper middle class, working class, celebrities, cosmopolitans and localists, intellectuals, artists, and even bureaucrats were actively or less actively involved in the struggle. In this sense, the participation of all the different subgroups within ASG came together wishing to challenge existing public services (Lowe, 1986) as response to authoritarian ruling. As one of my informants put it:

‘All the governments have tried to change the country and the city according to the needs that car usage creates, whereas the opposite should have been done [...] At some point those who rule this country, must understand that people, all Turkish people should be heard and their opinion should be a factor in their decision making’.

The 2000 financial crisis was a perfect alibi for the continuation of the same policies that resulted in what has been characterized as the ‘Turkish financial miracle’, exemplified in the expansion of the construction sector which in many cases blurs the limits of private and public spaces. The Gezi Park urban renewal is an example of such policies.

THE EVENT OF GEZI: HER YER TAKSİM, HER YER DİRENİŞ (EVERYWHERE TAKSİM, EVERYWHERE RESISTANCE)

In 2011, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality decided to go ahead with the plans of the urban regeneration of Taksim Square. Opposing these plans, an initiative called Taksim Platform (Taksim Platformu) was created. On the website of the initiative in the ‘about us’ section, it is mentioned that the Taksim Platform is an initiative of ‘people who live, enjoy, work and pass from Taksim, people who consider Taksim as the center of the city, people from all age groups and walks of life, men, women, architects, and local groups’.¹³ In 2012, the Platform along with dozens of other groups participated in a network of groups under the name Taksim Solidarity (Taksim Dayanışması) and as such they issued a joint statement¹⁴ to declare their opposition to

13. <http://www.taksimplatformu.com/bizkimiz.php>

14. http://bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/attachments/000/000/506/original/TAKSİM_DAYANİŞMASI_ORTAK_DEKLARASYONU.pdf

the announced plans of the government concerning the urban renewal of Taksim. In the statement it was also announced that their actions were coordinated by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects, an institution involved in both the ‘Tarlabası’ and the ‘Third Bridge’ conflicts (see above).

In May 2013, participants of the Taksim Solidarity in an effort to prevent the initiation of the project occupied Gezi Park by organizing a sit-in. In fact, some of my informants who were amongst the occupiers or the *çapulcular* (looters), as the Prime-minister at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had called them - an epithet by which they became known during the following days all over the world - invited me to join them. I was not in Istanbul during those first days so I could not be there, it was however my understanding that the occupation was peaceful. Whilst I was away on the night of the 28th of May news spread that what my informants had described as a peaceful sit-in had evolved into a violent clash with the police that attacked the occupiers of Gezi with tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets. Over the next month massive demonstrations burst all over the country, police brutality (no stranger to the square)¹⁵ reached its peak, demonstrators were killed, many were injured¹⁶ and people involved in the protests lost their jobs. However, at the same time the *çapulcular* set tents in Gezi park, run open-air libraries (açık hava kütüphanesi), organized book readings, small concerts and other recreational activities, had tents for praying (mescit) and organized many practical jokes against the police forces. In fact humor and carnivalesque happenings played a big part in the otherwise violent events of those days. ‘(Humor) helps us cope’ a friend told me as we were privately conversing on Facebook.

Ever since, the protest has been the subject of study of many scholars both within the Turkish and the international Academia. Gezi has been analyzed as a collective movement and a symbol of protest against neoliberalism (Farro and Demirhisar, 2014); as a transformative event in Turkey’s political landscape (Türkmen, 2015), as a symptom of modernization (Taştan, 2013), as grassroots populism (Özen, 2015), as anti-capitalist re-

15. Many incidents are related to Taksim Square as it is the place where almost all demonstrations take place. One of the most well known demonstrations in the history of the square is the 1977 Labor Day rally when 34 demonstrators were assassinated by right-wing extremist snipers (Mango, 2004).

16. One of those injured during the first days of the demonstrations was the Istanbul deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi – BDP*), who later became one of the main components of *HDP* when he was reportedly standing in front of bulldozers, trying to stop the uprooting of trees.

sistance against the commodification of urban space, nature and everyday life (Ercan and Oğuz, 2014); Gezi as an evidence of the confiscation of public space by private capital (Göle, 2013; Voulvouli, 2013a) and a pure anti-government protest (Yörük and Yüksel, 2014); Gezi as a secularist protest (Atay, 2013), an ad hoc uprising, horizontally and non-hierarchically organized (Yıldırım and Navaro – Yashin, 2013; Yıldırım, 2013) with heterogeneous encounters (Navaro-Yashin, 2013a; Özen, 2015); Gezi as a political process in liminal spaces (Gambetti, 2013), a protest against biopolitical authoritarianism (Avramopoulou, 2013; Voulvouli, 2013b), a protest claiming the right to the city (Sopov, 2013; Voulvouli, 2013c) and a resistance that bears the imprint of the 1980s oppression (Navaro – Yashin, 2013b).

I agree with all the above interpretations of the Gezi uprising. My ethnographic experience of those days suggests that it was indeed a heterogeneous encounter of all sorts of people. From secularists to anti-capitalist Muslims, from leftists to liberal and more conservative circles of people, from working class to upper class individuals, students, professors, intellectuals, celebrities, artists, politicians, unionists, environmentalists, LGBT and feminist activists. Gezi was an encounter of the ‘we’ in every possible synthesis against what Sydney Tarrow (1998) calls a ‘common enemy’. It was clear for those who experienced Gezi that the demonstrations did not occur because of the trees that were cut. The cutting of those trees was the tip of the iceberg. What happened in Turkey in 2013 was the performance of anger that had been accumulated for decades.

The case of Kemal, a left-wing activist with whom I met during the protests, is characteristic. His father was member of a Marxist group during the 1970s and had been persecuted and incarcerated during the Evren era. Kemal has always been active politically, especially during his years as an undergraduate student in one of Turkey’s progressive universities. Kemal’s narrative of Gezi was not focusing only on the suppression and police brutality during the days of the uprising, or during the Erdoğan era. ‘It has always been us, it has always been the leftists who have been targeted. In the 1970s, in the 1980s we have always been suppressed, chased and marginalized’. From the other end of the spectrum of people who participated in Gezi, Aslı a postgraduate headscarved student told me ‘in this country, women are always the victim. They are always afraid that one government will put a scarf on their head and the other will take it off’. With this narrative, Aslı referred to the headscarf issue that has permeated public discourse in Turkey for decades regarding the ban of the headscarf in public sector

jobs and in universities and the fear of secular women that an Islamist government would legally constrain all women to wear a headscarf.

The different groups that participated in the Gezi protests agreed on their disapproval of authoritarianism, religious or not. 'We expect from the government to respect our individual and collective rights as well as the right to the city' stated Turkish anthropologist, Leyla Neyzi when speaking to the Canadian network CBC. 'People won't go away. In the past, the police could disperse people around with gas bombs and water cannons but this time it's different. This time people won't back out'. 'Today is Monday 17th of June. Police has managed to break our block and the crossing of Gezi is under police control. However, we will not surrender. The Takism Commune existed even if only for two weeks' posted a Facebook friend to be followed by another one who wrote that 'for two weeks we realized our right to the city with solidarity and self-denial'. 'Even though the third bridge will not be constructed in Arnavutköy we are not happy. We did not want it to be built anywhere' told me one of my *ASG* informants who was present in Gezi during the uprising.

As Paul Durrenberger argues: 'The states in serving the interests of corporations are unable to serve the interests of their citizens by protecting their environments or ensuring their economic welfare. In democratic states, those in which citizens elect governments, this causes tensions. There is a tension between the interests of corporations and the interests of populations. That is what we see playing out in the process of globalization as numbers of people gather from around the world to protest wherever international bodies meet to discuss policies of world trade. If we want to understand these movements and their manifestations from protest to suicidal attacks, we must understand the system that gives rise to them'.

The fact that during the demonstrations banks were attacked either verbally or physically, the existence of banners against neo-liberal policies, the active presence of anti-capitalist groups amongst which the group of anti-capitalist Muslims, as well as of the leftist parties of the country, suggests that Gezi was an anti-neoliberal protest against the mechanisms that turn labor to bank profits, minimize the right to the city, destroy the environment, suppress human rights in the name of a disenchanting neo-conservatism 'headscarved' with religious legitimation.

Burak, a young anarchist from Izmir studying in Istanbul, was very emotional when he was shouting about the right to the city (*kent hakkı*). 'This is not yours to sell', he told me referring to the prime minister who, according to him, was privatising public spaces following the tradition of

all governments since the 1980s. 'It does not matter whether it is a coalition, a secularist or an Islamist Minister. They all say yes to the bridge! All of them serve private interests', one of my informants told me, when I was doing my fieldwork regarding the third bridge.

Taking the above into consideration, I claim that Gezi was not the first challenge against neo-liberal authoritarianism. Even though the coup of the 1980s appeared to have eradicated almost every opposition, on the level of what anthropologists call social poetics (Herzfeld, 2005), that is, the appropriation of meanings in order to meet certain ends, there has been a 'silent' battle against authoritarianism and neoliberalism from collectivities in both urban and rural areas.

Causes such as environmental, cultural heritage and human rights protection, democracy, justice and equality have been appropriated within the Turkish neoliberal *conjuncture* creating thus a culture of protest, which has been channeled through time and took on a massive manifestation in the summer of 2013 during the Gezi uprising.

Gezi (*évènement*) was the big scale parallel of Tarlabası, Bergama, İlisu, Tunceli, Arnavutköy and many more protests around the country. Heterogeneous encounters, democratization demands, human and political rights protection claims, anti-capitalist, feminist and LGBT agendas synthesize a constituency that exists in almost every corner of Turkey, born at the same time as the neoliberal state. 'Everywhere Taksim, everywhere Resistance' was one of the most popular slogans during the uprising amidst tear gas, water cannons, but also carnivalesque events, open-air libraries, music, humor. The 'Taksim Commune', as some of the protesters called the days of the uprising, brought to my mind one of the comments that an ASG activist had made during one of their festivals: 'Is this a revolution or what?'. I am not at all certain that we can speak in terms of a revolution or a repetition of the Paris Commune in the heart of Istanbul. It is, however, my belief that the Gezi uprising would not have been possible without the existence of those small in size but big in number protests that have been flourishing during this historical *conjuncture*.

FROM GEZI TO THE PARLIAMENT: BİZ'LER MECLİSE (WE, IN THE PARLIAMENT)

In his victory speech after the June 7th 2015 elections, the co-president of *HDP*, Selahattin Demirtaş said that 'this victory is a shared victory of the workers, the unemployed, villagers, farmers, women, the oppressed, the

exploited, hence it is a victory of the Left'. This statement was along the lines of the main campaign slogan of *HDP* in the pre-election period which was 'We, in the Parliament' (Biz'ler Meclise). *HDP* is a party which had been founded a year before the Gezi uprising and had managed to cross the 10% threshold, a necessary condition for a party before any of its elective representatives can enter the Turkish National Assembly. 'We did it! For more than thirty years they had managed to keep us out of the parliament' told me one of my informants' referring to the fact that the 10% threshold law was introduced with the constitution of the military junta in the 1980s. The accomplishment of *HDP* is seen by many of its supporters as a vindication of decades of dissent to authoritarian suppression, democratic interruption and conservatism, which resulted in the marginalization of progressive groups from the mainstream political scene. The party managed to capitalize on a general sentiment in the aftermath of Gezi and its attempt was 'applauded' initially, at the Presidential elections of August 2014 by an impressive 9.76% of the votes¹⁷. Later on, in the national elections, *HDP* won 13,1% in June and 10.7% in November of the constituency, who went beyond the dichotomies of the past with regards to the Kurdish issue and judged *HDP* not only as a pro-Kurdish party, which it undoubtedly is, but also as a progressive, liberal, leftist movement with two leaders from the new pool of the political personnel of the country, namely Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksedağ, a man and a woman. This representation respected the 50% quota rule in the participation of women in the party's committees and procedures, a quota which was also respected during the formation of the electoral lists along with quotas applied for participation of LGBT individuals, religious as well as ethnic minorities¹⁸.

In this sense, *HDP* positions itself as not yet another pro-Kurdish political party, but a multi-issue political formation; a political organization focusing on issues of class inequality, feminist and gender prerogatives, political suppression, human rights, democratic participation, as well as alternative governance. That is, many of the demands and claims of the Gezi protesters but also of decades of dissent by social movements constituted by all those grassroots initiatives, student and labor movements, smaller leftist political collectivities and parties.

17. Considering that Selahattin Demirtaş who was the party's candidate for the Presidency, is of Kurdish origin, this number was indeed very impressive.

18. On the rise of *HDP* as a consequence of the Gezi uprising see also Türkmen (2015).

‘The emphasis is on ‘we’ that includes all the oppressed. Kurds, workers, Alevis, Armenians, unemployed, poor, youth, women, LGBT etc.’

mentioned one of my informants, a high-ranking member of *HDP*, when I asked him why they used ‘We, in the Parliament’ as their central campaign motto before the June elections.

At the November 1st 2015 snap elections *HDP* lost a significant number of the votes it had gained in June. According to my informants, this was the result of the violence that followed the June elections (suicide bombings in a peace rally in Ankara and in a youth gathering in Suruç a city in the southeast part of the country and the retaliation attacks targeting soldiers, policemen and villager guards from the militants of the Kurdistan Worker’s Party *PKK* – in Kurdish: *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*). Right now, Turkey experiences a turbulent period and for some it is on the verge of civil war.

About a year ago, Turkish federal prosecutors launched an investigation against 1,128 academics who have signed a petition calling for peace and objecting to the government’s policy in the country’s Kurdish provinces. A few days before that, the President of the Republic Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had called for the lifting of immunity for the *HDP* leaders in order for criminal investigations against them to be initiated. Whether, how and when this conflict will end remains to be seen. It is not very easy to predict but as an ethnographer who tries to communicate the point of view of my informants, I feel that the words of one of them during the Gezi uprising help us reflect on what the future might bring:

‘Fear has been defeated now. We have learned to raise our voice when we are angry. Some people are fighting, others are dancing; some are lashing out drunk; others are collecting garbage and treating stray animals. I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. But today is a new day and we are all new people’¹⁹.

19. The authorship of this article was completed before the summer of 2016 and the July 15th attempted coup that has drastically transformed the Turkish political landscape. During the last year, Turkey is experiencing another cycle of authoritarianism and Turks are experiencing once more a very intense and difficult period. One of the many risks that students of contemporary Turkish society run while witnessing history in the making is that by the time their papers reach the press, Turkey might be a very different country from the one they are describing in their writings.

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