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The Composition of Multiple Times and Spaces in the Protests

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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Gezi Park Protests
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This paper demonstrates how the interactions of diverse people with Taksim, Gezi Park, and one another, as well as with material practices and events constructed the Gezi protests' spaces and times. While the Gezi protests began as a reaction against the uprooting of trees in the park, the excessive use of the police force turned the protests into national unrest. Gezi Park and Taksim Square witnessed a 15-days occupation, which provided countless potentials for bodily actions in material spaces. By looking at the moment in which the protests occurred and exploring the embodied performance of politics in Gezi Park, this paper argues that the Gezi protests created their own times and spaces, in which bodies performed, acted and experienced a different kind of sociality. The paper calls attention to how the protests produced such unique spaces and how internal and external dynamics shaped these spaces. To explore such multiplicity and diversity of the moments, the concepts of "politics of encounter," "performativity" and "carnavalesque" will be deployed in separate sections. In using these concepts, this paper elucidates the different narratives of the protesters, captured in the moments and practices of the protests.

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Introduction

The last decade witnessed Occupy-style protests on the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, Madrid, Athens, New York, Ferguson, Baltimore, London, Hong Kong, Seoul and many other cities around the world. Protests involving the occupation of spaces, actions and bodily performances that are produced by different identities are politically meaningful. There have been numerous studies on global protests which examined different dimensions of the protests within social studies. Some scholars specifically focused on the protest camp to explore encounter (Merrifield 2012, 2011, Halvorsen 2015a, 2015b), the meaning attached to the occupation of spaces (Calhoun, 2013), the reciprocities between public and virtual spaces (Gregory 2013), the ways in which the protests created new political subjectivities (Bethania 2017, Hassan 2012, Gambetti 2014) and the publicity of occupying (Murray 2016). This literature offers valuable insights to rethink the spaces of protests which can be uncertain, contingent and fluid. In this paper, I seek to expand upon these perspectives to demonstrate the multiplicity and diversity of the moments and spaces of protests. This paper, therefore, seeks to understand the multiple meanings attached to occupying public spaces as well as the claims that occupation of the public space is not merely a power of the act itself but also a powerful act. It demonstrates how the interactions of different people with Taksim and Gezi Park and with one another and with material practices and events constructed the Gezi protests' multiple spaces and times.

In order to better understand the multiplicity and diversity of the moment and its impact on the event, this paper perceives the spaces of the protest as relational. It applies Massey's (2005: 9) concept of "throwtogetherness" that is used to mark multiplicity, diversity and difference in cities: "the space in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity." Space is a dynamic network of conflicting power relations: it is a social product. Space cannot be treated as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (Foucault, 1980: 70), but instead as "socially produced". Lefebvre (1991: 91) states that "space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure." Likewise, Massey argues that space is not a "surface" or a "continuous material landscape." Space is "a momentary coexistence of trajectories, a configuration of a multiplicity of histories all in the process of being made." (Massey, 2000: 209). Massey's, Lefebvre's, and Foucault's definitions of space are intrinsically relational, heterogeneous and processual. This relational thinking of the place enables us to think about the ways in which diverse actors and processes constructed Gezi's multiple spaces and times.

In summer 2013, Turkey witnessed significant events after a protest against the government's plan to demolish Gezi Park, Taksim, located at the heart of Istanbul. The protests began as an environmental concern against the government's Gezi Park project, aiming to construct a shopping mall on the Gezi Park, and thus many activists went to the park to protect the trees from uprooting on 27 May 2013. Although only a few protesters stood up against the bulldozers, the police's response was excessively punitive, leading to the gradual expansion of the protest. Also, the harsh response of the then Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, inflamed the situation, and the mobilisation soon after turned into a nationwide anti-government uprising. During the 15-days occupation of the Gezi Park and Taksim Square, massive scale protests continued in other parts of Istanbul and across the country.

Demonstrations and protests in an urban park brought together a whole body of different interest groups: leftists, nationalists, Kemalists, LGBT people, football fans, Alawites, Kurdish activists, Anticapitalist Muslims, artists, celebrities and more. The diverse groups and individuals coalesced around varying concerns related to the policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP), which had been in power for more than a decade by then, and its leader—Recep Tayyip Erdogan. For fifteen days, as the busiest thoroughfare of Istanbul, Taksim Square and Gezi Park witnessed the coexistence of difference, thus providing countless potentials for bodily actions in material space.

By looking at the moment in which the protests occurred and exploring the embodied performance of politics in Gezi Park, this paper argues that the Gezi protests created their own time and space, in which bodies performed, acted and experienced a different kind of sociality which can be seen as "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" (Massey, 1993: 66). The paper calls attention to the way in which protests produced such a unique space and how internal and external dynamics shaped this space. To explore such diversity of the moments, the concepts of "politics of encounter," "performativity", and "carnavalesque" will be deployed. While each concept refers to different practices, these overlapped with each other. Politics of encounter' is used to emphasise the forms of new social relations in the park. Judith Butler's concept of "performativity" will be used to stress the political significance of bodily actions, even if there was not a single "real" goal sought by protesters. Bakhtin's carnivalesque concept offers an explanation for how prevalent norms and social positions can be challenged through irony, humour, and parody. In using these concepts, this paper seeks to elucidate the different narratives of the protesters, captured in the moments and practices of the protests. The paper also questions the limitations of the moment(s) in which the protests occurred. Although the paper calls attention to diverse and multiple moment(s) of protests, it argues that the moment(s) could not produce a transformative effect in the broader public.

The empirical materials used in this article come from several sources. It is mostly based on 29 in-depth interviews¹ conducted with the disparate groups and individuals who participated in the protests between March and September 2014. Media review is an important source also used in this paper. Several newspaper articles from different newspapers, such as Cumhuriyet, Sozcu, Hurriyet, HaberTurk and Sabah, were analysed, covering the period between 27 May 2013 and 27 May 2014. Conducting interviews, a year later after the protests allowed tracing the participants' changing ideas about the protest's long-term achievements

¹ In this paper, the names of participants were anonymised and ethical approval had been obtained by Durham University.

that were reflected towards the end of the article. Thus, this article considers the potentialities of occupying physical spaces and also the limitations of this act.

Encountering in the Gezi protests

After the police's withdrawal on the 1st of June 2013, an unusual multitude of people remained in Taksim and Gezi Park. On the one hand, thousands of people marched and walked through Istiklal, a pedestrian street between Taksim Square and the Tunnel, which is one of the most crowded streets of Istanbul, chanting "We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal". On the other hand, pro-Kurdish activists joined the protests. Moreover, three football clubs' fans, Fenerbahce, Besiktas and Galatasaray, known as homophobic and sexist, participated in the protests alongside LGBT groups, Anticapitalist Muslims, women's unions, trade unions, political parties, many individuals from various backgrounds. There were also many celebrities, artists, actresses, and more importantly, the capitalist class from big businesses expressed their sympathy with the protests through social media and in the following days joined the protests in the park. This unusual assemblage eventually shared the same space for two weeks that created new forms of political expression in the Gezi protests.

In fact, in cities like Istanbul, there has always been diversity, and such diversity comes together from time to time in different ways. Taksim has long been a space for protest. In particular, during 2011 and 2012, multiple political groups participated in the 1st May rallies. Yet, it was the first time in Turkish history that multiple groups spent 15 days together in the same public space. Therefore, it is useful to apply the concept of "encounter" to explain 'contact' between different identities during the protests. It is here argued that encounters between multiple political, cultural and social identities in the unique space of the Taksim protest created a difference. This encounter generated affinity and solidarity, but at the same time, it revealed that deep historical prejudices could not be dissolved in such a short period of time.

Encounter is often used to describe practices of bringing different bodies together in unexpected ways. Wilson (2016) demonstrates that encounters allow the ways in which we think about bodies, borders and differences to develop. Encounters enable a "focus on the embodied nature of social distinctions and the unpredictable ways in which similarity and difference are negotiated at the moment." (Wilson, 2016: 5). Thus, for her, the encounter is not merely bringing different bodies together, but more importantly, encounters generate a difference. She asserts that "words such as "rupture", "surprise", "shock" and "animation" are common to descriptions of encounter and describe a moment or instance in which something is unexpectedly broken open." (2016: 6). Moreover, Valentine (2008) claims that history, material conditions, and power have a significant impact on encounters, and thus they should not be romanticised. In her work on white majority attitudes towards minority groups in London, she concluded that encounters should not always be understood using the lens of new urban citizenship and cosmopolitanism as social prejudices create gaps between the scales of encounters. Therefore, spaces of encounters are often ambiguous and incorporate antagonistic practices.

Merrifield (2012; 2011; 2014) and Halvorsen (2015a) explore encounters in the context of urban protests. Drawing on Lefebvre's urban writing Merrifield believes that the current protests, which involve offline and online participation, can be understood through a politics of encounter. He does not take the question of how/when to make a successful encounter as the main point. Rather, he argues encounters are unpredictable and every encounter produces subjectivities. "Affinity becomes the cement that bonds, perhaps only for a moment, but a moment that lingers, a lasting encounter, of people across frontiers and barriers." (2011: 109). What becomes important in such protests is that encounters are staged in the heart of the city as well as through Facebook and Twitter. While virtual spaces provided new spaces for assembling and contestation (Murray, 2016), thanks to brave people who showed their presence in physical spaces public spaces were reconstructed (Gregory, 2013). Thus, these city spaces are not concrete physical spaces; instead, they are public spaces which "enable public discourses, public conversations to talk and meet each other, quite literally." (Merrifield, 2013: 919).

Gezi Park provided an open space of encounter in a way that empowered new social relationships between different bodies. People were flung together in Taksim that brought unpredictable consequences. Not only the event but also the history of Taksim as a cosmopolitan place enabled encounters of different subjectivities. For many of the interviewees participating in Gezi was one of the most remarkable experiences

in their lives, even although some of them had participated in many other protests. During this time, the catchphrase “Gezi spirit” was widely used in social media and in the park to express how the social divisions were blurred. Accordingly, the Gezi spirit named an affinity between different bodies and subjects that had previously felt it was impossible to come together. Such a spirit challenged identity positions between organised groups and those who do not have a party affiliation, between LGBT groups and football fans, between the Anticapitalist Muslims and secular Turks, and between the nationalist Turkish and Kurdish groups. For example, Buket, one of the interviewees, asserted that the atmosphere during the first days of occupation resembled the atmosphere in a football stadium because of all the swearing. Yet, thanks to women and LGBT activists who set up “Swearword Workshops” in the park, awareness about sexism grew, and as a result, the use of sexist and homophobic language was reduced. In this sense, attitudes and positions with regard to “others” evolved through an encounter.

An Anticapitalist Muslim, Kenan believes that encountering different classes was one of the most remarkable achievements of the protests.

The biggest gain is that people from different parts of the society came together for the same goal. This was something that could not be achieved for a long time. The feasibility of this was implemented there. An amazing brotherhood was established there, and a sharing environment was established there... These are the things that I will never forget. For 17-18 days of the period a space that is like a ‘rehearsal heaven’ was constructed, and everyone was watching each other’s needs.... (Kenan, April 8, 2013, Findikzade)

Kenan’s position is embodied in religious discourse. He carefully selected religious words to emphasise the affinity between people. As Merrifield (2013) indicates, affinity brings a new dimension to the crowds made up of people from different ages and groups who assemble and encounter each other. Gezi established horizontal relationships despite vertical differences in terms of social, cultural and economic between different individuals and groups. They all shared a common sense of frustration and anger. Merrifield (2011 114) states,

“For the politics of the encounter will always be an encounter somewhere, a spatial meeting place. It will always be an illicit rendezvous of human bonding and solidarity, a virtual, emotional and material topography in which something disrupts and intervenes in the paralysis.”

During the occupation, Kurdish groups with signs of Kurdish activism and Turkish nationalist groups with Turkish and Atatürk flags coexisted in the same space. Such coexistence provoked amazed comments from the protesters. In particular, many protesters found a picture capturing three citizens who stood against the police force together - one citizen holding the Turkish flag, and another citizen holding the PKK flag and the other citizen making the sign of nationalist movement- incredibly evocative and impressive. Ahmet, a middle-aged activist, believes that thanks to the Gezi spirit everyone embraced each other, creating solidarity. As a Kurdish citizen who has been campaigning for Kurdish rights for years, he thinks that Gezi brought the Kurdish problem into view and more people became aware of it.

People wanted to solve a problem instead of protesting about something. It was not just a protest. It was a stance against this practice [cutting the trees]. A lot of things have been gained, a history has been made, a culture has been created, and a sense of brotherhood has been created. Can you believe that in Kadikoy and Besiktas the protests were organised against the construction of a police station in Lice [a Kurdish district in Southeast Anatolia]? You know, these two districts are known for their Kemalist identity, but as a result of Gezi spirit, they said ‘resist Lice’ and perceived Medeni Yildirim [who was killed by a soldier during the clash in Lice after Gezi protests] as a martyr of Gezi... (Ahmet, May 5, 2014, Tarlabasi).

Gezi enabled the crossing of boundaries between different socio-cultural classes. Ahmet believes that this overcoming of power relations was inspired by empathy. While for some people encountering Kurdish activists in the park generated empathy, the ultra-Turkish nationalist groups, on the other hand, were less supportive. Many activists were disappointed by the reactions of ultra-nationalists towards the Kurdish groups. A leftist journalist who was one of the initial activists in the park told me that although the only thing

that Kurdish groups were doing in the park was performing a folk dance (known as *halay cekmek*) for 24 hours, they were targeted by the ultra-nationalists. Mahir, a law student, said that taking part in Gezi was an amazing experience. He articulated that in the park the only thing that mattered was brotherhood and egalitarianism. However, Mahir indicated that it was impossible for him to come together in solidarity with someone who holds a Kurdish flag. That was the reason why he put a distance between himself and the Kurdish groups in the park. In Mahir's case, encountering others with different political identities did not produce new social relations.

Of course, there were some disagreements, conflicting ideas, but we had to get united and in solidarity. Some provocative groups [Kurdish activists] tried to divide the mass and carried out the terrorist activities, but our people were never provoked. This was about who was leading the movement. The majority of people who were respectful about Mustafa Kemal [the founder of the Turkish Republic] and never gave up holding Turkish flags didn't allow these provocative groups in the park. The crowds weren't divided and didn't leave the park because of Abdullah Ocalan's flags. They persisted with their Turkish flags. They insisted on being respectful towards Mustafa Kemal. And these groups remained the minority in the park. The system drove them to the park, but the people took them out. (Mahir, June 6, 2014, Taksim).

Valentine (2008) observes how interaction with different political interests might engender resentment. As she indicates, attitudes and values towards different identities can remain unchanged and even toughen through encounters which was the case for some of the groups in the park. Therefore, although from the outside, it seemed as though the bodies that were resisting power united were united, there were still divisions out on the ground.

Consequently, although encounters in the park created a difference, this difference did not have the same impact on all groups and identities. For example, while the Anticapitalist Muslims performed their prayers, the leftists made a protective ring around them in case of police intervention. In contrast to this moment of solidarity between Anticapitalist Muslims and the leftist groups, there was antipathy between the pro-Kurdish groups and nationalist Kemalists. This also raises questions around the nature of encounters with people who were not supportive of the protests, or the shopkeepers in Taksim area. There was a different relationship with the Gezi spirit inside and outside of the park. The protests did not produce close proximity with those who did not support the protest. On the contrary it created more aggressiveness. Yayla (2013) and Yel and Nas (2013) claimed that the protesters harassed women with the headscarves deemed to be supporters of the government. They were regarded as responsible for the policies of the JDP and subjected to both verbal and psychological pressure in many places throughout the protests. Moreover, the protesters smashed the display windows of many shops including bank branches which of them were thought to have a close relationship with the government (Hurriyet, 2 June 2013; Sabah, 3 June 2014.). Thus, there was a different relationship with the Gezi spirit inside and outside of the park.

Performing bodily actions in the park

On 28th May when bulldozers entered the park to cut down the trees, some activists kept guard in order to protect the trees but were forcibly removed and this continued until 1st June when the police left the park. Later, people continued to set up tents and established a community in the park. That said, from 28th May until the 1st of June the protesters performed different bodily actions according to the situations that they faced. Thus, during this period of time the bodies assembled and acted together to show their presence in Taksim. Using Judith Butler's concept of performativity to show how bodies acted together, this section explains the political acts behind the protests.

Butler (2011) examines bodily actions in mass demonstration through the concept of performativity. She seeks to understand how our identities are performed, initially using this concept to understand the ways in which gender is constructed through iterative performances. Performativity is not "the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather... [the] reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains." (Butler, 1993: 2). In the same way, Butler argues that when bodies congregate in public spaces, they construct a collective political body that moves, speaks, and makes claims together. Bodies do not act alone; instead they act together as political subjects. It is bodily actions

that formed a new space in which political actions occurred. Following Butler's claim, I maintain that it was the collective actions of bodies in solidarity in Taksim and Gezi that created a new space.

Initially, only a handful of protesters occupied Gezi to prevent its transformation. The police had dispersed previous protests in Taksim such as 1st May rally and the protest against the demolition of Emek Cinema, but their actions created the opposite effect on 28th May 2013. As long as the police used excessive force, including burning the tents of protesters in the early morning, the bodies insisted on defending the trees. Moreover, every time the police intervened; more people went to the park. Burcak, a mechanical engineer who was one of the first activists, thinks that not only excessive police force but also the process itself enabled the protest to develop.

On May 28, when we first went to the park, the bulldozers already stopped, and there were not more than 50 people in the morning. Since we knew the bulldozers would cut the trees, we occupied there to stop them. The police came later on, and the municipal police officers were there, too... With the operation of the bulldozers, we were faced with the attack of police and municipal police officers this time when we tried to stop or interrupt the bulldozers to cut the trees. After a while, we were attacked, pushed and squeezed in ways that you might have already seen from those first images... As a matter of fact, as the hours passed, people began to assemble there, we were 50 then we became 100; we were 100 then we became 1000... It went like that (Burcak, May 20, 2014, Taksim).

The protesters' persistence gained a particular meaning. Butler defines bodies that assemble on the street as precarious, obdurate and insisting on their collective identities in a particular space. She maintains that bodies not only appear and act, they also refuse and persist "under conditions in which that fact alone is taken to be an act of delegitimation of the state. It is not that bodies are simply mute life-forces that counter existing modalities of power. Rather, they are themselves patterns of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action" (2011: np). People in Gezi Park and Taksim refused to leave the park. Protecting a few trees might seem a naïve response, yet exercising a right to protect the trees and insisting on this right by staying in place gained meaning. Bodies mobilised in the space, they occupied the space, and they constructed a new space through bodily actions between them, thanks to this persistence.

After the initial occupation, the park was turned into a living space by the protesters. They established a communal life, spontaneously constructing a café, an infirmary, a kitchen, warehouse, garden, library, mosque, memorial area and other utilities. They called their garden "Gezi Garden", the square "Democracy Square", the market "Revolution Market" and the library "*Capulcu* Library"². The space that they constructed dismissed the traditional distinction between public and private. Using Butler's rhetoric, it can be said that a 'new form of sociability' was established in the rescued space. As Butler maintains, the ways in which bodies performed on the streets cross boundaries between public and private, and eating and sleeping became actions done in the public domain. That helped to form horizontal relationships between bodies that broke gender, class and race relations and spoke in the name of equality.

Bodies not only performed private bodily actions in the park but also, they had new experiences and strategies through living in the space. They divided the park into cantons and each group set up their tents in different cantons. According to the interviewees, radical leftist groups with their flags were located in Taksim Square, and diverse groups and individuals with no party sign or flags were concentrated in different parts of the park. For example, anarchists and socialists mainly stood at the edge of the park, whereas those who were not affiliated with particular parties preferred to locate themselves deeper inside the park. One of the interviewees, a member of a left-wing party, smilingly declared that they, as socialists, were like 'bastions' that protected people from any interventions by law enforcement officers. This also reveals that there were some significant bodily differences in the wider body politic of the protest group. Protesters also constructed barricades from public and private vehicles, stones, wooden crates and seats, not only on the boundaries of Gezi Park but also on all the streets towards Besiktas, Osmanbey and Istiklal in order to restrict access to the Taksim area. They used strategies such as running, hiding and escaping from the police and a variety of solutions to diminish the effect of teargas. In this way, they were aware of the power that surrounded them and learned the ways to resist and oppose it.

² *Capulcu* means looter that I will address this word in the next section more broadly.

The occupation of Gezi also enabled multiple bodies to become visible in the public domain. Different bodies had different demands, but they all became public in the material space that was supposed to be turned into a private shopping mall. In so doing, the material spaces of Taksim and Gezi became part of, and supported the action of, the broader protest body. Thanks to the protests, the park was saved. However, the park revealed that bodies could act in solidarity regardless of the political differences they had. Ugur believes that Gezi changed his perspective in terms of being political.

We won the GP. For example, it is a much better park than it was before. We also have gained something else, that is, we have made the government step back, and we saw that such a thing could happen. It expanded our horizons in this sense. We saw millions of people on the streets. This was an incredible experience that would not come true even if we wanted. No matter what, we wanted it also for 1st May rally and we will try it again on 28th [May- the first anniversary of Gezi protest]. I think this is not something that can happen with our desire, but something that spontaneously happens. We saw ordinary citizens or our neighbours on the streets, too. Usually, we don't consider them activists or political figures. This is broadening our horizon from this perspective. Indeed, everyone is a political figure, everyone has some demands, and everyone has something to tell. We saw in Gezi that if possibilities are given, this can happen. (Ugur, May 8, 2014, Osmanbey).

Ugur attributed new dimensions to the right to protest. As an activist, he realised that anybody could have a political claim about the right to the city. Butler argues that street assemblies cannot be reduced into a singularity. What becomes important when bodies assemble on the streets is, as Butler stresses, that they assert their presence “as a plural and obdurate bodily life” in the public domain. “The “we are here” that translates that collective bodily presence might be re-read as “we are still here,” meaning: “We have not yet been disposed of... We have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life; we have not become the glaring absence that structures your public life” (Puar, 2012: 193). Consequently, Gezi witnessed multiple bodily actions that widened our perspective about the relationship between public and private and also about being political subjects.

Carnavalesque in the park

During the occupation of Gezi Park, a new political space was created by the protesters. These fifteen days of occupation enabled a break from the state's order. While constructing a communal life was a way to subvert the rules of authority, at the same time, a mixture of laughter and humorous performances also enabled the protesters to challenge existing forms of authority. In this section, by using Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque, I will show how life in Gezi was turned upside down in the demonstrations. To do that, I argue that *capulcus* and their performances should be understood through a carnivalesque lens and these carnivalesque practices can be identified as a joyful subversion of the state's power.

Carnavalesque is a concept that was employed by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in his book, *Rabelais and his World*, to refer to subversive acts at carnivals that are practised by people in order to reverse hierarchies and abandon conventions. For Bakhtin, (1984: 10) a carnival is “peculiar folk humour that always existed and has never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes.” Examining carnivals of the late medieval and early modern period, Bakhtin looks at their philosophical meaning and argues that people change their everyday lives into a utopia during such time-spaces. Carnival goers wear costumes that enable them to suspend their social class and gender identities. Males can wear female costumes just as women can wear male costumes. For Bakhtin, the carnival is not only about physical space, but it also enables people to do what they want to do, which they cannot do in their existing social world. He claims that carnival “builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state.” (Bakhtin, 1984: 27)

Following Bakhtin's concept, it can be said that Gezi turned into a carnival. The way participants performed and reacted against authority signified a critical politics of fun.

Perhaps like Erdogan said we, all the *capulcus* were there. (Buket, May 22, 2014, Findikzade)

Capulcu is a label that was used by Erdogan to refer to the protesters as a few looters (*capulcu*) in a TV programme on 2nd June 2013. While he used this term to humiliate the protesters in the park, everyone in the park joyfully embraced this label and started to describe themselves as *capulcu*. Thus, *Capulcu* as a bonding term for all people in the park was no longer an insulting word, but rather gained a meaning of resistance against state authority. The carnivalesque figure of *capulcu* suspended all differences between people (Bakhtin, 1984). It extinguished the hierarchies of status through the discourse of equality between all people. As Bakhtin (1984: 7) maintains:

“Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.”

As a bonding term, *capulcu* started to circulate nationally and internationally. Not only those in the park but also many others – celebrities, intellectuals, and politicians - labelled themselves as *capulcu*. The CEO of Boyner Holding, one of the big corporations in Turkey, tweeted “I am neither leftist nor rightist, I am only a *capulcu*” to show his political support. Similarly, Noam Chomsky recorded a video message with a banner stating “I am also a *Capulcu*. In solidarity, resist Istanbul”. By this way, the protests enabled to transcend of the vertical boundaries of class and gave a new and different meaning to space. Hence, we can see how the Gezi carnivalesque extended beyond the physical confines of the park and the square

By joyfully embracing the term *capulcu*, the protesters transformed the protests into a carnival defined by irony, satire, parody and grotesque. A robust sense of humour was found in graffiti, banners, slogans, chanting, dance and music. Graffiti that was painted on one of the buildings in Taksim read that “Every day I’m *chapulling*”, inspired by the famous rock group LMFAO’s hit, “Party Rock Anthem”. Through theatrical performances, Taksim was turned into a space of “everyday *capulling* [the verb form of *capulcu*]”, which is now addressed in more detail.

Capulcus and their carnivalesque practices

Capulcus re-appropriated and re-produced many things through performing in the space. They applied humour, creativity, and joviality in their songs, dances, graffiti, slogans, and chanting that turned the protests into a carnivalesque event. In this way, they produced new icons and memes associated with Gezi. The main theme was to call attention to the use of tear gas and to show the achievements of the protest. Bakhtin (1984: 8) believes that “carnival is the people’s second life, organised on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life. Festivity is a peculiar quality of all comic rituals and spectacles.” Gezi became an event of laughing in the face of authority.

On May 31st and over the following days, all chanting and graffiti were directed towards Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the anger expressed toward his personality. First and foremost, his name was used without a title or his surname, which is considered disrespectful in Turkish culture. Although walls and banners were covered with swear words about Erdogan, many banners and graffiti also used creativity and humour to criticise Erdogan. For example, to point out that state authority was performed by the police, they spelt his name “Recop Tazyik Gazdogan” (truncheon, coercion and gas). Likewise, the famous meme of Game of Thrones was replicated in English as “Tayyip, winter is coming” to show Erdogan’s time is about to finish for the protesters. Also, another exciting example was Nokia’s famous tagline “connecting people”, which was re-produced using Erdogan’s name as “Tayyip connecting people” was used to emphasise the unity and diversity of protesters thanks to Erdogan. Slogans using humour and creativity were often more effective in grabbing attention.

One of the most remarkable icons of the protests involved penguins. On May 31st 2013 when there was excessive use of police force against the protesters, one of the mainstream channels, CNN Turk, owned by the opposition group Dogan Media, showed a documentary about penguins instead of reporting the news. Penguins were no longer limited to the documentary. Indeed, in graffiti and banners they gained new meaning as a representation of censorship. Indeed, the name of the episode, “Spy in the Huddle” that was

chosen by CNN Turk could be caricatured easily in graffiti. This icon was widely displayed to ridicule and criticise the state authority.

Throughout the protest, music, singing and dancing were important performances in the park. Not only did the protesters create new songs, but they also performed modern and traditional dances containing new meanings linked to the protests. The famous Turkish rock group Duman's "bring it on!" (Hurriyet, 3 June 2013) Bogazici Jazz Choir's "are you a *capulcu*, wow!" (Hurriyet, 6 June 2013) and a Turkish folklore band's "the mood of pot and pan" (Hurriyet, 6 June 2013) were inspired by and dedicated to the protests. Another interesting example was the portrayal of the "whirling dervish". The whirling dervish is a dance that is practised by the Mevlevi order³. The dance is one of the spiritual treasures of the Mevlevi tradition. More importantly, the practice itself is a peaceful and spiritual exercise that expresses the closeness of the relationship between God and the human being. The powerful message behind such a performance is "you, too, come" (*sen de gel*), a stencil referring to a phrase attributed to the saint Rumi, which was written as follows:

Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving.
It doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times.
Come, yet again, come, come. (Mawlânâ Jalâluddîn Rûmî)

This dance was reinterpreted in Gezi Park. A dancer in a dervish costume with a gas mask on his face performed this spiritual dance in the park. Sometimes he was half-naked with black leggings and a pink skirt and sometimes in a green costume. The gas mask attributed an eclectic meaning to the whirling dervish: not only were these peaceful dervishes rebelling, but they also emphasise that Gezi was a peaceful protest. Transferring such a spectacle that is usually performed and/or seen by religious people to the park also showed the plurality and heterogeneity of protest: "you, too, come".

"Guy Fawkes" masks were widely used in Gezi Park. The sharp, triangular, subtly smiley masks have been widely used in global protests. The Guy Fawkes mask first appeared in a "V for Vendetta" comic published in 1982 in which an anarchist who wears a Guy Fawkes mask attempts to overthrow a fascist government and its collaborator, the media. "V for Vendetta" and the famous mask figure has gained worldwide popularity thanks to a Hollywood-made film, "V for Vendetta", that was released in 2005. Since then, the masks have become a symbol of opposition all over the world. Riisgaard & Thomassen (2016: 12) assert that the Guy Fawkes mask is used to contest power as "the mask calls out a source of authority hidden behind the protective veil of empty, abstract principles and black suits and tie." The mask references the historical rebellion against the English government by Guy Fawkes and hides the identities of people from state surveillance. From this perspective, mask-wearing in a collective protest has a symbolic meaning that challenges not only official forms of power but also emphasises multiple identities behind the mask. However, in contrast to other protests, protesters were holding the Turkish flag or the pictures of Ataturk while wearing masks. While the Turkish flags or Ataturk pictures symbolised the secular Turkish state, the mask itself was a global production of anonymity. Thus, this stance was not only against the authorities but also against the particular authority that was thought to destroy the secular principles of the modern Turkish state. Wearing the Guy Fawkes mask while waving Turkish flags or Ataturk's picture is, therefore, not a "closure but an opening, what it opens is not a predefined substance but the very realm of the sayable, made possible through an inner projection of the seeable, thrown onto the world stage of politics-in-the-making." (Riisgaard & Thomassen, 2016: 20). It was underpinned by the support of Anonymous, a network of hackers and Redhack, a Turkish hacking group. At the start of the protests, Anonymous launched attacks on the Turkish government and hacked the websites of authorities (Hurriyet, 3 June 2013).

All these examples suggest that through theatrical expressions, the *capulcus* created their own world in which they inverted hierarchies and reversed binaries. Ultimately, such an experience allowed "subjects to

³ The Mevlevi order is a traditional Sufi order that was based on the spiritual wisdom of Mawlânâ Jalâluddîn Rûmî, a Muslim saint who lived in the 13th century in Konya, Anatolia.

enter a liminal realms of freedom and in so doing create[d] a space for critique that would otherwise not be possible in “normal” society.” (Bruner, 2005: 140).

Chatterton (2006: 273) argues that although protests facilitate critical engagement with problems, they are mostly ephemeral “contact points and border crossings between different ethics and values... [and, thus] they are far from ideal.” The same can be said for Gezi. The Gezi protests created their own times and spaces, bringing together those who thought it impossible to bond and widening our perspectives about publics and publicness. Yet, it was hard to maintain such impacts for a longer time. Thus, the following section aims at revealing whether the protests could bring abrupt changes or not.

Moment or momentous?

For those who spent a day there, Gezi was an immense experience that seemed and felt like a dream. It seemed that not only were the protesters making history, but it was also a turning point in Turkish history. How could ultra-Turkish nationalist groups possibly come together with Kurdish nationalists or religious people with secular people or the capitalist class with socialists and communists? How could all the problems of ninety years be forgotten in a limited time? Here, the ‘Gezi spirit’ was perceived as a saviour that solved all the problems that Turkey had been facing. Protesters ate food that was brought by those they did not know. They did unite against Erdogan’s regime and showed what solidarity and encounter could look like if any chances were given. Then the question arises; “Did Gezi bring abrupt changes in Turkish public?”

Unlike social movements, which involve longer-term collective mobilisation, occupy-style movements occur for a short-term when public spaces are seized. Della Porta (2018) argues that some of the eventful protests have the potential to bring abrupt changes which occur contingently. Through evaluating a series of processes during the protests, Della Porta claims that global protests have a transformative effect, as they constitute norms, solidarity, and networks that provide resources and constraints for social movements. Beissinger (2007: 14) also asserts that protests are indeed “contentious and potentially subversive practices that challenge normalised practices, modes of causation, or system of authority.” On the contrary, analysing Occupy movements, Calhoun (2013) emphasises, the impacts of the movements are felt in cultural terms rather than as a permanent change in politics but yet each mobilisation not only speaks for the future but can also have an impact on existing relationships.

The Gezi protests brought together those who once thought it impossible to associate and thus allowed encounter and solidarity in offline and online spaces. Such encounters and solidarity have found in public forums and earth tables organised by the protesters after the massive protests. Although this sequence of activities enabled the protesters to expand their protests into everyday practices, their impacts faded away as time passed (Akay 2017). Oznur, an LGBT member, thinks such solidarity could not continue outside of the park and outside of the period of the Gezi protests. She perceives the time of Gezi as an impossible dream. It was the first time she encountered the Anticapitalist Muslims group. Yet, she concluded that the affinity in the park was only temporary. Likewise, Tarik, an oral history expert, truly believes in the spirit of Gezi. For him, Gezi achieved the impossible regarding overcoming differences. Even though he was incredibly excited to tell me how the Kurdish and Turkish nationalist groups came together, when I asked him what could have been different in the park, he disappointedly told me that problems did not really surface in the park.

Tarik: ‘I think almost everything was what it had to be, but there could be some more negative things. I wish there were. I wish they didn’t understand each other. I mean, it would be easier to understand each other if there were some more problems. They came and they sat on a table as if nothing had happened.

Me: who?

Tarik: As we just talked now, the Turkish nationalists and the radical Kurds. It seemed like nothing had happened before, they sat down and they performed the folk dance together. It shouldn’t be like that. They had to sit down and talk about their problems a bit harder. They talked but I think they had to discuss more in-depth...’ (Tarik, June 21, 2014, Galata)

Tarik suggests in-depth discussions were not held in Gezi. The commonality between the groups was limited to the fight against the JDP. Thus, there was an artificial togetherness between some groups. As Chatterton (2006) points out, unknowable and unrealistic aims cannot be achieved in moments of protest. “Desiring

them the whole scale often leads to frustrations. Victories come through subtle, slow changes. This is why a tense encounter or an angry conversation contains hope and has transformative power.” (Chatterton, 2006: 271). Since substantial discussions were not held between different groups, the “Gezi spirit” arguably remains no more than a populist claim that only lasted a brief moment.

While internal power relationships hindered the oppositional to coalesce around concrete political demands, external power relations shaped the direction of Gezi protests. Many people believed that there were two eras: before and after Gezi. While the former refers to politics based on old politics, the latter created a new pluralist political language. For example, Gole (2013: 14) claimed that the Gezi protests heralded, “the need for a new public culture based on recognition and acceptance.” However, the opposite has occurred and, in many ways, Gezi has exacerbated political instability. That said the post-Gezi protest environment was quite different from before, hindering the Gezi protests’ potentials to bring fundamental changes in the political domain. Walking alongside Koray, an architect and politician, through Istiklal Street, stroke me to think why the protests should be understood only through its times and spaces. Koray said that before the Gezi protests, they could easily organise small protests in Taksim without any police intervention but walking as a small group seemed suspicious for the police after the protests. Thus, the police would not hesitate to use power against them.

On the one hand, some of the protesters affiliated with radical political parties or groups sought to revive the protests repeatedly, and they called on the people to go to Taksim to protest every Saturday (see also Taksim Solidarity, 2013). On the other hand, the security forces exercised zero-tolerance for the right to protest. As the state did not allow any demonstrations in the area, Taksim became the most protected space in Turkey. The area around the Taksim Ataturk monument and Gezi Park were closed to public protests ever since to protect the public from the public, and police vehicles and undercover police officers were constantly present around Taksim and Gezi Park. Taksim became a battleground between the government and Gezi activism. Thus, it resembled a highly protected official site rather than a public space open to everyone.

Mona Abaza (2016), five years after the revolution in Egypt, questions what remains of the carnivalesque moments of Tahrir Square in 2011. She points out that although in the upheaval, the fearless citizens resisted the authoritarian state; it appears that the Arab spring has given rise to both militarism and terrorism. Similarly, while carnivalesque like protests revealed the uniqueness of Gezi, the aftermath of the massive protests did not meet the protesters’ goals. Although it might seem contrary to the multiple aims and ideals of the Gezi protests, the pluralist public sphere has been diminished, and the authoritarian drift of government has significantly increased (Akay 2017).

Conclusion

This paper claimed that Gezi created its times and spaces through temporary and happenstance constellations of differences. Using Gezi protests as a case study, it sought to comprehend how spaces and times of protests are created. The paper referred to the “politics of encounter”, “performativity” and “carnivalesque” concepts to signify the diversity and multiplicity of Gezi’s times and spaces. Such understanding allowed me to articulate the potentialities as well as the limits of what protests might bring in. The paper demonstrated how the Gezi protests brought something new, such as a multitude of different ideologies and political groups which found common ground. This multiplicity hinged on physical spaces, Gezi Park and Taksim Square and virtual spaces. Spatial practices that were performed in both physical and digital spaces revealed what Massey (2003: 4) calls “a global sense of place,’ i.e. ‘different stories coming together and, to one or another, becoming entangled.”

The paper also questioned the role of the moment which was crucial to understanding togetherness, actions and performances of the protests during the time of protests. Such limited times permitted us “to look seriously and critically at inequality and at the question of whether actual democratic institutions are really working.” (Calhoun, 2013: 38–39). One thing that was clear that a few trees and politics around these trees brought millions of people together. A few trees might seem meaningless, but the meaning they gained led us to revisit our understanding of public, public space, publicness and political subject.

Nevertheless, although a new type of opposition emerged from the protests, these practices only brought temporary, rather than permanent, changes to Turkish politics. In other words, there was power in the act of

the Gezi protests but they did not end up as a powerful act to bring about change. This post-Gezi instability arguably led to a sequence of events that challenged the power of the ruling party. Although the JDP has gained power legitimately by winning elections, it is also vulnerable and challenges to its power have produced more authoritarianism and state control, such as a ban on Twitter, YouTube and demonstrations in particular public spaces in the year after Gezi. These authoritarian practices have become “normal” in comparison to more repressive severe practices. After the coup attempt in 2016, hundreds of journalists and academics were arrested; many members of parliament from the pro-Kurdish party, HDP were also imprisoned; many academics were fired from the state-affiliated universities, and many NGOs were shut down. Consequently, although it might seem contrary to the multiple aims and ideals of the Gezi protests, the pluralist public sphere has been diminished, and social and political polarisation has increased ever since the Gezi protests. While this work aimed to reveal the complex and multiplicity of protests’ times and spaces, further research is needed to elaborate on the outcome of the Gezi Park protests and their impact on the political sphere in Turkey.

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