SUREN, NORA. An Actor-Network Approach to the Gezi Protests. (Under the direction of Dr. Adriana de Souza e Silva).

Due to the incomplete and one sided academic literature surrounding the Gezi protests, there is a need for a more robust and complex analysis of the protests. As such, this thesis critically engages with the literature on Gezi, arguing that an effective understanding of the complex Gezi network, which included both human and non-human participants, can only be obtained if the roles of different actors are acknowledged. In addition to contributing to the literature on Gezi, this thesis also suggests that we can still learn from a six-year-old protest by having a different framework derived from Actor-Network Theory (ANT) instead of reducing the phenomenon to a singular component as the narratives among most scholars have tended to do so. ANT is a valuable approach to my research, as it identifies the main participants in the emergence and formation of the Gezi protests as well as how this network of human and non-human agents act together to cause a change in Turkish youth. This study examines how the diversity of elements across a network, including art in public spaces, humor, social media’s technological features, as well as the circumstances surrounding the political environment of Turkey mutually articulate each other in the emergence of the protests and paving the way to civic participation for the Turkish youth. To that end, this thesis attempts to answer the question: What does the network formed by human and non-human agents in the Gezi protests do together?
An Actor-Network Approach to the Gezi Protests

by
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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor and chair Dr. Silva for her continued advice and help through the process of researching and writing this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Wiley and Dr. Bollmer for their diligent work in evaluating this study as my committee members.

Special mention goes to Arto Suren, Zivart Suren, Ayse B. Tosun, Beyza Burcak, and Nicholas Eng, who have been nothing more than supportive.
BIOGRAPHY

Nora Suren was born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey. During her senior year in English Literature program at Istanbul University, the Gezi Protests happened. The protests lasted from May 27 to August 20, 2013, and had an unforgettable impact on the country’s youth, including her. Having seen firsthand the power of social and mobile media as one of the most crucial contemporary communicative areas in our society, she decided to pursue an academic career in Communication to get the opportunity to do her own research on this topic.
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Introduction

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) asserts, injustice should be seen as a threat and everyone should take action to stop it. The Gezi protests exemplify the injustice in Turkish society, exemplified by the police’s excessive use of force through water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Amnesty International, 2013; Özbudun, 2014; Gül et al., 2014; Farro & Demirhisar, 2014). These police actions were directed towards unarmed and peaceful protesters.

The Gezi Park protests began in Istanbul (Turkey) in the end of May 2013 and then grew to become a nationwide movement. The movement started in opposition to the “Taksim pedestrianization project,” which was approved by the municipality. According to this project, the Gezi Park, located in Taksim Square, would be demolished in order to build military barracks and a shopping mall in place of the park. The project was introduced as the pedestrianization of the Taksim Square, which is considered the heart of modern Istanbul. On May 27, a portion of Gezi Park’s wall was destroyed, and in addition, trees in the park were removed under the scope of implementing the aforementioned project. To protest the removal of one of the last remaining parks in downtown Istanbul, a local group called Taksim Solidarity Group gathered in the park. The protests began as an innocent and environmentalist demonstration with people setting up tents in the park, similar to the Occupy Movement that was seen in the U.S. in 2011. Despite the fact that these activists were peaceful, intervention by the police against these people was extremely harsh.
As a reaction to government’s oppression, in just two weeks, the Gezi protests spread to 80 of the country’s 81 provinces, with more than 3.5 million people participating. While news of the occupation spread on social media, many of Turkey’s mainstream media outlets were caught off guard by these events (e.g., protesters being routed with tear gas and water cannons) and slow to adapt their coverage. Particularly, on June 1, as police brutality during the protests in Istanbul reached its peak and went out of control, one of The Turkish mainstream TV stations, CNNTürk, aired a documentary on penguins instead of demonstrating the real event during which police were firing teargas bombs to tens of thousands of youth and political activists. As a result, the penguin became an ironic symbol of media cowardice in the protests. Additionally, other pro-government stations like NTV continued to push the government’s conspiratorial talking points.

Gezi in review: Identifying the Gaps and the Media Landscape

Thus far several scholars have emphasized the role and use of art in the Gezi protests, such as humor, poetry, and street art (Gorkem, 2015; Aytekin, 2017; Colak, 2014). For example, Gorkem (2015) investigates the undercurrents and outcomes of the Gezi demonstrations by arguing that social media is an important battleground for the “cyber war” between the protestors, the supporters of protestors and the government and its supporters. Her argument is largely based on offline and online humorous texts with semiotic analyses of composition and content, which is conducted as a means to degrade the other party’s credibility and gain more supporters. Similarly, Aytekin (2017) underlines the role Second New Wave (SNW) poetry played in the protests, as the protesters appropriated the verses of the Second New Wave poets to create a unified movement. Drawing upon a Rancièrean notion of politics and inspired by Peter Weiss (2013),

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1 Second New Wave is a poetry movement, which oppose itself to the earlier Turkish poetry. The poets of this movement, who were inspired by such movements as Dada and Surrealism, tried to create a more abstract poetry.
Aytekin (2017) focuses on the aesthetic political acts within the movement, particularly delving into the SNW poetry. Unlike Gorkem (2015) and Aytekin (2017), Colak (2014) discusses the capability of art and humor in the conception and development of the Gezi resistance by looking at multifarious forms of art, including examples from humoristic productions, street art, and a dance show performed by a whirling dervish with a gas mask. Although Colak looks at the relationship between multiple forms of art and politics, his study is limited in the sense that it does not explain how different forms of art and politics work in unison. Also, Colak investigates the usage of artistic and humoristic productions in new social movements in terms of Scholl and Bakhtin’s concept of “carnival.” A “carnival” understanding does not concur with the weighty context of the Gezi protests. Although protesters used humor to construct a counter-hegemony, the police violence, the casualties, the dead and the government’s brutal interventions, they all created a weighty context.

As it can be seen from the examples above, most previous research on the Gezi protests has been one sided and studied the protests from one perspective. However, a multi-dimensional perspective helps me to analyze the diversity of multiple art forms and put those elements under a broad network. As Everhart (2014) explains, specific genres shape the formation and course of the events differently. In addition to that, movements do not generally rely on only one form of art. As stated in T. V. Reed’s (2005) research that during the Battle of Seattle (i.e., a series of protests surrounding the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference of 1999), activists utilized multiple forms (e.g., creative performances as dancing Santas, fire-eaters, clowns, and drag queens) in the street. Thus, an analysis based on multiple forms of art employed by the Gezi protesters allows me to understand one of the most significant actors in the Gezi network.

Social media provides a space for people to participate in social movements (Costanza-Chock, 2011; Hollenbach, 2013; Nelson, 2012; Pierskalla, 2013; Thigo, 2013; Castells, 2015;
Rheingold, 2008). For example, Gerbaudo (2012) claims that social media can be used as a tool to mobilize people. Further analysis is provided by Pierskalla and Hollenbach (2013) who assert that mobile technologies influence collective action events. Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005) also assert that technologies of information and communication are theoretically and empirically intriguing from a collective action standpoint. Self-organizing online groups, rapidly assembled networks of protesters, “meet ups,” new structures for interest groups, and “viral” e-mail lists are some of the examples they demonstrate as to prove that collective behaviors employ advanced communication and information technologies. The protests of 2004 and 2011 in Madrid and London demonstrated that mobile phones allowed people to text their friends and access the social-media outlets, which increased people’s abilities to organize and join the protests (Bradshaw, 2009; Sherwood, 2011). The recent literature on the Gezi protests also have shown that social media in general and mobile media in particular were used as a tool to connect people in order to increase information flow and participation (Gumustekin, 2015; Gorkem, 2016; Baban & Guzel, 2015).

Although in the case of the Gezi protests, social-media outlets were the central communication tool for the protesters, and indeed played a critical role in the emergence and spread of the protests, some scholars have overly focused on the role of social-media technologies in detriment of other non-human actors, including art, humor, and politics in the network of the Gezi. For instance, Gorkem (2016) examined digital activism in Turkey focusing on the significance of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for Turkish activists, and the way activists use digital media (Baban & Guzel, 2015). Similarly, Baban and Guzel (2015) investigated the way activists use social media and how social media affects the globalization of social activities. These scholars particularly focus on digital activism and roles and meanings of SNS for activists in the Gezi protests. These studies on digital activism
and mobile media affordances are highly valuable for the Gezi literature in the sense that they highlight the importance of digital media and social networking sites (SNS) in the emergence and formation of the protests; however, as the aforementioned scholars who have focused mostly on the specific art form during the Gezi protests, they only emphasized the role of the individual parts of the network. As stated before, this caused most of the academic literature surrounding the Gezi protests to remain incomplete and one sided. By putting these perspectives in conversation with each other in the form of a network, I am providing a more robust and complex analysis of the protests and refusing to reduce the Gezi network to one cause or element.

As such, this thesis critically engages with the literature on Gezi, arguing that an effective understanding of the Gezi network can only be obtained if the roles of different actors are acknowledged. Because the Gezi protests can be seen as a milestone for democracy and a signal for greater change in Turkey, it is important that they are explored on a broader scale. The emergence of the protests and the greater change the protests brought on Turkey is a very complex one. In order to understand this complexity, we need to look at the whole system. Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) is valuable to understand this system because it takes the whole picture into account and helps us understand it better. In addition to contributing to the literature on Gezi, this thesis also suggests that we can still learn from a six-year-old protest by having a different framework derived from ANT instead of reducing the phenomenon into a singular component as the narratives among most scholars have tended to do so.

As Bruno Latour (2005) states, instead of focusing on discrete actors with particular interests and intentions, it is more productive to trace how action is articulated through associations between human and non-human actors. Enmeshed in these associations and the complex network, actors are not stable, they are rather constantly assembled and reassembled. Through these associations, material entities, such as visual arts, graphic design, music, protest
signs, and humoristic contents become actors. Latour also emphasizes that not only humans, but also non-humans have agency. This does not necessarily mean that they determine or cause action on their own. Rather, they should be understood as “participants” in actions, which “might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (p. 72). According to Latour, ANT does not argue that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored (Latour, 2005). Thus, ANT is a valuable approach to my research by allowing me to identify the main participants in the emergence and formation of the Gezi protests as well as how this network of human and non-human agents act together to cause a change in Turkish youth. In this thesis, Latour and ANT provide me the perspective to analyze the intersections of the most powerful actors in the expression of the Gezi protests, namely social media, art in public spaces, and humor. My analysis covers a snapshot of this network in which prior and persistent symbols of the Gezi movement are evaluated. This thesis frames the multi-layered network by focusing on three aspects of the protests as mentioned above, as they included the most visible and iconic figures that endured to remain in this infinite network. I consider them the most powerful and visible because they fit the aim of this thesis to trace associations and to understand what patterns emerge from these associations, and it should also be noted that the content they produce and the associations they create are more traceable and visible through social media, as not every actor has digital traces for us to analyze.

The young activists of the Gezi movement reinterpreted art and humor and spread these expressions through social-media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. One of the most popular examples for the reinterpretation of art was “The Whirling Dervish with a Gas Mask” performance in Taksim Square and many other places. With a red dervish skirt and gas mask,
artist Ziya Azazi reappropriated the Sufi whirling in his own way. Mevlevi Sufism is one of the oldest Sufi traditions in Anatolia dating back to the 13th century. The Mevlevi (also known as the whirling dervishes) follow their strict rituals during their famous practice of whirling, which is a form of remembrance of God. The photographs of the exceptional performance of Ziya Azazi (Figure 1) that were disseminated on Facebook and Twitter were one of the notable moments of the Gezi protests. Together, these elements (e.g., online and offline spaces, photographs, and the public performance itself) formed a complex network in which a generation that had been accused of being apolitical became engaged in politics without reproducing what they perceive as the dull, exclusionary, and pointless politics of elder generations (Aytekin, 2017).


Scholars have stated that there is a fundamental need for activists to communicate their message and build visibility for the movement among the public and media (Andrews & Caren,
According to Katherine Everhart (2014), artistic expressions are one of the ways movements can communicate their message and make it visible to others. Examples from past protests such as political cartoons, visual flyers, graffiti, protest songs, protest signs, costumes, and documentary videos are some of the ways through which activists have spread their message to both the public and media (Adams, 2002; Chaffee, 1993; Reed, 2005). These imply that art, especially when it is performed in public spaces, is one of the most important elements in the context of the Gezi network which helps me to fathom the protests and how they drove a great change in Turkish youth. Depending on the medium, art has the potential to reach more diverse groups of people than more traditional means of political communication, such as news stories or political meetings (Everhart, 2014). Therefore, one form should not necessarily be deemed more successful than the other, but rather, they have the potential to reach different audiences (Rohlinger & Brown, 2013).

While there are a number of excellent studies available on the Gezi protests, little research has been conducted on how specific artistic and humoristic forms of expressions, politics, and social-media technologies are involved in the protests and networked with each other. Furthermore, much of the research on Gezi appears to consider art, humor, or social media as neutral “tools” that can be appropriated and shaped by particular social actors. It is also clear that these studies tend to focus on particular “social” actors and their specific interests; for instance, Gorkem (2016) and Baban and Guzel (2015) show how different “human” actors use new technologies to achieve certain ends. Drawing a conceptual framework from ANT, this thesis rather considers art, humor, politics, and social media as “participants” in the Gezi protests. As such, I examine how the diversity of elements across a network, including art in public spaces, humor, social media’s technological features, as well as the circumstances surrounding the
political environment of Turkey mutually articulate each other in the emergence of the protests and opening the road of civic participation for the Turkish youth. To that end, I attempt to answer the question: What does the network formed by human and non-human agents in the Gezi protests do together?

Taking the ANT approach allows me to address this question and understand each different actor in the emergence and the course of the Gezi protests. In this thesis I analyze the role of social media, art, and humor in the Gezi protests by focusing on specific actors of each mechanism, namely the “woman in red” and the “woman in black” photographs, the “standing man” and the “whirling dervish” performances, the “penguin with a gas mask” street art, as well as the “Everyday I’m Chapulling” and “You messed with the generation that beats cops on Grand Theft Auto” phrases. My analysis covers the networks surrounding the most visible and relevant actors that were digitally traceable.

**On Actor-Network Theory: An Overview**

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a sociocultural approach that has generated considerable interest among scholars from overlapping topics of science, technology, organization, and media. Developed by Michel Callon (1986), Bruno Latour (2005), and John Law (1987), ANT posits that everything in the social and natural worlds exist in constantly shifting and evolving networks of relationships. It argues that nothing exists outside those relationships. According to ANT, the influence exerted by non-human artifacts on social interaction is as significant as that which is exerted by human actors (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

As stated by both Callon and Latour (1981), ANT distinguishes itself from other sociotechnical approaches by considering both human and non-human elements equally as actors within a network. That being said, in order to fully understand and better reveal the complexities
of the Gezi network, we should attribute the same level of importance when faced with either a protester, a public performer, an image, or a technological tool: “An actor in ANT is a semiotic definition—an actant—that is something that acts or to which activity is granted by another…an actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of action” (Latour 1996, p. 373; Callon & Latour 1981, p. 286). As such, the identities of the diverse elements that emerged from the Gezi protests should be defined through their interaction with other actors which they are associated or influenced by.

ANT focuses on the description and analysis of associations between natural, human and technological entities (Law, 2009). It informs Science and Technology Studies (STS) research with an approach to trace associations between human and non-human agents in order to better understand how social dynamics are reassembled in contemporary settings, which are characterized as being more fluid, intricate and accelerated (Baron & Gomez, 2016). As Bruno Latour (2005) states, instead of focusing the analysis on discrete social actors with particular interests and intentions, it is more productive to trace how action is articulated through associations between human and non-human actors. Entangled in these associations, actors are far from stable, but are rather constantly assembled and reassembled. Through these associations, material entities, such as keys, viruses, laboratories, and cars, become actors. In the words of one of ANT’s key proponents, John Law (2009):

Actor network theory is a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations. Its studies explore and characterize the practices and webs that carry them. (p. 141)
In Reassembling the Social, Latour (2005) first claims that there are no fixed groups. There are only group formations, as groups are constantly made and remade. This way of understanding groups is helpful in the analysis of the Gezi protests because it allows us to avoid addressing “online activists” or “protesters” as stable and fixed groups. Though the protesters united with a purpose during the protests, they were all from different backgrounds and political views; decentralised, flexible and without formal representatives. Moreover, like most of the recent protests, Gezi had no leaders or spokespersons which spoke for the group existence. Not only the group of protesters or activists, but also the police were not stable and fixed as both of these groups added new members to their formations or lost the old ones and continually moved around the country throughout the course of the Gezi action. As Latour (2005) states, “groups are not silent things, but rather the provisional product of a constant uproar made by the millions of contradictory voices about what is a group and who pertains to what” (p. 31). Additionally, according to Latour, it is important to distance oneself from the idea that action is a product of deliberate intentions of particular actors. Rather, Latour asserts, action is overtaken; it “is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated” (p. 46). This is important because the action should not be attributed to the deliberate intentions of specific actors, such as social media, art, humor or the protesters. Rather, dispersed actors (including human and non-human elements) all played different roles, mobilizing and holding the protests together.

As Latour (2005) emphasizes, objects have agency, too. This does not mean that they determine or cause action. Instead, they should be understood as “participants” in actions, which “might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (p. 72). Everyday objects, such as cleaning sprays, paint respirators, goggles, scarves, and plastic bottles became medical supplies or teargas protectors during the Gezi
protests. For instance, cleaning agents with pumps were filled with milk and used to ease the effect of teargas by spraying into tear-gassed eyes (Werner & Sunder-Plassmann, 2014). Thus, materials, objects, or technologies can become political, too as they are not mere passive recipients and they co-articulate agency. Even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call non-humans. This also reminds us that “the social is materially heterogeneous and the technical is socially heterogeneous”:

Often in practice we bracket off non-human materials, assuming they have a status which differs from that of a human. So materials become resources or constraints; they are said to be passive; to be active only when they are mobilized by flesh and blood actors. But if the social is really materially heterogeneous then this asymmetry doesn’t work very well. Yes, there are differences between conversations, texts, techniques and bodies. Of course. But why should we start out by assuming that some of these have no active role to play in social dynamics? (Callon & Law 1997, p. 168).

As ANT suggests, studying the associations between heterogeneous actors – be it Erdogan himself, and his stance on the protests as well as the protesters – help us explore how they worked in unison and constituted this actor-network through the effects of these connections.

The mainstream literature on the roles of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within social movements has been tending towards technological determinism. From the Mexican Zapatista movement’s use of the Internet to the role of mobile communication in the protests related to President Estrada in the Philippines, to the use of Twitter in the protests in Moldova and Iran and during the Arab Spring uprisings (Shirky, 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009; Stepanova, 2011), most focused on technology and its “impacts” on social and political practices. For instance, Shirky (2011) attributes the loss of the Moldovan Communist Party during the 2009 elections to the impact of cell phones and social-media tools, such as
Facebook and Twitter by reducing the whole network to only one cause and ignoring other possible actors that might have had agency, too. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that these “impacts” should be understood as one of the outcomes that emerge from a complex mesh between various human and non-human actors, institutions, and practices (van de Donk et al., 2004).

There have been alternatives to this dominant literature. By taking a socially deterministic perspective, some claim that the role of ICTs within these social movements has been exaggerated and that ICTs have also been used by repressive governments instead of transforming society in a good way. They claim that ICTs actually support existing political structures (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Diamond, 2010). Morozov (2011), for instance, argues that the Internet is not a tool that liberates us; rather, according to his book, The Net Delusion (2011), it aids dictatorships and supports authoritarian regimes. He suggests that “the democratizing power of new media will in fact bring not democracy and freedom, but the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes” (The Guardian, 2011). Additionally, in their article, van Laer and van Aelst (2010) avoid an internet-optimism by pointing out the limitations of the Internet. They also assert that ICTs “will never be able to replace traditional forms of activism and face-to-face communication” (p. 1164). According to most of these scholars, the Internet is unable to establish trust and strong ties among a network of activists as they tend to dismiss online activism as “slacktivism” or “clicktivism”.

ANT, however, rejects this distinction between the social and the technological by differing from both technological deterministic perspective and social construction of technology approach. Through the use of ANT to analyze the Gezi protests, this thesis departs from both of these views. The ANT framework has indeed been applied in the context of other events. For example, Poell, de Kloet and Guohua Zeng (2014) analyze the involvement of Sina Weibo (i.e., a
Chinese microblogging website which is one of the most popular social-media sites in China) in the instances of political contention. Poell et al. (2014) draw inspiration from ANT to show how Sina Weibo’s particular technological features, its user cultures, its systematic self-censorship practices, as well as the occasional government interventions, mutually articulate each other. Their ANT approach allows them to trace how technological features and emerging practices become entangled with each other and helps them to establish a broader overview of how new publics are constituted and how symbolic reconfigurations unfold in the case of a platform like Sina Weibo.

I appropriate their focus on the intertwinement of technological features and emerging practices and build on this scholarship by analyzing the role of art, humor, social media in the configuration of Gezi. Heeks and Seo-Zindy (2013) also adopt an ANT approach in order to explore the role of ICTs in Iran’s Green Movement. With this approach, they aim to move beyond the dualities most of the previous literature have presented on this topic: seeing either technology or society (or culture) as the cause of impact. In order to answer their research question, which focused on the role ICTs play in the development of a social movement network from an ANT perspective, they selected a single case study, which was the Green Movement in Iran (i.e., a protest against contested presidential election results in June 2009). Lim (2012) also moves away from technological determinism by delving into the historical analysis of online activism in Egypt from 2004 to 2011. She argues that “the role of social media in the Egypt revolt was not merely technological but also sociopolitical” (p. 4). Following these studies, I seek to move beyond the dualities of technology and society; and beyond traditional concepts of cause and effect. ANT helps me expose the dynamics and processes that underpin the trajectory of a social movement network like the Gezi. Angry, unemployed, and oppressed youth participated in the Gezi protests with the same grievances, goals, and a common identity in opposition to the
government’s decisions. Nevertheless, these grievances alone are not enough to explain the evolution of events during those times.

ANT helps me unearth the entanglement between physical sites (e.g., Taksim Square), ICTs, particularly social media, and the Gezi movement. In doing so, my thesis not only moves away from technological determinism, in which technology determines social processes and cultural values, but also from social constructivism, in which human action is seen as directly shaping technology. My analysis is based on ANT (especially Latour’s (2005) perspective) because it is useful to understand the greater change in the Turkish youth and the complex system through which the Gezi protests unfolded. My analysis traces the associations and the networks among powerful actors of the Gezi protests, and as such allows me to focus on the whole picture. I address this by organizing my thesis into five main chapters.

**Thesis organization**

Chapter 1 describes the Gezi account to offer a better sense of the seriousness of the events surrounding the Gezi Park protests. In Chapter 2, the focus is firstly on the role of social media in social movements, as well as its mixed nature as it was also used by the government during the protests. Then I narrow it down to the role of social media in the Gezi protests, by touching upon the mainstream media environment in Turkey, as well as the use of social media by the government, and analyzing two different images that spread across social media throughout the course of the protests: the “woman in red” and the “woman in black”. Both images depict the disproportionate amount of violence exerted by the police towards protesters during the Gezi protests.

In Chapter 3, I examine the role of art in public spaces in the Gezi protests. In doing so, I begin the chapter with describing the role of art in social movements, and I continue with the role
of public spaces in social movements. Then, I turn to the Gezi protests by examining different actors. I focus on three prominent examples of art in public spaces, which are expanded upon in detail in the following chapters, (“The Standing Man” and “The Whirling Dervish with a Gas Mask” public performances in Taksim Square) and an example of street art which depicted penguins, sometimes with gas masks, sometimes marching. When public television channels chose to air a penguin documentary instead of covering the recent events, the animals became a powerful icon of the movement.

Chapter 4 focuses on the role of humor by demonstrating two different phrases that circulated on both online and offline during the course of the protests. First one is a phrase, named “Everyday I’m Chapulling”, created by the young protesters. Chapulling (Turkish: Çapuling) is a neologism originating from the Gezi Park protests, coined from President Erdoğan's (then the prime minister of Turkey) use of the term “çapulcu” (i.e., Turkish word for looters) to describe the protesters. The protesters re-appropriated the term and began to describe themselves as “çapulcu”, inspired by the lyrics of “Party Rock Anthem” by LMFAO (i.e., the original lyrics were "Every day I’m shuffling"). This phrase became popular both online and offline, be it in the form of street art or memes. The second actor that demonstrates the role of humor is again another phrase, “You messed with the generation that beats cops on Grand Theft Auto (aka GTA)”. This phrase was invented by the young protesters which was first a street art and then spread via social media.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the Gezi actor-network through an ANT approach and trace the associations between various actors I examined in the previous chapters. First, I give insights into the Gezi network through the lens of ANT. Next, I trace associations between different actors and demonstrate how they are connected in the same network. I close the chapter by answering my
research question in discussing how the Turkish youth changed and became civically engaged in the Gezi network.

Finally, in the conclusion, I summarize my main arguments about the Gezi network and emphasize how the change in Turkish youth happened through the protests. Then I conclude by listing the limitations of my study along with my suggestions for future research.
Chapter One

A streamlined explanation of the Gezi Protests: What went down and how

Introduction

Turkey has a long history of protests, riots and public demonstrations, with political movements often materializing on the streets. Since 1923, these political events have gradually increased. In the early days of the Turkish Republic, there were series of riots by local Kurdish communities, Seyh Said rebellion in 1925 and Dersim riots in 1937, among many others. In 1945, extreme nationalist groups set fire to a newspaper office in Ankara in 1945, and anti-communist student group took hostage the rector of Ankara University in 1947 (Ozturkmen, 1998; Kabacalı, 1992; Karakus, 1977). In 1955 there was what is now referred to as the “Events of 6–7 September, an organized mass looting that targeted shops of non-Muslim communities including Greek, Armenian, and Jewish on Istiklal Avenue in Taksim² (Ozturkmen, 2014).

Alongside street protests, there is a myriad of ways political protest are also materialized. Ozturkmen (2014) argues that “the performance of politics, particularly at the street level, has been evolving since the 1970s, when ‘street terror,’ public demonstrations, and televised political debates were part of the Turkish social life” (p. 42). This is further cemented by the changes that political expression went through in the last few decades, taking various forms—such as “televised debates, live theatrical performances, campaign meetings, protest rallies, and funerary marches” (pp. 42-43). At this junction, political comedy emerges as “another outlet for debate” (p. 44). As part of Turkey’s political humor tradition, which includes “entertainment clubs,

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² Beyoğlu-Taksim is one of the most popular districts of Istanbul famous for its lively atmosphere, Istiklal Avenue, Taksim Square and cultural activities.
theatres and TV sketches, all of which would caricaturize and criticize the government, either all “tolerated or ignored by the political leaders of the time” (p. 44). This demonstrates that since the 1980s and 1990s, political satire has been a crucial asset for the television industry in Turkey.

The tolerance towards the political comedy and satire took a turn when the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, the AKP (Justice and Development Party)—which is led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power in 2002. Political humor, especially impressions, was subject to Erdoğan’s public wrath, as well as legal actions. Erdoğan, since the beginning of his career, accepted giving interviews to only the journalists he chose and declined open debates. He would not welcome humor and took legal actions against numerous comic strips and cartoons which made satirical comments and remarks about him and his party. As a result, the number of televised political debates and shows dwindled.

To the minds of many, as several researchers suggest (Ozturkmen, 2014; Mengu et al., 2015), the younger generation that grew up under AKP’s rule was accused of being passive and distanced from the country’s problems and politics, even seen as “apolitical” when compared to the generations of the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, the resilience that was displayed by “the youth” in the Gezi Resistance was arguably unexpected to the older generations.

Following these sociopolitical developments, establishing a clear outline of the events surrounding the Gezi protests is imperative to understanding the nature and the implications of this period in Turkey’s history. In this chapter, I delve into the Gezi account to offer a better sense of the seriousness of the events surrounding the Gezi Park protests. I follow a linear narrative structure in order to present a coherent take on the events with full disclosure. The following account is mostly taken and appropriated both from Amnesty International’s report on the Gezi Park Protests (Amnesty International, 2013, pp. 54–58) and Ozturkmen’s (2014) study.
The Gezi Account: A Crash Course

On Monday, May 27th, a number of representatives from Taksim Solidarity, “a coalition of NGOs, political groups and professional bodies” (Amnesty International, 2013, p. 54) that were against the regeneration plans for Taksim, started gathering in the Gezi Park after the arrival of bulldozers, which were there to initiate the removal of trees from the park, one of the few remaining green spaces in Istanbul, to rebuild the Ottoman-era Taksim Military Barracks as well as a shopping mall. Due to the distrust of mass media (Ozturkmen, 2014), social-media outlets and mobile communication were used for coordinating people and spreading awareness about what was really happening in the Gezi Park. The social-media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, and an instant-messaging services for smartphones, WhatsApp, were used as the main tools by the participants of the Gezi protest not only to spread information, but also to keep friends and families posted about the government’s reconstruction plans for the Taksim area. The environmental protesters staged a peaceful sit-in at Gezi Park and were met with excessive force by the police, in an attempt to “clear the park.” It should also be noted that the term excessive force refers to the use of amount of force of the police with their tear gas, pepper spray, and water cannons, and is used in conjunction with the fact that the protestors were unarmed. The following day, Istanbul Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder threw himself in front of the bulldozers in support of the sit-in protest, which became one of the most important performances of the events surrounding the Gezi protests. By confronting the bulldozers, deputy Önder asked the operators for proper documentation for the deconstruction. After this “heroic” confrontation (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 45), police and bulldozers left the park. Filled with hope, the deputy tweeted to summon more people to come join them in the park, by saying, “They can’t tear down if everybody is here” (Genc, 2016). This was followed by the appearance of the “The Woman in the Red Dress,” who was captured while being sprayed with tear gas from less than a
meter away, even though she had only just arrived at the park site and had not been involved in any provocative acts. Her bright dress quickly became an iconic image of the Gezi resistance on social media. It was even printed on stickers and posters (Independent, 2015) as a symbol of the disproportioned amount of force used by police.

As the number of protesters in Istanbul grew in the wake of these events, footage shared on social-media outlets, namely Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, further demonstrated the use of such power, with the police “setting fire to the tents of protesters occupying Gezi Park in the early hours of the morning” (Amnesty International, 2013, p. 54), as well as using pepper spray and water cannons. After that, the number of protesters increased substantially following public outrage at the excessive forces used against the protesters. The police interventions continued, while tweets on “where and how the police attacked, where to escape, take refuge, get first aid, and also where to watch what had been going on” are circulated (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 46). This led to mass street protests in major cities, such as Ankara, Izmir, Hatay, Eskisehir, Edirne, Bursa, Kocaeli, Samsun and Adana.

However, these events were not covered by the major news outlets TRT, NTV and CNN Türk—according to Ozturkmen (2014), they completely “censored the battle” (p. 48). In a notable example, while the Taksim and Besiktas districts were under attack by water cannons and tear gas canisters, CNN Türk chose to show a documentary on penguins instead (The Guardian, 2013; Ozturkmen, 2014; Gürcan & Peker, 2014). This triggered a series of responses, and “the penguin” became another icon of the Gezi resistance. Conversely, alternative news outlets such as HALK TV, ULUSAL TV, and ARTIBIR had record audience ratings thanks to their coverage of the events (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 49).

On June 1st, the police withdrew from Taksim Square, but protests continued to spread to other cities, followed by the police in those cities (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Amnesty
International, 2013; Özbudun, 2014; Gül et al., 2014; Farro & Demirhisar, 2014). As there were no police present in and around the Gezi Park for about 10 days, it became almost like a festival site, with everyone “conspicuously displaying their group identities, exchanging food and goods, picnicking, storytelling, and sloganeering” (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 50). The park also became a hub for “performance freedom,” where the Taksim Square, which was subject to restricted (or no) public access, became a spot for “soccer games, screenings and daily yoga classes” (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 51). At least for those 10 days, protesters celebrated their victory by multifarious displays of creativity, humor, and performance.

At that time, the Interior Minister Muammer Güler revealed in a public statement that “in the first six days of protest, 1,730 people had been detained in 235 protests held in 67 provinces” (Amnesty International, 2013). The number of detainees reached 4,900 by the end of the protests. As of June 5th, the Turkish Medical Association reported a total of 4,355 injuries in 12 different cities, with the majority of the cases in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Eskişehir. Upon his return from a 4-day trip to North Africa, Prime Minister Erdoğan gave a speech about the protesters, stressing that their actions were illegal, and that a large majority of the injured were the police. He concluded that the “protests must end” (Amnesty International, 2013). These days were especially marked by the creative slogans and banners that surrounded the Taksim Square, targeting the government and Erdoğan himself, echoing “the Turkish public’s need for political humor” (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 52). The Gezi humor was now characterized as a re-ignited form of such humor.

On June 11th, the police intervened in Taksim Square with tear gas and water cannons, putting an end to 11 long peaceful days of square occupation. Clashes between the police and demonstrators continued, followed by the public statement of the Istanbul Governor, justifying the intervention as an attempt to “clear banners from the Atatürk Cultural Center and from around
the Republic Monument” (Ensonhaber.com 2013). The governor concluded his statement by pledging that “there will not be a police intervention in Gezi Park” (Amnesty International, 2013, p. 55).

The following evening, however, the police intervention continued with tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets. Forty-five lawyers were detained “for protesting the detention of another, smaller group of lawyers who wanted to make a press statement condemning police violence against Gezi Park protesters at the Çağlayan Courthouse in Istanbul” (Amnesty International, 2013).

On June 12th, following Erdoğan’s final warning to protesters to evacuate the Gezi Park, the police fired tear gas at the makeshift health clinic in the park in the early hours of the morning in order to end the protesters’ 11-day occupation of the Taksim square and the Gezi Park. The protesters were dispersed by teargases and rubber bullets. A bulldozer had moved in the park to demolish tents that had been set by the Gezi movement (The Guardian, 2013).

On the evening of June 15th, the police moved into the park, ending the occupation completely. They stood guard in the area to prevent further gatherings. The area was also cleared of protest signs and barricades. The police used water cannons, tear gas and plastic bullets in order to prevent the protesters from re-entering the Gezi Park. The use of force by the police continued at the entrance of the Divan Hotel which was where “makeshift health clinic had been established to treat injured protesters” (Amnesty International, 2013), an intervention which filled the hotel lobby with gas.

This period of “increased tension and confrontation” was especially marked by the emergence of creative slogans, particularly with the neologism “chapulling” (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 57). Prime Minister Erdoğan blamed social-media networks, calling out Twitter in particular. “Now we have a menace that is called Twitter,” Erdoğan said. “The best examples of lies can be
found there. To me, social media is the worst menace to society” (BBC.com, 2013; Champion, 2013). The government requested Twitter’s cooperation “to reveal protest-related subscribers” (Radikal, 2013). Online activist groups, such as RedHack3 joined the resistance by hacking the websites of Beyoğlu Police Department, Ankara Police Department, Istanbul Police Department and the National Parliament in order to protest against the police violence and the press censorship. Erdoğan was also at the forefront of the online clashes as he clearly took a stand against social media. Shortly after he called the protesters “çapulcu” (BBC, 2013; The Guardian, 2013) (“looters” in Turkish), slogans of “Chapulling” (Turkish: Çapuling) emerged on social media and then on the walls of Gezi, with the protesters re-appropriating the term, and calling themselves “çapulcu.” Likewise, the original lyrics of American electronic dance music duo LMFAO’s “Party Rock Anthem,” which says “Every day I’m shuffling” was turned it into “Every day I’m chapulling.”

After the evacuation of the occupiers from the square and the park, though Taksim was “lost” to the governmental forces, other neighborhoods were used as substitutes for Taksim. On June 17th, Çarşı (the fan club of Beşiktaş soccer club) announced that the Abbasaga Park in Besiktas “would be the new Gezi Park until the latter was again available for public use” (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 58). This meant that, as Ozturkmen (2014) asserts, Gezi was now an idea, to be “displaced and relocated to multiple sites” (p. 58). The very same day, performance artist Erdem Gündüz decided to display a form of passive activism by standing on Taksim Square, facing the Atatürk Culture Center “without moving for eight hours” (Mee, 2014). At first, the police, who had taken control of the Gezi Park, did not even notice him. When they did finally,

3 RedHack is a Turkish computer hacker group founded in 1997. They have claimed responsibility for hacking such institutions as Turkish police forces, the Turkish Army, and the National Intelligence Organization and many other websites.
they did not know how to handle the situation as he was not breaking the law and was only standing there silently. Gündüz’s protest was “so influential that the following day the number of standing men and women in Taksim Square reached 300” (Ozturkmen, 2014, p. 58). By then, at least 16 solitary protesters were detained and released after eight hours, while the total number of injured in the protests reported by the Turkish Medical Association rose to 7,478 (Amnesty International, 2013).

On Sunday, June 23rd, The Ministry of the Interior reported that “almost 2.5 million people have taken part in demonstrations in 79 of Turkey’s 81 provinces,” with roughly “4,900 people [...] detained for various periods of time” (Amnesty International, 2013). On Monday, June 24th, Erdoğan praised the police “for their brave, heroic actions during the Gezi Park protests” (Amnesty International, 2013) in a public address at a police academy graduation ceremony. Two weeks later, on July 8th, Istanbul Governor Hüseyin Avni Mutlu briefly opened the park to the public, which was quickly filled with activists. Following this, the police announced that the park needed to be evacuated, which they followed once again with tear gas and plastic bullets. As a result, 50 citizens, including representatives of Taksim Solidarity were detained after peacefully attempting to enter Gezi Park later in the day (Amnesty International, 2013). On Wednesday, July 10th, according to the updated report by the Turkish Medical Association, the number of injured people had risen to 8,038 at the scene of the Gezi demonstrations.

Meanwhile, five people had died during the course of the Gezi protests, and most of these deaths were evidently linked to the police brutality. As an example, after having been badly beaten while running away from a police intervention at a protest in Eskişehir, 19-year-old protester Ali Ismail Korkmaz was pronounced dead. Following this event, “five people including one police officer were later arrested and charged with his murder” (Amnesty International,
Four days later, all of the representatives of Taksim Solidarity who had previously been detained on July 8th were released (Amnesty International, 2013) without any official explanation. On Monday, July 22nd, the police cleared the peaceful protesters in Hatay’s Sevgi Park in the early hours of the morning as they did not want protesters to gather around the parks. The use of tear gas and water cannons against protesters by the police continued on Taksim Square. Four days later, on July 26th, prosecutors charged 73 people for “attending the funeral procession of Ethem Sarisülük, a protester shot dead by police” (Amnesty International, 2013) in Ankara. On Wednesday July 31st, a massive gathering took place in Taksim for the 14-year-old Berkin Elvan, who was in a coma after being hit by a gas canister on his way to buy bread. Elvan passed away on March 10th, 2014, after nine months in a coma. Thousands marched “with a piece of bread in their hands” to commemorate Elvan’s tragic death (Wohlwender, 2014). On the following day, well-known columnist Can Dündar was fired from Milliyet newspaper for covering the Gezi resistance. Indeed, the Union of Turkish Journalists reported that 81 journalists were fired because they covered the Gezi Park events.

On August 3rd, the police again confronted the protesters who were in and around Gezi Park. The intervention continued through the night. On Monday August 19th, the police in Hatay used water cannons and tear gas on protesters who were commemorating “the 40th day since the death of Ali Ismail Korkmaz” (Amnesty International, 2013). On the following day, the police confronted the participants and supporters of “Walk for Justice,” a group of four who walked from Antalya to Istanbul to draw attention to “the lack of justice” for those who were the victims of police violence during the resistance.

According to many sources, the protests were the most challenging events for Erdoğan’s ten-year term and the most significant nationwide unrest in decades (The Gulf News, 2013; Euronews, 2013). Although the scale and frequency of demonstrations died down as of August
2013, the government consented not to build either the shopping mall or the military barracks in the place of the park. Nevertheless, many lawyers, journalists, or even ordinary citizens who had supported, posted or tweeted about the protests lost their jobs and faced criminal charges (The Guardian, 2014).

For Mücella Yapici, founding member of the activist group Taksim Solidarity, the Gezi protests were only the beginning: “A new solidarity was born in June, and it's not over. The most important thing is that the people re-learned how to raise their voices against the crimes and injustices that are being committed against them. Gezi was a lesson in democracy.” (The Guardian, 2014). Yapici also told the reporters of The Guardian that “Gezi created an awareness of urban renewal processes, of solidarity with victims of gentrification and displacement, and awareness for our city. We don't accept any more that decisions concerning our living spaces are simply forced down our throats.” This quote sums up the aftermath of this long and complicated series of events.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided some context about the events that took place throughout the course of the Gezi protests. To narrate the events in a linear form was not an easy feat, since some of them happened simultaneously. However, having an account of all the incidents that happened in those days will help us understand the Gezi actor-network, including the actions of protesters, the police, the government, as well as the mobile technologies, and public spaces.

After demonstrating what happened day by day in the Gezi days, in the following chapter I analyze the role of social media in social movements to understand these events. Then, I present my review of the literature on art and humor in social movements to better synthesize the role of each of these main actors in the following chapters.
Chapter Two

The role of social media in the Gezi Protests

Introduction

For social movements and protesters, social media is useful in many ways, such as exchanging ideas, sharing information, and raising awareness towards their cause. Social media also serves as “a space for the creation of counterpublics to challenge existing power structures, and for new social meanings to emerge” (Jenzen & McGarry, 2017). In this chapter, I examine the role of social media in social movements. Specifically, I examine the role of social media in the Gezi protests in particular, by discussing the mainstream media environment in Turkey, as well as the use of social media by the government. To do that, I analyze two different “viral” images that spread across social media throughout the course of the protests. The first is the “woman in red,” initially captured by a Reuters journalist in May 28, 2013 in Istanbul while she was visiting the protest and became the target of the police violence. The image was named after her red summer dress as she was wearing one when she was sprayed. Because it spread out so quickly via social media, it quickly became one of the memorable symbols of the disproportionate amount of violence exerted by the police during the Gezi protests. The second image, the “woman in black,” depicts another female protester who became a hero after standing bravely in front of a Mass Incident Intervention Vehicle (TOMA) in Istanbul, in her black dress. I conclude by highlighting the importance of tracing the role of each actor in the Gezi network.
Connecting people in revolt: The Role of Social and Mobile Media in Social Movements

The mobilization politics and methods of individual and mass activist groups are significantly influenced and informed by the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (van de Donk et al., 2004). These new developments in ICTs point to a shift in the forms of protest, where mobile communication technologies added the ability to disseminate news and images of more traditional practices (e.g., occupying a public space, gathering en masse, making protest signs), offering mass movements plenty of opportunity for coordination and communication as well as posing threats to them.

With newer movements focusing on concepts such as “diversity, decentralization, informality and grassroots democracy rather than unity, centralization, formality and strong leadership” (van de Donk et al., 2004, p. 3), it becomes possible to compare and contrast the influence of ICTs on the journey of these movements, as well as how the ICTs fit their needs and purposes. With non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace using the Internet and ICTs to spread their message to young and old, the effectiveness of such tools becomes visible on a global scale and influences the formation of public opinions. As explained by Bimber, Flanagin and Stohl (2009), the Internet is a formidable tool that “blurs public and private boundaries” (p. 72) with cost-effective solutions, therefore enabling the masses to access all types of information and discover new systems to manage and disseminate that information.

These new forms of information dissemination take shape with examples of Internet-based collective action and organization (Bimber, Flanagin & Stohl, 2009), such as mailing lists, forums of discussion and social-media platforms, as well as the strategies that surround the way individuals engage with the messages of those particular collective actions. Groups are joined by new members, new groups are formed, new alliances are created in various contexts, “from
Indonesia to the Middle East (Kalathil & Boas, 2003; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003) to Iraq (Arieanna, 2005) and to Mexico (Ferdinand, 2000).”

Furthermore, ICTs facilitate political action and amplify its visibility, making it easier and cost-effective for particular messages to be spread and encouraging the formation of “collective action” (van de Donk et al., 2004). As argued by Bimber (1998), groups who are outside the traditional political and institutional constructs can benefit from the influence of ICTs for that particular reason, as they do not depend on formal resources or support.

As an example of collective action, “The Battle of Seattle” (Armond, 2001; Rheingold, 2003) was a series of protests where mobile technologies and the web were primary means of communication, where the protesters were not financed by any official bodies or had a certain hierarchy or structure in their mobilization. By using efficient ICT communication techniques, the protesters made their intentions clear and protested against the WTO meeting that was about to take place.

Similarly, the “People Power” (Castells et al., 2009; Rheingold, 2003; Rafael, 2003) protests in the Philippines were also organized by a swarm of text messages amongst the public, following the annulled impeachment of the nation’s president. Thousands organized via SMS and started protesting on the Edsa Square (which in turn caused the protests to be dubbed EDSA-2, after another famous series of protests in the same location after the Marcos regime was brought to an end). It is reported that the EDSA-2 (a.k.a. People Power II) demonstrations gathered over a million protesters. During People Power II, the mobile phone played “a major role in message dissemination, political mobilization, and the coordination of campaign logistics” (Castells et al., 2009, p. 193). However, as suggested by Castells et al. (2009), “the mobile phone was limited in the social scope of its influence due to the digital divide” (p. 193). Likewise, Rafael (2003) points out the over-praised power of the mobile media among the middle classes in the Philippines by
stating that although some members of the lower classes joined this movement, they were “voiceless” in the “telecommunicative fantasies about the cell phone,” as most of the poor protesters did not own cell phones, unlike the middle-class protesters (p. 400).

Another protest of similar nature took place in China, where factory workers unionized by text messages in the wake of an alleged cover-up of an epidemic outbreak by the Chinese government. The news of “a fatal flu in Guangdong” were quickly circulated and soon reached 120 million citizens via text messages (Hoenig, 2003; Rheingold, 2003; Castells et al., 2009). As the government responded by criminalizing the spread of outbreak rumors via text, this was seen as an outright confirmation. Following this event, other protests that took place in the country were also observed to put emphasis on mobile and web technologies in their communication methods.

Mobile technology use in collective action was also observed in the TXTmob application in the U.S., which was created with the aim of providing protest groups with information on the protests against the Republican National Convention in NYC. The application later ran into technical problems and was revealed to have been marked as spam by mobile operators. As a tool intended to “support the counter-counter reaction of demonstration organizers” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 233), TXTmob it can arguably be pointed to as an example of text messaging as a medium for facilitating the organization of mass movements. It should also be noted, however, while ICTs had significant roles in the aforementioned protests, there were other prominent elements, including human and non-human factors involved within the actor networks of these movements. For example, as in the case of the “fatal flu in Guangdong”, mobile communication technologies worked in unison with the issues of politics and power relations between the Chinese government and the factory workers.
ICTs can also function as “nonviolent direct action” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 235). For instance, Amnesty International makes use of text messages for communicating their alerts and bringing certain political issues into the spotlight. As blogger Turrettini (2003) points out:

Participants in their campaigns, opt-in by signing up online and giving their mobile number. They will then receive an “action” SMS every two weeks… The latest one sent out for instance, was concerning the plight of a 16-year-old boy who has been abducted in Guatemala. The recipient replies to this “action” SMS with a simple “yes,” which will serve as a digital signature, his name then added to a petition which Amnesty International will send off to the Guatemala government to pressure them into releasing the boy (Turrettini, 2003).

As explained by Anneke Bosman in 2004, Amnesty International has also prevailed in helping a political prisoner from the Democratic Republic of Congo by posting alerts via SMS – actions which usually prompt calls and letters by their audience to relevant authorities.

To sum up, the dynamics of dissent politics and collective action constitute spheres that are directly influenced by the effectiveness of mobile and web communication technologies.

While the aforementioned examples in no way constitute a certain moralistic leaning, their contributions to the formation of what might be called “smart mobs” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 236) quickly points out how the dissemination of information (or disinformation) by such means holds paramount importance. As also stated by Henry and Hirsch (2005) and Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2005), if these tools are increasingly adopted by political authorities, they might also turn into means of “surveillance, jamming, and countermeasures” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 237).

As a chosen medium for the masses, the Internet has become the central stage on which political collective action manifests itself in today’s information age. From religious movements to environmental ones, it is a space that constantly evolves and extends in scope. With examples
ranging from the Zapatista movements in Mexico to Falun Gong in China, political movements have continuously displayed a growing tendency to utilize ICTs for the organization, planning and execution of mass action.

As an extension of that tendency, the individual or collective movements have also found ways to conduct what may be termed “hacker-activist protests” (Castells, 2002, p. 139), targeting the online presence of their object(s) of dissent, whether they be governments or large corporations. One notable example was the hacking of the sites for pro-Israel organizations by pro-Palestinian hackers in 2000 (Castells, 2002), where the sites were then modified to display propaganda for the opposing side.

In other instances, such as the Egyptian revolution, we see collective action with the help of SMS, tweets and videos that go viral—specifically demonstrated in the example of business student Asmaa Mafhouz’s viral vlog post, later called “The Vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution” (Wall & El Zahed, 2011). Following the vlog, thousands of people congregated on Tahrir Square, turning it into a public space for protest and expression, calling for the “resignation of Mubarak and the end of the regime” (Castells, 2015, p. 56).

It can therefore be inferred that telecommunication networks, the web and social media on the whole contribute significantly to the formation of public spaces through dissent and protest action, as exemplified in the case of the Egyptian revolution. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most scholars (e.g., Khondker, 2011; Lotan et al., 2011; Stepanova, 2011) and media have somewhat overemphasized the role of technology and its impacts on the developments in the Middle East. Specifically, the media utilized the term “Twitter revolutions” for the Arab Spring and attributed the swift spread of revolution to the role of social-media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, thus reducing the whole network to only one cause and ignoring the possibility that there might be other actors involved in the network. It is important to highlight that Facebook and
Twitter were only one of the media that used to disseminate ideas and information in a more efficient way. The whole network is a complex web of diverse human and non-human actors, such as institutions, difficult socioeconomic conditions, activists, journalists, mainstream media organizations, participants, political actors, satellite television, cell phones, and ICTs. As explained later by Allagui and Kuebler (2011), the Arab Revolutions that took place in Egypt and Tunisia were examples of “the power of networks” (pp. 1435-1436). The reason for protesters gathered in the squares and streets was not to follow any leaders, political parties, or gatekeepers, rather they assembled and mobilized due to the socioeconomic conditions they had been living in (unemployment, the high costs of living, inequalities among classes, censorship, corruption, and social repressions). One of the most important driving forces behind the gatherings and uprisings was “the flow of networks to which people belong: networks of friends, family, work, school and so forth” (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011, p. 1436). These networks, which pre-exist the events of protest, created a space for interaction, reciprocity and solidarity among the members, thus proved “the motivating power of social relations” (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011, p. 1436). Members, through these networks, confronted “dictators, their online censors, and the offline police” (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011, p. 1436). Therefore, this brings us to the over-celebrated role of Twitter and shows that social-media tools do not cause revolutions on their own.

Similarly, in February 2011 the Spanish euro-crisis saw the creation of a small network on Facebook, led by individuals from Madrid, Barcelona, Jerez, and other cities. Called the “Platform of Coordination of Groups Pro-Citizen Mobilization”, the group expressed their wishes to defend the country’s Internet users against the pro-censorship Sinde Law. Later evolving to become the “Democracia Real Ya” (Real Democracy Now) forum, the network had a decentralized nature where each city pursued unique, localized and collective action, with mass regular meetings and new members flooding into the group. They defended that the political
majority in the senate were not interested in the wellbeing of the citizens and this stance was later brought to the streets, much like the Arab revolutions that preceded it.

According to Castells (2015), the nature of the aforementioned movements across the globe points to a networking tendency with “multiple forms” (p. 249). With the highly connected and fast-paced nature of online communication, already existing forms of networking are further enhanced and members of society are put into contact with one another with new networks every day, revolving around movements and new ideological platforms. While social and political movements are often associated with masses that take over the streets, this new dimension adds to the weight and extent of the movement in question by making it decentralized and very easy to access, with no “formal leadership, command and control center” (Castells, 2015, p. 249).

However, as Shirky (2011) states, the use of social media and online communication tools does not always have a predetermined, positive outcome in terms of collective action. It has been known to backfire on various occasions as many governments find the use of social media by activists too dangerous and willing to diminish social media’s sphere of influence. For example, the 2006 protests against President Aleksandr Lukashenko's vote rigging scandal in Belarus, the June 2009 Green Movement protests in Iran and the 2010 Red Shirt protests in Thailand, where in each incident the respective government(s) attempted to censor, limit or otherwise de-emphasize the message that was being spread. This goes to show that the success rate of such tools has a mixed nature and is often subject to direct interference by authoritarian governments.

In terms of the influence of social media on politics, according to Shirky (2011), there are two different stances. One defends that the tools alone are unfortunately “ineffective” (Gladwell, 2010), whereas the other contends that the interference of social media on politics on the national scale does harm and good at the same time. While some journalists like Gladwell (2010) insist that the tools are short on any action and argue that participants cannot seek social change via
low-cost activities, such as joining Facebook groups; some scholars like Shirky (2011) concentrate on the dual role of these tools. In addition to empowering the mass movements, the tools also prompt the governments that are the target of dissent to learn how to use them better.

As contended by Malcolm Gladwell in *The New Yorker*, the “ineffectiveness” criticism focuses on the idea of “slacktivism” (Morozov, 2011), where the individuals feel that taking a minimal amount of action (such as sharing a post or joining a group) is in itself enough contribution to their particular cause. Similar terms include “cheap talk” or “clicktivism” (Morozov, 2011). This is contrasted, however, by the power of social-media tools to organize masses and coordinate collective action, as seen in the case of the education oriented protests in Chile, as well as the protests against fundamentalist vigilante culture in India (Shirky, 2011). This further strengthens the idea that social-media tools are a way of supporting the collective action and the dissent that comes with it.

This makes way for the second argument at hand, which points towards the “increasingly sophisticated means of monitoring” (Shirky, 2011, p. 7) that is undertaken by governmental bodies in the face of collective action. For instance, the Chinese government took various precautions to censor political content on social media, with a sophisticated surveillance system in place—however, they also do recognize that the main source of dissent for them is not outside influences (such as The New York Times), but rather their own public that is airing their grievances with the regime (Shirky, 2011).

As seen in the examples of Bahrain’s banning of Google Earth (Shirky, 2011) to cover up a royal land scandal and the Thai government’s censorship of telecommunications systems to cut off protest coverage, there is an increasing tendency amongst authoritarian regimes to shut down their communication systems entirely to avoid political dissent and allow the general public to find out about apparent political conflicts between the government and protesters. While it is easy
to believe that social-media tools can influence collective action and inspire change, both the protesters and the governments are willing to use these tools for their own respective purposes.

Following the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, there has been significant debate on the contributions of the Internet and social-media channels in inspiring collective action and political change within authoritarian contexts. Some see the Internet as a “disruptive” element (Aday et al., 2010; Howard, 2010), whereas others argue that it can act as an auxiliary element for authoritarian governments (Morozov, 2011).

In an example of that disruptive nature, Egyptian revolutionaries, dissenters and minority groups alike used the Internet in opposition to the Mubarak regime. Although censorship did not occur in general, many were sent to jail. The online pushback was later followed by protests in real life, in the form of a labor strike. The Kefaya (“Enough”) movement was born in support of the strike on April 6th, and the dissenters were able to express themselves on social media and broadcast channels. In 2009, Facebook was launched in the Arabic language, which provided the revolution with a vital platform. At this junction, Tufekci and Wilson argue that before the Tunisian revolution began, the “physical protests in Egypt remained fairly small and the regime appeared to be firmly in control” (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 2).

Upon the Tunisian protests, a Facebook page appeared: “We are All Khaled Said” (Baker, 2011; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). Real-time content was published during the demonstrations, access to Internet was limited between January 25 and February 2 (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), and the “small but technologically savvy group of protestors” (p. 22) did not stop sharing information, exposing corruption and creating content. As a result, the protests were followed by the resignation of President Mubarak.

In that light, Tufekci and Wilson defend that these series of protests in the Middle East and North Africa took shape by the introduction and influence of new communication
technologies and the increased use of social-media platforms and mobile technologies resulted in a low-cost, effective and decentralized system of information dissemination that eventually “topple(d) a longstanding authoritarian regime” (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 15). They also add that there is “a monumental shift in the ability of everyday citizens in repressive societies to document and express their desires for social change” (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 15).

The Gezi movement in Turkey followed a similar trajectory in the sense that social media played a crucial role. Yet to understand the Gezi network fully, we need to investigate the mainstream media environment in Turkey.

**Mainstream Media in Turkey: A Brief Overview**

Turkey has a rapidly growing media and entertainment sector in spite of the constraints placed on free press. A small number of wealthy companies own nearly all of the country’s most important outlets in both television and print. National newspapers based in Istanbul and Ankara account for 80.6 percent of the country’s annual circulation, and at most a dozen of those dominate the national conversation on domestic politics and international affairs. Most media outlets have well-known political allegiances. Sözcü is Kemalist (also known as Atatürkism, is the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey), BirGün is leftist, Yeni Şafak is Islamist, Zaman is associated with the Gülen movement (an exiled cleric currently living in the U.S.), and so on.

There is also a group of newspapers considered “mainstream” which can reach an audience beyond the believers of one ideological group. These papers include Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, and Akşam. The government’s efforts to control the media have focused most of its attention and pressure on these “mainstream” outlets. The government’s main idea is to reduce these papers’ independence. For example, the government forced the sales of Sabah and Akşam to pro-government business groups in order to assert more control on media. Also, Milliyet has
fired some of its most liberal and well-known columnists like Hasan Cemal and Can Dündar just because of the fear of the government. Therefore, step-by-step these mainstream media outlets have become mouthpieces for the government, in other words “Erdoganist” media.

The tools used to control and influence media outlets and journalists existed before the AK Party (the ruling party in Turkey) came to power. But the party has used them with increasing frequency and force. Turkey ranks number 157 out of 180 countries in terms of press freedom according to Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom Index, 2018). According to Stockholm Center for Freedom, 240 journalists are in jail as of May 12, 2017 and many more have pending court cases.

The failure of the mainstream media corporations to cover the events pushed people in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul, towards the use of social media, mainly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Periscope, where users posted solidarity messages and provided the rest of the country with real photos and live footages of the horrifying street battle. According to several scholars, the Internet and information technologies played one of the most important roles in the occurrence of this event (Oz, 2016; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2013; Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016).

Social Media and the State

Government officials were following a completely different course of action regarding the use of social and mobile media. Calling the protesters looters or extremists, as mentioned in previous chapters, Erdoğan blamed social media, especially Twitter, for provoking the protests. “There is now a menace which is called Twitter,” Erdoğan said. “The best examples of lies can be found there. To me, social media is the worst menace to society” (The Guardian, 2013).

Despite Erdoğan’s continuous criticism of social media, Twitter in particular, many party branches already had their own Twitter accounts and active Twitter users among the party
members (Saka, 2014). For example, Mehmet Şimşek (then the Minister of Finance), Melih Gökçek (then the Mayor of Ankara), and AK Party advisor Ibrahim Kalın frequently expressed opinions on Twitter, especially throughout the Gezi protests. In addition to the Twitter usage of the government officials, the AK Party launched campaigns on the platform highlighting discussion topics in favor of themselves through the pro-AK Party “trolls” (a term that refers to the Twitter users who have the specific goal of attacking opposing views). Their main goal is to promote the party agenda, as well as challenge the opposition, in this case the protesters. The AK Party also used Twitter, during the Gezi protests, to organize meetings and rallies with their supporters at the Istanbul Kazlıçeşme Square. In his speech, Erdoğan condemned social-media sites such as Twitter and Facebook rather than addressing the ongoing use of force by the police (Amnesty International, 2013). Despite Erdoğan’s condemnation, “social-media channels were escalated to the status of the major source of information and the primary devices of communication” during the Gezi protests (Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016, p. 7).

Although social media could be deemed a successful tool in the absence of traditional media, it had a mixed nature, as the government used it, too for their own purposes and was subject to direct interference by the government. For instance, the they launched Twitter campaigns through the pro-AK Party trolls. Moreover, many lawyers, journalists, and citizens who posted or tweeted about their support for the protests lost their jobs and some even faced criminal charges (The Guardian, 2014). Thus, the role of social media should not be separated from the actions of other actors, such as the state and citizens. Even though it had downsides, such as providing a platform for the government to raise hatred towards the protesters and surveilling citizens, social media played a crucial role in the Gezi protests. Yet to fully understand the Gezi network, ANT helps me investigate the effectiveness of social media, therefore pointing me towards the mainstream media environment in Turkey. Without unearthing
the entanglement between the failure of the mainstream media corporations and the use of social media, we cannot understand the Gezi actor-network. As discussed in depth in Chapter 2, the failure of the mainstream media corporations to cover the Gezi protests, urged people to use social media, where users could obtain information and communicate with other participants of the protests. Therefore, people relied on social-media technologies as sources of information partly due to the total blackout of the mass media outlets. However, social media allowed for “increasingly sophisticated means of monitoring” (Shirky, 2011, p. 7) by governmental bodies in the face of collective action. For instance, the government monitored the protesters’ online practices during the Gezi protests and arrested 90 of them for their use of Twitter, accusing them of using social media to fuel anti-government propaganda (Gasaway Hill, 2018).

In addition to the views expressed by Shirky, some scholars like Aday et al. (2010), Howard (2010), and Morozov (2011) view the Internet as a “disruptive” element, as they argue that it can act as a supplementary element for governments (Morozov, 2011). To exemplify, many people were arrested for expressing their views online, including artists, lawyers, writers, and actors. The police also took 39 journalists, who shared their thoughts online and participated in public demonstrations, into custody (Yaman, 2014). In order to better understand the role social-media channels played during the Gezi protests, we need an in-depth look at the two viral images that spread across the online environment, the “woman in red” and the “woman in black.”

“Woman in Red”

Similar to the above-mentioned protest movements in other countries, social networking sites and mobile media had important roles in the Gezi protests. Social media facilitated mobilization and organization, as well as filled the gap for freedom of expression, due to the lack of free mass media (Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016). Moreover, social-media channels, such as
Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, “escalated to the status of the major source of information and the primary devices of communication” (Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016, p. 7). In addition to that, Shaw (2014) lays out the different uses of social media throughout the Gezi protests:

On the evening of May 31, my Facebook feed shifted from its usual eclectic articles and pictures of cute cats to instructions on how to make an improvised gas mask from a water bottle and a handkerchief; maps of police vs. protest barricades in the neighborhood where I used to work; recipes for teargas antidotes; announcements about escape routes as well as police traps; reports, photographs, and videos of violence and injuries; and images of tear-gas floating across familiar streets and buildings.

One of the roles of social media during the Gezi protests was to allow organizations to meet many needs, “such as shelter, food, human networks” (Yılmaz & Yılmaz, 2015, p. 2813). Furthermore, with the help of social media, several instances of performance art and humorous texts, including “performance, graphic design, cartoons, tweets, and graffiti” (Shaw, 2014) were easily accessible to the public. The anonymous nature of authorship on social media enables the spread of artistic, humoristic, and creative works and texts by multiple authors, cultural producers, and consumers, thus highlighting the “voice of the collective”, instead of reducing the Gezi network to single author names or brands. By thwarting the role of censorship over mass media in Turkey, “the anonymity of authorship enhanced the ability of online cultural producers and commentators to recycle images that connected previous responses to the evolving chain of events” (Shaw, 2014). Many diverse (yet collective) voices, artists, producers, consumers, or actors of the Gezi network reproduced and reworked anonymous images through the mediation of social media.

One crucial image, which summarized the disproportionate amount of violence exerted by the police, was the “woman in red” (Figure 2). This was the first popular meme or image
emerged from a Reuters photograph (Shaw, 2014). The photo, one of the most shared images of the Gezi protests on social media (New York Daily News, 2013), was reproduced as cartoons, memes, and so on, thus becoming the leitmotif for female protesters during the difficult days of the Gezi demonstrations in the country. In the photograph, captured by Osman Orsal (a photographer for Reuters), a woman dressed in a red cotton dress carrying a white tote bag is seen being sprayed by a policeman during the Gezi demonstrations in Taksim Square in downtown Istanbul on May 28. The heroine of the famous photograph was an academic at a university who had been visiting the peaceful protest when she became the target of the pepper-spray of one of the officers in Taksim Square (New York Daily News, 2013). The image successfully displayed the state violence against the individual during the protests (Shaw, 2014).

*Figure 2. Woman in Red. Taksim Square, Istanbul, May 28, 2013. Courtesy REUTERS/Osman Orsal.*
This unplanned and spontaneous moment, when the “woman in red” was captured, was then transformed into one of the symbols of the Gezi, as some of the design students at Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir recreated the scene by enlarging the image and making a hole in the place of the woman’s face so that protesters could pose as “the woman in red.” (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A cardboard billboard with a drawing of the “woman in red” figure. Izmir, Turkey. Retrieved from https://www.theverge.com/2013/6/7/4405412/ceyda-sungur-lady-in-red-photo-becomes-symbol-of-turkey-protests.

Afterwards, the same image was turned into LEGO (Figure 4) by a LEGO photographer, whose work circulated on Instagram and Twitter, and later into a miniature painting (Figure 5) by Taha Alkan, which became the cover for NTV Tarih (a weekly Turkish history magazine, which was closed down in 2013 due to this coverage of the Gezi protests). This transformation of the “woman in red” exemplifies the nature of the Gezi protests, an evolving chain of events. By
tracing the interwoven connections between the actor-networks, such as the photograph, the woman subject, the police officer, the design students, the coverage of NTV Tarih, and finally social networking sites along with the mobile media, it is clear that they worked in unison and enabled the circulation of this image of the “woman in red.” Thus, multiple active participants (actors such as the photograph Orsal’s lens captured, social media technologies that helped the spread of it, memes and appropriations of the original act) distributed data about this precise moment and contributed to the movement of this defining image of the protests. This network created by the various participants also mapped the interaction dynamics (e.g., the decision of the anonymous users to post the photograph to Twitter and Facebook) that supported the spread of the image.

*Figure 4.* The Lego “woman in red” figure. Retrieved from https://i.pinimg.com/originals/90/c0/53/90c053291b987a40e4de720dbb7ef59d.jpg.
Social media provides a platform for individuals to come together and form new networks, in which they were able to resist state violence through their creative side (Özbank, 2013, pp. 28–37). Thus, it fueled creativity during the Gezi protests by paving the way for the emergence of “intellectual transformation” (Yalcintas, 2015, p. 21), which will be touched upon in the following two chapters. As discussed by Yalcintas (2015), “individuals with instincts of creativity and humor shifted the intellectual paradigm in the country towards a collective experience of politics as arts and ingenuity” (p. 7). The Gezi protests had a great impact on the intellectual life of the country as they transformed and inspired “musicians, film-makers, novelists, poets, writers, social scientists, and other members of the creative class out of a concern for the aesthetics of the protests” (Yalcintas, 2015, p. 7).

“Woman in Black”

Parallel to the “woman in red” phenomenon, several consecutive photographs, images, and memes of female protesters went viral on social media. It is no surprise that two of the most powerful images of the resistance feature females. Although the protests stemmed from an environmental issue, many other issues and government policies had effects on the emergence of the protests, too. Some of those issues (e.g., legislations about restricting access to abortions and birth control) involved the country’s female population. “One of the truly remarkable aspects of the recent protests in Istanbul and around the country has been the level of participation and visibility of women,” Anna Wood (an American freelance journalist living in Istanbul) said. “Easily half the crowd at any given protest that I've seen has been female” (The Verge, 2013).

A woman in a black dress became one of the most remarkable symbols of the Gezi protests when a photograph was published illustrating her standing in front of a Mass Incident Intervention Vehicle (TOMA) in Istanbul. The so-called “woman in black” (Figure 6) image made the Australian exchange student Kate Mullen go viral through social media (Hürriyet Daily News, 2013). Her unplanned performance indicated the spontaneity of the Gezi protests. The protagonist of the popular photograph told BBC Türkçe:

I noticed that there was a large group of photographers nearby and in order to emphasize the peacefulness of the protests despite the [police] violence, I decided to stand in front of a TOMA and open my arms. I wasn’t afraid. I didn’t think they would hose me down but if they did, I knew it would be an amazing photograph. (BBC Türkçe, 2013).
The “woman in black” photograph operated as “an aesthetic trope through the implicit iconography of crucifixion” (Shaw, 2014), reflecting the feature of social media that enables political aesthetic expression. Moreover, the photograph bore close resemblance to Delacroix’s painting, *Liberty Leading the People*⁴ (1834) (Figure 7). Although one shows a woman in an active leadership role and the other shows her a victim, both the photograph and the painting illustrate the struggle for civil liberties, as an ordinary person emerges from the masses and

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⁴ *Liberty Leading the People* is a painting by Eugène Delacroix commemorating the July Revolution of 1830, which overthrew King Charles X of France. The painting depicts a woman, symbolizing the notion of liberty, who leads people over a barricade and dead bodies, holding the flag of the French Revolution in her hand.
replaces leaders by leading people to revolution. This image stood for the theme of “revolution,” as it “rearticulated the myth of a spontaneous popular uprising set against the tenuous hopes of revolution, often articulated through the symbolic deployment of women’s bodies” (Shaw, 2014). The spontaneous decision of the Australian student to stand in front of a TOMA was an unplanned act, thus proving the improvisational character of the performances during the Gezi protests. Yet it should also be noted that the driving forces behind the uprisings were not as impulsive as this act. It could also be added that the protagonist of the photograph is “reminiscent of the personified Liberty” (Shaw, 2014) with her simple dress and her hope of social change. The resemblance of the “woman in black” photograph to the iconic Liberty is significant because it entails the disavowal of “the masculine rhetoric of Erdoğan’s state paternalism” (Shaw, 2014).
Tracing the associations between numerous human and non-human actors and objects (such as the TOMA the woman in black was facing, photographers along with their cameras, the woman’s body, and social-media technologies), the “woman in black” constitutes only one of several nodes of the Gezi actor-network. This image is not about this woman anymore; it is about an action which is “borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated” between several actors that all played important roles in mobilizing and holding the Gezi network together (Latour, 2005, p. 46). The impromptu act of Kate Mullen did not work
independently as there were other actors involved in the network, too. For instance, her actions would not have been disseminated and circulated on Facebook, Twitter, Bobiler.org, uludağ sözlük, and several online newspapers if it was not for the large group of photographers nearby.

In addition to the circulation of the photograph itself, there were several memes involved in this network, which utilized iconic images like the “woman in black” and reconstructed the meaning behind it (Bozkuş, 2016). Such memes mainly emerged to protest the sheer use of force by the police. In one of the memes, a former Galatasaray (a Turkish soccer team) soccer player Didier Drogba (Figure 8) stands in front of the pressurized water in the place of the “woman in black”.

![Figure 8. #Çare Drogba / Drogba is the Solution. Retrieved from https://galeri.uludagsozluk.com/t/gezi-park%C4%B1-sembolleri-475022/](image)

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5 Bobiler.org is a satirical website, which publishes memes and videos.
6 Uludağ Sözlük is an online social community website.
Another instance of memes that spread on mainly Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr was a birthday cake for celebrating the first anniversary of the Gezi protests (Figure 9). The TOMA was depicted to spray water on the cake to blow the candle on it. Both instances demonstrate that participatory media and memetic practices were frequently employed by anonymous users during the protests, thus increasing the spread of the “woman in black”.

Figure 9. Gezi 1-Year-Old. Retrieved from https://www.bobiler.org/etiket/pasta

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, social media was an important stream in the manifest of the Gezi protests, as it fueled creativity, offered a site for political expression for youth, helped political art, along with the protest humor, and enhanced public participation. However, social media was not the utmost force in the Gezi protests, as these protests were performed in streets,
too. Therefore, ANT allows me to highlight the intersection of diverse actors, such as offline (public spaces) and online (social media) practices during the protests, rather than reducing the protests to one element or attributing the whole Gezi network to only one cause.

To better understand the role of social media in the Gezi protests, I analyzed two viral images: the “woman in red” and the “woman in black”. Both of these images illustrated female protagonists, who were ordinary people. The contribution of these female figures to the Gezi network was significant. Because both iconic figures repudiated the patriarchal discourse and reinforced “the protesters’ faith in their invincibility even in the face of brutal police violence” (Parla, 2013). In doing so, they rejected “the fragility of the body” (Parla, 2013) against the armed police force. In the next chapter, I turn to the role of art in public spaces during the protests by first defining public spaces and then demonstrating how they are transformed by the protesters’ use of art. Therefore, it is vital to recognize and devise an understanding of what constitutes public spaces in order to pave the way for constructing a counter-hegemony against the political and economic authorities as well as serving as a stage for humor, creativity, and art among the youth.
Chapter Three

The role of art in public spaces in the Gezi Protests

“Imagination expands slowly and strikes suddenly.”

– Can Altay

Introduction

As Altay, an Istanbul-based visual artist puts it, the role of art and humor in the Gezi protests should be examined with great care as it paved the way for the people of Turkey to imagine and invent something that is new. Art, humor, and social media merged in the network of Gezi to help people create multiple platforms to raise their voices and claim the power to protect their public spaces and their lives.

Art is pervasive in many political movements and it is instrumental in the achievement of its objectives (Adams, 2002). For example, art in public spaces has been a critical part of the shantytown women’s protests in Pinochet’s Chile. Art-making raised awareness among the shantytown women who were unemployed, abused, tortured, or victimized by the regime and helped them earn their own income to support their families. In the US, songs sung during the civil rights movement between 1954 and 1968 played a significant role in solidifying the stance of the activists and the ethos of the social movement. Likewise, rock music acted as a communicator of the punk/rock movement’s ethos to the public in East Germany. By examining the role of art in public spaces in the Gezi protests, I demonstrate that protesters used art to revolt against the authority of the state in transforming the public space. My ultimate goal is to show how art is an essential element of social movements in general.
Before delving into the role of art in the Gezi protests, I begin this chapter with the role of art in social movements. Then I turn to a brief definition of public spaces and an analysis of the role of public spaces in social movements. I then focus on the Gezi protests, followed by an in-depth analysis of three prominent examples of art in public spaces during the protests: “The Standing Man” public performance, “The Whirling Dervish With a Gas Mask,” public performance in Taksim Square, and an example of street art: penguins on the walls, sometimes with gas masks, and sometimes marching. I conclude by arguing that we need to trace the associations between the various human and non-human actors of Gezi to better understand the dynamics of the network.

**The Role of Art in Social Movements**

Several scholars suggest that social movements use artistic expression to communicate with the larger society (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Kaplan, 1993; Neustadter, 1992), as well as internally. First, raising political awareness via public art can help mobilize protesters (Chaffe, 1993; Denisoff, 1983; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Garofalo, 1992; Pratt, 1992; Qualter, 1963; Sanger, 1997). For instance, performance art (e.g., theatrical, musical, or dance) can be the locus of a manifestation of political attitudes (Goldfarb, 1980; Kaplan, 1993; Wicke, 1992). As Wicke (1992) suggests about musical performances, rock music in particular, in East Germany: “Music is a medium which is able to convey meaning and values which ... can shape patterns of behavior imperceptibly over time until they become the visible background of real political activity.” (p. 81). Thus, rock music can serve as an oppositional tool and voice that contains political content. By making political statements, rock songs in East Germany found creative ways to erode the dominant ethos and appeal to people’s political sensibilities during the punk/rock movement. Also, rock music produced a message that resonated with the young people who listened to that
specific music genre, enabling them to relate to the movement. Second, art also helps recruit individuals into a specific movement by providing emotional messages (Jasper, 1998), reinforcing the value structure of individuals who are active supporters of social movements (Denisoff, 1983), and catering to the feeling that social and political change is possible (Staggenborg et al., 1993–1994). Individuals have been recruited to participate in political movements through songs as well as art workshops. Shantytown women in Santiago and in nearby towns in Chile, for example, were recruited to participate in “arpillera”\(^7\) workshops. Even though they had never made any artwork before, they were used to sewing, and so it was easy for the “Vicaria de la Solidaridad”\(^8\) (Vicariate of Solidarity) to get them involved in the group (Adams, 2002). The Vicaria recruited the shantytown women who were the victims of the regime (either unemployed or tortured and abused) into these workshops to help them earn income while educating them about “the political and economic situation, human rights, and women’s rights” (Adams, 2002, p. 30). Third, art is useful to social movements because it keeps people committed to a movement (Chaffe, 1993:16; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Jasper, 1998; Murray, 1991; Sanger, 1997). One of the most important reasons why people continue to participate in social movements is through collective art-making, which helps them develop bonds with other members (Jasper, 1997; Pratt, 1992; Staggenborg et al., 1993–1994). As Jasper (1997) exemplifies, music making that is done in a group can create a network of friends and comrades and allow people to get involved in the subculture of the movement while sustaining their participation through the bonds they cultivate with other members. Furthermore, art keeps people

\(^7\) “Arpilleras” are patchwork pictures made in cloth.

\(^8\) The Vicariate of Solidarity was a human rights organization in Chile during the military regime of Augusto Pinochet. They helped the poor and victims of human rights abuses, while educating them politically during the Pinochet regime. In doing so, they set up “arpillera” workshops to recruit shantytown women and enable them to earn an income.
participating in movements by creating a feeling of group solidarity (Denisoff, 1983; Falasca-Zamponi, 1997; Jasper, 1997, 1998; Neustadter, 1992; Sanger, 1997; Adams, 2002) and collective identity (Eder et al., 1995; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Falasca-Zamponi, 1997; Jasper, 1997; Kaplan, 1993; Neustadter, 1992; Pratt, 1992; Sanger, 1997; Staggenborg et al., 1993). To exemplify the feeling of solidarity and collective identity, Adams (2002) talks about the Chilean resistance between 1973 and 1990, and how the movement had “a very strong ethos of solidarity” as the members communicated their doctrines via the arpilleras they made (p. 40). This creates feelings of “insiderness” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Firth & Street, 1992; Jasper, 1998). For example, the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964 utilized the power of music within their movement by using popular and traditional songs and turning them into new uses in order to “provide a sense of identification and rallying strength to resist authority” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1995, p. 457) among the student protesters. Similarly, religious songs in the Civil Rights Movement in the USA served as a bridge between the students and outsiders, thus creating a feeling of insiderness among members and non-members (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998).

Numerous researchers have examined the effectiveness of art as an oppositional tool in authoritarian regimes. As they suggest, art can be the locus of an oppositional voice (e.g., Chaffe, 1993). It can indicate a way for a movement to threaten the regime (Chaffe, 1993). For instance, street art under authoritarian regimes signifies an activist and collective sense. It essentially becomes a form of psychological warfare and creates a counter-hegemony against the dominant culture (Adams, 2002). As mentioned before, Wicke (1992) suggests that “rock music contributed to the erosion of totalitarian regimes throughout Eastern Europe long before the cracks in the system became apparent” (p. 81). Through their song lyrics which conveyed political statements, rock music raised a political voice, thus showing the oppositional power of
the music. Likewise, Adams (2002) discusses the role of “arpilleras” in helping deteriorate the Chilean regime in the same way. Overall, most of these studies (Chaffe, 1993; Adams, 2002) put forth that street art or other forms of art under authoritarian regimes construct a collective sense by paving the way for a subculture to emerge as an organized opposition and culture of resistance towards the dominant culture and the elite.

**The role of public space in social movements**

So far the Gezi Park movement has been compared to other social protest movements such as the Tahrir Square movement in Egypt, the Arab Spring, and the movements in the capitals of Western cities, such as Occupy Wall Street and those of the Indignados (i.e., The anti-austerity movement in Spain, also referred to as the 15-M Movement) (Kaya, 2017). Gezi shares several characteristics with its predecessors, such as the anti-capitalist nature, and seek for democracy. Also, all these protests had neither leaders nor hierarchies, thus embracing all kinds of citizens. For instance, in the case of the Gezi protests, “youngsters, socialists, Muslims, nationalists, Kemalists, Kurds, Alevi, gays/lesbians, ecologists, football fans, hackers, artists, activists, academics, anarchists, anti-war activists, women” (Kaya, 2017, p. 2) participated equally. But most importantly, all these protests used an intersection of offline and online forms of participation: The protesters mobilized and organized via the help of social and mobile media, and maintained their resistance by “occupying” the squares and public spaces such as parks in their cities. That being said, several scholars pay attention to the interplay between physical and digital practices in contemporary protest movements (Jurgenson, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). For instance, Jurgenson (2012) points out how the “digital and physical enmesh to form an augmented reality”: 
It is this massive implosion of atoms and bits that has created an augmented reality where the advantages of digitality—information spreads faster, more voices become empowered, enhanced organization and consensus capabilities—intersect with the importance of occupying physical space with flesh-and-blood bodies (p. 86).

It should also be noted that from the mesh of social practices with digital and physical spaces, a “hybrid reality” or a “hybrid space” (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 265) arises. A hybrid space “is a conceptual space created by the merging of borders between physical and digital spaces, because of the use of mobile technologies as social devices” (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 265). However, it should be highlighted that a hybrid space is not an outcome of technology, it is only “materialized by social networks developed simultaneously in physical and digital spaces” (de Souza e Silva, 2006, pp. 265-266). Thus, in hybrid spaces the use of mobile technologies, social interaction, communication, digital and physical spaces, they all play significant roles.

While the Gezi movement shares some features with the above-mentioned movements, it distinguishes itself in a few ways. For instance, although the Gezi protests resemble the Arab Spring in terms of the occupation of a public square and the anger that was aimed at a hegemonic state, the political structures of the two movements are quite different. Turkey has had free elections since 1946; whereas the Arab Spring expressed the demand of the majority to have a voice, via democratic elections. Additionally, the Gezi Park movement shares some common features with European movements such as the Indignados who protested high unemployment rates, welfare cuts, Spanish politicians, and the two-party system in Spain, as well as the political system, capitalism, banks, and political corruption. However, the biggest reasons for those protests to happen were the threats posed by economic instability and financial crisis, which was not the case with the Gezi protests. The Gezi protesters objected to the urban development projects undertaken by the AKP government. This does not mean that the motives behind the
Gezi protests were only about defending the trees in the Gezi park. The plan to construct a shopping mall in the place of the public park was just the boiling point.

In the Gezi Park movement, environmental sensitivities and the critique of global capitalism became intertwined. For the Gezi protesters, the project of constructing a shopping mall in the middle of Gezi Park meant “private capital’s confiscation of a public space, of a park open to all” (Gole, 2013). Thus, one of the main objectives of the Gezi Park movement was to protect a public space against commercialization. The park stands for the public sphere. It is a space in which citizens can give voice to their opinions and gather together as seen in the Gezi protests. The interference in this public space by state power led to the participation of ordinary citizens from different stratas of the country. This multivariate participation signals a common goal that unites all the protesters: the dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Because of the fact that the Gezi Park was one of the last remaining public parks in a major city like Istanbul, protesters did not want their park being taken away from their hands, like the other facets that were taken by the government.

Thus, the Gezi protests illustrate the importance of physical space as a prominent element in the Gezi network for constructing a counter-hegemony against the political and economic authorities as well as providing a stage for interaction, community building, humor, creativity, performance, and art among the protesters who gathered and performed both in the Gezi Park and on Taksim Square.

Since the 1970s, a growing body of literature has sought to incorporate the study of social space, and in particular public space, into the social sciences. These studies have moved beyond the traditional understanding of space as the mere background of social relations to examine how space is socially produced, defined, and contested (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991). As Edward Soja (1985) states, “the essential and encompassing spatiality of social life is
being progressively revealed and provocatively repositioned at the very heart of social theory and political consciousness” (p. 90). In other words, the overall spatiality of social life is gradually changing and is taking on a more “provocative” position, well situated within politics and social studies.

Moreover, the recent literature traces a connection between the geography of social mobilization and contentious politics. As Charles Tilly (2000) and William Sewell Jr (2001) focus on the control and use of space by social movements, they highlight the relationship between space and protest. Sewell (2001), for example, declares that the spatial dimension is an “object and matrix of power” for the modern state (p. 68). Tilly adds to it by asserting that “state power is embedded in a concrete territory and particular spatial routines, thus contention over space is a direct challenge to state control” (Tilly, 2000, p. 138). As an effective way to challenge state authority, protest can also “reshape the symbolic meaning of the spaces where it takes place” (Sewell, 2001, pp. 65-66; Tilly, 2000, pp. 138-139). For instance, the Gezi protests transform streets, squares, and public parks around the country from their routine daily use into “a venue for the public expression of contentious claims” (Zajko & Beland, 2008). Thus, it can be argued that the Gezi experience, the occupation of city squares and public parks, indicates a new transformation of the public sphere (Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016). As Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) point out, “urban spaces are constantly changing to accommodate new tools and practices” (p. 88). They also add that “technologies enable urban practices to extend beyond what one can touch or see” (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011, p. 88). In the case of the Gezi protests, there were many actors that reconfigured the everyday practices of public spaces, however public performances and street art are the ones that will be explored in detail in the following sections.

The histories and politics of public spaces help us understand the dynamics of protests in concrete locales as well as the tendency for social movements to organize through decentralized,
diffuse, and leaderless networks since the 1960s (Calhoun, 1994; Gerlach & Hine, 1970). While space retains its prominent role at a “macro level,” it is arguably possible to see that the state’s absolute power, which was exerted towards controlling the protests was the subject of dispute, in relation to the occupations (Foucault, 1980), which happened by the appropriation and resignification of specific urban spaces such as public parks and squares for the use of public gatherings and demonstrations (Tilly, 2000; Sewell, 2001; cf. Zajko & Beland, 2008).

However, on a more “macro level”, the aforementioned occupations formed the focal point of the stance against turning what is “a social space into abstract space” (Juris, 2012) within the frame of neoliberal capitalism. As argued by Henri Lefebvre (1991), when capital is globalized, it brings about a reinterpretation of how space is viewed, planned, and structured, making it a focal point for how capital is perceived and ascribed value through infrastructures (Brenner, 1997, p. 142). Therefore, one could argue that movements that aim for shifts in norms also strive to redefine what space could be according to this new interpretation (Dirlik, 2001, p. 36). This brings to mind the connections with “urban squatters, indigenous communities, unemployed and landless workers, and direct-action activists”, who turn various spaces into living spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). This in turn provides fertile ground for communities to grow and the public to organize in a democratic atmosphere (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). In this sense, the Gezi protests, particularly the sit-ins in the park, sought to redefine urban space as a common public space, whereas maximizing profit has been at the heart of urban planning decisions (Karasulu, 2014).

We should also acknowledge that there has been a distinction between public and private when it comes to the traditional sociological definitions of public space. First, the separation of public and private can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks, as the public, an open space, (e.g., the Agora) was the place for politics whereas the private, a closed and sheltered space, belonged
to the place of property and the family (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 143). With the growing economy during the eighteenth century, public spaces became privatized. Also, at the start of the twentieth century when technologies became prevalent and the concept of “a new urban subject” (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 87) was constructed, “the metropolitan man” (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 88) had to accommodate everyday life realities (e.g., meeting strangers in public spaces) in this new urban subjectivity. Although there have been socially constructed borders between public and private, these boundaries are more permeable and blurred today.

It should also be noted that with the use of mobile technologies, there has been a change in the way we understand public spaces. There are no clear cuts between public and private anymore, as these entities are “objective” and “socially negotiated”, as well as “constantly shifting” (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 15). The networked connections of this era have had an impact on physical spaces, the shared spaces of the public, as suggested by de Souza e Silva & Frith (2012) they “need to take into consideration both face-to-face and remote connections” (p. 74). This contemporary sense of public spaces points out that “both remote and co-present interactions are now interfaced via mobile technologies fundamentally redefines how we understand public spaces and the character of locations” (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 74). Therefore, the tension between the public and the private is being challenged by the growing use of mobile technologies, as they act as interfaces to public spaces, “shaping mobility, privacy, power and control” in these spaces (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 12).

As one of Istanbul’s well-known public arenas, Taksim Square has been subject to the city’s various socio-political stages of crisis and protest, becoming a symbolic space in terms of expressing demands and mobilizing politically throughout the 1970s, as well as a popular spot for tourists (Baykan & Hatuka, 2010). In that regard, the role of governmental forces is also brought into the spotlight, as they exert their power on these spaces and their extensions (Karasulu, 2014),
of which Gezi Park and Taksim Square are chief examples. One could argue that the protests surrounding Gezi Park were sparked by what seemed to be a simple stand-off against the destruction of a public space (an open space for politics and protests), whereas upon taking a look at the bigger picture, it could be inferred that this was a defense of the urban commons and their subjectification to capitalist motivations and what might be termed “gentrification” of one of Istanbul’s last remaining public parks. The attempted redefinition of the city as a space for capital profit was therefore met with resistance by the Istanbul urbanites (Kuymulu, 2013).

The Gezi protests were striking for their use of performance art. Well-known performances like “The Standing Man” and “The Whirling Dervish with a gas mask” revealed the possibilities of merging art and activism (Tas & Tas, 2014). The two prominent examples of public art performances in Taksim Square highlight this tension between digital and physical spaces, which reveal the power asymmetries since these spaces were utilized by both protesters and the police during these specific instances. This tension is caused by the increased control of the power mechanisms of Turkey over space, along with the lack of control over protesters’ own movement in these spaces. Public art performances not only empower artists or other citizens in public, but also governmental forces, who control, surveil, and exert power over individuals.

“The Standing Man”

One of the most iconic works of performance in public space during the occupation of the Square was “The Standing Man” (Figure 10). Erdem Gündüz, a Turkish dancer, actor, performance artist, choreographer, and teacher, stood in silence for about eight hours right in the middle of Taksim Square. This silent performance was soon adopted by ordinary people in various cities around Turkey, becoming their main form of civil disobedience. Since this was the first example of a passive resistance during a protest in Turkey, the photos and videos of the
performance went viral (Mee, 2014). The fact that such a silent performance received popularity among protesters demonstrates the need for a non-violent form of civil disobedience amidst the violent climate in Gezi. One might possibly draw parallels between the performance of Gündüz and that of Mahatma Gandhi, who led a passive resistance campaign in South Africa.


“The Standing Man” performance underlined the fact that the body is a site of resistance (Grosz, 1990). In Foucauldian terms, the body always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription. As Foucault often draws connections between political power and the body, he
argues that one can train the body to make it socially productive. It is therefore possible to suggest that Gündüz’s body could be an element of counteraction in relation to the way the government and the police handle the social management of the citizens. The police were startled by Gündüz’s act of passive resistance, not knowing how to react to a man who was merely standing there. Meanwhile, the protests spread all over Europe, including London, Stuttgart, and Amsterdam as well as, in the US, including Boston, Las Vegas, and New York. There was even a Standing Kid who performed on the streets in Australia. With these increasing reproductions (Figure 11, 12, & 13), the influence and the image of the act became important actors of the Gezi network. For instance, inspired by the motionless protests of the “Standing Man,” many protesters stood silently and read books in Taksim Square. The chosen reading material of the protesters could be seen as a way to express their discontent with the political environment.

Figure 11. A man reading Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World by Murakami.


Figure 14. The Avengers. A meme of the iconic figures of the Gezi protests including the “standing man,” the “woman in red”, and the “woman in black”. Retrieved from https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/766430-occupy-gezi.

By using a performance act as a tool for non-violent action, Gündüz can be seen as a stance against governmental repression and police violence. This performance showed us that the use of a silenced body could still speak against the repression and be heard in a political environment where every dissident voice is being silenced. In an interview with the BBC, Gündüz indicates his relationship to “The Standing Man”:

I’m nothing... The idea is important: why people resist the government. The government doesn’t want to understand, didn’t try to understand why people are on the streets. This is really silent resistance. I hope people stop and think “what happened there?” (BBC, 2013)
As being one of the prominent actors of the Gezi network, “The Standing Man” performance cannot be separated from the other actors that were in Taksim Square at the same time as “The Standing Man,” including other citizens who were reproducing his act, the gas masks some of the supporters were wearing, the police officers who were searching his backpack, and the cameras that captured this performance, thus reinforcing the viral sensation of it. After standing silently for eight hours, Gündüz became one of the significant symbol of the resistance movement. With extraordinary speed, his act was emulated by thousands of others. Additionally, as Latour (2005) states, it is crucial for us to understand that action does not take place of the deliberate intentions of particular actors. Though Gündüz deliberately went to the square to perform his silent standing act, the replication of his performance by other citizens as well as the virality and visibility of his act, were beyond his intentions. His performance as an actor is far from stable, but rather constantly assembled and reassembled by the nature of its imitability. With the reproduction of his performance all over the country and world, the impact of this action is also “distributed.” Thus, this helps us to fathom that Gezi does not only consist of one element, but rather constitutes a network, entangled with a diverse range of other actors in the course of the protests.

Another major symbol of resistance via public art which arose from the Gezi protests was “the Whirling Dervish with a Gas Mask”. As in the case of “the Standing Man”, the images of the artists’ performances went viral online via social media, and contributed to the outcome of the protests.

“The Whirling Dervish with a Gas Mask”

On June 2\textsuperscript{nd}, during the occupation of the Gezi park, people witnessed a whirling dervish performance by Ziya Azazi, a Turkish dancer and choreographer focused on contemporary dance. The artist was dressed in traditional dervish costume wearing a gas mask (Figure 15). Azazi
worked with a photographer to document the project, which focused on the Sufi philosophy. Sufism is centered on the ideas of being open to all, which fueled Azazi’s approach: He welcomed everyone from all backgrounds and urged them to stand together in solidarity. His performances featured Sufi dancers in gas masks, which was a way to point out the “collective determination to survive immediate tear gas bombs, and by extension, the divisive, suffocating rule of the AKP” (Potuoglu-Cook, 2015). Despite being evicted from his chosen spot for performance due to the police seeking to disband all public assembly, he continued with the project in different locations across Istanbul for the next month and a half. Stencils of this image included the phrase, ‘Come along!’ (‘Sen de gel’ in Turkish), a reference to a famous thirteenth-century poem by Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose followers founded the Order of the Whirling Dervishes. The words of the poem—“Come whoever you are, come as you are”—made a very powerful and moving statement in the context of the Gezi protests inviting people from different backgrounds to participate in the protests and experience the collective identity of the Gezi network. Despite a decline of Sufi orders in the modern Turkish society, Sufism has continued to play an important role in the Islamic world and in Turkish national culture, and has also influenced various forms of spirituality as it draws on the philosophy of openness and welcoming everyone regardless of their social or political standing.

According to Bayraktar (2016), Azazi’s choreography arguably acted as a gateway for the positioning of publics in “negotiations with power,” where the body of the individual is geared towards the pursuit of survival, and supported by new forms of movement, in this case the act of whirling. Azazi combined the Sufistic form of dancing with a more Western style of physical expression, which is a technique he had previously worked on in his Dervish-in-Progress project.

Drawing inspiration from the philosophy of Sufism, Azazi uses quotes from Rumi’s poems in his work, as well as delving into the concepts of “stillness and repetition” that are ascribed to the dervishes of the Mevlevi order.

Azazi’s improvisation-based interpretation of the Mevlevi whirling stands out in the sense that it became an iconoclastic image of resistance during the Gezi protests. Throughout the protests, expressions of solidarity were often seen in the form of dancing, both by professional and amateur participants, highlighting the role of choreography as a unifier, a mobilizer and a
catalyst of “social action” (Martin, 1998). These ballerinas (Figure 16), dancers (Figure 17), mimes (Figure 18) and tango enthusiasts (Figure 19) took an active role in rallying the protestors across the city’s streets and public arenas.

Figure 16. A ballerina with a gas mask. Retrieved from https://funologist.org/2013/06/14/occupy-gezi/. 

Figure 17. A snapshot from the documentary by Claudia Carolin Münch. The creative resistance in the Gezi protests. Retrieved from https://filmfreeway.com/818680.

Azazi’s choice to perform in a public space such as the Grand Rue de Pera in Istiklal Street is interesting on various levels. Firstly, it enabled the place of performance to become a space of encounter (Bayraktar, 2016) for the young, educated protesters within the movement, as well as residents and tourists of that area. It also enabled people from various sociopolitical spheres to interact, creating a potential space for dialogue (Bayraktar, 2016). These series of performances were also conducted in heavily policed areas, with the possibility of (violent) intervention at all times.

The gas mask, which was arguably central to the visual aesthetics of the performance, was reproduced in various forms of expression later, such as stencils (Figure 20) and graffiti (Figure
becoming a catalyst to distinguish the sacred dervish body from the dancer’s vulnerable body (Bayraktar, 2016). As the Gezi protestors were often met with interventions of pepper spray, this forged an interesting connection between the image of the protestors as a vulnerable being that still resists, and the presence of the dancer as someone who uses public space and positive attitude drawn from Sufism for expressing dissent.

Figure 20. Stencil of the whirling dervish with a gas mask. Along with the Rumi quotation ‘Come Along!’ (a.k.a. Sen de Gel!). Retrieved from https://www.x-traonline.org/article/turkeys-summer-of-love/.
These performances also put Azazi in the spotlight as an icon in the resistance, as his performances were depicted as chief contributions to the protests as a whole, as well as inspiring the discussions on the act of whirling and its possible effect as a catalyst for individual and social awareness (Bayraktar, 2016).

To that end, one can argue that Azazi’s union of modern dance with political expression yielded a reimagining of the Sufi dervish identity as an icon of resistance, thus updating the concept of the dervish as a current actor in the network of this protest. The act of whirling,
therefore, could be seen as a strategic way to use performative expression to make a larger statement that inspires the public. Azazi’s “whirling body in the street does not only inhabit a Sufi dervish but becomes the bodies of protesters who had fought, survived, been injured or even died in the previous few days” (Bayraktar, 2016). In other words, Azazi’s reinterpretation of the dervish whirling is a combination of the traditional and the contemporary, which becomes the voice of the protesters through his public performance and his body.

“The Standing Man” performance shares numerous qualities with that of “The Whirling Dervish with a Gas Mask”. First, both can be classified as public performances as they occurred in Taksim Square as well as other public spaces such as parks. Second, both Gündüz and Azazi are performance artists, choreographers, and dancers. Third, both performances are prominent examples of non-violent resistance as they protested against the brutality of the police during the Gezi protests by only using their bodies. Moreover, their performances involved the public, too (either deliberately or not). Overall, even though one of the acts were motionless, and the other was mobile, both are symbols of great resistance which arose from the Gezi protests.

Following Azazi’s gas mask performances and the Standing Man, an image of standing penguins with a gas mask went viral online as a reaction to the main Turkish TV station.

**Penguin street art: The standing penguin with a gas mask**

CNN Türk was broadcasting a documentary on penguins during the peak of the police intervention towards the protesters who were being attacked with gas and water. This total blackout of media triggered a series of responses across both digital and physical spaces in which “the penguin” became one of the essential icons of the Gezi events. Social media filled with images of protest penguins (Figure 22), bravely facing water cannons in Antarctica, carrying slogan cards on the ice, wearing gas masks, or posing as “standing penguin” (Figure 23) (a
reference to the Standing Man) (Ozturkmen, 2014). Not just on social media, the penguins also circulated in the public space as in various forms of street art.


By appearing in a variety of forms, the penguin’s original standing as a symbol of the mainstream media’s attempts to ignore the protests was clearly subverted. The Gezi culture embraced the image of the penguin as a symbol of the very public that the mainstream media turned its back on, making it an unlikely icon in the course of the protests, along with the Whirling Dervishes. In that regard, it could also be said that the Gezi protests involved the subversion of tactics of suppression and oppression by the mainstream media and the state, as the images and phrases were appropriated using “disproportionate intelligence” (Gorkem, 2015, p.
Gorkem, 2015, p. 583) against “disproportionate violence” (Gorkem, 2015, p. 583). As Law (2009) argues, “ANT treats everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located” (p. 141).

That being said, the multiple applications of penguins into different forms illustrate the continuous production of endless traces and relations in the Gezi network.

Figure 23. The standing penguin with a gas mask. A reference to “The Standing Man,” as well as the penguin documentary that CNN Türk showed instead of reporting on the Gezi events.


There are countless versions of the penguins as forms of street art, however, my last site of examination includes one particular instance of “the standing penguin with a gas mask” as it is one of the most prevalent actors in this network. This example of penguin street art functions as a
communication device for informing and persuading, as well as mocking the Turkish media and its censorship culture. As a medium for political expression, street art is one of the few tools for people to vocalize their dissent freely in repressive regimes where systems attempt to cut off every other platform. With the standing penguin with a gas mask street art, it can be argued that it did what the mainstream media could not do by forming a social consciousness and breaking the silence (Chaffee, 1993).

This example of street art exemplifies the Lefebvrian idea of “the right to the city”. Lefebvre (1996, p. 158) defines the city as “an oeuvre, a work in which all citizens participate”. The right to the city is the right to “urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of … moments and places” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158). Similarly, David Harvey (2012) defines the right to the city being:

far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts’ desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. (p. 4).

These both approaches highlight the fact that street art is one of the many important actors of the Gezi network, as it is directed towards the urban transformation projects in Istanbul which aimed to change the rights of citizens to live in the city. Thus, street art in Istanbul during the course of the Gezi protests shows the aesthetics of the revolt against the authority of the government in shaping the public space as well as the city. The example of penguin street art can be viewed as one of the instances that shapes public space as a form of resistance. Furthermore, by
emphasis the excessive use of tear gas against the demonstrators, the standing penguin with a gas mask serves as an actor to reclaim the walls of Istanbul and the public space. That said, this specific example of art cannot be separated from the other actors that can be traced in the associations of the Gezi network, such as the anonymous graffiti artist(s), the work of art itself, as well as streets and walls of the city as they both become artistic resources (Riggle, 2010).

Conclusion

At their core, the Gezi protests illustrate the importance of hybrid space as a prominent element in the Gezi network for constructing a counter-hegemony against the political and economic authorities as well as providing a stage for interaction, community building, humor, creativity, performance, and art among the protesters who gathered and performed both in the Gezi Park and Taksim Square.

In this chapter, I analyzed three important examples art in public spaces: The Standing Man, the Whirling Dervish and the penguin street art example (a.k.a. the standing penguin with a gas mask). While the Standing Man and the Whirling Dervish underline the role of public space as well as performance art in the Gezi protests, the penguin street art piece as a decentralized form signifies the censorship culture that is present at Turkey.

These examples all demonstrate the importance of actor-networks which should be understood as participants having their own agencies in actions and exploring those participants, as some of them are non-humans, proves Latour’s (2005) point: “no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored” (p. 72). In the next chapter, I continue illustrating the importance of actor-networks in Gezi by delving into the role of humor in the protests.
Chapter Four

The role of humor in the Gezi Protests

“Every joke is a tiny revolution.”

–George Orwell

“Those who laugh together, belong together.”

–Peter Berger

Introduction

When Orwell wrote these words in a 1945-essay called “Funny but not Vulgar,” he could not have known the extent to which they would correspond to the realities of our days, and 73 years on, his words are still relevant. As the object of this chapter, humor counters the hegemonic power of the repressive governments.

Throughout the three months that the Gezi protests lasted, there were eight thousand injuries, with at least eight deaths (Yaman, 2014; Letsch, 2014). The police arrested over 5000 individuals, 90 of these for their use of Twitter who were accused of using social media to fuel anti-government propaganda during protests (Gasaway Hill, 2018). Many people were arrested for their participation in public demonstrations, including artists, lawyers, writers, and actors. The police also took 39 journalists into custody and attacked 153 of them (Yaman, 2014). These are just a few examples of the actions which aimed to suppress people’s freedom of expression.

Nevertheless, even in this extremely serious and oppressive context, the people of Turkey did not lose their sense of humor, and through humor they created a platform for protesting
against the government. During the Gezi protests, the creativity of the Turkish people blossomed. People’s creativity was already apparent with the public art performances and street art analyzed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I delve into the role of humor in social movements as a form of nonviolent resistance. Then, I narrow down my scope and focus on the role of humor in the Gezi protests specifically, by analyzing two different phrases that circulated both online and offline during the course of the protests. The first phrase is “Everyday I’m Chapullling,” created by the young protesters. The protesters re-appropriated the term and began to describe themselves as “çapulcu” (i.e., Turkish word for looters). This phrase was inspired by the lyrics of the song “Party Rock Anthem” by the American music duo LMFAO, which contained the catchphrase “Every day I’m shuffling”. The Gezi protesters transformed the catchphrase into the slogan “Everyday I’m Chapullling,” that quickly became a viral sensation. This phrase became popular in the form of street writings and memes. The second phrase is “You messed with the generation that beats cops on Grand Theft Auto (aka GTA)”. This phrase was invented by the young protesters as well, first as a street writing and then it spread via social media. I will conclude by emphasizing the significance of each actor in creating the Gezi network.

**Humor in Social Movements: A Form of Nonviolent Resistance**

Traditional resistance is challenged with the appearance of humor, in that it assumes a modus operandi that is not violent, introducing a completely different dynamic. While scholars like Benton (1988), Johansen (1991) and Stokker (2001) have discussed the effectiveness of political humor with varying stances, Sorensen argues that humor could be an important factor in terms of resistance. From dealing with the mental pressures inflicted by the horrors of war (Henman, 2001) to its strategic role in conveying ideas of resistance, humor has the potential to grant some semblance of mental relief as well as to provide new perspectives through absurdity
(Brigham, 2005). For example, Henman (2001) found out that humor is “an effective coping mechanism, a way of fighting back and taking control” (p. 83) when she interviewed 62 Vietnam prisoners of war (VPOWs). She mentions that humor, used as an element of communication among the VPOWs, has helped them to survive post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after they had been in captivity for over seven years. In addition to its function as a coping mechanism, humor is also a form of nonviolent resistance as it was utilized in the Serbian Otpor (“Otpor” means resistance in Serbian) movement. The movement used humorous actions, such as humoristic mocking and ridicule to change the agenda in the country, in order to bring down Slobodan Milosevic from power in 2000, thus highlighting “wit as a contrast to the brute force of the regime” (Sorensen, 2008, p. 176). It could also be added that humor plays “a crucial role in setting a different agenda and challenging fear and apathy” (Sorensen, 2008, p. 185). In looking at humor as a tool for resistance, Sorensen further explains that humor becomes a catalyst that mobilizes and energizes the masses, increases the numbers, contributes to the foundations of resistance culture and pushes back against the oppressors in question. This last element is perhaps the most vital one, because it has the potential to change the power dynamics between the resistance and the oppressors (Sorensen, 2008), as it did so in the case of Otpor.

From an intellectual point of view, the force that is exerted by the state or the ruling class is also thwarted due to the wit and satire that are employed through humor, which can be traced back to humor’s tendency to attempt at a redefinition of power dynamics between opposing sides. For example, during the Gezi protests, humorous content was mostly associated with the title “disproportionate intelligence from Gezi” implying that the government did use disproportionate violence as it had its police force and state power; however, this force was backfired by the protesters, who were able to deal with it all via the help of their humorous and creative side.

The dialogue of commonality that humor creates can be observed on micro and macro
levels, starting from the individual and moving towards larger groups, where this language of commonality helps the group to bond and prevail over their political stasis or apathy, which in turn empowers them, as it happened with the Spain’s Indignados movement mentioned in the previous chapter (Romanos, 2012). In researching the movement, Romanos found that employing humor as a tool encouraged the resistance to act individually and create their own humorous takes on their oppressors (Romanos, 2012). To do so, the members of the movement “wrote messages on individual and collective placards, organized ironic performances, tried to change the style of communication inside the movement’s committees and used techniques of identity correction on the Internet” (Romanos, 2012, p. 13).

By ascribing a commonality to those that resist, humor contributes to the momentum of the act of expression: it “provokes, mocks, or ridicules” (Sorensen, 2008), taunting the oppressor, attacking the system it adopts and encouraging the resistance and increasing morale in turn. “The use of humor reduces fear within the resistance movement” (Sorensen, 2008, p. 180), and it stimulates joy or amusement in others, thus heightening the mood and spirit of the movement. It strengthens the shared ideological bond between people, by bringing them together as a leveler, increasing participation and cementing the idea of us versus them. While the dynamics that are explored in relation to both parties rely on polarization, it should also be noted that both sides depend on each other – neither exert complete control over the other and their actions are “interlinked” (Sorensen, 2008).

The relationship between politics and humor has been a topic of interest in various stages of history (Speier, 1998), as the latter is often a tool through which conveys the essence of the social or political movement it is ascribed to, in forms of visual and performative expression, such as protests signs, placards, posters, or political cartoons. The widespread use of humor a tool in sociopolitical contexts also brings forth two important qualities it must possess. To truly
convey its message, humor must be in a relevant context and form, employ a strategy that touches upon relevant political points and resonate with the target audience (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014).

As a culture oriented actor, humor needs to have a fundamental connection to a commonality of ideas and social standards, referencing the right cultural context in a manner that makes sense. Used in a political context, these expectations soar, as the balance between “levity and sincerity” (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014) becomes finer. The use of humor in such contexts can be observed in examples such as Nazi Germany (Merziger, 2007), totalitarian regimes (Shehata, 1992), and the concept of gallows humor (Swart, 2009), providing ample evidence that humor in a political context exists in oppressive environments in one way or another. For example, Merziger (2007) describes the use of humor in National Socialism as a dichotomy, where “there is the ruling power that uses satire to ridicule, to abolish, and to exclude its opponents; on the other side there are the people who resist the regime by keeping their humor” (p. 276). Likewise, Shehata (1992) states that in totalitarian regimes “when political dissent and criticism are not tolerated, the political joke always becomes a vehicle for such criticism” (p. 75). In Greece, for instance, the political humor became an important form of criticism when a military dictatorship suspended freedom of speech and the press. In both Spain (under Francisco Franco), and Mexico, political jokes served as a form of political expression. Lastly, Shehata (1992) gives an example from Egypt, when a group of officers overthrew the monarchy of King Farouk and replaced it with a military regime. The new regime was the end of political freedom in Egypt, thus expressing political views openly became almost impossible. So, in such climate “the political joke emerged as a vehicle for the criticism of political leaders, their policies, and government” (p. 75).

Humor is also used in a performative way that employs various visual and narrative aspects, such as street performances. Some performances, humorous and passionate, can relate to
performance art as street protest (Shaw, 2014). However, in this chapter I focus on the protest humor, which may have artistic tendencies depending on the text. Not all humor is artistic, but all humor is tinged with political tendencies. As an engaging and interesting form of humorous expression, these performances challenge their audiences to pay attention and be open to new ideas. As argued by Wettergren (2009), such performances can be used to convey “difficult messages” to a new audience that does not necessarily share the same commonality of ideas with those conveying it. To that end, the audience in question could be those who support the opposition, the general public, the resistance itself or the mainstream media (not always as an objective observer). It could be argued that the potential disparity of ideology between these audiences is subject to the ability of humor to communicate with parties with no correlating ideological agenda, mostly due to its ability to use common cultural points and ideas as a way to connect audiences with one another (Cohen, 2007; Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2007; Wettergren, 2009), exerting its potential to “educate, entertain, and persuade” (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014).

**Humoristic Media in Turkey**

If we look at the discourse of humor in modern Turkish media, we realize that modern day humorists have always been part of a counter-hegemonic discourse by being the voice of the oppressed (Dinc, 2012). As emphasized in Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony, these discourses are formulated in the interpretations, social circulations, and uses of media content (Lull, 2000). Examples of publications for modern day Turkish humor include Leman (one of the oldest humorous and opposition magazines in Turkey, founded in 1991), Penguen (a Turkish satirical magazine founded in 2002), and Uykusuz (a Turkish satirical magazine founded in 2007), whose goals are to survive in a market full of magazines without publishing any commercial advertisements in order to maintain “independence” against political influence or
personal interest (Dinc, 2012). Nevertheless, the political humor in Turkish media faces a large number of lawsuits filed by politicians. These weekly humor magazines find themselves in this long-standing dilemma of balancing the demands of the market and their own political stance (Dinc, 2012). In addition to the long running tradition of humor magazines in Turkey, popular humor sites like eksisözlük⁹ and Zaytung¹⁰ have been also highly effective among especially the GenY youth, who were directly canalized to their first grand rebellion. To do so, Turkish youth utilized humorous texts, becoming both creators and audiences during the Gezi protests. In order to unveil how the Gezi network was shaped by a wide variety of actors, and how these assemblages generated a change in the protests, I turn to one of the most popular phrases that had been created and disseminated widely both through city walls and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Additionally, as argued by Secil van het Hof (2015), Turkish humor actually derives its vitality and creative power from a long tradition of offline and online outlets, such as Akbaba, Gırğır, Limon, Leman, Penguen, and Uykusuz, as well as Zaytung.com, which is a site that shares satirical fictional news stories, in the spirit of The Onion. In that regard, Van het Hof contends that the characteristics of Turkish humor and the state of Turkish politics go hand in hand, as the absurdity and severity of political situations are employed as contexts and targets in humoristic expression, as part of popular discourse, dating back to examples like Nasreddin

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⁹ Ekşi Sözlük (means "Sour Dictionary") is a collaborative online community, built up on user contribution. With over 400,000 registered users and 54,000 writers, this online public sphere provides information sharing on various topics ranging from scientific subjects to everyday life issues, but most importantly, functions as an online socio-political community where users share their personal views about trending political issues.

¹⁰ Zaytung is a satirical website, which publishes fake, humorous, and ironic news. It is similar to American publication, The Onion.
Hodja\textsuperscript{11} and Keloğlan\textsuperscript{12}.

**Humor in the Gezi Protests**

As an example of the use of humor in sociopolitical movements, the Gezi Protests emerged as a collective series of actions that drew artists from all disciplines, uniting them with a point of commonality that generated artistic, aesthetic and highly political forms of culturally rich and humorous expression. These collective and creative actions contributed to the momentum of the protests, producing panoramas of the absurd, politically charged and polyphonic nature of the environment at hand.

These ironic and humorous expressions exerted such cultural and intellectual influence on sociopolitical spheres that they have become pieces of “action art” a la Czech Action Art in what known as Czechoslovakia at the time (Yalcintas, 2015), described as “a vassal to the political situation and met with peripeteia that the West was unfamiliar with” (Morganov, 2014, p. 19). The ideology that was borne out of the protests is arguably the fuel which today’s alternative opposition against the ruling regime runs on (Yalcintas, 2015). Alternative and new media channels were also established during the protests, with examples such as Ötekilerin Postası (an alternative online news source which was created by a group of activists) and Çapul TV (an alternative online media association), where the mainstream discourse of Turkish media was also challenged with news on the protests themselves.

Yalcintas (2015) argues that the language of resistance created by the Gezi Protests aimed to criticize and deconstruct the sociopolitical norms and prevailing ideologies in the absence of

\textsuperscript{11} Nasreddin Hodja is considered as a populist philosopher and wise man, who lived in present-day Turkey, in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. He is remembered for his funny stories and anecdotes, which usually have subtle humor and pedagogic nature.

\textsuperscript{12} Keloğlan is a well-known fictional character in Turkish culture that has appeared in several tales and cartoons.
official and political actor(s) of dissent, which meant that the opposition consisted of individuals that found a commonality that brought them together in disobedience, refusing to be part of the prevailing ideology and the politics ascribed to it in the last decade and a half, in a biopolitical act of survival (Yalcintas, 2015): creative, intellectual and most importantly, collective action.

As an opposing strategy against intellectual mediocrity and bad politics, humor exceeds its on-the-surface definition of an agent of comedy, but rather becomes a subversive weapon of creative expression. A good example of such usage can clearly be seen in the Gezi protests, where the masses were drawn in by humor, creative and intelligent expression and persuaded to resist and speak out. Their sympathy and interest afforded further momentum to the movement, building on their commonalities as a public and strengthening their stance against state power and prevailing, repressive ideologies. People from diverse stratas of society came together and protested, nullifying the ideas of political apathy that were imposed upon the generations of the last two decades, as well as mobilizing and unifying minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, Kurds, nationalists and anti-capitalist Muslims (van het Hof, 2015).

Humoristic phrases of the Gezi network help us understand “the use of disproportionate intelligence” (Gorkem, 2015, p. 583; Gurel, 2015, p. 6; Colak, 2014, p. 469) to highlight the use of disproportionate force by the police. Suffering extreme levels of violence themselves and with their friends, the Gezi protesters demonstrated their ability to collectively control their reactions with their “instinct for creativity and sense of humor” (Yalcintas, 2015, p. 19) and invalidated such provocations by the police, to a great extent. As the Gezi protesters demonstrated, “the use of disproportionate intelligence” (an umbrella term for all humorous material produced during the Gezi protests) is a great weapon that applies high levels of creativity. This phrase has been used to show the protesters’ intention “to react to the disproportionate violence they were exposed to
while positioning themselves as more civilized and able in comparison to the police and the government who could only resort to violence” (Gorkem, 2015, p. 583).

By constructing a sense of relationality and consciousness between protesters, these efforts proved effective in converting Gezi Resistance to a “liberation space,” with the artistic and humorous productions thereof being multifarious and effective. Numerous videos, documentaries, exhibitions, artistic performances, concerts took place collectively. The term “collective” is important, as it allows us to assert that one of the main features of Gezi was that it enabled the anonymous, collectively produced humor. Almost no one signed under the street writings and graffiti, as well as numerous photographers shared their work anonymously via Internet, rejecting commodification as they refused to reduce the voice of the collective to a single authorship or ownership. As Wendy Shaw (2014) puts it, “the anonymity and absence of figures underscores the anti-divisive, anti-hierarchical message of the protests as people from numerous political and ethnic groups came together.” Furthermore, illustrators and cartoonists held exhibitions on the streets and numerous concerts were organized in Gezi Park, as well as other protest sites across Turkey, with a minimum 372 songs composed about Gezi (Colak, 2014). The fact that these songs were memorized and sung in unison can be described as a “materialization of collectiveness” (Colak, 2014). Music provides a motivational dimension in times of resistance—and in this particular case, it was the aliveness of the Gezi soul. To that end, I continue with two anonymous, collectively produced phrases that were painted on walls across the country.
“Everyday I’m Chapulling”

As individuals and collectives, the Gezi protesters came together under the term “Çapulcu,” as coined by Erdoğan to describe the protesters, which translates to “looter” or “plunderer.” Just like the “long haired youngsters” of the Czech Action Art (Morganov, 2014), the “Occupiers” of Occupy Wall Street (Özer, 2014) and the “sans-culottes” of the French Revolution (Oran, 2014), the term took a life of its own, being coined as a daily idiom as “chapulling” (Turkish: çapuling) and “chapulit” (Öncü, 2013), and was accepted and used by the Gezi protesters in their acts of creative expression, with notable examples such as “Everyday I am chappulling,” (Figure 24), “I chapull, therefore, I am,” (a play on René Descartes’ famous saying), “ChePulcu,” (an allusion to Che Guevara) and “Charlie Chapulling” (an allusion to Charlie Chaplin). The protesters took the insult and transformed it into a positive symbol of civic action. Although looting is normally associated with anti-civic actions, the coining of “Everyday I’m Chapulling” turned that negative association into an active social and political engagement (Gasaway Hill, 2018).

The protesters turned Erdoğan's attempt to demean them upside down. Protesters in Istanbul as well as other cities embraced the word and labelled themselves as proud “çapulcu”. The sentence became synonymous with the youth-driven, anti-capitalist movement. The protesters, mainly young college students, named their makeshift camp Çapulistan, where they slept several nights under the trees in Gezi Park during the protests (Harding, 2013). In addition to the camp, the park and Taksim Square had a Çapul art gallery—paintings by protesters hung on the walls. There was also a Çapul peace tree, on which people hung their wishes (Harding, 2013). Furthermore, the phrase exploded across social media, which played an important role in spreading news of the protests after state media failed to report them. Even newspapers, such as The Zaman newspaper in Turkey, described the Gezi revolt as “Turkey’s chapulling movement”
It could be argued that instead of rejecting the humiliating label of “looters”, this civil movement took advantage of it and “applied it to their activism, creating a common identity for all protesters and bystanders” (Uranli, 2013). As defined by Uranli (2013) in her column in *Today’s Zaman* (then an English-language daily newspaper based in Turkey), çapuling acts “in a peaceful and humorous manner to remind governments why they exist”. Thus, it can be suggested that the protesters adopted Erdogan’s hateful and hurtful insult as “a mark of unified identity” (Shaw, 2014), and to do so, they chose a non-violent, humorous, and creative way.

In order to be able to grasp the allusion, one must know about Erdogan’s insult and in which context he used it. The insult and the protests that generated this insult worked together and mutually articulated each other, resulting in this coinage of “Everyday I’m Chapulling”. ANT allows me to trace how this phrase came into existence and helps me to establish a broader overview of how different human and non-human actors constitute an assemblage, which becomes entangled with a diverse range of other actors (Erdogan and his insult) in the course of the protests.

*“You messed with the generation that beats cops on GTA”*

The second site of examination features the phrase “You messed with the generation that beats cops on Grand Theft Auto (aka GTA),” which was painted on the city walls during the course of the Gezi events (Figure 25). Grand Theft Auto (GTA) is an action-adventure video game series, developed by Rockstar North, and published by Rockstar Games. Most games in the series are set in fictional cities, such as Liberty City, Vice City or San Andreas, which are allusions for New York City, Miami and the state of California. Gameplay focuses on an open
world where the player chooses missions to follow a story, as well as engaging in side activities, including driving, third-person shooting, role-playing, stealth and racing elements.


A generation’s (once deemed the apolitical youth) love of video games helped them to cope with the graveness of the situation by creating a common language between the protesters during the Gezi days. Thus, the humoristic reference that was made to GTA provided a common ground by spreading in the city as well as online and becoming one of the catchphrases of the movement. The phrase was used to keep the resistance going by disallowing any kind of hierarchy. People internalize protests as their own through these kinds of humoristic
interventions, as they help shape a counter-hegemony (Colak, 2014). This humoristic sentence, which was first painted on the city walls, then shared and circulated on social media, made a major contribution to the resistance by sustaining the peace and creating “a realm of freedom” (Colak, 2014, p. 470). The widely popular expression played an important role to make the resistance amenable by creating a sense of collectiveness, particularly among the young protesters. Both physical sites and media technologies played important roles in circulating the phrase.

Video games feature reflections on the political realities of the informatic age, effectively being informed and reinscribed by the power relations and practices that are linked to the real life, and offering a detailed comparison between the virtual and the actual. As described by Alexander Galloway, video games are, at their structural core, in direct synchronization with the political realities of the informatic age (Galloway, 2006).

As Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) argue, video games are “revealing themselves as schools for labour, instruments of rulership, and laboratories for the fantasies of advanced techno-capital” (p. xix). Video games are basically elements of the hypercapitalist sphere, mimicking the “real” world capitalism (Demirbag-Kaplan & Kaplan-Oz, 2018). However, video games provide a platform for the players to interact economically, politically, and socially as well as creating them safer opportunities to “occupy” spaces, be it building a city, leading an army or driving a racing car (Demirbag-Kaplan & Kaplan-Oz, 2018). Therefore, video games like GTA create an alternative social space as social movements do.

This humoristic catchphrase associated with the video game GTA became an inclusive tool, especially by the widespread usage of Internet during the resistance (Colak, 2014), and constructed a language that has a transformative function. This language formed what Paolo Virno (1996) conceptualizes as a “general intellect” or “commune” as basing itself on multitude
in the actor-network (p. 266). In a creative and non-violent way, humor takes its stance against
the use of disproportionate violence and polarization by the state, generating “pluralist spheres”
(Colak, 2014, p. 470) and keeping the resistance alive. ANT helps me trace the associations
between different elements of the actor-network, including the phrase itself, the video game
GTA, the protesters and social media—as it was an important “battleground of humorous texts”
(Gorkem, 2015, p. 587), which was utilized to gain the support of a larger audience and diffuse
these humorous terminologies without censorship.

Both phrases I analyzed for this chapter exemplify the nature of protest humor as a tool
for passive resistance and political resentment, as well as a coping mechanism for the protesters
during the Gezi protests. To sum up, humoristic expressions provided a platform for the youth to
construct a counter-hegemony by being creative. These humoristic expressions built solidarity
between the protesters and potential supporters and encouraged them to strive for a change.

Conclusion

ANT is a valuable approach to take in order to understand the role played by art and
humor on social media during the Gezi protests. Creativity can be traced back to pre-Gezi days
among Turkish youth; however, this creative production reached its peak during the protests.
Thanks to humor, young people found a creative and nonviolent way to raise their voices and
establish a counter-hegemony by using their “disproportionate intelligence”. The two actors I
examined for this chapter exemplify how various actors work with each other in unison to
provide a mutual language of togetherness in a dire situation and a sense of active citizenship
among young protesters. Therefore, I argue that without all these actors working in unison, the
formation of such a constellation of counter-hegemony in the Gezi Protests would not have been
possible.
As we see in this chapter, both actors accomplished to undermine traditional sources of power, such as the government (mainly Erdogan and his insult) and the police. The importance of humor as a way of resisting oppression should not be overlooked, since humor has a powerful potential in facilitating outreach and mobilization, a culture of resistance and turning oppression upside down (Sorensen, 2008). As a result, humor emerges as a multifarious and unifying actor in the larger network of the Gezi culture. In the next chapter, I analyze the Gezi actor-network and trace the associations between various actors I have discussed so far.
Chapter Five

The Gezi Actor-Network

Introduction

In order to explore social media culture during the Gezi protests, ANT is a useful approach, as it allows me to connect the role of art in public spaces, the role of humor to that of social media in the complexity of the Gezi network of human and non-human actors, such as street art, public spaces, art performances, banners, posters, digital art, memes, protesters, the state, technology, news organizations, power relations or hierarchies. These worked together in the emergence and expansion of the protests, thus underlining the interconnectedness of the actor-networks.

As we have seen in previous chapters, social media was one of the important media to disseminate performances in public physical spaces, functioning as a platform to circulate the memes, images, and photographs from the protests faster and more efficiently. Yet there were also other powerful actors involved in the Gezi network, which is why I needed to take a different approach than most of the scholars who worked on the Gezi protests to demonstrate how the Gezi network was complex in its nature and should not be reduced to a single cause or element.

Social media offered a unifying platform for the political expressions of the youth, enabling political art in public spaces and humorous phrases and images that were reproduced by anonymous creators to be transmitted and circulated during the Gezi protests (Oz, 2016; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2013; Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016). However, one should note that although social media incited creativity and enhanced public participation, this wave of creativity dates back to before the Gezi protests. In April 2013, before the Gezi protests started, there were demonstrations
against another redevelopment plan, which involved turning one of the oldest cultural heritage in Istanbul, Emek Movie Theatre, into a shopping mall. This led people working in creative fields to protest against the demolition of the historical building through the power of creativity and humor. Many filmmakers, actors, and critics came up with several creative protests posters and signs (Figure 26). The Gezi protests also created the space for the creative class to express their discontent with the same government through the use of art, irony and humor (Yalcintas, 2015). Therefore, social media did not cause people to be more creative, it paved the way for them to find a new platform to share their already creative sides with the rest of the protesters and the world. ANT helps me to delve into the part that public spaces played in the artistic performances, dissemination of humor, and protests of the Gezi network. Therefore, ANT provides me with a framework in which I am able to detect the intersection of offline and online practices during the protests.

As an example of collective action, Gezi was a series of protests where mobile technologies and social media were the primary means of communication, and where the protesters did not have a certain leader, hierarchy or structure in their mobilization. In previous chapters my analysis focused on specific actors from the Gezi network in order to show how they each had different roles in the protests, nevertheless, this chapter demonstrates how each element is connected to each other, and then what patterns emerged from this analysis of the network. Specifically, I analyze the Gezi actor-network and trace the associations between various actors I have examined in the previous chapters. First, I give insights into the Gezi network through the lens of ANT. Next, I trace associations between different actors and demonstrate how they are connected in the same network. Then I discuss how the Turkish youth changed and became civically engaged in the Gezi network. I conclude with a brief section about the ending of the protests, the current state of the park, and what the protests have left behind.

**Insights into Gezi through the lens of ANT**

It is important to understand the massive role played by social media in the Gezi network, as it entangled multiple actors in a web of associations, yet, at the same time, the relationship between the government and social media must be acknowledged to avoid abstracting technologies from the complex contexts in which they are involved. In doing so, it should also be emphasized that social media was not the only cause of the emergence of the network, rather it was one of the many interconnected actors involved in the emergence and spread of the protests.

In order to understand the mixed nature of social media and to explore social media culture during the Gezi protests, we need to take an ANT approach, as it is one of the major actors I examined throughout my thesis and one of the knots that connects the roles of various actors in the Gezi network. ANT helps me unearth the entanglement between social media and
other actors in the Gezi movement, such as police, protesters, and government. Tracing the
associations between various human and non-human actor-networks among the Gezi protests, my
analysis avoids reducing the whole network to a single actor or a cause. Through ANT, it is
possible to see the connections between the several nodes of the network as they all play different
yet important roles in forming, mobilizing, accelerating, and holding the protests together.

As I analyzed specific instances from various angles, it became clear that art, humor, and
social media were relevant nodes in the network of Gezi that helped people create multiple
platforms to raise their voices and claim power to protect their public spaces and their lives. ANT
helps me expose these dynamics that constitute the base, route or course of a social movement
network like the Gezi. Not attributing the cause of the Gezi protests to only social media, my
analysis reveals how different actors crossed paths and formed the protests, and how the angry,
unemployed, and oppressed middle-class youth participated in these protests and became
civically engaged and changed through the Gezi spirit. Although the Gezi network is neither
static nor finite, my analysis covers a snapshot of this network in which there are prior and
persistent symbols of the Gezi movement. I decided to frame this multi-layered network by
focusing on three aspects of the protests as mentioned above: social media, art in public spaces,
and humor, as all of them included the visible, powerful and iconic figures that endured to remain
in this moving and changing network.

ANT also highlights the nature of the Gezi protests, which consisted of an evolving chain
of events. By tracing the interwoven connections between the diverse actor-networks of the
particular instances I analyzed in the previous chapters, for example, in the case of the “woman in
red” image, the photograph, the subject, the police officer, the design students, the coverage of
NTV Tarih, and social networking sites, it is clear that they worked in unison and enabled the
circulation of this image of the “woman in red.” To that end, it can be argued that through an
The Gezi Network: Disentangling the Complex Nodes

In the Gezi network, it could be seen that social media’s technological features, user cultures, as well as government interventions, such as online censorship and monitoring, mutually articulate each other. For example, the government monitored the protesters’ online practices during the protests and arrested 90 of them for their use of Twitter (Gasaway Hill, 2018). Nevertheless, social media’s technological features were able to thwart some of the censorship and monitoring processes as “the anonymity of authorship enhanced the ability of online cultural producers and commentators to recycle images that connected previous responses to the evolving chain of events” (Shaw, 2014). By tracing how technological features and emerging practices become entangled, we gain insight into how civicly engaged youth are constituted and how this complex network unfolds.

Thus far, most studies have focused on particular social actors and their specific interests. They aimed to show how different human actors (e.g., protesters) use technology, social media in particular, to achieve certain ends (Gorkem, 2015; Aytekin, 2017). Nevertheless, this puts a question mark on our minds: What do non-human actors (e.g., technology, street signs) do? To address this question, ANT is significant as it considers both human and non-human elements equally as actors within a network. Thus, my ANT-inspired study unveils technical, cultural, and political associations involved in the Gezi network.

The Gezi network is no longer simply a flat network (Figure 27), but a widespread collage of photos (“woman in red” and “woman in black”), memes, digital artists as well as anonymous users, public performances (“Standing Man” and “Whirling Dervish”), street art (“Penguin with a
gas mask”), websites, newspaper articles, social-media technologies, public spaces, police officers, the state, institutions, news media organizations, power relations, hierarchies, objects (gas masks, water cannons, pepper sprays), and so on. Through ANT, we are able to spot many patterns that emerged within the network, such as issues of politics, creativity and humor as subversion of power, power relations and hierarchies. For instance, different layers of power relations and hierarchies existed in the network between the government and other entities, such as the police, news organizations, social media, and protesters. To exemplify, due to the power relations between the government and news organizations, mainstream media outlets had certain political allegiances, therefore acted as mouthpieces for the government, as most of them were sold to pro-government business groups.

In addition to that, humor and parody emerged as one of the patterns or characteristics of Turkish (digital) culture among youth. As forged images and humorous appropriations were circulated widely on social-media platforms and beyond, taking an ANT approach allows us to trace how technological features, user culture, and media censorship practices mutually articulate each other and become intertwined with activities on other media platforms and with government interventions. Due to the power relations and hierarchies between news organizations (corporate leaders) and the government (mainly Erdoğan), the pressure of censorship practices obliged the mainstream media to keep silent during the days when the use of force by the police was vehemently excessive. Instances like CNN Turk’s decision to air a penguin documentary illustrates how each piece is connected to each other in this network. The associations can be traced between the government and its censorship policy, power relations due to institutional and commercial configurations, which ultimately shape activism among youth, mainstream media organizations’ failed coverage of the events, and finally the increased use of social media by protesters.
The Gezi network also illustrates how phrases, terms, and jokes expressed through text become entangled with visual expressions, as well as how these expressions simultaneously involve particular technologies, user culture, and censorship practices. For example, due to the fear of getting arrested for their creations, content producers performed anonymity through social media while they came up with humorous expressions. In order to allow them to circulate more efficiently, anonymous creators visualized these texts. Thus, humorous phrases that circulated both online and offline become participants that address issues, criticize governmental reactions and encourage the public to think about their plight from a different, more instantaneous and accessible perspective.

Furthermore, the analysis of the network allows us to understand how Gezi is tied to the larger Turkish online media landscape. Both public art performances and humorous appropriations are entangled with social media, as although most of these were performed in public spaces, they spread more efficiently and widely through the practice of commenting, sharing, reposting or retweeting, manipulating and circulating of images. These online practices and features became occasions for drawing unexpected connections across the political and cultural landscape. As these practices shaped activism and changed youth in the process. For instance, such patterns that emerged with ANT as humor and creativity could be seen as ways to subvert state power by the Turkish youth. The connections could be made between the popular culture references the youth appropriated for the sake of producing street art, banners, posters, or digital art and the political and cultural environment of the country. In these instances of online and offline contention, social practices, cultural expressions, and the political environment become fundamentally entangled with the technology of social media as well as the opportunities public spaces provided with.
Unexpected associations took shape in the process of forming the infinite network, as some actors would disappear, some would join. For example, social media temporalities could be one of the reasons that some actors would disappear from the network over the course of the protests. Some posts on Facebook or some tweets on Twitter would be accessed easily when they first posted. However, it would not be possible to reach the content once it is deleted after a certain period of time. These processes inspired connections drawn across the Turkish political landscape, thus helping us understand the environment in which the Gezi network emerged. That being said, the political landscape constituted Erdoğan’s views towards social media, protesters, nature and public spaces, along with the police intervention, censorship practices towards both traditional and social media by the state, the way the government handled the protests for about three months. To be more precise about the political environment of the country and to exemplify Erdoğan’s views towards the Gezi protests and the protesters, it should be noted that in one of his speeches in June 2013, Erdoğan deemed the protests as “dirty games” and “lawless protests,” and the protesters as “terror groups” and demanded that they must end. “These protests that are bordering on illegality must come to an end immediately,” he said (The Guardian, 2013). With these in mind, the ANT framework is applied in this context in order to better understand the dynamics of the political landscape and the outcomes of these dynamic associations.

Thus, shifting the focus from particular actors and interests to the associations between actors, it becomes clear that the Gezi network is much more than an intermediary that facilitates communication between human actors. Rather, non-human elements, such as organizations, institutions, objects, technologies and their user cultures that involved in the network become participants, too.

If we start with the “woman in red” and “woman in black,” the square, the police, and the photographer, we see that they were connected to each other, as both women were captured in the
form of photographs while performing in public spaces. Thus, public space, another actor in the
network actually produced its own associations. In addition to their use of public spaces, the
images of both women spread out via social media, which turns these powerful instances and
photographs into iconic figures and provides a platform for Turkish youth to produce memes out
of these actors. Also, the fact that both figures are women is not a coincidence, as the high level
of participation and visibility of women can be associated with “the masculine rhetoric of
Erdoğan’s state paternalism” (Shaw, 2014) in this network. A pattern can be seen through this
analysis, which emerges as issues of politics. Millions of women were in the streets at the
forefront against the water cannons and pepper sprays of the police for their freedom and future
(Kaya, 2015). The active participations of women could be associated with the issues of politics,
such as “the dominance of the government on women’s bodies that is increasing in recent years”
(Kaya, 2015, p. 5). There are other issues to trace like “the proposal of abortion ban, keeping an
eye on pregnant women, and the increase in the murders of women” (Kaya, 2015, p. 5).
This pattern can also be traced to other actors that were touched upon in previous chapters, such as the “Standing Man” and the “Whirling Dervish” performances. These actors prove that they are part of the same network, as they emerged as a non-violent form of resistance to the decision of the government which brings us back to the issues of politics. Also, like the “woman in red” and the “woman in black” photographs, these actors utilized both online and offline spaces. Both physical features of public spaces and technological features of online spaces become intertwined with these aforementioned actors. The “Standing Man” and the “Whirling Dervish” also inspired digital artists and anonymous social media users, like the “woman in red”
and “woman in black”. They became memes and iconic figures in the forms of graphic illustrations across social media and circulated on different accounts. Moreover, all four of the performances were not stable, but rather constantly assembled, reassembled, influenced and translated by the nature of their imitability. Due to the replication of their performance across the country and world, the impact of these actions are distributed, and therefore defined through their interaction with other actors in the network.

The male protagonists of the two photographs, Erdem Gunduz (a.k.a. the Standing Man), and Ziya Azazi (a.k.a. the Whirling Dervish) are also connected to each other in a level where they all underlined the fact that the body is a site of resistance (Grosz, 1990). These actors showed us that the use of a silenced body could still speak against the repression and be heard in a political environment where every dissident voice is being silenced. Tracing connections between these different actors allow us to see a common theme that they are entangled in a larger political and cultural assemblage. All actors in this same network can be seen as a stance against issues of politics, such as governmental repression and police violence.

“All I’m Chappening,” and “You messed with the generation that beats cops on Grand Theft Auto (a.k.a. GTA)” phrases, which are other prominent actors in this network, became viral sensations in the form of graffiti and street writings, like the standing penguin with a gas mask street art. Also, they circulated on social media and turned into memes and illustrations like the other actors did on same platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Bobiler.org (a satirical website, which publishes memes and videos). They are connected to each other and to the previously mentioned actors in a way that they are also non-violent forms of resistance. A common theme or a pattern that emerges from these associations and connections would be the use of humor and creativity among the Turkish youth to criticize the police
violence, state repression, censorship practices, limited freedom and spaces, thus connected to the political environment in the country.

By linking to other online platforms (e.g., Bobiler.org), a much broader discussion was opened up and the circulation of the memes, illustrations, images, comments about these actors extended. Drawing a connection from streets and walls of the country to the social media, then to other platforms can be viewed as the network’s hyperlinking practices. In this way, these interwoven connections extended the public (mainly the young audience) and circulated content across the media landscape. Like most of the elements of the Gezi network, the two phrases, “Everyday I’m Chapulling,” and “You messed with the generation that beats cops on GTA” emphasized the emerging patterns of the network, such as sense of humor, creativity, youth, solidarity, and the Gezi soul.

Through the use of popular culture references and the appropriation of cultural values into memes, the Turkish youth turned political controversy into a celebration of wit. By tracing the associations between Erdoğan’s insult and the phrase “Everyday I’m Chapulling,” as well as connections between the phrase “You messed with the generation that beats cops on GTA” and the police brutality show us that every individual element in the Gezi network mutually articulates each other and produces its own associations with the issues of politics, which is a crucial pattern that emerged with this analysis of the network. As these humorous texts were not stable and constantly moving like the above-mentioned examples, they paved the way for other phrases (e.g., “Keep calm and keep chapulling”), thus creating an infinite web of associations on both public spaces and numerous online platforms.

ANT is helpful in this analysis to unravel how particular technologies and user cultures were involved in the network, as well as to trace how different actors were entangled in a larger political and cultural assemblage in which critical issues are formulated, questioned, and
continuously interconnected. With all these different actors, namely art in public spaces, humor, and social media, working in unison, the formation of such a constellation of counter-hegemony in the Gezi protests yielded results that accomplished to undermine traditional sources of power, such as the government and the police. Thus, throughout the movement of the Gezi network, the youth was changed and became civically engaged, as detailed below.

**From Apoliticism to Action: The Beginning and the Aftermath**

Until the Gezi protests happened in 2013, the younger generation that grew up under AKP’s rule was often accused of being passive and distant to the country’s problems and politics, even seen as “apolitical” when compared to the generations of the 1970s and 1980s (Ozturkmen, 2014; Mengu et al., 2015). Therefore, through the resilience that was displayed by “the youth” in the Gezi movement, the new generation proved the older generation wrong by embracing the Gezi spirit and becoming civically engaged. To the minds of many, Gezi became a symbol of resistance—a milestone for political dissent among the citizens, especially young citizens, in Turkey (Deutsche Welle, 2017).

As mentioned several times in this thesis, Gursel Tekin (now the vice-president of the main opposition Republican People’s Party) also states that Gezi was an “example of claiming rights; an act to reclaim the city, the nature and the environment” (Deutsche Welle, 2017), with the urban middle class youth wanting to be left alone, said Soli Özel (Deutsche Welle, 2017), a professor of International Relations at Kadir Has University in Istanbul who also wrote a book named “The Making of a Protest Movement in Turkey #occupygezi”. Moreover, the initial plan to tear down the trees and the park, as well as the police clampdown mobilized different groups in Turkey. “I think social conservatism that was beginning to be felt more starkly and the discourse of power triggered the reaction,” Özel added (Deutsche Welle, 2017).
The Gezi protests had drastic consequences on Turkish politics and society. “The most visible outcome was the reiteration of the state’s prerogative to use force,” Özel said (Deutsche Welle, 2017). Although the protests achieved a lot, there were some drawbacks in the aftermath of Gezi, as it became more difficult to hold street protests against the government, and almost all the attempts were suppressed (Deutsche Welle, 2017). However, Tekin from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) draws a connection between the Gezi spirit and recent events in Turkey: “Despite the pressure from the state and the government, despite the restrictions, around 60 percent of our citizens endorsed democracy and voted no (in the referendum on constitutional changes to expand the president's prerogatives)”. He also touches upon the reaction of the majority of the citizens towards irregularities and alleged fraud: “This means one thing: The Gezi spirit is still alive and will remain to be so” (Deutsche Welle, 2017).

In addition to Tekin, for many of those who participated in the Gezi protests, the lessons learned are invaluable (The Guardian, 2014). For example, the anthropologist and journalist Ayse Çavdar says that “We now have a taste of what it is like to go out in the street. We are now a society that got a taste of what it is like to challenge our government. That never existed in Turkey” (The Guardian, 2014). She also adds the following:

Gezi fundamentally changed the foundations and the language of politics. This is new because Gezi doesn’t suggest any power practices. Quite the contrary—Gezi is a certain outlook on life, it's the practice of judging power. It suggests ethical guidelines for all of us (The Guardian, 2014).

Parallel to the views of Çavdar, Mücella Yapici, the founding member of the activist group Taksim Solidarity, remarks that “Gezi created an awareness of urban renewal processes, of solidarity with victims of gentrification and displacement, and awareness for our city. We don't
accept any more that decisions concerning our living spaces are simply forced down our throats” (The Guardian, 2014).

As Çavdar stresses, one of the main achievements of the Gezi movement was to shatter the narrow identities imposed by state discourse:

Gezi brought down the walls between conservative Muslims and secularists, nationalist Turks and Kurds, Alevis and Sunnis, men and women. Everybody started talking. Why should the state tell me what to think about Kurds, about Alevi, or about my neighbours? I’ll decide that myself. They should worry about healthcare, education, maybe sidewalks (The Guardian, 2014).

Furthermore, feminist activist Dogan says that the pluralist dialogue that emerged from the Gezi movement challenged sexist, homophobic and transphobic stereotypes: “People even stopped using expressions like “faggot” and “whore” in their protest slogans when they realized that LGBTs and sex workers, too, were with them in the park” (The Guardian, 2014). Dogan also adds: “We also realized that conservative women and women wearing headscarves share many of our problems: domestic violence, equal pay, access to abortion. This created much wider solidarity networks between women” (The Guardian, 2014).

Incilay Erdogan, a member of the Istanbul Chamber of Medical Doctors’ human rights commission who volunteered in makeshift clinics during the Gezi protests, asserts that “the Gezi protests taught people in Turkey more solidarity across ethnic, religious and class lines” (The Guardian, 2014). To emphasize the solidarity and collectiveness of the movement, Erdogan continues:

When we used to do press declarations on the lack of work safety and workers’ rights, there were usually a few dozen people, if at all, she says. But after [the mine disaster in]
Soma, there were several thousands, and all of them had come despite knowing that they would get teargassed for it. I think we owe this to Gezi (The Guardian, 2014).

As Erdogan suggests, a much wider group in Turkish society is now aware of how arbitrary police violence can be, how the state ignores the opposing views, and that the media corporations fear the state: “Everybody saw how ordinary people demanding more rights were called “terrorists” by the government. Everybody saw how the mainstream media are used to peddle the government line. We have learned to approach authority with much more caution” (The Guardian, 2014).

Thus, this collective action among people from different backgrounds and the idea to challenge power through creativity certainly emerged from the complex Gezi network—“neighborhood forums, politically motivated squatting, and volunteer election observers are just a few of the social experiments now under way in Turkey” (The Guardian, 2014).

**After the Gezi Protests**

The Gezi protests were considered as the most challenging events for Erdoğan’s ten-year term and the most significant nationwide unrest in decades (The Gulf News, 2013; Euronews, 2013), as it posed “a direct challenge to the authority of Erdoğan” (Reuters, 2018). Although the scale of demonstrations dwindled as of August 2013, the government complied. They did not destroy the Gezi park, nor did they build the shopping mall or the military barracks. Nevertheless, many lawyers, journalists, and even ordinary citizens who had supported, posted or tweeted about the protests lost their jobs and faced criminal charges (The Guardian, 2014).

As of today, anti-government demonstrations, even peaceful marches, on Taksim Square are forbidden and quickly dispersed (Deutsche Welle, 2018). Erdoğan (now the president) has further expanded his power (Deutsche Welle, 2018). Since a failed military coup in 2016, many
people have been arrested or lost their jobs. Many artists, academics, intellectuals have left Turkey, and now live in Germany, the Netherlands, France (Deutsche Welle, 2018). For instance, Mücenda Yapici, the founding member of the activist group Taksim Solidarity, was called in 2018 by police to answer some questions regarding the Gezi protests and she is only “one of dozens who are caught up in a renewed investigation” (Reuters, 2018).

**Conclusion**

In order to better understand the complexities of the Gezi network, ANT is a useful approach to take, as it sets out to follow the actors and network builders and interpret the process of network construction by considering both human and non-human elements equally as actors within a network. Thus, as we have seen in this chapter, my analysis took this approach to highlight the interconnected nature of the diverse actor-networks that emerged during the Gezi protests, and to argue that they all played important roles in the network instead of reducing the whole network to a single cause or an element. I conclude this thesis by summarizing my analyses and arguments about the Gezi network, and stating the limitations of my study along with my suggestions for future research.
Conclusion

In the era of information and communications technologies, ever growing audiences and evolving Internet culture, it is no surprise that social movements and protesters utilize such media as “a space for the creation of counterpublics to challenge existing power structures, and for new social meanings to emerge” (Jenzen & McGarry, 2017). In the case of the Gezi protests, we saw that social media played an important role, as it created a platform for the political expressions of the youth and endorsed political art, as well as protest humor, which resulted in public participation and civic engagement. However, as mentioned several times throughout this thesis, social media was not the utmost force in the Gezi network, as these protests were performed on the streets, too. To that end, approaching this topic through the lens of ANT further supported my argument, which refuses to reduce the protests to one element or attribute the whole Gezi network to only one cause, and situates the protests’ place in the bigger picture—one that stands at the intersection of diverse actors, such as offline (public spaces) and online (social media) practices during the protests.

In addition to the role of online spaces, the Gezi protests illustrate the importance of physical space as a prominent element in the Gezi network for weakening the hegemony of the political and economic authorities. Public spaces, such as the Gezi Park and Taksim Square, also served as stages for interaction, humor, creativity, performance, and art among the protesters. For instance, the examples I analyzed (the Standing Man, the Whirling Dervish and the penguin street art) in the role of art in public spaces in the Gezi protests chapter underlined the role of public space as well as performance art in the Gezi protests.

They all demonstrated the importance of actor-networks which should be understood as participants having their own agencies in actions and exploring those participants, as some of
them are non-humans, proved Latour’s (2005) point: “no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored” (p. 72). Along with social media and art, another crucial element of the Gezi network was humor, as it provided young people with a creative and nonviolent way to raise their voices and establish a counter-hegemony by using their “disproportionate intelligence”. The various actors I examined for this thesis exemplified how different actors worked with each other in unison to provide a mutual language of togetherness in a dire situation and a sense of active citizenship among young protesters. With all these actors working in unison, I was able to unravel the strands of the dynamic associations of the Gezi network. Several patterns emerged with my analysis through the perspective of ANT. One pattern that emerged from the dynamic associations was the issues of politics. The active participation of women in the Gezi protests could be seen as a stance against “the dominance of the government on women’s bodies” (Kaya, 2015, p. 5). Also, the non-violent forms of resistance, through the use of public spaces, art, humor, and social media, served as a way of defying authority and standing up to the issues of politics, governmental repression and police violence. Furthermore, the idea to challenge power through creativity also emerged from this complex network. Social-media platforms, street art, public spaces, banners, posters, digital art, memes, and so on were united under the umbrella of creativity and humor. The discontent of the Turkish youth that had built up for a long time (Aknur, 2014) finally erupted in the form of creativity during the Gezi protests. Additionally, another significant pattern came up with this analysis was the power relations and existing hierarchies between the political elites and others, such as the police, news organizations, and ordinary citizens. Different layers of hierarchies coexisted in the network and created the dynamics of the political landscape of the country during those days. In telling the story of the Gezi protests through an analysis of the complex Gezi network, the change in Turkish youth, which could be seen as the outcome of the
dynamic associations of the network, was the focal point of my argument, as detailed in the previous chapter.

In conclusion, this thesis is intended as a step in the direction towards understanding the larger scope and complex nature of the Gezi protests. Since in most of the previous research, this complex network that constituted both human and non-human elements within itself had not been looked at in its entirety, tracing the primary actors, network builders, to follow and interpret the process of network construction was necessary, especially to understand the change in Turkish youth. However, this thesis was limited in the sense that although it refused to reduce the whole Gezi network to a single cause, it still did not take all of the actors that played either big or small roles in the protests into consideration, since this would be almost an infinite amount of work. However, I analyzed the networks surrounding the most visible and relevant actors. The Gezi network was neither static nor finite, as it was constantly moving and changing due to the emerging assemblage of new actors and the disappearance of older ones. Although a complex network like Gezi never stops and entangles itself in infinite web of associations, for the sake of completing my analysis within the time frame of my thesis guidelines, I decided to frame the network by focusing on three major aspects of the protests, namely social media, art in public spaces, and humor. Tracing every single actor of the network would not be possible for this thesis, as I had limited amount of space and time to complete it. Because I centered my arguments on a specific snapshot of the network, there is the possibility of missing out smaller and invisible actors in the network. In that respect, a well-rounded further research on the diverse actor-networks within the Gezi protests is vital to better reveal the complexities of the network. Also, an extended study can be done by comparing the political and cultural environment of Turkey with other countries. A comparative analysis of the role of social media along with art, humor, creativity in the protests between Turkey and other countries would be beneficial to better
fathom the patterns of the cultural, economic, and political environments of them. Finally, comparing the patterns that emerged from the Turkish political landscape during the protests (e.g., redevelopment plans, limitation of freedom and censorship practices, police violence, hatred towards the protesters) and the ones that would arise from other countries would be a valuable contribution to the literature on social movements and political protests with an emphasis on social media.

Overall, we learn from this thesis that we need to take major and prominent actor-networks into consideration instead of reducing the cause or effects of the complex networks like Gezi into a separate single force, so that we could fathom the social implications of these networks.
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