

THE GEZİ PARK PROTESTS

A POLITICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL,
AND DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

HATEM ETE, COŞKUN TAŞTAN



YETER DA
UŞAĞUM!!
MADDE KATILIMI
DEĞER KATILIMI

EMPERYALİZM;
SAVAŞ, İSGAL, YOKSUL
ALTERNATİFİ;
SOSYALİZM!
Emperyalizm ve
Devrimci V

Taksim-Gezi Projesi iptal edilsin!
Vali ve Emniyet Müdürü görevden alınsın!
Biber gazı kullanımı yasaklansın!
Bütün meydanlar halka açılsın!
EMEK PARTİSİ

Alinteri
ZENGİNE CENNET, YOKSULA SEFALET.
Ya ADALET
Ya KIYAMET!
Sosyalist Dayanışma Platformu

İŞSİZLİĞE, YOKSULLUĞA
KRİZE KARŞI
BİRLEŞ, DİREN, ÖRGÜTLEN
SINIF MÜCADELESİNE KİTLEN!
devrimci dönüştür
Gelecek ve Özgürlük İçin
MÜCADELEYE
DEVAM
Ekim Gençliği

SİMDİ
ANARŞİZY
ZAMANI

LI DİJİT
DEHAQAN
EM NEMU
KALICANE
DEVRİMCİ
ANARŞİST
FAALİYET

THE GEZI PARK PROTESTS

A POLITICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, AND DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

COPYRIGHT © 2014 by SETA

SETA Publications 34
First Published in 2014 by SETA
ISBN: 978-605-4023-36-3

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Translated by Gülgün Köse and Handan Öz
Design and Cover: M. Fuat Er
Layout: Ümare Yazar
Photo: EPA, AFP, AA

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Matbaacılık Yayıncılık A.Ş., May 2014

SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TURKEY
Tel: +90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90
www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43
Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 212 395 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 395 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C. Office

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106
Washington, D.C., 20036 USA
Tel: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Cairo

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No 19 Cairo EGYPT
Tel: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

THE GEZI PARK PROTESTS

A POLITICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, AND DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

Hatem Ete
Coşkun Taştan

Contributors
Yunus Akbaba
Ömer Aslan
Galip Dalay
Sami Orçun Ersay
Doğan Eşkinat



SETA

SIYASET, EKONOMI VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
مركز الدراسات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية



CHAPTER 1 | 9
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 2 | 13
DEFINING THE PROTEST(ER)S: SOCIOLOGICAL FINDINGS

CHAPTER 3 | 33
DEFINING THE PROTEST(ER)S: WARS OF DISCOURSE

CHAPTER 4 | 53
CONCLUSION



Wall Street
INSTITUTE
444 99 99

HAVA YOLLARI

TA
DI

ADALET
İçin

AK
PİLİSİ
AK
PİLİSİ

AK
PİLİSİ

AK
PİLİSİ

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION | 9

DEFINING THE PROTEST(ER)S: SOCIOLOGICAL FINDINGS | 13

Profile of Protesters | 13

 Political Profile of the Protesters | 13

 The Socio-Economic Profile of the Protesters | 17

Socio-Psychological and Political Dynamics of the Protests | 18

 The Pull incentives for the Protesters | 18

 Push Incentives for Protesters | 19

Sociological Imaginations of the Protesters regarding the Protests | 22

Opinions of the Protesters on the Main Problems of Turkey | 24

Protesters' Opinions on the Government Party and Opposition Parties | 24

 Opinion of Protesters on the AK Party Government | 24

 Protesters' Opinions on Opposition Parties | 26

Expectations of the Protesters from the Protests | 28

Demands of the Protesters | 29

DEFINING THE PROTEST(ER)S: WARS OF DISCOURSE | 33

Defining the Protesters | 34

 Defining the Protesters as Civilian, Democratic, Peaceful, and Generation-Y | 35

 Defining Protesters as Leftist, Authoritarian, Violence Prone, and Revolutionist | 37

Defining the Protests: In between “Revolution” and “Coup d’état” | 40

Gezi Protests as a “Revolution” | 41

Gezi Protests as a “Coup d’état” | 42

Dynamics behind the Protests | 46

Dynamics: Understanding the “Burst of Anger” | 47

Structural Dynamics: Understanding the “Accumulation of Anger” | 48

CONCLUSION | 53

INDEX | 63

INTRODUCTION

The Gezi protests were one of the most striking social-political developments in Turkey in recent years. The Gezi protests triggered serious social fault lines, which will continue to occupy Turkey's social-political agenda in the future.

What had started in late May 2013 as a protest against The Taksim Square Pedestrianization Project of Gezi Park located in Istanbul's Beyoglu District turned into a widespread anti-government rally, drawing immediate national and international attention. To fully understand the widespread social protests and mobilization that ensued – analyzing this historic event from different perspectives - is necessary. Observers questioned what were the deeper motives behind these protests; what triggered these protests to explode into a widespread movement; what were the political, ideological, and social profiles of these protesters; and finally what were their objectives.

This study aims to determine the political and sociological dynamics behind the Gezi protests and their possible political reverberations. Within this scope, this research is based on interviews carried out with protesters in four metropolitan cities (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Eskişehir); the research team's observation notes in the areas of protest; slogans of protesters; the leaflets distributed during the protests; and the analysis of discourses adopted towards protests by the media and politicians.

RESEARCH METHOD

Two main groups were the subjects of the research. The first group is composed of young people (17-30) who actively took part in the Gezi protests. The Gezi pro-

tests in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Eskişehir were carried out by activists, who set up camps as a resistance in certain local areas of these major urban centers. Protesters gathered in Gezi Park in İstanbul, Kugulu Park in Ankara, Gündoğdu Square in İzmir, and in front of the Espark shopping mall in Eskişehir. During the data collection (June 12-16, 2013), some of the protesters stayed for the night in these tents and did not leave the scene of protest for 24 hours while others participated in protests at different hours of the day. Within this scope, this research is based on the data collected during the in-depth interviews with 62 protesters (30 protesters in İstanbul, 12 protesters in Ankara, 10 protesters in İzmir, and 10 protesters in Eskişehir).

The second group consists of the fractured population defined by the governing party, opposition parties, print and visual media. Within the scope of this research, the second group is contextualized with a political mechanism through which the public and voters' perception were shaped by means of the rhetoric of the Gezi protests. This political mechanism is significant in that it creates political subjective positions that change according to political party and ideological preferences. Conducting a qualitative "discourse analysis" which establishes political positions step by step, reinforces the way the research examines the protests. The leading assumption of the "discourse analysis" employed by this research approach to understand this population is the following: what has been said or written reflects identities, social relations, and value judgments.¹ Our knowledge of the world and events are not "objective" but "subjective" narratives, which are constituted in line with our demands and requests to render the world more understandable. In other words, discourse reflects the mental content that we create to show what the outside world's events mean to both ourselves and others. Based on these presumptions, this research aims to show how political parties defined the Gezi protests through varied operations and projected them onto the masses.

THE PHASES OF THE PROTESTS

It is possible to analyze the outbreak and development of the Gezi protests in three phases. These stages are not only chronologically different but also reflect the contrasts in content, target, and style of the protests.

The Beginning phase (May 27-30, 2013) encompasses the initial protests by a limited number of activists protesting against the project for the pedestrianization

1. Burr, 1995:3; Gergen, 1985:266-7.

of Taksim Square. These are local protests in terms of target, scope, and influence. During this period, the aim of the group was limited to the protection of Gezi Park from being destroyed and the group, therefore, continued their efforts through peaceful means. This phase includes incidents and events from the night of May 27, 2013 to May 31, 2013 when violent clashes between the protesters and the police broke out. It should be emphasized that both national public opinion and political parties represented in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey viewed the Gezi protests during this period as a simple problem of public order and these protests did not have much coverage on the political agenda.

The Politization phase (May 31- June 15, 2013) includes the two-week period from June 1, 2013 to June 15, 2013 during which the Gezi protests reached their peak. The distinctive characteristic of this phase is that the protests underwent a rapid and overall transformation in terms of targets, geographical characteristics of the protests, and the demographics of the protesters. What had begun as a low-key protest by around 50 activists in Istanbul's Beyoglu District rapidly spread across the country as of the night of May 31, 2013. It turned into an anti-government rally that clearly included more general claims and demands in addition to motives with regard to the Gezi Park. During this phase, streets were inaccessible due to scimmages between protesters and the police, as the protests morphed into a direct clash between the police and the protesters. Some groups carried out simultaneous protests by turning the lights on and off and banging pots and pans (for about half an hour) at 9 p.m. Though these protests initially meant to support the Gezi protests in Istanbul, they turned into an anti-AK Party rally. In this sense, altercations between the security forces and the protesters took place from June 1 to June 15, 2013 across the country and the protesters were tried to be stopped by the police. In parallel to the efforts for maintaining law and order, government authorities sought dialogue with the protesters. To this end, politicians and bureaucrats from different levels met representatives of protesters.

The Weakening phase (June 15, 2013 and beyond) includes the rapid decline and the weakening of the influence, targets, and scope of the protests following the police intervention in Gezi Park in the evening of June 15, 2013. As of that day, most protesters reverted back to peaceful activities and engaged in public forums and independent election campaigns. Developments since June 15, 2013 indicate that public opinion began to pay less attention to protests as they subsided.



DEFINING THE PROTEST(ER)S: SOCIOLOGICAL FINDINGS

This section covers the data collected between June 12 and June 16, 2013 with face-to-face in-depth interviews with protesters who actively took part in the Gezi protests held in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Eskişehir.

PROFILE OF PROTESTERS

Political Profile of the Protesters

Atypical Supporters of the Republican People's Party (CHP): The most debatable issue with regard to the Gezi protests is the political profile of the protesters. This is rather about “who” these protesters are. The initial assumption prior to the release of the field research was that the protesters were not affiliated with any political party. Some commentators and observers even argued that the protesters were composed of young people who remain completely detached from politics. Nevertheless, the quantitative research proves otherwise. The Quantitative research conducted during the protests at the Gezi Park reveals that the majority of the protesters are affiliated with the CHP. Notwithstanding, different research centers obtained quite different results in face-to-face interviews. For instance, when Metropoll² asked the protesters whether or not they are affiliated with a political party, 49.4 % of the protesters replied that they feel affiliated with a

2. Türkiye'nin Nabzı 'Gezi Parkı Protestoları ve Türkiye'nin Otoriterleşme -Özgürlük Sorunu' June 11-13, 2013, *Metropol*, <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/turkiyenin-nabzi-gezi-parki-protestolari-veturkiyenin-otoriterlesme-ozgurluk-sorunu-haz>,

political party. On the other hand, 50.6 % of the protesters stated that they did not feel affiliated with a political party. According to the same survey, 41.7 % of the subjects who “feel affiliated with a political party” indicated that the CHP was their political party. On the other hand, in GENAR’s³ survey, 66.5 % of the protesters said that they had voted in the past and 72.7 % of the protesters *had voted* for the CHP *in the past*. Therefore, according to this statistics, 49 % of the protesters voted for the CHP. GENAR asking the respondents for which party they would vote in the upcoming elections found out that 64.7 % of the Gezi protesters would vote for the CHP. The survey by Konda⁴ revealed that 41 % of the protesters voted for the CHP in the 2011 elections.

When the data obtained in the quantitative research and our qualitative research are combined, it is possible to reach the following conclusion: Protesters who voted or would vote for the CHP although they do not feel affiliated with any political party make up a significant portion of the Gezi protesters. We may refer to them as “atypical CHP supporters.”

Contrary to typical CHP supporters, the atypical CHP supporters are composed mostly of “young people.” This group also includes those who are raised in a family of “typical CHP supporters” and who vote for the CHP at the polls although they have different political identities. Young CHP supporters are those whose parents vote for the CHP and who are raised according to a stance which is against the set of values AK Party is carrying out today.

On the one hand, as a natural consequence of their youth, the young CHP supporters refuse their parents’ attempts to shape their identity, but on the other hand, “criticize the system” due to their doubts about the political system. As a result, they do not currently represent a faithful electorate towards any specific political party. Given that an anti-AK Party approach has shaped their identity as they are raised in a family of CHP supporters, the best political option that these young people have is to vote for the CHP, “though involuntarily” to quote the words of the protesters.

In order to see the dynamics behind the political party choices of the protesters and how effective these dynamics were in taking them to the streets during the protests, one can look at the answers of a 19-year-old male protester (Gündoğdu Square, İzmir) who refuses to identify himself with an ideological affiliation:

3. ‘Gezi Parkı Profili’ June 8-9, 2013, *Genar*, http://www.genar.com.tr/files/GEZIPARKI_PROFIL-SON.pdf

4. Ne noktada Gezi Parkına Gelemeye Karar Verdiler?, June 6-7, 2013, *Konda*, <http://www.konda.com.tr/>

Interviewer: If an election was held this weekend, which party would you vote for?

Protester: Well, this requires a lot of deep thinking. I don't know. I would probably vote for the CHP just because it is the closest party that may challenge the party in power. Otherwise I wouldn't vote for it, either.

Interviewer: So, which party you wouldn't vote for?

Protester: I would never vote for the AKP.

Another 17-year-old protester who said that he is not affiliated with any civil society organization or political party gave the following answers when we asked his political choices during the interviews in Ankara:

Interviewer: So, if you were to vote, which political party would you vote for?

Protester: I would vote for the CHP though I don't support it.

Interviewer: Is it because of the attitude that the CHP adopted during the protests?

Protester: Not exactly. But I believe that if they come to power, we can, at least, better defend our rights and that they will adopt a different attitude than the current government.

Whether atypical CHP voters will become typical CHP voters is debatable. What is crystal clear, however, is that the number of these voters in the Gezi protests is quite high and they assumed pivotal roles in spreading these protests across the country. Atypical CHP voters joined the protests in a short period of time and greatly contributed to the increasing number of protesters.

Supporters of the Political Parties below the Election Threshold: One of the significant findings about the political orientations of the protesters is that the protesters also included those who voted or will vote for political parties below the election threshold in Turkey. These mostly include the radical left parties. People who vote for these parties believe that there are two types of political parties in Turkey: Systematic parties and anti-systematic parties. According to this view, the AK Party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and even the CHP are the

systematic parties while the Labor Party and the Communist Party of Turkey are “anti-systematic parties.”

When asked which party she would vote in the upcoming elections, a 19-year-old female protester replied that she would “definitely not vote for the AKP, MHP, and CHP.” When asked why she would not vote for these parties that receive the highest votes in Turkey, she said that “these parties are part of the system of exploitation and the actors of fascist oppression.” According to her, “in Turkey the education system exploits students, the health system exploits patients, the economic system exploits workers and the most powerful political parties work for maintaining this very exploitation.”

Another 17-year-old male protester who described himself as “Marxist-Leninist” said that the platform titled the People’s Democratic Congress (HDK) will become a political party when political parties below the election threshold such as the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), the Labor Party (EMEP), the Socialist Democracy Party (SDP), and the Socialist Party for the Oppressed came together and he would vote for this party in upcoming elections. He added that he would “never vote for bourgeois parties.” When asked what he meant by “bourgeois parties,” the protester called the “AKP, CHP and MHP” bourgeois parties.

Anti-systemic Radicals: As the quantitative research clearly indicates, atypical CHP voters constitute only about half of the protesters. A significant portion of the other half of the protesters consists of anti-systemic radicals who do not support any political party, as they do not trust political institutions. So, what keeps these anti-systemic protesters who make up 30 % of the protesters away from political parties and what makes the political system disreputable in their eyes? A 24-year-old Green Peace activist, who did not want to confine herself to any political group, said that she has never voted and will never vote arguing that she does not have any trust in the election system, as there has always been ways to trick this system. This attitude is quite widespread among protesters. Another 25-year-old protester said that he is not affiliated with any political opinion, arguing that he has never voted for any party and he is determined not to vote in future elections. A 20-year-old male protester, describing himself as “Marxist-Leninist revolutionist,” said that he did not vote in the 2011 elections although he was an eligible voter and will not go to the polls in the upcoming elections either. When asked why he did not vote even for socialist parties, the protester replied that elections are nothing but a trick and if elections were to change things, the state would have abolished elections. What lies behind the distrust of anti-systematic radical protesters in

political institutions is the thought that the political system is indeed the product of the global imperialist powers. What a 21-year-old (M), member of the Turkish Revolutionary Youth Federation (Dev-Genç), who described himself as Marxist-Leninist and “revolutionist for 7/24,” said shows this very distrust:

Interviewer: So, you are 21 years old. Did you go to the polls in the 2011 general elections?

Protester: I didn't vote because I believe that nothing will change in this political order. They grant us the right to vote every four years. They think that they can contain the anger; the hatred of people at the polls. That's why I trust in neither votes nor people elected by these votes.

Interviewer: If an election was held this week, would you go to the polls?

Protester: No, I wouldn't vote. Because if elections were held this week and if, for instance, the AKP was overthrown and let's say that the CHP, MHP, TKP or any other party replaced it, nothing would change. This is because this country is ruled by an oligarchy. This Oligarchy is dominated by the United States. So, whoever is chosen by the US will come to power or whoever comes to power will do whatever the US tells him to do.

The widespread distrust of the Gezi protesters in political institutions is indeed a significant factor in the outbreak of the protests and the high number of protesters. If the young people had any faith in politics and politicians, would not have they preferred to act according to the rules of institutional politics? As a matter of fact, numerous demands voiced in slogans during the protests either are voiced by the current political parties or can be voiced by a new political party. Notwithstanding, the protesters, after a while, took a position against political institutions and political actors. This opposition by its very nature questions the existence and the structure of politics and political actors rather than their legitimacy.

The Socio-Economic Profile of the Protesters

Young people between the ages of 15 and 29 form the majority of the protesters at Gezi Park. Unfortunately, we do not have any statistical data on the age profile of the protesters in other cities (Ankara, İzmir, and Eskişehir) covered in our qualitative research. Based on our observations in these cities, however, it is possible to say that

the age profile of the protesters in these cities is quite close to that of the protesters in İstanbul. The quantitative research indicates that the female/male ratio among the protesters is roughly equal. Surveys conducted during the Gezi protests reveal that university graduates or undergraduates make up a significant portion of the Gezi protesters. According to the survey conducted by the Metropoll, 54 % of the protesters are university undergraduates (when students of high school are added, this increases to 66 %), 20.6 % are university graduates, and 8.2 % have a post-graduate degree (Master or PhD).⁵ The data gathered by the qualitative research in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Eskişehir indicate that individual economic incentives of the protesters are very low. Mancur Olson, a pioneer of collective action has a simple and clear argument in this sense: The possibility that, in a case where there was no economic incentive for a collective action, there might, nonetheless, be a social motive.⁶ We asked the protesters about the average monthly income of their families. Then we asked whether his/her income is sufficient and what class (lower, middle or upper class) s/he considers himself/herself. Based on the original data, our research revealed interesting information related to the protesters' socio-economic profile. Protesters whom have completely different income levels and all identify themselves a "middle class." The socio-economic profile of the protesters clearly indicates that the Gezi protests do not constitute a "labor movement" or a movement of the youth (student)-worker coalition like the May 1968 events.

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF THE PROTESTS

The factors that led people to join the protests can be analyzed under two headings: *Pull incentives* and *push incentives*. *Pull incentives* are the factors that lead protesters to *come* to the area of protest while *push incentives* are the factors that lead protesters to *go* to the area of protest. The *Pull incentives* are deep and rooted incentives while the *push incentives* are more superficial and sudden incentives. There is no doubt that both incentives influence individuals in combination.

The Pull incentives for the Protesters

The pull incentives for the protesters mainly included the physical location of Taksim Square, which is logistically favorable, the dynamism of the scene of the protest, police harassment, the increase in the number of protesters at the scene

5. Ne noktada Gezi Parkına Gelemeye Karar Verdiler?, June 6-7, 2013, *Konda*, <http://www.konda.com.tr/>

6. Olson, 1965:60.

of the protests, and the media coverage of these developments. The push incentives for the protesters initially included the restoration and modernization works at the Gezi Park. In line with the transformation of the profile of the protesters, there exist anger and hatred felt towards the AK Party government and the Prime Minister. The concern for the intervention in individual freedoms in daily life and the anger based on ethnic, sectarian, and religious identities triggered opposition to the state authority and the political system.

In our research, the responders were posed different questions in order to understand, within this conceptual frame, the motives that led the protesters to join these protests. The motives varied among the protester. However, the leading motive was a *pull incentive*: the violent police intervention at Gezi Park. The news that the violent intervention of the police against the Gezi protesters staying in tents at dawn on May 31, 2013 had rapidly spread throughout Turkish social media. The news caused public indignation and people began to pour into Taksim and Gezi Park. The reasons that *pulled* the protesters to the Park are superficial and incidental. The reasons why these motives caused the protesters to be present at Gezi Park did not influence all individuals. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the *push incentives*. The following section analyzes the answers of the protesters with different characteristics and tries to show how the *push incentives* for these protesters functioned.

Push Incentives for Protesters

Radical disagreements inherent to the political-social fabric in Turkey: What were the main motives to join the protests? We have called these *push incentives*. These factors may not always be visible. For instance, anger towards the AK Party government (whether rational and justified or irrational and unjustifiable) is a *push incentive*. Similarly, the micro level negative experiences that a person may have under the AK Party Government can also be a *push incentive*. Such radicalism is inherent to Turkish politics. Therefore, anger caused by discontent with the very existence of the AK Party rather than the anger caused by the party's performance can be a *push incentive*, leading the protesters to *go* to the scene of the protest.

The political priorities of the protesters give indications of push *incentives* for the Gezi protests. This is because political parties create a subjective political rhetoric, which impacts the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of individuals. In time, a consensus can form around that political ideology. To be more precise, the discourse of political parties influences thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of individ-

uals. For instance, today, it is possible to guess, which political party a person supports by just asking him/her questions about the Kurdish question, the Alewi question, and the Turkish identity issue because political parties can generate and consolidate anger and motivations of individuals.

The majority of the protesters believe that the AK Party interferes in their daily lives and this may lead to direct interference. The restrictions on alcohol sales can be cited as a typical example of this argument. A 23-year-old (F) protester who describes himself “leftist” and, who has never voted, clearly expressed this concern (Gezi Park, İstanbul):

Protester: [the Prime Minister] bans alcohol sale, bans protests like this one, and demolishes places without asking people for their opinions. I believe that if something is done, then he should also ask people for their opinions on the issue. We are living here together; he is not the only person who lives here. [...] After all, he is imposing more and more restrictions. He begins with imposing petty restrictions and keeps saying this is forbidden, that is forbidden, remove this from here, and remove that from there and so on.

Global Ideological Disagreements: Ideological background is another noteworthy motive for the Gezi protesters. There is a close relationship between *push incentives* for the Gezi protesters and the modernization “adventure” of Turkey. When carefully analyzed, it comes into sight that those who are against the neo-liberal policies of the AK Party; those who believe that Turkey is ruled by a fascist and oppressive system; those who consider capitalism or imperialism as the roots of all problems; environmentalists, animal advocates, supporters of sexual freedom, feminists and even the “revolutionist Muslims” and “anti-capitalist Muslims” are the part of Turkey’s unfinished modernization process, which has been going on for more than two centuries.

As far as global ideologies are concerned, it is clear that the Gezi protesters are under the influence of “socialism.” During our interviews, we found out that the concept of “socialism” is supported by a wide range of opposition groups. For instance, even incompatible opposition groups, i.e. the Nationalist TGB supporters who prioritize Turkish identity and the BDP supporters, who prioritize the Kurdish identity, share a “socialist” identity.

According to the Metropoll, the ideological profile of the protesters is as follows:⁷

- Socialist: % 27,6
- Apolitical: % 15,2
- Libertarian: % 15
- Atatürkist: % 11
- Social democrat: % 5.8
- Secular: % 5.4
- Kemalist: % 3.6
- Democrat: % 3.4
- Nationalist: % 3
- Leftist-nationalists: % 2.6
- Communist: % 2
- Anarchist: % 1.6
- Other: % 3.8.

All aforementioned ideologies are closely related to the modernization process of Turkey. They are political groupings that the dynamics of modernization process have introduced. In this table the supra-identity of both new social movements such as the LGBT, environmentalists and political movements that emerged within the specific conditions in Turkey such as the Kurdish movement is “socialism.” The environmentalist discourse at Gezi Park served as a secondary motive for some protesters. In other words, activist rhetoric about protecting the environment is far from being the primary motive leading this group to join the protests. However, it was observed that some protesters underestimated the environmentalist discourse by comparing them to humanitarian and social issues.

For example, a 21-year-old Dev-Genç member protester (M), who described himself “Marxist-Leninist,” gave the following answer (Gezi Park, İstanbul):

7. Türkiye'nin Nabzı 'Gezi Parkı Protestoları ve Türkiye'nin Otoriterleşme -Özgürlük Sorunu' June 11-13, 2013, *Metropol*, <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/turkiyenin-nabzi-gezi-parki-protestolari-veturkiyenin-otoriterlesme-ozgurluk-sorunu-haz>

Protester: I did not participate in the protests in the first four days. During these first four days, the protests were about trees. Ok, I have respect for trees, in the environment, but since Friday there has been a grassroots movement here and I have been here since that day. [...] Ok, the fight broke out because of a tree but this has nothing to do with the tree itself. Well, it is, in a sense, related to the environment but the people protesting here generally want the overthrow of this government.

SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATIONS OF THE PROTESTERS REGARDING THE PROTESTS

It is significant to understand the motives that led the protesters to join the protests but it is also important to find out how the protesters evaluate the protests, to quote Mills, to find out the “sociological imagination”⁸ of the protesters. Accordingly, we tried to reveal whether the protesters consider the Gezi protests as a revolution or as an uprising, resistance, rebellion or a similar popular movement. Given the tremendous growth of the protests, some protesters felt that this was a revolution and Turkey would not be the same in the aftermath of the protests. However, it is noteworthy that most of the protesters did not buy into this point of view.

The following dialogue with a 22-year-old “leftist and revolutionary” female protester indicates that some protesters considered the protests as a sign that Turkey will fundamentally change, and perceived protests as a “revolution:”

Protester: When they attacked last Tuesday, we came from this way and saw what was going on. The Police seized the Taksim Square. There was nobody left in the tents. I saw that moment and started crying because we were on guard duty for the revolution. We called this “the revolution.” We were on duty.

In an environment where the protests were lively, the police temporarily ceased direct intervention and the protesters thought that government officials had

8. C. Wright Mills argues that even familiar routines of our daily lives are a part of the macro picture but adds that one should have an ability to see the relation between these experiences and the big picture. Mills calls this ability “sociological imagination.”

backed off and were faltering. Some protesters began to think that the Gezi protests constituted a “revolution.” However, our observations in the field of the psychology and the discourses of the protesters indicate that the protests constituted a “burst of anger” or an “uprising” rather than a “revolution.” That protests spread to other cities, in particular, boosted the self-confidence of the protesters and their position against the government became much more legitimate in their eyes.

In İzmir, the protesters, consisting mostly of Kemalist and leftist-nationalists, protesting the AK Party government gathered in the area of protest in a carnivalesque environment. What brought these leftist-nationalist youngsters together was a form of discontent, not just about the AK Party policies but about the party’s very existence. Therefore, the imagination of the youth about the Gezi protests remained within the limits of a leftist-nationalist paradigm. According to this paradigm, the situation in the country is getting progressively worse: the government is selling every inch of the country, interfering in people’s lifestyles, pushing them into a corner, and dragging the country into a deadlock by discriminating on the grounds of ethnic and sectarian identities. From this point of view, the people could no longer stand it and had to take to the streets under the banner of the Gezi protests. This paradigm shaped the psychology of the majority of young protesters in İzmir. When these protesters are analyzed, it comes to light that these protesters are lost in daily and ordinary details of the protests.

In Ankara, the opinion of the protesters was different from that of the protesters in İstanbul, as the Gezi protests developed in Ankara in different ways. The protests intensified in certain neighborhoods, in Çankaya in particular, and included civilian activities such as “banging pots and pans,” “turning the lights on and off,” and “honking horns.” However, it also included violent clashes with security forces. In such a unique atmosphere, the protesters believed that their movement Turkey rose to the level of a rebellion. They equally believed that a political process was unfolding during which the world also supported the protests and the AK Party would be driven back into its corner.

In Eskişehir, protesters consisted mostly of students. The protests in Eskişehir turned into a small-scale fairground of thoughts. Any flag, streamer or symbol indicating the affiliations of the groups was forbidden. Therefore, protests in front of the Espark Mall were less colorful than those in İstanbul, İzmir, and Ankara. Similarly, protests in Eskişehir were less enthusiastic than those in other cities. Under these circumstances, the protesters considered the movement to be a mass uprising where people from every walk of life participated. Some protesters viewed the Gezi park protests to be a crackdown due to the lack of an opposition in Turkey

and a political reaction that would pave the way for groups and political parties to be established, fill the void.

OPINIONS OF THE PROTESTERS ON THE MAIN PROBLEMS OF TURKEY

The findings of the research indicate that answers of the protesters to the question “what is the biggest problem of Turkey?” are not compatible with the motives that led the protesters to join the protests. In other words, the motives for a large number of protesters did not address Turkey’s main problems.

Firstly, a significant portion of the protesters did not set out to resolve Turkey’s main problems. The protests are sociologically significant in that they put problems on the agenda and helped prioritize the key areas. For instance, many of the protesters we interviewed said that the government’s resignation would not resolve any of the political problems we face today. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the general motivation behind the protests is different from what motivated the protesters individually.

In mass protests similar to the Gezi protests in certain aspects, protesters principally focused on “freedom.” The same goes for the Gezi protests. When asked what the biggest problem of Turkey was, the majority of the Gezi protesters answered “the restriction of freedoms.”

Another of Turkey’s central issues, based on what the protesters said in the interviews, is “discrimination” or “enmity among social groups.” The majority of the protesters are of the opinion that Turkey’s biggest political and social problem is ethnic and religious discrimination and disunity. The protesters argue that this is a long-standing problem, however, the AK Party policies deepened this problem.

PROTESTERS’ OPINIONS ON THE GOVERNMENT PARTY AND OPPOSITION PARTIES

Opinion of Protesters on the AK Party Government

The protests and the anger vented during these protests were apparently against the incumbent party and the Prime Minister. There was, however, another group in the protests who would join the protests irrespective of the party in power. This group includes individuals who are not against specific parties, but the overall “system” and/or the state.

Another issue that we analyzed within the scope of our research was the opinion of the protesters on the AK Party government. The view that the AK Party provokes

ethnic, religious, and sectarian polarization and bases its policies on these differences was widespread among the Gezi protesters. Some protesters argued that these are long-standing problems in Turkey; however, the AK Party deepened the problems while some believed that the AK Party created these problems. A 23-year-old female protester, for instance, says: “*I believe that separatism has escalated since the AK Party came to power. I don’t remember that we had a Kurdish-Turkish issue before.*”

Within the scope of our research, the protesters were asked to comment on the accomplishments and failures of the AK Party in the last decade. The protesters, as a matter of course, focused on the failures of the AK Party rather than its successes. When asked “what are the accomplishments of the AK Party?” protesters sarcastically gave the following answers: “*It was successful in dividing the people and the country,*” “*It was successful in favoring its supporters,*” and “*It was successful in selling the country.*” Other answers basically had the following meaning: “*the AK Party has not accomplished anything.*” According to this view, the AK Party has exacerbated problems in the economy, health, and education systems in Turkey but has been successful in spinning them favorably through “perception management.” Only a few protesters mentioned some of the accomplishments of the AK Party. These included the elimination of the military tutelage, improvements in investments and transportation as well as innovations in the health sector.

Some protesters feel desperate and alienated due to the efforts of the AK Party to resolve the Kurdish question. The Kemalist youth, in particular, considers the AK Party’s policy for the resolution of the Kurdish issue as a national betrayal. This viewpoint includes: talks between the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the state; negotiations and dialogue with the Kurdish people; and having the PKK agree to leave Turkey. When commenting on the police intervention, the protesters argued, “the government which tolerates terrorists commits violence against civil protesters.”

An 18-year-old (M) protester, who defines himself as pro-Ataturk, said the following (Gezi Park, İstanbul):

Protester: They attack with tear gas here. Day and night. [...] Well, you can warn, you can repeat a few times or, you know, you can kindly ask, but you cannot get people out of their tents by force and then burn down their tents. This is what they do. But when it comes to other people; they forgive and bring those, who killed your soldier, your people in your country, to Turkey.

Protesters' Opinions on Opposition Parties

One of the widely accepted reasons behind the Gezi protests was that people took to the streets because opposition parties are not strong enough in the Parliament and have failed to mount an effective opposition. In this sense, the protesters were also asked to comment on the opposition parties. Some of the protesters, as mentioned before, believe that streets are the best forums for the opposition as they oppose the system and the very existence of the AK Party. Moreover, they cannot find a political party that represents them in the current social order and political system. The quantitative research indicates that this group of protesters represents the second most widespread profile of protesters in the Gezi protests after the CHP voters. These protesters believe that the social order and the political system are based on exploitation. These protesters (particularly those who are influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology), therefore, consider an anti-system opposition as more realistic and effective.

When asked whether he finds opposition parties efficient enough, a 24-year-old male “revolutionist-democrat” protester in Gündoğdu Square, İzmir said the opposition parties are not strong enough against the AK Party due to the disunity among them.

The protesters who believe that the current political parties do not represent them at all show the fiercest attitude towards the opposition parties. These include those who take to the streets because their opposition views are not voiced in the Parliament. Saying that he would never vote for any political party, a 17-year-old protester who defines himself as “socialist” commented on the opposition parties as follows (İstanbul):

Protester: [Opposition parties] are poorly gifted. We ended up in this situation because they failed to mount an effective opposition. [...] I don't think they represent us. To give you an example, even at the beginning of the protests when there were clashes with the police, none of them were there. They came back here to give speeches after the police withdrew. I mean, people here didn't want that but they came anyway.

Saying that she did not vote in the elections because there has always been ways to “trick the system,” a 24-year-old female protester in İzmir who is a Green Peace activist criticized the CHP as follows:

Protester: As far as I see and watch on TV, the opposition does not duly perform its duty. The biggest opposition party is the CHP. But as far as I saw or I watch from TV, the only thing that the CHP does is to fire back at Erdoğan. That's what it does, to provoke a fight, to start a row. "Look, you say this but indeed wouldn't it be more moderate if we do this like this, and so on...?" What we always witness is bickering. The Prime Minister rounds on him [the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu] then he snipes at the Prime Minister. This is nothing but role-play. So what would people do? People would take to the streets and began shouting their demands. Isn't it a beautiful way to say "enough is enough?" Well, it is beautiful that different groups agree on something. This is the opposition! So, why does the CHP remain silent now? Because it also knows well that it does not duly perform its duty. I think they are embarrassed.

The desperation among the protests is shaped by the following criticisms from different protesters about different opposition parties: The widespread view among the protesters is that the CHP is unsuccessful in generating concrete policies; the MHP severely criticizes the ruling party but fails to change anything in Turkey; and the BDP fails to focus on Turkey's main problems, as they almost totally concentrate on policies related to the Kurdish question. Other parties do not gain a sufficient number of votes to have parliamentary seats. The AK Party, consequently, turns into an uncontrolled and unopposed power.

Defining himself as pro-Ataturk, a 19-year-old Gezi protester said that he would vote for the CHP in the upcoming elections, but he underlined that this doesn't necessarily mean that he trusts the CHP. When asked his opinion on the opposition party, this protester said the army is the only actor capable of overthrowing the AK Party but it is deprived of this power; the CHP does nothing but casts aspersions about the AK Party while the BDP relies on and gives in to the AK Party; therefore, opposition does not exist in Turkey. This view is quite widespread among the protesters, although expressed in different ways.

Defining himself as "leftist" and "half Kemalist," a 24-year-old Alewi protester said that he has not voted for any other political party other than the CHP. His opinion on the main opposition party reflects the typical views of the atypical CHP supporters:

Protester: If another party, I mean a strong one, passes the election threshold and its number of votes approaches that of Erdogan, I would not vote for the CHP. The CHP doesn't make my voice heard. Not even one tenth of my opinions... I don't have any other choice but to vote for the CHP. I don't want to vote for someone who receives a few votes. I have to vote for the CHP. I want the supporters of the other left parties to vote for the CHP as well. I believe that they should vote for the CHP if they want a strong party against the AK party. But if you ask me whether the CHP defends my rights, I would say it doesn't defend my rights at all.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE PROTESTERS FROM THE PROTESTS

The motives that led the protesters to join the Gezi protests are not directly linked to their expectations from the protests. As a matter of fact, a 22-year-old (M) Marxist-Leninist protester who defines himself as “socialist” (Gezi Park, İstanbul) argued that these protests represent a grassroots desire for change for the first time in the history of the Republic. They will not be remembered only as a student or labor movement, rather as a popular movement by people from all walks of life. In this sense, the protester considers the protests as a step taken towards a system change in Turkey rather than changing governments, people, and bureaucrats. He believes that in order to change the system, it is necessary to raise the people's awareness and people should demand change. The Gezi protests are the sign of this change.

The protesters have different short-term and long-term expectations from the Gezi protests. It would be, for instance, unrealistic to argue that the protesters at Gezi Park mostly expect the protests to change the political system or the political authority in Turkey in a very short period of time. Therefore, it is better to examine the expectations of the protesters in two categories: *short-term* and *long-term expectations*. The short-term expectations include developments that would cause protesters to stop protests *sua sponte*. Short-term and long-term expectations are not directly related to each other.

A 22-year-old protester who defines himself as “socialist” said that “The protests in İstanbul will not stop until the Prime Minister and the police change their attitudes and they will continue to get organized and take to the streets in other places even if they are expelled from Taksim.” This protester, however, also said that even

if the protesters stop protests *sua sponte* after the Prime Minister and other state officials take positive steps, this doesn't necessarily mean that the protests will cease. As for the protester's long-term expectations: "*Unless the system changes in Turkey, these protests will not end and they will be postponed to be carried out in another place at another time.*" This protester believes that the Gezi protests can pave the way for left movements to form a coalition and this coalition may become political.

Some other protesters also hoped that the Gezi protests will give birth to a kind of a political movement; in other words, an integrated opposition bloc. A 23-year-old male protester thinks that political groups that did not know each other came together at Gezi Park. Together, they learnt how to break down their prejudices and had a chance to get to know each other. He said, "*for instance the TKP and the BDP supporters did not know the LGBT activists. But given the current atmosphere in two weeks at Gezi Park, they shared water and food and they had a chance to get to know each other.*" He believes that other simultaneous protests in other cities indicated a "spark" of a "revolution." He added, "*the protests simultaneously carried out in other cities mean that people are unified against the AK Party government and this coalescence indeed is a revolutionary development.*"

In conclusion, this group of protesters expects that the protests supported by a large number of people in almost every city in Turkey will definitely change things in Turkey. It should be underlined that these "expectations" are more realistic than the "demands" made at Gezi. While some protesters expect that the AK Party government will not dare, in the future, to impose bans and to interfere in individual freedoms randomly while some other protesters expect that a serious opposition movement will be formed and this movement will turn into a political party in time, thus transforming the left and opposition in Turkey.

DEMANDS OF THE PROTESTERS

There is a difference between demands and expectations. Expectations are more realistic and the perspective is plain and simple. Demands represent a more complex process in Turkey's political landscape today. Moreover, each tangible demand also includes the desire for "*recognition*" of the actor making it. For instance, the demands voiced by Taksim Solidarity in the Gezi protests addressing the government, on the one hand, expressed a desire for encouraging the government to take certain steps while the protesters, on the other hand, sought recognition as a legitimate actor.

The answer that an 18-year-old male protester who identified himself as “pro-Ataturk” gave to the question “what specific steps would the government have to take in order for you to decide to individually end the protests here?” clearly proves that demands include a “desire for recognition.” The young protester said “*the Prime Minister should apologize for calling the protesters looters and drunks and guarantee that Gezi Park shall remain as a park.*” Later in the interview, he reveals his “desire for recognition:”

Protester: I am sure that not only in Turkey but across the world, people talk about us for what we do here (protests). And I believe that I will take pride in my involvement in the future. That’s why we should stay here.

It is necessary to consider another aspect of the crowds to better understand the nature of their demands. Groups are able to change the perception of reality. The sense of reality created by the group influences an individual who has become a part of that crowd. As a sociological phenomenon, “the crowd” can be described as a simulation of “the society.” An individual who has become a part of this simulation begins to gradually lose the sense of reality created by protesters. As far as the sociological characteristic of collective acts is concerned, these acts tend to be trapped in a tautology in terms of their short-term goals and significantly benefit from this tautology. When the protesters witness the intervention of the security forces, they face the risk of arrest, injury and even death. After a while, these protesters demand resignation of the perpetrators and release of the detained protesters. Governments usually reject such demands as they consider them “impossible to address.” Then these demands of the protesters turn into slogans and become the primary aim of their protests. In this way, the “consequence” of the protests begins to determine the “aim” of the following protests.

In comparison, during the May 1968 events in France, the young people were trapped in this tautology when they demanded that the perpetrators step down, the re-opening of the Sorbonne University, which was shut down due to boycotts, and the release of the detained protesters. The same tautology is applicable for the Gezi protests. The Taksim Solidarity, the platform representing the protesters, presented five demands to the government.

The government should:

- Guarantee that Gezi Park will remain a park;
- Put an end to the police violence and ensure the resignation of governors, police commissioners, and other responsible officials in İstanbul, Ankara and elsewhere;
- Ban the use of tear gas;
- Release the detained protesters
- And lift the bans on meetings and protests in public squares across the country, including Taksim square.⁹

Interestingly enough, all short-term demands of the protesters were wrapped around this tautology. Long-term demands, on the other hand, were usually symbolic and mere slogans. For instance, when protesters said that they “demand freedom,” the government cannot be expected to meet this demand, as the exact meaning of this demand was unclear. The immediate concern of the government is to convince the crowd in the area of the protests and end the protests without a delay.

There is a sociological principle, which significantly determines the demands voiced during large-scale collective protests: the physical intervention of the security forces and the following judicial and legal process cause protesters to form a “recollection of the protest.” This “recollection of the protest” is largely based on giving a symbolic value to the protesters who died and were injured during the protests and on transforming what happened during protests into slogans. After a while, this “recollection of the protest” overshadows the “long-term expectations” of the protests. In other words, the common experience of “suffering,” as a *consequence* of the protests turns into the *aim* of the next round of protests. For instance, the protesters demanded that the perpetrators of the police harassment resign. Similarly, the demand for the release of the detained protesters is put forward as a consequence of the protests. These demands can be cited as examples of the “tautology of short-term goals.”

9. ‘İşte Gezi Parkı eylemcilerinin talepleri’, *CNN Türk*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2013/turkiye/06/05/iste.gezi.parki.eylemcilerinin.talepleri/710731.0/>,



DEFINING THE PROTEST(ER)S: WARS OF DISCOURSE

This section covers the analyses on the discourse expressed by different social, ideological, and political groups sparked by the Gezi Park protests in İstanbul, in May 2013. Heated and intense discussions have been held on how to define the protest(er)s since the very beginning of the demonstrations. Political positions, opinions, and attitudes changed in reaction to the protests; new political alliances were formed; and novel conceptual discourses were expressed. The political reverberations of the widespread and spontaneous social protests branching out from Gezi were not limited to the geographic space of the occupied streets, nor was it contained to the interaction among the protestors. What influenced the political discussions more than the people out in the streets is the discourse adopted during these protests.

The public perception of the image of the protesters was not limited to the events that unfolded in the streets. Thus, how and by what means these images are reflected are also significant. An intensive and effective intellectual process was conceived to shape and influence the public perception of the protests from the very outset of the demonstrations. The political-intellectual-discursive struggle to influence the public perception of the Gezi protests can be placed into three categories: defining the protesters, determining the goal of the protests, and elucidating the dynamics underpinning the protests.

Those who supported the protest(er)s idealize the protest(er)s. For this group, there is a lack of critical evaluation of the context and how their partic-

ipation and mission evolved during the demonstrations. To better analyze this movement, an objective viewpoint would better serve our understanding of the social-political phenomena that occurred. Supporters of the initial movement had to adopt a discourse to preserve the initial image of the peaceful and non-violent demonstrations when protests began to slip into the hands of “anti-democratic” groups tainted with violent undertones and transforming the profile of the protesters. While, those opposing the protests had to admit to the initial “spontaneity” of the protest(er)s, but adopted a discourse focused on the transformation of the protests when it spiraled out as of the second week of the protests.

There are contrasting viewpoints of the dynamics underpinning the protests. On the one hand, those who supported the protests argue that they were the expression of Turkish societies mounting discontent against the policies and practices of Erdoğan’s government. On the other hand, those who kept their distance from the protests posit that there were structural-permanent-ideological reasons behind the protests rather than circumstantial reasons.

Those who supported the protests view the general motivation of the protesters as democratic. However, those in the second group viewed the protesters as anti-democratic. This discursive struggle between these two groups continued even after the protests ended.

This section covers how this discursive struggle began and how these two groups have formulated different paradigms to explain the protests. This is as significant as the sociological findings about the protesters to deepen our understanding of the political reverberations of the protesters.

DEFINING THE PROTESTERS

This discursive struggle was mainly based on the identity and motivations of the protesters. In other words, different political groups had contrasting views of the protesters and were engaged in a struggle both during and after the protests. These two opposing views among those who supported the protests and those against them created two different perceptions of the profile of the Gezi protesters. Those sympathizing with the protests argued that the protesters in İstanbul and other cities in Turkey were composed of those who had never joined similar political activities. This assumption led to the perception that the protesters were all post-1980 youths, carrying out the first “generation Y” demonstrations in Turkey. They were believed to be part of an “apolitical” generation and supported peaceful protests.

A significant portion of the international media and foreign governments seem to adopt this approach while the representatives of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in particular, most of the left political parties except the BDP,¹⁰ and some liberal commentators put this approach into circulation in Turkey.¹¹ Within this scope, the presence of organized or individual leftist protesters was deliberately ignored in order to increase the social support and legitimacy of the protests.

In addition to the approach of romanticizing the protests, another approach came into view with a focus on the concrete reality of the protests. This approach differentiated between protesters who protested the pedestrianization project through peaceful means on May 27, 2013 and those who took to the streets since May 31, 2013 and were at times engaged in violent activities. Similarly, the liberal democratic discourse adopted at the very beginning of the Gezi protests mutated into the Kemalist, nationalist, and traditional leftist discourse because of the changing profile of the protesters. The more realistic approach analyzed the protests within the scope of a historical and political context. Proponents of this approach argued that those affiliated with a political party and groups were disproportionately represented among the protesters when compared to their percentage in society. Thus, this was not at all the idealized a-political youths envisioned by the initial supporters of the protests.

Defining the Protesters as Civilian, Democratic, Peaceful, and Generation-Y

Supporters of the Gezi protesters advocated that the protests were part of a pro-democratic movement and expressed themselves through civil democracy: anti-government demonstrations. Because many of these supporters sympathized with the critical approach of the protesters against Prime Minister Erdoğan and the AK Party government's policies and values, they made positive assumptions about the protesters.

This imaginary profile of the protesters was introduced during the public debates without question and affected, to a great extent, the perception of certain groups in Turkish society of the protests. This approach launched an "angelism" campaign to increase the popularity and attraction of the protesters in the eyes of the society. The position was so outrageous; it seemed that their depictions of "the Gezi youth" had no grounding on reality.

10. The Peace and Democracy Party argued that what had initially begun as a civilian-democratic approach turned into a nationalist-authoritarian reaction.

11. This did not change even after the Gezi protests ended.

In the words of one columnist, this group of youths seemed to be characterized as: “supra-class, supra-generation, supra-gender, supra-arrogance, supra-emotion, supra-party, supra-attitude and supra-team.”¹² Another columnist, who distinguished the protesters from the political and historical contexts, presented them to the public opinion as if they were in a gold fish bowl, figuratively speaking. He created an imagery of people gathering at Gezi in protest and with the aim of resolving all of the country’s problems:

Inebriated youths, who took alcohol till morning the day before, were distributing Turkish bagels and tea to Muslims on a religious holy night. Some were dancing the traditional Halay dance in front of the Kurdish leader Öcalan’s pictures, while some others were protesting in favor of the Kurdish, militant, Islamist leader, Mirzabeyoglu. Groups, who would normally be in opposition to each other, gathered to protest together. There was no authority or police but these groups did not fight, bully, or harass one another. Everyone was happily sharing food, medicine, and books.”¹³

The Gezi protesters were portrayed as having no past, no tradition, no politics, and no self-serving interests. In a short period of time, this image of the protesters almost became untouchable. This is the context in which those in favor of the protests wanted to freeze in time the imagery of the those enthusiastic youths who listened to their conscience and protested against the pedestrianization project of Taksim Square between May 27-31, 2013. However, after this initial idealized period, as of May 31, 2013, the protesters, rather than acting on environmental concerns, began protesting based on political motivations, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Erdoğan. Rapidly, the increasing number of protesters geographically spread out across the country. This second stage of activism was completely overlooked by the supporters of the “idealized youths.” The effort to freeze the idealized image of the protesters was successful, as it gave a public representation to the movement. Thus, a heterogeneous group was popularized and was transformed into a homogenous movement with seemingly consistent demands. Consequently, the description of the protests in the media did not cover the changes, which occurred in the profile of the protesters. Those sympathizing with the protest(er)s also ignored the demands of certain groups who had joined the protests in order to strengthen the perception that the protests

12. Ertuğrul Özkök, “Kimdir Bu İnsanlar?” *Hürriyet*, June 3, 2013., <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/23421802.asp>

13. Can Dündar, “Taksim: Özlediğimiz Türkiye’nin Maketi,” *Milliyet*, June 8, 2013, <http://gundem.milliyet.com.tr/taksim-ozledigimiz-turkiye-nin-gundem/ydetay/1720160/default.htm>

constitute nothing but a “youth movement.” In an attempt to garner more sympathy in the eyes of Turkish society, these sympathizers did not identify the demands and activism carried out by the left wing parties and unions, who aligned themselves with the Gezi protests. Based on this imaginary profile of the protesters, which was expected to be welcomed by the public opinion, as the localized protests turned into a mass protest, the increasing acts of violence were attributed to undercover policemen and provocateurs. For instance, when the clash between a group from the Socialist Democracy Party (SDP) and the police at Taksim Square was broadcast live, numerous journalists and celebrities described these events in conspiratorial terms. This was part of the “romanticization” and the selective representation of the Gezi protests.

The printed media, in particular, carried out a similar campaign underlining the homogeneity of the protesters such as *#FlamasızGezi* (Gezi without banners) to show that the protesters were independent and apolitical. Not coincidentally, discussions about “Generation Y,” in the Turkish context, the generation who grew up in the aftermath of the September 12, 1980 military coup, were everywhere. In the words of a columnist, “creative rascals” fundamentally changed the sulky “revolutionism” of the left in Turkey and launched a witty, social opposition movement full of humor.¹⁴ During this period, different arguments praising Generation Y were put out there to create the perception that Turkish society was facing a new phenomenon it had never faced before.

Defining Protesters as Leftist, Authoritarian, Violence Prone, and Revolutionist

The argument supporting the activism and the pro-environmental and democratic movements of the Gezi youths along with other groups who wanted change was accepted almost without questioning during the first days of June. This was in part because, Turkish society was taken aback by these protests and surprised to see a wide variety of political and social groups coming together whom otherwise would not. Nevertheless, as of the third day of the protests, there were significant developments rendering it difficult to support the argument that all the protesters were homogenous, peaceful, and apolitical.

Some events that took place after the security forces left Taksim Square and Gezi Park clearly reflect the change in profile of the protesters. Also, the alter-

14. Murat Menteş, “Kreatif Keratalar,” *Yeni Şafak*, June 11, 2013. http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/Murat_Mentes/kreatif-keratalar/38097

ation of the messages expressed by the protesters weakened the image of the Gezi protesters as peaceful, civil, and pro-democratic-environmentalist. These developments, instead, paved the way for alternative readings of the protests. The profile of these groups of protesters reflected an activism that was violence prone, virulently political, and included a number of radical leftist groups. This reading emphasized that the mission and identity of the protest(er)s changed after the first week and underlined that the protests should be analyzed from a more detailed perspective rather than making an affirmative interpretation of the protests by focusing on the very first days of the protests.

The rapid and fundamental transformation of the masses that joined the protests in İstanbul and other cities in Turkey was one of the reasons why the more critical vision of the protesters profile became gradually more accepted. Within this scope, the protesters can be put into three general categories:

The first group includes the Gezi Park protesters and a large group consisting mostly of the youths who reacted against the excessive use of police force. It would be misleading to say that this group is apolitical. However, it is possible to suggest that this group does not identify with any sharp and polarizing ideological formation. The idealized profile of the Gezi protesters is inspired by this group. Indeed, it is possible to agree with most of these analyses as long as they are limited to this group. Notwithstanding it would be difficult to define this group simply as environmental activists with demands for a more participatory democracy. The protesters in this category and those at Gezi Park, in particular, clearly demonstrated denominational and political motives. Their reactions regarding life style were not only against the discourse of the AK Party but also against its policies. This group does not, for now, have an anti-AK Party discourse; however, it is apparent that one of their leading motivations included a weakened AK Party and Erdoğan. This is clearly seen in the declarations issued by many groups from the business world to the international media and political circles.

The second group consists of social groups who facilitated the spread of the protests across the country. This group, which is located in certain neighborhoods and residential areas rather than city squares, is mostly comprised of the constituency of the main opposition party, the CHP. Rather than demanding more democracy, this group has regularly taken a stance against the democratization initiatives of the last decade in the country. This group, relying on sectarian divisions, played a significant role in the transformation of the protests to the extent that it risked provoking social tensions. The second group served to transform the protests, whose initial power was in their indefinable and unpre-

dictable nature, taking the legitimacy of the protests hostage and usurping its political lexicon. Due to the polarizing effect of identity politics in Turkey, there is a tendency to capitalize on political events and capture them for the benefit of one group's political end game. This is done without consideration for the risks to social peace.

The third category includes militant and coup-mongering groups. The radical leftist groups attempted to instigate and provoke Turkish society to bring them to the streets, using the protests as a platform to spread provocative and manipulative messages on Twitter. Also, included in the fringe groups are the coup-mongers who wanted to see the civil ruling party be ousted. Members of this group are ready to paralyze public order by occupying streets at night and engaging in vandalism against other citizens. They are ready to even harm the initial mission and positions of the first group of protesters.

Each of these groups, although to different degrees, affected the views of public opinion and political circles on the protests. Therefore, analyses, which only focus on the initial group of the protesters and ignore the other actors also included in the protests, do not reflect reality. This is because the change in the protester profile requires that we assess the deeper causes or meanings attributed to the protests.

As the profile of the Gezi protesters changed and so did their tactics, the initial position based on non-violence and peaceful protests began to lose credibility in the public eye. Organized attacks on the Prime Minister's Office in Istanbul's Dolmabahçe neighborhood and attempts to occupy the state institutions, such as the Prime Ministry headquarters in Ankara and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, caused social segments, who did not strongly support the movement, to clearly side against the protests. Most of the protesters, without a doubt, did not take part in these violent acts. However, the escalation of violence ruined the reputation of all who took to the streets to support the Gezi protests. Given this picture, those who kept their distance from the protesters construed the protests as a post-modern coup attempt.

The Gezi protests gradually lost its initial multi-party structure, which also weakened the arguments that they were neutral and apolitical. The BDP Istanbul MP Sırrı Süreyya Önder, who greatly contributed to the protests' growing into a mass movement, criticized its party and others within the Kurdish political movement such as the People's Democratic Congress for not supporting the protests. The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which claimed to support the protests, denied these allegations and did not take part in this picture. The changing profile

of the Gezi protesters, however, contributed to the increase of protesters from political parties such as the Labor Party, the Socialist Democracy Party and the Communist Party of Turkey, which have a limited social support.

Consequently, people began to question the language of those who sympathized with the protests when broader political objectives replaced environmental concerns. Beginning from the first days of June, the Gezi protests focused on threatening the AK Party government and singling out Prime Minister Erdoğan, in particular, rather than universal issues such as democracy and civil liberties. During the same period, a series of quantitative research conducted by different institutions¹⁵ revealed the weight of the leftist and secular presence among the protesters, who seemed at first to be totally heterogeneous. Given these developments, those who did not support the protests had the chance to voice concrete criticisms against those joining the street protests. The main advantage of this alternative discourse was that it also paid attention to the developments after May 31, 2013 contrary to the “Generation Y” arguments, which only focused on the period between 27 and 31 May. The alternative discourse was adopted by the government. Furthermore, the transformation of the protests was documented. Based on the government’s perspective, many in Turkish society began to question the declared public identity of the Gezi protesters.

DEFINING THE PROTESTS: IN BETWEEN “REVOLUTION” AND “COUP D’ÉTAT”

A discussion on the characteristics, target, and mission of the protests will give indications on the second significant dynamic behind the political attitudes towards the Gezi protests. The discussion leads to two extreme definitions of the protests: “revolution” and “coup d’état.” Those supporting the protests, whom either verbally or actively joined the protests, argue that the main motivation behind the protests are environmental concerns, demand for freedom and more participation, and objection to the government’s imposition of a certain lifestyle. According to this group, the protests engendered a new political understanding and dynamism. This new type of politics can be qualified as “the Gezi spirit.” This group argued that the most powerful and “creative” opposition against the AK Party government would be possible because of this nascent “spirit.”

An opposing argument is that the Gezi protests evolved into representing those who failed to electorally succeed against the AK Party government through

15. See. Research by Konda, Genar and Andy-ar.

democratic means. Instead, certain Gezi protesters aimed to overturn the party in power through illegal and anti-democratic mechanisms. These groups after giving up hope of acceding to power acted out with violence and caused chaos. Thus, observing this course of events leads the analyst to deduce that there was a failed coup attempt undertaken by certain groups during the Gezi protests. Again, their tactic was to resort to other mechanisms than the ballot box to overthrow the legitimately elected governing party. Elements among the protesters also appear not to grasp the purpose of a pro-democratic civil society movement, as they simply perceive “the streets” as another means to overthrow the government instead of expressing themselves at the ballot box or through non-violent civilian movements. Furthermore, they see the “new Turkey” of Prime Minister Erdoğan and the AK Party as part of a “conspiracy” of international and local actors against their elitist and Islamophobic ideal of Turkey.

Gezi Protests as a “Revolution”

The initial motive behind the Gezi protests was the desire to protect the trees at Gezi Park against the project for the pedestrianization of Taksim Square. Claims that the trees at the Park would be uprooted and the area turned into a shopping mall triggered environmental concerns. In a wider sense, these protests can be viewed as a “resistance of a neoliberal attack on nature.” What had brought the protesters together was “environmental concerns” during the initial peaceful phase of the protests. However, the police brutality against the protesters that ensued and the derogatory dialogue between the Prime Minister Erdoğan and the protesters accelerated and heightened the level of acrimony of the protests, turning them into “a demand for freedom and participating in decision-making.” Fuat Keyman highlighted this aspect of the protests, he argued that “*by means of the protests, people defined democratic governance as discussion, negotiation, acting together and reconciliation rather than imperatives, power hierarchy and saying “I did it and it’s a done deal.”*¹⁶ Many Turkish citizens, other than the protesters, felt that the government should have asked the opinion of Istanbulites about the Project for the construction of Artillery Barracks at Taksim Square, which is replete with different symbolic interpretations. Also, many held the opinion that the government should take a step back given the strong reactions against the project. Also argued by Ahmet Insel “*the Gezi Resistance mainly demanded that the government*

16. Fuat Keyman, ‘Artık Eve Dönme Zamanı’, *Milliyet*, June 15, 2013, <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/artik-eve-donme-zamani/siyaset/ydetay/1723099/default.htm>

take their opinions and choices into consideration on the issues that concern their own living space. They did not want the government to pretend that it is asking for their opinion only at the ballot box. It was a demand for participatory democracy."¹⁷

While the numbers of protesters was steadily increasing and expanding across Turkey, the motives for taking to the streets were changing. The perception that the AK Party was trying to set the life styles for all Turks was a common criticism for many protesters. The alcohol regulation adopted at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shortly before the protests was a rallying point for those who felt like the AK Party was ignoring and even trying to control the life styles of many people in Turkish society. The headline, "Islamist party in power bans alcohol in Turkey," provoked claims that the ruling party is imposing, in a wider sense, its own lifestyle on other groups of Turkish society. Therefore, for many people, the Gezi protests became a means to reject the government's "imposing a particular lifestyle." Describing the protests as an "*uprising for dignity*," Insel argued that "*the protests are a result of the loss of security in people who feel that their lifestyle is more or less in danger when faced with a hyperactive personality, who believes that he knows what is best, nice, and right for everyone.*"¹⁸ It was argued that the political reverberations and reflections of the protests will be permanent and long lasting, and the protests gave birth to a "Gezi spirit." Furthermore, it would be correct to expect this spirit to reappear in different issues, places, and tones.¹⁹ As a result, it was frequently reiterated that politics would never be as it was before in Turkey, as the Gezi "spirit" undoubtedly had an impact on Turkey's youths, its society, and the nature of the protests in Turkey.

Gezi Protests as a "Coup d'état"

Those, who were against the protests, argue that it is impossible to describe the subsequent protests that broke out, following the initial peaceful ones, through positive motives such as "environmental concerns" or the "struggle for freedom."²⁰ Accordingly, they considered the Gezi protests, which had started out as a non-vio-

17. Ahmet Insel, 'Her Yer Taksim, her yer demokrasi', *Radikal*, July 16, 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal2/her_yer_taksim_her_yer_demokrasi-1141911

18. Ahmet Insel, 'Haysiyet Ayaklanması', *Radikal*, June 4, 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ahmet_insel/haysiyet_ayaklanmasi-1136174

19. Onur Baştürk, 'Gezi Ruhu Durarak Geziniyor', *Hürriyet*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/23536628.asp>

20. Başbakan Bu Tayyip Erdoğan Değişmez', *Hürriyet*, June 12, 2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/23479966.asp>; <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/-baska-bir-noktaya-dogru-yol-aliyor/siyaset/detay/1719847/default.htm>

lent protest but then was coopted into the agenda of marginal leftist organizations, as a “production of the post-28 February,” “a rehearsal of a quest for civil coup²¹” and “a digital coup attempt²².” Protests, which initially began with Gezi Park, but spread across the country and then turned into a Turkish uprising without regard for “the ballot box,”²³ seem to be an effort to “show that Turkey is a country where there is no democracy.²⁴” Thus, opponents of the protests, no longer saw the Gezi protests as a peaceful civil movement but as an effort to pave the way for a “civil society coup²⁵” and to disturb peace, stability, and security in the country²⁶.”

Also, that some trade unions and chambers of commerce, such as the Confederation of Public Workers’ Unions (KESK), the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DİSK), the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, and the Turkish Dental Association, called for a general strike to support the protests was reminiscent of street protests and meetings led by certain unions and civil society organizations, which rendered the Welfare government dysfunctional during the February 28 post-modern coup process.

The most popular slogan of the protests became “Tayyip Resign!” This ultimately strengthened the perception that the protests had a different goal from its initially declared one. At first, although the number of protesters against the AK Party and Erdoğan was high the main message was about environmental issues and the demand for a more participatory democratic process when it comes to urban planning. The scope of the protests was narrow. However, as the protests grew and new groups joined, the anti-AK Party and anti-Erdoğan discourse became the leading message. Thus, the protests went beyond Gezi Park, and turned into a rally where groups who failed to defeat the AK Party at the ballot box tried to slam it on the streets.

The Gezi protests brought together nationalists, anti-capitalist Muslims, LGBT groups, secularly concerned people, liberals, libertarians, Alewis, and sup-

21. Nihal Bengisu Karaca, ‘Samimi Müşteki, Organize Müfteri’, *Habertürk*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/850099-samimi-musteki-organize-mufteri>

22. ‘Gezi Parkı Dijital Darbe Girişimidir’, *Yeni Şafak*, June 23, 2013, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/roportaj-haber/gezi-parki-dijital-darbe-girisimidir-18.07.2013-534955>

23. Nihal Bengisu Karaca, ‘Hasar Raporu’, *Habertürk*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/853424-hasar-raporu>

24. Nihal Bengisu Karaca, ‘Hasar Raporu’, *Habertürk*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/nihal-bengisu-karaca/853424-hasar-raporu>

25. Omar Encarnación, ‘Even Good Coups are Bad’, *Foreign Affairs*, July 9, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139570/omar-encarnacion/even-good-coups-are-bad>

26. Hilal Kaplan, ‘Ağaç ve Hükümet’, *Yeni Şafak*, June 2, 2013, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/HilalKaplan/agac-ve-hukumet/37971>; Emrullah İşler, ‘Arap Baharı’ndan Gezi Parkı’nı Okumak’, *Yeni Şafak*, June 18, 2013, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yorum-haber/arap-baharindan-gezi-parkini-okumak-19.06.2013-533684>

porters of Beşiktaş and Fenerbahçe soccer clubs, who otherwise would never “join hands” under normal circumstances, against Prime Minister Erdoğan under a “common goal.” Environmental concerns about Gezi Park, therefore, masked the deeper resentment of secularists towards the AK Party government’s Islamist tendencies. Also, other groups, such as the Alewis, harbored true misgivings of the government’s intention to name the 3rd Bosphorous Bridge after the Ottoman Sultan “Selim the Grim.” Other concerns were then thrown into the mix, such as the recent bombing in the Turkish border town of Reyhanlı and the Syrian crisis²⁷. In this sense, the Gezi protests turned into a bitter cauldron of animosity by different groups towards a number of policies and projects developed by the Prime Minister and the AK Party government. This heterogeneous group, with contrasting if not sometimes even opposing positions, came together *temporarily* against their perceived common adversaries: Prime Minister Erdoğan and the AK Party.

Given the discourse, banners, and slogans of the protests, the common enemy of this alliance was, without a doubt, Prime Minister Erdoğan. This feeling was clearly stated by a journalist who supported the protests: “*Yes, Prime Minister, you are the problem, not someone else; you are at the heart of the issue.*”²⁸ The resistance to the continued power of Erdoğan fits into a broader Turkish political context with his self-declared last term as Prime Minister coming to a head and the possibility of him running for President to continue his “reign” over Turkish politics. Thus, since the opposition was unsuccessful in winning at the ballot box against him, they expressed their discontent of current Turkish politics on the streets. Their goal is ultimately to block the Presidential system and not let the AK Party and/or the Prime Minister Erdoğan build this “new Turkey,” which they do not feel integrates their way of life and political and social priorities. In this sense, the Gezi protests can be construed as an opposition to the construction of the “new Turkey” at the hands of the AK Party and/or Erdoğan.

The purpose of taking the discussions on the presidential system off the agenda was to prevent Prime Minister Erdoğan from becoming the President²⁹. The Chairman of the CHP, Kılıçdaroğlu, declared that Prime Minister Erdoğan lost his chance to become the President after the Gezi protests. By taking this position

27. Nathalie Tocci, “A u-turn in Turkish politics? Gezi Park in perspective”, *The Open Democracy*, June 3, 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/nathalie-tocci/u-turn-in-turkish-politics-gezi-park-in-perspective>

28. Hasan Cemal, “Türkiye hızla tehlikeli sulara doğru seyrediyor! Ve Sayın Başbakan, mesele sizden başkası değil”, *T24*, June 17, 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/yazi/turkiye-hizla-tehlikeli-sulara-dogru-seyrediyor-ve-sayin-basbakan-mesele-sizden-baskasi-degil/6906>

29. Aslı Aydıntaşbaş “Taksim Başkanlık sisteminin sonu mu?” *Milliyet*, June 2, 2013, <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/taksim-baskanlik-sisteminin-sonu/siyaset/yardetay/1717471/default.htm>

publicly, the CHP leader confirmed the aim of the Gezi alliance.³⁰ The optimal aim, after preventing the Prime Minister from becoming the President, was to sideline him from the political sphere. In particular, if he kept his promise, in line with the AK party bylaw, not to run for a third consecutive term as Prime Minister.³¹ Prominent journalist, Markar Esayan, who also agrees with these arguments, said, “*Gezi was an attempt of a coup d’état targeting Prime Minister Erdoğan and it adopted a method to create the perception that Erdoğan was a dictator and to break Erdoğan’s connections with the AK Party.*”³²

The long-term aim of the alliance and atmosphere during the Gezi protests was to pave the way for the construction of a “New Turkey” based on liberal-left values rather than at the hands of conservatives. Protesters gave examples from some steps taken by the AK Party government and the Prime Minister’s opinions on several issues, and argued that “the Prime Minister is authoritarian and oppressive,” “the government is made up of moderate Islamist,”³³ “the Prime Minister is returning back to values of the National Vision (*Milli Görüş*).” These arguments should be interpreted based on the discussions about which values the new Turkey will rely upon. For instance, a journalist, who supported the Gezi protests, argued that one of the values that new Turkey should integrate and respect is “freedom of expression.” Therefore, there will be no new Turkey as long as religious values adopted by certain segments of the society are belittled.³⁴ On the one hand, it is possible to read the alliance during the Gezi protests as an alliance by those, who lost during the elimination of the old Turkey, and those, who feel alienated during the construction of the new political system, to prevent the AK Party from building a new Turkey according to its own values.³⁵

On the other hand, it was emphasized that the protests equally represented the elitist longing of “White Turks”³⁶ and their children in the new generation to regain

30. ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Olma Şansını Kaybetti’, *Yeni Şafak*, August 2, 2013, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/politika-haber/cumhurbaskani-olma-sansini-kaybetti-02.08.2013-549522>

31. Adnan Boynukara, ‘Erdoğan’sız Siyaset Özlemi’, *Star Açık Görüş*, July 6, 2013, <http://haber.stargazete.com/acikgorus/erdogansiz-siyaset-ozlemi/haber-769207>

32. ‘Gezi Aydınların İçindeki Canavarı Ortaya Çıkardı’, *Yeni Şafak*, July 27, 2013, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/pazar-haber/gezi-aydinlarin-icindeki-canavari-ortaya-cikardi-01.08.2013-546515>

33. Cengiz Çandar, ‘Muhafazakâr Demokrat’lıktan ‘İhvincilik’e, Gezi’den Mısır’a...’ *Radikal*, July 14, 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz_candar/muhafazakar_demokratlikten_ihvincilik_geziden_misira-1141705

34. Hasan Cemal, ‘Bugün Erdoğan’dır, Eski Türkiye’den hâlâ vazgeçemeyen...’ *T24*, June 9, 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/yazi/bugun-erdogandir-eski-turkiyeden-hala-vazgecemeyen/6852>

35. Hatem Ete, ‘Su akar, kum kalır’, *Sabah*, June 22, 2013, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Perspektif/Yazarlar/ete/2013/06/22/su-akar-kum-kalir>

36. The old establishment Turks

their old privileges. Those who support this argument, illustrate it by the position expressed by the Taksim Solidarity Platform, when it rejected holding a referendum on the project of the government on the grounds that “*a scientific issue cannot be put to a referendum*” in the meeting with the Vice-Prime Minister Bülent Arınç. The Platform participated as the “spokesperson” of the Gezi protests. According to one journalist, the Gezi protests re-put on the agenda the understanding “*for the people, despite the people,*” supported by the founding Republican elite.³⁷

Consequently, the definition of the Gezi protests sparked off one of the most heated debates indicating the attitudes towards the protests. Those considering the Gezi protests as an opportunity and/or guarantee for the democratization of politics, simply preferred to focus on the spontaneity of the initial protests, environmental concerns, and the police brutality, but ignored the changing composition of the protest(er)s and the changing target, message and the desired influence of the protests. Those who were against the Gezi protests underlined the transformation of the protests in time, opposed those who tried to explain the protests following the initial peaceful ones through positive factors, and described the protests as anti-democratic.

DYNAMICS BEHIND THE PROTESTS

Through the Gezi demonstrations and the dynamics behind the protests, two contrasting positions emerged on who were the Gezi protesters and what were their goals. Fundamentally, there were two different interpretations on the reasons behind the Gezi protests: Those who supported the protests focused on psychological and situational factors, such as government policies and the language of the Prime Minister while those who were against the protests underlined the structural dynamics behind the protests. The supporters of the protests pointed to the AK Party government policies that they opposed, Erdoğan’s uncompromising rhetoric, his perceived unsupportive approach to environmentalism, and the police brutality that ensued during the first days of the protests. According to this group, the imperious language of Erdoğan and the insensitive policies of the government led to a “burst of anger” in the society. This perspective, which attempted to explain the protests by providing psychological reasons, abstained from discussing the structural and historical dynamics behind the protests. Although those who were against the protests acknowledged that the initial days of the protests stemmed

37. ‘Dijitokrasinin Türk Baharı Arzusu’, *Star Gazetesi*, June 15, 2013, <http://haber.stargazete.com/acikgorus/dijitokrasinin-turk-bahari-arzusu/haber-762863>

from political frustration among the a-political youths and environmental activists, they emphasized that none of these reasons explained the accumulation of anger and the social unrest that followed. Furthermore, those who were against the protests underscored how rapidly the protests underwent a transformation from a civil society movement to a violent-rally, challenging the political order of the AK Party government and attempting to settle accounts with the government. This deep-seated resentment by certain groups in Turkish society against the current political order was expressed through anger and has structural political and social causes. Thus, to understand the “burst of anger” that erupted during the protests, the deep-rooted causes of the accumulated anger need to be analyzed.

Dynamics: Understanding the “Burst of Anger”

Those who considered the Gezi protests as a “burst of anger” cited psychological and situational reasons. These reasons can be categorized into three headings: (1) environmental concerns, (2) police brutality, and (3) the political style and language of the Prime Minister. Environmentalism is the first reason explaining the dynamics behind the protests. A number of analysts seriously stopped to consider this issue. Nilüfer Göle penned one of the most influential articles on the central role of this issue in understanding the protests. The words of Göle indicate the central role of environmental concerns and urban awareness in these protests: *“Where does the originality of this movement come from? Like the movement itself, its anatomy has a close analogy to the roots of trees. The attitude that sees trees only as a pretext fails to notice the meaning, innocence, and root power of the movement. Young people occupied Gezi Park to protest the project, which would chop down the trees and build a shopping center in their place and put a new urban awareness on the agenda.”*³⁸ As this analysis indicates, Göle argued that environmentalism and urban awareness completed and strengthened each other.

According to other analysts, this environmentalist reaction meant the rejection of the AK Party’s policies to constantly be building up the city. Shopping malls are one of the symbols of this hap-hazard and over the top urbanization. Moreover, in leftist circles there is a strong critique of the AK Party’s pure neo-liberal economic policies since it came to power in 2002. Opponents of these policies argue that “trees at Gezi Park will be uprooted and a new shopping mall will be built instead” on the grounds of both pro-environmental concerns and

38. Nilüfer Göle, “Gezi: Bir kamusal meydan hareketinin anatomisi”, T24, June 06, 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/yazi/gezi-bir-kamusal-meydan-hareketinin-anatomisi/6824>

anti-neo-liberal economics. The government project for Gezi was criticized, as being anti-environmental and a reflection of a culture of unwarranted benefits for the construction lobby and the new political elite in Turkey. .

Though environmental reasons constituted the first dynamic of the Gezi protests, the main factor behind the spread of protests nationwide was the use of excessive and disproportionate police force and tear gas. Columnist Cengiz Çandar briefly summarizes this view: *“The accumulated reaction to Tayyip Erdoğan turned into a ‘historical Istanbul revolution’ when the police ruthlessly fired tear gas against a group of people, who was peacefully protesting against the intervention in the green field at the Gezi Park under the name of ‘pedestrianisation project’ at Taksim, and against movie and TV stars, artists, musicians who supported them”*³⁹.

It was reiterated that the protests were a reaction to the “imperious attitude and political style of Erdoğan.” Another columnist and an academic, Ahmet İnsel, gave one of the best examples of this interpretation: *“The Gezi protests constitute an uprising of those who are fed up with an aggressive and dominant political style, this disdainful tone and those who felt that their dignity as citizens is jeopardized. Therefore this is not a riot against the regime but an uprising for dignity.”*⁴⁰ Accordingly, prior to the Gezi protests, Prime Minister Erdoğan’s speeches and policies of “bringing up a religious generation,” “having three children,” and “the alcohol regulation” were viewed as government interference into the private lives of Turkish citizens. During the very first days of the protests, the Prime Minister’s remarks, describing the demonstrators as “looters and vandals” among others pejorative descriptive, were read as a continuation of this disturbing tone and attitude. Consequently, when the Prime Minister maintained his imperious tone and political style during the protests it triggered a burst of anger among the already frustrated protesters. Thus, three main reasons for the escalation of the protests were: “environmental concerns and opposition to shopping mall culture,” “police brutality,” and “the political style and tone of the Prime Minister.”

Structural Dynamics: Understanding the “Accumulation of Anger”

Another interpretation argued that structural factors played a greater role in the “accumulation of anger” among the protesters. Initially, this analysis received relatively less coverage in public debates but may be the key to a better understand-

39. Cengiz Çandar, “Postmodern bir direniş”, Radikal, June 03, 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz_candar/postmodern_bir_direnis-1136001

40. Ahmet İnsel, “Haysiyet ayaklanması”, Radikal, June 04, 2013, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ahmet_insel/haysiyet_ayaklanmasi-1136174

ing of the unfolding events. The scope of this analysis is broad. It encompasses the recent political transformation in Turkey's political center, which paved the way for the AK Party ascent to power. In coming to power and governing for over a decade, the AK Party has brought to the forefront a political identity that had previously been excluded from the system. Faced with this new identity, the opposition has failed to fill the gap in politics during this process and properly represent its old constituencies. Moreover, there are groups in Turkish society, especially among the youths, who can neither identify with the AK Party nor the old ineffective opposition. Further aggravating this political and social tension, it has been argued that there is a lack of political mechanisms to balance out the strength of the AK Party in the political system. There appears to be means or room for many groups in Turkish society to be heard. According to this view, these developments caused an accumulation of anger in a significant part of the Gezi protesters.

Supporters of this view focused on the crisis of representation for the Kemalist-secular groups after the AK Party has reached a dominant position as the ultimate political centrist party in Turkey today. Since 2008-2009, the AK Party has been engaged in an active struggle to eliminate the military and bureaucratic tutelage system. Within the scope of this struggle, political cases such as the Ergenekon, the Sledgehammer and other similar ones were launched and constitutional packages and legislative amendments followed. As a result of this struggle, the tutelage of military and civil bureaucracy over the political system was eliminated and these structures were confined to their limited areas. As the tutelage system was weakened, democracy has become more established. With the AK Party, civilian government is no longer a nominal government or a government under the shadow of the military and the bureaucratic tutelage system of a "Statist" elite. The AK Party is a democratically elected government in its own right. Its accountability is to its electors.

However, the weakening of the tutelary system, which represented a significant turning point for the democratization of Turkey, paradoxically resulted in a representation crisis (lack of representation) of its former constituencies. Despite various effective interventions, the CHP or any other opposition party failed to fill this representation gap thus further deepening the crisis. Underlining the structural reasons behind the Gezi protests, columnist Etyen Mahçupyan clearly shows that the opposition in general and the CHP in particular failed to represent its own constituency in the political system as a meaningful political actor: *"The first groups in Gezi by-passed the political party; in other words, the CHP, which was expected to represent them by default. In a society where cultural identities determine*

*political divergences, they convicted the political movement, representing their own cultural identities, by ignoring it.*⁴¹ This resulted in a sense of estrangement and accumulation of anger in many groups consisting mainly of the CHP constituency.

The change of the political codes at the center with the AK Party's consolidation of power and successive electoral wins of over 50% of the population fueled and exacerbated the sense of estrangement and accumulation of anger in these groups who had controlled the polity in Turkey for many years. Traditional center-right or center-left parties in Turkey consider that their main mission is to bring their own constituencies to the center and enable them to make the most of political and economic opportunities afforded to the dominant political power. According to this approach, these parties did not aim to change the way the political system was structured. It was a top down political strategy. They believed that if something needed to be changed, it was the constituency.

In contrast, the AK Party's relation with the center of politics is quite different. The AK Party does not aim to bring its constituency to the center and offer them the privileges of the center. The AK Party, instead, aims to transform the political center per se and reconstruct it. Esayan clearly shows that the AK Party's goal is to fundamentally transform the center rather than merely making cosmetic changes: *"the AK Party is a founding party and it fundamentally changes the first Republic."*⁴²

During this transformation and the re-construction process, the AK Party culled its representatives and its electorate from Turkish society with similar identities and values. Among the social groups - integrated into this new political class - were Islamist conservatives and representatives of Turkey's previous political periphery. This new political establishment brought its own colors to the system. These very same values and identities were regarded as a security threat against the state. Instead, they have greatly contributed to the new dynamic center of politics in Turkey. However, this new political phenomena has been received like a pebble stuck in someone's shoe by the former political elite, in particular those who held steadfast to the social engineering project of the Kemalist system.

Another dynamic behind the accumulation of anger leading to the Gezi protests is the lack of opposition in Turkish politics and the resulting sense of victimization. Mahçupyan underlines the CHP's failure to assume a role in finding

41. Etyen Mahçupyan, "Gezi'nin yapıcı misyonu", Zaman, July 07, 2013, http://www.zaman.com.tr/etyen-mahcupyan/gezinin-yapici-misyonu_2108155.html

42. Markar Esayan, "Demokratikleşme paketi, hemen şimdi!", Markar Esayan personal website, June 19, 2013, <http://www.markaresayan.com/?cat=3&paged=5>; See also. Ertem and Esayan, 2013.

a solution to the Gezi protests, reflecting the lack of opposition in Turkey: “*CHP seems to remain outside this micro 'politics' during the resolution seeking*”⁴³.”

Therefore, the lack of opposition in Turkey obviously resulted in the accumulation of anger among certain groups of the society. Police brutality, the Prime Minister’s style of language and the way the government handled the Gezi protests may have caused a “burst of anger” but they were not the deeper factors and fail to adequately explain how this anger accumulated and why these groups took to the streets. Masses are inclined to take to the streets when they feel they are victimized and are not adequately represented in politics. They feel frustrated when they cannot find viable political channels to vent their grievances and be heard by the political establishment.

In brief, those rejecting the argument of a “burst of anger,” which only explained the first phase of the protests, focused on more structural factors behind the protests. In other words, they argued that it would be impossible to see the whole picture of the Gezi protests event without understanding what caused “the accumulation of anger,” the phase before the “burst of anger.”

43. Etyen Mahçupyan, “Gezi’nin yapıcı misyonu”, Zaman, July 07, 2013, http://www.zaman.com.tr/etyen-mahcupyan/gezinin-yapici-misyonu_2108155.html

DUNYA HALKLARI
DEVRIME YURUYO
HER SEY EMEGIN OLA



KADELE
BIRUGI

YASASI
DEVIRI
SOSYALIZM
SOSYALIST
DEMOKRASI
PARTISI
SDP

fabrika, zevi u
desthilatdariya siyasi
de her tist bibe ye kede

fabrikalar
tarlalar
siyasi iktidar
hersey
emegin
olacak

SYKPI Sosyalist
Partisi Kurulusu
Partisi



EMPERYALIZM
SALDIRGANLIGA
HAKSIZ TENDRE
DEGT. KEMNETEGEDEL

DEMOKRATIK HALLAR
FEDERASYONU

ISTIFA

HKP

EMPERYALIZM
SIVAS, EGALYON
ALTERNATIF
SOSYALIZM
CAGRI

SIMDI
ANARSI ZI
ZOMAN



LI
DEHA
EM
KALK
DEVIR
ANAR
FAAL

Özgü

Alinteri
ZENGINI CENNET, YOKSULA SEFAKET
Ya ADALET
Ya KIYAMET!
Sosyalist Dayanisma Platformu

SOSYALIST HUKUKSIZLIGA
KARSI
BIRAZLIK, GIGITLIK
SINIF MUHTELLEKLER KUTLE

OCCUPY HABERTURK!



ZOOKE
PARTI
54
BADEM
BIRIKLINSI
HALK
DO
gezi



CONCLUSION

The Gezi Park protests began as a social movement and ended as a political one. More precisely, the Gezi Park protests phase as a social movement ended as soon as they were turned into a political movement. New movements can be created by political motivations and acts of political “engineering,” however; these very efforts are transformative and will hinder the social character. As the protests became politicized in a short period of time, the social aspect of the protests did not receive adequate coverage and instead left behind a significant political imprint. Within the Turkish political framework, the Gezi protests offered up a new and powerful political roadmap other than the parliamentarian one, which has become static since the 2007 general elections. This roadmap excluded traditional political actors; however, it also brought to the forefront traditional topical issues as well as new dilemmas. In this sense, it is possible to say that the protests made visible political, social, and cultural fissures that existed since the establishment of the Republic. There is no doubt that the protests will have a permanent influence on politics through these dynamics in the long term, and beyond their short term direct effect on the incumbent party and its leader.

Before examining the political reverberations of the Gezi protests, it would be better to consider four main points: First, one should keep in mind that the composition of the protesters during the three-week long protests evolved daily. The protesters had a heterogeneous structure at the beginning in terms of political opinion, ideological tendencies, political party, and age. However, protesters

supporting a certain opinion, ideology, political movement and party replaced these aforementioned protesters as of the second week of the protests. Second, the target and the justification of the protests evolved in parallel to the politicization of the protesters. The protesters were initially mobilized out of environmental concerns and social awareness to react against the misreading and mishandling of the protests. However, political awareness replaced the environmental and social awareness. Protests were used as a means to settle the score with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and to object to the construction of the “New Turkey” at the hands of the ruling AK Party. Third, numerous domestic-foreign, national-international actors and institutions, in parallel to the change in the motivation of the protest(er)s, were involved in the protests through different means and priorities on a discursive level and tried to change the course of the protests. Fourth, in addition to the transformation of the protest(er)s and the change in their objective, the protests reach went beyond its initial context. Both the protests and the political reverberations of the protests changed over the course of the demonstrations. After a while, why these protests had begun, how they developed, who the protesters were, and what their original purpose was began to lose meaning. Instead, the created perception and political “engineering” of the incidents came to the foreground. The protests were perceived as the birth of a strong and permanent opposition against Erdoğan and his government.

One should pay attention to this preliminary information while analyzing the political legacy of the Gezi Park protests. This is because the groups supporting the Gezi Park protests adopted a conscious strategy, concentrated on the initial profile of the protesters and refused to make layered and varying definitions of them. Today, they persist in adopting the same attitude despite obvious and transformative phases of the protests. Since June 4, 2013, the big picture of the early days of the demonstrations has been “frozen” although the profile of the protesters and their motivations evolved. The main political motives behind the following phases of the protests were kept out of discussions. Moreover, the profile of the protest(er)s have remained fluid to develop a seemingly homogenous opposition front against the ruling party. It is, therefore, necessary to analyze the political content and context of the Gezi Park protests and to discuss the political legacy of the protests.

THE AIM OF THE PROTESTS

“Reaction” overtook “demand” during the Gezi Park protests. The protesters took to the streets to react against certain governmental policies rather than formulating

proactive ones. As “reaction” was preferred over “demand,” different political-social groups, which would never easily reconcile with each other, gathered together on a same political platform. In this sense, it should be underlined that the main dynamic that brought the protesters together is a reaction against the current political actors and values rather than certain normative political propositions or a quest for resolving Turkey’s long-standing problems. That the protest(er)s did not have a founding function in political terms does not necessarily mean that they do not have a political goal. On the contrary, it is clear that the protests had easily definable purposes. Furthermore, the meaning attributed to these protests by many actors and groups during and after the protests continued to shape these purposes.

The aim of the Gezi Park protests in the short and middle term was to limit the authority of Erdoğan, to isolate and weaken him, to convince him to cooperate, and to force him to negotiate. Basically, the underlying goal was to exercise control over him prior to the Presidential elections. The protesters tried to reach this target by reshaping the image of Erdoğan. They tried to depict Erdoğan as someone who is “irreconcilable,” “obstinate,” “irrational,” “emotional,” “a wishful thinker,” “non-pragmatic,” and “mentally sick. Moreover, Erdoğan was described as “authoritarian” and a “dictator.” The message that was being conveyed to the Prime Minister’s colleagues, supporters, the Turkish and international public opinion, and actors was that Erdoğan was no longer an effective leader. They tried to gradually isolate him in the eyes of the AK Party, Turkey and international circles, and to weaken his decision-making capacity; therefore, rendering him ineffective or forcing him to cooperate. In the middle and long run, the Gezi Park protests aimed to levy control over Erdoğan and the AK Party and retake the command over the coordinates of the new political system.

A POST-MODERN TUTELAGE ATTEMPT

The Gezi Park protests are the first and the most effective protests of the ‘Post-Tutelage –New-Turkey.’ Both the concepts and dynamics triggered by the protests and the reactions and demands of the protesters are unique to this ‘Post-Tutelage-New-Turkey.’ In this sense, it is possible to discuss the protests within the scope of Turkey’s two century-old Westernization-modernization experience and its century-old tutelary period. Since the founding of the Republic, the main dynamic that shaped Turkey’s political activity has been the power struggle between the Western-oriented minority elite and the conservative social majority. The Western-oriented minority elite maintained their privileges relying on the power

and dominance of the civil-military bureaucracy in the political system for centuries. After about a century-long democratic struggle, the bureaucratic tutelage was weakened, elections began to shape the political system and the role of the national will in politics grew and matured. The milestone of this struggle was the September 12, 2010 referendum.

Because tutelary actors were deprived of the instruments to control politics and the political parties no longer voiced the demands or interests of these actors, the Western-oriented minority elite took to the streets. The streets became the new medium to impose tutelage over politics. It is the mindset of the tutelary system to exclude democratic political means and force the governing party to make decisions by any means necessary, including street politics. The tutelage system used to be imposed with the help of the privileges of the military and civil bureaucracy. This new approach is to try and impose tutelage by pouring into the streets, using attractive political concepts and discourses that sacrifice democratic means to street politics. In this sense, numerous concepts such as ‘ballot box-democracy relations’ and the ‘dichotomy of majoritarianism and participation’ have been introduced. This is a post-modern tutelage attempt. In the past, the demands of the social majority were ignored by tutelary actors and now they are trying to delegitimize the social majority and render them weak-willed. In the past, tutelary actors and institutions weakened the national will and now they are trying to weaken it through discursive instruments and threats of chaos.

THE CONCERN FOR LIFE STYLE VERSUS DEMOCRACY

The Gezi Park protests marked the change in the dynamic of politics that has been witnessed since the referendum. Since the establishment of the Republic, the main dynamic of political activities was to eliminate the tutelary system, to democratize the political system, and to build democracy. The tutelary system was weakened through the struggle for democracy and the political system was beginning to be finally rid of the antiquated tutelary system. However, the AK Party’s attempt to build the new political system caused discontent among many political groups, including those who supported the AK Party when it weakened the tutelary system. As a result, the concern for a certain “way of life” overtook the concern for the political system. Concerned by the conservative-religious identity of the AK Party, numerous groups gathered together. The Gezi Park protests defined the political dynamic of the new period as the struggle for “a way of life.” When the democracy was no longer the founding dynamic of politics, a large majority of the liberal and

left groups prioritized identity politics rather than democracy. The Gezi Park protests not only proved that the founding dynamic of politics has changed but also reinforced this change. In this sense, the Gezi protests symbolized sacrificing the demand for democracy for the sake of concern for “a way of life.” If the political dynamic consolidated by the Gezi protests persists, similarities and differences of styles of living rather than the struggle about pro and anti-democracy will, from now on, shape the political roadmap.

THE NEW POLITICAL ROADMAP

The Gezi protests made visible the transformation of the old political actors and the pains of the change in the center of politics, in the last decade, as they shed a light on the struggle for building the “New Turkey.” When the political mission shifted from eliminating the tutelage to building a democratic system, almost all of the actors who were effective in shaping the political life changed their positions and discourses. Actors changed their positions in relation to the religious-conservative groups, which have been building the new political system. The political representative of these groups is the AK Party and its leader Prime Minister Erdoğan.

LIBERALS’ TEST OF DEMOCRACY

It is possible to say that the leading group that changed its political position is the left-liberal group. Considering the actors who are shaping the public opinion, the left-liberal groups, which supported the AK Party in its efforts to weaken the tutelage, now regard the AK Party as a rival during the construction of the “New Turkey.” This results from the disagreement about which values to prioritize while building the “New Turkey.” The Gezi protests proved this disagreement and showed that the liberal-left groups are willing and determined to lead and represent the anti-AK Party coalition. The main group of the Gezi protests, the nationalist group, with their discontent about democratic reforms that have been carried out in the last decade in Turkey gained undeniable legitimacy when liberal groups with democratic discourse allied with them. The Gezi Park protests mainly differ from the Republic protests, which were carried out on the eve of the 2007 presidential elections, in that for Gezi the left-liberal groups allied with the Kemalist-nationalist groups. Supporting the Gezi protests, the left-liberal groups showed that they prioritized identity politics based on a concern for preserving a certain life style above the quest for building a democratic political order.

THE CENTER BESIEGED BY NATIONALISM

The Gezi protests strengthened the political power of the Kemalist-nationalist groups. They have gained momentum with the help of several key issues, such as: the spillover effect into Turkey of the civil war in Syria, the excesses of the Ergenekon Trials, and the trials and tribulations of the Kurdish question. The Kemalist-nationalists have recently increased their political influence by forming alliances with other groups instead of building up their constituency. The latter consisted of organized cliques in the last few years. The Gezi protests were the peak of this trend. A new urban population was also involved in this dynamic, which was limited to youth organizations, the radical-left Kemalist organizations, and the main opposition CHP grassroots movements. This new urban group keeps its distance from radicalism and marginalism. However, their political argument is limited to their concern for preserving their life style. This group obviously lent considerable legitimacy to the Kemalist-nationalist groups. This new situation will have strong political reverberations. First, if nationalism takes position in the center, the political medium may turn radical. This may increase the political and social tension and result in radical-marginal behaviors in the center. Second, political and social groups in opposition may be transformed and marginalized due to their alliance with nationalist actors. In other words, the alliance of the nationalists with the new urban group, in opposition to the ruling party, may result in a permanent transformation of its identity. The center-left and the Kemalist urban groups may position themselves in the left similar to what happened to the center-right in the 1990s. In addition to many other dynamics, if this new urban group, who mobilized out of concerns for life style and an anti-Erdoğan discourse, cooperates with the nationalist groups that are prone to violence.

THE CHP'S DIVERGENCE FROM THE CENTER

The attempt by the nationalists to besiege the center and transform their marginality into a political medium will affect the CHP the most. Since the second half of the 1960s, the CHP has determined its political discourse and activities in order to strengthen the center-left against the radical left. It is possible to say that the CHP maintained this attitude until very recently despite the more recent changes. However, during the CHP presidency of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP changed both attitudes owing to many dynamics, including the Ergenekon Case and the Syrian policy. The CHP's political activism is limited to giving political support to protests and celebrations led by radical left organizations. The CHP carries out a policy, which exposes its constituency in the center to the political

agenda of radical organizations rather than drawing to the center radical circles who feel discontent about the current political situation. The Gezi Park protests crystallized this tendency. The CHP consented to a passive policy. As a result, it not only helped radical-marginal organizations to take the political situation hostage and attempt to absorb the center but it also began to forget its very political aim. If the CHP maintains this attitude, it will either have to give up its position as a center party, therefore, becoming an identity party or risk losing its political significance and be replaced by marginal parties that are aligned with extremists Kemalists-nationalists.

INDECISION OF THE KURDISH PEOPLE

The Kurdish people were another actor whose discourse and position were under critical examination during the Gezi protests. The call to those who supported the Gezi protests in the Kurdish movement; discussions among the Kurdish movement about what kind of an attitude they should adopt in the protests; and consequently the decision of the Kurdish movement not to actively participate in the protests are all elements worth analyzing. First, the Kurdish movement, which was initially accepted as a natural part of the Gezi coalition, remained distant to the Gezi protests due to the resolution process. This gives significant indications about where the Kurdish people stand and what kind of a role they will assume in the construction of the new political paradigm. Second, the attitude of the Kurdish movement during the Gezi process reflected how the resolution process is having an impact on the social peace and how it is transforming the Kurdish movement. Third, the attitude of Kurds towards the Gezi protests will bring up many questions and cause the Kurdish movement to inevitably discuss existential issues that underpin Kurdish identity politics, such as being from Turkey, the role of the Turkish left, and the place of religion for the Kurdish movement. Fourth, it showed that the coalition that supported the Gezi protests was ready to give up its most significant attitudes to put the AK Party in a difficult position. Finally, it showed that founding political moves are able to nullify the most powerful games, traps, and plots.

THE RADICALIZATION OF ALEWI YOUTH

One of the outstanding issues that the Gezi protests raised on the political agenda is that many Alewi youths became radicalized, accumulated political tension, and were very engaged in the street. This is a new development for Turkish politics and begs an in-depth analysis. Various recent political developments such as the chairmanship of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu of the CHP, Turkey's Syrian policy, and the Kurdish

resolution process seem to have transformed the relation of the Alewi groups towards politics. The Gezi protests revealed that this transformation is not negligible. The massive accumulation of political energy resulting from the failure of the CHP to form effective political channels and of the political establishment to resolve the problems, seem to have turned into increased tensions following the Gezi protests. The Gezi protests indicated that this tension becomes violent at times. In the upcoming period, political actors should confront this pressing new development. There is a need for political channels and actors that will represent the demands of the Alewi groups in the political arena and convince those groups inclined to violence to opt for pro-active but peaceful political and legal tracks to achieve their goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is clear that the Gezi Park protests will influence political activities in many other aspects. It is, therefore, necessary to analyze in detail the Gezi Park protests, new political tendencies created by the protests and political alliances, and to develop new political measures to avoid possible negative reverberations of protests on the democratization of the political system and building social peace. In this sense, a great responsibility falls on the shoulders of all actors who care about these two agendas. However, the responsibility to develop a new language and policy to compensate for the political costs and fall out of the Gezi process rests on the shoulders of the AK Party government due to its potential to assume a foundational role in politics.
- Turkey succeeded in its struggle against the century-old tutelary system with the help of a political strategy in which democracy became the main dynamic of the political system. The democracy agenda paved the way for different political actors and groups to postpone their individual agendas of priority and to form a broad alliance front on legitimate grounds. This also paved the way for democratic gains that one could not imagine until very recently. In this transition period, during which the construction period of a democratic political system in lieu of tutelary system is still in progress, Turkey does not have the luxury to put other anti-democratic dynamics at the center of politics. Today's tensions and rivalries among groups that initially allied around democracy since the September 12, 2010 Referendum harms the mission to build a democratic political system. In this framework, the new political system based on democracy can be built only if these actors and groups, who are able to gather around the common ground of democracy, channel their political energy into building a democratic political system rather than in pursuit of other goals.

- Discussions since the referendum indicate that many actors and groups, who are ready to ally with the AK Party for the democratization of the political system, are concerned about the agenda of the AK Party for the construction of the system. The concern for preserving “life styles” seems to have become the most powerful dynamic in politics – with the addition of new groups that have formed based on this single issue. The AK Party has succeeded in removing uneasiness about its political agenda through transparent and planned democratic reforms. Today, the AK Party should abstain from discourses that deepen the concerns of some groups within the society, counter the questions and criticisms through increased democratic reforms, and adopt a policy to quell concerns over changes to life style issues. Such a strategy, today, as it did in the past, will enable to separate those who have real concerns from those who hide their enmity under the veil of legitimate concerns.
- Recently, political tensions are based on individual reactions to local acts rather than friction among political identities and groups. This new situation, which is a result of, to a great extent, the democratic reforms of the AK Party government, pushes the limits of traditional political practices and procedures and makes it necessary to develop a new political understanding that enables the broadening of political participation channels. Within this scope, there is a need for the pluralization of decision-making processes and mechanisms, development of a new local administrative mentality, and redefinition of many topics such as localization of the administrative structure by paying attention to new political culture and demands.
- The AK Party has come a long way in terms of weakening the tutelary system through its democratic reforms for more than a decade. It is possible to say that the September 12, 2010 Referendum considerably eliminated the tutelary actors from the political system. However, the tutelary system takes its strength from its ideology in addition to the actors who keep this system alive. The AK Party is working to eliminate the tutelary ideology from the political system through democratic opening and resolution processes. However, the AK Party should adopt a decisive strategy and remain patient because the tutelary ideology gained strong social roots for over a century. In this context, it is urgent to launch a democratic reform process to meet the demands for the rights of all political identities - notably Kurdish and Alewi - in order to eliminate the tutelary ideology based on ethnic and religious separation and the anachronistic hierarchy of the statist and elitist political-social structure. The goal is to adopt an equitable democratic and pluralistic vision.



INDEX

- Bilgiç, Esra Ercan ve Kafkaslı, Zehra (2013) *Gencim, Özgürlükçüyüm, Ne İstiyorum?#direngeziparkı Anketi Sonuçları* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları)
- Burr, Vivien (1995) *An introduction to Social Constructionism* (London: Sage)
- Ertem, Cemil ve Esayan, Markar (2013) *Dünyayı Durduran 60 Gün* (İstanbul: Etkileşim Yayınları)
- Freud, Sigmund (1949) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London: The Hogarth Press)
- Gergen, K. (1985) "The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Social Psychology", *American Psychologist*, 40(3): 266–75
- Le Bon, Gustave (2002) *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.)
- Mills, C. Wright (2000) *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Newman, Isadore and Benz, Carolyn R. (1998) *Qualitative-Quantitative Research Methodology: Exploring the Interactive Continuum* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press)
- Olson, Mancur (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- Opp, Karl-Dieter (2009) *Theories of Political Protests and Social Movements* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Perakyla, Anssi (2008) "Analyzing Talk and Text" in Norman K. Denzin ve Yvonna S. Lincoln (2008) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (London: Sage Publications), pp. 869-886.
- Seidman, Irving (2006) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (New York: Teachers College)

HATEM ETE

Having completed his BA and MA in Sociology at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Hatem Ete spent one year (2007-2008) at Columbia University on a scholarship to pursue further research in his field of area. He received his PhD. Degree on sociology upon completion of his doctoral thesis titled “Democracy and Tutelary Regime in Turkey: The Political and Sociological Roots of Tutelage in Single-Party Era” from METU. He has widely published on these issues in various journals and newspapers. He has been working as the coordinator of political research at SETA Foundation.

COŞKUN TAŞTAN

Dr. Coşkun Taştan is currently an assistant professor of sociology at Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University (Ağrı/Turkey) where he serves as the head of the department. He received undergraduate education in sociology (major) and philosophy (minor) from Middle East Technical University (Ankara/Turkey). He was a research fellow at CMES of Harvard University between 2007-2009. He received his MS degree in sociology (2004) and PhD degree in sociology (2010). His areas of interest are psychoanalysis, xenophobia, formations of national subjectivities, Turkish nationalism (late 19th-early 20th centuries) and collective behaviours. His works on the history and sociology of psychoanalysis in Turkey received Istanbul Psychoanalytic Association’s “2011 Psychoanalytic Writings Award”. He is the author of “Gezi protests: A Qualitative Field Research”. He recently collaborated on a book with Dr. Hatem Ete, entitled “Gezi Protests: Between Image and Reality”

THE GEZİ PARK PROTESTS

A POLITICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, AND DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

HATEM ETE, COŞKUN TAŞTAN

There have been many things written and discussed about the protests that started at the Gezi Park and shortly spread around the country with the high range of participants. Different segments of the society have made different interpretations about what these demonstrations "mean" exactly, who were the protestors, what kind of social, economic and political dynamics were behind these demonstrations, what was the aim of the protestors, and what possible social and political reverberations of the activities would be.

We are going through a period where the old political system with its actors and ideology becomes dysfunctional: it is substituted by a quest for a new political system as all actors in our social and political life are looking for ways to have an active role in the play. The function, nature, and priorities of politics are changing; political identities are transforming and political maps are being redrawn. Furthermore, this change is not limited only to Turkey. Our near region, where Turkey has had contacts with all along and where these contacts have recently transformed into an interaction, is also experiencing a historic and radical change. Governments change hands, regimes are overthrown and re-established.

The Gezi protests taking place in such an atmosphere undoubtedly correspond to a critical momentum of our political history. Motivation, aim and implications of the demonstrations will continue to have an impact on our political life for a long time; and interpretations about developments will be made by referring to these protests.

This study tries to make an in-depth analysis of one to one detailed interviews held with the protesters in the second weeks of the demonstrations in four cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Eskisehir), a political assessment of the discourse adopted during and after the protests; analyzes change and sustainability of the discourse and policies of the political parties about the protests; and lastly sheds a light on current political implications and possible implications of the Gezi demonstrations.



SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research
Nenehatun Caddesi No:66, GOP, Çankaya
06700 Ankara, TURKEY
Tel: +90 312 551 21 00 | Fax: +90 312 551 21 90
www.setav.org | info@setav.org

