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Encountering difference and radical democratic trajectory

An analysis of Gezi Park as public space

Irem Inceoglu

Summer 2013 was a historic period in regards to political activism in Turkey. Commonly referred to as ‘the Gezi Resistance’, the grass-roots mobilisation caught the rather self-assured AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government off guard as hundreds of thousands rushed to the streets, squares and parks to reclaim those spaces publicly. The resistance started with the attempt by a handful of environmentalists to protect a few trees being cut down in central Istanbul. Then it quickly moved beyond just about protecting a few trees and became a collective reaction to the recent and ongoing urban modelling projects that would turn commons into gated spaces for consumption. Significantly, the Gezi Resistance, which reclaimed public spaces, started to mobilise multiple identity groups who entered into the political arena in the radical democratic sense. This paper aims to scrutinise Gezi Resistance and the occupation of the park in relation to reclaiming public spaces and the politics of identity, hence as an opportunity for a radical democratic emancipation. In this context, emancipation refers to contestation against the dominating discourses of the majoritarian government with neoconservative tendencies. Public space is contextualised as the agonistic domain that enables individuals both to appear, hence become visible for a possible interaction and acknowledgement, and join collaborative struggles against dominant discourses. In this regard, performing dissent re-produces subjectivities while articulating these to one another also requires a public space.

Key words: Gezi Resistance, public space, urban uprising

Introduction and methodology

It has now been more than a year since Turkey joined the global wave of uprisings and experienced a unique revolt. There is a literature commenting on and analysing the process of Gezi Resistance in various academic fields such as media studies, psychology, sociology, urban studies, etc.¹ With this piece I would like to contribute to the growing literature

employing a conceptual approach in relation to notions of radical democracy, public space and space of appearance, enriched by my observations and experiences both as a resident of Istanbul’s Beyoğlu District—where Gezi Park is located—and as a participant of demonstrations, forums and work-groups. Guided by the view that ethnography is closely linked to the lived experience of the ethnographer (Berry 2011), I consider this particular piece an

ethnographic study, moreover, a work in line with critical ethnography which aims to contribute to change living conditions. That is to say, instead of defining and fixing a situation, critical ethnography asks questions and tries to understand how things ought to be. Hence, it is a way of research and analysis based on ethical responsibility that challenges processes of injustice within a particular lived domain (Madison, cited in Chari and Donner 2010). In relation to this standpoint, my own lived experiences as an activist-researcher in Gezi Park led me to conduct this ethnographic research. That is to say, unlike the conventional academic way, I did not plan to start this ethnographic work, but my being in Gezi Park during the protests and occupation and my interaction there with other people turned into an ethnographic research due to my academic background and interests. In other words, my existence in the field started as a result of political interest as a citizen, which eventually cohabited with my researcher identity. Like others, who participated in the Gezi Resistance, I did not know how it would evolve, yet as a researcher who is native to the cultural and political codes in Turkey, I knew the situation was extraordinary. With the occupation of the park, I consciously started to conduct a self-reflexive critical ethnography as an activist-researcher.

Being in the field—namely, in Gezi Park and Taksim Square—since the very beginning of the protests, I started to participate, observe and collect data. I was on the streets in solidarity with tens of thousands of others, marching, chanting and barricading against the police who constantly used water cannons and tear gas. While being part of the act of resistance I started to realise and share the feeling of unity of various groups and individuals, which later on were referred to as the Gezi Spirit. Researching and conceptualising the social movement activism is part of my existence, hence, during my involvement I started to take notes and photographs, which I continuously analysed in relation to the cultural

codes and the current political environment in Turkey.² Therefore, this particular piece aims to provide an overview of Gezi Resistance reflected by an academic-activist with political science and cultural studies background. Accordingly, it is driven by an intention to conceptualise and interpret the happening she participated in personally, with the help of theoretical frames she has been influenced by. The research rests upon participant observation as well as unstructured, on the spot chats with participants and some of the audio-visual material produced by the participants of Gezi Resistance.

Political struggle over public space

Taksim Square and the adjoining Gezi Park historically has been the focus of power struggles. It was once the water distribution centre of the Ottoman capital in the 18th century, then offered for Ottoman military use by the construction of Artillery Barracks at the beginning of the 19th century. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the new secular Turkish Republic, the area became the site to express the urban planning of the modern country. In the 1930s, the Barracks were demolished and a modern park and a promenade were constructed in Western style (Bozdogan 2001; Gul 2012). ‘Taksim ... became the most important urban space in Istanbul for official celebrations and the display of Republican urban planning principles in much the same way that Times Square, New York is used as a participatory public sphere’ (Makagon, cited in Gul, Dee, and Cunuk 2014, 66). For the Kemalists in the 21st century, who were already annoyed by the idea of a government using political Islam as its departure point, the plans around Taksim Square and Gezi Park were seen as yet another threat to the secular republic. For this particular ideological stand, Taksim Square, the park and the surrounding area represent the spirit of the modern republic; in fact ‘its physical manifestation portrayed powerful symbolic meaning

that underlined the radical shift from the values associated with Ottoman identity to a new, modern and secular republic' (Gul, Dee, and Cunuk 2014, 68). Moreover, the square and the surrounding area have a strong symbolic meaning and sentimental value for left-wing groups in Turkey. For the labour movements starting from the 1950s and especially in the 1960s and 1970s, Taksim Square was the place for political rallies and crowded demonstrations. However, the use of the square and the surrounding area for Labour Day demonstrations in 1977 ended violently with 34 casualties and hundreds of injuries. Since then, the demonstrations of left-wing groups in Taksim Square especially on 1 May, the international Labour Day, have been an issue of tension between government officials, the labour unions and left-wing parties. The AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government legalised the celebrations of Labour Day on 1 May in Taksim Square in 2010, after a 30-year ban that created tension and ended up with a number of injuries that followed clashes between the organised left and the police.

However, on 1 May 2013, once again access to the square was restricted for labour unions and left-wing parties. As a rationale of the ban, the government put forward the pedestrianisation of Taksim Square. The demonstrators insisted on going to Taksim Square and the authorities were even more persistent in not letting them. As a result, the city of Istanbul was locked down; thousands of policemen (and police-women) being deployed across the city. Mostly concentrating on Taksim Square, they blocked main and side roads leading towards the square. Public transport at the heart of the city was withdrawn on the day and no one, including tourists trying to get to their hotels, was allowed passage. The day ended with 10 injuries and arrests. This power struggle over Taksim Square was one of the indicators of Gezi Resistance, as many commentators agree (e.g. Çelik 2013; Kuymulu 2013; Tugal 2013).

The Gezi Resistance

It is an often-repeated quote by Prime Minister Erdoğan and his followers that the Gezi uprising was not just about protecting the trees but set out to harm the government. He repeated this view on various occasions so as to emphasise the illegitimacy of the resistance. Many of the protesters also argued that it was not just about the trees though, and in their case this was to emphasise the symbolic importance of Gezi Park and the resistance. The transformation of the Gezi Park and Taksim Square projects was seen as the straw that broke the camel's back. The uprising emerged at the end of May 2013, when the government began the works that would unlawfully abolish Gezi Park along with the plan to build a replica of the old Ottoman Barracks. The new structure would contain a shopping mall and a mosque. Outraged by the uprooting of five trees, a small group of activists and concerned citizens gathered under the umbrella of Taksim Solidarity stopping the machines and camping in the park on 27 May. The next day, there were more people in the park, including an MP from BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) who came to support and prevent the machines abolishing the site. The number of people coming to the park for support increased, and the evenings turned out to be a park-fair with music and performances. The dominant discourses of these initial days of resistance included the importance of green public spaces, condemning gentrification projects that would privatise public spaces and putting emphasis on the symbolic value of trees. However, the peaceful and fair-like park gatherings faced police brutality that targeted the guarding group camping in the park.

Around 5:00 a.m. on 29 May, when people were sleeping, police raided the park and removed the tents, and the machines went back in. Meanwhile, on the same day during the ceremony for the start of the construction of the third bridge across the Bosphorus, Prime Minister Erdoğan made his point

while arguing that the government had made their decision and the plans for the Ottoman Barracks would continue whatever the protesters say.³ Political parties in opposition started to show their support and MPs from two parties, CHP (the main opposition party with Kemalist ideology at its core) and BDP (the Kurdish party with socialist tendencies, which makes the smallest group in the parliament), visited the park.

The police raided the park once again around 5 a.m. and burnt the tents. The number of protesters increased during the following hours and days. Police brutality targeted individuals during a peaceful sit-in at Taksim Square on 31 May at noon. Among many traumatised and injured protesters, Lobna Allami, a young woman who had joined the sit-in, was hit by a gas canister causing brain trauma, which meant she had to go to intensive care. Following these instances of state violence targeting citizens, an unexpected crowd of people from all walks of life passed the threshold of fear, and instead of running away and leaving the streets, protesters fought back against the police who attacked them with tear gas and water cannons.

The resistance against the police and their misuse of violence when combating the crowd resulted in even more people leaving their homes and joining the street protests.⁴ Meanwhile, the government manipulated mainstream media and ignored both the people taking on the streets and the police violence against them. However, the reluctance of the mainstream media to keep the public informed resulted in employing social media platforms extensively in order to spread the word about the clashes and police brutality. In fact with several million Tweets hash-tagged as #direngeziparki (translates as resist Gezi Park) and #occupygezi (Inceoglu 2014a), it became clear that the initial information in relation to the unrest was being followed via social media.

As the police continued to attack the protesters and the Prime Minister backed excessive use of tear gas, water cannons and even

rubber bullets, the dissent spread around the country. In other words, the spirit of protest quickly moved beyond the local demand represented in the strong will of protecting the park from demolition and instead turned into a nationwide chain of protests against the infringements of the current government. Along with the neo-liberal gentrification projects, it was also the 'authoritarian reflexes of the AKP government and the police brutality it inflicted on the people' that prompted 'the struggle for Gezi Park to jump scales to the urban and the national' (Kuymulu 2013, 275). What is now commonly referred to as the Gezi Resistance turned into a nationwide collective reaction not only against the existing and ongoing urban modelling projects but also against the mounting authoritarianism in relation to everyday life policy and social practices in Turkey. Therefore, concerns about many other issues predating the Gezi Park's demolition attempts had been included within the discourses of resistance.

Gezi Park as the radical democratic public space

Accordingly, *Gezi Park* became the symbol of this process of politicisation outside the political party domain. The political domain I denote here is the one that is legitimised by the Prime Minister referring to the popular support his party received in the 2011 elections, which was more or less 50% of the valid votes that resulted in three-fifths of the seats in the parliament. Prime Minister Erdoğan frequently referred to the percentage of votes he and his party received to outlaw the resistance. During the days Gezi Park and the adjoining Taksim Square were occupied by the protesters, both the government and the allied media used the discourses of institutionalised politics in order to criminalise the occupation and the resistance. For instance, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister suggested that the urban modelling plans regarding Gezi

Park would be subject to a referendum.⁵ Although this proposal was suggested as a negotiation point to end the dispute about Gezi Park, in oppositional platforms it was argued that a popular vote would only help to enhance the tyranny of the majority in the country.⁶ In fact, a popular vote without considering the process and the outcomes in perspective would be likely to result in advantage of the holders of power positions. However, the reason why people of all walks of life joined the protests and occupation movement despite the draining and threatening police violence was to go beyond the election-based political representation. Instead of a machinery that would look for a straightforward ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as answers to complicated issues, citizens were looking for a platform to voice their concerns, issues, worries and in fact that was the underlying cause of Gezi Resistance with so many constituents (Bilal and Nahrwold 2013; Kuymulu 2013; Tugal 2013).

In the following, I would like to develop my argument interjecting the concept of *radical democracy* and the way in which Gezi Resistance in general, and the Gezi Park occupation more specifically, could be considered as a case of radical democratic emancipation. In this context, emancipation refers to a contestation of the dominant discourses of the majoritarian government with neoconservative tendencies. Citizenship, according to the radical democratic conceptualisation, does not simply refer to the individual’s relationship to the state and institutions, but moves beyond this. Public space is contextualised as an agonistic domain (Mouffe 2000) that enables individuals both to appear, hence, become visible for a possible interaction and acknowledgement, and join collaborative struggles against dominant discourses (Arendt 1958). An *open public space* is crucial for individuals and groups who might be excluded from the political domain to perform their identities and interact with each other. Therefore, what Arendt (1958) calls the ‘space of appearance’ is the very basic notion of radical

democracy as individuals need to be seen by others on an equal footing in order for democratic politics to occur. According to Arendt, only individuals can act and the condition for individuals to act is to appear before others. That is to say, they submit their words and deeds to the judgement of an audience (Barbour and Zolkos 2011). Therefore, for a public space for the individuals to appear and hence act, there needs to be a common ground of equality. In this context, it is possible to read Arendt’s ‘public space of appearance’ in relation to Laclau and Mouffe’s radical democracy. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), radical democracy requires a chain of equivalence and a public space where equal components would appear before each other. Moreover, these individuals need to reformulate their identity positions in relation to the interaction and negotiation with one another. In this regard, performing dissent, and therefore reconstructing subjectivities while articulating discourses, is an outcome of identity performances in the public space.

Gezi Park became this public space both physically and symbolically in Turkey. As mentioned above, the grass-roots uprising emerged as a movement reclaiming the commons in Istanbul by the end of May 2013, forming a case of radical democratic encountering. Gezi Resistance is unique in the sense that tens of thousands initially gathered together spontaneously to demonstrate their dissent in relation to politics, which mostly affected their everyday life. It is distinguished because the dissent was embodied in a particular public park and the adjoining square which made hundreds of thousands (even millions uprising across the country) share the feeling of solidarity in resistance. This happened despite having various, and many times conflicting, ideological positions and walks of life.

The two-week occupation of Gezi Park and Taksim Square converted this recreational area into a radical democratic public space. Many quotes by the participants reflected astonished comments of protesters

regarding the moments of encountering the ‘other’ and challenging their identity position following that encounter. That is to say, during the occupation the Kurdish groups holding flags with the PKK leader Öcalan’s photo and the Turkish nationalists holding Turkish flags with Atatürk’s photo occupying the park together, or football fans known as being homophobic and sexist standing next to LGBTIs (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) on the barricades have been invaluable instances. During my talks with participants of the protests and/or occupiers of the park this point was raised quite frequently.

‘Even in the first days, before the police raided the campers in the park on May 28, we were coming here after work to spend a few hours meeting friends, enjoying cool evenings. Some were playing music, dancing. Once me and a few female friends were sitting on grass and drinking beer when I noticed that right behind us there were Anti-capitalist Muslims aligned whereas right in front of us there were a group of young Kurds dancing and singing guerrilla songs. It was an impossible scene coming to life.’ (Protester X, 8 June 2013, Istanbul)

‘It was on one of the earlier days of resistance. I was walking around in the Park. There was a stage and a microphone for representatives of groups within the park. A member of LGBT group was on stage talking about the LGBT issues and how they related these to the resistance. Then I heard a group of football fans next to me chanting “the world would shake to its grounds if the queers were free ...” These are the group of people that would shout at the referees as “faggot” during a match when they are not happy with the whistle.’ (Protester Z, 17 June 2013)

There were also examples of Twitter or Facebook messages as well as open stage comments indicating how the position and opinion of individuals regarding the ‘others’ were influenced and modified due to their encounters during the resistance and occupation. In one case, at the People’s

Assembly—a platform for open microphone contributions—some confessed that they voted for AKP in the last elections and now regret it. On another occasion, a gay man going on stage warned the protesters not to use sexist and homophobic language while protesting the government, similarly, an ethnic Armenian citizen criticised some social media comments cursing Erdoğan as the ‘Armenian offspring’ (a common curse in the Turkish language, which denigrates being Armenian). More intensely in the same setting, a young man said:

‘Sadly I have to confess that I had some fascist ideas before participating in these protests. In front of everyone, I apologise from everybody because of every day that I was supporting the police violence. Long live freedom. Long live the sisterhood of peoples.’⁷

Similar comments appeared on social media where people confessed they had been blind to internalised racism and state violence against Kurdish and other ethnic and religious minorities. The spatiality of the park as a public space conveyed possibilities to ‘envision new forms of solidarity based on recognised interdependence’ (Mouffe 2004, 131).

Alongside the radical democracy concept, and in order not to create a false romanticised scenery, it should also be noted that there has been contestation within the park among various groups during the occupation. As a critique of Habermasian deliberative democracy, Mouffe (2000, 2005) argues that the idea of radical democracy is not to establish a deliberative consensus in the public sphere. Instead, Mouffe (2000) develops the concept of ‘agonism’ and stresses that eradication of conflict is not desirable for the sake of democracy. On the other hand, the confrontation should not result in antagonism either. Instead, the contestation must be between adversaries. Therefore, the agonistic relation of different opinions, for example, activists within the occupied park, would be a desirable outcome of radical democratic public space.

The park and its surrounding were reclaimed by the occupiers as public space without any administration of institutionalised authority. Further, it was an example of an ideal public space for two weeks. The space was regulated by individual initiatives and everything was organised on a voluntary basis and in solidarity. Derived from their participation of the Gezi Resistance, Bilal and Nahrwold (2013, 91) reflect on their experience:

‘People experienced a new solidarity in the Gezi Commune. It was an alternative community, with a new usage of public space. The protesters reclaimed their space and experienced an urban utopia. In the Gezi Commune, there was no state violence because police were not allowed entry, no cash flow because everything was free, no authoritarian politics but instead directly democratic forums. An ideal public space was created, which empowered different perspectives and made possible something unique: different people contributed with their individual abilities and made themselves agents of history.’

The amazement of the individual participants regarding the self-regulatory order of Gezi Park as public space has been uttered in various conversations including the ones below, as I was addressed:

‘I have never seen people of Istanbul being that kind to one another. In the park, within the occupied zone, whenever someone hits you by mistake they immediately apologise and you smile. People give way to each other. This is something extraordinary for Istanbul. Here, we usually walk taking our guard.’ (Protester Y, 8 June 2013)

‘Look at this place! It is a public place. There is no authority to regulate this space except the will of people. It is spotless. People collect garbage in the park collectively, without any material return. It is the feeling of belonging and solidarity. What else could we wished for?’ (Protester W, 10 June 2013)

The occupied zone, though only temporarily, was a *polis*—a public space with geographical

correspondence—where ‘the citizens’ existed as responsible individuals and their existence and action actually turned the place into a *polis*. The *polis*, as a recurring concept in Hannah Arendt’s writing, refers to all instances of communities of equal individuals set up in a public realm to exercise speech and action. In her own words:

‘the political realm arises directly out of acting together, the “sharing of words and deeds”. Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it.’ (Arendt 1958, 198)

In relation to Arendt and Mouffe’s conceptualisation, *the park*, as the physical space where various identities could appear and engage in a dialogue with each other on a horizontal level, had a vital role to play in relation to a radical democratic public space to come into existence. The space that is regulated via solidarity and without coercion, has proved to be the crucial requirement for radical democracy.

Symbolic meaning of space and the issue of sustaining the radical democratic public space

As mentioned earlier in this text, Taksim Square and the surrounding space including Gezi Park, carry a symbolic value for left-wing politics that suffered from military coups and various other forms of authoritarianisms. In addition to left-wing or alternative political views, Gezi Park and Taksim Square have also been the gathering place for various other occasions such as the New Year parties, or football celebrations, Gay Parades, Women’s Day marches, etc. As Gul, Dee, and Cunuk (2014, 71) remind us, ‘Taksim protest is a telling reminder of the power of place in cities. It underlines the myriad of values, symbols, ideologies, associations and meanings such places hold and the passions they can ignite in the minds of people.’

But of course Gezi Resistance was not just limited to the Gezi Park itself as many more people were taken by the spirit of the revolt. Gezi Park was not the only space of appearance, as demonstrations and protests continued at other sites. According to Arendt (1958, 198), *polis* is not restricted to a physical location but 'it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me'. Therefore, such public space of appearance could be recreated anywhere citizens come together 'in the manner of speech and action' (199), that is to say, politically. Further, the park and the adjoining square hold symbolic importance for the resistance and this is uttered by the most popularised chant 'everywhere is Taksim, resistance everywhere'. Therefore, even if the physical space is limited, the idea of that space being the site of resistance, moreover being the site of alternative public space, is argued to be beyond geographical limits. The chant became so popular that the supporters of three rival teams of Istanbul (*Fenerbahçe*, *Galatasaray* and *Beşiktaş*) set an example of solidarity as they introduced an imaginary collective team they called 'Istanbul United'. Moreover, the football supporters established a tradition of chanting 'everywhere is Taksim, resistance everywhere' during the football games of these teams, especially at the 34th (plate number for Istanbul) minute of each game to show their support to the resistance.

This slogan has been attributed a broader meaning after the evacuation of Gezi Park by the police force on 15 June. Following the call of ÇARŞI (the heroic *Beşiktaş* supporters that gained respect during the resistance), people started to establish park forums in their neighbourhoods. The rest of summer 2013 witnessed the mushrooming of local park forums functioning as new public spaces with Gezi Spirit. Despite the shock of many due to the level of police brutality, the resistance had the chance to anchor locally and took the form of local park forums (Inceoglu 2013). However, it is also

due to that frailty of public space that this public space

'does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men ... but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.' (Arendt 1958, 199)

Therefore, according to Arendt, the condition of a public space is the will of individuals to act and communicate politically in a collective manner. In this regard, the localisation of resistance did not prove to be the most fruitful political strategy to sustain Gezi Spirit.

In an early reflection of Gezi Resistance, I analysed local park forums as cases of radical democracy from a rather optimistic point of view (Inceoglu 2013). It was, in fact, a novel case for the habitants of Turkey to appear in a public space and create forums where individuals of diverse ethnic, social, class backgrounds and sexual orientation could come together in order to utilise a public space for public debates. Moreover, these spaces were organised to enable horizontal communication and networking; that is to say, without a top-down order. In this sense, it is important to note that this method of organisation is owed to the tide of global precedents, such as the Occupy movement, in terms of uses of space and the organisation of communication among participants.

The after-Gezi local park forums adopted the methods of global justice movements such as the Occupy movement. For instance, the hand gestures to enable communication among crowds without creating noise were emulated at some of the forums with larger participation. Similarly, 'open stage' where individuals queue for and take turns to express their thoughts, ideas and vision freely, is another element of this movement's repertoire that became a common feature. Nonetheless, despite the enthusiasm the

local park forums lost their momentum towards the end of autumn 2013 as the politics in Turkey focused very much on the local elections.

In hindsight, I believe the neighbourhood forums were important in the sense that they engaged individuals in relation to local concerns but that this also endangered the idea of more heterogeneous gatherings and encountering the 'others' in the more diverse sense. Gezi Park and Taksim Square have the historical symbolic meaning that other parks and public spaces lack.

Following Mouffe, I consider radical democracy as a non-ending process of articulations and dislocations within any given hegemonic struggle. It is not simply 'a matter of establishing mere alliance between given interests but rather of actually modifying their identity so as to bring about a new political identity' (Mouffe 2005, 19). In line with this conceptualisation we can argue that what the protesters named as the Gezi Spirit was a seed of occurring radical democracy. That is to say, Gezi Resistance and the conventions established through the process of coexisting within the territory of public space opened a window for a radical democratic formation. This formation, albeit for a limited period of time, facilitated the repositioning of identity struggles via negotiating with one another. The occupation of the park and the following local park forums kick-started a radical democratic appearance. However, the temporality of the occupation of a historically symbolic space, which was one of the reasons why it was so intensely alternative in terms of appearance and coexistence, could not last long enough to encourage novel practices of reclaiming public spaces and extending the Gezi Spirit. Although localisation of park forums was a valuable attempt, the lack of symbolic meaning of new spaces could not compete with that of Gezi Park and Taksim Square. On the other hand, the Spirit re-occurred during the Presidential election in the summer of 2014. The election campaign of Selahattin Demirtaş, the candidate of the

left-wing Kurdish and Turkish alliance, was based on the argument of radical democracy. Demirtaş's text for election was titled 'The Call for New Life' and it stated that 'the call for new life is Radical Democracy' which later is detailed to be the call for fraternity on an equal footing.⁸

Concluding observations

Gezi Park still remains an important symbolic space as the government of Istanbul closes the park to public access anytime there is a public demonstration. Further, the symbolic meaning of the park and the adjoining square now has been enriched with the two-week-long occupation and commune in the sense of radical democratic public space. The Gezi Resistance that reclaims public spaces has started to mobilise multiple identity groups who entered into the political arena in the radical democratic sense. That is to say, Gezi Resistance is the result of the accumulation of dissident and different positions uttered through reclaiming the park and the adjoining square as public space. Hence, Taksim Gezi Park became *the public space for Turkey*, both physically and symbolically. However, the strong symbolic meaning attributed to the park, and the possibility of a multifaceted existence and appearance of identity groups in the park, also makes it difficult to replicate the 'public space of appearance' in such a variety and dedication in other places. Gezi Park and Taksim Square became the site of an 'agonistic public space that became the basis of emancipation' (Springer 2011, 525) where there has been the possibility of new forms of voluntary association and mutual aid, where pluralism could blossom and democratic engagement enhanced.

Gezi Resistance has proved to be a rich source for many researchers and their analysis in various fields. One year on, it is still hard to list the overall influence of the resistance. There have been various occasions where the Gezi Spirit is revived in different

forms such as the memorial days of the murdered individuals or even during election campaigns that motivate opposition politicians to adopt an embracing discourse. However, one comment could be made for sure, that the citizens of Istanbul if not all of Turkey, have now been informed about the park as an existing public space. This in itself could be considered as one of the great gains of the resistance.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

- 1 There has been a wide range of publications even during the occupation of the park, some of which included preliminary observations and some analysis in relation to what would be expected. I am utilising a few of these analyses in this paper but there are a number of other academic writings on the Gezi Resistance including Öğütle and Göker (2014) and Çelik (2013b).
- 2 I have a few essays regarding the Gezi Resistance including Inceoglu (2014a and 2014b).
- 3 See the newspaper link regarding Erdoğan's speech: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/23390657.asp> (accessed June 2014). Another important point to note here is the significance of the ceremony Erdoğan made his speech. The third bridge over the Bosphorus is another issue the public dissented. Especially for the Alevi citizens, when the name of the bridge was announced as Yavuz Sultan Selim it caused indignation among Alevis as the name refers to an Ottoman Sultan known for the massacre of Alevis.
- 4 According to the survey conducted in June 2013 by KONDA, a reliable survey agency in Turkey, 49.1% of Gezi Park protestors joined the resistance in the park following the violent police crackdown (www.konda.com.tr).
- 5 In fact, what they really meant was plebiscite as it is a local issue rather than a constitutional one. See the links for the news in relation to that issue: <http://goo.gl/gH46fZ> (accessed June 2014) and <http://goo.gl/RgQgTr> (accessed June 2014).
- 6 An ethical discussion on plebiscite was published anonymously (in Turkish) on a website launched to provide correct and responsible information about Gezi Resistance (<http://www.istanbuldaneoluyor.com/?p=402>).

- 7 A video collection of People Assembly sessions with English subtitles is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ1UKAyVqZI> (accessed June 2014).
- 8 For a detailed version of the text, see <http://en.selahattindemirtas.net/newlife/>

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