Gezi Insurgency as ‘Counter-Conduct’

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This article defines the Gezi insurgency as a case of ‘counter-conduct’ with a heterotopia in a Foucauldian sense and compares it with similar movements to underline its peculiarity. It argues that Gezi cannot be defined as an ‘anti-austerity’ or ‘anti-dictatorship’ movement. Rather, it was a struggle against the neoliberal-cum-neoconservative conduct under AKP rule and its leadership taking the form of a pseudo-presidential regime. Gezi not only was a search for a different conduct but also a possible self-conduct through self-invention in prefigurative experimentations with different ways of being and practicing direct democracy in the reclaimed public spaces that characterized the action process. What sustained this counter-action process was the spontaneous constitution or deployment of certain platforms like Blok and Çarşı which did not, in themselves, express or represent any given social or political organization nor a corresponding form of a generic identity. In the Gezi insurgency, actors tended to outflow their defining social categories and become a part of the series of performances in which a sense of self-transformation has been common.

KEY WORDS: Çarşı and Blok; Conduct of conduct; Counter-conduct; Gezi insurgency; Heterotopia; Neoliberal-cum-neoconservative; Prefiguration

The Gezi Park insurgency in Turkey (2013) exhibits common characteristics with the tide of social upheavals beginning with the case of Iceland in 2009 and following through Tunisia, Spain, Egypt, Greece, the US and Brazil in the early 2010s. Yet, it is also peculiar. Its analysis can yield a contribution to our knowledge of both this recent wave of insurgencies and the contemporary condition of political and social life in Turkey. As will be discussed, the Gezi insurgency is a case of complex counter-conduct challenging the three faces of neoliberalism in Turkey: soft and stealth governance through the constitution of self-regulating competitive markets and ‘responsibilization’ of agents (individuals and firms alike); active use of the state’s power and sovereignty to repress dissidence, promote social conservatism and commodification of commons (neoconservative governmentality); and finally a self-proclaimed pastor who aims to monopolize ‘government’ (state power) to conduct the people. In this sense, Gezi was not an anti-austerity movement led by the precariat and those who are ‘vulnerable to precarization’, the point, for instance, that Della Porta...
made with respect to the contemporaneous movements in Greece, Italy, Spain (*Indignados*) and the US.³ It also was not a struggle against a dictatorship without any democratic legitimacy like the cases in Tunisia and Egypt. The AKP government was democratically elected and was sustaining a popular base at the time of the Gezi insurgency and proved able to sustain its base later in the November 2016 elections (with slightly less than 50 percent of the vote).

Taking the Gezi case in the context of this recent wave of movements, Bülent Gökay and Farzana Şahin have pointed out the common dynamics behind the Gezi insurgency and cases of protests in Brazil and Chile. They claim that the protests were mainly because of the rising expectations of ‘the educated professionals and university students from reasonably well-off families’ beyond economic ones after years of ‘economic success’. Accordingly, they mainly demanded ‘improvement of the quality of public services and participatory democracy’ by opposing ‘the grand projects of neoliberal restructuring’ carried out by the ruling parties.⁴ This comparison, however, misses the basic point about the Gezi case: It was widespread, socially heterogeneous, and a total rejection of the ruling AKP’s configuration of power. In the process leading to the Gezi insurgency, the AKP government was turning more and more into an authoritarian and intrusive power with a clear project to control and reconstitute subjects in the neoliberal-cum-neoconservative model they hastily were trying to establish under the full authority of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a pseudo-presidential regime. Gezi was an insurgency movement of those who refused to be conducted by this power. Moreover, the actions of the subjects in this movement indicated a strong aspiration for a move toward autonomous self-invention against the conduction itself.

As implied, this study takes its cue from Michel Foucault’s theory of power by interpreting it as an action-based critical social theory. It provides a perspective to analyze social and political struggles in terms of the mutual incitation between power as conduct of conduct and autonomy politics as counter-conduct. Foucault introduced the concept of counter-conduct in a historical context and process. The Catholic Church’s incorporation of the ruler-pastor of the pre-Christian Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures⁵ as an institution within the Roman Empire was followed by the intermingling of this institutional pastorate with the modern government since the end of seventeenth century ‘in the exercise of governmentality’ in Western Europe.⁶ In this context, Foucault emphasized that ‘inasmuch as government also begins to want to take responsibility for people’s conduct, to conduct people’ what followed was ‘conflicts of conduct on the borders and edge of the political institution’. The term counter-conduct enables us, Foucault argues, to analyze ‘the acts in the very general field of politics or in the very general field of power relations’ which are ‘struggles against processes implemented for conducting others’.⁷ Though there may appear a historical gap between this background of the concept and the contemporary world of neo-liberal governmentality, Dardot and Laval emphasized its contemporary relevance. Neoliberal governmentality induces subjects to conduct themselves and toward others by

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⁵ Foucault refers to the figuration of the king as ‘the shepherd of men.’
⁷ Ibid, p. 201.
internalizing the norm of competitive enterprise. As they argue, one cannot rebel against an outside authority for not to be conducted as such but one can oppose through a ‘double refusal’ of this way of relating to one’s self and others, which implies an ethics of self-invention in and toward autonomy. As they affirmed, this refusal and the ensuing attempt for transformation of the self and relationship to others best can be captured by the term counter-conduct.

**Analytics of Counter-Conduct**

In Foucault’s theorization, the form of power in modern and late-modern societies simultaneously totalizes and individualizes subjects by operating in various planes rather than by having a central and single locus. The state apparatus not only is an instance of these series of power that deeply penetrate everyday life through family, education, medicine, psychiatry, economic relations, etc., but also it is where a ‘general design’ and ‘institutional crystallization’ of various power strategies is ‘embodied in the formulation of the law, in various social hegemonies’. Despite the emphasis on the pervasiveness of power relations and strategies in different planes of everyday life and the significance of the state in that, freedom is the precondition of power relations in the modern and late modern society in Foucault’s theory. Freedom refers to the capacity to imagine, represent and pursue possibilities other than what already prevails as real or intelligible. In the absence of freedom there would be no reason to act upon act or for a conduct of conduct to orient the subjects toward certain behaviors among other possibilities. As Foucault says, ‘power is exercised only over free subjects, and only in so far as they are free’. Therefore, there is a ‘reciprocal incitation’ between power acts as subjugation and freedom as the capacity to act differently for the possibilities other than the available ones presented by an intelligible normative-discursive order. It is the capacity of the subjects to act differently in and for freedom that makes and keeps a system of power relations contingently ‘singular’, fragile and vulnerable. Counter-conduct is the term that points out this possibility.

Foucault distinguished counter-conduct from ‘misconduct’, as it assumes a proper conduct (a norm), and ‘dissidence’ as it implies the action of a subject-agent (the dissident). It refers to the actions or action processes as struggles against power in action in the form of conduct of conduct. Therefore, Foucault concludes, ‘without having to give a sacred status to this or that person as a dissident, we can … analyse the components in the way in which someone actually acts in the very general field of politics…’ In this context, an action-based critical analysis would focus on ‘the ways’ of acting, that is a series of actions or action processes in ‘the general field’ of politics or power relations which is the arena of contestation between the two ultimate forms of action: Conduct of conduct vs. counter-conduct. Counter-conduct, in Foucault’s analytical framework on the ‘background of governmentality’ involves active searches for

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a different form of conduct, to be conducted differently, and ‘the possibility to escape direction by others’\textsuperscript{13} for an experience of self-conduct. The latter is both self-confrontation to the extent that forms of subjectivity are effects of power and a struggle against the strategies of power, which aims to control the conduct. The process of struggle (the ways of acting) in counter-conduct involves an ethics of self-invention not simply in terms of remaking one’s self but also in keeping open the field of possibilities for experimentation and exploration. Counter-conduct is autonomy politics in this sense. In the contemporary insurgency movements and in the case of Gezi, it is possible to see the reflections of this contestation.

Carl Death previously used the term counter-conduct to develop a Foucauldian ‘analytics of protest’ for the study of contentious politics or social movements.\textsuperscript{14} He emphasized two merits of this framework. First, it approaches ‘protests and contentious politics not from an actor-centric perspective but rather orientates itself toward specific practices and rationalities of protest’ that performatively constitute particular identities and subjectivities in the process of dissent. Second, it shows ‘how protest and government are mutually constitutive’.\textsuperscript{15} In his analytics of protest, Death stresses that ‘protests, or counter-conducts, are themselves forms of continual criticism and politicization’.\textsuperscript{16} What needs to be added to the term’s ‘two merits’ is the possibility of movements, as cases of counter-conduct, which both oppose the conduction itself and open up processes of self-invention (or self-care) as ‘forms of continual criticism and politicization’. In this sense, this study takes counter-conduct in parallel with Arnold Davidson’s interpretation. He pointed to the ‘double dimension’ of the term. They correspond to the two components of the counter-conduct as an action process: Revolt/resistance and ethical search toward self-invention. As such, the concept not only indicates the want ‘to be conducted differently’ but also the ‘attempt to indicate an area in which each individual can conduct himself, the domain of one’s own conduct or behaviour’.\textsuperscript{17} The Gezi Park insurgency exhibited each of these two components of the action process that the term counter-conduct defines. It was the insurgency of those who experienced a certain form of oppression under the on-going AKP project of constituting a certain social hegemony that has been crystallizing in the institutional structure of the state. It is also an attempt to ‘indicate’ Gezi Park as a platform (an area/domain) for the ethical practices of self-invention, which took the form of prefigurative politics.

In this sense, this study takes the case of Gezi as a counter-conduct challenging and undermining the emerging configuration of power under the AKP’s neoliberal-cum-neoconservative rule rather than being implicated in the extant form of governmentality (as Death’s frame would suggest). Taking the Gezi case in the track of interpretation that Davidson suggested enables us to bring early and late Foucault together. Foucault’s early work on ‘heterotopia’ and late work on the ethics of self–care have their reflections in Gezi Park as a ‘real’ site of ‘counteraction’\textsuperscript{18} and an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, p. 194.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 236.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 248.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Arnold I. Davidson (2011) In praise of counter-conduct, History of the Human Sciences, 24(4), pp. 25–41.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Michel Foucault (1984) Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias, Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité, October, pp. 1–9.
\end{itemize}
arena of the ethical practices of self-care in and for freedom to ‘develop’, ‘transform’ or ‘surpass’ oneself. Gezi Park bears certain elements of ‘heterotopia’. It is a ‘real’ but ‘counter-site’ where utopias ‘effectively are enacted,’ a ‘real space’ where alternative ways of being against the neoliberal-cum-neoconservative conduct of conduct have been tried out in the bazaars without an exchange value, in the manners which have been promoted and in the public forums experimenting with direct democracy. As a site of counter-action and as a counter-site, it created a ‘sort of absolute break’ with the protesters’ ‘traditional time’ and generated its own temporality in ‘the mode of festival’. It was ‘another space’, not of ‘an illusion’ but of a ‘meticulous and well organized’ attempt to create an alternative world as ‘compensation’ for the oppression to which they have been subjected.

The deployment of the analytics of the counter-conduct in the study of social movements is relatively recent and rare. The significant ones and how this article relates to them already have been noted. There is only one study–by Nilay Kaya and Haktan Ural19– that uses the concept of counter-conduct in framing the Gezi movement. Moreover, their study applies the concept in a limited way to define Gezi as a protest movement of the young. Here, I attempt to propose the concept counter-conduct as a central term in Foucault’s critical theory to define a broader analytical frame and then deploy it to the study of the Gezi insurgency as a complex counter-action process involving a multiplicity of actors outflowing their given categorizations and becoming part of a series of performances in which a sense of self-transformation was common.

Neoliberal-Cum-Neoconservative Background to the Gezi Insurgency

The neoliberal conduct of conduct, expressed in government policies since the AKP came to power in 2002 until mid-2013, when the Gezi insurgency erupted, had different faces and phases. The first period, 2002 to 2008, conformed to the IMF stand-by agreement, the implementation of which had begun a year before the AKP came to power. It integrated Turkey into finance-led global capitalism. This was a phase of disciplinary neoliberalism expressing a logic of governmentality in conformity with global rules and regulations. Markets were regulated by independent agencies (most importantly the financial market), and the Central Bank had independent status (to stick to its primary goal of price stability) while the government adopted tight fiscal policies. A neoliberal technocratic rationality and management dominated public institutions and private enterprises. Neoliberalism reigned through rapid and large-scale privatizations of public enterprises and extensive marketization and commodification of public services and natural resources. For instance, the health sector reform in 2003 made it possible for public service procurement from private hospitals, which enabled the latter to proliferate.20 An important public institution, the Mass Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) was given authority to control all public lands, which then were commodified as real estate for the building projects of large construction companies in the big cities. These public resources (rent arising from the commodification of


public land) have been transferred to small and medium-sized contractor firms in the smaller cities.\(^{21}\) The privatization and deregulation of the energy market has been a significant arena where neoliberalism and AKP politics converged. As Sinan Erensarrivée explained, AKP government, through a bylaw, made it possible for the public authority to lease sections of rivers and streams for 49 years to private companies for the construction of hydroelectric power plants.\(^{22}\) It also used excessively a specific legal procedure, urgent expropriation, to confiscate private lands, which had been intended originally for wartime. A total of 1785 urgent expropriation decisions were taken between 2004 and 2014. They were mostly for the appropriation of small rural lands to lease them to private companies for energy projects. Between 2002 and 2013, 874 hydroelectric power plant projects built by private companies were licenced for electricity production through public tenders. Most of them were on small rivers or creeks and had detrimental environmental effects.\(^{23}\) In addition to the environmental impact of this ‘hydropower renaissance’, the government gave more than 16,000 mining licences to mining companies between 2005 and 2015, which commodified nature and transferred the generated wealth to select business groups.\(^{24}\)

The second phase started with the global economic crisis of 2008 when the AKP terminated the IMF agreement and attempted to take the neoliberal economy under its political control and manipulation by undermining the autonomy of the regulatory agencies and central bank on the one hand and loosening fiscal constraints on public expenditure on the other hand. In this period, executive power has been recentralized over a decentralized neoliberal economy. Interestingly, ‘centralization has gone hand-in-hand with marketization’\(^{25}\) to control and to redistribute the accruing wealth to the favored business groups during this phase. The AKP had its socio-economic basis in the medium-sized Islamic or conservative business groups from its beginning and supported them through privatizations, public and municipal tenders and credit facilities in the first period within the limits of disciplinary and rule-bound neoliberalism. From the end of the first phase through the second phase, this policy has been augmented in the form of more explicit favoritism in such a way that the AKP aimed to create politically loyal new big business groups. Emerging new big businesses returned these favors through investments in the media sector (again through public tenders transferring certain media groups to them) to mobilize political support.\(^{26}\)

The party leadership’s attempt to design a new political form through constitutional change characterized the last phase of this on-going, politically manipulated neoliberal social and economic transformation during AKP rule. This project for a presidential

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\(^{21}\) Ibid, pp. 37–38.


\(^{24}\) Bianet, Son 10 yılda 16 bin 218 Maden Ruhsatı Verildi [16218 mining licences were given in the last 10 years]. Available at: https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/160064-son-10-yilda-16-bin-218-maden-ruhsati-verildi, accessed December 29, 2016.


\(^{26}\) For this relationship and a list of new big business groups flourishing from the first through the second phase see Buğra & Savaşkan, “Politics and Class.”
regime would end the long-standing parliamentary democracy model. The first AKP proposal for a new constitution was submitted to Parliament’s Constitutional Committee in November 2012. After its rejection by the opposition parties, this proposal was suspended, although the party leader consistently invoked it as the ultimate goal. Parliament passed a second proposal for a similar constitutional change later in January 2017 with the support of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and it was ratified in a controversial and disputed referendum by 51.4 per cent of the vote in April 2017. In the proposed system the president is poised as the locus of political power. As has been noted in the Venice Commission Report, the amendments ‘lead to an excessive concentration of executive power in the hands of the President and the weakening of parliamentary control of that power’. The president can rule by decree and retains power to control the higher judiciary and public bureaucracy through appointments. The president also can annul parliament and call for elections (in this case the elections would be held for both the presidency and the parliament). Besides, the president can retain party membership and hence control the parliamentary group of the party. In a sense, the proposed model unifies power in the president, undermining the separation of powers principle. In fact, this highly authoritarian model is the culmination of the authoritarian political conduct of the party and its leader. The AKP leadership’s politics is a unique combination of neoliberalism and a post-Islamist neo-conservatism (incorporating elements of Turkish nationalism), a blend that produces strong authoritarianism. In the third term of the AKP government (2011–2015) Turkish society faced radicalization of AKP’s version of neo-conservatism. The party and Erdoğan openly declared their intention to raise a ‘pious generation’ through new educational policies, limited the use and selling of alcoholic beverages in public spaces and in the shops, interfered with women’s rights by limiting abortion in practice (though not legally), promoting maternity rather than a career and disputing their equality with men.

The AKP’s radicalized neo-conservatism basically involved establishing authoritarian dominance of conservative Sunni Muslim religious values, which the AKP considered to be ‘the majority’ in social life. The AKP’s radical neo-conservatism constructed an ideological link between its social hegemony and foreign policy aim to restore the Ottoman legacy in the former regions once under the Ottoman rule. This nexus of foreign and domestic policy worked in two ways. The conservative social hegemony claimed sublimity with references to Ottoman ‘heritage’ in various spheres of everyday life and the conduct of foreign policy claimed to represent the history and morality of the society. Behind or under the cover of this sublimated authoritarian conservatism, a ferocious commodification of the commons, the parks, forests, agricultural lands, rivers and public spaces in the cities proceeded via politically manipulated permits and privatization of hydroelectric power plants, mining, construction of

28 For a study of the AKP’s neo-conservatism see Kürşad Ertuğrul (2012) AKP’s Neo-conservatism and Politics of Otherness in Europe-Turkey Relations, New Perspectives on Turkey, 46, pp. 157–186.
residences, malls, etc. The Gezi Park project is the climax of this radical neo-conservative-cum-neo-liberal transformation of Turkey: It is about the commodification of a common (a public park) and very authoritarian imposition of a social hegemony (references to the Ottoman legacy and all the values associated with it) in the center of Istanbul.

The Turkish case under AKP rule exhibits the characteristics of a combination of neoliberal and neoconservative governmentalities. The AKP introduced its social, cultural and educational policies with a clear intention to reconstitute Turkish subjects in conformity with the norms of the conservative community while promoting a ferocious neoliberal process of commodification and finance backed by the use of the repressive power of the sovereign state. The state was turning into the apparatus for this social hegemony, which was crystallizing through legislative and administrative measures. Imposition of market values and discipline of professionals on the one hand and the legal investigations against challengers on the other hand were a combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ means of neoliberal conduct of conduct during this period.30

The Gezi Park insurgency represented a pivotal moment during which the early protests escalated into counter-conduct including a prefigurative autonomy politics against this neoconservative-cum-neoliberal conduct of conduct in daily life. The AKP leader’s actions, such as poising himself as the unchallengeable de facto president, dismissing any opposition and demanding outright obedience to his policies, intensified this contestation. He clearly perceived himself as the pastor of the ‘majority’, an imaginary homogeneous community of pious Muslims living in accordance with a traditional morality and respecting their ‘leader’. In the early days of the Gezi insurgency, Erdoğan warned the protesters during a press conference: ‘We are in difficulty to keep at least the 50 per cent of this country [referring to people who are supposedly not supportive of the Gezi protests] in their homes [to prevent counter-mobilization].’31 He was implying that he leads and can guide this huge population as he chooses, and he is promoting their morality and values in the conduct of conduct that he was representing as power in action. This ahistorical pastoral power was added as the cover in the form of an aspired pseudo-presidential regime to the neoliberal-cum-neoconservative conduct of conduct since November 2012. During the Gezi insurgency process this form of politics that the ruling party’s leader conducted was referred to as ‘fascist’. One graffiti reads: ‘Gece giündüz fasist bir başbakan istemiyoruz’ [We do not want a prime minister with a fascist mind day and night].32 This graffiti was signed by ‘kafas kıyak gençler’ [tipsy young], alluding to ‘drunkenness with fascism’ in the case of the prime minister.

Social and Political Characteristics of the Gezi Insurgency

Although the Gezi insurgency begun at a specific real site for a specific agenda and at a specific moment in Istanbul, it escalated into a country-wide insurgency against the

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32 Gülmez, Gezi Parkı.
government that continued from the end of May to early July (2013) with sporadic after effects. It is an unprecedented experience for Turkey in terms of its lasting intensity, number of people actively participating in the streets and neighborhoods and its consequences. Erdoğan’s reaction to the early protests and ensuing police violence ignited the spark for escalation of a protest by a small number of concerned citizens and certain associations defending one remaining public park in the city centre. On the third day of the still small-scale and local protests (29 May 2013) Erdoğan declared in response to the protesters: ‘No matter what you do we decided and will do accordingly’.33 The park project that Erdoğan had tried to push forward was to convert it into a shopping mall with a residential area under the façade of a mid-19th century Ottoman artillery barrack (Topçu Kişlası), which was to be rebuilt under the claim to ‘restore history’. Erdoğan’s Gezi Park project can be regarded as the climax and crystallization of the political, social and economic model that his government was pursuing for years.

According to the Ministry of Interior report, 3,611,208 people actively took part in 80 cities of Turkey throughout the insurgency, and 5,532 protest events were recorded.35 Comparative studies on contemporary insurgencies in Egypt, Iceland, Latin America and Tunisia emphasize that in all those cases most protesters previously were politically inactive, and they represented a cross-section of society in terms of gender, age and class. It is also notable that their organization was spontaneous, non-institutional, horizontal and network-like.36 Available surveys on the social and political backgrounds of the Gezi protesters attest to similar characteristics. A survey during the early stage of the insurgency emphasized the high rate of participation by university graduates, the employed, and students as well as the young (between the ages 25–35) among the protesters. This was disproportional to their representation in the population of Istanbul and Turkey. Among the employed, representation of the working class was low in comparison to their proportion within the overall population while white collar professionals’ representation was high, again disproportional in comparison to their presence in the overall population. Gender representation was approximately equal to their proportional representation in the overall population and the average age of the participants was close to the average age of the population, 28 and 31 respectively. An important finding of the survey: about 79% of all participants were not members of nor affiliated with, any political party, group, platform or association whatsoever.37 However, another study conducted in Istanbul (not limited to Gezi Park) and İzmir (another large city, and a vibrant center of the protests) after the street clashes

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34 Topçu Artillery Barrack had been built between 1803 and 1806 as a part of a military modernization program in the Ottoman Empire. By the second half of the nineteenth century it was being used for non-military public entertainment events like horse races. The ruined barrack was used as a stadium for a while until its final demolition in the 1940s. See Ömür Harmanşah (2014) Urban Utopias and How They Fell Apart: The Political Ecology of Gezi Park, in Umut Özkeçeli, ed., The Making of A Protest Movement in Turkey (occupygezi) (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp.121–133.
subsided, confirmed the high rate of participation by the middle and upper classes compared to their presence in the population and emphasized that the majority of the protesters were (formal and informal) proletariat, comprising 54% of all protesters. This study underlines the heterogeneous class composition of the protesters and concludes that it was political and cultural orientations of the participants rather than their class background that brought them together: being more secular, less pious and aligned with leftist politics. Hence, one can conclude that a cross-section of the society in terms of class backgrounds, gender and age participated in the Gezi insurgency as a struggle against their oppression under the ruling party’s radical neo-conservative and neoliberal conduct of conduct, emblematically represented by the acts and discourses of its leader.

Qualitative studies and field observations also confirm the above. For example, Spyros Sophos, on the basis of interviews he conducted at the time of insurgency and his field observations, underlines that there was neither social nor political homogeneity in the composition of the protestors, and no unity in their demands. What they shared in common was a feeling of oppression. He cites an interviewee: ‘One person says I’m being oppressed for wearing an earring, another says I’m being oppressed because I am an Alevi, others will say it’s because they drink’. Similarly, Zeynep Gambetti notes the difficulty of identifying ‘the subject’ of the resistance. Therefore, she defines the protestors as all those ‘bodies’, literally ‘any body who was discontented or outraged by police violence or felt choked by the authoritarian regime’.

The surveys and the field observations suggest a process of revolt, protest or resistance against the neoliberal-cum-neoconservative conduct of conduct under the AKP government on the part of a socially heterogeneous multiplicity of people who shared experiences of oppression. At the same time, an organizing social and political identity seems to have been lacking in the Gezi protests. Funda Odabaşı argued that this pattern resonates with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s theory of radical and plural democracy. Odabaşı has pointed out that ‘the most striking finding’ of her field research was that ‘a great majority of the protesters either had difficulty in, or abstained from, defining their political identity’. Therefore, Odabaşı claimed that the anti-essentialist argument about the ‘undecidability and the impossibility’ of identity constitution and their transient articulations in a never-ending politics of hegemony would explain the Gezi case. The problem with this explanation is that Laclau and Mouffe’s theory is a political ontology in which the incomplete and relational character of identity, hence the impossibility of fully-fledged identity, and their openness to hegemonic articulations in the general field of discursivity should be thought for any identity and any politics. In this political ontology, ‘the social’ is the sedimented form of the never-ending politics of hegemony. Politics as such refers to all the attempts to

39 Ibid, pp. 119–120. 
43 Ibid.
fix ‘the infinite play of differences’. This point, for instance, also applies to the AKP’s projected image of the nation as the conservative Sunni community, therefore not only to the case of Gezi. In that, there is neither a socially and culturally homogenous conservative Sunni community and nor are Sunnis totally fixed within AKP ideology and politics. The projected image is just a ‘subject position’ in a hegemonic articulation which is bound to be undermined and challenged ‘in the general field of discursivity’. As a result, what is needed in the case of Gezi is a theoretical framework and perspective that applies to the cases of insurgency or social mobilization against certain power configurations rather than a political ontology. Foucault’s tentative conception of counter-conduct provides such a prism. It defines the action process that cannot be reduced to the wills and choices of any given subject. It is a rejection process of a particular form of conduction and opens up the possibility of ‘ethical’ action toward the experimental enactments of self-invention.

The social and political characteristics of the Gezi insurgency as a counter-conduct have been reflected especially by the two platforms that stand out in the resistance process: LGBT Blok and Çarşı (fan group of Beşiktaş football club). They were at the forefront during the clashes in the barricades and active in the provision of the necessities in the encampment area. The emphasis on these two platforms does not mean neglect of the extensive mobilization of organized groups with already categorized or affirmed social and political identities including the sustained resistance of the Alevi communities in the barricaded neighborhoods in big cities or the significance of Taksim Solidarity. The point here is that what made the Gezi insurgency an unprecedented event rather has been the unexpected mobilization of various people with undefined political subjectivities both in terms of self-definition or fitting into an established identity category. They initiated and took part in an action process that no given category of subject could claim to represent.

The platforms LGBT Blok and Çarşı did not have a particular political identity, formal and hierarchical organization or formal membership. They were not only open to but also characterized by political, social and cultural diversity. They also shared a dissident attitude against discrimination, oppression, police violence and authoritarian interventions in daily life. Both platforms expressed a capacity of spontaneous self-organization, reflexive and creative response and resilience.

The LGBT movement and way of life had been targeted specifically by the AKP’s neoconservative-cum-neoliberal conduct of conduct between 2010 and 2013. Representatives of the government and the party’s parliamentary group reiterated several times that homosexuality ‘is a sickness’. Moreover, Gezi Park as a public space was important to the LGBT people. It was the ‘last remaining queer space’ especially for working-class people who could not afford the ‘high-end bars and clubs’. In this sense, ‘Gezi Park had been a space of seemingly strange encounters that cut across class, political ideology and gender identity divides long before its occupation by a

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45 Taksim Solidarity was founded in February 2012 with the joint declaration of about 80 organizations including chambers of engineers, architects, city planners trade unions and NGOs against the government’s Taksim Project. For a study of the Platform see Yeseren Elicin (2017) Defending the City: Taksim Solidarity, Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 19(2), pp. 105–120.
variety of activists and concerned citizens.\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Blok} in Gezi Park, composed of various LGBT organizations and independent individuals, was formed during the Gezi Park resistance process against police brutality.\textsuperscript{48} Independent individuals comprised the majority within the \textit{Blok}. They were ‘previously unaligned or apolitical individuals\textsuperscript{49} who experienced and gained political subjectivity in the process of struggle. In an interesting commentary on the experience of LGBT people in the Gezi insurgency, Mehmet Tarhan emphasized that the impressive presence and activism of the LGBT people, ‘running with high heels in the barricades and constantly mobilizing in the Park’, not only was for their coming out, visibility and self-expression but also because of the harmony of the queer identity with the Gezi insurgency process.\textsuperscript{50} On that note, he implied that the subjective diversity, corresponding encounters and emergence of new subjectivities in the Gezi insurgency process exposed and affirmed the fluidity of identities, their porousness and ambiguity. Taking cue from this point it can be argued that the social and political characteristics of the Gezi insurgency bear a certain queerness. To the extent that ‘queerness indicates merely the failure to fit precisely within a category\textsuperscript{51} in the normative-intelligible order, it is a defining characteristic of the experience of many in the Gezi insurgency. They did not fit in with the established identity categories (in personal, social and political senses), institutions and organizations. Moreover, the performative subversion of imposed labels of insult and their affirmative transvaluation in the queer practices, as was the case in the term queer itself,\textsuperscript{52} also can be attested in the Gezi Park practices. One significant case is about the transvaluation of the Turkish term \textit{çapulcu}, which means looter. In the early days of the Gezi insurgency Erdoğan insulted the protesters by calling them \textit{çapulcu} (June 2, 2013). In an instant and spontaneous response the protesters subverted and affirmed the word by a playful modification of it. The word has been made to sound like a verbal form of an imaginary English word, \textit{chapulling}, in an affirmative way in the sense of a joyful expression of what one does. This invented term first appeared in a graffiti ‘everyday day I am \textit{çapuling}’ by allusion to the popular American English hip-hop song ‘every day I am hustling’. Then, the music of the original American song was used with this new word in a clip with scenes from the Gezi resistance in the background.\textsuperscript{53} The TV station that the protesters managed to operate in Gezi Park by June 6 was named \textit{Çapul} (looting) TV. In an interview, the two station operators, who used the pseudonyms \textit{çapulcu} 1 and \textit{çapulcu} 2, emphasized how appealing the word has become in the Park. What is striking in their account is their


\textsuperscript{50} Mehmet Tarhan (2013) LGBT hareketi ve haziran direniş: görünürlik politikalardan siyasal öznelemeye [LGBT movement and June resistance: from the policies of visibility to political subjectification], in Nuray Sancar, (ed.) \textit{Sıcak Haziran: sonraki direnişe mektup} [ Hot June: the letter to the next resistance] (İstanbul: Evrensel), pp. 301–308.


\textsuperscript{53} The clip was posted to youtube one day after Erdoğan’s insult. See \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QV0NTUY0ZIs}, accessed 17 March, 2022.
point about the protestors’ experience of self-transformation in the Park on the one hand and how fitting the word çapulcu has been on the other hand for the operators’ self-identification with the protesters in their broadcasts.\textsuperscript{54} This (self) identification of the insurgents with being çapulcu indicated their subjective experience of outflowing from their political and social backgrounds and identities in a process of self-transformation. Originally an insult but then playfully and joyfully subverted into a transvalued label, çapulcu has provided a symbolic representation of the experience of subjective change. Therefore, the evolution of the word çapulcu from an insult to an affirmation enabling the insurgents symbolically to represent their experience of moving out of the normatively given intelligible categories of identity reveals the relevance of queer practices and politics for the Gezi insurgency in a subterranean way. However, this is not to imply that the ‘semantic shift of çapulcu’ can be taken as ‘the ultimate signifier of queerness’.\textsuperscript{55} Rather, the case of çapulcu is one significant cultural recoding practice that reflects the conduciveness of Gezi as ‘counter-site’ to the queer existence and practices.

The football culture of daily life has been a significant source abounding with references in the slogans, graffiti and chants during the Gezi insurgency’s action process. As Süreyya Evren argues, one graffiti remains a strong testimony of how even a desperate ‘cry from street football and amateurish games’ came to define the movement: ‘Come to the defence for God’s sake’.

One football fan group of the Beşiktaş club, Çarşı (referring to the market area at the center of the Beşiktaş district near Taksim Square and Gezi Park) played a

\textsuperscript{54} Mutlu Dursun (2013) üstümüzde direniş sorumluluğu vardı [The responsibility of resistance was on us], in Nuray Sancar, ed., Sıçak Haziran: sonraki direniş mektup [Hot June: the letter to the next resistance] (İstanbul: Evrensel), p.248.

\textsuperscript{55} I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this point.

\textsuperscript{56} The photo of the graffiti is from Süreyya Evren, ‘Bir allahım seven defansa gelsin hareketi olarak Gezi [Gezi as a movement of coming to defence for God’s sake]. Available at: https://yesilgazete.org/blog/2013/07/15/bir-allahimi-seven-defansa-gelsin-hareketi-olarak-gezi-sureyya-evren/, accessed June 22, 2018.
significant role during the struggle process. It galvanised the protesters by its dynamism, creativity and use of slogans and chants from the football culture, emphasizing resistance against police violence. It is noteworthy that Çarşı, similar to Blok, turned into a platform during the process of struggle (action as counter-conduct) for the participation of the previously ‘unaligned’ individuals with no prior experience of activism or socialization in any organisation or party. Interestingly, Çarşı embodies the social and political characteristics of the Gezi insurgency. It is a fan group representing the political, social and cultural diversity of Beşiktaş district in the stadium in support of their club. As one representative of Çarşı noted ‘Gezi resistance was like the stadium with its diversity, colorfulness and the co-existence of different worlds’. Çarşı is not aligned with a political party or organization. It has a capacity of spontaneous self-organization and quick reflexive response. It is not formally organized and it is not hierarchical. Yet, it expresses a dignified, conscientious dissident identity that also is attributed to Beşiktaş district throughout its history from the late Ottoman era to contemporary times. Çarşı was at the forefront of the Gezi resistance because of all these characteristics; ‘it became a platform for all to unify on a common ground’ during the Gezi insurgency. The narratives of Çarşı representatives about their feelings concerning the government’s Gezi Park Project also epitomize the broad sense of opposition against it. They thought that the Taksim Gezi Project was ‘the embodiment of the on-going interferences into’ their lives [by the policies and discourses of the government and security forces] and that they ‘joined the resistance to recapture’ their lives and ‘future’ and to take side with ‘the friends’. They also pointed out that ‘the people who could not express themselves anywhere and walk with any other organization took their place under the banner of Çarşı’ in the resistance process.

Yet, after the police’s forceful and violent dispersion of the Gezi Park encampments, Çarşı representatives emphasized that the ‘burden’ on the fan group had become ‘overwhelming’ in terms of high political expectations (propelled by certain myths and legends about the bravery of the group). They reminded supporters that ‘they were just a fan group of a football club’ and ‘people of a particular district’ who prioritise devotion to the club and concerns about their living area. The ethical component of the Gezi counter-conduct (self-care or search for self-invention) clearly reflects in the prefigurative politics of everyday life, which have been showcased vigorously both in the Park and then in the forums. The insurgents self-consciously expressed the aspired ‘manners’ of inter-subjective life as everyday practices. Speaking about ‘Gezi Manners’, İlay Ors and Ömer Turan define them as

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57 Beşiktaş Çarşı (2013) Tribünde ne varsa gezi’de de o vardi [Whatever there was in the tribune here it was in Gezi] in N. Sancar (ed.), Sıcak Haziran: sonraki direniş mektup [Hot June: the letter to the next resistance] (İstanbul: Evrensel), p. 101.
58 Rıdvan Akar (2014), Söyleş [Interview], in Anıl Helvacı, Saro Dadyan & Ömer Erte (eds.), Çarşı Gelyooor! [Here Coooomes Çarş!] (İstanbul: Okuyanus), p. 46.
59 Ibid, p. 50.
61 Helvacı, Dadyan and Erte (eds.) Çarşı Gelyooor!, [Here Coooomes Çarş!] pp. 110, 149, 151, 160–161.
behaviors emphasising ‘respect, politeness, generosity, ethic of collective work, anti-violence, peace and pluralism’. Similar to the Indignados experience ‘money has been removed’ while ‘gift-giving’ became emblematic of participation in the rebellion. Networked, horizontal assemblies, which arose in all contemporary insurgencies, played important roles in this prefigurative politics of everyday life by creating ‘prefigurative survival structures for necessities’ like ‘food, medicine, child support and training’. Indeed, in the Gezi Park experience, ‘a soup kitchen was organized’ first, then came ‘infirmary, library, a lecture and study hall, a TV station, a playground and even an informal fire department’. In this sense, the attempts of creating a ‘perfect’, ‘well-arranged’ alter-reality in the Gezi counter-site, the site of counter-action, reflect a ‘meticulous’ performance in search of a ‘compensation’ against the imposed ‘reality’ under AKP’s neoliberal-cum-neoconservative conduct of conduct.

In the wake of the Gezi Park insurgency a more vibrant civil society emerged in Turkey. After the forceful dispersion of Gezi Park encampments in a violent police attack on June 15, the resistance shifted to the parks, especially in big city neighborhoods. Assembly forms of direct democracy were experimented and practiced there. By the end of June there were about 80 forums in 13 cities. Prefigurative practices were tried out in these forums both in terms of direct democracy and meeting needs. Certain rules were agreed for the speakers and participation (fixing talk time, using certain gestures for expressing views), barter bazaars were established, food and drink were provided collectively and for free and libraries were set up. Participation of students, young people and women were predominant in these forums. These forums debated issues concerning resistance, the action process and the neighborhood.

The most important consequence of this insurgency has been the experience of self-transformation of youth in Turkey from a politically inactive, unorganized and unaffiliated subjectivity to becoming unyielding activists utilizing their technological capabilities in the creation of networks of communication and cooperation and resisting with surprising resilience. Their creative actions, supported by people of heterogeneous social backgrounds, constituted a new subjectivity asking respect from the ruling powers, demanding participatory democracy and dignified lives. Graffiti written in a pink, childishly playful Turkish expresses this shared concern in the process of politicization through the Gezi insurgency: ‘Ne Devrim Ne Ş eriyyat Sadece Saygı’ [Neither Revolution nor Sharia just Respect]:

63 Castells, Networks of Hope, pp. 126–127.
64 Sitrin and Azelini, They Cannot Represent Us, p. 119.
66 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” p. 8
68 Ibid.
69 Gülmez, Gezi Parkı.
An online poll conducted in the early days of the Gezi insurgency attested this point. The researchers designed a closed-ended questionnaire and circulated it through Facebook and twitter accounts. In their justification for the online poll, they underlined how the people acting in the streets, squares and parks and even on the balconies banging pots and pans, were keeping their smart phones and tablets at their hands. Therefore, the Gezi insurgency was an ‘online action’ and an online poll was apt.70 This point is similar to the one Castells made about other insurgencies at the time: They were creating new public spheres by linking the virtual and the real ones. Those who were ‘supporting the protests’ were invited to participate in this online poll. In twenty hours more than three thousand supporters of the protests participated. According to the concluding report of this research, 63.6% of all respondents were between nineteen and thirty years of age; 53.7% of the respondents pointed out that they had not participated in any mass street protests before, and they did not feel close to any political party. In response to a question about how protesters defined themselves, the top three choices were: ‘strongly agree,’ ‘have been/I am’ libertarian, secular and apolitical. In the question about the reasons of the protest, the ‘strongly agreed’ top choices were ‘the authoritarian attitude of the [then] prime minister’, ‘police violence’, ‘breach of the democratic rights’, ‘limitation of freedoms’ and ‘police state practices’. The respondents expressed their desired outcome of their protests as being: ‘stopping police violence’, ‘respect for freedoms’, ‘paying attention to people’s demands when deciding about public spheres’, ‘apology for the police violence’ and ‘taking into account the voices of the non-AKP electorate’. The researchers concluded findings: ‘The young people supporting the protests put up resistance for

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their freedoms and demanded participatory democracy against the insufficiencies of representative democracy’.  

Because of this significance of youth in the Gezi case, Kaya and Ural defined Gezi as a ‘young people’s counter-conduct directed against the ruling party’s political methods that impose its own image of the ideal society and political order upon the country’.  

However, as noted above, Foucault described counter-conduct as an active process of struggle that cannot be reduced to the aspirations and concerns of a given form of subject. It is an open-ended process of action in search of a different form of conduct and a possible self-conduct in which given forms of subjectivity undergo an experience of transcending the given normative order and its direction. This study identifies the self-transformation of the young as a significant outcome of Gezi as a process of counter-conduct, and hence agrees with Kaya and Ural in this sense. Yet, I think that ‘young people’ cannot be identified as ‘the subject’ of the counter-conduct (‘young people’s counter-conduct’).

The Gezi insurgency as a counter-conduct unleashed an action process in which a multiplicity of groups and individuals expressed their rejection of the conduct of conduct by the AKP’s neoliberal-cum-neoconservative political project and attempted to prefigure the alternative ways of being in the occupied public spaces. While doing this, most of them were not representing any given identity or organization. Therefore, they were not ‘subjects’ fitting in with the given social and political categories. What sustained this form of action process was the spontaneous constitution or deployment of certain platforms (like Blok and Çarşı) which, in themselves, did not express or represent any given social or political organization nor a corresponding form of a generic identity. Hence, the emphasis on the self-transforming active process of struggle in Gezi counter-conduct does not mean a neglect of the existence of categories of gender, class and age as most of the available data/surveys define the protesters on this basis. The point here is to see how a multiplicity of actors from diverse defining categories joined together in a series of counter-performances, creating a sustained process of counter-action in which a sense of self-transformation was a common experience. The fluidity of the process and an experience of outflowing from the given categories of definition cannot be reduced to the a priori social categories. This is intrinsic to the process of action itself.

Conclusion

The Gezi insurgency was a process of action in which mostly unorganized, unaffiliated and diverse (in terms of socio-economic background, gender and age) subjects with no significant experience of activism or politicization struggled against the authoritarian, neo-conservative-cum-neoliberal conduct of conduct in Turkey under AKP rule. Existing organizations, groups and their platforms did not lead or represent the insurgency movement. They mostly functioned as horizontal networks of communication, coordination and mediation for the on-going counter-conduct, as was case with Blok and Çarşı. The participation of politically unaligned youth, and their experience of constituting a new political subjectivity, was possible because of the counter-conduct

process, which depended on the creation and use of such platforms appealing to socially, culturally and politically heterogeneous groups and individuals who commonly experienced oppression. Gezi Park itself has become the platform of these platforms, beyond Istanbul and across the country, making a process of counter-conduct possible through the unexpected and unprecedented mobilization of all who experienced a certain form of oppression. This common experience of oppression was due to the ruling AKP’s on-going political project, which aimed to constitute a ‘social hegemony’ pervading everyday life and ‘crystallizing’ in the state.

In this sense Gezi Park, both as a real-physical ‘counter-site’ (as a form of heterotopia), and an idea of a common, has been the platform for all those who refused the on-going neoconservative-neoliberal-pseudo-presidential conduct of conduct under AKP rule and its leadership. It both ‘indicated’ an intersubjective daily life arena for prefigurative autonomy politics and represented the freedom to try out possibilities other than the existing ways of being and relating to others. Yet, the overflowing experiences of the newly constituted resistant subjectivities through performative subversions and affirmations (emblematically captured by the word capulcu) beyond the given political and organizational identity categories could not be sustained by these platforms as the core groups retreated toward their ‘generic’ social roles and corresponding categorisations. Still, Gezi as a case of counter-conduct, despite its limitations, unleashed a vibrant dynamic of resistance and prefiguration of alternative ways of being beyond the AKP’s normativity. It constituted new political subjectivities and opened possible futures that would haunt the powers that be.

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