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Cyber-Gezi: How the 2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests in Istanbul subverted historical neoliberal domination, violence, and revealed President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's repressive cyber-authoritarian goals

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Cyber-Gezi: How the 2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests in Istanbul subverted historical
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by
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“Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past

to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.”

—John Perry Barlow, ***A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace***

“The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip.”

—Ronald Reagan, ***The Guardian, 14th June 1989***

“Once men turned their thinking over to machines in the hope that this would set them free. But that only permitted other men with machines to enslave them.”

—Frank Herbert, ***Dune, 1956***

“To those like the misguided; look at the story of Man, and come to your senses! It is not the destination, but the trip that matters. What you do today influences tomorrow, not the other way around. Love Today, and seize All Tomorrows!”

—C.M. Kösemen, ***All Tomorrows: The Myriad Species and Mixed Fortunes of Man, 2006***

“We must create conditions where disagreement can take place without fear of exclusion and excommunication.”

—Mark Fisher, ***Exiting the Vampire Castle, 24 November 2013***

Introduction

On the 1st of May, 1977, Labor Day celebrations were held in Taksim Square, Istanbul, Turkey. This year, the celebrations had attracted a crowd of some 500,000¹. Many felt safe there from anti-leftist violence as Labor Day celebrations had been held there in Istanbul since 1912². It was a day of music and speeches, with most of the large groups of attendees only having arrived as late as 7 PM. At the end of a speech by Kemal Turkler, a leader of the influential Confederation of trade unions, gunfire rained onto the crowd. Masked gunmen fired from two buildings: the Intercontinental Hotel, which had been closed for the Labor Day celebrations, and the building of the Municipal Water Authority. Subsequently, police forces entered the square with armored vehicles making way with firearms discharge, explosives, sirens, and hosing the crowd with pressurized water. People tried to escape to the nearest exit from the square, but multiple police vehicles blocked their escape route. An official indictment against 98 participants in the celebrations presented 34 victims' names, though the investigation would later conclude that up to 42 people were killed and 126 to 220 people injured. Those that died were trampled by others, run over by police vehicles, or shot.

It was determined by the court that most casualties were caused by the panic that the police intervention created, rather than due to the shooting by the gunmen. None of the gunmen would ever be caught and brought to justice. After the incident though, over 500 demonstrators who were celebrating were detained, and of those 98

¹ The Kids Want Communism — Turkey's 1977 May Day ("akıl takılması") Available at: <https://tkwc.tumblr.com/post/151734075850/turkeys-1977-may-day-ak%C4%B1l-tak%C4%B1lmas%C4%B1>

² İkinci, S. (05/01/2003) Turkey's bloody 1977 May Day still clouded in mystery, World Socialist Web Site. Available at: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2003/05/turk-m01.html>.

were indicted, later being acquitted. During the trial, the Chairman of the Hotel Workers Union Ali Kocaman had information which he had received from hotel personnel:

“Three days earlier [before the Labor Day celebrations], the third, fourth and fifth floors of the Intercontinental Hotel were emptied and no one was allowed on the floors, which were under police control. Americans had come and stayed on the floors which the personnel were not allowed to enter. After the incident, these people checked out of the hotel.”³

In a press conference a few days after the massacre, then-leader of the opposition Bülent Ecevit responded to questions related to perpetrators of the incident :

“Some organizations and forces within the State, but outside the control of the democratic State of law, have to be taken under control without losing time. The counter-guerrilla (a clandestine anti-communist government initiative with a goal of subverting communism in Turkey.) is running an offensive and has a finger in the 1 May incident.”⁴ Later, in a speech to the Turkish parliament on an incident supposedly involving members of the very same ‘clandestine initiative’, Ecevit revealed “The accident unveiled the dark liaisons within the state” former prime minister Bulent Ecevit told parliament in December, 1990⁵. These incidents are but pages in a story spanning over 50 years, of political dissenters, left-wing activists and sympathizers to the Kurds in Turkey being the target of an onslaught of persecution and scapegoating by the government, themselves inspired by Western anti-revolutionary actions.

There is a historical precedent for Taksim Square being a key space where the forces moving Turkey’s political future met and clashed. The outcomes of these events can only be defined in light of the cyclical processes of feedback of violence and repression in Turkey tracing a line starting in 1969

³ İkinci, S. 1 May, 2003. Turkey’s bloody 1977 May Day still clouded in mystery,

⁴ İkinci, S. 1 May, 2003. Turkey’s bloody 1977 May Day still clouded in mystery,

⁵ The Kids Want Communism, Turkey’s 1977 May Day (“akıl takılması”)

The space of Taksim Gezi Park has seen cycles of violence over generations, who –marginalized from one another by religiosity, ideology, and on a class basis– have seen political feedback and the resulting repression and domination from the government looped back into the input of a social equation constructed by the political establishment in Turkey. The political animus for the people to rely on Erdoğan would only exist once the unrest could contain a plausible reason to be violently quelled, and so the only way to combat the legitimacy of the protests –the absolute morality of the demands of the protest: to stop the authoritarianism and neoliberal policies– was to construct an absolute morality opposed to it. Erdoğan’s denial of credibility and legitimacy, –and the political implications behind it– will be a key point of analysis in my project, as the causal link enforced by the authorities in Turkey shed light on the cybernetic nature of the cycles of violence, particularly those that seemingly attract Taksim Gezi Park.

Before the 1977 Taksim Square Massacre, the stage was set 8 years prior, 4km from Taksim Gezi Park, where the Kanlı Pazar (“Bloody Sunday”), another Labour Day celebration faced severe violence at the hands of right-wing counter-protests and police, leaving two dead and many injured.⁶ These incidents of terrible and astonishing violence at the hands of a unified Turkish police and ‘clandestine’ anti-democratic forces display how the question of Taksim Gezi Park’s political importance is a temporal one, one of multiple histories and ideologies coinciding on not just a simple geographic point, but in a purposefully, constructed trend towards either more unmediated or mediated political formations. This distinction, crystallized not simply out of the conflict

⁶ Mavioglu, E. *Radical-online / Turkey / 30 years later, bloody May 1 (8)*. June 5th, 2007, Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070930201618/http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=220454>

at Taksim Square itself, but also the phenomenological association that arose out of patterns of rebellion against authority, seeded there as early as 1969.

Even before then, Taksim Gezi Park itself was once the former site of the *Halil Pasha* Artillery Barracks, a large square-shaped military barracks complex constructed in 1806. Various proposed construction plans came from either independent construction companies or government subsidiaries, though all were resisted or shot down early.⁷ In modern Istanbul before the proliferated cycle of civil unrest set in 2013, the space was known as a ‘green area’ park⁸, in which pedestrians could come and sit on the grass, or meet friends. In 2012, major hotel and large-scale residential construction projects popped up all around the neighborhoods surrounding Gezi Park, leading to a process of gentrification which threatened the original citizens who lived in more traditional and already-present homes along the streets around Gezi Park. This confrontation would crystallize into a negation of the desired outcome for the protestors: increasing police brutality, a governmental lockdown, an effective prelude to the coup in 2016, and the constitutional crisis which is still ongoing. This confrontation was made inevitable in two areas, in particular, I will argue. First is the historical precedent of Turkey’s repression of civil disobedience established and reproduced by Erdoğan and the AKP. Secondly, this historical precedent moved, unseen, to provide cover for a deception fed to the technology-able public by technological utopianism.

⁷ EJOLT (2014-06-02) Taksim Square and Gezi Park construction works, Turkey | EJAtlas, Environmental Justice Atlas. Available at:

<https://ejatlas.org/conflict/taksim-square-and-gezi-park-construction-works-turkey>

⁸ Letsch, C. (2014) ‘A year after the protests, Gezi Park nurtures the seeds of a new Turkey’, The Guardian, 29 May. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/29/gezi-park-year-after-protests-seeds-new-turkey>

The structure of this project is as follows: In my first chapter, I provide historical information providing context for the growing local discontent surrounding Taksim Gezi Park, drawing a path from the origins of the Turkish government's involvement in the area as a mere development project to the first moments of violence, and eventually to the nationwide unrest which it led to. Then, I will establish a narrative drawing from sources ranging from social media posts, news articles, and academic sources not only from within the Taksim Gezi Protests themselves but from external observers. By doing this, I will demonstrate the value of the virtual images and the disruption they posed to traditional channels of communication at Gezi Park in 2013— both providing undeniable proof of the violence that police inflicted on protesters, yet not reversing the increasing violence and effort with which the Turkish government cracked down on the protest. My first chapter will conclude with a juxtaposition of the virtual images shared by the Gezi Park protests and the cybernetic virtual images, referring to the relationship between the images of the protests and its relationship to the organization and behavior of individuals moving forward. Through this structure, I will demonstrate the power behind the protests beyond just those Turkish citizens who chose to face the police but in the context of development and growth of cultures in digital media, and in real-life protest and subsequent government response.

The world outside Turkey seemed to stifle itself with regards to reaction and intervention to the Taksim Gezi Park protests, and this is reflected in the digital ghosts of literature written about the protests, with seemingly widespread but difficult-to-locate articles buried under now-defunct paywalls, on unofficial and/or clandestine websites, or simply belonging to text on dead web pages —no doubt victims of Erdogan's internet

brigades. This issue has played a role in my research, and though many authors wrote extensively on the protests and its digital footprint, following the protests and the situation subsequent to that, my second chapter focuses on and demonstrates that fact that the internet, while providing key digital evidence for the use and misuse of the Internet in the creation, and the repression of the Taksim protests. The chapter will carry insight into the compounding problem of growing internet dependency in the face of a police state in Turkey after Gezi Park.

By highlighting its nebulous and inherent non-ideological nature in the chapter, I am better equipped to describe its relationship with President Erdoğan's policies in my third chapter. PM Erdoğan's policies reflect more and more a *tech-savvy* dictator than, whose power rests largely on an image of power, and spectacle: the Internet, in this regard, is his friend. However, the preconditions for this image of power and spectacle have fallen away to his attempts at making prolonged, open warfare against the PKK and YPG – pro Kurdish political aligned Kurdish regions, Draconian immigration policies and, as many authors and sources have pointed out, increasingly authoritarian restrictions on diverse political expression.

In my second chapter I will first present and critically analyze instances of the internet being both an aid to protestors, and to governmental forces during the Gezi Park protests, and after. I will use the cybernetic and cyberspatial texts, using frameworks of thinking which expand into techno-politics and deconstructionism. This will be done with reference to the relationship cybernetic theory of system, political temperament and virtual images presented by cyberneticist author Maurice Yolles as well as the political theory and analysis of observers and participants of the Gezi

protests provided by authors like Zeynep Tufekci, Begüm Adalet, Banu Bargu, Berk Esen, and Sebnem Gumuscu.

Finally, in my third chapter I intend to answer through various connecting sources and political theory and cybernetic theory the question of why did Turkey return to authoritarianism after the 2013 Gezi Park protests? Was Erdogan's policies a reflection of pragmatic policy practice, or more ideological, lofty pursuits? Were the preconditions to authoritarian development inevitable or were they preventable? Is the literature leaning in the direction of the success of the protests to enact change, or its failure to do so? What were its foreseen implications on Turkish government policy at the time, and how has the protests legacy evolved today?

Chapter One: A Growing Storm

In this chapter I will hope to explore the intersecting historical and political points which led to the eruption of a storm of multitudes of political expression. I will cover the socio economic conditions in Turkey prior to the Gezi Park protests, and how Erdogan and his political party used a desire for stability and national identity to secure power, and how a construction and development -oriented policy contributed to an outcry of resistance against him.

This chapter will then further discuss the rapid proliferation of resistance to Erdogan, and discuss how the expressions of that resistance can still be found today on the internet, through the medium of virtual images, which I will attempt to define in political and cybernetic terms.

The Justice and Development Party

Justice for Turkey's Development?

Erdoğan has ruled Turkey with an increasingly authoritarian grasp alongside his political party, the AKP("Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi , or the Justice and Development Party ") since winning their first election in 2003. Even before the 2013 protests they have used any means necessary not only to remain in power but to punish those who challenge their position. After ending the serious political instability caused by a coup in 2016, the AKP enjoyed and successfully protected a relatively popular structural prominence much like it had in 2002⁹, although many knew that the coup had much to do with what happened in 2013. The AKP held onto power through much of the 2010s through the same "construction-based preoccupation with economic growth", says political theorist Begüm Adalet, in her *book Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey*, arguing that

"Erdogan's less-than-tolerant response to the protests apparently came as a surprise to 'experts' who had so recently been extolling his model of neoliberal democracy. The persistent incarceration of leftist, primarily Kurdish, activists, journalists, and students, which started as early as 2008 and intensified after the elections of 2011, had somehow not found its way into policy-oriented scholarly analyses on the other side of the Atlantic."¹⁰

Despite these many obstacles for opposition enacting real change in a modern, neoliberal Turkey effectively constructed by AKP-led initiatives¹¹, in the 2019 Turkish local elections, the electorates of both Ankara and Istanbul, as well as many other AKP strongholds switched from the voter preference of AKP to the CHP ("Cumhuriyet Halk

⁹ Bargu, Year One: Reflections on Turkey's Second Founding and the Politics of Division

¹⁰ Adalet, Begüm. *Hotels and Highways : The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey*, Stanford University Press, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/detail.action?docID=5317439>.

¹¹ Begüm. *Hotels and Highways : The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey*,

Partisi, or the Republican People's Party"), and as a result many of these electoral challenges to the AKP were annulled in court cases brought by AKP members.¹²

This electoral instability for the AKP is due to key faults within the adopted strategies of Erdoğan's administration, now within many years entrenched in governance lies Erdogan and his subordinates' inability to reasonably justify the implementation of unduly strict regulations, his economic decisions based on Reagan-esque policy, as well as his stances on social issues. As Adalet writes further, Erdoğan's adopted policies involving a "...developmental and capitalistic vision of American policy and at its core ideological offering, modernization theory."¹³ tells us of the American dream Erdogan hoped to turn into a Turkish one.

This Turkish dream would appeal to Turkish citizens desiring accumulation of wealth and economic growth, many Turkish nationalists, and conservative Islamists who still lend him their support. Their support of him has, after all, been rewarded, as early on under his rule, the economy of Turkey recovered from a financial crisis and recession that began in 2001, drove forward an infrastructure-focused agenda in particular by a construction boom, and the AKP appealed further to a widespread group of supporters, with neoliberal policies involving privatization of public services and rapid industrialization.¹⁴ However, the boons of an Erdoğan-led AKP administration have seemingly dropped away from his supporter's feet: with the coup attempt led by some elements of the Turkish military in 2016 severely shattering illusions of stability, and a major constitutional and economic crisis spurned by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's

¹² Weise, Z. (2019) *Turkish authorities cancel Istanbul mayoral election*, POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkish-authorities-cancel-istanbul-mayoral-election/>

¹³ Begüm. *Hotels and Highways : The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey*

¹⁴ Begüm. *Hotels and Highways : The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey*

increasing authoritarianism and his policies involving the national economy, and government intervention in the market.¹⁵ All the benefits of an AKP government have turned to dust.

The protests of 2013, unlike demonstrations before, had many different faces within its crowd: students marched in the streets as did pensioners, communists, and anarchists, in lockstep with liberals and nationalists, with violent resistance to police attempts to disperse the crowds and campsites, alongside environmentalists, and pacifists helping with first-aid, food provisions, and supplies for the protestor's camps. In Adalet's words,

“The Gezi protests quickly metastasized into a far-reaching critique not simply of the Taksim development scheme but also of the AKP's governing vision and its domestic and foreign policies.”¹⁶

This signified a rising spirit of popular protest which emerged at Gezi park which transcended historical boundaries and political affiliation, and while this is not something uncommon in protests around the world, the unity with which the protestors spoke was a key development. Individuals from distinct and sometimes opposing socio-political identifications and groups came together without question to protest an action they collectively disagreed with.

Commentators widely emphasized the abrupt and spontaneous nature of the Gezi protests¹⁷, where historical revolutionary sentiment in Istanbul coupled with developments in mobile technology and social media, which helped promote, unify, and facilitate the spread of protests. This facilitated unity was on full display with the

¹⁵ Hakura, F. (2016) Erdoğan's Policies Are Undermining the Turkish Economy, Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank. Available at:

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/03/erdogans-policies-are-undermining-turkish-economy>

¹⁶ Begüm. Hotels and Highways : The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey

¹⁷ Dağtaş, M.S. (2016) “Down With Some Things!” The Politics of Humor and Humor as Politics in Turkey's Gezi Protests', *Etnofoor*, 28(1), pp. 11–34.

massive influx of posts made on the website Twitter, called tweets, in Istanbul around the time of the first protest, with some sources placing the number of Tweets made at Gezi Park somewhere near 15,000.¹⁸ With the striking images coming to mainstream media through only international outlets, alternative means of information-sharing needed to be utilized in order to share exactly what was going on.

Years after the physical conclusion of the protests, one need only ask a passerby on the streets of Istanbul about the phrase ‘Spirit of Gezi’, which signals that unifying spirit of the protests and the criticality of political stress at which 3.6 million Turkish citizens participated in 5,232 protest events from the end of May until the first week of September 2013 resisted the power of an authoritarian state.¹⁹

Through digital preservation, that spirit of these protests –and the lessons of its relation to the state forces which fought it– should be able to live on, as the message and core impulse of the movement can be reified and reproduced in both the experience and phenomena of protest. This process would be achieved through virtual images of both violence and dialogue, and as protests would inspire protests in many cities around Turkey, as well as inspiring protests in other countries in support of the protestors at Taksim Gezi.²⁰

Following this question comes others: what factors lead to the failure of the Taksim Gezi Park protests to establish a meaningful dialogue between the protestors and the government in President Erdoğan's Turkey? Alongside deteriorating rights of

¹⁸ Khazan, O. (2013) These Charts Show How Crucial Twitter Is for the Turkey Protesters, The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/these-charts-show-how-crucial-twitter-is-for-the-turkey-protesters/276798/>

¹⁹ Porta, D. della and Atak, K. (2017) ‘2. The spirit of Gezi. A relational approach to eventful protest and its challenges’, in 2. The spirit of Gezi. A relational approach to eventful protest and its challenges. Amsterdam University Press, pp. 31–58. doi:10.1515/9789048531356-003.

²⁰ “Local demonstration supports Turkey protests”. Chicago Tribune. 2 June 2013. Retrieved 2 June 2013.

expression and of Political affiliation in Turkey since Erdoğan's election –closer to 2022, and further– what are the long-term Digital and technological effects of the Taksim Gezi Park protests, and what can tech-savvy people of other nations, held under the yoke of a similarly stifling neo-liberal dominion for so long, may learn, or have yet to learn from it? Including background information and recent events in Turkish politics since the Gezi Park protests, I intend to display how the stifled conclusion of the protests effectively stalled that classic demonstrative form of political action: protests, and dialogue and discourse with follows, negotiation and compromise. This was eluded by the gross over-emphasis on social media exposure of the protest itself: the government seized on active digital participants in the protests, and has even arrested and re-arrested several Turkish hacktivists nearly half a decade later.²¹

Thus, after introducing the beginning of an attempt to shift in modalities of political expression and freedoms in Turkey, originating in Taksim Gezi Park, I will use my sources to illuminate how Taksim Gezi Park set the stage for an increasingly dangerous and yet ultimately decisive point for political practice for Turkish people, and how it stands as a capstone in the development of the shared links of future technologies and political machinations.

²¹ Defendants in Gezi Park trial acquitted but new arrest warrant issued for Osman Kavala (2020) France 24. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200218-turkey-acquits-defendants-of-terrorism-charges-gezi-park-osman-kavala-landmark-trial>

Big Trouble in Little Istanbul:

The Taksim Pedestrianization Project

On October 31st, 2012 the Turkish government's controversial renovation plan for Istanbul city center, officially known as the "*Taksim Pedestrianization project*", a government project of "re-organizing Taksim Square with the construction of the "Taksim Military Barracks", designed to be a shopping and residential area as well as an Ottoman historical landmark finally moved forward with initial closure of roads leading to the heart of the city. Construction plans which gave the protestors greater impetus to block the demolishing were a plan specifically to demolish a grassy area containing some trees, a space that had served as a public gathering place. Plans for the project greatly emphasized the cultural and historical significance of the construction, and promises were made that the project would not interfere with the park space, though to no avail. The fuse had already been lit.

The desire to link historical precedent with present action to create legitimacy within the memory of an imperial past is key to understanding the goals of Erdoğan and his nationalist desire to develop the buildings over the park. The area, even in its park form maintains a historical significance as a remnant of history, either as a symbol of commonality and community or as a monument to an imperialist past. And clearly, this has played a role in the relationship between the community and the government, as the obsession with the accumulation of capital overtakes an appreciation for such novel and simple things as a lawn with trees, protests became more and more violently over what an uneducated observer would assume to be either a civil uprising over a minor environmental protest gone awry. The AKP government's preference for accumulated

wealth and industrial development, from which limbs of capitalism would proliferate further, seemed too horrific a concept for the citizens of Turkey, who would not so easily let a real, substantive dream of real, public space die such a quiet death.

Everywhere is Gezi

On Monday, May 27th, 2013, a small group of representatives from 'Taksim Solidarity' -- a coalition of "NGOs, political groups and professional bodies who had been active in opposition to the development plans that would demolish the park²²-- started gathering in Taksim Gezi Park after bulldozers arrived. An initial tweet, posted at approximately 11:47 PM that night began calling for Turkish citizens and residents of Istanbul to come to Taksim Gezi Park to protest the demolition²³. By the morning of the 28th of May, around 50 protestors --mainly environmentalists-- were camping out in Istanbul at Gezi Park, in order to prevent its demolition. The protesters, with the help of Peace and Democracy Party MP Sırrı Süreyya Önder, initially halted attempts to bulldoze the park by refusing to leave. This moment of confrontation was when the Zabıta municipal police began to use tear gas, flash bangs, and non-lethal ammunition to disperse the protesters and burned down their tents in order to allow the bulldozing to continue, using up to 130,000 tear gas canisters in only 20 days, over 6,000 discharged gas canisters per day.²⁴

²² Vardar, N. (04, June, 2013) Taksim Solidarity Announces Its Demands, Bianet - Bagimsiz Iletisim Agi. Available at: <https://www.bianet.org/english/crisis/147196-taksim-solidarity-announces-its-demands>

²³ Vardar, N. (04, June, 2013) Taksim Solidarity Announces Its Demands

²⁴ Turkish police to buy 100,000 gas bomb cartridges - Turkey News (no date) Hürriyet Daily News. Available at: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-police-to-buy-100000-gas-bomb-cartridges--49075>

Figure 1.



Source: Comert, Yersim.
Twitter post. May 28th, 2013

Images of the protests –such as photos of protesters camping out on the first day of protests, when it was just environmentalists staging a peaceful sit-in (see Figure 1), or of young and old people either contributing to the materials of the protests (see Figure 2), or of the aftermath of police action (see Figure 3)– quickly spread throughout the media across the world. The Washington Post reported that a particular image

"...encapsulates Turkey's protests and the severe police crackdown" (see Figure 4), while Reuters called the image an "iconic leitmotif".²⁵ These mainstream media reports differed from the social media posts from the protests, in that the information online was direct, from-the-ground, and transparent to the audience, rather than interpreted by newscasters or through journalists. Much of the information shared among protestors had some message encouraging others to join the protests, as well as for foreign coverage and attention to the police brutality.

By the afternoon of the 1st of June, it is shown by tweets that "the entire city started to reverberate."²⁶ with tens of thousands of people crossing the Bosphorus Bridge (see Figure 5), which bisects the entire city of Istanbul in half. Social media also

²⁵ Umut Korkut, Itir Erhart, and Hande Eslen-Ziya (no date) Beyond the Iconic protest images. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/38131374/Beyond_the_Iconic_protest_images_docx

²⁶ BBC News (2013) 'Turkey protests: Unrest rages in Istanbul and Ankara', 1 June. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22739423>

reported that public transportation shut down, and thousands of smaller protests, one even aimed at Erdoğan's anti-alcohol campaigns seeing a large volume of protestors.²⁷

Thousands of protesters from one side of Istanbul walked across the

Figure 2.

Bosphorus Bridge around 06:00 local time, to join the main protest groups in Taksim. They were met with further violent police intervention. Police intervention involved flanking maneuvers by armored vehicles, the discharging of non-lethal and tear gas weaponry, as well as flash grenades, which resulted in the injuries and deaths of protestors. These weapons were widely criticized for their capacity to inflict bodily harm, without chance



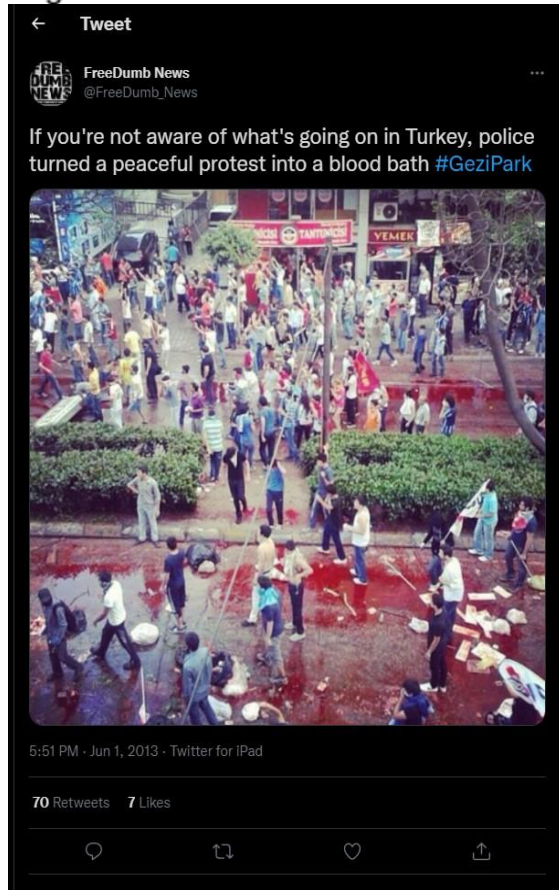
Source: User Zeynep Gabrali.
Twitter post. June 14th, 2013.

of a lethal injury. Images began popping up of injuries of protestors from riot weapons used by Turkish police. Enraged and inflamed by the images and messages coming through social media, only more people came forward to join the protests. Tweets went out asking individuals to let others use their phone chargers, turn on their internet hotspots without passwords and support the protests with materials.

²⁷ I did not see anyone consume alcohol in mosque during Gezi protests, muezzin says - Turkey News (2013) Hürriyet Daily News. Available at: <https://www.hurriyetaailynews.com/i-did-not-see-anyone-consume-alcohol-in-mosque-during-gezi-protests-muezzin-says-49573>

The original protests in Ankara that had begun on the 31st of May continued in so many neighborhoods that the security around Erdoğan's own office and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey were also increased. After leaving to safety, nearly 10,000

Figure 3.



Source: User Free Dumb News. Twitter post. June 1st, 2013.

people gathered there to directly protest in front of Erdoğan's office.²⁸ During the actions on the evening of the 1st, an armored police vehicle ran over a protester. This, along with the other reports of police brutality led to more and more people joining the protests, urged on by those images of the violence²⁹, as well as the shared message of the protest: the peoples' frustration.

In multiple cities, crowds of a size consistently over 10,000 gathered at either local AKP headquarters or police stations. Once there, in almost all cases the police responded to the protests with tear gas, water cannons, and military-style tactical formations. It is reported that on the 1st of June that Abdullah Gul, a founding member of the AKP, and President of Turkey from 2007 to 2014, cut short a formal visit to Turkmenistan to return home and by midday stated that the protests had reached a "worrisome level". PM Erdoğan gave a televised speech in which he stated that quote,

²⁸ Erensoy, Ş. (2019) 'Contesting claims on public space: The case of the Gezi Park Protests (Istanbul, 2013', *Pluralities Non-Fiction Film Journal* [Preprint]. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/41040906/Contesting_claims_on_public_space_The_case_of_the_Gezi_Park_Protests_Istanbul_2013

²⁹

“...Every four years we hold elections and this nation makes its choice ... Those who have a problem with the government's policies can express their opinions within the framework of law and democracy [...] Taksim Square can't be a place where extremist groups hang around...”³⁰

Figure 4.

The government's response towards the demands of protestors and citizens suggests the tendency of this particular government towards conflict instead of dialogue. Erdoğan referred to the protestors and supporters of the unrest as 'extremists' and 'terrorists' which, as well as being an ironic call-back to the actual extremists who fired on Labor Day celebration participants in 1977, showed the determination of Erdoğan to paint the protests as an implacable series



Source: User Anaiksinamayakii. Twitter post. June 2nd, 2013

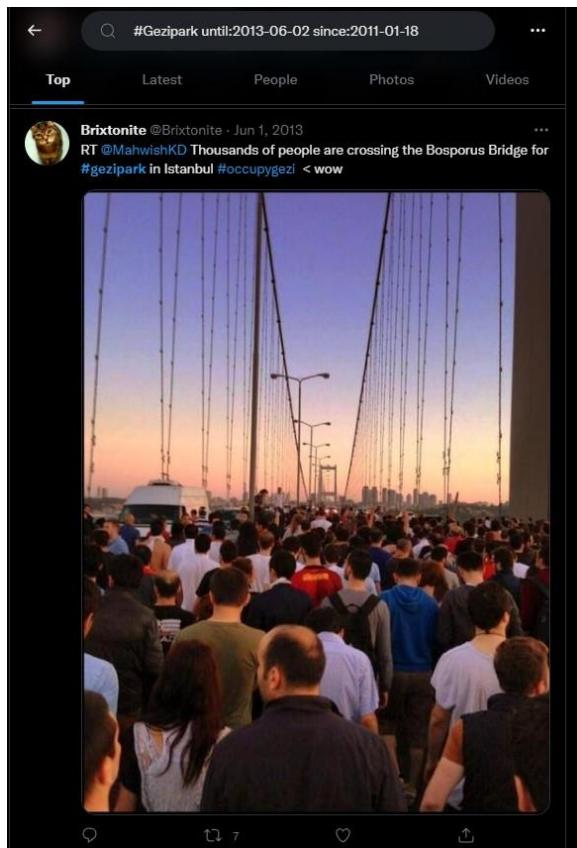
of riots organized either by an International conspiracy, internal agitators, or both. . as on the 3rd of June tensions reached a boiling point, as visible with the posts showing

By the 2nd of June, in the Western city of Izmir, people who started to clean the main streets and squares, which were polluted by the protests since the day before for almost 5 hours— gathered as a crowd, bigger and bigger until police started using random violence to disperse the crowds. Multiple tweets showing the violence and brutality of the police response to the protests come from this time, with 34 of these

³⁰ Haaretz (June 1, 2013) 'Erdoğan: For Every 100,000 Protesters, I Will Bring Out a Million From My Party'. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/Erdoğan-for-every-100-000-protesters-i-will-bring-out-a-million-from-my-party-1.5272067>

posters being detained on June 5.³¹ Dozens of tweets also display political

Figure 5.



Source: User Brixtonite. Twitter post. June 1st, 2013

messages directly referring to the digital revolutionary impulse at the protests, signifying the rise of internet-savvy radicals in Turkish politics.

On the 4th of June a solidarity group associated with the Occupy Gezi movement, Taksim Dayanışması ("Taksim Solidarity") –comprised of 124 trade unions, political parties, community groups, sports club fan groups and initiatives– issued several demands, which were:

- “the preservation of Gezi Park;
- an end to police violence, the right to freedom of assembly and the prosecution of those responsible for the violence against

demonstrators;

- an end to the sale of "public spaces, beaches, waters, forests, streams, parks and urban symbols to private companies, large holdings and investors";
- the right of people to express their "needs and complaints without experiencing fear, arrest or torture."
- for the media "whose professional duty is to protect the public good and relay correct information ... to act in an ethical and professional way."
- ruling authorities to realize that the reaction of the citizens is also about the third airport in Istanbul, the third bridge over the Bosphorus, the construction on Atatürk Forest Farm, and the hydro-electric power plants"³²

³¹ 33 Twitter detainees in Gezi Park protests released - Turkey News (2013) Hürriyet Daily News. Available at:

<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/33-twitter-detainees-in-gezi-park-protests-released--48316>

³² Taksim Solidarity (2013) We are Taksim Solidarity, We are Here! | Taksim Dayanışması. Available at: <https://www.taksimdayanisma.org/taksim-dayanismasi-biziz-biz-buradayiz?lang=en>

These demands reflect the growing scope of the protests and the development of their vision for what they wanted to change. This expansion was beginning to grow online quickly, and over social media and through channels left Turkish channels and reached out internationally.

On the 5th of June, it was announced that multiple individuals had been arrested around Turkey for “cyber-crimes” involving the Gezi Park protests. They were accused of “...using Twitter to urge people to come to the protests.”³³ These arrests are significant because, on the same day, Syrian hackers and the digital activist group Anonymous both hacked into Turkish cyber-infrastructure. They released usernames, passwords, and IP addresses of Turkish Government officials to expose the personal information of said officials. They stated that this action was directly in response to the Turkish government’s infringement of digital rights, and not to mention ‘their political opposition to Erdoğan’s many neo-liberal and authoritarian policies.’³⁴

The actions at the Gezi Park protests have consistently made clear the worsening situation for Turkish people’s rights in such a way that is analogous to the alarms raised worldwide about the consent of the governed in industrial nations. In trying to emulate and appeal to economic investment, Erdoğan has mollified his support base, his party, and his opposition. and turned his back on the inherent direct democracy secured and supposedly enshrined in the Turkish constitution.

Turkish citizens were battered, tear-gassed, water-soaked, flash-banged, and arrested, just like in 1969 and 1977, where leftist demonstrations were similarly

³³ Protests in Turkey - 24 Arrested for Social Media Crimes (June 04, 2013) Daily Kos. Available at: <https://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/6/4/1213798/-Protests-in-Turkey-24-Arrested-for-Social-Media-Crimes>

³⁴ *Syrian Electronic Army*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130608051158/http://leaks.sea.sy/txt/basbakanlik>

repressed. The use of police brutality was captured in the images online which were impossible for the government to deny. Images of the police in tightly-organized columns could clearly be seen marching to confront protestors in the center of the Park in a military fashion, trucks loaded with auxiliary units prepared to back up any thrust in the protests across the square. Much of the police force was moving intending to clear the group out with force

Figure 6.

By the nights of the 6th and the 7th of June, thousands of protestors had been staying in the park overnight to protest, and riot police throughout the evening and early morning battered, tear-gassed, and



Source: OZAN EKİN GÖKŞİN, Avlaremoz, April 3rd, 2016

arrested dozens of them, further inflaming tensions. And though the principal aim of the protests was the unilateral stopping of the demolition of the park, it became much more diverse in its grievances about his neoliberal, neo-ottoman, nationalist projects. This is visible when, as Turkish anthropologist Mahiye Dagtas point out, "The absence of a coherent political agenda to animate the uprisings was well captured in a young protester's graffiti from the early days of the resistance of 'Kahrolsun bazı şeyler!' ('Down with some things!', with emphasis added) humorously expressing rejection and criticism mixed with confusion and uncertainty" (See Figure 6) ³⁵ This kind of ambiguity of political targeting imbues the protests at Gezi Park as in the lack of a unified political

³⁵ Dağtaş, M.S. (2016) "'Down With Some Things!' The Politics of Humor and Humor as Politics in Turkey's Gezi Protests', *Etnofoor*, 28(1), pp. 11–34.

agenda, which contributed to its suppression as caught in the net of a government who would become well versed in using cyberspace to achieve their own goals. Individuals who could be tracked were tracked and if their transgressions against the government were deemed too great.

Using a series of keywords, specifically the hashtag “Gezi Park”, with time boundaries within the search terms limited to the end of 2013, I was able to collect a multitude of eye-opening tweets – from declarations of support for the protests in Taksim Gezi, to protestors themselves snapping images and taking videos, sharing information on police movement, and indeed, sharing information on political developments within Turkey following and during the protests. The first results displayed

Figure 7. a map showing the variety of identity groups that represented themselves



at the Gezi protests: camps of feminists, anarchists, nationalists, Islamists, socialists, workers' unions, environmentalists, LGBTQ activists, as well as groups of football hooligans who dedicated themselves to sending a message to Erdogan. (see Figure 7)

Alerted to the happenings by social media the size and scope of the protests grew, as additional protesters joined the encampment and put up more tents, creating barricades

and making ready for any police intervention. This displays the willingness of the protest

participants to produce phenomena of radical and disruptive intent, within traditional identity boundaries. This powerful development transcended the law and order versus violence dynamic, exported by neoliberal Western Industrial countries, co-opted by Erdogan and peddled out via his proxies.

Erdogan's Deputy Prime Minister, Bülent Arınç, criticized the police brutality but defended its necessity, citing 'safety and security of Turkish citizens against violence.'³⁶ This assertion of a convention of division serves only to incite further discord between those who either support Erdogan or the protests. By undermining and devaluing the legitimacy of the protests, and when referring to the protests themselves Erdogan estranged even passive observers with his rhetoric.

These protesters, angered further by brutal police reprisal against demonstrators on the first day, a consistent lack of response from government authorities regarding to the demands made by Taksim Solidarity, as well as well-distributed evidence of the police's violent reaction to the demands of the protestors, cheered on and supported by revolutionary cadres of the protestors, as well as residents of Istanbul.

In an interview with VICE News, Sirri Onder, the prominent PM for Turkish Parliament who himself had been shot with a tear gas canister while at the protests, stated, "For the first time, people with very different opinions, who wouldn't normally unite, tired of the governments smug and hegemonic attitude, have come together. For a long time now in Turkey, people's opposition has been suppressed. This attitude has become [a] norm for them. Now that illusion is shattered."³⁷

³⁶ Bar'el, Z. (June 1st, 2013) At height of political career, Erdogan's powers put to test - Haaretz Com - Haaretz.com. Available at:

<https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-an-all-powerful-Erdogan-put-to-test-1.5272015>

³⁷ Ground Zero: Turkey - The Protesters of Gezi Park, VICE News, July 2nd, 2013

One of my initial research questions was concerned with this subversion of borders between relationships that subverted a key aspect of the digital administratorship of the internet. What political qualities do the virtual images posted at Gezi Park present hold that made them influential and a key ingredient in the mobilization of the 2013 protests? I found this to be an important and relevant question because of the false narrative it is presented alongside: from its release to the public the Internet has been presumed to be a 'level playing field', operated by a class of administrators who possess effective ownership over individuals' information, their quality of information, as well as all responsibility for users' consumption of said information by governments and corporations. The user uploads information –the content could be virtual images, text, video, a music file– and though the administrators more than often are assumed to be acting in the best interests of the class of users.

Transcending language and country

While this chapter will be composed of questions concerning both the political composition related to case studies of instances of digital tactics of protest movements such as the Gezi Park protests, such as those Which suggest ways of assessing the effectiveness of the Internet and Digital technologies for political protest movement, as well as Democratizing Information and those Digital technologies which have been involved.

An internet which provides animus for political 'impulse' reflects a desire for more comprehensive and organic modes of communication and organization. Taksim Gezi became the perfect avatar for the syncretism of historical precedent of violence

against leftist political expression. While this may be true, it seems every large-scale protest always has this kinetic energy, an inherent impulse. This impulse could be one derived from the spaces in which the Internet is used in radical political thought, or could be drawn from the Internet itself as a breaker of barriers around those thoughts and where they come from. provide key distinctions for the cases of the Internet altering protests, the Internet being altered by protests against, and by the state. This highlights the case of social media --though specific to a social media platform on which political organization occurs more often than on others-- as Turkish sociologist Zeynep Tufekci states in *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, is social media:

“These are giant corporations that control and make money from the user experience, and yet the impact of that experience is not accessible to study by independent researchers. Social movement activists are greatly attuned to this issue. I often hear of potential tweaks to the algorithm of major platforms from activists who are constantly trying to reverse-engineer them and understand how to get past them. They are among the first people to notice slight changes. However, this is not a neutral game. Playing to the algorithm comes with political costs as well.” ³⁸

The Internet is a vehicle for many modes of expression and has provided tools for researchers and scientists to study and share information across the World, beyond just Taksim Gezi Park. It has aided organizations in humanitarian efforts, created platforms for socially connecting otherwise isolated people, and --as some would argue-- help

³⁸Tufekci, Z. (2017) *Twitter and tear gas: the power and fragility of networked protest*. New Haven ; London: Yale University Press. Pg p161

bring justice to those deserving of it, or to a community. The real world examples of individuals using the Internet to bring together others to organize political demonstrations and spread its message is nothing new, but to the extent that the internet posts and images disseminated so quickly among a given population –Turkey— is a political development which seems to have only arisen in more mobile digital technologies in more recent years. With the accessibility of social media becoming more and more a priority for the developers of the applications used to post the messages and images, it is increasingly a conflict between those in favor of a free Internet and one under dominion by censorship and regulation. The impact of algorithmic modes of communication and user-tracking such as those found on Facebook or Twitter, or used in website construction since 2013 are varied and complex and are exponentially becoming more so. This could only mean an exponential impact of social media on a society like Turkey's, where emerging trends of social media use prove that the dissemination of the Gezi protestor's demands and knowledge of police actions in Istanbul, Erdogan's response, and demonstrations all over Turkey.

Zeynep Tufekci's models that apply to the Gezi Park protests –focused primarily on social media, messaging apps, forum-sites, and their propensity for being spaces of linkage of persons and ideals being utilized by protestors– is that of the '*Networked-protest*' and '*adhocracy*'. These models raise the question of a digital revolution in the way individuals participating in civil disobedience are under the guidance of forces of Globalism freely access information relevant to the political issue at hand, without cause for concern. Tufekci makes an analogy; "As climbing Mount Everest became a staple on the bucket lists of relatively privileged adventurers, a whole

industry sprang up, employing the mountaineering people of Nepal—the Sherpas—to assist inexperienced people in making the climb.”³⁹

Tufekci’s critical writing on assertion of the models of the networked-protest and adhocracy points out that:

“The missing ingredients, Tufekci believes, are the structures and communication patterns that appear when a fixed group works together over time. That practice puts the oil in the well-oiled machine. It is what contemporary *adhocracy* appears to lack, and what projects such as the postwar civil-rights movement had in abundance. And it is why, she thinks, despite their limits in communication, these earlier protests often achieved more.”

While Tufekci does raises the model of modern ‘*adhocratic*’ protests as effective as predecessors, she simultaneously raises doubts about the relative effectiveness of the ‘*networked-protest*’ model as a primary example for concluding the specific demands in protests due to the urgency and impulse inherent within the Internet, while also comparing the protests to other movements, such as the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt, .”⁴⁰

As Tufekci’s ‘*adhocracy*’ refers specifically to the participation in a protest ‘ad hoc’--whoever chooses to show up or contribute to the said protest– we can assume that it came as a response to the virtual images, or simply information shared in the public sphere: disseminated by multiple sources which lead to other communities, perhaps completely separated from the original community.

³⁹Tufekci, Z. (2017) Twitter and tear gas: the power and fragility of networked protest.

⁴⁰ Tufekci, Z. (2017) Twitter and tear gas: the power and fragility of networked protest.

Combining a viewpoint of cybernetics from Yolles and Tufekci's methodology of the "Networked-protest" and 'adhocracy' analogies recontextualizes the sherpa-climber relationship which came before the evolution of the Internet as one rooted in the historical and cultural questions, who are privileged in a particular country and who is not, who can access the Internet, and who is not able.

This is important to remember, as Taksim Gezi Park's massive demonstration in May of 2013-- was a 'turning point' in digitized protests, where the public, in relation to digital-savvy protest, would no longer be 'fringe' or 'unacceptable'. No longer was there an unimportant resistance in cyberspace, anybody with a phone, a device becoming rapidly more and more accessible, featured both prominently in Tufekci 'adhocratic' and 'Networked-protest' models point to increasing difficulty on the part of both citizens and the government to control and predict the outcome of any particular development. While it would seem the Networked-protest model is rooted more in the metric of a successful protest based on its effectiveness, 'adhocracy' is balanced on the spontaneity, the impossibility of the protest taking place. This then coordinates with the syncretism of information access and political freedom which is contained within various models of both understanding State-individual dynamics online, as well as Information-access online.

Comparisons made between modern-day internet political expression and historical examples of similar phenomena make up a bulk of the textual analysis about the subject, and one should be wary to remember these are issues which specifically plague a society enraptured in a digital revolution. The barriers between the different spheres of influence That is to say that there are two key elements to this political

equation, namely Web-powerful states and web-powerless states. It is often the case that the powerful hold sway over the powerless, and thus holding the Administrator in the Internet sense closer to the State as an administrator in a “real world” sense becomes a more and more realistic comparison.

Chapter Two: Post-Taksim Cyberspace

‘Cyber-Present’

The following chapter focuses on the intersection between political understanding, cybernetic theory and the statistical consequences of the government response following the 2013 Gezi protests. To do this, I will be using two critical theories which are influential in critically analyzing their aftereffects: ‘cyberspace’ and ‘cybernetics’.

Cybernetics was first defined by mathematician and philosopher Norbert Wiener as ‘the study of control and communication in the animal and the machine’⁴¹, and it is useful for the purposes of understanding the Taksim Gezi Park protests as a process of communication and control. with political cybernetics theorist Maurice Yolles’ texts, *The Political Cybernetics of Organizations*, and *Revisiting the Political Cybernetics of Organizations* in which his development of ‘Managerial cybernetics’ and ‘political temperament’ fits both my analysis of Erdogan’s top-down delegative power structure, his violent response to political challenges as an technologically-intersecting conflict, and Wiener’s characterization of a comprehensive focal point for the digital component

⁴¹ Wiener, Norbert. Press, 1961, *Cybernetics; or, Control and communication in the animal and the machine*. Publisher: New York : M.I.T. .

of my query into the Gezi Park protests' consequences, and particularly within a context of recent developments in Turkish internet infrastructure.

Yolles' theoretical developments not only address cybernetics as a whole piece theory, but also discusses how politically autonomous communities, such as the loose organization of protestors at Gezi Park, and their behavior are fundamentally linked with it. Yolles' formulation of the synergy between cybernetics and politics in the case of the Taksim Gezi Park protests demonstrates that Erdoğan used his own virtual image of power and "...power processes to shape structures, manipulate information, and influence the way that people behave"⁴² In his directives following 2013, particularly his orders to silence information about the protests in traditional media and online, we can see that while the Internet served as both the primary source of mobilizational power for the growth of the Gezi Park protests, it also provided a wellspring for Erdoğan's ability to suppress the protests with force.

As mentioned in my previous chapter, the key component of understanding the role Internet plays in Cyber-political terms is the illusion that it is a fully free and safe refuge from authorities. Authorities may pose as rebels, and vice versa, so the way the Internet can produce complicated political developments is seriously understated. Entire networks of information quickly became established by the Turkish government to track down and punish those who participated in or posted about the Taksim Gezi protests.⁴³ Though social media was simultaneously the tool of the mobilization process by protestors, as well as the target for more government action. Companies like Facebook,

⁴² Yolles, M. (2003) '*The Political Cybernetics of Organisations*', *Kybernetes*, 32. doi:10.1108/03684920310493242.

⁴³ Voorhees, J. (2013) '*Turkey Is Now Arresting People For Using Twitter to Spread "Untrue Information"*', *Slate*, 5 June. Available at: <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2013/06/turkey-twitter-arrests-erdogan-reportedly-detains-25-for-spreading-untrue-information.html>

Instagram, and Twitter are more interested in an amicable relationship with the Turkish government and investors, and after the protests agreed to store Turkish users' data only in Turkish government databases, restricting data access to only government agencies, per Law.⁴⁴ From the construction of a fictional world, where one could post anything beyond a pedestrian and unprovocative statement related to a news story or tech development, the world seemed at ease. This information is almost certainly being used to track 'problematic' citizens and detain any who may pose a threat to the Turkish government. Starting from the mid to early 1990's web-development and technology companies fashioned the spirit of the repression which would emerge once the global Neo-liberal order was disrupted in the dot com boom of the late 90s and early 2000s: the world of the computer was becoming the convention, and within the next 20 years, it was simply indiscernible from reality.

The Cyber-Myth

The Internet was first characterized by Technological Utopianists as a democratically-equalizing tool that allowed participants to share information regardless of social status, that it granted access to education sources in remote regions, and that it would open up new boundless frontiers in idea-sharing to new generation of people, an 'overwhelmingly positive' development⁴⁵. These are all true benefits of widespread

⁴⁴ ARTICLE 19.Turkey: *Twitter becomes latest company to comply with repressive social media law* March 24, 2021 Available at:<https://www.article19.org/resources/turkey-twitter-becomes-latest-company-to-comply-with-repressive-social-media-law/>

⁴⁵ Marantz, A. (2019) 'The Dark Side of Techno-Utopianism', The New Yorker, 23 September. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/09/30/the-dark-side-of-techno-utopianism>

internet access and have been well-documented to have constructive benefits to said society, while also being used as part of the sales strategy by tech companies.

As countries gradually adopted national internet systems, isolated political-spheres of dialogue and interactivity emerged from the Internet as the usage of its systems became introduced as a way of communicating, doing business, and participating in the cycle of labor and production, global communication, although lineated by national and electronic borders.

It would be during this early time in the adoption of the internet where a synonym would emerge, cyberspace: the boom of a hypersonic Internet, the digital renaissance of the 1990's to the early 2000's, a synthesizer-heavy laden soundtrack imagining of 1982's Blade Runner's sinister dystopia meshed with an escape from the mundane of the real world. First coined by science fiction author William Gibson in 1984 book, '*Neuromancer*', Gibson described Cyberspace as:

“A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters, and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.”⁴⁶

While Gibson's emphasis on the intangibility of his predicted World Wide Web may have been dramatic, his assertion of the complexity of the net and its unimaginable capacity for expansion has become more of a prediction than a work of fantasy storytelling.

This has certainly been the case in Turkey during the last decade, as in 1990 a “vast percentage of the population, including government entities, had no idea of the

⁴⁶ Gibson, William, 1984-. *Neuromancer*. New York :Ace Science Fiction Books, 1984.

Internet's existence".⁴⁷ While in 2000, only a meager 3.72% of the Turkish population was using the Internet. By 2012 –a year before the protests– the number had grown to just about 45%.⁴⁸ These statistics demonstrate that the digital environment preceding the protest was a time of growing interest in, and rapid adoption of, the internet.

Because of this environs following the grim, dark dystopia of the 1980's limping alongside deterioration of the century-defining Cold War mindset, the once-flourishing technological utopianism of the dot com boom era of the 1990s and early 2000s died with but a whimper: a dream of usage of the Internet to free oneself from earthly politics and ideology had become mutated.

After the 2013 Gezi Park protest, the 2016 coup, and even amidst the ongoing economic and constitutional crisis, it was reported almost 9 out of 10 households had internet access in 2019, with some 75.3% of its citizens using the internet.⁴⁹ The rate of internet users in Turkey then reached 82.6% in 2022.⁵⁰ In the first three months of 2021 more than 80% of internet users were online almost every day, With such staggering numbers of persons enmeshed within cyberspace in which the government had effectively strong-armed the corporations who designed the programs and websites into submitting all the information the government would ask for, while practically touting a free and unerring mechanism by which a revolution of the mind would begin –the true start to the new millenium.

⁴⁷ Yurderi, T. (2016) Internet Development in Turkey: A Case Study. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20160103124808/https://www.isoc.org/inet97/proceedings/E3/E3_3.HTM

⁴⁸ Yurderi, T. (2016) Internet Development in Turkey: A Case Study.

⁴⁹ Over 88% of Turkish households have internet access - Latest News (August 27th, 2019) Hürriyet Daily News. Available at:

<https://www.hurriyetsayfasi.com/over-88-of-turkish-households-have-internet-access-146093>

⁵⁰ Kaya, Ahmet & Aydın, Ömer. (2019). E-Commerce in Turkey and Sap Integrated E-Commerce System. 11. 207-225. 10.34111/ijepeg.20191128.

Now no longer a rarified tool for the elite, the Internet –through early the 2000’s– began to outwardly fulfill the role of a Yolle’s ‘unsupervised political structure’, which brought together a mix of participants from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, conditioning the notion of a personalized cyber-world and where individual grievances and expressions could be promoted by the platform itself. This lie, sold to Internet users since the early 1990s by Technological Utopianism, could only go so far as real-world implications fell in line with the narrative being created.

These laws reflect a growing attention being paid to Cyberspace, an organic conception of a holistic, digital world in which one would be immune from government pressure. And with the memory of no risks to political actions within it-- directly creating the opportunity for misuse of Digital technologies to implement authoritarian and draconian measures will continue to plague nations which continue to recklessly intend to harvest its awesome power.

Viral Information and Cyber-War

States such as Erdoğan’s Turkey who perceive protests and demonstrations –whether organized in Cyberspace or not– as a danger to their administration will begin to use the Internet more and more as its first means of defense against minor political transgressions.

Yolle’s political expansion⁵¹ upon Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francis Varela’s⁵² formulation of two biological terms; *autopoiesis*; the capacity of an

⁵¹ Yolle, Political Cybernetics of Organizations

⁵² Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1980.

autonomous system, such as organisms or collectives, to reproduce and organize culture and knowledge. An example of autopoiesis is the socio-political alliances formed by protestors at Gezi Park –and their capacity to manifest and progressively alter phenomena from self-production of its virtual images- In this case, as Tufekci mentions, the millions of Turks who learned of the protests via the “re-tweeting” or “sharing” of images of the protest on social media platforms such as Twitter was an informal, unmediated process of such self-production⁵³, in addition to their capacity to transmit and change that knowledge –the individual’s agency to then share the information with others– such as it stands to reason a reproduction (or transformation) of previously existing knowledge is analogous to the “re-tweeting” or “sharing function”; as well as *autogenesis*; the evolved principles of governance which derive from cultural/paradigmatic knowledge being developed out of political temperament. In the context of my focus for the project, the protestors and activists are analogous to an unmediated political system attempting a cycle of autopoiesis in Turkish political freedoms, and the government is a wholly mediated political system trying to reinforce autogenesis.

This reproductive system, of autogenesis and autopoiesis, when applied to Taksim Gezi Park, is parallel to cybernetic perspective of viral information regarding the protests in 2013. Key here is Yolle’s emphasis on the reproduction of networks of power by participants through ‘virtual images’, in which a system exists within a Cybernetic ‘metasystem’, namely the Turkish AKP-run state. Within this Cybernetic metasystem of Yolle’s, one of feedback and input in an equation which pays inhuman levels of close attention to the minutiae of individuals producing and reproducing images, generating

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content and phenomena or even protesting, in turn, authorizes and retroactively legitimizes the authoritarian and mediated power formation of governments like Erdoğan's.

The Turkish police at Taksim Gezi Park arrested protestors as they left the protests, days after the protests in their own homes, tracked via their GPS-phone links, social media posts, and messages with friends and families which gave away their presence at the protests to authorities. These subtle and sophisticated measurements and data representing the various amounts of information that is used by government and corporations to track undesirables and to perpetrate anti-democracy measures online, such as 're-arresting participants and organizers of the Gezi Park protests'⁵⁴ It is clear that Erdoğan's administration is committing to the neoliberal conceptualization of a 'law and order' response to anti-authoritarian protests, however, they also turned to technological, digital means to enforce their power.

Power Dynamics

After 2013, it became clear that a government unfamiliar with freedom of expression, the right to organize and demonstrate, but gifted with the ability to harness digital powers to their own goals displays the tendency of that system of power to always use violence to punish transgression. In January of 2016, the Turkish government, fearing digital reprisals presumably mirroring the Anonymous and Syrian Electronic Army attacks of Turkish government digital infrastructure, blocked all TOR

⁵⁴ Hacıyakupoglu, G. and Zhang, W. (2015) 'Social Media and Trust during the Gezi Protests in Turkey', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 20(4), pp. 450–466. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12121.

anonymization services.⁵⁵ indicating that the government would be willing to go as far as to explicitly limit anonymity that only more tech-savvy hackers could acquire.

Facebook, Twitter, and other tech and social media companies with massive amounts of its users who live in Turkey⁵⁶ have had a massive failure of conception which then led to failures in policy and practice. These include how the Internet is used to track protestors' faces at demonstrations, recording messages and transcripts, tracking locations via GPS services pre-loaded into our phones, all in the name of 'national security'. These companies, bound by legislation in Turkey such as Law No. 5651, would be required to submit to rules involving Erdogan's own national security of Turkey. And though many would assume their adherence to protecting individual's data, Sarah Clarke, Head of Europe and Central Asia at international Human Rights organization ARTICLE 19 is skeptical, writing,

"all four of the major social media platforms have now shown their willingness to put profit above protection of their users. The severe restrictions for freedom of expression already in place in Turkey will now be worsened, with the Turkish state gaining even more control over what its people say online."⁵⁷

What can we say for power dynamics at Taksim Gezi Park? It fell upon the Turkish citizen –like many citizens of other countries with digital conflict raging– to defend against government-sponsored reprisals online.

⁵⁵ BBC News (2016) 'Turkey blocks access to Tor anonymising network', 19 December. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-38365564> (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

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⁵⁷ *Turkey: Twitter becomes latest company to comply with repressive social media law* (2021) ARTICLE

19. Available at:

<https://www.article19.org/resources/turkey-twitter-becomes-latest-company-to-comply-with-repressive-social-media-law/>

The AKP sponsored large brigades of internet trolls whose sole purpose it was to bully, harass, and expose those who expressed anti-government views online.⁵⁸ It became widely known that groups of AKP-loyal internet users were mass-reporting, harassing and bullying, particularly around the time of the 2013 protests, the 2016 coup, and during the constitutional referendum held by Erdogan to alter the executive function of Turkey's government from parliamentary formation to an executive presidential one. In this hat is a digital citizen, and what rights do they have? Where are those rights enshrined? What do the models for democratizing these technologies which have introduced digital citizenship and rights have in common, and what do they differ on?

Beyond the violent and consequential aftermath of the Gezi Park protests on the ground, this legislation was introduced after the 2013 protests in Turkish courts which shredded digital rights to pieces, increasing authoritarian measures.

These developments are important, as it reflects a shift in Turkish legislation –as evidence suggests as a result of the Gezi Protests– to merge the concepts of the individual and the group, a corporation like Facebook, and Twitter as individuals. as if expecting the Founders of those Corporations who had never left and had to personally represent the companies in Turkish courts whenever they are brought up in a case there. These cases highlight a key development in the recognizance of Digital entities as actors and as true beings with rights, or at least with the capacity to be held accountable as individuals, rather than a collection of individuals. Vowing to 'eradicate Twitter' in his country, PM Erdoğan argues that Twitter officials currently "ignore" some

⁵⁸ Albayrak, A. and Parkinson, J. (Sep. 16, 2013) Turkey's Government Forms 6,000-Member Social Media Team - WSJ. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323527004579079151479634742>

court rulings in Turkey, which order the social media platform to "remove some links" as per the complaints filed by Turkish citizens.

"The ban started after midnight and got into effect gradually depending on which internet providers they used, but it's a court order (actually four different courts) which means every provider, including GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) companies, are obliged to implement this ban"⁵⁹ reported Turkish journalist Erdem Arda Gunes.

What this means is that even international companies once thought only subject to regulations from responsible international regulators for mobile communications must be in line instead with Turkish censorship laws, or at least be totally willing and comfortable to share information, history and geo-location of users with the Turkish government per request, if they intend to conduct business there.

Furthermore, legislation became enacted following the events of 2013-2016 which restricted freedom of speech and freedom of the press further isolating Erdogan's position, despite positive polling resulting from his economic reforms before Turkey's entry process to the EU⁶⁰, which had since fallen apart. Furthermore, Turkey's March 2015 Law No. 5651 and its Second Amendment stipulates that Ministers and the Prime minister have the ability to give instant blocking orders for websites and provide simplified ways for blocking online content on the grounds of national security and crime prevention in Turkey.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Turkey blocks Twitter, after Erdoğan vowed 'eradication' - Turkey News (no date) Hürriyet Daily News. Available at: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-blocks-twitter-after-Erdogan-vowed-eradication-63884>

⁶⁰

⁶¹ Kaya Bedii, M. (May 1st, 2021) 'The Turkish Internet Law – Full Translation – Mehmet Bedii Kaya'. Available at: <https://www.mbkaya.com/turkish-internet-law/>

As a result of further erosion of possibly meaningful dialogue and community building supposedly possible via the Internet shows clear political value to such a tool. It is apparent that the Internet, as an apparatus by which to evaluate and value information tips the scale in favor of those with the increased capacity to do so. The laws passed in Turkey grants the government the ability to associate

“combating fake accounts, fake news, and misinformation on social networks, encouragement of suicide, sexual abuse of children, facilitation of the use of drugs or stimulants, obscenity, promotion of prostitution, Providing space and facilities for gambling ”, with digital protest.

Comparisons within the government made to bills passed in Germany and France aiming at combating fake news. Opposition MPs such as MP Engin Ozkoc, deputy leader of the parliamentary group of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), which was the largest opposition party in Turkish parliament in 2020, announced in a press conference that the CHP would file a constitutional complaint with the Constitutional Court against the bill, and argued that the amendments were a ploy to censure the opposition in social media. However, this constitutional complaint simply fell through.

On February 26th, 2014, the Turkish General Assembly ratified a bill in which changed several of these laws, allowing traffic information (what websites and links a computer user accesses, their location, what they search, their messages) to be collected, as well as specifically IP numbers, subscriber numbers, subscription information from the Internet service provider company itself, the type of service the device uses, and the amount of data used.⁶² These items, particular information which

⁶² Daigle, L. (2014) ‘Turkish ISPs Hijacking Traffic: This is How an Internet Breaks’, Internet Society, 1 April. Available at: <https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2014/04/turkish-isps-hijacking-traffic-this-is-how-an-internet-breaks/>

an individual carries with them while using the internet, are effectively the property of the Turkish government. This effectively erases the Internet freedoms users in most countries take for granted: that the Internet Service Providers themselves cannot have regulated streams of data being controlled by them, it comes under the nationalized control of Government-owned censors, which then allows for total oversight of messages, posts, geotags (the approximate coordinates of where a post was made) among other secure data-points. In turn, this created the ultimate techno-police state, in which Orwellian fantasy becomes reality.

Chapter Three: Policy and Power after Gezi Park

The Kurdish Connection

On April 26th, 2022, Turkish businessman and activist Osman Kavala was sentenced to life in prison without parole for “attempting to overthrow the Turkish government by force”⁶³ by allegedly orchestrating the 2013 Gezi Park protests. The court also sentenced 7 other defendants to 18 years in prison, while 9 remaining defendants, including some who were outside the country and were therefore tried in absentia will be prosecuted again in another proceeding⁶⁴.

Erdoğan’s attack on one of the people recommended by Abdullah Öcalan –the leader of the PKK– to guide the Turkish-Kurd reconciliation process should not be seen

⁶³ Turkish court sentences activist Osman Kavala to life in prison (2022). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/25/turkish-court-sentences-activist-osman-kavala-to-life-in-prison>

⁶⁴ Defendants in Gezi Park trial acquitted but new arrest warrant issued for Osman Kavala (2020) France 24. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200218-turkey-acquits-defendants-of-terrorism-charges-gezi-park-osman-kavala-landmark-trial>

as a coincidence. Osman Kavala, who has been directing an underground political capital with tangible funding and connected with the previously mentioned Sırrı Süreyya Önder, who –in a meeting with Ocalan– said:

“Sir, we have discussed everything. There is also the issue of the presidency. It is a delicate matter among the public. Also, Osman Kavala sends his regards.

People are worried that the presidential system might turn Turkey into an autocratic regime.”⁶⁵

This suggests that Erdogan used the Gezi Park protests as a convenient means to tie up potential loose ends within the Kurdish reconciliation process, as well as throughout domestic leftist or radical opposition. This behavior suggests an attempt by Erdogan to implement policies which respond to developing situations. This attempted dynamism, revealed by his discourse according to Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, compose Erdogan’s “...unprecedented attempts to polarize and politicize Turkish society. C That Erdogan has consistently violated the norms of impartiality in favor of the AKP since his ascendance to the presidency is another challenge for the concept of delegative democracy.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Realpolitik

Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu’s “competitive-authoritarian” determination of Erdoğan’s governance style elaborates and builds on Tufekci’s direct and Yolles’ indirect commentary on Erdogan’s priorities and goals. Esen and Gumuscu identify “authoritarian retreat” from confronting “the nature of political contestation in Turkey,

⁶⁵ Kaplan, H. (2015) The curious case of Osman Kavala, Daily Sabah. Available at: https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/hilal_kaplan/2015/09/05/the-curious-case-of-osman-kavala

where elections function as key political institutions and permit competition, albeit on a highly uneven playing field.”⁶⁶

Realpolitik is, in contemporary terms, more closely associated in political academics with ‘power play’ than it is with ‘political realism’ –what the thinker who coined the phrase, Ludwig von Rochau– initially considered it to be. von Rochau was writing on political interaction and power the early German states in, the 1850s, and while later thinkers have tried implementing the term into a more contemporary usage: Henry Kissinger is popularly considered to be the developer of modern ‘realpolitik’, though never defined realpolitik beyond self described ‘political realism’.

Modern dictionaries associate its usage with “pejoratively implying political policies that are perceived as being coercive, amoral, or Machiavellian”⁶⁷ and, due to the proliferation of its usage amongst neo-liberal hegemonic states in the 21st century, practical conceptions made by politicians who spoke to one another developed into the more Hobbesian, and removed the concept of a natural dynamic between individuals being one of conflict between ‘all versus all’.⁶⁸

The term real in *realpolitik* was initially in its German origin to refer to ‘things’, rather than simply ‘real’ or ‘realistic’, denoting an application of politics for the material world, for ‘things in space’.⁶⁹ A realistic, practical, and actual politics which prefers agency of circumstances and factors, rather than only ideological, moral and ethical premises. This seemingly stands contradictory, in terms of field-of-study, to the fields of

⁶⁶ Esen, B. and Gumuscu, S. (2016) ‘Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey’, *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), pp. 1581–1606. doi:10.1080/01436597.2015.1135732.

⁶⁷ Humphreys, A. (no date) ‘Realpolitik’. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/4100553/Realpolitik>

⁶⁸ Bew, John. “The Real Origins of Realpolitik.” *The National Interest*, no. 130, 2014, pp. 40–52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44153278>.

⁶⁹ May/June 2017, G.J.I. (2017) ‘Realpolitik: A History’, 14 April. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2017-04-14/realpolitik-history>

Cybernetics and Cyberspace, whose existence itself is in defiance of the 'real', the 'thing', and the 'material'. However, as Yolles stipulates,

“In terms of the formal relations that express the real power relations between individuals, space may also be indicative of the way that information is likely to be used and represented in the web partnership.”⁷⁰

Erdoğan's assertions of the illegality of online participation in demonstration at a core level reflect his desire to project a particular *realpolitik*, in which policies of pragmatism and protection of private property allows oversight of what many of his own advisors, employees, and secretaries cannot. The phenomena of the Taksim Gezi Park protests reveal a facet of this emerging confrontation between the supposed unmediated political safe space of the Internet promised by techno-utopianism, and a government-enraptured in its own alternative reality, a delusional set of policies seeking to limit the individual's agency to externalize their own thoughts would destroy any semblance of agency an individual had on the Internet.

This *realpolitik* of Erdoğan's reflects the techno-pessimism which arose within the techno-utopianism that was sold to millions of people around the world by tech corporations and media giants. Instead of a free and Reality itself would bend to the script of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and deviation would be punished accordingly.

Additionally, Erdoğan's projection of pragmatism allows him to create the narrative of how the international community, or a certain group of individuals conspired to seed the Gezi Park protests to undermine him and his supporter's position. This narrative, one of an “us versus them” mentality, has been found to lead to irrational group favoritism in which the key interests of those who support Erdoğan are diametrically opposed to what Erdoğan is actually doing⁷¹.

⁷⁰ Yolles. (2003) *The political cybernetics of organisations*

⁷¹

The longer Erdoğan is remaining in power, and the more a substantial argument is provided for his removal from office, yet the stronger his supporters' love and dedication will grow. It is a clever aspect of realpolitik which, whether intentional or not, secures power for an autocrat for a longer time than simply a polarizing leader, one who sows not simply division, but rather an absurd delineation of reality, and of history as well.

Since the protests, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has solidified his position amongst people who already support him and severely weakened his power in population centers like Ankara and Istanbul, according to the election results and polling done in 2019 and 2021⁷². This is widely considered a result of his botched reaction to the Taksim Gezi Park protests, as well as his poor economic decisions, and the results of his policies of total war against the Kurdish forces in southern Turkey and northern Syria.⁷³

Erdoğan's characterization of the legitimacy of the police actions denotes a perception of the Gezi Park unrest in which a simplistic and understandable dichotomy of 'bad vs good' fits a narrative of privatization and laissez-faire attitude to grievances levied by a large group of his own people. In fact, by shifting the focus of blame from his own government, by accusing Western sources as planting the seeds of unrest, Erdoğan repositions and presents himself and the AKP as part of an "anticolonialist"⁷⁴ struggle, and defending Turkish Islam from perversion and degeneracy. As Sociology

⁷² Reuters (2021) 'With poll support dropping, Erdoğan's party looks to change Turkish reelection law: officials', 2 March. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-politics-idUSKCN2AU1V4>

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⁷⁴ Turkyilmaz, S. (2019) *Erdoğan is the embodiment of anti-colonialist policy*, Yeni Şafak. Yeni Şafak. Available at: <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/selcuk-turkyilmaz/erdogan-is-the-embodiment-of-anti-colonialist-policy-2047235>

Professor Cihal Tugal identifies “Anticolonial struggle based on nationalist, Sufi and/or Islamist themes and organization led to the marginalization or subordination of socio-economic questions.”⁷⁵

While the AKP has enjoyed a parliamentary majority since its rise to power in 2003, and popularity polls since showing that since the protests his approval rating has only been split between more liberal and secular Turks, from more conservative and religious Turks⁷⁶, following the well-established premise of a divided people. The premise of this chapter is that after the Taksim Gezi Park protests, PM Erdoğan has enjoyed structural power, such as elites, corporations’, military and police loyalty, while lacking any significant support among leftist, environmentalist, Kurdish and human rights groups.

This is coupled with his deals with the EU and the United States, part and parcel of the neo-liberal strategy of foreign investment in a country's particular geopolitical exigence: Turkey stands as a physical and political bridge between Europe and the Middle East, and it's supposed neo-liberal appeal in domestic policy to the European Union or NATO countries has made it a key agent with regards to international deals on limiting or raising the number of refugees allowed to pass through Turkey on their way to seek asylum in Europe. Erdoğan had cemented this deal with the influx of Syrian refugees in both 2016, and in 2019.

AAs part of Erdoğan's deal with Europe, regular migrant attempts to enter Greece would be returned to Turkey, and Ankara would take steps to prevent new

⁷⁵ Tuğal, C. (2016). *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism*. United Kingdom: Verso.

⁷⁶ Poushter, J. (June 5, 2013) ‘Prime Minister Erdoğan popular in Turkey broadly, but less so in Istanbul’, Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/05/prime-minister-Erdoğan-popular-in-turkey-but-less-so-in-istanbul/>

migratory routes from opening.⁷⁷ In exchange, the European Union agreed to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey on a one-to-one basis, reduce visa restrictions for Turkish citizens, pay 6 billion euros in aid to Turkey for Syrian migrant communities, update the customs union, and re-energize stalled talks regarding Turkey's accession to the European Union. It is part of this figmentation of criminals running these protests which involves conflating the distress of the community rising up for Gezi and for the Turkish people's autonomy with criminals and deep-state conspirators trying to bring a bona fide man of the people down.

Justifying the counter-revolutionary violence at the protests in speeches at party rallies and commemorations shows the rhetorical vilification Erdoğan used to delegitimize the protestors, whom he consistently refers to at rallies as "looters."⁷⁸ On various occasions, Erdoğan accused them of immoral and unethical behavior, ranging from drinking alcohol in public to entering mosques with beer bottles to physically attacking and harassing women in headscarves.⁷⁹ Pro-government circles, who considered Erdoğan a "tall man under constant attack," regularly framed the protestors as "the enemy." In this regard, they considered the protests as a "sinister international and national plot to oust Erdoğan and his government by non-electoral means, and so "police went into Taksim" sounds no longer like undue violence but law and order.

Crime was long cited by Erdoğan and other AKP pundits –though protests had sprung up in practically every Turkish city by the end of July– as the principal reason

⁷⁷ Corrao, I. (2019) EU-TURKEY STATEMENT & ACTION PLAN, European Parliament. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train>

⁷⁸ Tufekci, Z. (2017) Twitter and tear gas: the power and fragility of networked protest. pg160

⁷⁹ Released footage shows no physical attack on headscarf-wearing woman during Gezi protests - Turkey News (February, 14, 2014) Hürriyet Daily News. Available at: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/released-footage-shows-no-physical-attack-on-headscarf-wearing-woman-during-gezi-protests-62479>

there were protests in the first place. Government estimates at around this time cite the total population of those participating at somewhere around 3.5 million people⁸⁰ As mentioned earlier, protests in support of the Gezi Park protests popped up in numerous other countries, directly calling for the cessation of police brutality, and for the halting of the demolition plans for the park. Erdoğan and the AKP party line that the protests were criminal acts, effectively asserts that individuals participating in protest renounced their civilian status and effectively became outlaws by virtue of protestation.

This is in line with the Party and with Erdoğan: what Begüm Adalet called political philosophy of ‘Erdoğanism’, in which power is delegated from top-down to uphold an a “steadfast program of neoliberalism and success in luring foreign capital and increasing growth rates. Prior to and early after his election in 2003, Erdoğan’s policies reflected a misguided conception of power dynamics, and of a twisted social contract between the citizen and their state, in which foreign perceptions of investment-opportunity and tourism superseded actually constructive domestic policy. In addition to this, though his policies seemed a salve to the economic woes of Turkey in the early 2000s, his policies shifted drastically after 2013, and even more so after the coup attempt in 2016. This major coup d’état was attempted by elements of the Turkish military, where the Turkish parliament was bombed and shootouts between Coup members and Loyalist military groups in the streets of Istanbul and Ankara occurred⁸¹. After being crushed, a series of purges –which to this day are still occurring– began to directly alter the heart of Turkish

⁸⁰ Turkey must abandon ‘show trial’ against Gezi Park protest organizers (2014) Amnesty International. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/06/turkey-must-abandon-show-trial-against-gezi-park-protest-organizers/>

⁸¹ Cengiz, M. (June 12, 2014) Who Was Behind the July 15, 2016 Military Uprising in Turkey? | Small Wars Journal. Available at: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/who-was-behind-july-15-2016-military-uprising-turkey>

political priorities. During the coup, and as recently as 2020⁸², individuals were arrested for ‘posting videos on social media shouting expletives against PM Erdoğan’. This was considered a crime of “insulting state elders”⁸³, which in itself asserts Erdoğan’s position as a state elder: as Elder, he has ‘founded’ or ‘birthed’ the modern Turkish state.

This coup is described by political theorist Banu Bargu in *Year One: Reflections on Turkey’s Second Founding and the Politics of Division* as a confrontation between powers seeking “...to re-establish unity among state apparatuses and to enhance state power from above, and, on the other, the popular energies of participation from below.”⁸⁴ Within this definition, it can be compared within the framework of both Yolles’ cybernetics, cyberspace, and even Tufekci’s ‘networked protests’ and ‘adhocracy’ as emergent explosions of contradicting impulses from lateral systems of power trying to restore balance to the metasystem. – in this case, non-governmental entities and groups, within the military, and with the parallel ability and agency of a powerful government with its own loyal military government forces, in attempts to halt the further destruction of the truth and of reality begun in 2013, a task Erdoğan accomplished alongside populist leaders around the world by 2016.

The Cyber-Obliteration of Reality

Recep Erdoğan’s actions following the Gezi Park protests have revealed him as an autocrat weaving his own narrative. With his increasingly tight grip on political expression in Turkey and his projection of power outward, the conflict and tension

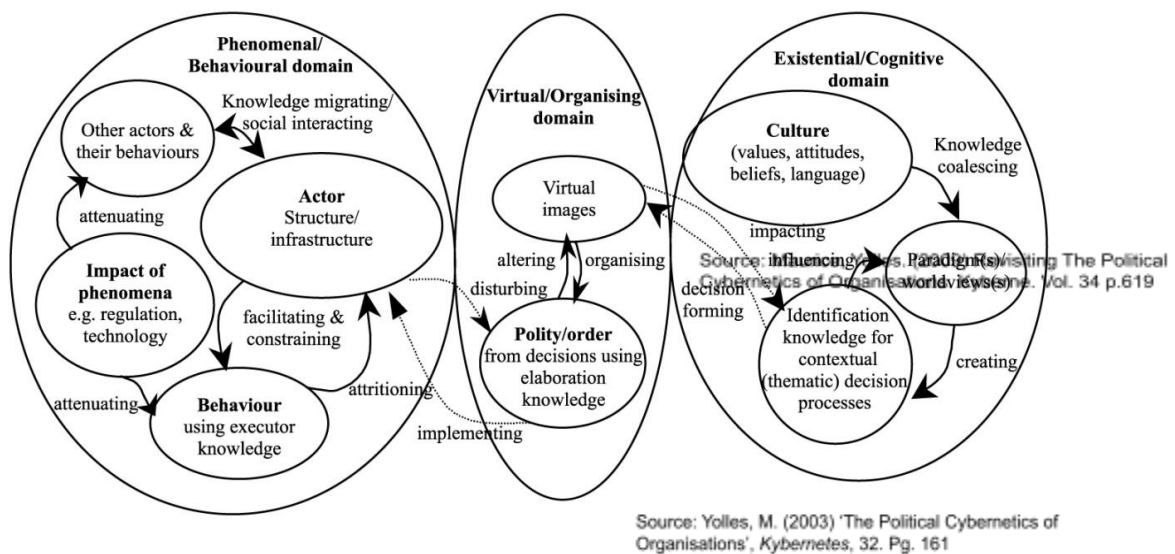
⁸²Ahval News. (18 Apr. 2020), 80-Year-Old Man Detained for Insulting Erdoğan Due to Facebook Like. <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-social-media/80-year-old-man-detained-insulting-erdogan-due-facebook>.

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⁸⁴ Bargu, B. (2018) ‘*Year One: Reflections on Turkey’s Second Founding and the Politics of Division*’, *Critical Times*, 1(1), pp. 23–48. doi:10.1215/26410478-1.1.23.

between virtual images and their altering and organizing effects on polity, behavior, and cultural paradigm as proposed by Yolles becomes clearer. With Erdogan's realization of the power of the virtual image, we can turn to the terms usage contained in Yolles' expansion on Erik Schwarz's cybernetical/cyber spatial, rational/real, and ideological/moral domains (see Figure 8)

Figure 8. Yolles and Schwarz' Influence diagram exploring the relationship between the phenomenal, virtual and existential domains



Within this framework we can see that the modern industrial/technological society of Turkey was characterized by the illusions of socio-economic emancipation of the corporations. Yolles characterizes this as an increase in social intensity as part of the 'deepening of capitalism'⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ Yolles. (2003) *The political cybernetics of organisations*, p1276

The dynamic between the oppositionary forces of the Gezi Park protests, the coup military forces of 2016, and Erdogan's AKP government, is consistent, if applied to Yolles and Schwarz' explanation of domains with conflicting 'claims to reality'.⁸⁶

Furthermore, Yolles' highlights the globalist notion of author David Held's "corporate capital influence over location, distribution and organization of economic power and wealth."⁸⁷ Yolles asserts that Held's concern with globalization is characterized by four types of change:

- "1. a stretching of social, political and economic activities across frontiers, regions and continents;
2. an intensification, or the growing magnitude, of interconnectedness and flows of trade, investment, finance, migration, culture, etc.;
3. a speeding up of global interactions and processes, as the development of world-wide systems of transport and communication increases the velocity of the diffusion of ideas, goods, information, capital and people;
4. a growing extensity, intensity and velocity of global interactions can be associated with their deepening impact"

And within this, Yolles' notions fit the expressions of Erdoğan's power over the rational/real, and the ideological/moral systems, and his foray in the cybernetic and into the local cyberspace biome creates considerable global consequences.

Banu Bargu's portrayal of the political situation following the 2016 coup as

"a contradictory amalgam of democratic and authoritarian elements, even if the decline can be tracked as a form of authoritarian backsliding, populist erosion, or gradual decay by corruption, the overall balance would not give us an accurate sense of the situation."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Yolles. (2003) *The political cybernetics of organisations*, p1276

⁸⁷ Held, D. et al. (1999) Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture, International Journal. doi:10.2307/40203424.

⁸⁸ Bargu, B. (2018) 'Year One: Reflections on Turkey's Second Founding and the Politics of Division',

This contradictory amalgamation displays Erdoğan's
administrational ability to manipulate the courts and lawmakers, which
remained, even after the coup of 2016.

Through the preservation of earlier challenges to his power Erdoğan's temperament towards Internet legislation changed. This is apparent because shortly after the coup bills were introduced or amended in Turkish law which were aimed at curbing Internet freedoms. One such Law passed was Law No. 5651, entitled The Law on the Regulation of Broadcasts via Internet and Prevention of Crimes Committed through Such Broadcasts, and the subsequent Law No. 7253 which, when amended changed the government's definition of "social network provider" as "real or legal persons, who enable users to create, view or share contents such as text, image, sound or location on the Internet for social interaction purposes"⁸⁹. These laws were introduced to retroactively hamper further protest organizations on Social Media, in Turkey, and to punish those who practice it, and are caught. Erdoğan's power is, at this point, analogous to every populist, nationalist demagogue who has used the contemporary popularity of neoliberal social and economic policies, and revive an immensely convoluted and complex narrative of old CIA-led clandestine operation which targeted Turkish leftist and supposed communist sympathizers

It is remarkable, then that Erdoğan's rise to power was almost killed in its infancy when he was barred from entering Turkish politics for publicly reciting an 'inflammatory and violence-inciting' poem by pan-Turkish poet: ""The mosques are our barracks, the

⁸⁹ Omnibus Bill, No. 524 (June 26, 2013), Amending Provisions in Various Laws and Decrees including Law No. 5651 "Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of Such Publications", Law No. 5809 "Electronic Communications Law" and others. | wilmap (2013). Available at: <https://wilmap.stanford.edu/entries/omnibus-bill-no-524-first-introduced-june-26-2013-amending-provisions-various-laws-and>

domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers”⁹⁰ Though Erdoğan’s personal thoughts may have shifted, this rhetoric is what follows Yolle and Eysenk’s model of a ‘paternal autocratic’ doctrine, where ‘people relate to each other as objects, they tend to maintain a balance of personal power in which one person is manipulating another...’⁹¹

Thus, when the clear delineation of narrative versus reality, the public became aware that for a long time, mainstream news and media channels had been broadcasting a kind of government-controlled reality show, wherein the entire construction follows along a carefully planned route, unbeknownst to the participants, that made access to even relatively unbiased information impossible. Everyone knew the government was lying, nobody cared anymore.

During the height of the protests on the 2nd of June, 2013, CNN Turk ran a documentary on penguins while social media exploded with images showing the extent of the violence.⁹² (see Figure 9) This became a key symbol for the protestors, some of whom began graffiting penguins in and around Taksim Square, calling attention to the gross overlooking of a national crisis: all but the AKP government realized the government’s unrestricted access to media platforms and internet technologies threatened their free streams of dissemination of information. Especially during the protests, young people deployed various creative tools provided by social media

⁹⁰ Welle (www.dw.com), D. (6th June 201) Erdoğan supporters hold mass rally, protesters cleared from Gezi Park | DW | 16.06.2013, DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/erdogan-supporters-hold-mass-rally-protesters-cleared-from-gezi-park/a-16885919>

⁹¹Oktem, K. 9th, June, 2013 Why Turkey’s mainstream media chose to show penguins rather than protests | Kerem Oktem for Free Speech Debate, Guardian Comment Network | The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/turkey-mainstream-media-penguins-protests>

⁹²Oktem, K. 9th, June, 2013 Why Turkey’s mainstream media chose to show penguins rather than protests

platforms to increase their mobilisational and organizational capacities. Due to this, the government's tactics changed drastically after realizing the solution would not be so

Figure 9.

simple as to subsidize renovations or begin a new project.

Erdogan would have to face the consequences of his repressive handling of the 2013 protests, the 2016 coup attempt, and the constitutional crisis unfolding since 2019,



Source: Alfonso, Fernando. 2013-6,2,2013. "CNN-Turk airs Penguin documentary during Istanbul riots". The Daily Dot.

which no doubt displays a deteriorating sense of security for the autocrat. Furthermore, Erdoğan's policies focusing outside of Turkey turned botched efforts at 'containment or assimilation' of the Kurds and political, ethnic and religious minorities in and around Anatolia to policy-bombs within Turkey, dividing supporters even further..

Turkey has seen its military forces intervene in politics a total of 5 times, with the first being on May 27th, 1960, the second on March 12th, 1971, and a third on September 12th, 1980⁹³. It is after this coup, under the shadow of American political domination in 1980 where a young Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged alongside growing national patterns of violence against opposition and protest, which led to the 2013 protests, the 2016 coup, and the current constitutional crisis.

⁹³ Timeline: Turkish coups (2016). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/7/16/timeline-a-history-of-turkish-coups>

Conclusion

The Ghosts of the Cold War

This project has argued that the experience and phenomena of the Taksim Gezi Park unrest expressed in cybernetic and political terms are key in understanding the downfall of Turkish citizens' ability and agency to freely express their political beliefs on the Internet. The question posed in this project was: Beyond the 2013 Gezi protests, as demonstrated with my sources and textual analysis, is there a growing risk of loss of more freedoms, and the expression of their politics outright? Repression online has become the norm by now, and opposition remarks are treated with hostility by government sources in Turkey.

By reduction of the legitimate claims of the protestors in 2013 –from simple opponents to AKP rule to radical extremists operating on the fringe of perverse social beliefs– Erdoğan and AKP censors forgot that nonparticipants use those very same digital tools just as much as protestors. In making this decision, the Turkish authorities revealed the dream of a digital Utopia in Turkey as an elaborate sham, constructed with aid from companies such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter.

In comparing Yolles' cybernetic processes to the Turkish nation post-Gezi Park shows us that the structural leadership in Turkey behaves similar to the 'Mediated political systems' per Yolles' characterization⁹⁴. I posit that this process agrees with Tufekci's consideration that within a process such as those Yolles shows, "the news of unrest and protests might never have made it onto the national agenda."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Yolles. (2003) *The political cybernetics of organisations*, p1276

⁹⁵ Yolles. (2003) *The political cybernetics of organisations*, p1276

These political systems indicate the tendency for that government in terms of reproduced power formation to: attempt to alter and shape reality itself to fit the narrative of a just government defending the people of Turkey against foreign interests and criminals; use violent means to reassert its position; and punish those questioning it.

Yolle's thesis rests on communities with a defined culture or normative behavior –in this case the protestors at Gezi park and Erdoğan's AKP government and pro-government citizens– which then perfectly mirrors with the aforementioned violent historical precedent of Taksim Gezi Park and Yolle's notion of political temperament, in which Erdoğan is distributing "power in a way that is ultimately conditioned by their ability to appreciate the existence of their participation in processes of social intensification and complexification, resulting in modes of power distribution. Opposing this, the protestors of Gezi Park attempted to maintain and empower the 'Unmediated Political system' in order to, as Yolle asserts, "undertake a process of consultation and personal involvement rather than object manipulation."⁹⁶ displays the meaningful and constructive goals of the protestors– and the dialectical opposer, the object manipulation of the formation of power in the Erdoğan government.

What these expressions of newly developing digital politics reveal is that increasingly the people of the world –who are able to access the internet– are participating in the creation and reproduction of– systems of political feedback loops beyond the control of any centralized entity. Erdoğan's administrations' bungled attempts to neutralize the caustic effects of the 2013 protests and maintain effective centrality effectively missed the mark, and contributed to the development of the 2016 coup and the current constitutional crisis.

⁹⁶Yolles. (2003) *The political cybernetics of organisations*

These questions I have raised and attempted to answer in my project raise a question on the destructive relationship of humans with power is apparent when the lie of the safety of Digital activism is considered from a worldwide phenomenon-viewpoint. In Turkey, social media activism, use of digital resources to share information, reading leftist or pro-Kurdish materials, anti-government writings, and behavior analogous to the Gezi Park Protests behaviors are all but impossible in Turkey without a VPN. These are effectively a digital mask which hides your location and automatically-collected information from both one's Internet service provider, and their government. A VPN company operating in Turkey reported on the 6th of June, 2013 a 1000% growth in the local use of its free virtual private network VPN.⁹⁷ This statistic represents how fast users lose trust in the structure of their places of refuge from government eyes, as early as a few days after the obliteration of its electronic walls. As of 2021, usage of VPNs in Turkey is highly restricted by laws, but approximately 32% of Turkish citizens online use them.⁹⁸

Political speech on the Turkish Internet is entirely divorced from political speech on other national systems, especially with regard to social media companies and Internet service providers' willingness to protect information about the individual. Multiple protestors and participants were arrested, as recent as last year⁹⁹, for urging others to attend protests. This is significant because whilst protestors at Gezi Park could be effectively de-arrested by their comrades, there is no such luck within one's own home at early morning hours, or in an apartment complex, you don't even have a share

⁹⁷ BBC News (2013) 'Turkish people turn to VPNs as Istanbul protests spread', 6 June, 2013 Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-22799768>

⁹⁸ Kuadli, J. (2021) '30 Staggering VPN Statistics [2022]', SeedScientific, 15 November. Available at: <https://seedscientific.com/vpn-statistics/>

⁹⁹ Turkey's Gezi Trial Verdict a Travesty of Justice (2022) Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/turkeys-gezi-trial-verdict-travesty-justice>

in. These arrests were made to send a message to Turkey's Online communities that would dare to bring up the Gezi Park protests: a rapid crackdown would begin on any challenge –whether major or minor– to Erdoğan's power.

Worldwide opposition to Erdoğan only exists insofar as the global community informally perceives and publicly labels Erdoğan's actions as unjust. Online, government organizations may express their displeasure or concern at Erdoğan's flagrant disengagement from compromise and further violent repression of the attempted restructuring of the political structure in Turkey, however will still make deals in Turkey with nationalized corporations or even directly with the government. Furthermore, they will ignore the historical precedent and cycle of violence against leftist movements and organizations, and instead will follow along the narrative established by Turkish mainstream media, under the guidance of the government.

Erdoğan, like many other authoritarian rulers, reigns on the manufactured consent of his people, division of the Turkish people between 'the party' and 'the criminals' being the one, echoing many of the talking points of populist political figures similar to Erdoğan – names like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Rodrigo Duterte, who are all strong-men with the shared desire to reify historical legitimacy and strength, pushing to live in a particular point in history– until the end of it.

The political consequences of ignoring the intangible, of ignoring the invisible are overwhelming and present numerous challenges for the peoples of industrialized societies. More and more our lives are built around these constructs made to augment our lives, rather than serve as a cyber-prison. The events occurring in our world have become increasingly difficult to predict or intuit beforehand, and though the slant of

geopolitics may be towards war and conflict, the powers of the Internet will remain at the behest of those with the powers to summon them, be they for good or evil intent. A government, bound by its desire for mediated and restricted political systems, needs only a single digital spark to ignite an explosion which enlarges those restrictions on its people. Although it may seem already too late for the democratic internet –through the events the 2013 Gezi Park protests, and the 2016 coup– a democratic reality that was promised, in Banu Bargu words, was reborn into a greater possibility for the construction of a “coherent ideological vision and patiently build a counter-hegemonic bloc.”¹⁰⁰

Do the developments in Turkey after the Taksim Gezi protests mean similar divisive outcomes for the counter-hegemonic movements in other countries with parallel circumstances to Turkey in a post-Gezi park timeline? I must concede that there is no evidence for the phenomenon of movements like Taksim Gezi park to be a dying kind of occurrence. How can the actions of a unique motivator such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his AKP be analyzed in a format which best fits an understanding of civil disobedience in another historical context, and without its connection to the developed culture of a particular formation of power? It cannot. This is not to forget that the occurrences which provide fuel for an impetus to provoke such a reaction from a counter-hegemonic movement like the reaction at Gezi Park in 2013 is not predictable. Nor is it –beyond the amount of individuals present, and the actions of the day– particularly quantifiable: that struggle is qualitatively intangible, and difficult to process without taking into account every angle and every historical event reaching out and grabbing individuals in the present, shoving them into the future. That intangible nature

¹⁰⁰ Banu, *Year One: Reflections on Turkey's Second Founding and the Politics of Division*

of struggle and impulse is key when conceptualizing the prior political conditions for an eruption like at Gezi park in 2013, except that looking at the situation now, which stagnates and buckles internally, as seen in the coup of 2016, against the weight of a government like Erdoğan's.

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