

Reflections on *Taksim – Gezi Park* Protests in Turkey

Edited by
Bülent Gökay and Ilia Xypolia



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Editorial

Bülent Gökay and Ilia Xypolia

The 2013 protests in Turkey started in late May 2013, initially to contest the urban development plans to redevelop Istanbul-Gezi Park into a complex with new mosque and shopping centre. However, the character of the protests changed quite substantially when the Turkish police attacked protesters with considerable violence, and what started as an environmental protest to save 600 trees in Gezi Park quickly turned into a nation-wide political demonstration against Tayyip Erdogan and his government. Some of those hasty proclamations of a “Turkish Spring” concentrate on Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan’s increasingly anti-democratic and authoritarian ruling style, and compare Erdogan’s rule with Mubarak’s. Some others in the media debated whether the Taksim-Gezi Park protests could be compared to the protests against neoliberalism, such as the 15M movements in Spain, the anti-government protests in Greece, the “occupy” protests in Europe and the Americas.

What do the protests really mean for Turkey? Is this a rebellion against the lack of democracy, voice, and representation? Is the Erdogan’s government promoting a neoliberal agenda with harsh privatizations, urban ‘transformation’ and ‘development’ for the sake of profit for a small number of ultra-rich? Is this the reason why people were protesting? And finally, what do the protests in Turkey tell us about democracy and Islam? To provide convincing and clear answers to such questions is perhaps not possible yet as we may need more time to digest all the aspects and consequences of the events. However, one of the more positive effects of these events has been to stimulate much serious discussion about them, and thus about the right to use urban commons, how public investments are allocated, the distinction between urban public goods and urban commons, and more importantly about the urbanization of capital.

This collection of essays examines both the eruption of the conflict around Taksim-Gezi and the escalation of it into a nation-wide anti-government conflict. It looks at the origins and wider implications of the conflict as well.

The essays here do not constitute a unified perspective on what happened (and why) in late May-June 2013 in Turkey, and the government’s response to it. They are perhaps most usefully read as an experiment in writing contemporary history as it evolves. Some contributions here contradict others, some are quite specific, and some others generalise more broadly. They all assert, however, that there is no simple answer to difficult questions around the recent events in Turkey, only a complex braid of explanatory factor that have yet to be fully considered.

Living With Taksim Gezi: A Photo Essay

Mustafa Yasacan¹

Unsatisfied people but in peace, discontent but happy to be together, feeling others' warmth on your shoulder, then there is no fear anymore.

Do not bother me,

Don't interfere with my way of living,

Don't bother me with your rules.

Islam does not belong to you, Islam is peace not brutality.

Do not ignore the other beliefs, and sexual preferences.



Figure 1: Police using the pepper gas on the protestors, 28th May 2013.

¹ PhD Candidate, Research Institute for Social Sciences, Keele University, UK.



Figure 2: Women marching towards Istiklal. Feminist groups and others gathered at the front of the Galatasaray College, and started to walk towards to Taksim.



Figure 3: After the night of full on violence, Istanbul was calm, mother and daughter posing in front of the damaged bus. (8th June 10:30 Askerocagi Caddesi).



Figure 4: Children happily playing in the wreckage left over from the violent night.



Figure 5: Crowd control barriers became barricades just outside the Ceylan Intercontinental Hotel.



Figure 6: One of the hotels provides the electricity for charging these phone units. South East of the entrance of Gezi.



Figure 7: "Gezi Park- The day I don't come here, is the day I die." Says one of the banners (8th June, Gezi Park).



Figure 8: “Çarşı Herşeye Karşı / Carsi against everything”. CARSİ: A young, well-organized, self-disciplined group of alternative football supporters. (8th June 10:35)



Figure 9: "If we don't direct the world, it won't spin". (8th June 10:35)

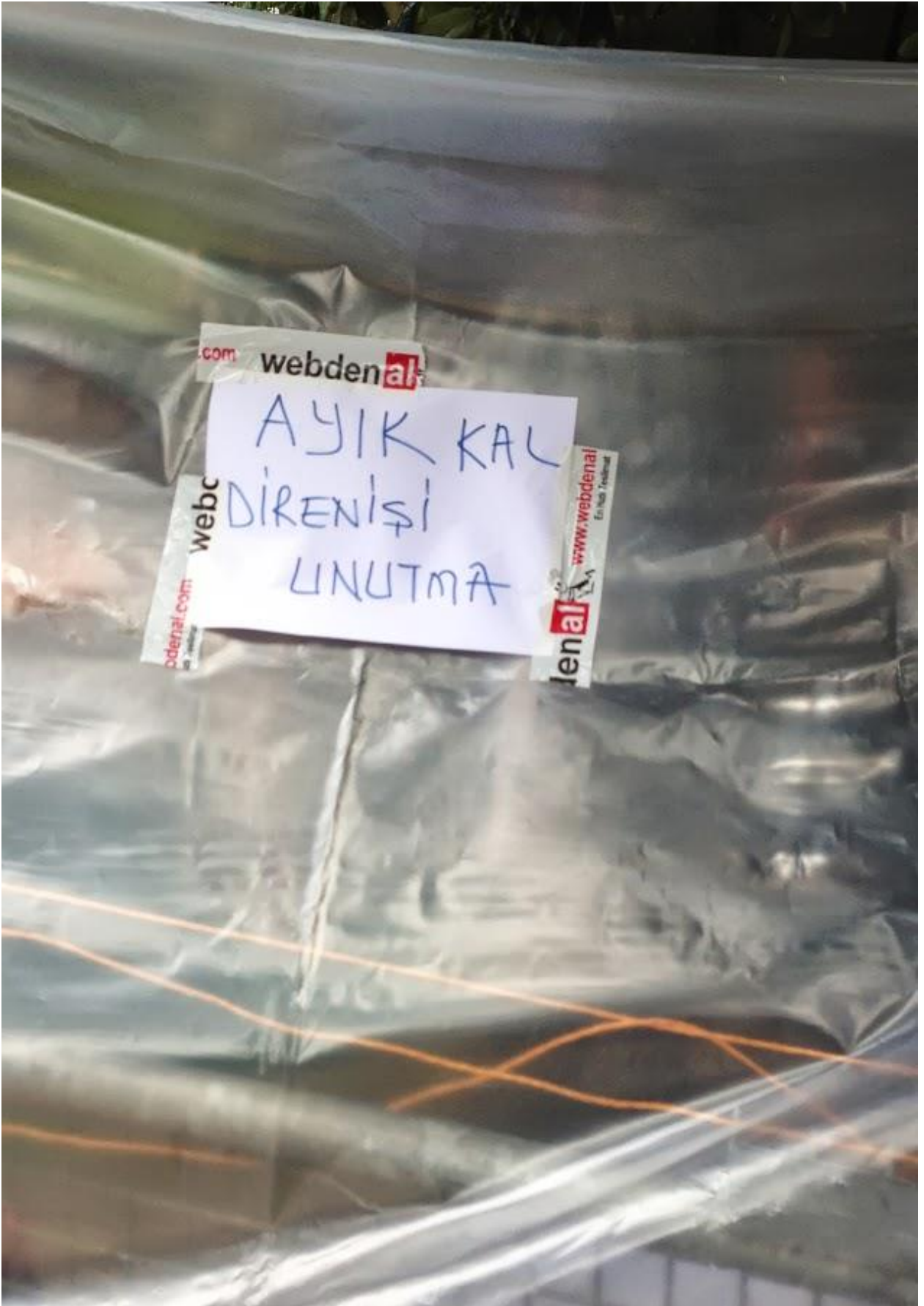


Figure 10: "Be sober, Do not forget the resistance." (8th June 10:36)



Figure 11: "Nothing is on sale in the Park."



Figure 12: “No to Drugs, don’t interfere with my smoking. Smoking Free Zone.”



Figure 13: Morning Yoga, after the tense night.



Figure 14: “Revolution Market!”



Figure 15: Families are coming to the square with their young children on that sunny day. 8th June Taksim Square



Figure 16: Unused vehicles under protection of the protesters.



Figure 17: “Freedom Monument” in Taksim square.



Figure 18: "If we were scared of the gas, we wouldn't fart."



Figure 19: Plastic bullets.

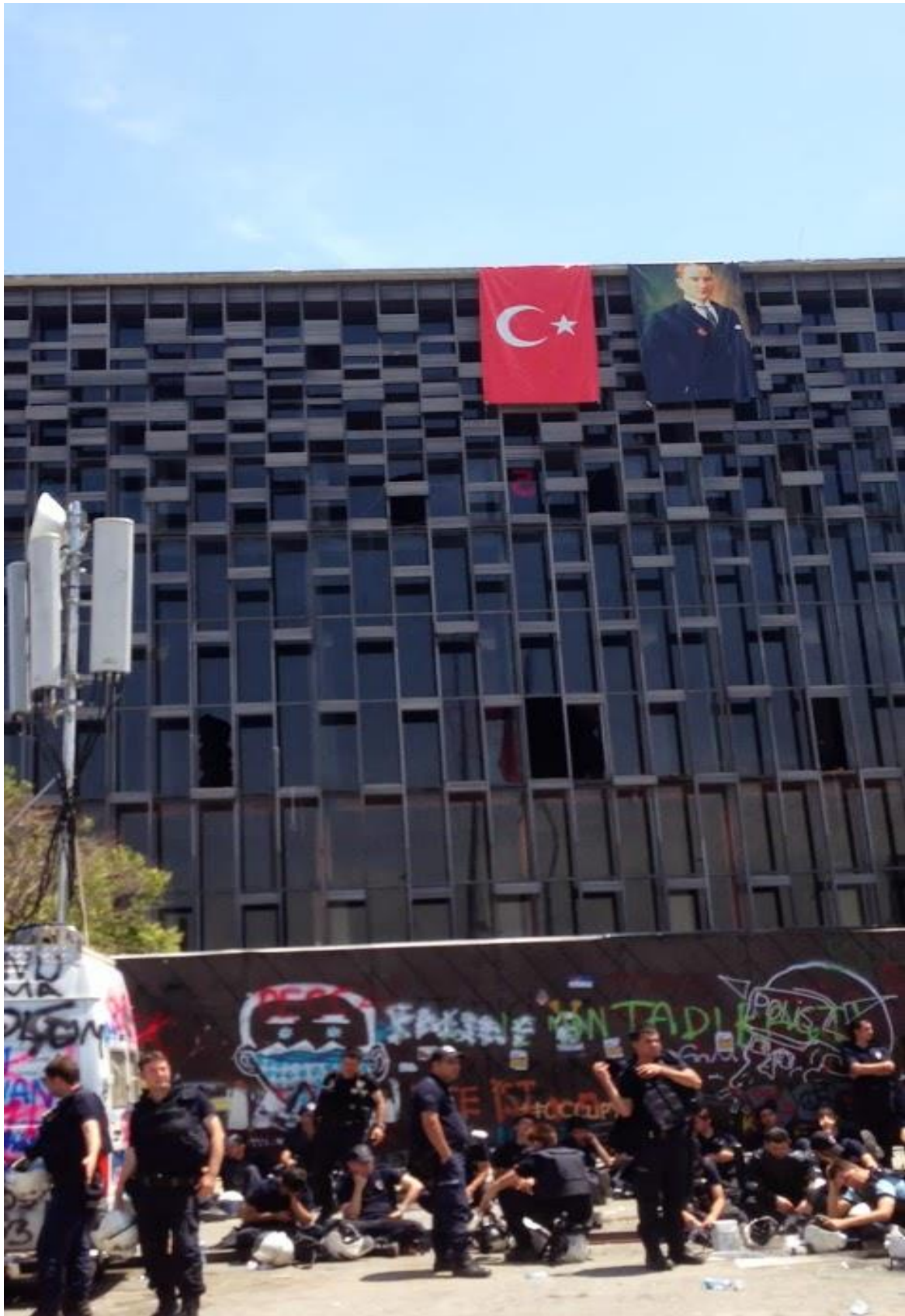


Figure 20: Security forces in the square waiting for the next attack.



Figure 21: “PEACE and POLICE”, before the police occupied the Square there was no violence, the atmosphere in the square and Gezi park it was unbelievably cool and relaxed.



Figure 22: Members of the police force were as young as young as the protestors.



Figure 23: Some youth in Taksim Square, resisting water cannons (11th March 11:12)



Figure 24: TOMA WATERS.



Figure 25: Chemical Water - fare!



Figure 26: water cannon vehicles and gas canister shootings.



Figure 27: Burning tyres became a problem for everyone not only police.



Figure 28: Night-time after occupation of the Square by police.



Figure 29: Night march, “WAKE UP BESIKTAS, SAVE YOUR CHILDREN” shouted the crowd.



Figure 30: Police was getting ready to use gas against people in the Square. The protestors were putting on their gas masks.



Figure 31: Taser gun.



Figure 32: Taser gun

Turkey: Dilemma of the Kurds¹

Immanuel Wallerstein²

The world's attention is focused at the moment on Taksim Square in Istanbul and the popular uprising against the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Everyone is saying that the anti-authoritarian rebellions that have been sweeping the world, and lately particularly the Middle East, have now reached Turkey, long acclaimed as a "model" government that would be impervious to such uprisings.

As with similar uprisings, the focus is on the authoritarian behavior of the government, and for some, its commitment to neo-liberal economic policies. Thus far, what started as a tiny protest of environmentalists against the government's intention to eliminate the last major green area inside Istanbul in favor of a development project caught on and attracted daily more and more people to Taksim Square in Istanbul and similar sites all over Turkey. The response of the government has been unyielding in its previous decisions, instead engaging in repression of the demonstrators by the police. This response has seemed to be counter-productive, attracting ever more people to the protests.

As is usual in such protests, the protestors now cover a very wide gamut of persons. There is what might be called the secular left, and especially the women, who are upset with the creeping imposition of Islamic rules and constraints by the "moderate" AKP party in power. There are those who are upset with the ever-larger involvement of the government in the attempt to oust Bashar al-Assad in Syria. There are those on the political right who consider themselves the protagonists of a "Kemalist" position, which is nationalist and hostile to Islamist parties. There is even a faction within the AKP, led by President Abdullah Gül, which considers the government too little Islamist, too tied to the United States in terms of its foreign policy, and too repressive of the groups that are protesting.

In short, it is a typical situation in which it is unsure whether the government can continue to hold. And it is equally unsure what kind of government would succeed it, if it fell, whether via resignation or new elections. It is this uncertainty of the outcome that is most disturbing to the Kurds, who are themselves divided about how they should behave in this situation.

The Kurds in Turkey have been struggling, ever since there was a Turkish republic, to obtain the right to autonomous structures and the use of the Kurdish language. For some, this necessarily implied an independent state, while others were ready to accept a constitutionally-guaranteed autonomy within Turkey. This objective conflicted deeply with the integrative Turkish nationalism propounded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Ataturk and his followers insisted that there were nothing but Turks in

¹ © Immanuel Wallerstein

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Turkey. His "gesture" to the Kurds was to proclaim them "mountain Turks," with no concessions whatsoever on language.

The Kurds of course are located within a number of neighboring states, principally Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Their biggest concentration, however, lies within Turkey. And in the last forty years, they have been organized politically within a movement called the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), whose leader has been Abdullah Öcalan. This movement engaged in military action to pursue its objectives. The successive Turkish governments, and particularly the Turkish army, fought back ruthlessly, proclaiming the PKK a "terrorist" organization.

In 1999, with the assistance of the United States, the government was able to abduct Öcalan in Kenya. They convicted him of treason, sentencing him to death. This sentence was *de facto* commuted to life imprisonment on the remote island of Imrali, with no possibility of contact with anyone. In recent years, the position of the AKP in power and of the PKK (still considering Öcalan their leader) has evolved. In particular, the PKK is no longer a Marxist-Leninist party, and wishes the guns to be silent and allow diplomacy to work. As a result there have been some ongoing discussions between the two parties as to a possible compromise that would end the conflict. The PKK has said that it is ready to abandon military action and participate in "normal" political life in Turkey, provided that Öcalan is released, and there is some recognition of autonomy and linguistic rights. The AKP government seems to have been receptive to the arrangement, apparently realizing that a purely military victory is impossible.

The major obstacle has been deep mutual suspicion. Neither side wants to lay down its arms before the other. How to work out a transition to the new arrangements is precisely the matter under discussion. The big problem for each of the two parties is to ensure that their followers accept it. Erdogan was having trouble with one wing of the AKP, and Öcalan was having trouble (perhaps less than Erdogan) with some elements in the PKK.

In the middle of these delicate discussions came the uprising in Taksim Square. And here is the Kurdish dilemma. There seem to be only two groups that are sympathetic to this proposed "solution" to the Kurdish demands. One is Erdogan and his supporters, and the other is some segments of the secular left who are a mainstay of the anti-Erdogan uprising. The other groups in Taksim Square are precisely opposed to the possible new arrangements with the Kurds.

What then should the Kurdish movement do politically? There are some Kurdish militants, particularly in Istanbul and other large cities, who have joined the rebellion, as individuals. But the PKK has carefully avoided any statement on the uprising. And in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city, the number of protesters has been very few. It could well be that a major victim of the anti-authoritarian uprising in Turkey will be the Kurds.

Turmoils and Economic Miracles: Turkey '13 and Mexico '68

Ilia Xypolia¹

Turkey's demonstrations have been illustrated on the global news for the past few weeks. Wholly unacceptable images of police brutality and government's arrogance have been at the epicentre of the myriad accounts of the events. In the heat of the moment, especially the participants prefer to see the on-going unrest as a revolutionary event. A vague revolutionary fantasy has been filling their heads as they dream of a new beginning for Turkish society. However this paper aims to challenge certain over simplistic and deteriorating myths. In doing so, it holds the argument that the recent events can be best described not as the prelude of a revolution but only as a democratic purge in a developing economy.

Like in every similar case journalists and scholars are tempted to compare on-going events with glorious previously held ones. A lot have fallen into this trap to link the protests with those that recently took place in Arab countries, the so-called 'Arab Spring'. However, this equivalence is by no means accurate. Still, the ruling AKP party in Turkey not only won the last polls in 2011 but even today enjoys a widespread support in the country. Nevertheless, the most fundamental difference with the protests of the Arab uprising and even the Occupy movement lies in the field of the economy. In the same realm, massive demonstrations and protests of the *Los Indignados* in southern Europe were mainly caused by the long-standing economic crisis and the neoliberal austerity in rapidly declining economies. While in all these cases from the Mediterranean cities to the Western core of the Occupy movement the young educated middle-class were protesting against their economic suffering, in Turkey the economic growth of the past decade has produced considerable benefits for the population. In particular, the emerging new middle-class in Turkey has seen its living standards rapidly increase during the AKP's time in office. Therefore any comparison between the protests in Turkey and the recent turmoil in Mediterranean and the West lacks a basic understanding of the people's demands.

The central argument that this paper holds here is that in search of historical comparisons the Turkish protests have more similarities with those that took place in 1968 and especially in Mexico in the summer of 1968 than any other case. In July 1968 as the echo from the uprisings in Paris and Prague was fading away, students in Mexico revolted against the government of President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz.² The protests ended with the Tlatelolco massacre in October 1968. Despite their national peculiarities, from a political economy perspective these countries share a lot of common features.

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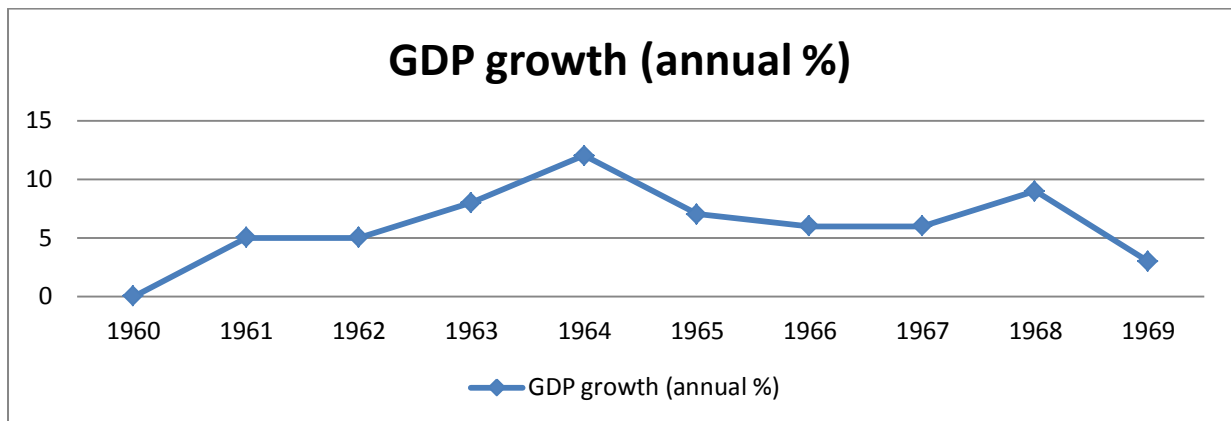
² King J. (2007) *The Role of Mexico's Plural in Latin American Literary and Political Culture. From Tlatelolco to the "Philanthropic Ogre"*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rising Economies

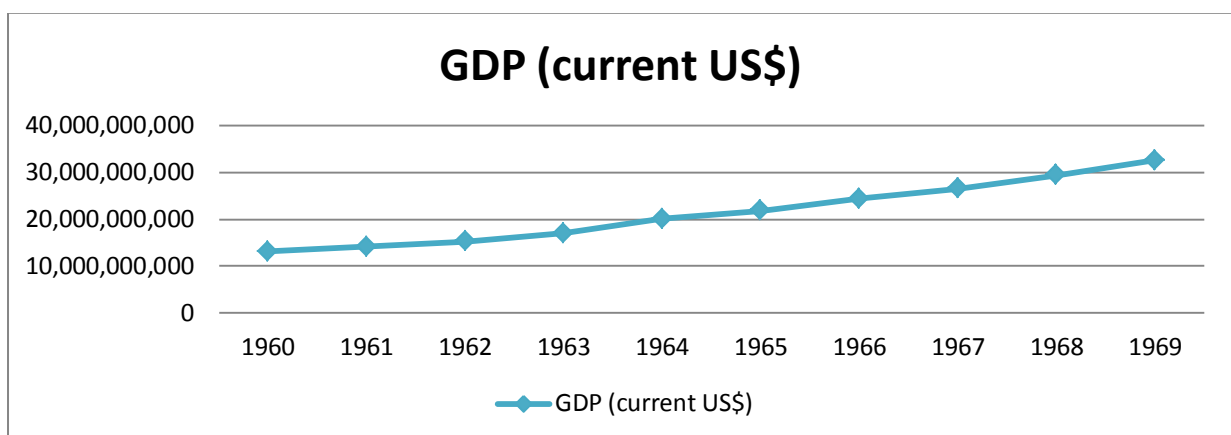
The main common denominator in the cases of Turkey and Mexico is their economic performance. Turkey and Mexico are developing countries with dynamically emerging economies. Samuel P. Huntington calls both Turkey and Mexico, along with Russia and Australia, torn countries that have reformed to a ‘modern economic system’ but have maintained their traditions.³ Notwithstanding analyses that could not move beyond the fallacious binary of secularism vs. Islamism have failed to grasp the new economic realities.

Both economies enjoyed a period of growth before the outbreak of the unrests. During the 1960s, the high growth of the Mexican economy (graph 1) along with low rates of inflation made observers refer to the ‘Mexican Miracle’. Mexico’s post-war inward-looking economic development was comprised of a rapid industrialization along with a trade protectionist policy.⁴ During these “golden years” Mexico’s economy was industrialized and modernized.

Graph 1: Mexico GDP growth, 1960-1969⁵



Graph 2: Mexico GDP, 1960-1969⁶



³ Huntington, S., P., (1993) *The Clash of Civilizations?* *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3), pp. 22-49.

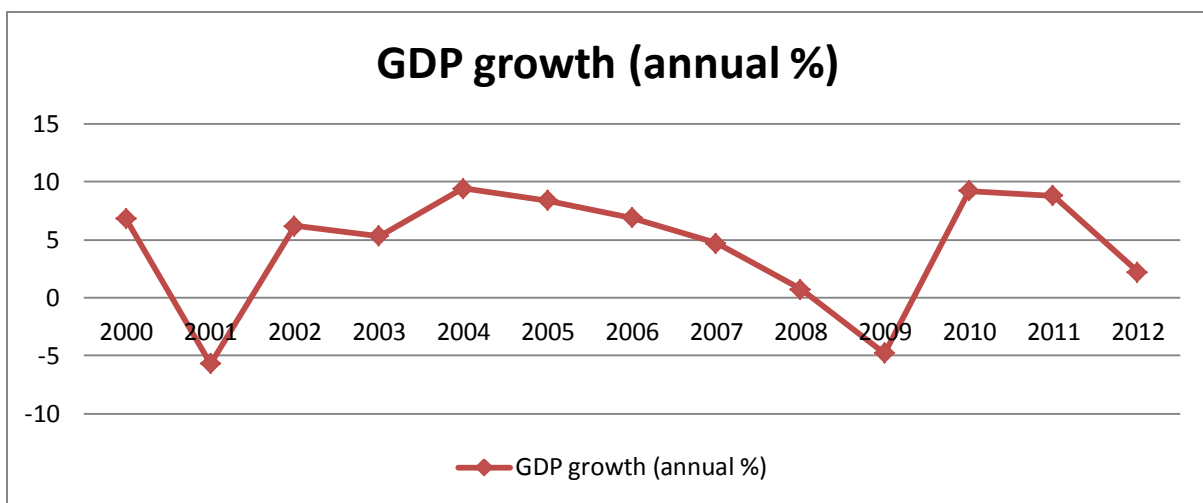
⁴ Lustig, N. (1998) *Mexico: The Remaking of an Economy*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution. 2nd Edition.

⁵ Compiled on the base of data from the World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org> (retrieved July, 2013)

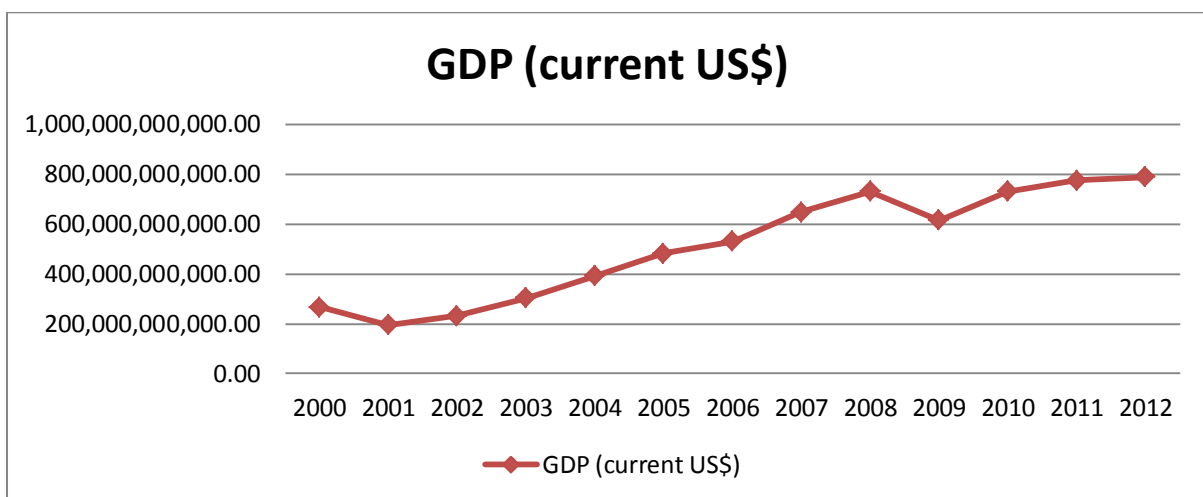
⁶ Compiled on the base of data from the World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org> (retrieved July, 2013)

Turkey has managed to swiftly recover from the 2001 crisis by adopting fiscal and financial reforms under the Ecevit coalition government.⁷ The reforms that were initiated by the minister of finance Kemal Dervis moved forward with the advent of the AKP government. Macroeconomic stabilization and structural reforms resulted in a stable GDP growth up until the outbreak of the global crisis (Graph 4). Turkey succeeded to make her final payment on its IMF debt in May 2013 just few weeks before the outbreak of the demonstrations.⁸ Turkey’s economy has performed remarkably well amid a global financial crisis. During this period Turkey has generated high annual growth rates. The good economic performance of the past decade has dramatically improved the income and the living standards of the vast majority of Turkish citizens.

Graph 3: Turkey GDP growth, 2000-2013⁹



Graph 4: Turkey GDP, 2000-2013¹⁰



⁷ European Commission (2009) Growth and economic crises in Turkey: leaving behind a turbulent past? - Mihai Macovei . *European Economy. Economic Papers*. 386. retrieved July 2013

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication16004_en.pdf

⁸ International Monetary Fund, Press Release, 14 May 2013.

<http://www.imf.org/external/country/TUR/rr/2013/051413.pdf>

⁹ Compiled on the base of data from the World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org> (retrieved July, 2013)

¹⁰ Compiled on the base of data from the World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org> (retrieved July, 2013)

Middle Classes and Problems in Democracy

Against this background, new middle classes have arisen. The new generations of young educated and employed middle class with expanded expectations as citizens constitutes the vast majority of the participants in the protests who aspire to be the agents of change.

The Mexican middle class in the 1960s enjoyed a quality of life unimaginable in previous decades. These children of the Mexican Revolution that now lived in comfort were, for the first time, able to send their own children to university in unprecedented numbers.¹¹ Although the economy continued to flourish, social inequality remained a factor of discontent. Moreover, the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) rule became increasingly authoritarian and at times oppressive.

In the past decade the urban middle class in Turkey has enjoyed unprecedented economic prosperity but it was restricted by authoritarian politics and rigid morality. According to OCED Better Life Index¹², Turkey has made considerable progress in improving the quality of life of its citizens over the last two decades. In Turkey the Income and Living Conditions have dramatically improved in the past decade.¹³ However, green space is a major issue in a megacity like Istanbul. In Turkey, 33% of people feel they lack access to green spaces, much more than the 12% average of OECD European countries.¹⁴

Though in both cases governments were democratically elected by a high margin, there are structural problems in the democratic system. However despite its outward modernity, Mexico's politics were trapped in another age. The hegemonic party model allowed one party to monopolize power for almost 70 years.¹⁵ Nevertheless, The PRI enjoyed the popular support and maintained its hegemony during the 1960s. The one-state regime was leaving no political space for a credible opposition.

Though the AKP government has taken important measures towards democratic reform, the electoral 10% threshold was designed to prevent a proper Kurdish representation in Ankara. The restriction of freedom of speech is a key issue in Turkey illustrated with the tight control of the media, on imprisoning journalists, especially those who express views critical of the authorities on the Kurdish issue. It is indicative that in the 2013 *Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index* Turkey has fallen on 154th.¹⁶

¹¹ Loaeza, S. (1993) Mexico 1968: Los Origenes de la transición, in Semo, I. et al (eds.) *La Transición Interrumpida: México 1968- 1988*. Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana/ Nueva Imagen. Pp.15-48.

¹² OECD Economic Surveys: Turkey 2012
<http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/OVERVIEW%20ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf>

¹³ Turkish Statistical Institute, <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr>

¹⁴ OECD Economic Surveys: Turkey 2012
<http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/OVERVIEW%20ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf>

¹⁵ For the structural impediments of the democratic system in Mexico, see. Crespo, J. A. (2004) *Policy Papers on the Americas: The Party System and Democratic Governance in Mexico* - Volume XV, Study 2. Online : [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/ppcrespo\[1\].pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/ppcrespo[1].pdf)

¹⁶ Reporters Without Borders (2013), *World Press Freedom Index - 2013*, available at: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html>

A.K.P., has adopted an increasingly authoritarian attitude that threatens to control basic freedoms of the Turkish citizens. The latest measures that were undertaken by the Turkish government included the restriction of selling alcohol and the kiss in the metro. The decision to demolish one of few green spaces in the City and to build Ottoman barracks was the straw that broke the camel's back. It is worth noting that a lot of analyses fall into the trap of attributing this turmoil only to the long-standing conflict in the Turkish society that has its roots in the late Ottoman era. Unfortunately, these accounts only scratch the surface, as these social cleavages cannot fully explain the dynamics of the recent events.

Dealing with the unrest

One more common feature is the spontaneous character of the protest. There is also a lack of central leadership. In both cases the protests appear to have spontaneously exploded. These forms of collective action have not been initiated by a clear leadership figure. In Gezi Park the vast majority of the participants were not a member of any political party or association.¹⁷ The protestors are highly-educated.¹⁸ Turkey has invested in the educational system in order to strengthen its human capital.¹⁹ In Mexico also the main protestors were students who were not affiliated with any political party.²⁰

The role of women is important in both cases. In the case of Mexico a lot of women participated in leading positions. Actually these protests are now considered as the starting point of the Mexican feminism movements that gained momentum in the 1970s.²¹ The hegemonic and patriarchal model that Erdogan represents has been criticized by Turkish feminist groups. The public sphere is male dominated and it is reflected on the slogans of the resistance. Graffiti and slogans from the protestors often deploy a sexist and masculine language. However, there is an attempt by feminist and LGBT activists to reinvent the 'language of resistance'. Feminist and LGBT activists for instance covered sexist graffiti attacking the Prime Minister. They even wore T-shirts calling to resist without swearing.²²

The governmental arrogance provided a fertile ground for the protests to gain a momentum. The driving force of both unrests was the aspiration of freedom and the

¹⁷ According to a Poll, the 79% of participants in the Gezi Park resistance were not a member of any political party or association. In the Konda Poll, 4,411 people participated in the resistance on June 6-7, almost in its peak <http://t24.com.tr/haber/konda-gezi-parki-anketi-cikardi/231889>

¹⁸ 35% high school graduates and 43% university graduates and 13% a post-graduate degree. Konda Poll for the T24. 4,411 people participated in the resistance on June 6-7, almost in its peak <http://t24.com.tr/haber/konda-gezi-parki-anketi-cikardi/231889>

¹⁹ OECD Economic Surveys: Turkey 2012
<http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/OVERVIEW%20ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf>

²⁰ Poniatowska, E. (1971), *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Mexico: Era.

²¹ Frazier, L.J. and Cohen, D. (2003), Mexico '68: Defining the Space of the Movement, Heroic Masculinity in the Prison, and "Women" in the Streets, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83:4, pp. 617-660

²² Korkman, Z. K. and Aciksoz, S. C. (2013) Erdogan's Masculinity and the Language of the Gezi Resistance. *Jadaliyya*, 22 June <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12367/erdogan%E2%80%99s-masculinity-and-the-language-of-the-gezi> [accessed 23 June 2013]

democratic purge. The economies were growing fast and they had created a new middle class with demands of being incorporated to the political processes.

Same as in Mexico, Turkish government attempted to undermine the protestors by arranging demonstrations of their own. In the governmental rallies that were organised, the leaders exposed their unwillingness to compromise with the protestors. President Diaz Ordaz dismissed the public unrest in his national address and even threatened continued violence against any future demonstration of dissent. Aggressive and intimidating public addresses had acted as a red rag to a bull.

Social media in case of Turkey played an important role in the mobilization and the communication of the demonstrators. The Turkish Prime Minister blamed social media as ‘the menace to society’.²³ In the 1960s, when social media had not penetrated our lives, demonstrators were using more conventional ways and means of communication. President Diaz Ordaz held that the protestors had ‘a great capacity for propaganda and dissemination of falsehood and perversity.’²⁴

Both the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey acted stubbornly in dealing with the protestors. Governments’ initiatives aimed at discrediting the protests. Erdogan warned protestors to leave the Gezi Park and tension rose after Erdogan counter-rally.²⁵ President Diaz Ordaz addressing the General Congress of the Union in September 1968 stated that though they had been tolerant until then, they would not continue to permit the violation of the legal order.²⁶ The government made the distinction calling certain protestors peaceful while the rest marginal, extremists and terrorists.

The excessive use of force by the oppressive state apparatus, the police was observed in both cases. In Turkey thousands of teargas and water canon against demonstrators have been reported. In Mexico police used excessive violence in order to control the riots. A report on the brutality of riot control in Mexico it is indicative. Mexican Army units were utilized to assist police and riot police (*Granaderos*) in breaking up student riots which got out of control at the end of July.²⁷

The protests both in Turkey and Mexico were highly influenced by the revolutionary spirit of the time. The Spring of 1968 highly influenced the students in Mexico. Some of the participants in the Turkish demos are Western educated and actually they have been participating in the Occupy movements in London and New York. In Mexico their slogans often referred to the assassination of Ernesto Che Guevara that took place the previous year.

²³ Letsch, C. (2013) ‘Social media and opposition to blame for protests, says Turkish PM’. *Guardian*, 3 June <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/02/turkish-protesters-control-istanbul-square> (accessed 3 June 2013)

²⁴ Poniatowska, E. (1971), *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Mexico: Era. p. 64

²⁵ Morris, C. (2013) ‘Turkey unrest: Mass rally for Erdogan amid new clashes.’ *BBC*, 16 June <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22925619> (accessed 16 June 2013)

²⁶ Poniatowska, E. (1971), *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Mexico: Era. P. 52

²⁷ DIA Intelligence Information Report, Troops Used to Help Quell Mexico City Student Riots, c. August 15, 1968, Confidential. (retrieved July 2013) <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB10/docs/doc04.pdf>

Legacy

To sum up, the driving force behind the unrests both in Mexico 1968 and recently in Turkey is the changing economic conditions of the countries and their middle classes in particular. An improvement of the living standards for the newly arisen urban middle class does not automatically translate into more democratic rights. The demands and the concerns of the protestors showed that this highly-educated new generation feels marginalised and desires more political space that encompasses their interests.

Applying Albert Hirschman's terms in democratic states, dissatisfied citizens could respond to a deteriorating relationship with the government either with exiting or complaining (voice).²⁸ The opted voice that citizens have raised could lead to an improvement of the government's performance. What is needed now for the government is to take heed of the protestor's concerns and attempt to accommodate them in a democratic and inclusive manner.

AKP has been in power for over a decade. These protests are a wakeup call for AKP. Politically engaged and vociferous citizens are an asset for the democracy. Democratic reform to incorporate the concerns of the protestors is needed.

Although the protests in Mexico 68 did not lead to any direct political change, they lead to a change of mind-set in the population. The protest was suppressed before this change was brought about. The protests in Mexico succeeded in shaping President Echeverria's political initiatives.²⁹ Echeverria's reformism can be attributed to the 1968 events.

Myriad accounts of the current financial crisis and the global unrests lack deep historical and theoretically informed analysis. The gradual resurgence of these phenomena should only be examined in a global economic context. The revolutionary spirit calling for more individual freedoms unleashed and paved the way to the economic neo-liberalism. There is a growing volume of literature that draws a direct linkage between the individualism that was cultivated after the 1968 uprisings and the neo-conservatism neo-liberal reforms that followed that. Now we have to wait to see what these recent upheavals will bring.³⁰

²⁸ Hirschman, A. O. (1970) *Exit, Voice and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

²⁹ Shapira, Y. (1977) Mexico: The Impact of the 1968 Student Protest on Echeverria's Reformism. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 557-580

³⁰ See for example the work of Daniel K. Fletcher.

The Gezi Protests, Polyphony and ‘Carnavalesque Chaos’

Ömer Şener¹

The Gezi Park protests near Istanbul’s Taksim Square quickly became a media phenomenon, attracting international media outlets such as the CNN, which aired the protests, live for hours. The fact that the police reacted harshly to the protesters became the vantage point of criticism against PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was now increasingly being seen as an authoritarian figure. While some print media gave a balanced account of the protests and the government’s stance on the issue, there were two different extremes in depicting the government’s position; one position held that Erdogan was right in everything he did (including the police’s disproportionate use of tear gas and water cannon) and another extreme position which, in an Orientalist fashion, projected the image of an ‘Oriental despot’, a dictator (with images of Hitler and Ottoman Sultans), on Erdoğan. As an academic and a balanced observer I have chosen not to adhere to either extreme position. Furthermore, I argue that instead of focusing on the personality or character of Erdoğan (praising or ridiculing his person) by following these two camps, we should pay utmost attention to understanding the nature of the Gezi protests, to be able to make sense of this unexpected upheaval. In this sense, I would like to emphasise three concepts that I think can aid us in analysing the protests, namely the concepts of the ‘Bakhtinian carnival’, ‘polyphony’ and ‘Rabelaisian laughter’.

‘Carnavalesque Chaos’

Taksim Square as the first venue of the Gezi Park protests became a gathering where the concept of the ‘carnival’ (as understood by Bakhtin) as an ambivalent process could be observed. In this sense, the protests have operated so far as a ‘carnival’, turning everything upside down as a rebellious upheaval initially against the government’s decision to re-build the Topcu barracks on the Gezi Park area. However, the protests eventually transformed into an upheaval against the government’s perceived restrictions in a few sensitive issues, such as alcohol consumption (which the government argued was a regulation in line with EU standards) and ultimately, with the involvement of marginal political and activist groups, an upheaval against the current government as a whole, with calls to the people asking them to ‘topple’ Erdoğan.

As per Bakhtin, the ‘[c]arnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people’.² As a ‘special condition’ and as ‘the people’s second life’, the carnival also can be exempt of some of the societal rules and restrictions.³ Gezi Park protests’ carnival-like qualities

¹ PhD in Cultural Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University.

² Bakhtin, M. (1984) *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana: Indiana University Press. p.8.

³ Op.cit. pp.7-8.

are reflected in the group dancing together (folkloric dances like the popular ‘halay’) and drinking. Further, the participants try things they might not have tried before in a carnival fashion, which shows one of the functions of the carnival, as an escape from daily realities and restrictions: graffiti, bowdlerized humour, political cartoons, use of twitter and other social networks, and the use of swearing and inflammatory language through these networks to criticize those in authority. All of these elements point to the fact that through the Gezi Park venue as a site of what I prefer to call ‘carnavalesque chaos’, the disparate groups that participated in the protests found a means to express their disappointment with the recent restrictions (which they perceive variously as an attack on their lifestyles, an attack on ‘secularism’, or laïcité) by expressing themselves in ways that can be perceived as defying cultural and societal mores.

The Vulnerability of Polyphony and ‘Rabelaisian Laughter’ in the Protests

In Bakhtin’s view, Rabelaisian laughter signifies a quality of laughing in the face of authority. In his analysis, Bakhtin identifies ‘Rabelaisian laughter’ in the figures or images of parody and laughter from the medieval concept of the carnival, and from François Rabelais’s work. Perhaps most importantly, the figures and images in examples of the genre of parody meant that there was no central and authentic perspective, or in Bakhtin’s words, no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face.⁴ The Gezi Park protests also became a venue of laughing in the face of authority from the first day, with humorous cartoons of penguins (criticizing one national channel for showing a documentary about penguins instead of the protests) going viral. As the protests continued over a fifteen day period, it has also become clear that in line with the Bakhtinian notion of ‘polyphony’, there was no central authority among the protesters, nor there was a hierarchical structure to restrict views and silence unwanted voices. But this polyphony of voices in the protests also meant that the demands of the protesters became blurred, and became vulnerable to the provocations of dissident groups. As I was writing these (13 June), the provocateurs were said to have been repelled from the Taksim Square with another harsh crackdown by the Riot Police. The media reports held that there were only the peaceful protesters left in the area. As of today (16 June), the police entered Taksim Square for the last time and dispersed all protesters from the area. According to Bakhtin, the carnival is not meant as a concept to be understood as a spectacle, but as an occasion which its participants equally share and experience, ‘while [the] carnival lasts’.⁵ As such, instead of viewing the protests as a spectacle to be closely watched, politicians should be able to understand that the protests were a shared experience. This was recognized when the Prime Minister invited the representatives of the protests to talk about their issues and come to a common understanding. However, when there was another police crackdown after the talks, this was received with anger and mixed reactions and created question marks regarding the government’s approach towards the protests.

⁴ Bakhtin, M. and Holquist, M. (eds.) ([1981] 1998) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press. P. 273.

⁵ Bakhtin, M. (1984) *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana: Indiana University Press. p.8

Finally, the protests also became a venue for disproportionate use of misinformation and fabricated news, and particularly the use of provocative images and photographs that were taken at different occasions unrelated to the events. While the harsh criticism of police's disproportionate use of force was justified, the use of misinformation to inflate the police crackdown was another reality of the protests. In this sense, the polyphony of the protests made them open to the highly political attempt of separatist and oppositional groups monopolising the protests for their own goals of creating chaos and dealing a blow to the current government.

Taksim Gezi Park Protests: Birth and Backlash of a Political Sphere

Taptuk Erkoc¹

The history of Turkish politics has gone through a variety of phases, struggles and bottlenecks including four coup d'états since the early days of modern Turkish Republic. On the 28th May 2013, it was confronted with a new incident initiated by the people who were protesting against the demolition of Gezi Park which is located in Taksim, Istanbul. Although the protests were sparked on the basis of environmental consciousness, “by May 31, as a result of excessive use of teargas and water cannons by the police, the protests grew into mass anti-government mobilization that also spread to the cities of Ankara and Izmir”.² That is to say, “the environmentalists started an eco-struggle to protect the view of the Gezi Park against the Taksim project in the Taksim Square. The eco-struggle transformed into a worldwide campaign”.³ Accordingly, motto of the protests turned out to be ‘Everywhere Taksim!, Everywhere Resistance!’.

This paper is focused on explaining the birth of this political sphere created by Gezi Protestors as well as examining the role of exogenous actors that were apparently influential on determining the span of this sphere’s diameter. The exogenous actors are enumerated as police violence, Prime Minister’s (PM’s) rhetoric, position taken by the traditional elite, and finally violent extremist groups whose impacts are shown in Figure-1 below.

The initial inference of this development is that the Gezi Park protestors created a political sphere by initiating protests. This political sphere almost converted into a Habermasian public sphere “in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk” and communicative action.⁴ It is appropriate to reveal here the initial profile of Gezi Park political sphere as follows:

What does the sphere refer to? : The sphere refers to an enhanced democratic engagement as well as raising voices for the rights and thoughts of the certain segments of Turkish society by the means of contemporary institutions of deliberative democracy.

Why did it occur? : It started as a clear indication of environmental consciousness and subsequently converted into anger towards PM’s recent pejorative statements on secular lifestyles alongside with standing up against pressure of majoritarianism that occasionally rules out civil liberties of minority groups.

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² Bilgin, F. (2013), Turkey: Politics of the Gezi Protests, *Rethink Brief 01*. Rethink Institute, Washington DC.

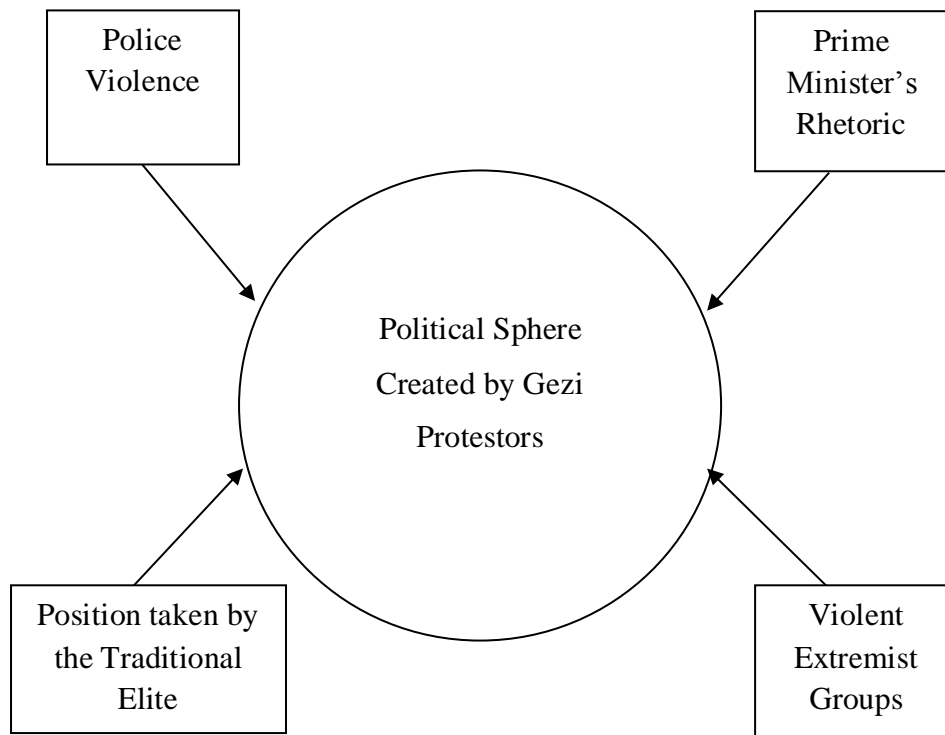
³ Kilic, M. (2013), Chapulling ‘Turkish Spring’: Strike of an Unpredictable Synchronization. *Turkish Journal of Politics*, 4 (1).

⁴ Habermas, J. (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.

Methods? : The Gezi Park protestors are exceedingly good at developing a discourse by using strong sense of humour, incorporating music into their power of opposition and employing social media. However, in certain cases means of social media caused a rapid dissemination of false information that had an adverse impact on the credibility of the protests.

In the following paragraphs, the impact of the each and every exogenous actor indicated in the Figure-1 will be articulated.

Figure-1: The Exogenous Actors of Gezi Park Political Sphere



A. Police Violence

The very first days of Taksim Gezi Protests can be shown as the most peaceful protests of Turkish political history. The protestors were sitting on the grasses of Gezi Park and showing their dissent in a silent way. Nevertheless, police forces preferred employing harsh and ruthless methods towards them by even attempting to burn the protestors' tents down. Recent surveys⁵ indicate that police's brutal attack on the protestors raised the awareness among the people who were watching the protests on TV, which means that the immediate impact of police violence extended the magnitude of the political sphere. But its secondary effect contracted the area of the political sphere due to two main reasons i) the area of public sphere where the communicative action took place was physically restricted ii) excessive usage of

⁵ KONDA (2013), *Gezi Parki Arastirmasi*, [Online] Available at www.konda.com.tr, [accessed 14 July 2013].

violence by police forces attracted some of the protestors to violently react to it which caused to rethink the legitimacy of this political sphere.

B. Prime Minister's Rhetoric

Another significant actor of the Gezi Protest is the PM himself. From the very early days of the protests, he has been inclined to evaluate the protests as a coup towards himself as well as developed a pejorative rhetoric to the protestors by defining them as *capulcular* that literally means 'looters'. In lieu of approaching to the protests as an opportunity to take one step further to the consolidated democracy by carving out new channels of democratic engagement, he blatantly criticised protestors to be manipulated by the foreign governments and international investors to redesign Turkish politics in accordance with their political and economic interests. There is of course no doubt that the international actors are excited to shape the political structure of Turkey by abusing the Gezi protests, nonetheless internal political and sociological aspects/dynamics of it can't be underestimated either. It may sound a bit odd but PM's strong stance on the protests as well as rhetoric successfully contracted the political sphere of the protests via watering down their legitimacy on the eyes of Turkish society. Moreover, his emphasis on the environmental policies of AKP government negated the arguments of protestors that were highly influential on the Turkish public including AKP supporters.

C. Position taken by the Traditional Elite

Three successful election results of AKP weakened the accumulated power of traditional elite of the modern Turkey whom is the staunch supporter of Kemalist regime. The Kemalist elite consisted of businessmen, academics, and journalists so and so forth, has been acting as the loyal safeguard of the status quo in Turkey. AKP's success in political arena and economy mobilised ordinary citizens located in the periphery to move towards to the centre threatened the status of traditional elite. Members of the traditional elite attempted to take advantage of Gezi Protests either in direct or indirect ways to be able to debilitate AKP government that couldn't be beaten through elections. Consequently, the position taken by traditional elite was seen as an attempt to preserve their political and economic power and narrowed the political sphere of protestors who were also criticising the attitudes of Kemalist elite during the protests.

D. Violent Extremist Groups

The last exogenous actor can be put forward as the most influential factor on contracting the political sphere of Gezi Protests due to the fact that any kind of violence delegitimise the political opposition and action. PM's success in convincing the majority of Turkish public was mostly motivated by the violent attacks carried out some of the leftist movements. The conventional wisdom that argues the legitimacy of

political action and violent extremism are mutually exclusive did work on the case of Taksim Gezi Protests as well. Although the protestors who successfully created the political sphere in Taksim endeavoured to isolate themselves from the violent extremism, their disorganised political activism was hijacked by the violence employed by certain groups.

In conclusion, the most peaceful protest of Turkish political history that created a chance to take one step further towards participatory and deliberative democracy fell short of its anticipated outcome. In addition to the actors enumerated above, disorganised structure of the protestors, lack of ability to convert their opposition into concrete political demands and the unfair treatment of international media had an apparent impact on the extent and power of the political sphere formed and executed by Taksim Gezi protestors

Gezi Park: the powerfully symbolic chance to act together!

Nikos Christofis¹

The Turkish elections of 2002 marked a significant breakthrough in Turkish history. By the time the Islamic *Justice and Development Party* (AKP – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), with the former mayor of Istanbul at its head, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won the elections, Turkey, was desperate for a change. The electoral win was accompanied by a new democratic dynamic that was well-received by the Turkish people hoping for a change, especially following the economic crises of the previous years and the political bankruptcy inherited by the 1980 coup d'état. Turkey entered a period of impressive rapid economic growth, while at the same time civil society was empowered by talks on amending the constitution and progressive legal reforms.

After a decade in power the AKP seems to have abandoned its original political agenda, which sought to confront and limit the power of the actors and institutions that dominated Turkey after the 1980 coup d'état, and now instead it derives its strength from them. A closer look shows that AKP adopted and instrumentalized the same authoritarian institutions and forces that provide excessive powers to state agencies without question. Although AKP managed to bring a significant blow to the Turkish Armed Forces, which were protected in large extent by the 1980 regime, it seems that they were replaced by the police and passed on to them the role of the guardian of the state. The violence of the police and the congratulating message by the Prime Minister concerning the effectiveness of the police actions is quite revealing in that respect. It is the police and the media, to name just two of the institutions that played a key role in recent events in Taksim square, that AKP employed, as other governments before did to suppress opposition. AKP itself appropriates these same ideological and repressive state apparatuses to retain its power and position. At the same, the party leader adopts an authoritarian discourse in which democracy is defined first, as selective, putting a dividing line between 'us', the pious 50% of the population, and 'them', the other 50% of the population, and second, as the obligation of the Turkish citizen to elect the next monarch for the next four years, the Turkish citizen being nothing more than a voter.

Robert Michels, the German sociologist, showed us “how an “iron of oligarchy” operates within any government or any party to separate top from bottom and to make power-holders insensitive to the needs of the mass. No matter how democratic elections are, they represent only fleeting and widely separated moments of popular participation. In that long span between elections, people are passive and captive”.² It is exactly to that specific attribute that the Turkish people decided to react and change. The massive, dynamic and the way of expressing its demands showed that

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² Zinn, H. (2001) “Non-Violent Direct Action”, in Howard Zinn, *On History*, New York-London, Sydney-Toronto: Seven Stories Press. p. 40

something important is taking place in Turkey, and not just, as numerous Greek journalists and commentators rushed to simplistically diminish it as a *cliché* struggle between secularism and Islamism. Societies claim their place in *History*; they claim their political, economic and cultural emancipation. And, perhaps most importantly, they claim to define the new “national narrative” on their own terms, regardless of it being a narrative of a “success story” (Turkey, Brazil), or a narrative of political and cultural change (Egypt). Societies do not allow “any paternalistic authority to appropriate the new over the old, they do not let democracy to the hands of those who, in the name of the *new*, undermine democracy”.³

In brief, the recent events started when a small environmentalist group protested against the neoliberal “urban renewal” plan by AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in order to protect “Gezi Park”, one of the rare green areas in Taksim. In a purely symbolic act the protests started exactly a month after the suppression of the First of May demonstrations. The protest took unprecedented proportion and turned into a massive social movement. Most probably, nothing would have happened if the brutal repressive police force that burned down the protesters’ tents and belongings did not take place. It was the violent behaviour of the authoritarian state that triggered the massive support to the initial protesters and turn within hours into Turkey’s biggest anti-government movement in decades, including protests in all urban towns. In other words, what we notice is a minor triggering event (the park) which leads to a major social uprising facing an unprecedented police violence with authoritarian, undemocratic statements by the Turkish Prime Minister that testify to his authoritarian tendencies.⁴

The once-popular leader was turned into another sultan – or a “democratic dictator” as Ahmet Insel observed⁵ – who considers suppression as the only possible way to silence millions of opposition voices. In addition, in just a few days, Erdoğan, unleashing a bunch of vitriolic and insulting statements against the Turkish people, and to be more precise, against the 50% of the non-AKP voters, managed to bring together so many diverse groups (from Kemalists to leftists to environmentalists to LGBT to Kurds, even Islamists who had supported AKP but no longer agree with its policies) in opposition to authoritarianism and state paternalism, as well as to struggle for unity in diversity. This coalition of diverse groups and the powerful fight for the public space and democratic participation creates a new dynamic that demands to be heard, not only in elections, but at all times and to have a say in the operation of the authority. What is of great importance though is that, it is a movement that is being led by neither the Left nor some other political group. It is a movement whose energy and dynamic derives from “below”, from all these people who belong to different groups, but who all have something in common, the anti-authoritarian spirit that acts

³ Anagnostopoulou, S. (2013) “One Turkey or Two?”. Paper presented in *Turkey 2013: Collective Action and Social Conflicts*, Athens, 4 July.

⁴ Logotheti, A. (2013) interview at *Radio Bubble* <http://liveradio.radiobubble.gr/2013/06/392-amaryll-8613.html> 8 June [in Greek].

⁵ Insel, A. (2013) ‘Tayyip Erdoğan Diktatör müdür?’. *Birikim Dergisi* [Online] Available at: <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim/makale.aspx?mid=966&makale=Tayyip%20Erdo%F0an%20Diktat%F6r%20m%FCd%FCr> [accessed 12 June 2013].

as an element of resistance to anything that is linked with authoritarian state authority (Erdoğan, police, Media).

Turkish modernization was, and still is, an attempt to introduce as many modern elements as the national elite deemed necessary and useful, while, at the same time, repelling those it deemed harmful and dangerous. The Turkish nation had to be modern, but at the same time obedient to the national elites. Thus, the Turkish citizen was never a citizen in the full sense of the term, since only the national elite defined the public space and the rules by which politics should be conducted.⁶ Thus, a monolithic national ideology was being shaped, while at the same time social diversity was used as an obstacle to people understanding each other, and therefore not questioning the terms under which the political community was structured. It is the first time in years that the claim for democracy in Turkey is presented and claimed so intensely. This claim did not take place against the politics of the parties also, but against this scheme that undermines democracy. In other words, it was a claim in the name of a democratic politics against the authoritarian politics which is constantly reproduced by the bipolar “Kemalism – Islamism”. What AKP and Erdoğan misinterpreted is that when the Turkish people voted him in 2002, they voted him in the name of democracy and democratic change. People voting Erdoğan were actually assigning him with the task of not establishing a new hegemony against the old, the Kemalist one, but with a task in the name of democracy and for that reason, it was against the Kemalist hegemony and its guardian, the army. Similarly, Erdoğan was elected not to replace the great leader who haunted the Turkish society, but to be redeemed by him, without replacing him with another one, himself.

Although nobody knows where the resistance will lead, one thing is certain; the Gezi protest is far from over. The Turkish government will not fall back, because such an action would mean defeat, so it is highly unlikely to happen. On the contrary, the Turkish state's violence will draw attention to its efforts to suppress the movement. Also beyond doubt is the fact that the Turkish people have already won, regardless of the outcome of the resistance. It is not about Gezi Park, perhaps it never was. But Gezi certainly provided a powerfully symbolic chance to act together, resisting to a tyrant who violated the dignity of the citizens.⁷ The Turkish people took that chance and offer a prime example of how to resist to neoliberal authoritarianism, and how a society claims its place in *History*. What comes out of it is that people, united, in solidarity and collectively, can choose its own fate. A lesson to learn and never let be forgotten.

⁶ Moroni, I. (2013) “The Prominence of the Citizen in Turkey”, *Avgi*, 9 June [in Greek]

⁷ Insel, A. (2013) “Haysiyet Ayaklanması”, *Radikal*, 4 June [in Turkish]

The invisible hand in Gezi Park protests?

Emre Tarim¹

In his decade long rule of the country, Mr Erdogan has presided over decreasing inflation and increasing economic growth rates. One of the positive effects of these has been the decreasing interest rates by which Turkey is able to borrow in international markets. Concomitantly, Turkey has reversed its debtor relationship with the IMF and is now planning to increase its contribution to the IMF. These improvements have been recognized by upgrades on Turkey's credit rating, the last of which happened shortly before the Gezi Park protests and reinforced Turkey's investment grade status.

The Gezi Park protests started small but turned into country-wide protests after the brutal police crackdown on protester campers in Gezi Park. As protests have widened to Ankara and other cities, the PM has called protesters “chapulcu” [riff raff]. However, the protesters have shown resilience against the excessive use of tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets. Many commentators have seen this resilience as the manifestation of pent-up anger against Mr Erdogan's increasingly dictating and polarizing voice on different matters such as abortion rules, regulation of alcohol consumption, refusal to grant place of worship status to Cemevi- Alewives' place of worship, and rebuilding Topcu Barracks as a mall at the expense of Gezi Park, one of the few remaining greenery in urban Istanbul. The PM's rhetoric, which for many is combative and condescending, has not helped. As one commentator put it, this is a protest movement among urbanites to restore their dignity in the face of PM's actions and words.

It is in these circumstances, the PM has led the discursive counter attack on the protesters by calling them mere tools in the hands of “the interest lobby”. In Mr Erdogan's narrow usage of the phrase, the interest lobby simply refers to a group of national and international actors who strive to increase the fee on the loans given to Turkey. This phrase is not a new tool in Mr Erdogan's rhetorical arsenal. Mr Erdogan and his close circles, which include rising columnists and media tycoons, have repeatedly argued that Mr Erdogan's political and economic success has been at the expense of this lobby.

Although finance capital is expected to seek higher returns, risk is the reverse side of the coin. Simply put, the interest rate by which a country borrows in international markets is determined by a plethora of risk factors such as local inflation rate, global economic prospects influencing the circulation of finance capital, and debtor country's growth prospects and political stability signalling its ability to pay back loans. One cannot rule out foul play in international markets as recent LIBOR fixing scandal has demonstrated. Nevertheless, such scandals and the underpinning opportunistic behaviour cannot explain everything in the markets.

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So what has happened in the Turkish markets during the Gezi protests? The stock market went down by more than 10 per cent after the PM's stern dismissal of the protesters and their demands. The benchmark interest rate spiked by more than 2 per cent and the default insurance premiums on the Turkish debt went up by more than 60 basis points to 183. In the process, it is claimed that several billion US dollars have exited the Turkish stock and bond market. For the PM and his supporters, these were the signs that the interest lobby decided to destabilize the Turkish economy not just to earn higher interest fees but also to thwart the rise of Mr Erdogan and Turkey to global power status. Nevertheless, in the weeks preceding the protests, the developed and emerging country stock markets have been jittery because the signs that the US and Japanese central banks might reverse their monetary expansion policies have got stronger. The prospect of such a reversal has led to sellings in the stock markets including the Turkish one which have benefited from the monetary expansion policies and negative interest rates. The Gezi Park protests in Turkey and the government's reaction have exacerbated the downward momentum in the Turkish assets. Nevertheless, the stock market has recouped most of its losses and the benchmark interest rates and the default risk premium on Turkey have loosened down as the protesters and the PM have started dialogue on how to resolve the issue peacefully.

If there had been an intent on the part of the interest lobby to topple Mr Erdogan by causing social, economic and financial mayhem, it seems like the lobby has decided to stop playing their part in the financial realm without a reason. The PM and his supporters argue that it has been their uncompromising determination to stay in government and fight any international conspiracy that has scared the interest lobby. Yet, so far there has been no investigation from the Turkish financial regulators on any local or international financial actor. On the other hand, the Turkish economy has been and will be vulnerable to change of sentiments in the international markets mainly because of its low savings rate (one of the lowest across emerging markets) and its dependence on foreign capital to reach its target of becoming a high income country in the next 10 years. Such dependency on foreign capital has actually made the Turkish investors more sensitive to global economic events than domestic economic agenda. In this context, increasing the crackdown rhetoric on foreign capital would add unnecessary strain on Turkey's ability to borrow in international markets and make things worse for Mr Erdogan's rule.

For long Mr Erdogan's rhetoric of being the victim- turned-hero who can advance Turkey behind a military tutelage has helped his popularity among the masses. Now that Mr Erdogan seems to have harnessed most of the branches of state authority, he turns to shadowy rhetorical figures such as the interest lobby to explain the growing national discontent with his polarizing rule and reinforce his rank and file.

A Neighbour in Turmoil: Two Waves of Popular Protest in 2013 Bulgaria

Kyрил Drezov¹

The eruption of the Gezi Park protest in Turkey in May 2013 attracted a lot of interest in Bulgaria. Much of the Bulgarian public instinctively sided with the secular protesters. In commentaries, especially in the Bulgarian electronic media, Turkey's complexity was routinely presented as a straightforward conflict between 'progressives' (the Istanbul protesters) and 'retrogrades' (the pro-Erdogan sympathizers, suspected of Islamic and neo-Ottoman sympathies). This was entirely in line with traditional Bulgarian sentiments: Ataturk has always had a rather good press in Bulgaria, even in communist times, unlike the Ottoman sultans and their avowedly Muslim empire.²

Bulgarian Turks, both in their traditional homeland and in Turkey, also have a solid reputation of being mostly secular and Kemalist in orientation. As much of the Bulgarian media relied on Turkish-Bulgarian journalists for coverage of events in Turkey, this tended to enhance further sympathies towards the Istanbul protesters. In addition, many Sofia residents saw in the Istanbul protesters people just like themselves – young, educated and cosmopolitan, yet at the mercy of an alien and arbitrary government. In contrast, there was no sympathy for Erdogan's country bumpkins with their suspect religious attitudes. Neither was there much sympathy for the impoverished fellow citizens of the self-same Sofia intellectuals, when these citizens rebelled against high electricity prices four months before the Gezi Park protest, and five months before the Sofia-centered summer protest in Bulgaria.

A Tale of Two Protests

From late January to the middle of March 2013 mass protests engulfed Bulgaria, triggered by sharp increase in electricity prices. The initial demands were economic, but through February and March protesters increasingly made political demands, calling for complete overhaul of the political system. These protests did succeed in bringing down the government and in forcing early elections, yet failed to make any lasting impact on the political system. The much reviled traditional political parties won the May 2013 elections and formed the new government through traditional horse-trading for positions and privilege.

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² The phrase 'five centuries of slavery' sums up popular Bulgarian perceptions of the Ottoman period. Concerning Ataturk, a mostly adulatory and uncritical biography was published in 1973 with official sanction from the then communist authorities – see Парушев, Парашкев: Мустафа Кемал Ататюрк (София; Издателство на Отечествения фронт, 1973). After the fall of communism the same biography was re-published by an academic publishing house with the title 'Ataturk – the Democrat Dictator' – see Парушев, Парашкев: Ататюрк - диктаторът демократ (София; АИ "Проф. Марин Дринов", 2000).

From late June to early August 2013 mass protests again erupted in Bulgaria, this time triggered by the government appointment of a suspect oligarch to head the State Agency of National Security. The initial demands of the protesters focused on stopping the government from appointing shady figures with oligarchic or underworld connections, yet quickly escalated to calls for government resignation and early elections. Again demands were made for an overhaul of the political system that would make impossible oligarchic domination. These new protests did succeed in preventing some odious appointments, but by early September were quietly absorbed by the traditional party players and effectively deprived of an independent voice. From then on the protest would be dominated by political parties focused on discrediting their political foes and on replacing them through early elections – in other words, ‘politics as usual’. Yet again the momentum of the original protests was lost, without much impact on the political system.

It would be interesting to examine the trajectory of these two waves of mass protest in order to establish why in both cases the results fell so demonstrably short of expectations.

The Winter Protests

These protests erupted on 28 January 2013 and by mid-February engulfed the whole country, bringing up to 100,000 protesters on the streets in a country of 7 million. The protests affected up to thirty five cities, international roads were periodically blocked, buildings and vehicles of electricity distribution companies in Varna and Plovdiv were damaged.³ A horrible highlight of these protests was a wave of self-immolations, with five fatalities in February and March.

Protesters blamed the spike in electricity prices on monopolistic practices by foreign operators (Czech and Austrian), who have dominated electricity distribution after privatization in mid-2000s. For years there has been a lot of anger about private electricity operators in Bulgaria, and the sharp rise in prices in early 2013 was seen as the last straw.

Some of the key demands of protesters were: re-nationalization of the electricity distribution companies; management of all electric distribution by the state National Electrical Company; electricity from the state nuclear power plant at Kozloduy to be distributed only on the domestic market; declassification of all contracts in the energy sector and prosecution of parties guilty of illegal deals.⁴ It is clear from the list that the protesters put their trust in the state to manage natural monopolies and wanted to make the state more accountable to citizens and

³ Изпепелиха две коли на EVN в Пловдив’ (BNews.bg 10 February 2013) - <http://www.bnews.bg/article-69445> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

⁴ ‘100 000 недоволни блокираха страната в най-масовия протест от 16 години’ (Сегга, Брой 4618/41, 18 Февруари 2013 - <http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=637084> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

consumers. Not surprisingly, the most active groups in the protest were anarchist and communist sympathizers (notably from youth movement ‘Che Guevara’).⁵

Other important demands concerned overhaul of the political system, with calls for the convening of a constituent assembly, right of recall of parliamentary representatives and replacement of the present proportional system (seen as beholden to political parties) with a majority voting system that would allegedly empower voters. Again, it was clear from both the demands and the tenor of the demonstrations that they were rejecting the whole post-communist political and constitutional system of Bulgaria as established in the transition from state socialism since 1989.

The mass demonstrations caught by surprise the government of the right-of-centre Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, a consummate populist, was genuinely shocked and disoriented by the scenes of mass anger directed at him. For Borisov had grown to expect adulation from the masses, not defiance. On 20 February the premier unexpectedly announced the cabinet’s resignation, following a very public self-immolation in Varna earlier in the day and violent police clashes with demonstrators in the previous day. By that time Borisov’s single-party government was clearly on a downward spiral – facing tough economic decisions, increasingly unpopular, mired in scandals and losing key anchors like Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Simeon Djankov. In such climate, Borisov had evidently calculated that an early resignation may improve his re-election chances.

In the subsequent early elections on 12 May GERB indeed won the biggest number of parliamentary seats of any single party (97 MPs), but still fell short of a majority. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (84 MPs) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (36 MPs), who had dominated the government before GERB in 2005-2009, won jointly 120 MPs, one MP short of absolute majority in parliament. This put the ultranationalist Ataka (23 MPs) and its fiery leader Volen Siderov in a key bargaining position.

Smaller parties close to GERB failed the 4% barrier, thus depriving GERB of secure parliamentary allies. Alienation from GERB and Borisov were such that any other coalition combination looked like the ‘lesser evil’ to any of the other three parties in parliament (BSP, MRF and Ataka), leading them to informal anti-GERB coalition. In this climate BSP and MRF formed an avowedly ‘expert’ government under Plamen Oresharski, a respected economist and former finance minister, which depended for parliamentary quorum on the cooperation of Ataka.

Both BSP and MRF were wary of relying on the whims of Siderov and Ataka for parliamentary support, but had little choice. In addition, a de-facto coalition of ex-communist Socialists (BSP), an avowedly liberal party that is predominantly ethnic Turkish and Muslim (MRF), and Ataka as an openly anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim party immediately created international and image problems.

⁵ See the ‘Che Guevara’ site at <http://komunistibg.wordpress.com/> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

In this climate of horse-trading the stars of the earlier demonstrations were completely marginalized and forgotten. On 22 March some of the key leaders of the winter protest had founded 'Movement for Civic Control' as a new movement of individuals, rather than as umbrella of existing parties or movements.⁶ They had expected to win a near majority in the new national assembly, but were bitterly disappointed. Their result in the parliamentary elections was quite dismal - 15,482 votes or 0.437% of those who voted.⁷ It is clear that those tens of thousands who willingly followed the protest leaders in the winter demonstrations had utterly failed to recognize them in the electoral ballot papers.

The Summer Protests

On the morning of 14 June 2013 the Bulgarian parliament approved the nomination of Delyan Peevski, MP from MRF, as new head of the State Agency of National Security (SANS, or DANS in Bulgarian).⁸ 32-year old Peevski controls much of the media in Bulgaria (the nominal owner being his mother Irena Krusteva) and had been repeatedly embroiled in corruption and censorship scandals.

The nomination of Peevski, which happened minutes before the vote, was forced on a reluctant BSP parliamentary group by party leader Sergey Stanishev. The head of SANS was previously appointed by the president, but just before Peevski's appointment this had become parliamentary responsibility. The new parliamentary majority had also significantly expanded the remit of SANS, allowing it not just to analyse and report criminal activities, but also to investigate them.

Peevski's appointment as head of SANS immediately led to mass mobilisation of opponents through Facebook, with demonstrations 'against the oligarchy' scheduled for the same evening in at least 15 Bulgarian cities. President Plevneliev publicly condemned the nomination and convened a meeting of the consultative National Security Council on 20 June to discuss Peevski's appointment.⁹

The blatant disregard of common sense, procedure and public opinion with Peevski's appointment confirmed the worst suspicions about oligarchic control over the new government. In the evening of 14 June over 10 000 came to protest in front of

⁶ 'Ангел Славчев, Дончо Дудев и Янко Петров създадоха „Движение за граждански контрол“' (Darik Radio 22.03.2013) - http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=1058826 (accessed on 4 September 2013); 'Протестът си направи партия, иска 160 депутати' <http://offnews.bg/index.php/174121/protestat-si-napravi-partiya-iska-160-deputati> (accessed on 4 September 2013). Also 'ДГИ, Ангел Славчев Дончо Дудев Янко Петров, Демократична Гражданска Инициатива София България' - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Eb_6y1Zbp0 (Published on 30 March 2013; accessed on 4 September 2013).

⁷ See 'Резултати от избори за народни представители 12.05.2013 г.' (Central Electoral Commission) - <http://results.cik.bg/pi2013/rezultati/index.html> (accessed on 4 September 2013). The Movement for Civic Control used the electoral registration of Democratic Civic Initiative, so their joint results are listed under the latter.

⁸ 'Parliament chose Delian Peevski to chair SANS' (Radio Bulgaria News, Friday June 14, 2013) - <http://bnr.bg/sites/en/News2013/Pages/140513B2.aspx> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

⁹ 'President Plevneliev, protesters protest at Peevski appointment as SANS boss' - <http://sofiaglobe.com/2013/06/14/president-plevneliev-protesters-protest-at-peevski-appointment-as-sans-boss/> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

the Council of Ministers in Sofia. The protesters were mainly young, educated and middle-class. Small protests were organised also in Plovdiv, Bourgas, Varna, Ruse and other cities in the country.

Facing the anger of the masses, on 19 June parliament formally cancelled the controversial appointment of Peevski. However, protesters continued calling for the government resignation. They would gather daily in their thousands in Sofia until the summer recess of parliament in early August. In contrast to the winter protest, the new wave of protests remained largely restricted to middle-class citizens and to the capital Sofia. After the success of their original aim (the resignation of Peevski), protesters had to redefine their aims and thus naturally fell back on the call for government resignation. This simple and clear slogan certainly gave focus to the protesters; nothing else might have kept them on the streets. However, such a political demand had also opened them to influence from the government political opponents from GERB. Even though the original protesters held firm in their rejection of both the government and GERB throughout the summer, GERB supporters and agents of influence were getting more and more visible on the streets. After the summer recess GERB leader Borisov felt emboldened enough to call on his supporters to join the resumed protest on 4 September. This completed the transformation of the protest into just one element in the power struggle between political parties, mostly BSP and GERB. The period of spontaneity was largely over.

In one respect the summer protesters did better than their winter counterparts: key participants began discussing an electoral alliance a week after the start of the protest. On 7 July five parties created a Reformist Bloc. Their key aims were new electoral rules that would guarantee fair elections, plus transparency in party financing to avoid oligarchic dependence.¹⁰ By early September reliable opinion polls were giving around 7% support for this Reformist Bloc.¹¹ However, the choice of building the Reformist Bloc from above, as an alliance of independent parties that had all existed before the summer protest, both limits its appeal to only part of the protesters (many protesters would refuse to endorse at least one, if not more, of the five coalition partners) and also stores trouble for the future, as horse-trading between five partners rarely makes for a pretty scene. It is debatable whether an attempt to build the Reformist Bloc from below would have worked better, but this alternative approach was never seriously discussed. In theory at least, a brand new single formation would certainly have had wider appeal and greater organisational coherence.

Missed Chances and Dormant Connections

To sum up, it seems that both waves of protest missed their chance to translate their strength on the streets into political strength. Neither wave proved able to produce a

¹⁰ 'Пет партии образуваха реформаторски блок' - <http://www.bnews.bg/article-80779> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

¹¹ The respected sociological agency Alfa Research gave the Reformist Bloc 7.6% of the vote, based on polls conducted in late August 2013 – see 'БСП изпреварва ГЕРБ, трети е Реформаторският блок' (Mediapool, 01.09.2013) - <http://www.mediapool.bg/bsp-izprevarva-gerb-treti-e-reformatorskiyat-blok-news210703.html> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

viable and popular organisation that would challenge established political parties in Bulgaria. Another fatal weakness was the class division between winter protesters (mostly working class, provincial and economically deprived) and the summer protesters (mostly middle-class, from the capital and relatively affluent). Moreover, many of the summer protesters were keen to emphasise their superiority in terms of means and origin compared to their poor relatives from the winter protests. The latter repaid them by either supporting Oresharski's government, or keeping aloof from the summer protesters.

Both waves of protest have clearly demonstrated that Bulgaria is in dire straits and that the majority of its citizens are disgusted by their political or economic situation. However, it would most likely take another crisis to test Bulgaria's citizens ability to put aside class divisions, snobbery and pride in order to challenge effectively the dominant oligarchy.

As for the Istanbul connection of the Sofia protesters, it remained dormant throughout the summer protest in Bulgaria, except as a cautionary tale.¹² For one, under the premiership of Oresharski the Bulgarian police behaved with utmost restraint towards the protesters, even in the face of extreme provocation (under Borisov the Sofia police was certainly more hands-on with the protesters, especially on 19 February, although falling way short of its Istanbul counterparts). The very cause for the summer protest, Peevski's appointment, was pressed on the government by MRF, a party that has near monopoly on the Turkish vote in Bulgaria – so most Bulgarian Turks, both in Bulgaria and in Turkey, met the anti-Peevski's protest with deafening silence. The one Turkish party that did support the protest and joined the Reformist Bloc, the miniscule People's Party of Freedom and Dignity, happened also to be Erdogan's and AKP's preferred Turkish partner in Bulgaria (and widely mistrusted because of that).¹³ And whatever their private thoughts, Turkish members of the Sofia-centred Reformist Bloc were certainly not going to praise the Istanbul protesters that were earlier so extravagantly praised by other Bulgarian Turks. In other words, despite the striking social similarity between the Istanbul and Sofia protesters, there was otherwise a complete political mismatch between them.

¹² The mayor of Sofia Yordanka Fandakova famously said on 22 July: 'I do not want Sofia to become an Istanbul for the protesters' - <http://www.faktor.bg/obshtestvo/ulicata/11080-fandakova-ne-iskam-sofiya-da-se-prevarne-na-istanbul-za-protestirashite.html> (accessed on 4 September 2013)

¹³ See 'В защита на Реформаторския блок, 21 август 2013' - an interview with Radan Kanev, one of the key leaders of the Reformist Bloc, on his personal blog - <http://radankanev.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/blog-post.html>

Making sense of the protests in Turkey (and Brazil): Urban Warfare in “Rebel Cities”¹

Bülent Gökay² and Farzana Shain³

Many mainstream accounts of the recent Taksim-Gezi park protests have made references to the so-called Arab Spring events in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. Many asked the same question: Are the Taksim Protests Turkey’s Arab Spring? In this paper, we draw on David Harvey, distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography, to offer an alternative account to explain the events in Turkey.⁴

The protests in Taksim started small: its initial aim was to stop developers from building a shopping-centre that was to be housed in a replica of a military barracks building demolished sixty years ago, resulting in the destruction of much of the Gezi Park, one of the last green spots in central Istanbul (Europe’s biggest city and the business capital of Turkey). However, the character of the protests changed when the Turkish police attacked protesters with considerable violence, and what started as an environmental protest in Istanbul quickly turned into a nation-wide political demonstration against the policies of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and his government. The protest rapidly gained support from a cross-section of society in Istanbul and other urban centres and became diversified. However, the protests were generally led and dominated by young middle class professionals and university students, and their demands for access, freedom and a new kind of urban living remained at the centre of the events. Issues related to the city and its quality of life dominated the protests.

It is no coincidence that the demonstrations started and concentrated in Istanbul, the largest and the most developed urban centre in Turkey. Istanbul is a unique example of contemporary urban development projects with the big urban transformation and regeneration projects. It was in the 1980s, soon after the military coup in Turkey, the city witnessed the beginning of the neoliberal transformation and the celebration of property rights, in the same way with the similar transformations happened in other metropolitan centres, like New York, London, Madrid, etc.

The metropolitan cities have now central significance in the whole system of capitalist surplus production. David Harvey describes this as “it is the metropolis that now constitutes a vast common produced by the collective labor expended on and in the city. The right to use that common must surely then be accorded to all those who

¹ (a shorter version of this article was published by *openDemocracy*, 26 August 2013)

“Rebel Cities” is a reference to David Harvey’s 2012 book, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012).

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³ Farzana Shain is a Professor of Sociology of Education, Keele University, UK.

⁴ In particular his 2012 book, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso), and his 2008 *New Left Review* article, “*THE RIGHT TO THE CITY*”.

have had a part in producing it. This is, of course, the basis for the claim to the right to the city on the part of the collective laborers who have made it. The struggle for the right to the city is against the powers of capital that ruthlessly feed upon and extract rents from the common life that others have produced.”⁵

In this sense, the Taksim-Gezi protests share a common ground with a great many diverse social movements focusing on the urban question, from India and Brazil to China, Spain, Argentina and the US.⁶ Just a few months before the Taksim-Gezi protests started, David Harvey spoke about the urban origins of the social movements and referred to Istanbul, saying that “What do we see in Istanbul? Cranes, everywhere.”⁷

Democracy and “representation”

Some of those hasty proclamations of a “Turkish Spring” concentrate on Tayyip Erdogan’s increasingly anti-democratic and authoritarian ruling style, and compare Erdogan’s rule with Mubarak’s. A certain slogan evoked some sympathy in the crowd: “Taksim will become Tahrir!” To them, the Taksim protests represent the next stage of the “Arab Spring”.⁸

Since Erdogan prides himself on being a democratically elected leader with strong grassroots support, his critics now pose questions such as how to define majority in representative democracies and whether a regime can still be considered a representative democracy when it does not follow policies to serve the interests of the majority. That is true that the 11 year long AKP rule has not led to the creation of a fair distribution of income, the benefits of huge economic success were not shared fairly and equally by all strata of the population, and as far as the *Human Development Index* is concerned Turkey is still a very unequal country.⁹ Most of the policies of the AKP favour the new bourgeoisie, the extended middle and upper middle classes rather than the vast majority of the working people. We agree with these observations. However,

⁵ “The right to the city is not an exclusive individual right, but a focused collective right. It is inclusive not only of construction workers but also of all those who facilitate the reproduction of daily life: the caregivers and teachers, the sewer and subway repair men, the plumbers and electricians, the scaffold erectors and crane operators, the hospital workers and the truck, bus, and taxi drivers, the restaurant workers and the entertainers, the bank clerks and the city administrators.” (Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, pp. 78 and 137)

⁶ This is in line with David Harvey’s reworking of Marxist political theory places the city first and foremost, in terms of its position as a generator of capital accumulation, as opposed to the factory/ work place. Harvey explains this situation as “the concept of work has to shift from a narrow definition attaching to industrial forms of labor to the far broader terrain of the work entailed in the production and reproduction of an increasingly urbanized daily life”. Harvey also discusses how urbanization will play a key role in social conflicts of today. (*Rebel Cities*, p.138)

⁷ “Urban Class Warfare: Are Cities Built for the Rich?”, *SPIEGEL ONLINE*, May 21, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/marxist-and-geographer-david-harvey-on-urban-development-and-power-a-900976.html> [accessed in August 2013].

⁸ “From Taksim and Rio to Tahrir, the smell of teargas”, 29 June 2013, <http://roarmag.org/2013/06/from-tahrir-and-rio-to-taksim-the-smell-of-teargas/>; “Turkey protests escalate, activists call for ‘revolution’”, <http://www.euronews.com/2013/06/02/turkey-protests-escalate-activists-call-for-revolution/>, 2 June 2013. (both accessed in July 2013)

⁹ <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TUR.html> (accessed in August 2013)

none of these observations are directly relevant in terms of whether the AKP regime represents the interests of majority in Turkey's representative democracy.

“Democracy” literally means “government (power) by the people. Usually the word is employed to designate the parliamentary regimes which developed in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century on the “British model.”¹⁰ A representative democracy is a system of government in which representatives are elected by popular vote. These representatives then poll their constituents on the various matters and represent them in the large meeting called the parliament. Representative democracy is the basis of constitutional democracy existing in many Western countries. All those countries which call themselves democratic have a representative system of democracy. It is suggested that this is the only form of democracy which is viable in the larger and more complex societies of today. Even though on principle, representatives are chosen by the people to act in their best interest, this does not mean that they necessarily act the way the people want them to in every circumstance. Theoretically power rests with the elected representatives, but this is obviously not the case since the policies implemented by governments are for most part contrary to the interests of the working people, and almost always in line with the interests of the powerful big business. This is a form of democracy but quite different from straight-up majority rule. This is what Alexis de Tocqueville called the “dictatorship of the majority.”¹¹

A system based on true democracy is participatory democracy, where members of the public are effectively members of the government by voting directly on all policies. However, this is considered unpractical and difficult to administer and as a result, most modern democracies are representative, and for most of the time the regimes exercise their hegemonic power moving between consent and coercion, which was once described by Antonio Gramsci as ‘half man, half beast’- Gramsci took this term over from Machiavelli as the image of power as a centaur, a necessary combination of consent and coercion.¹²

Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan has been, by far, the most popular politician in Turkey after winning three consecutive elections by increasing his majority: 34 per cent in 2002, 47 per cent in 2007 and more than 50 per cent in 2011. His success and popularity is interlinked with Turkey's economic development: Erdogan's leadership coincided with an impressive growth spurt for Turkey which placed the country among the top ten emerging stars of the world alongside with the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Turkey's per capita income was tripled within a decade under Erdogan's leadership. Annual economic output of Turkish economy is at \$10,000 per

¹⁰ Besley, T. and Coate, S. (1998) “Sources of Inefficiency in a Representative Democracy: A Dynamic Analysis”, *The American Economic Review*, pp. 139-156; Ernest Germain, *Marxism and Democracy*, Marxists' Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/1948/09/democracy.htm> (accessed in July 2013)

¹¹ Horwitz, M. J. (1966) “Tocqueville and the Tyranny of the Majority”, *The Review of Politics*, 28 (3), 293-307.

¹² Cox, R. (1993) “Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method”, in S. Gill (ed.) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.52.

person, it is about the same level as Brazil or Mexico and has been growing at a steady pace.¹³

Alongside with managing a growing economy, Erdogan's government achieved some other significant successes during this period. AKP regime has been dealing effectively with the coup leaders of Turkey's recent troubled past. A large number of generals were arrested, and one in three generals is now in prison. It was also under his leadership that significant steps were taken to calm the decades-long violent conflict with the country's significant Kurdish minority.¹⁴ However, these successes have fuelled Erdogan's sense of his own importance in Turkey's recent economic rise. As a result, it seems Tayyip Erdogan now believes that he is invincible. His excessive use of the state apparatus to establish his power base to such excess has led to accusations that he is indeed governing the country in the same autocratic style for which he had bitterly criticised the secular generals. After 11 years and three terms in power the result is the emergence of an increasingly authoritarian, religiously inspired and obsessively neoliberal system. It is based on a cleverly crafted hegemonic apparatus. This has been quite evident since 2011, with the start of violent repression of public protests, the jailing of journalists on suspicion of conspiring with terrorists, pressure being put upon newspaper owners to sack critical journalists; and the updating of the 1980s' military regime's anti-terrorism laws.¹⁵

All the above mentioned reactions and policies are characteristic of an administration that has spent too long in power and become far too confident about its capacity to maintain electoral power. Therefore, perhaps the current conflict – which has found its most powerful expression in the Taksim Gezi Park protest of tens of thousands of young people – boils down more than anything else to a style of ruling, the style of a leader who is increasingly intolerant of dissent. He gets angry too easily and reverts to his scrappy street fighter self. As his regime provides material improvement in the lives of large sections of Turkey's population, he becomes more and more arrogant and too sure of himself and his authoritarian ruling style. He is acting as if the national power is his own personal power because the millions of people, almost 53 per cent in the most recent elections, in Turkey's representational democracy had given their power to his party. These are all aspects of a regime becoming increasingly undemocratic and arrogant. But still none of these justify to put the events in Turkey in the same category with the so-called Arab Spring countries. Despite the obvious "Tahrir feel" of Taksim, one must acknowledge that the significant differences are substantial. To start with, Mubarak was a dictator, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an elected prime minister. More importantly, Arab uprisings were mass events preceded by massive economic crises, while protest movement in Turkey is mainly a middle-class movement, mostly about young educated people defending lifestyle matters. Turkish protestors were, in general, better educated professionals

¹³ What has impressed many analysts over the past ten years is the broad nature of Turkey's economic development. The industrial and services sectors have expanded alongside tourism. (J Hawksworth, "The World in 2050: Beyond the BRICs – a broader look at emerging market growth prospects", http://www.pwc.com/en_GX/gx/world-2050/pdf/world_2050_brics.pdf, accessed in August 2013)

¹⁴ "Amending Turkish Constitution for Kurdish Question", 21 March 2013, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2013/03/2013336372537622.htm> (accessed in July 2013)

¹⁵ Bulent Gokay, "Ragip Zarakolu, human rights symbol in modern Turkey", *OpenDemocracy*, 11 February 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/bulent-gokay/ragip-zarakolu-human-rights-symbol-in-modern-turkey>

and university students from reasonably well-off families, and they are better connected through technology. This is the new middle class of an emerging powerhouse. They are protesting about quality of life, about future opportunities, and freedom of expression.¹⁶

The mainstream terminology used by the Western media and experts, and shared by some Left/ Liberal accounts make the comparisons between Taksim and Tahrir Square referring to the ability of the street to topple a government. Some even claimed that “the Gezi Park resistance is a [revolutionary] turning point for the people of Turkey. After many decades they feel their power again”.¹⁷ However tempting, we believe such comparisons represent a gross over-simplification based on a range of superficial similarities many of which ignore the class analysis of the events. The political-economy background of the events in Turkey is very different from that of its war-torn Arab neighbors. Turkey’s protests are also very different from the discontent in some of its European neighbors, such as Greece and Spain where weak economies have brought the unemployed youth out onto the streets.

It is clear that the riot police in Turkey has employed a massive amount of force against these protestors, though it is not very different from Spanish, Italian, Greek, and British police tactics which we witnessed during the same weeks when hundreds of thousands of protestors walked against their crisis-ridden governments’ austerity policies. In those European countries comparable levels of police force were employed, with the same instruments -- tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets-- to pacify the protesters and control the angry crowd. However, none of these European events were considered as a British, Greek or Spanish “Spring”!

Undoubtedly, the two events, Turkey’s and Egypt’s, started and centred in two symbolic squares- Tahrir and Taksim; just like Tahrir Square Taksim has become a strong reminder of the power of public space; a number of normally rigorously competing football fans unified in their opposition to their governments’ policies leaving aside their historical differences to defend “their city”; protesters demanded the resignation of the rulers in both cases; and the police responded harshly both in Tahrir and Taksim squares.¹⁸ But similarities end here. Still, a growing number of articles in the mainstream media focused mainly on Turkish government’s Islamism and the presence of secular groups within the demonstrations, presenting Turkey’s protests yet another example of an Oriental Muslim dictator oppressing his mostly secular subjects. “Islamists in power and secular, modern Turkey is in the streets and squares” says one such account.¹⁹ These interpretations tend to simplify complex and multi-layered events into gratifying morality tales about Western democratic

¹⁶ “Turkish protesters are young, liberal and mad at PM, poll says”, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130605-turkey-protesters-istanbul-taksim-park-anger-erdogan> , 5 June 2013.

¹⁷ I. Zekeriya Alman, “Turkey: ‘Occupy Gezi’ -- Istanbul’s red-green uprising; Right to the City movement and the Turkish summer”, <http://links.org.au/node/3373> , 2 June 2013.

¹⁸ A poll published in *the Hurriyet Daily News* revealed that 70 percent of the protesters insisted they did not “feel close” to any political party. (given in “In Istanbul’s Heart, Leader’s Obsession, Perhaps Achilles’ Heel”, *New York Times*, 7 June 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/08/world/europe/in-istanbuls-taksim-square-an-achilles-heel.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

¹⁹ “From Tahrir to Taksim”, <http://www.ericlee.info/blog/?p=763> , 12 June 2013.

secularists versus conservative Islamists.²⁰ Such an interpretation is too ethnocentric, in the sense that those who look like us are “good guys”, those who look/ and dress less like us are “bad guys”. Such presentations have a tendency to see the Muslims only in clichés, and run the risk of creating a cultural caricature.²¹

Brazil, Turkey, (and Chile) -- Protests Follow Economic Success

It would be more appropriate to make comparisons between the demonstrations in Turkey and the protests in Brazil, which started just a couple of weeks after the protests in Taksim. One might even include the student protests in Chile in 2011 here.²² Despite their significant differences, in particular in terms of the reactions from the Turkish and Brazilian authorities, both Turkish and Brazilian protesters seemed to be coming from similar class backgrounds and ages, and they were making similar demands of democracy in similarly innovative ways.²³

There are a number of other comparisons that might be made of Turkey and Brazil, (and Chile too): both are emerging powers with booming economies and dynamic, democratically elected governments; both countries are exerting considerable influence in the regions around them, and often being cited as models; both have been developing global ambitions. Brazil is one of the BRICS, B of the BRICS, and the largest economy in the Western hemisphere after the US. Turkey is at a critical junction of Europe and the Middle East, and is a key geopolitical player in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East. Both countries pull considerable weight in affairs far beyond their own borders.

There are, of course, some divergences too. The immediate, explicit issues which led to the protests are not exactly the same, but similarly urban: the government's plan to redevelop Gezi Park, an urban park next to Istanbul's Taksim Square in Turkish case, it was very much "a right to the city" type of a movement; an increase in public transport fares in Sao Paulo in Brazilian case- for free bus fares and under the slogan "*Copa pra quem?*" (Whose Cup?) tens of thousands of young

²⁰ ‘the fact that in Turkey, Egypt or Tunisia an “Islamic republic” with its own peculiarities was not born, as in Iran, is the reason for disorder and conflicts’, says Daniele Scalea in <http://www.4thmedia.org/2013/06/23/from-tahrir-to-taksim-the-carousel-of-revolt-in-the-mediterranean-periphery/> (accessed in July 2013)

²¹ Such Eurocentric prejudices had emerged over centuries, supported by the writings of leading Western thinkers/ writers. Immanuel Kant, for instance, divided humans into four racial categories, set apart from each other by differences in natural disposition. “Humanity”, he writes, is “at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites”. (in E.C. Eze, *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader*, Blackwell, 1997, pp.47, 55 and 63) Similarly, James Mill, great British philosopher and historian of the 19th century, wrote a five-volume history of India to demonstrate how deficient the Indians are in governance, science, philosophy, art, and technology. Today other Western writers repeat a similar line. Niall Ferguson, for instance, writes, “Without the spread of British rule around the world”, colonised people, such as Chinese and Indians, would not have parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, incorrupt government, and individual freedoms. (Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2003)

²² Massive protests of August 2011 or the Chilean Education Conflict (as labelled in Chilean media), a series of ongoing student-led protests across Chile, demanding a new framework for education in the country. Beyond the specific demands regarding education, there is a feeling that the protests reflect a "deep discontent" among some parts of society with Chile's high level of inequality. Recently, following the start of the protest movement in Brazil, mostly peaceful demonstrations started again across the country to demand education reform.

²³ “Peace is over, Turkey is here?” was one placard in Sao Paolo. (Reuters, 14 June 2013)

Brazilians took to the streets, occupied and set-up neighborhood assemblies to reclaim their city from neoliberal forces. The governments are not at all alike, Turkey having a long-serving popular leader who heads a conservative Islamist party; and Brazil with a relatively new president, a former leftist guerrilla who was imprisoned and tortured in the 1970s during military dictatorship, heading a leftist popular movement. But there is a very important similarity: they are both representative democracies. Not only that, each country has a powerful military that had been involved in politics in the not too distant past. But now, both countries have managed to put their armies in the barracks, and therefore their democracies considered quite stable. Based on their world-class model of economic progress, development and reasonably stable democracies, both countries are often cited as examples of previously underdeveloped countries able to overcome their troubled political past. In this sense, there is no Turkey Spring as there is no Brazilian Spring. This is not Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. Democratically elected governments in Turkey and in Brazil are far more resilient and their leaders far more popular and secure in their power than the North African dictators swept away by the events of 2011. Despite his increasingly authoritarian policies, Turkey's Erdogan still remains immensely popular among the country's poor and deeply religious majority.

However, as can be seen in many “democratic” countries, democratically elected leaders often come to have an inflated sense of knowing better than their citizens what is best for their citizens, and they do have a tendency to favour prestigious infrastructure projects rather than what affects most peoples' daily lives. This is exactly what is at stake both in Turkey and Brazil. So, in one sense, both in Brazil and Turkey, participatory democracy was forcefully diluted among an orgy of neoliberal mega-projects, generating dubious profits for a small elite in their respective countries. All this also created an inflated self-image around these mega structures for the leaders. In Turkish case, it is the ruling AKP's collusion with powerful business interests in the so –called re-development of Istanbul. In Brazilian case, it revolves around massive public funds for the hosting of the World Cup and the Olympics.²⁴ This is common feature of capitalist system in the context of so called urban re-development and cultural investment in and around many modern metropolitan centres. This is justified by an economic argument around the importance to capitalism of land, rent and speculation more so than straightforward production. “Over the past 30-40 years, where cities try to brand themselves and sell a piece of their history. What is the image of a city? Is it attractive to tourists? Is it trendy? So a city will market itself.”²⁵ There are many passages describing this situation in David Harvey's *Rebel Cities*, such as:

there is always a strong social and discursive element at work in the construction of such causes for extracting monopoly rents, since there will be, at least in many people's minds, no other

²⁴ There is a background to this: since 2008, the ongoing pacification programmes in Rio's favelas which entail a neoliberal urbanized approach to social and class warfare through the application of a range of different public policies to “troubled” neighbourhoods, such as special police units (Pacification Police Units, UPP) patrolling favelas to help broker peace being warring drug traffickers.

²⁵ Interview with David Harvey: *Rebel Cities & Urban Resistance Part II*, 7 January 2013, <http://www.zcommunications.org/contents/190562> , accessed in August 2013.

place than London, Cairo, Barcelona, Milan, Istanbul, San Francisco, or wherever, in which to gain access to whatever it is that is supposedly unique to such places.²⁶

Or:

Much of the corruption that attaches to urban politics relates to how public investments are allocated to produce something that looks like a common but which promotes gains in private asset values for privileged property owners. The distinction between urban public goods and urban commons is both fluid and dangerously porous. How often are development projects subsidized by the state in the name of the common interest when the true beneficiaries are a few landholders, financiers, and developers?²⁷

The recent events in Turkey and Brazil are examples to how authorities respond to the crowd when their “grand” projects of neoliberal restructuring were challenged by their citizens, many of whom may have voted for the ruling parties. No representative democracy is fully democratic, and the fact that the way the Turkish, Brazilian and Chilean rulers’ not fully representing the demands of their populations is not very unique either. Even in the UK, which is generally considered one of the best examples of the Western parliamentary democracy, just over ten years ago in February - March 2003, Tony Blair’s Labour government utterly ignored huge demonstrations, largest ever in the history of his country, including the two-million strong anti-war protestors in London, and pressed on with a disastrous war policy against Iraq. The surveys of that time, March 2003, pointed out that fifty-five per cent of Britons agreed that the London marchers were right because the war was delivered on false pretences and delivered little other than bloodshed. There were also global protests against the war in Iraq: three million people protested on the streets of Rome, considered as the largest anti-war rally ever in human history, and anything between 10 and 30 million in other metropolises around the world. Still, none of this made any serious impact on the decisions of the Blair government regarding starting a disastrous war in Iraq. The Western governments’ refusal to listen to the anti-war protesters was such a dramatic illustration of the limits of parliamentary democracy, but also such events shaped a strong and growing taste for direct action, one can find many examples from the anti-Vietnam War actions in the 1970s to the occupy movements of the 2008-13.²⁸

Until recently, Turkey, Chile and Brazil were the envy of much of the world. Their economic rise has been spectacular. These were among the fastest developing countries on earth. All three countries have seen a strong period of mass growth, economically and population-wise. Sustained growth brought in enough tax revenues to improve both education and health spending. The boom also allowed the governments to increase minimum wages significantly without any apparent damage to employment. As a result of governments’ extension of welfare, health and

²⁶ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p. 103.

²⁷ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.78.

²⁸ Guardian/ICM poll, in February 2003, shows that at least one person from 1.25 million households in Britain went on Saturday’s anti-war march in London, confirming estimates that between one million and two million people went on the march. The poll shows it is the prime minister’s personal standing rather than the Labour party which has suffered the wrath of anti-war voters. Labour’s standing is down four points from 43% last month to 39% this month but the government still maintains a healthy eight-point lead over the Conservatives. (*The Guardian*, Tuesday 18 February 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/feb/18/politics.iraq>)

educational provision, a large section of people in Turkey, and Brazil, has gained access to better public services.²⁹

If we try to make a connection between these economic success stories and the recent protest movements, first observation will be about how a strong cycle of economic enrichment over the past ten years has changed the public's expectations of its politicians. Since Turkish, Chilean and Brazilian regimes achieved sustained growth and employment, delivering on growth and employment is no longer enough to satisfy the majority of their populations. Citizens increasingly hold their leaders accountable to improve the quality of public services, and to expand the boundaries of participatory democracy, and listen to their concerns closely. One therefore can consider the protests in Chile, Turkey and Brazil as a symptom of radically shifting demands, driven mostly by these emerging power houses' economic success. These are democratic protest movements in societies experiencing rapid change where the public's demand for better services and more democracy at local as well as national levels grow at a faster pace than their governments' ability to provide.

Despite the multiplication of the slogans and emerging chaos about the aims of the protesters, it is important to note that the protest of both Turkey's and Brazil's urban youth are first and foremost a response to the ruling regimes' grandiose neoliberal projects of urban transformation, gentrifying schemes, with the aim of creating high-tech malls, skyscrapers, and expensive giant high-tech stadiums. All this is part of "the violent neoliberal attack upon the public provision of social public goods over the last thirty years or more".³⁰

It is also important to note that the educated urban youth is at the forefront of the resistance to such neoliberal assault. To many analysts, young people's role in the protest movements came as a surprise because young people had been identified as apolitical and individualistic for decades. With the recent protests movements in the summer of 2013, the urban youth proved that they cared about how current policies of their governments are affecting their life, urban space, their country and their fellow citizens, and that they are willing to protest resiliently.

Youth and urban "warfare"

Within neoliberal narratives, youth are mostly defined as a consumer market, a drain on the economy, or stand for trouble. ... Young people increasingly have become subject to an oppressive disciplinary machine that teaches them to define citizenship through the exchange practices of the market and to follow orders and toe the line in the face of oppressive forms of authority. They are caught in a society in which almost every aspect of their lives is shaped by the dual forces of the market and a growing police state. The message is clear: Buy/ sell/ or be punished.³¹

²⁹ http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2013/07/08/130708ta_talk_surowiecki , <http://theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=10040> , <http://www.globalenvision.org/library/3/1377> (all accessed in July 2013)

³⁰ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p. 85.

³¹ Henry A. Giroux, "The Violence of Organized Forgetting", *Truthout*, 22 July 2013, <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/17647-the-violence-of-organized-forgetting> (accessed in July 2013)

Much like the protesters in Turkey, most demonstrators in Brazil have jobs and are well educated. They are mainly from the country's growing middle classes, which government figures show has ballooned by some 40 million over the past decade amid a commodities-driven economic boom. Unlike countries such as Greece and Spain where weak economies have brought the unemployed out onto the streets, the discontent in Brazil and Turkey has been created by strong economic growth.³² As standards of living have risen, so have people's expectations for better services and wider participation in decision-making. Brazilian and Turkish youth are not protesting because they want to overthrow a dictator or are angry about massive unemployment. They are upset, and rightly so, about the priorities and the manner in which these have been pursued – without sufficient consultation – by their governments. They demand the right to participate in the planning and distribution of their country's wealth. In both countries, more and more people demand the right to be heard and to be involved, linked to the feeling that they aren't really able to get involved. They want the right to determine their own futures. They are no longer prepared to be talked down to by the government.³³ The protests can in one sense be read as the articulation by those involved of what a fair and just world might be.³⁴ Turkish and Brazilian youth, rejecting the neoliberal notion that democracy and markets are the same, have not only addressed some of the current injustices while reclaiming their urban space, but they also started to produce new ideas with a new and very imaginative political language.

The whole process is almost a textbook case to what David Harvey describes as “the urbanization of capital”³⁵:

The reproduction of capital passes through processes of urbanization in myriad ways. But the urbanization of capital presupposes the capacity of capitalist class powers to dominate the urban process. This implies capitalist class domination not only over state apparatuses,... but also over whole populations – their lifestyles as well as their labor power, their cultural and political values as well as their mental conceptions of the world. That level of control does not come easily, if at all. The city and the urban process that produces it are therefore major sites of political, social, and class struggles.

³² Anthony Faiola and Paula Moura, “Middle-class rage sparks protest movements in Turkey, Brazil, Bulgaria and beyond”, *The Washington Post*, 28 June 28 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-06-28/world/40250885_1_turkey-new-government-arab-spring . (accessed in August 2013)

³³ James Surowiecki, “Middle Class Militants”, *The New Yorker*, 8 July 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2013/07/08/130708ta_talk_surowiecki . (accessed in August 2013)

³⁴ “Turkish protesters reject neo-liberalism not Islamism”, *ahramonline*, 4 June 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/73116/World/Region/Interview-Turkish-protesters-reject-neoliberalism.aspx> . (accessed in August 2013)

³⁵ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.65.

In the final analysis, we believe that the protest movements in the urban areas of Turkey and Brazil represent the direct responses of youth in the search of “a different way of urban living from that which was being imposed upon them by capitalist developers and the state”.³⁶ In our view, the demonstrations can be connected to a wider discussion developed by David Harvey around “the right to the city” which is a right to democratic control over the process of urbanization. The specific aims of the protesters in Istanbul and Sao Paolo, to keep a green space as a public park and to defend affordable transportation fees for urban public, are in a general sense their attempt to reclaim their city, their urban space. Whatever the initial results, or lack of specific gains, of the recent protests, Turkish and Brazilian youth have already created “a critical mass of political energy” for a “struggle to fashion an alternative to globalisation that does not trade on monopoly rents in particular or cave in to multinational capitalism in general”, and initiated “a platform for what an alternative urbanization project might look like”.³⁷

³⁶ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.21

³⁷ Matt Mahon, “Interview with David Harvey”, *The White Review*, May 2012, <http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-david-harvey/> (accessed in August 2013); Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, pp. 88 and 111.

Gezi Park Protests at a glance: Chronology of the events





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