OCCUPATION OF TWITTER DURING GEZI MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

A Master's Thesis

By

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Ankara

September 2015

To the anonymous masses who lend strength and recognition to one another...

OCCUPATION OF TWITTER DURING GEZI MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

of

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CAN KUTAY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ANKARA

September 2015

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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ABSTRACT

OCCUPATION OF TWITTER DURING GEZI MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

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M.A., in Media and Visual Studies

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Özlem Savaş

September, 2015

This thesis will attempt to analyze the occupation of social networking site Twitter by Gezi protestors just like any other offline public place like Gezi Park and the de-occupation process of the same platform by the Pro-government users thus aiming to break the linkage between "on" and" off" during Gezi protests in Turkey. Throughout this struggle between opposite collectivities, the social networking sites such as Twitter were defined as contested spaces that could be "freed" from the protestors' occupation like any offline public place.

Keywords: Occupy, Gezi protests, Twitter, SNS, Online activism

ÖZET

TWITTER'IN GEZİ EYLEMLERİ SÜRECİNDE OCCUPY EDILMESİ

Kutay, Can

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Danışman: Yar. Doç. Dr. Özlem Savaş

Eylül, 2015.

Bu çalışma; 2013'ün Mayıs ayında İstanbul Gezi Parkında başladıktan sonra büyük bir hızla tüm Türkiye'ye yayılan, hükümet karşıtı "Gezi Protestoları" esnasında Twitter başta olmak üzere Sosyal Medya mecraalarının protestocular tarafından nasıl ele geçirilip, kollektif bir kimlik oluşturmak için kullanıldığını araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Occupy, Gezi Eylemi, Sosyal Medya, Online Aktivism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The events that have inspired the main propositions of this thesis had taken place between 30th of May and roughly around the end of summer of 2013. These incidents, later entitled as the “Gezi Movement” or “Gezi Resistance” that spread all over Turkey in matter of hours, had been ignited by the heavy police intervention to a group of activists who were protesting the sanctioned demolishment of Gezi Park (a green area in the middle of Taksim, located in Istanbul) by occupying the park.

One of the most well-known slogans that have resonated very well with the protestors during Gezi park protests was “Her yer Taksim, Her yer Direniş” which roughly translates as “Everywhere is Gezi, Everywhere is Resistance”. First introduced as a message of support and unity for the protestors in Gezi Park who had been harshly dispersed by the riot police in 30th of May, slogan declared that those protests were not an isolated or marginalized gatherings of people, but there were many citizens who shared these protestors’ discontent towards governments’ policies. It was through this discontent towards government that, a shared emotional

response to the actions of riot police had surfaced in both online and offline public places.

The source of this shared emotion was the feeling of being ignored and suppressed by the government's authoritarian rule over Turkey. During the protests, 92.4 percent of the participants said that they have taken to the streets because of Prime Minister's [1] authoritarian attitude which could be seen in an everyday basis through mass media (Uras, 2013). This anger towards government and namely towards prime minister had reached a boiling point with the dispersion of protestors in Gezi park. Due to the online activism that took place in social network sites, this anger and discontent towards the governments' policies became visible. This shared feelings that became visible among SNS subscribers who maybe for the first time raised their oppositional voice in unison, eventually contributed substantially for giving birth to a collective identity. By expressing their own take on the actions of the government against Gezi protestors, millions of social media users have introduced their personalized politics into the political sphere (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011; Bennet 2012) through Facebook posts and Twitter hashtags.

Through this collective identity, born through shared emotions that fed upon the discontent towards government and its policies, a unique breed of protestor in the history of civil disobedience in Turkey was born as these platforms have "shaped new political subjectivities based on the network as an emerging political and cultural ideal" (Juris, 2012: 260) .These protesters who managed to marry their online activities within SNS with political movements they are rooting for, were named after the park where the first occupation took place. "Geziciler" had become

[1] Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

the official alias for any protestor involved with the movement as it was used by both protestors and government officials to refer to protestors.

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate how Social Networking Sites such as Twitter became online sites of protests through the occupation of these platforms by the masses during Gezi Movement. These online places did not miraculously turn into vessels for the collective identities born out of Gezi movement by themselves, or by default due to their design, but rather the occupiers of the platform utilized these spaces for this end. It will be further highlighted that these occupations were always under the threat of dissolvement whether due to police raids in occupied parks or streets, or due to oppositional online activity against the protesters, current occupiers of these online spaces. This struggle, the Twitter wars between oppositional sides for gaining the upper hand in online public places has come to be ever present, even after the offline occupation of Gezi Park ended in 2013.

As essential as SNS platforms are to contemporary social movements, I believe there is a gap in literature regarding a) how during these times of protests the social networking sites such as Twitter had suddenly became vessels for the movement, turned into an occupied online public space and b) what was the link between offline and online occupied public spaces and the occupiers in both spaces? Some insight was shed on these questions by various scholars whom work will prove essential through this thesis as answers to these questions will be investigated through the example of Gezi movement. However exploring how these online public spaces were occupied by protesters would still require a more in depth analysis of these online activities in question and a case study of Twitter activity during and after the Gezi movement in Turkey would be required.

Accepting online public spaces as online counter parts of their offline versions i.e. Gezi Park, it will be suggested that these platforms are no different than parks and squares in terms of their design .As Gezi Park was not designed for to be used during social movements by the Turkish State, Twitter and other social networking sites were also designed for different purposes then political ones. As Gezi Park was occupied by protesters and used for raising their collective voice against government, embodying their discontent with government's political decision, Twitter was also occupied by protesters with torrents of messages and voices in a similar manner. Collective emotions had driven these protesters to occupy public places, which were not designed to be used in this manner by their designers, and conduct their collective identities in these online and offline public places.

To gain an insight regarding how this collective identity was formed during Gezi protests within both online and offline public spaces, a retrospective analysis of the usage of internet by oppositional movements and its promise of delivering a democratic, egalitarian platform for individuals from all segments of public could participate and raise their voices, was essential for this thesis.

The second chapter focuses on feminist politics and activism in cyberspace and how these online activists used or suggested using these new born platforms before millennia and before the introduction of SNS such as Twitter. Moreover, the inquiry regarding whether online gathering places such as forums, chat rooms and ultimately SNS platforms could function as a public sphere, as defined by Habermas, was also argued. This chapter also aims to compare different approaches to Web 2.0, which was introduced to the literature after the millennium which enabled SNS platforms such as Twitter to emerge among other services like online

wikis and video sharing websites like YouTube. The contradicting approaches of scholars regarding the advantage and perils of this new technology were grouped under titles as; “Techno optimists” and “Techno pessimists”. The advocates of both these approaches present opposing arguments regarding the role of SNS platforms during Occupy movements.

Third chapter mainly focuses on providing a theoretical background to the arguments presented in this thesis regarding the role of internet and SNS platforms in particular, during Occupy movements such as Gezi. This was done by adopting various terms and concepts by other scholars such as notions of “Tactics” and “Strategies” from Michel De Certau to highlight how occupation of both online and offline public spaces was done by protesters. Furthermore, the intertwined nature of online and offline protests were emphasized in this chapter for the sake of bringing forward the mandatory link between these sites of protests and how they contemplate one another. It will be attempted to illustrate how an offline site of protest could also form its online counter-part, an online version of Gezi Park which can be accessed by millions through internet to get familiarized with the movement and even more; being a part of a collective identity.

The final chapter, in the light of theoretical background provided by the previous two chapters, provides the material supplementary to the main assumptions of the thesis. This content was taken from more than 60 different Twitter accounts both during and after Gezi protests along with a number of published news articles on the subject. This chapter, through progressing in a chronological order by starting its narration from 27th of May, the allegedly first day of protests, and covering events took place up until May of 2014, shows how the collective identities and the usage

of Twitter as an online public space sustained themselves even after the Gezi protests offline phase had ended in the summer of 2013. This chapter further attempts to analyze the occupation of social media by Gezi protestors and the de-occupation process of the same platforms by the Pro-government users i.e. beating the protestors in their own game thus breaking the linkage between online and offline aspects of the movement. It is shown that how this process was critical since the attempt to de-occupy social media by rallying pro-government users against the Gezi protestors in an online "war", as the mayor of Ankara put it, had defined social networking sites such as Twitter as contested spaces which could be "freed" from the protestors' occupation like any offline public place.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. An Introduction with the Internet

This chapter provides an overview of previous research done on the perception of internet as either a "liberating" or "potentially alarming" online space (Ostwald, 1997; Nunes, 1997; Wise, 1997; Turkle, 1995; Papacharissi, 2002). As various scholars have suggested even before the millennium had arrived with web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2004), the internet i.e. cyber space could already harbor new possibilities for oppressed/neglected to raise their voice (Wise, 1997; Spender, 1995; Rheingold, 1993). However the advantages of these new online platforms seemed to be balanced by the potential risks they may have carried within themselves.

The scholars who have approached cyberspace more skeptically, pointed out the dangers of internet being under the control of specific segments of societies (Wise, 1997; Fraser, 1990; Negt and Kluge, 1993) or users "getting lost" in the virtual space (Virillio, 1991; Nunes, 1997:165) ,being sucked into the imploded, impossible World behind the screen" (Kroker and Weinstein, 1994:9). Drawing from the works

of Baudrillard and Lyotard, these arguments suggest that since the cyber space override the "actual", the individual who has been sucked into the cyberspace begins to perceive it not as a "simulation", but the actual itself (Nunes, 1997: 165-169). The possibility of the cyberspace traveler getting detached from "real", suggests that an individual could easily lose his/her connection with any spatial-temporal context when launched into the cyber space (Virillio, 1991: 101) and could possibly lose interest in what's happening in the real world. The immediacy, transparency and controllability of the cyberspace (Turkle, 1995) could be easily favored to the old offline space and communication platforms as Mark Nunes suggests (1997). As one transpass the physical boundaries (of real space), he/she could be anywhere (in cyber space) through World Wide Web.

What is most intriguing in this skeptical approach, in my opinion, is the argument that; even though internet introduces new online platforms that carry the potential to revolutionize communication, these virtual spaces still mimic their offline counter-parts (Dibbels, 1993: 37). The online chat rooms for instance, which constituted the bulk of online communication before social media, being first to promise "…a meeting point that allows people to communicate with other people otherwise inaccessible." (Peris et.al., 2002) were quick to establish a hierarchy within them, as administers regulate every input by users and had the ability to modify and delete messages or even ban users access to these online gathering places. Thought in this way, the online platforms which believed to possess the potential to deliver a more democratic space and community may still be under the dominance of power relations of offline world and thus same censorship and authority. So what internet appears to be is an extension of already established hegemonic structure in a new

vast platform. A promise of internet harboring a censor-free, democratic, un-intervened space may seem unlikely under these circumstances where every input is under surveillance, under the threat of being censored or deleted altogether (Willson, 1997:147).

However as several scholars suggested, even under these circumstances internet could still be used to challenge, topple the dominant powers and ideologies.

2.1.1. Feminism and Cyberspace

Patricia Wise, as one of the earlier scholars who had seen the potential of the Cyber-space in creating a new power- relation between its online "citizens", as an alternative to already established power relations of the "real" worlds, argues that Feminist politics in Cyberspace must continue to explore and extend their understanding of these virtual platforms (1997: 191). According to Wise, against the "molar assemblages" of patriarchal hegemonies, which constitutes our everyday lives, a new disassembled "molecular" becomings are possible through internet with its fluid and yet to be anchored spaces. The Molar assemblages as they are defined by Deleuze and Guattari possess a propensity to code and territorializing everything and generally stratifying the socius (Murray, 2013). Internet in this sense, since it is an ever expanding and new space has the chance to offer a "non-coded" and "non-unified", fragmented space that is yet to finalize its own stratification. Since woman are no stranger to their subjectivity being virtualized by being "objectified" as "not complete, non-unified" by men, they are "perfectly placed for cyber-citizenry" because of internets' fragmented and non-unified nature (Wise, 1997: 191).

Elizabeth Grosz remarks how this virtualization of women as "non-complete", that is defining women through an operation of difference with men in which women lacks the genitals of men that symbolizes "male power", is related with internet by suggesting: "All cultural production is Phallocentric (that is, covers over women's specificity) but this doesn't mean that we shouldn't use it [internet]: it means we should use it very carefully , aware of the risks it may entail" (Grosz, 1992: 7). By perceiving their objectification by the male oriented society and coming up with novel methods to challenge it by establishing a new perception of themselves, women are already used to multiple literacies and polvocality (Wise, 1997: 188). This ability, this accustomed way of navigating in society could in turn provide an advantage to feminist activism in "non-unified" and fragmented online space.

However Wise, besides Grosz, warns the reader against the "utopian" discourses regarding cyberspace, drawing attention to the patriarchal "creators" of the platform itself (184-186; Nunes, 1997:165). What Patricia Wise suggests about how feminist politics should be utilized in cyberspace is that; since the cyberspace is created with a patriarchal mindset in the first place, that of the offline world, the best strategy for feminist movement to foster in this new space, would be embracing nomadic movements. Through this nomadic movements and guerilla tactics, oppositional movements like feminism could disrupt the established order. One way of doing this would be popping out whenever or wherever the patriarchal system least expected it, by ignoring the already designed "boundaries" of cyberspace and disrupting the attempt of "unification" of the internet, by intervening in it, creating molecular resistance pockets online. In her own words "Feminists need only to keep popping

up in unexpected places in unexpected guises to put a virtual cat among the virtual pigeons" (194).

With the introduction of Web 2.0 we can see blatantly that "popping out" in unexpected places in unexpected guises has been adopted by feminist movements as well as others. The websites such as; feminist.org, feministing.com, everydayfeminism.com, feminist.com, thefword.org.uk have managed to create their own fragments of the internet, carrying the feminist policies to the cyberspace. However, what is more intriguing is how the feminist politics managed to "penetrate" the SNS[2]. By popping up in social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the feminist movement made themselves visible in platforms that they were not expected. The "Facebook groups"[3] dedicated to feminist movements as they appear along many other, mostly non-political groups in the platform can be a solid example of this. The difference between the websites such as Feminist.org and Facebook groups such as "Feminism", with more than 200.000 members, is that a website usually reveals its aim right off the bat in its URL[4] and could only function if the user opens up the website. A Facebook group on the other hand, could reach out more than just who is already interested in the feminist movement but to anyone who happens to navigate through their news feed (The home page for the Facebook subscribers when they log in to their accounts which highlights the online actions took place recently. This list can contain the users' friends online activity or Facebook group posts or any advertisements) in Facebook. A similar strategy by feminist activist can be seen on Twitter as well, another heavily used SNS platform.

[2] Group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.
[3] Groups are dedicated spaces where you can share updates, photos or documents and message other group members. They are created by users.
[4] (Uniform Resource Locator and is a reference (an address) to a resource on the Internet).

Accounts such as "@Feminist Frequency" with more than 260.000 followers are using this online platform, which is not designed to be used for oppositional movements such as feminism, for "popping out" in unexpected places thus gathering attention to their cause as well as saving themselves a fragment of the platform.

I believe what Patricia Wise suggests for feminist users to do in cyberspace shows significant similarities with the notion of "occupation of online and offline public places during social movements" suggested in this thesis. The notion of "popping up in unexpected places in unexpected disguises" is parallel with "camping out, occupying" spaces which were not designed for hosting social movements in the first place but were later occupied and appropriated by the protesters during occupy movements. SNS like Twitter or public parks such as Gezi or Wall Street are such examples of public places being re-appropriated by protesters to be used in accordance with the movements' needs and goals.

2.1.2. An Online Public Sphere

Another leading argument regarding the potential of cyber space was, and still is; whether the online spaces, such as bulletin boards, forums, chat rooms can function as a democratic gathering place where every user gets the chance to state his/her ideas about various topics regardless of their age, political orientation, skin color or gender (Poster, 1997; Mumford, 1991; Dibbel, 1993; Rheingold, 1993; Nunes, 1997). One prominent idea within this discussion is; could the concept of "Public Sphere" by Jürgen Habermas (1962) which suggests a public platform, like public coffee houses, where diverse, rational individuals can gather up and discuss the

contemporary politics freely, uncoerced, and ultimately force the government to hear their pleas, can exist in cyberspace? (Poster, 1997; Fraser, 1990; Negt and Kluge, 1993) This linkage of public sphere and internet sounds feasible as the public sphere seems to be reflected in online chat rooms where fluid identities are common where a male user, for instance, can assume the opposite gender's role by simple using a female alias (Turkle, 1995; Poster, 1997: 223) thus may at the same time stay anonymous and tap into a different perspective regarding gender politics through interaction with other users. Furthermore, since the barriers such as race, gender, ethnic background, and physical features between human communications simply doesn't exist in cyberspace, the users may participate in discussions of any nature, avoiding certain stereotypes against the person they are engaged with as Gilmore remarks "On the internet nobody knows you at all, on the internet nobody knows what your race is or your sex" (1996). Besides anonymity of users, low barriers of joining in to these discussion platforms (Willson, 1997-152), which may be even easier for citizens than going to coffee shops, also contributes to accepting online discussion places' potential as democratic gathering places.

However the criticisms towards Public sphere had carried on to the online spaces as well. These criticisms were mainly against the elitist nature of public sphere that allowed only a small percentage of the society to be represented in these spheres, neglecting other segments of the public such as feminists (even maybe "women" in general) and proletariat (Negt and Kluge, 1993; Fraser, 1990). This idea has been reinforced with the numbers of computers connected to the internet which roughly equals to %11 of World population by 2000 and were mainly located in USA and Western Europe whereas only a very small percentage of internet users were from

Africa or Middle East (Worldmapper.org, 2002). This statistics suggests that only a small portion of human population was able to join in to any discussion platforms in the internet. Since not everyone could express their opinions in these communication platforms, simply due to having no access to internet yet to these platforms, the notion of a fully democratic online gathering place is negated. Moreover the chat rooms mentioned previously that contains a hierarchal system within them, as administers have the power to shape and control the conversations going on, also stands against the notion of an online censor-free and democratic discussion place. These platforms which believed to possess the potential to deliver a more democratic space and community may still be under the governance of one group or individual (Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000). These online places, as Papacharissi argues;" Provides public space, but does not constitute a public sphere" (Papacharissi, 2002: 13)

Habermas himself accepted later that his early definition of public sphere neglected proletarian, feminist and other components of the public (Habermas, 1992: 425-430). The Public sphere, both online and offline prototypes of it, didn't seem to live up to the expectations of the techno- optimists because a) they couldn't include all segments of the public and b) they could not be free from the dominant patriarchal ideologies as they favored the bourgeoisies'; white, educated male citizens' participation above the other segments presence.

Besides public sphere, the recognition of internet as a platform that might offer a relevantly democratic and uncensored meeting place among individuals persisted with different definitions. Not as assertive as the public sphere, the term "Agora" was appropriated within the cyberspace literature by several scholars (Mumford,

1991; Rheingold, 1993; Ostwald, 1997). The Agora literally meant "gathering place" in ancient Greek and were used as market-places located outside the city. They were: "open spaces, publicly held and occupiable for public purposes" (Mumford, 1991:176) and were open to any merchants, potential client or just any passer-by. In a Foucauldian sense, these places were heterotopias that were "outside of all places", even though they were related with other spaces. For instance; other parts of the Greek city such as the city hall or military barracks were represented in Agora with all their rules and customs since these other parts' rules and customs that are located in the same culture were contested and inverted within agoras. In other words these unique places were interdependent of other places' hegemonic structure (Foucault, 1986: 24) even though all the other parts/sites of the city are represented, contested and inverted within them, not one of these parts dominating another

In the instance of Agora, it can be argued that even though these open spaces were guarded by the soldiers of the state (equivalent of administers of online chat rooms), the context of these gatherings were not regulated by a power holding institution. The agora was bounded by spatial boundaries; however the usage of the space could change as frequently as required since Agora reacted to public purposes which were brought front by citizens (Ostwald, 1997: 133).

I believe the Agora of ancient Greek cities, public spaces that are malleable with public occupations in terms of usage and context they host, is a more compatible comparison with the internet than public sphere. Agora, unlike public sphere, does not promise any emancipatory discourse but rather suggests that it is the citizens, users, of these spaces that determine the context and agenda of these platforms (Mumford, 1991:190; Benedikt, 1991; Kazi, 2011: 174). This perception of internet

as a combination of spaces that are by themselves not different from empty Agoras, empty spaces waiting to be inhabited by its citizens, is what this paper also embraces and builds upon. However the problem with the public sphere, which fails to include every segment of the public within itself, still lingers with these online Agoras. However the deprivation of users from various strata of public in online platforms is attempted to be remedied with new emerging communication platforms and technologies.[5]

2.2. Introduction of Web 2.0 and SNS

With the introduction of web 2.0, as the term coined by O'Reilly (2005), with its new platforms that hold user participation and content productions in high regard, the role of Internet in the society began to be discussed under the light of these new innovations. Lev Manovich defined the difference between web 1.0 and web 2.0 as: "…the 1990s the web was mostly a publishing medium, in the 2000s it has increasingly become a communication medium." (2009: 320) With the introduction of SNS such as; Friendster (2002), My Space(2003), LinkedIn (2003) and later Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006), users could now reflect their ideas through producing and distributing their own online content such as re-mixed music clips, edited videos, sharing photos and micro blogging (Manovich, 2009).

These Social Networking Services were defined by Kaplan and Haenlein as ; "'Group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content

[5] Indeed the number of internet users has increased drastically in the last decade. The number of internet users has increased tenfold from 1999 to 2013 from 280 Million to almost 3 Billion.

"(2010). According to this definition, the users who were previously only located at the receiving end of a dialectic communication model could now also take an active role in the production phase of a multi-modal communication network. Manuel Castells names this new multi-modal digital communication model as "Mass self-communication" (2009). According to Castells, "mass self- communication … processes messages from many to many" (2012, 6) since whenever a user shares content, whether it is a video, status update or a comment, on SNS platforms such as Twitter or YouTube, they could now address a global audience i.e. masses. This communication model opens up new possibilities with its horizontal chain of command and user based content production / distribution which are quite different from traditional mass media platforms. Within these traditional mass media mediums such as Radio or television where information is produced and distributed vertically, with top to bottom, from one to many, audience is a passive receiver (Castells, 2007). Unlike traditional mass media, mass-self communication "…provides the technological platform for the construction of the autonomy of the social actor… (Castells, 2012, 7)"whom can be both located at the sending or receiving end of a user produced message. To put it blatantly, the producer and the receiver positions in this Mass self-communication model are both occupied by none other than the "self" as both a content producer and consumer.

Mass self-communication model of Manuel Castells can be compared with the "agora" concept, mentioned in the previous chapter by Mumford and Ostwald. These spaces usage, agendas are not segregated from the users' contribution to them. As a merchant could open up his shop in an "agora", a video artist can advertise his work through his Twitter account by sharing link to his YouTube

channel (Manovich, 2009). Furthermore, through these online and global agoras, a political activist or organization could launch their campaign online. This was the case with Wael Ghonim whom during Arab Spring created a Facebook page after hearing a university student beaten to death by Iranian police, which later established a link between 250.000 Egyptian users who shared their own reasons for opposing the Mubarak regime. (Vargas, 2012).However a distinction between a "new public space" and a new "pubic sphere" is crucial when approaching these online platforms as Papacharissi remarks (2002, 11), reminding us that it is how users interact with these platforms that determines their function in a society, not their underlying architecture (Lim, 2014, 8). This distinction between public online spaces; with networked individuals, communicating in horizontal channels of communication whom joined into these platforms for various reasons besides political ones (Lim, 2014: 56), and acknowledging these platforms and networks as foundations of a public sphere is crucial.

SNS platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer a new kind of political participation to its subscribers. Through these platforms, expression and distribution of each subscriber's "personalized politics" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Bennet, 2012) became possible through mass self-communication model that was introduced with the web 2.0 as discussed above. This new kind of democratic engagement is "an expression of personal hopes, lifestyle values, and the promise of individual opportunity that further eroded group memberships and loyalties to parties and political institutions" (Bennett and Segerberg 2013, 23). As a result of this novel approach to politics, the civic engagement with the government and state through online platforms could be mashed into the expression of personal lifestyles of users

(Bennet 1998; Ostwald, 1997). However as Merlyna Lim highlights blatantly; "Social media is [before all else] social" (2014, 56). Social media networks and online spaces they present, online agoras, do not inherently spark political participation, this engagement with the politics consists only a part of the online communication taking place within these platforms.

For instance; none of the top 10 popular topics (Top Trends) in one of the most popular SNS, Twitter, during 2012 and 2011 were political in terms of their content (Fuchs,2014 : 190,191) whereas these years were when the protests in Egypt against Mubarak regime and Occupy Wall street protests took place. Even though these events strengthen the perception of social media as a "new democratic platform" and drew applause from various scholar and writers (Shirky, 2011; Mason, 2012; Ghonim, 2012) in terms of how it was utilized during these protests, political context only constitute a small portion of all the communication took place within SNS.

Generating civic spaces where political discussions can take place should not be taken granted for SNS platforms, let alone utilizing these platforms as public spheres where people can engage with rational, meaningful public debates (Lim and Kann, 2008). What can be asserted though, about these new platforms is that; these communication hubs, online agoras habited by users, can assembly previously "unlinked" individuals together through online platforms such as SNS with mass-self communication that favors multi-modal, horizontal communication among users. As also observed in contemporary social movements such as Arab Spring, 15M, occupy Wall Street and Gezi Protests, in seldom circumstances such as during social movements; the co-ordination of these online platforms also have the

potential of transforming these already linked individuals into masses with political purposes (Castells, 2012; Rheingold, 2002; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002; Bennet, 2003; Shirky, 2011; Mason, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Lim, 2014). However the efficiency of these online masses, the credibility of online political activism and the role of cyber networks within these global protests is still a contested debate zone. Malleability and the reliability of SNS and web 2.0 rekindled some of the old discussions regarding the role of internet in contemporary society as well as created new opposition as to SNS's usage during protest times. These arguments revolve around the argument that whether these platforms, by themselves, are "Protest Friendly" online spaces that bring revolutionary methods for oppositional movements, or "Potentially harmful" platforms that sparks false hopes among protesters.

2.3. Protest Friendly SNS

Within scholarly debates regarding the emerging SNS platforms, some of the arguments were parallel at the core with their predecessors that; whether these new platforms could deliver a democratic gathering place for users where they can share their thoughts on various issues such as politics without any intervention or censorship (Downey and Fenton, 2003; Neumayer and Raffl, 2008). It was argued that; SNS like Facebook and Twitter were far more suitable for political communication than traditional mass media due to their design, which favors subscribers' content contribution to the platform, even though not everyone has the privilege of "accessing internet" yet, especially in developing countries such as Egypt or Turkey (Neumayer and Raffl, 2008). As mentioned previously, the

participatory dynamics of SNS networks favor user contribution and content rather than a centralized institution that produces all the content and distributes it like in traditional mass media. As a result, personalized politics through mass self-communication harbors the potential for every user to express their opinion regarding any issue with potentially a global audience.

However what carried these arguments one step ahead with the web 2.0 was the inquiry that; could these new online platforms, like SNSs such as Twitter, have the potential to be actively used in or kick-start social protests? Several scholars concur with these suggestions and accept that internet had now revolutionized political participation to a point that protests can be launched, spread and sustained through online platforms which became the most essential tool for communication among protesters (Shirky, 2008, 2011; Vargas, 2012; Ghonim, 2012; Pfeille, 2009; Mason, 2012).

The claims that are most common among this circle of scholars are; A) internet, especially social media has now enabled individuals to know a lot more about "what's going" around them, especially through the usage of SNS like Facebook and Twitter (Mason, 2012; Shirky, 2008,2011) and B) that the more people know about what's going on around them such as; the injustice and corruption of a government (as in the case with Arab spring and Gezi Movement), they are far more likely to gush out on the streets for protesting the injustice they have mostly learnt thanks to the information platforms that are serviced by internet (Shirky, 2008; Vargas, 2012; Ghonim, 2012). Zilber emphasis the importance of these online information exchange platforms by claiming that ; "With the inevitable regime crackdown on the international press, the place of traditional print and television

reporting has shifted overwhelmingly to new media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and other similar peer-to-peer social networking sites."(2009). Since both 2009 Iran and 2011 Egyptian uprisings took place under authoritarian regimes which allegedly had the power to censor traditional mass media thus preventing them from covering the protests in news bulletins, the importance of SNS platforms with their potential to disseminate information among citizens without a governmental censorship appeared as a game changer for protests (Shirky, 2009, 2011; Zilber, 2009). Shirky further suggested that the authoritarian governments would face with a "conservative dilemma" (2011) with the SNS platforms if they desired to censor or ban these platforms. Authoritarian governments could indeed prefer to restrict access to SNS platforms or censor some of the content within these online spaces since exchange of information within them which could potentially breed different points of views regarding various political issues, may contrast with the government's official demeanor about same political issues. To fight against the forming of oppositional voices to its authority, the oppressive government had two choices according to "conservative dilemma". The government could start its own propaganda against these oppositional voices, lower their credibility thus invalidates these groups' concerns and demands. This however would be a costly, long term operation since it would require the production of a set of pro- government discourses and critics, public figures to carry them forward. The easier way to oppress these voices could be censoring or banning these platforms where oppositional voices are raising from (Shirky, 2011) just like censoring the main stream media channels such as television and newspapers. The downside of this approach is that it could potentially damage the economy of the government massively since shutting down internet in a global age, as we are living in, could

damage the economy of a state massively. During Egyptian revolution in 2011, government stopped the %90 of internet activity for five days to prevent protests to spread even wider. This however had cost the Egyptian economy an amount of 90 Million $ in just five days which roughly equals to %4 of Egypt's annual income (Castells, 2012; 65). In other words, both of these options that governments could take during protests against their regimes may not be completely effective on the citizens whom they were exercised upon and could also cost substainally for the state.

To clarify the "conservative dilemma" with an example; during the Gezi protests that took place in Turkey during the summer of 2013, majority of the mass media platforms such as newspapers and television channels were highly criticized by protesters due to their "lack of interest" with the protests (Ozbilgin And Burch, 2013). To learn about "what was going on" in Turkey, millions of citizens turned to alternative platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or Ustream where people could broadcast what was going on around them online through their cell phones or other mobile devices (Gunes, 2013). Government officials also took notice of this flow of information and did blame Twitter for spouting propaganda resources and lies during these protests and threatened to ban it for good.

Besides this, political government figures such as Prime Minister or the Mayor of Ankara (Turkey's capital city) personally started a smearing campaign against the protesters, revealing the activists' "shady", subtle allegiances with exterior powers and their "detest" against Turkey's "unstoppable "raise in power. Various stories about the" deviancy" of the protesters were revealed to public by government officials channels through both mass media channels like television stations and

SNS platforms like Twitter. This propaganda campaign included accusations against protesters such as; the allegiance of protesters with an international "interest lobby" which would profit massively from the economical downfall of Turkey (Hurriyet Daily News, 2013a) and the alleged harassment of a turbaned mother and her child in Kabatas pier by a group of protester even though there was no video footage of such action or witness testimonies that could support such claim (Aygun, 2014). The propaganda against the protesters did aim to marginalize the protesters thus as depicting them as deviant and marginalized individuals and thus invalidating their concern and demands. However as this smearing campaign did manage to create an oppositional voice against the Gezi protesters among the nation, it also further divided the nation in two as pro-Government and pro-Gezi fractions (Treynor and Letsch, 2013). This division was visible through the debates and arguments took place on online platforms as well as with street confrontations between sides during Gezi protests.

As Shirky suggests with "conservative dilemma" paradox, actions taken by the government of Turkey during nationwide protests, whether exercising cencorship on media or de-grading the concerns and profiles of the protesters, could not annihilate the oppositional voices altogether. As more and more citizens turned to online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, the more they were exposed to different oppositional voices that did contrasted with the official government discourse, its' take on the protests. As people now had an access to multiple sources of information coming from the streets directly and believed to be uncensored, they would be more likely to participate in the protests taking place in their countries.

Scholars and authors who expected emancipatory results from the usage of SNS, especially in environments where an oppressive government is present, believed the knowledge, knowing about an injustice though online platforms, would give birth to protests on the streets (Gerbaudo, 2012: 7). Mark Pfeifle even took one step forward in holding SNS in high regard when arguing its potential for evoking protests and nominated Twitter for a Nobel Prize in 2009. He explained his reasoning briefly as; "Twitter has been criticized as a time-waster – a way for people to inform their friends about the minutiae of their lives, 140 characters at a time. But in the past month, 140 characters were enough to shine a light on Iranian oppression and elevate Twitter to the level of change agent" (2009). Here Pfeifle gives a brief idea about the techno-optimist approach to internet platforms that are introduced with web 2.0 like Twitter. In accordance to Pfeifle, even though these SNS platforms may appear as simple transmitters of mundane, everyday practices, they could also serve to a higher purpose when the times comes, such as during occupy movements and protests.

2.4. Weak ties and "False" Hopes

As a result with this sanguine perspective of internet and SNS, a group of scholars criticizing the techno-optimists were now even more skeptical with the potential of the internet as a democratic platform and as a space where oppositional movements can be created or be let to foster. This techno-pessimistic approach against the online platforms' "emancipatory" potentials were grounded on the assumptions that; A) online users' weak ties among themselves or for the political goals they appear to be rooting for are not durable enough to give birth to a political movement and B)

these online platforms' "untrustworthiness", that is being vulnerable to surveillance by the state or to be exploited by companies which aim for financial profits (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009, 2011; Dean, 2005; Levin, 2014; Fuchs,2007, 2014).

One of the main arguments of scholars, who approached social media's role in contemporary politics dubiously, is based on the" weak-links" that are established among online users (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov; 2009, 2011). These weak links, established through online platforms such as SNS, lack the dedication and the sense of "comradeship" among protesters which could be only established through street protests since these kinds of demonstrations require much more commitment by the participants (Gladwell, 2010). As one of the leading thinkers among scholars questioning the potentials of SNS, Malcolm Gladwell argues that online activism which requires little commitment by its participants, such as joining a Facebook group or "re-tweeting" a Twitter message, cannot give birth to revolutionary movements such as Greensboro sit-ins that took place in USA in 1960 against racial discriminations of Afro-American citizens (Gladwell, 2010). Gladwell asserts that civil-rights movements such as Greensboro sit-ins did not required an online network or SNS to be successful; on the contrary, they could be successful exactly because they did not rely on online activism which could "banalize" these protests.

The term "Slacktivism" has been coined into literature to define contemporary online activism as Morozov states rather satirically; "Slacktivism" is an apt term to describe feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact. It gives those who participate in "slacktivist" campaigns an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook

group. “Remember that online petition that you signed and forwarded to your entire contacts list? That was probably an act of slacktivism...”(Morozov, 2009). Here the online activism is described as the kind of political activism with almost no social impact on society but rather it is aimed towards the individual to feel “connected” to a cause, from a safe distance. In other words, against the claims of techno-optimist perception of internet, a techno-pessimist perspective would deduct that; as citizens know more about an injustice taking place in their country and even if they become a part of an online activism against this injustice, this information does not directly transforms into street protest.

Indeed, a study done by David Levin and Sigal Barak Brandes on Teenage girls between the age of 12 and 18 who are active social media users showed that the online activists may tend to have a short attention span and commitment to the political agenda they are rooting for (2014). Levin reports that even though acts such as “joining a Facebook group” or following a political account on Twitter did made these subjects feel like they were a part of a protesting community, they were quickly distracted and lost focus after they felt “involved” enough. (Levin, 2014: 351) Simple and little time-consuming online activities, can work to relieve the guilt of being apathetic and feeling politically involved for a small cost (Dean, 2005). The “false hope” that is being sparkled here, in accordance with a techno-pessimist perspective on online activism, is that these online activisms could lead to a significant change in society whereas in reality it serves little towards such a change with such little effort.

Morozov believed that the SNS networks such as Facebook and Twitter could only be useful if “committed activists who are risking their lives on a daily basis in

opposition to the regime ... use those platforms to further their existing ends." (2011: 186) He suggests that, as similar with Gladwell, the offline protests such as massive sit-ins or marches are far superior to their online counterpart i.e. online activism due to formers' participants' commitment to the political cause. Both Gladwell and Morozov suggests that this commitment is apparent in offline political protests as these actions are considered to be "high risk" (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011; 185-198) activities that carry the danger of protesters getting incarcerated or even suffering physical damage due to clashes with the oppositional groups or armed forces. Against the claims of Techno-optimists such as Clay Shirky, who believes online activism, the online communication among peers regarding a political issue could gave birth to social movements, techno- pessimists such as Gladwell and Morozov assert that the necessary condition for any social movement to succeed is offline protests which should took place prior to online activism.

Furthermore, what is being celebrated by scholars such as Shirky and Castells; the horizontal links among activists in online communication platforms which enable every user to raise their voice (Castells, 2007: 246; Shirky, 2011) through many to many communication and thus empowering every social actor in an online network, is seen as a disadvantage from the techno-pessimist point of view. It is argued that, a strong, organized hierarchy can nurture strong links among protesters which could encourage them to take "high-risk" actions in which protesters would be "ready to die or go to prison if the circumstances so require" (Morozov, 2011:198). This commitment, established through offline protests, is rendered essential when a social movement aims to take on a powerful organization, such as governments (Gladwell, 2011). Since these oppositional movements are faced with very well organized

hierarchal institutions, “messy networks” with their weak ties among participants, lacking a central command based on hierarchical chain of command could not prevail against them (Gladwell, 2011).

Another cardinal issue the techno pessimist approach concerned about is the assertion that SNS platforms vulnerability against surveillance and exploitation by governments and private companies (Morozov, 2011, 2009; Fuchs, 2014; Fenton and Barassi, 2011). Fuchs suggests that surveillance on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are “the surveillance of prosumers” (2014: 169), the subscribers who constantly shares user-generated content. This content is later gathered and analyzed by third-party advertising companies who in turn use this data to profile a consumer profile. Social media companies such as Facebook gathers massive amount of income through sharing this data with interested third-party companies (Fuchs, 2014: 154- 156). Fuchs further defines this mechanism satirically, with re- defining Manuel Castells’ terms as: “Mass self-surveillance is the shadow side of mass self-communication” (Fuchs, 2014:164). In accordance with Fuchs, as SNS platforms ever encourage user generated content, they are tapping into a constantly working consumer survey machine which runs by volunteered users. As users share more of their ideas, their concerns or their artistic works, they are voluntarily surrendering their preferences on various issues which are then turned into user-specific advertisements.

There is however another kind of surveillance can be done with online gathering places like SNS, which is presumably far more dangerous for online activists. This kind of surveillance on SNS were done by government agencies, aiming to put online activists under threat of getting incarnated due to their online activity and/or

suppress a fostering oppositional movement before it can be spread through online channels (Morozov, 2011). Morozov suggests that;

While it is tempting to encourage everyone to flock to social networking sites and blogs to avoid the control of the censors, it would also play into the hands of those in charge of surveillance and propaganda. The more connections between activists it can identify, the better for the government, while the more trust users have in blogs and social networks, the easier it is to use those networks to promote carefully disguised government messages and boost the propaganda apparatus. (83)

One of the major downsides of using SNS during protests is also seen as one of its most appraised features. Within these platforms, connecting with one another user and spreading any kind of content is easier than it ever was. According to Morozov, since a multitude of users are connected to each other in these online communication platforms, where users can stay anonymous without revealing their identities, it would be easy to penetrate this web of online activists. Furthermore, government agencies that became familiar with SNS platforms could launch their own online campaign against the protestors. Such incidents when government figures launched an "online war" against protesters through rallying their own supporters were seen during both in Egypt uprising in 2011 (Ghonim, 2012: 69) and Gezi Movement in Turkey. This argument strengthens the techno- pessimist approach to internet and SNS platforms' role during social movements of contemporary world by highlighting that these platforms are indeed open for anyone regardless of their opinion about the protests. A good online propaganda by government agencies prior the full bloom of a social movement, then, is enough to silence the oppositions' voice thus preventing the protests.

2.5. Techno- Determinism

Bold claims regarding the web 2.0's role in social movements and protests around the World embraced by Techno-optimist scholar and authors, had been countered with equally daring and generalizing responses from Techno-pessimists circles. These oppositions by authors such as Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov were as techno-determinist approaches to the internet as the arguments they were against since all shared the same tendencies when evaluating the internet and SNS's role during protests and political movements. Whereas Shirky and other techno optimist scholars believed SNS are inherently suitable for protests and social movements due to their participatory nature, their opposition lead by Gladwell and Morozov classified same platforms as "unsuitable" or even "harming" to political movements(Gerbaudo, 2012: 9).

To avoid a techno fetishistic approach to SNS and online sites of political struggle during social movements, a wider perspective regarding the usage of these platforms needs to be embraced. Jeffrey J. Juris explains this problem and defines the new perspective that should be embraced regarding SNS and other internet platforms role during Occupy movements as:

> "…debates between techno-optimists and skeptics are rather beside the point….The important question, then, are precisely how new media matter; how particular new media tools affect emerging forms, participation [matters… and how virtual and physical forms of protest and communication are mutually constitutive" (Juris, 2012: 260).

Instead of expecting revolutionary expectations from these online platforms or shunning them due to their design which enables surveillance of user activity in them, these platforms should be examined due to "their intervention in specific

local geographies of action or their embeddedness in the culture of the social movement adopting them"(Gerbaudo, 2012:5).

One crucial aspect of social movements' adaptation of social media, which is ignored by techno-determinist approaches to these platforms that solely focus on the advantage or disadvantages of these spaces, is the emotional solidarity among protesters and how it is established through online platforms such as SNS. It is through spaces such as these that various oppositional movements can find common grounds since "some form of appeal to collective identity and solidarity is a necessary precondition for the emergence and effectiveness of an oppositional movement "(Rita Felsinki, 1989: 168-169). The importance of this collective identity and emotional solidification during contemporary social movements is stressed by various scholars (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Arora, 2014). It would be beneficial to include the emotional variety and solidarity of users of an online platform which is based on mass communication (Castells, 2009, 2012) and of personalization of politics (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Bennet 2012), that constitute the main features of web 2.0, when evaluating the role and impact of an online platform during social movements.

The emotional solidification and the collective identity of these discontent individuals, however, could not give birth to social movements. Ignoring an offline gathering of these individuals who may constitute a collective identity through online spaces, the movements would lack the magnetic gatherings (Gerbaudo, 2012: 13) that could strengthen the dedication of protesters to the cause. Through these magnetic gatherings that could harbor great emotional attraction encourages the protesters for undertaking "high risk" taking actions such as clashes with the riot

police or massive sit-ins that Gladwell and Morozov see as the essential core of any social movement. These agglutination of online and offline public spaces, the intertwined nature of these two seemingly separate spheres is what the techno-determinist approach to SNS's role in social movements is lacking.

The next chapter will build upon the works of these scholars whom favors a wider perspective on online platforms role in social movements that includes users' interactions with these online platforms more thoroughly. The aim of the third chapter is to define how their work can be appropriated when analyzing the Gezi movement that took place in Turkey during the summer of 2013.

CHAPTER 3

OCCUPATION OF AN ONLINE SPACE

3.1. Logging into the "Gezi Resistance"

In the morning of 31th of May, I have reached out to my smart phone to check the latest news on Gezi Park. I hadn't opened up television, checked any newspapers or looked into online news websites. It was evident from the day before with the scarcity of news about Gezi Park that these sources were less "dependable" when it came to minute-by-minute updates from an anti- government protest due to their editorial process and allegedly being under censorship by the government. This lack of news coverage was not unexpected since the censorship on the media regarding "sensitive" issues is a well-known situation in Turkey (Ozbilgin and Burch, 2013).

I had seen news on Facebook in 30th of May about a protest taking place in Gezi Park and I was curious about it, I wanted a follow-up regarding what it was about. However there was limited news cover of the protests in main stream media. Something was happening out there but the major questions regarding this happening couldn't be answered through regular traditional mass media channels such as television or radio news. The questions about protests such as; "Who were

the protestors?", "How many of them were there?" and "What was their purpose?" were left unanswered by mass media. It was argued that"…all mass media have made accommodations with the Erdogan government"(Tufekci, 2013) thus denying protesters any visibility in mass media was in accordance with governments' policy which was to turn a blind eye to the demonstrations and expecting the nation to do the same.

By sharing this problem of "not getting news from the ground" on Facebook, I almost instantly received an answer regarding an alternative platform for getting inside information about the protests. The news medium that seems to handle this feat was" Twitter" through its various dedicated hashtags to the Gezi park in which every registered user could potentially turn into a citizen journalist (Arda,2014) by sharing news from the protest site, posting links to videos or photos (producing content) or simply commenting on what was going on.

As I logged into my long-forgotten twitter account, I also simultaneously "logged in" to the "Gezi Resistance" for the first time with images, videos, comments and inquiries about the movement filling up my screen one after another. As it turned out, at the early hours of 31th of May, there was a massive police intervention to the Gezi protestors who camped out in the Park through the night. Images depicting; protesters getting beaten up, tents burnt to the ground, riot police using pepper spray in a seemingly non-very-well controlled way, kept piling up in hashtags. The presence of an ever increasing collective voice who called for a gathering in various cities to raise their anger towards government's violent actions was apparent.

To grasp how essential this initial emotional impact was during establishing period of the movement and how this collective emotion was utilized through Twitter and

Facebook; the majority of the active tweeter users (%60) who were involved with Gezi movements in Tweeter, had surfaced in these first few days due to violence occurred through Friday (31th of May) to Monday (3rd of June) (Varol, 2014). The daily overall number of tweets by Turkish tweeter users was approximately between 9-11 million before Gezi protests. In 31th of May the number of tweets exceeded far above 15 Million (Ergurel, 2013). A shared anger, targeted against the police whom seen as an aggressor of an "oppressive" government, had already been established in Twitter hashtags when the nation-wide street protests were still hours ahead.

Even though "the word was on twitter" at that point, what had enabled social media to turn this "online anger" into a series of protests on the street was not only due to the sheer numbers of users or technological abilities of the internet. Gerbaudo proposes that;

> "Facebook messages, tweets and blog posts have constituted not simply channels of information but also crucial emotional conduits through which organizers have condensed individual sentiments of indignation, anger, pride and a sense of shared victimhood and transformed them into political passions driving the process of mobilization. These and other social media have been used to create a sense of commonality among participants essential for the mobilization of a spatially dispersed and socially diverse constituency." (2012;14)

This sense of commonality, emotional conduits between protestors could now be seen on news feeds in Facebook through people sharing Gezi news on virtual walls or torrents of Gezi related tweets under hashtags such as #direngezi, #direnankara, #direnistanbul. Even though the protesters were spatially dispersed as protests were happening in 78 cities out of 81 (Hurriyet Daily News, 2013b) in Turkey during Gezi protests, the sense of commonality and collective identity could be sustained in these online communication platforms.

Online platforms, such as Twitter, were needed to be occupied by protesters just like Zuccotti Park in Occupy, Puerta del sol in 15M and Tahrir in Egypt during Arab Spring and Gezi Park in Gezi movements before they could become the online aspect of the occupy movements. Segerberg and Bennet also remarks social media as a protest space which offers flexible means of joining in to the movement and navigation through the avaible online content (2012). It is through these online protest spaces that a preliminary solidarity among protestors could be established. However it is only after these "online parks" have been occupied and thus could be transformed into the voice of collective emotion and identities of the protestors, that they can become online sites of protests for the movement.

Next section will be analyzing how protestors occupied online and offline public places through "logging in", and how these occupations were actually a "ways of operating" in the pre-designed public places for different purposes (De Certeau, 1984). Through Certeau's notions of "tactic" and "strategies", it is possible to grasp the transformation of a physical location or a virtual platform into to an occupied protest place.

3.2. Tactics of an Occupier

Tactics as they are defined by De Certeau stands for the ingenious or guerilla tactics the weak/ the consumer develop to counter the "proper usage" of a product or a public space that have been determined by authorities or power holding institutions. These tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways of interacting with a product empowers the weak as it poaches on the territory of the strong (1984: xvii). Not

rejecting consuming the designed product, but refusing to internalize the "proper usage" of it thus turning the act of consumption into a dialectic process. Not coming up with an alternative space or product, but utilizing the existent space and products through re-appropriating them through tactics. These tactics are conjured against the strategies that determine the "proper usage" of these spaces.

Strategies are developed and utilized by authorities to define proper usage for each product. These designs determine the "correct" ways of consuming a product or appropriate ways of using a space or platform. For instance, most urban parks are designed mostly for physical activities such as walking (McCormack et al., 2010), outdoor gatherings, providing a playground for infants or sitting on a bench to take a breather. Placing hiking trails, benches, sandboxes, picnic areas are strategies that are developed by the designer of these parks to point out to the appropriate ways of using this public space. These and similar activities taking place in an urban park, which are consisted with their design that is done by a power- holding institution, fall within the definition of the dedicated "proper usage".

As strategy defines these proper usages, it simultaneously draws the line between proper and deviant or marginal usage of these places. Ways of interacting with these platforms which are alien to "proper usage" defined by strategies are labeled as "marginal" or "deviant" by the power holding institutions such as state or private companies. As mentioned above, these marginal ways of interacting with these products are done through tactics devised by the consumers.

The tactics are the ways in which individuals negotiate the ways of consuming the products that strategies had set for them (De Certau, 1984; xix). The individuals manage to navigate their way through strategies that define how they should interact

with the products by not rejecting their presence or rebelling against them openly; yet poaching on the places that strategies have designated for proper use (De Certeau, 1984: xii). During the Occupy protests, the protestors were occupying public square parks, streets and boulevards which were originally designed for public use by the authorities in the first place. In other words, the original purposes of these parks were actually being fulfilled in an altered way during these protests since they were becoming gatherings places of protesters. Individuals were gathering in a public place which was designed principally for social interact between citizens. Occupiers acknowledged the proper ways of using parks and they manipulated it to fit their own needs and agendas.

Protesters escaped the pre-determined, proper use of these squares by introducing a new way of interacting with them. Instead of sitting on a bench, the protestors were camping out in these public gatherings, launching protest marches originating from the park rather than leaving these spaces after a hike, engaging in discussions with political content with total strangers instead of casual conversations with their acquaintances. The" visitors" of the parks had been mostly replaced by occupiers of a public space.

A similar pattern could be observed within online public spaces during occupy movements. Twitter or Facebook or any other SNS platforms were not designed to be used in protest movements. These online spaces were occupied during occupy protests in a very similar fashion with their offline counterparts. As Twitter CEO defined the purpose of Twitter as "instantly connect(ing) people everywhere to what's most important to them "(Barnett) in 2011 , the occupy protests worldwide

were utilizing Twitter exactly for this purpose, staying in touch with the movements and other protestors regardless of their physical locations.

The proper ways of using Twitter were not ignored altogether during Occupy protests, that is "connecting users worldwide in an instant" but it was now utilized to fit the demands of the protestors. The kitten pictures, dinner tables, personal messages about users daily activities were now mostly off limits and replaced with images from the protests areas, collective voices of discontent, discussions on the protests and call for gatherings. As of June 1st, number of the tweets sent in Turkey had reached 27.5 million as 15 million of these tweets were uniquely related with the protests (Ergurel, 2013). Through hashtags such as "DirenGezi," "Direnankara","OccupyGezi", protestors were able to maintain a continuous flow of content production and distribution by occupying the "topic" of the social media platforms thus gaining a high visibility and occupying themselves an online place. This occupied online space would enable them to renew the online resources that are needed to maintain the emotional intensity among protestors as Gerbaudo (2012) and Castells (2012) see as an essential component of occupy movements.

These protestors operated within the technical capacity of the website and were using the "default" mechanics of the Twitter during their occupation of the platform. The shared anger and the collective identity, "Gezici", that protestors could muster themselves under, were all expressed and shared through Twitters basic "hashtag" system[6]. Protestors did not launch a cyber-attack on the social media websites, like the infamous hacker group anonymous could have done, but rather they appropriated the already established system for their needs. Through occupation,

[6] The # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages.

which is a tactic to topple with power holding institutions' dominance over platforms, the SNS platforms became "habitable" (Manovich, 2009: 322) zones for the protestors. Protesters develop "potentially subversive tactics to move around the edges of corporate defined information-communication spaces" (Hopke, 2012: 6) like Twitter.

Occupiers whether they were in offline or online public squares, occupying both of them respectively, were not creating a new public place but rather they were using, manipulating these spaces, introducing news ways of operating within them (De Certau, 1984: 30). The "others", since "others" are the ones who did not obey the proper use of these places as they were determined by strategies/authorities and thus are excluded, can poach on these places and suspend the proper use for a period of time. The power of creating a "proper" space that is permanent still rests in the monopoly of the authority. Against tactics, strategies have the power to conjure a strategy to create a proper place and ways of operating within that place and unlike tactics, can hold on to this created place, use it as a base to further widen its influence.

> "The "proper" is a triumph of place over time. It allows one to capitalize acquire advantages, to prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances. It is a mastery of time through the foundation of an autonomous place." (1984: 37)

The occupied online platforms, just like their offline counter-parts such as parks, will be eventually forced to dissolve their control over these spaces in favor of the power-holding institutions. The consumer or the" other" in other words, cannot sustain its grip on the permanent, "proper" places which were designed by power holding institutions in the first place but could only introduce news ways of operating within them for a limited time.

Lacking a base, a permanent ground to keep what it has achieved, tactics depend on time, watching for opportunities as they appear. (De Certau, 1984: xix). These events and opportunities for tactics to manifest themselves during Gezi protests can be; the police intervention to Gezi Park, the brutal treatment of the protesters by government forces, the popular use of SNS with its ability of mass communication (Castells, 2009, 2012) and personalized politics (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Bennet 2012), the built up anger of certain groups in Turkey against the government's authoritarian regime. These events sparked a collective anger against government which has its roots planted prior to Gezi movement. The SNS platforms on the other hand, enabled this anger to be shared and be formed under an online roof thus have laid the foundations of a new wave of resistance movement in Turkey. Together, these events and contemporary technologies such as SNS platforms introduced by Web 2.0 had enabled various tactics that occupied both online and offline spaces.

3.3. The Occupied "Spaces"

The "spaces" that were being occupied during Occupy movements in both offline and online spheres are intertwined platforms and only through linking these spaces, as various scholars suggest, can lead to a globally recognized, borderless occupy movement (Lim, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012; Castells, 2012). However far before the occupy movements, the importance of the Space in politics and especially as sites of protests were argued among scholarly circles. As a social construct that is regulated through material relationships, a signifier of a hierarchal power that rests its legitimacy in the history that the constructed space contains, the space was

accepted as more than an empty zone. As a spatial platform where class structures and conflicts could be seen, a "space … fragmented into parcels, homogenized into discrete commodities, organized into the locations of control" (Soja, 1980) embodies the complex relationships between different strata in a community. In this sense it can be agreed that; the strategies of power holding institutions were used to "parcel" the space, regulate it in accordance with the hierarchal power it manifests, making the segregation visible among different segments.

As one of the leading scholars in Spatial analyze and socio-spatial dialectics Edward W. Soja defines space as a socially constructed product that is heavily regulated by advanced capitalism where capitalist materialism not only visible but also keeps on re-producing/ re- articulating itself thus constantly shaping social and spatial division of labor simultaneously. (1980). He even further suggests that for a revolutionary movement by the proletariat to succeed, an occupation of these spaces are essential since it is through these socially constructed products that capitalism can manifest and sustain itself i.e. by organizing and regulating suburban areas where the labor resides in the modern city. These suburban places where manual laborers and their families reside are socially constructed spaces that signify an ever expanding city's requirement of labor power and the desire to separate these individuals from the city life of that of bourgeoisie.

The occupation of Spaces that were constructed and regulated by higher powers such as governments or profit driven companies like Twitter are a critical part of contemporary protest movements. By depriving a space from its original purpose that serves these higher powers whether for financial profit or exercising political power through it, the protesters could utilize these occupied platforms for different

purposes such as challenging the status quo. What better way can be adopted to challenge this status quo then occupying a public space that signifies this hierarchy in an everyday basis, and deny the embedded rules in it (Öztoprak and Dursun). The occupation of both offline and online public spaces, such as urban parks and SNS platforms, shows similarity in this fashion that both were designed by power holding institutions for various purposes but they could also be appropriated by protesters as new sites of protest and resistance (Arora, 2014:2).

Within his socio-spatial analyze of Space as a construct, Soja frequently cites from another well-known scholar, Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre also introduces space into the political debates as a contested construct that is; subject to spatial/territorial conflicts and as a platform where class relationships/conflicts are visible (Soja, 1980). Developing a ground for further socio-spatial discussions that Soja and many other scholars such as Manuel Castells and David Harvey can benefit and built upon; Lefebvre redefines space as a political actor rather than an empty zone that waits to be filled by an ideology i.e. by a capitalist agenda (Lefebvre, 1976).

However what shows even greater parallelism between occupy movements and Lefebvre's spatial analyses that suggests "The occupation of the spaces to challenge the dominant ideology for a revolutionary movement", is his concept of "Carnival" or "la fete" that he coins in the literature in the early 20th century. Lefebvre defines the carnival/festival as; "Festival differs from everyday life only in the explosion of forces which had been slowly accumulated in and via everyday itself" (Lefebvre, 1991: 202). This definition of carnival reveals that, a carnival, a revolutionary movement is an end product of an already present tension, an emotion. The birth of occupy movements such as Gezi movement, along with Egypt Uprising, 15M and

Occupy Wall Street are due to this explosion of forces which were accumulated over time. In the case of Gezi, this accumulated emotion was the shared discontent of living under an authoritarian government (Uras, 2013).

Carnivals reconfigure the daily life and during these moments of carnivals; the daily routines, every day practices are disturbed, revealing what lies underneath them which is a revolutionary potential to transform the everyday life (Highmore, 2002). It is during these carnivalistic moments that the creativity of humans finds ways to express themselves, released from the drudgery of every day practices. The concept of "creativity" or "satirist" attitude of occupy movements are frequently mentioned during various occupy movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Gezi Park (Beucke, 2011; Yalcıntas, 2015; Mumyakmaz, 2013). It is through this creativity of the protesters, that an oppositional movement could be born. Robert Stam also emphasize this revolutionary aspect of Carnivals as:

> "Carnival, in our sense, is more than a party or a festival: it is the oppositional culture of the oppressed…not the mere disruption of etiquette but a symbolic, anticipatory overthrow of oppressive social structures…the joyful affirmation of change, a dress rehearsal for utopia." (Stam, 1989; 95)

The shared dreams of a utopian community could be practiced to a certain degree within occupied places where emotional proximity and collective identity among protesters manifested itself physically in offline spaces. By denying the use of currency to purchase services and products such as books, rations, beverages, movie screenings, free lectures on various topics, the Gezi Park became an oppositional experience where capitalist rules of exchange temporarily ceased to exit (Gambetti, 2014: 93; Turgut, 2013). This offline experience could also be channelized through occupied online spaces, maintaining a constant state of "being in touch" and "connected" among protesters.

3.4. The Revolution won't be Tweeted, It is Live!

At this juncture it would prove essential to mention that I do not perceive social media or any other online platform as a substitute for offline platforms as sites of protests. The power of Occupy movements can only manifest itself through a close linkage of online and offline protest areas, hubs, centers of gatherings. As for instance; it would be analytically limited to accept online platforms as "failed" substitutes to offline public spaces which have been deprived of their utility as public gathering places in contemporary societies (Bauman, 2000). However the tendency to "simplify" the movement to one of the mediums it utilizes, even though it is a crucial medium for the movement, would also prove to be equally limiting since a techno-optimist perspective such as this would lead to a fetishistic perception of social medium as a genuine "protest medium" as if it's designed purpose was to be utilized during protests, political movements (Juris, 2012, Gerbaudo, 2012). Number of authors even perceived social media as potential "weapons, social instruments" that can change the tides across the World as it was suggested by Payack and Peters in The Hill; "We should keep this in mind and not dismiss social media as a passing fad for the young and foolish, but rather as new tools, new social instruments, or even strategic weapons that can, will and are having societal and strategic influences around the globe today" (2012).

However, Twitter or any other social networking sites are not weapons or tools that could rally a political action miraculously by themselves. Castells asserts that: "The Internet is a particularly malleable technology, susceptible to being deeply modified by its social practice and leading to a whole range of potential social outcomes" (2001:5). I concur that these platforms gain various properties in accordance with

how the users interact with them and how they establish a link between "tweets" and the streets. These online platforms are not designed by their creators to be utilized during protests or simply to assist any political movement. Social media platforms, as the name explicitly announces, are media platforms that are under the constant watch of their creators for any angle that can be used for financial profit.

Fenton and Barassi emphasizes that"...user activity is captured by and used for corporate gain. We are excessively and ever more deeply commodified as so much more of our daily habits and rituals take an informational technology form (Fenton and Barassi, 2011: 192). This issue of ownership however does not negate these platforms role during social upheavals as we have seen during Arab Spring and up until Gezi protests in 2013. Similar with Fenton and Barassi, Mozorov also questions the "revolutionary" perception of social networking sites especially by the Western Media and remarks that these platforms are designed for entertainment and personal, daily usage not for revolutionary discourses (2011).

As mentioned previously, social networking sites are online parks, squares, public platforms which are "designed" by corporations for daily social interaction among their subscribers with a financial agenda. Obviously the contexts of these interactions among users are not necessarily of political nature, on the contrary, most of the interaction took place among users are of non-political nature (Fuchs, 2014: 190,191). Zuckerman argues with his "cute cat theory" that, it is precisely this nature of social media interactions that are seldom of political content that shields these platforms from state censorship (2008). Unlike banning a website, which is a common practice of Turkish government among with SNS surveillance when

confronted with "malicious" content[7], censoring a SNS platform with millions of subscribers is much harder. Even in this case, Turkey's government attempted to censor YouTube numerous times and requested Twitter to remove or censor it's content more than any other government in 2014, the year following Gezi protests (Twitter.com, 2014).

The usage of social media as a vassal for establishing collective identity, creating a sense of solidarity and identification among protesters can only be gained through occupying these online places, using them outside their designed boundaries just like occupying, camping out in a park such as Gezi park. Social networking sites offer a virtual platform for users to interact with one another, however it is up to these users to decide to what end this interaction will lead to. The Twitter's former CEO Dick Costolo also stated this malleability of the platform in 2010 by stating that:

> "It is hard to speak about Twitter's vision without factoring in how much of its purpose has been defined by its users over the years. Users came up with so many parts of the service, such as the 'hashtag' [which allows people to link to a subject or an event] as so many people use it in so many different ways."(2010)

As in case with Gezi and other occupy movements such as occupy Wall street or 15M movement in Spain, the very users of these websites occupied these platforms, hijacked them to be used in social movements. These occupied platforms then used for; becoming constructor of a collective identity, a vessel for emotional reaction to circulate among individuals, a discussion place for Occupy movements' common goal and aim to be announced globally, an instant communication hub for protesters during clashes with the riot police and ultimately linking offline and online sites of

[7] In 2014's" World Press Freedom Index" released by Reporters without borders, Turkey ranked 154rd among 180 countries regarding freedom of information.

protests under one roof, a place. This usage of social medial platforms was the tactics of none other than the users of the platform themselves. The SNS by themselves did not suggested this kind of utilization or constructed with such an agenda in the first place. As parks and other offline public places were transformed into protesting zones, so did their online counterparts through the protesters occupation of these spaces.

3.5. The Mandatory Linkage between Online and Offline

Occupy movements' such as Gezi movement managed to occupy and both online and offline platforms together and establish a link between streets and internet. As mentioned previously the emotional solidification among protesters through shared concerns are an essential component for establishing a collective identity that is needed to muster all protesters under one roof. Under this online roof where there is no central command to steer the direction of the movement, subjectivity and diversity thrives among protesters which enables a "relaxed framing" of the goals of the movement (Della Porta, 2005). This relaxed framing is also reflected in the occupied parks and boulevards since occupied Gezi Park turned into an "empty signifier where:" All sorts of discontent against the growing authoritarianism of the AKP… (Gambetti, 2014: 94)" could be gathered under, be addressed within the movement. The title "Gezici" was connoting more than just the protesters who were against the demolishment of Gezi Park, but anyone who was troubled with at least one aspect of the governments' policies. As SNS platforms became a platform to express messages of discontents, the number of individuals sympathizing with the movement increased. The previously singular voice of the movement, which

protested the demolishment of the park became a polyphonic voice. This polyphonic voice drew attention to concerns of citizens on various issues besides environmental ones such as; interventions to people's life style, against neoliberal economic agenda of the government, minority rights, gender discrimination, censoring of media, police brutality and even against regulations on alcohol consumption (Gambetti, 2014: 94).

Even though a sense of solidarity," comradeship" could be established among protesters through occupied SNS platforms, a physical place was required to link Tweets and the Streets (Gerbaudo, 2012). Here, it is again highlighted that against the techno-determinist approach to SNSs' role in social movements, the real usage and importance of this online medium becomes evident when it is analyzed in accordance with offline occupation of public spaces. Whereas occupation of an online platform can be used to establish a collective identity through emotional solidarity, it also relies on offline protests to sustain this occupation. Only through connecting these online and offline occupied public spaces which"… have become interdependent dimensions of social movements …they can provide 'spaces' for people to interact for the establishment of human agency and the expansion of social networks of the movements" (Lim, 2014: 51).

The protestors establish this link between the on and off public spaces by "logging in" to offline sites of protests in a way that resembles how they can log into their social media accounts. These kinds of assertions are not new in terms of claiming online participation patterns are manifestations of offline protests and are new tools to strengthen influence and power of these physical gatherings (Vissers and Stolle, 2014). However this interaction between online/offline places of protests does not

function in a linear way; that online sites of protest exist and mimic similar patterns to reinforce their offline counterparts, but rather offline ways of operating during protests are also heavily influenced by online sites of protests.

As users log into their account in any social media platform, the duration of their stay, their physical location when logging in, the news and updates that peeked their interest and how they get engaged with these topics are simply at user's leisure. In other words, there is no "correct" way of navigating through avaible content in social media since this process is highly individualized, depending on the user preferences. A similar pattern can be seen when a visitor comes into an occupied park whether it is Zuccotti in Wall Street, Tehran square in Egypt or Gezi Park in Turkey. The ever changing dynamics of occupied parks are similar in the sense that there is more than one point of interest for any visitor. As mentioned above the "relaxed framing" of the goals of the movement is a common feature in both online and offline public places where everyone can bring in something unique and personalize the movement for themselves.

For instance during the occupation of Kugulu Park (The Swan lake) in Ankara during Gezi protests, in which I had the chance to visit occasionally during the protests, there were usually more than one forums targeting various concerns of protesters regarding the policies of the government. As various topics were discussed in these platforms, it became more and more apparent that the movement had started to harbor more than just environmental concerns.

Besides these forums, trademark events of the occupy movements were present in Kugulu Park such as; free libraries, food counters that served free meal, music events, areas dedicated to spiritual needs of the protestors and busy tables for

preparing various bills and posters. For a passerby, there was more than one point of interest in these occupied zones. This pattern of flexible and multiple entry points, navigation through the movement could appear highly familiar to a social media user since the experience each visitor, protestor will get out of from wandering in an offline occupied place would remind him/her a similar experience he could get from navigating in online protest areas such as Twitter. There were multiple hashtags in Twitter that were dedicated to the movement which were addressing various concerns or local sites of protests like; #medyagreve[8], #referandumahayır[9],#Diren Gezi parki, #direnankara[10],#Diren Eskişehir[11], #Polisevinedönsün[12] #bingöldekitecavüzesessizkalma[13],#parklarbizimdir[14](Babaoglan and Banko, 2013). Similar with the offline sites of protests, the subscribers of Twitter could navigate their way through the torrents of messages and context in accordance with the aspect of the movement that they were interested in. The polyphonic voice of the Gezi movement that rises different concerns and sparks various discussions in both online and offline communication hubs had now enabled bounteous attention from different segments of the nation.

3.6. Everywhere a Gezi Park

As mentioned previously, online and offline sites of protests share the same atmosphere which consists horizontal chain of command among participants, multiple points of interest and entry points into the movement and shared emotions among participants that constitutes an essential part of their collective identities.

[8]"Media workers on strike"
[9] "No to a referendum"
[10] Resist Ankara.
[11] Resist Eskişehir.
[12] Police, return your home.
[13] Raise your voice against the Rape incident in Bingol
[14] Parks are ours.

Due to the occupation of social media, the user didn't had to be physically present in the physical location of protests to be able to "log in" in to the same place with other protestors who were camping in offline sites of protests. As a research conducted by Varol, Ferrara, Ogan, Menczer, Flammini regarding the language and location diversity of tweets and content production included in tweets during the onset phase of Gezi protests, it is seen that protest had reached far beyond the boundaries of Turkey and yet users were bounded by an "online" version of Gezi Park (2014). This commonality is apparent with the new lexicon that Gezi protestors conjured by assigning new meanings to both familiar and unfamiliar words. This creation of a shared language, slang, contributed heavily on creating a collective identity which was later named as "Geziciler". Some essential words that this Gezi Lexicon consisted were as follows with the number of times they were mentioned on Twitter between 30.05.2013 and 15.06.2013;

Polis: 8.956.591 Police

Gezi :8.473.164 Gezi

Tayyip: 3.647.085 First name of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Gezi Parkı : 3.568.204

Toma: 1.641.375 Short for Toplumsal Olaylara Mücadele Aracı – the heavily armored vehicle armed by water and tear gas cannons used by the police for riot control

Çapulcu : 1.586.077 Prime Minister Erdogan used the word Çapulcu (looter in English) to name and defame the protestors, which quickly got re-appropriated by the protestors, who then called themselves capulcular (looters).

Biber Gazı :1.438.739 Pepper gas . [15]

This lexicon offered a common ground for the protestors to strengthen their collective identity even further. Through coming up with their own words for defining themselves ("Çapulcu", "Gezici"), naming the opposition they were facing ("Toma", "Tayyip", "Biber Gazi", "Polis"), and their shared goals (Gezi Parkı) the Gezi movement had its own signifiers now. This ever-expanding lexicon which could re-define the connotations of various words, objects, personas in accordance with the mood of the movement, was stored in online occupied spaces. It is through these places that ingredients for constructing a collective identity could spread over the World.

Milan describes these online places where the collective identity and its components are stored and constructed as the "Cloud". In her words cloud is:

> …where a set of ingredients enabling mobilization coexist: identities, narratives, frames and meanings, know-how, and other "soft" resources. They are fundamentally different from the "old" pre-packaged ideals and beliefs soaked in ideology, because they can be customized by and for individuals. Resources are in the cloud to be shared in a 'pick and choose' fashion, allowing each individual to tailor his or her participation. Anyone can join anytime; one can bring along his or her identity, cultural and political background, grievances and claims, and even groups of friends. Anyone fits in the broad narrative of the cloud, anyone can contribute. Identities, resources, narratives are negotiated on and offline, but they mostly "live" online. (Milan, 2011)

Since the crucial materials for constructing a collective identity is stored in an online, easy-to-access platform such as Twitter, which could store the ever expanding context of the movement, an online version of Gezi Park is avaible for "peeking in" for any curious wanderer. It is through this online place that many protestors felt connected to the Gezi protests even though they were unable to attend

[15]Statistics gained from Varnali, K., & Gorgulu, V. (2015). A social influence perspective on expressive political participation in Twitter: the case of# OccupyGezi.

any protests in Istanbul or even in Turkey. The collective identity and the emotional connection among protestors that gives birth to Gezi protests were avaible online, stored in the cloud as Milan names these platforms. Protestors could then utilize their own focal points, physical gathering places, in their local environments both in Turkey and abroad by channelizing the collective identity stored in online occupied spaces. As a protestor in Istanbul announced during a police raid on occupied Gezi Park; "Prime Minister did not kick us out of the park, he made everywhere a Gezi Park"(Tahaoğlu and Yöney, 2013).

Social media had enabled Gezi Park (an offline focal point of the movement) to turn "on", becoming an online place that anyone can camp out, occupy, log in regardless of their physical locations thus becoming accessible everywhere. Geziciler" were both in online and offline public places, occupying them both with torrents of events, news, discussions and content. These public places in return were attracting more and more curious visitors every day for weeks before riot police dispersed all occupied parks in nationwide in mid-June simultaneously. Following the dispersion, Gezi protestors' grasp on social media started to fluctuate due to an ever raising online opposition for the dominance of social media.

CHAPTER 4

THE TWITTER WARS

4.1. "We Invite Everyone to Stand Against"

The first tweet regarding the Gezi Park's demolishment and a call for action was allegedly posted in 27th of May by Twitter account "Ahmet Saymadi", 4 days before the nationwide protests started.[16][17]

Although this particular Tweet was moderately well spread in the user's social network, with 283 retweets by its followers, the peak of activity in social media

[16] "Construction machines are entering the Gezi Park from the direction of Divan Hotel. We invite everyone to stand against the Demolishment of Gezi Park."

[17] This topic was also discussed in Eksisozluk.com, an online Turkish wiki website under the title "gezi direnişine ait ilk Tweet". Even though the journey to find "first Tweet about Gezi" is rather a dubious effort due to these posts not being send under an hashtag, thus hardly traceable, this Tweet by "Ahmet Saymadi" is nonetheless one of the first posts about the demolishment of Gezi Park and the protest against it in Twitter.

regarding Gezi movement was still 5 days ahead of the time it was posted. Even though the bulk of the protest were still yet to come, when the main focus of the movement would shift from preservation of a green area in Istanbul to anti-government protests due to violent clashes with police, the news of the demolishment of Gezi Park still drew significant attention.

Gezi park and other various structures and public spaces were seen as an indicator of the transition between Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic that took place in early 20th century (Gül Et al. ,2014). According to this understanding; Gezi Park which was constructed during the early stages of Turkish Republic had signified the modern, secular and westernized face of the country where mixed gender gathering platforms were acceptable. On the other hand, public spaces such as Gezi Park were problematic to the conservative side of the country even before the AKP regime. Necmettin Erbakan, a former prime minister and predecessor of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in many aspects[18], had made clear seven years before AKP came to power in 2002 that Gezi Park should be "remade". Erbakan announced in 1995 that he would like to replace the park with a mosque and then rebuilt the park around it. His decision was supported by the mayor of Istanbul at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Yilmaz, 1995).

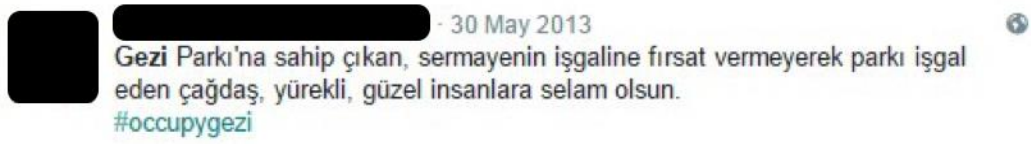
Even though the demolishment of Gezi Park could not be done in 1995, it was put back on the agenda in 2013 by Erdogan government. Erdogan announced in 2013 that the Gezi Park would be replaced by a resurrection of an historical military building from 19th century, a tribute to the Ottoman Empire's legacy, which would

[18] The close connection between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Erbakan's s conservative and politically right wing oriented political party (Refah Partisi) is well known as Erdoğan was elected the mayor of Istanbu in 1994 through the support of Erbakan.

be companied by a shopping mall (Cheterian, 2013). Besides replacing Gezi Park (symbolizing the secular Republic of Turkey) with Artillery Barracks (embodiment of the conservative, Islamic Ottoman Empire) and the stark contrast this transition presents, the construction of a shopping mall also attracted negative criticism to the project (Harmanşah, 2014; Iğsız, 2014). The rapid privatizations of the previously state controlled public spaces were seen as the result of an excessively neoliberal economic agenda, led by the AKP (Harmanşah, 2014: 123).

As seen in the Tweet below by "Otekilerin Postasi", a popular Facebook group[19] , the project of replacing Gezi Park with military barracks was seen as an excuse to profit from this transaction through constructing a mall along with the barracks.

[20]



[21]

The environmental concerns regarding the rapid loss of public spaces for the sake of privatization and the fear that the AKP regime is distancing Turkey from the

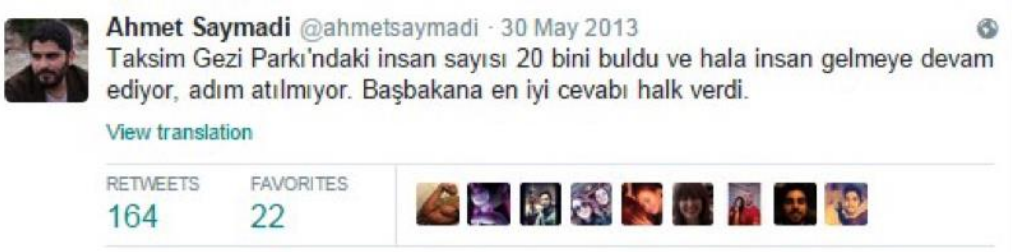
[19] As of 16.04.2015, "Otekilerin Postasi" is a well known anti-government facebook group with more than 160.000 followers

[20] "The construction of artillery Barracks is just an excuse to profit from the destruction of Gezi Park. "

[21] "I greet every modern, courageous and decent people who stand against the construction of Gezi Park for profit."

secularism and westernization (Bilefsky, 2011), had both became prominent issues that are raised in both SNS and Gezi Park. The struggle to save a green area in Taksim had begun to turn into an oppositional political movement, as the demolishment of Gezi Park meant more than just the loss of a forested public space.

The Twitter account of Ahmet Saymadi also expressed how the protesters opposition to the destruction of Gezi Park was a direct rebellion against Prime Minister's policies i.e. AKP regime.



[22]

As it is evident with the following tweets; the attention of the protestors both in Gezi Park and in SNS platforms were focused on the preservation of the Gezi Park during this time period. Even though there were occasional clashes with the police forces, antagonism against police and government was still secondary to the environmental concerns. Nonetheless it is evident that a collective identity was assembling among protesters; a common concern, the demolishment of Gezi Park, had linked various individuals together for standing against a power holding institution's demands. Protesters were already giving out the messages of solidarity among themselves at this early phase of the protests.

[22] "There are now 20 thousand people in the park are more are joining us by the minute. The citizens are giving their answers to Prime Minister's intention of demolishing Gezi."

[23]

[24]

Ironically it wasn't entirely due to the online activity of sympathizers or the initial intention of the protesters who camped out in Gezi Park to prevent the demolishment of it that caused the nationwide protests. It was the heavy police intervention to these protesters in Gezi Park and how the photos, comments and videos circulated in SNS platforms during this intervention that had transformed the protests into the Gezi movement that affected the whole country. Especially after the brutal police intervention to the protesters located in Gezi Park in 30th and 31st of May, the online material that would have later constituted the "cloud" (Milan, 2012) had started to appear. It would be through this cloud of online material; photos and videos depicting police violence, the gathering of masses to protests the government, the mottos, manifesto and catch phrases of the protest and these materials' circulation on digital networks on SNS platforms, an emotional

[23] "The human forest is resisting for the trees."
[24] "We are defending our very right of "living". We are defending every creature's right to live as well as ours".

solidification and a collective identity could be established among the sympathizers of the movement.

One of the most well-known images of the Gezi movement, the "woman in red" had emerged during these early days of protests. Taken by Osman Orsal for the Reuters in 28th of May in Gezi Park, the photograph depicts a young woman in a red dress being exposed to tear gas from a very close range by a police officer (Hudson, 2013).

[25]

This image would later become one of the first embodiments of the passive resistance attitude embraced by the protesters against physical violence. As the clashes with the riot police escalated, especially following the dispersion of

[25] "The police intervention to protesters opposing the demolishment of Gezi Park."

occupiers in Gezi Park after the 31st of May, the usage of images such as "woman in red" where police violence against protesters is depicted clearly, were widely circulated in SNS platforms

Even at this early phase, Gezi Park had started to transform from a green space in danger of demolishment, to a magnetic gathering place (Gerbaudo, 2012) where offline occupation of an public space was accompanied by online solidarity messages sweeping through SNS, giving birth to a social centrality.

[26]

As a result of these convergences of offline and online platforms, a sense of togetherness had started to form between individuals.

4.2. The Police are In the Gezi Park

One of the earliest surveys conducted for unearthing answers to questions such as "Who were the Gezi protesters? "And "Why were they on the streets and on SNS platforms, what were they protesting?" was done by Esra Ercan Bilgiç and Zehra Kafkaslı between 3rd and 4th of June. Even though the authors acknowledge that this was only a preliminary research on the Gezi movement (2013: 6), with 3008 participants whom %70 of located within the occupied Gezi Park, and yet to come up with conclusive answers, the survey still manages to give an insight about the

[26] "Thank you for bringing us altogether. We really needed this. We are now all together."

protesters and their concerns. According to the survey; %91.4[27] of the citizens who had sympathized with the protests were got involved because of the police violence against the protesters whereas the demolishment of Gezi park scored lower regarding the reasons why protesters got involved with the protests (Bilgiç and Kafkaslı, 2013). The issues such as;" censorship on mass media channels", "Prime Minister's authoritarian regime", and "fear that certain life style and democratic rights are under threat with AKP regime" were also significant grounds for various citizens to sympathize with Gezi movement as it is reported in survey results.

In coherent with Bilgiç and Kafkaslı's research, another survey also pointed out the importance of the police intervention to the Gezi Park and how it escalated the protests. According to the analysis by Konda, a well-known Research and consultancy company in Turkey, derived from a survey conducted all across Turkey in June 6th with 4411 respondents, the majority of people in Turkey believed that it was the clashes with the riot police that had a negative effect on soothing down the protests and instead further escalated them (Konda, 2013). Survey further reinforces the idea that the prime Minister's harsh attitude had been perceived as problematic by many protesters.

In rhyme with these results, it is safe to assume that the collective emotional response to the police intervention to the protesters in Gezi Park, companied by the Prime Minister's attitude when addressing the protests, had caused most of the stand-byers to turn into sympathizers with the movement if not to protesters. The scope of the political movement shifts afterwards 31st of May with the police intervention to the park. The preliminary concerns rose during the first few days of

[27] %97 including the respondents who answered "why you got involved with the protests?" survey questions as "somewhat agree".

protests; environmental worries regarding the destruction of a green area companied by the fear of rapid commercialization of urban spaces, had now became part of a wider collection of voices of discontent, mostly focused on police violence. The preliminary fear of AKP regime becoming more authoritarian, on the other hand, had become even more highlighted after the police intervention.

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Following the events of 31st of May, a collective identity emerged among protesters which corresponded to this emotional solidarity. This emotional solidarity, unified anger against government and riot police it controls, turned into a collective identity which was easily detectible in both online and offline public spaces during Gezi movement. "Antagonization" of riot police and the government had become a cardinal point in sustaining the collective identity, since words such as; Police, Gezi, Tayyip, Toma, Çapulcu had been used massively, by millions, between 31st of May and 15th of June, during the most heated period of Gezi movement (Varnali and Gorgulu, 2015). These words, through creating a slang that could be used by both

[28] "Police are so ruthless against us. They are attacking us as if we are an enemy. Shame on you."
[29]"As expected from them, police attacked the citizens at 5 in the morning. That however only strengthens the bond between protesters. The announcements by the prime minister would also do the same."
[30] "One day, police may also murder you."

pro-Gezi and Pro-government supporters, had enhanced the solidarities that have formed during this time.

Solidarity formed among protesters against government and police, is well expressed in the tweet of one of the protesters as seen below.

In accordance with the assumptions so far regarding the importance of collective identities being born out of emotional solidifications, Manuel Castells also suggests that emotions play an essential role during oppositional movements. He suggests that "By sharing sorrow and hope in the free public space of the Internet, by connecting to each other…individuals formed networks, regardless of their personal views or organizational attachments "(2012: 2). Even though the term Castells use, "free public space of the internet", entails some utopian understanding of the internet and the supposed total freedom it presents, the grounds SNS offer for emotional solidarities to foster among its subscribers is critical.

The online public spaces, SNS platforms such as Twitter indeed played an essential role in building this collective identity through sharing feelings of outrage and discontent through users' already established social networks. The Twitter activity, which is around 9 million tweets per day in a regular day in Turkey, had reached above 15 million in 31st of May with the news of police intervention to the Gezi Park (Ergurel, 2013). A research done by New York University Social Media and Political Participation lab members Pablo Barberá and Megan Metzger, had

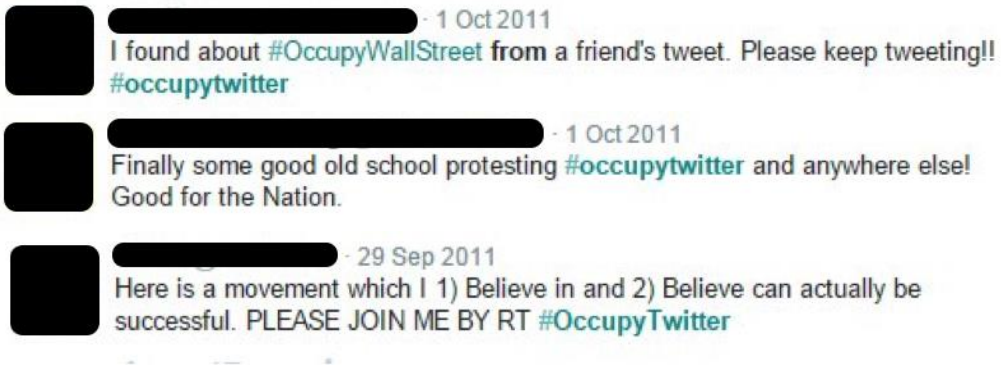
redeemed the Online activity during 31st of May of 2013 in Turkey as phenomenal in the sense of online activity associated with a social movement ;

The social media response to and the role of social media in the protests has been phenomenal. Since 4pm local time yesterday, at least 2 million tweets mentioning hashtags related to the protest, such as #direngeziparkı (950,000 tweets), #occupygezi (170,000 tweets) or #geziparki (50,000 tweets) have been sent (Barberá and Metzger, 2013).

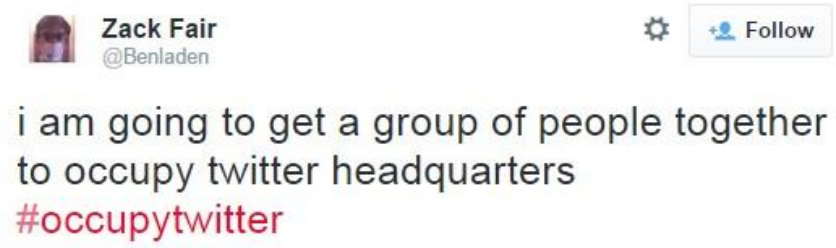
By introducing a new way of interacting with an SNS platform, that is through utilizing the Twitter's own design that enables communication between users through tweets and hashtags, the protesters managed to penetrate the platform with their personalized politics, transforming it into a political sphere (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Bennet 2012) with excessive amount of messages sent under related hashtags. This nature of SNS platforms that encourages individual participation, contributes to plurality of voices as these personalized politics widen the scope of the movement as each participant can voice his/her discontent (Demirhan, 2014; Stalker and Wood, 2013).

This is the occupation of an online public place. Similar with its offline counter-part, as explained previously, using the platforms own resources, designs to come up with an alternative use of it. Companied by with sheer numbers, the Gezi protesters had managed to temporarily occupy the online public place that is offered by Twitter.

Attempts of occupation of Twitter is been tried even before Turkey, such as during Occupy Wall street movement in 2011.



The aim is similar with Gezi movement, turning the SNS platform Twitter into an occupied protest zone where solidarity among protesters could foster and sustained through constant flow of content. The most intriguing fact is that this Hashtag, "occupytwitter", which was created in 2010 even before the Occupy Wall street movement, has transcended its preliminary usage and utilized by both Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Gezi movements years later.



Even though the main hashtags both movements concentrated on during protests varied, respectively #occupywallstreet and #direngeziparki, occupation of twitter was still the common grounds where both movements came together with 2 year gap between them. In other words, both movements paid the hashtag #occupytwitter their respects at one point and acknowledged it.

[31]

[31] "Our anger, frustration and sadness is due to the fact that a public space is being destroyed for financial profit."

Occupation of an online public space is essential for establishing a collective identity which could then emphasize collective actions, since only after acknowledging via torrents of messages on SNS platforms through which their concerns and feelings are shared by masses, the whispers of individual outrages could turn into loud collective voices of dissent (Doğu, Et al., 2015; Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). It is also critical to mention that this collective identity that is present within both online and offline public places are cut from the same cloth as, "Users online share content, give support, mobilize, and contribute in a valuable way, while users offline contribute to the cause in a different way; but we should bear in mind that users can be both types of contributors now, they need not be one or the other, they share the same group identity." (Coillie, Et al., 2013:29)

Indeed, as the Gezi survey from Konda also highlights, over %84 of the protesters located in the Gezi Park were active in SNS as well (2013). A number of protesters were acting as "citizen journalist" (Arda, 2014) by filming the events took place in offline protests and publish them through online channels thus being active in both online and offline protest zones, whereas others were using the SNS platforms to

[32]" #direntwitter (Resist twitter), we need you."
[33]" #occupytwitter Turkish nation is behind you :) We finally transformed the Twitter as well."

share their insights regarding the protests and police interventions.

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The direct differentiation between the identities and characteristics of online and offline activists seen in Techno pessimist circles (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov; 2009, 2011) appears to be more blurred in Gezi movement. The "high- risk" activism is not limited with offline political activities, as Gladwell puts it, as it is evident with the "Twitter arrests" during Gezi protests where 25 Twitter users were arrested due to their alleged online activities against the state in Twitter (Harding and Letsch, 2013). Occupation of online platforms, which are evidently under surveillance by government, can turn out to be a high risk activity that entails the risk of incarceration just like their offline counterpart.

[34] "Kugulu Park was like that few minutes ago. We came back home to rest a bit before going back tomorrow."
[35] "We can overcome all obstacles in Ankara as we did in Istanbul. Come on Ankara, gush out to the streets. The freedom resides in the streets."

4.3. Keeping the Movement Alive and "on"

Occupied online gathering spaces such as Twitter could be used by protesters as; a space to withdraw and regroup (Hopke, 2012:5) and to reserve "soft resources" of the movement online which could be used in a 'pick and choose' fashion by the users, allowing each individual to tailor his or her participation"(Milan, 2011). Besides these usages, the visibility of the movement to the public eye also proves to be a crucial asset that could be gained from the occupation of an online public space. So by being visible in the Twitter through making into TT (Top Trends) list, the occupiers were aiming to make the Gezi movement known in the whole world as well as turning it into an occupied public space where all kinds of content related with the movement would-be avaible 24/7.

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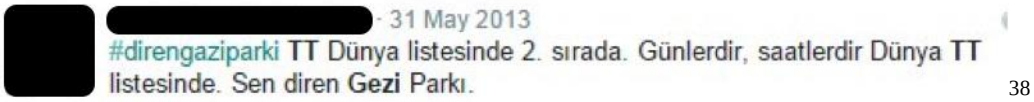

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The occupation of Twitter through hashtags by millions of subscribers as they keep the flow of content and messages ongoing, would also mean visibility in both in the

[36] "The hashtag, #direngeziparkı, which consists of content related with the protests regarding the demolishment of Gezi Park, is now number one in TT (Top Trending) list."
[37] "Come on friends, let's keep tweeting. They want to break the resistance. If Gezi Park becomes silenced, the whole nation will lose its voice."
[38] "#direngeziparki is second in World TT list. It also kept its place in that list for hours, days. Resist Gezi Park."

platform itself and in the public eye since main stream channels could not ignore such presence in SNS platforms. As William Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld states:" "The media spotlight validates the fact that the movement is an important player. Receiving standing in the media is often a necessary condition before targets of influence will grant movement recognition and deal with its claims and demands" (1993: 116). In other words, by making themselves visible the protesters could no longer be ignored by the power holding institutions. In the case of Gezi movement, the mass media was criticized for ignoring the first days of Gezi movement when the clashes with the riot police and the number of the demonstrations were rapidly escalating (Ozbilgin and Burch, 2013; Fleishman, 2013). Ironically, Konda survey results highlights that the majority of Turkey actually learnt about the protests and protesters demands through traditional mass media channels such as Television after they had started to cover the protests (Konda, 2013). The cache here is the difference between the mediums used by various segments of the nation to learn about news. The traditional main stream news platforms such as Television news provided the news that majority of the public learn about the movement (%71.2 nationwide) whereas the bulk of the protesters residing in Gezi park knew about them through social media (%69 among protesters within Gezi Park). These statistics, companied with the tweet, message statistics mentioned previously, suggests that due to the heavy presence of protestors and protest related content in SNS, mainly in Twitter, the main stream media was forced to lend visibility to the protests even if they were under the state censorship. As a result of this visibility the prime minister had agreed to meet with the representatives of the Gezi movement gathered under the name "Gezi initiative", after 10 days of protests which drew

attention not just from the Turkish media but also from global news agencies (The Guardian, 2013).

This circulation of the online content through Twitter had enabled the Gezi Park to become visible and was now in front of the public gaze. It is also due to these materials becoming online, an "easily navigable "online version of Gezi park was avaible for sympathizers with the movement through the globe and Turkey. The protesters around the World could snatch the emotional solidification and collective identity that is avaible in occupied online public places and channelize this content to their local offline protests. The use of social media, the online content was heavily involved with the construction of physical proximity with these expatriate protests (Gerbaudo, 2012: 155). The online resources circulating through this online version of Gezi Park had provided a political locality (Gordon and Souza Silva, 2011), a sense of togetherness with those who were not in the physical proximity of the original protest zones in Turkey and assisted them to formulate their own physical protests spaces with the same collective identity.

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[39] "I sincerely thank all the citizens who attended the gathering in Lafayette Park, Washington."

However even if the online material was avaible, what really made them accessible by millions was the visibility of the movement, the recognition of the movement by both mass media and various political actors even when speaking against the movement (Koopmans, 2004).

Ironically, this was the case with the Prime minister as he himself kept drawing attention to Gezi protests during this time period by repeatedly targeting them through his public speeches (Harding and Letsch, 2013; Calatayud, 2013; L.A Times, 2013). Prime minister ignored the fact that the protesters were already riled by his manner of speech when addressing them during his public speeches, antagonizing them even further. As a result, by accepting him as the common adversary, protesters further solidified their collective identity on this polarization. Prime minister kept on fueling the protests with his speeches in which he targeted

[40] "Occupy Gezi Park San Francisco- Support Gezi Park."

the protesters and claiming that he personally acknowledged and supported the police interventions against protesters.

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However as prime minister, involuntarily, further solidified the collective identity among protesters that was forming against the current regime and depicting him as the antagonist, he also defined the SNS platforms as an infested zone, a menace to whole society as it is filled with lies and provocation (Oremus, 2013). His accusations against the platform had been possibly understood by his followers as a call for arms for "cleaning" the social media, the infested zone from this "menace" of protesters.

[41] "To respond to the protesters, the Prime minster had organized 6 gatherings in 3 different cities within 12 hours. However, just saying two words would be enough; "I'm sorry"."
[42] "Yet another historical moment. As police clashes with the protesters in Ankara, Prime minister is still propagating the masses in his political gatherings."
[43] "There is only one explanation for organizing 6 gatherings in one day: "Fearing your own people"."

4.4. The First Contact

The malleability of the content in SNS platforms and distribution of this material shows parallelism with "Agoras" of ancient Greek cities where various citizens, passersby and merchants could gather up to discuss whatever the "hot topic" of the day was. These agoras were "open spaces, publicly held and occupiable for public purposes" (Mumford, 1991:176), just like online public spaces such as Twitter. The occupation of Twitter by Gezi protesters had provided the "hot topic" in these platforms where the participants (subscribers) could discuss about the protests under dedicated hashtags. Providing these discussions with digitally stored soft materials such as photos and videos from the offline protest zones, these discussions had contributed massively to the formation of collective identities among protesters in these online platforms, especially during the first days of the movement. However, just like Agoras as they were designed by the state power and were under surveillance by it, SNS platforms are constructed by profit driven companies, power holding institutions like state, which seek financial gain from the usage of these platforms (Morozov, 2011, 2009; Fuchs, 2014; Fenton and Barassi, 2011). In other words, these platforms do not provide support or space to social movements by default. Online public spaces are needed to be occupied, forced into this kind of usage by its subscribers.

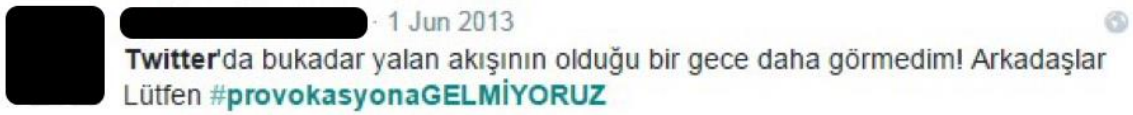
Furthermore, these online "agoras" are not egalitarian in nature as participation in these online spheres requires at least a preliminary knowledge of devices which are required to log in to them. Within developing countries such as Turkey with more than a half of population lacking access to internet at all yet to SNS platforms (Internetlivestats.com, 2015), all segments of the nation is hardly represented in

these online public spaces. However this unbalance regarding having access to internet, is rapidly being remedied with the introduction of mobile cell phones, tablet pcs and through other technological innovations around the globe. As a result, it might be suggested that online public spaces such as blogs, SNS platforms, and forums are no longer in the monopoly of one segment of the population any more. On the other hand, it is still too early to define them as completely democratic platforms in terms of participation.

The statistics of the usage of SNS and other internet platforms by the Gezi protesters also supports this argument regarding the disequilibrium of internet access among citizens in Turkey. Both Konda and Bilgiç's survey results indicated that the majority of the protesters were young individuals mainly between their early and late 20s and are mostly either University student s or graduates. Majority of these protesters were offended or felt insecure with the policies of the government whether it is the neo-liberal economical agendas or unrestricted police actions. Furthermore, most of the protesters were affiliated with the SNS platforms prior to the movements to some degree unlike the %70 who had learnt about the protest from traditional mass media channels. In accordance with this set of data, it is plausible to conclude that the majority of the protesters were highly educated, techno-friendly young citizens who showed an oppositional attitude towards the current regime in Turkey (Tuğal, 2013). It is mostly these individuals' online actions that have dominated the Turkish Twittersphere during the onset phase of the Gezi movement, mainly between 31st of May and first week of June.

On the other hand the online activities of the Pro-government users, rather a minority compared with pro-Gezi users at the time, are mostly focused on

questioning the legitimization of the protests during this phase of the movement and accusing pro-Gezi users for spreading false information through Twitter. These messages, either as a response to tweets posted by other users or sharing personal insights on the events of the day, are initial response of the pro-government accounts in Twitter against Gezi movement. These messages and content however, were not piling up to an emotional solidification and a counter- collective identity among pro-government users. It is only later, as these messages and emotions were focused around a political persona such as prime minister, that a collective identity and emotional solidification among pro-government users could be born. Nonetheless, these messages prove that even when the SNS platforms were dominated by torrents of messages by Gezi sympathizers, a minority of counter-oppositional was still present even at this phase.



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[44] "I have never seen such a pile of false information. Friends, please, #Provokasyonagelmiyoruz(We won't be propagated)."
[45] "When I logged into Twitter, I thought a war had started. People are tweeting with such determination. We won't "Provakasyonagelmiyoruz"."

1st of June, the first day the intense clashes between riot police and protesters had begun, also witnessed some of the early verbal exchanges between the opposite sides on Twitter regarding Gezi protests.

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[46] "We should be aware of false information, especially ones spreading through Twitter. They are spreading these news to propagate people into protests. "

[47] "- Today is the day of people who are long suppressed and ignored.
- Carrying the protests outside of the Park cannot be justified. It has nothing to do with the democracy."

These arguments, however, got more intense and one sided as both occupied Gezi Park and AKP rally zones such as Kazlıçeşme meeting where Prime minister gathered his followers together in a location not far from Gezi Park, had become polarized spaces where each group expressed their criticism of one another. During these physical gatherings, there was little space, if any, for engaging into conversations with opposing group (Hurriyet Daily News, 2013c). As Prime minister kept addressing the Gezi protesters as "drunkards" and "traitors" in his political rallies, the protesters' antagonism against the government also strengthened further.

Consequently, various SNS platforms had become the primary spaces where citizens with conflicting ideas about the movement could "read" one another (Doğu, Et.al, 2014:74-77). Unlike within occupied parks and squares and political rallies, oppositional voices could interact with one another. Interactions among users with different political orientations, harboring different feeling towards the Gezi movement hints the potential of these online public spaces functioning as public gathering places where different viewpoints on various issues can be shared. The fact that logging into Twitter being enough to expose a user to content with different political orientations than his own through the usage of common hashtags , also highlights this potential of the platform (An et al., 2011; Yardi and Boyd, 2010). Nevertheless, Twitter could also cause high levels of polarization among users since as collective identities formed within the platform through shared emotional responses to a particular station or event, these solidarities may tend to

[48]"- Don't buy into the provocations of people who claim they are protesting to preserve 30 trees whereas they wouldn't plant 30 seeds.
- Then you should follow the Example of Atatürk who would move a whole estate to protect one single tree rather than ones who would destroy a park to build a shopping mall."

antagonize one another, as was in the case with Gezi movement. As a result, even though a connection between users holding contradictory political opinions could occur in these online public spaces, hostility toward one another was also present in these interactions (Gruzd and Roy, 2014). Consequently, as both sides solidified their presence in Twitter, these conversations between oppositional voices mostly turned into heated arguments during Gezi protests.

4.5. Twitter as a new war zone

Lev Manovich suggests that strategies and tactics, as they were defined by Michel De Certau, are more intertwined in contemporary societies then they ever were (2009). He remarks that new "…products are explicitly designed to be customized by users" (2009: 323) just like the hashtag system in Twitter where users can form various discussion platforms as they like. In other words, instead of limiting these spaces in regards with the way people operate within them, power holding institutions that design these online spaces encourage the user contribution and let them take the initiative in regards with finding new ways to utilize these platforms. The "malleability" of the platform, as mentioned previously, inspires the users of these online spaces to shape both these spaces and their experiences in them as they wish.

These new online gathering places such as Twitter and other SNS platforms are results of logic of tactics being re-appropriated as logic of strategies by power holding institutions (Manovich, 2008:324). Manovich explains this shift in "tactics/strategies" paradigm with the introduction of Web 2.0. Within Web 2.0

platforms, the user generated content such as edited videos, images, photographs and comments on various issues were harbored, welcomed and were profited by websites such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. This perception of SNS platforms, profiting from free and volunteered labor of their subscribers who provide an ever flowing stream of content in them, is parallel with a techno-pessimist approach to web 2.0 as it hints of an exploitation of users by big companies.

However what is even more intriguing is how this novel strategy of re-appropriating the tactics of the consumers, done by sites such as YouTube or Instagram, can also be done by governments during the times of social movements. As highlighted numerous times the occupation of SNS platforms such as Twitter where a collective identity can be born through shared feelings of masses, is crucial for the movement. Accepting this as a tactic, in a De Certauian sense, of the "weak" against the "strong", the consumers of the platform decide to utilize these online spaces to connect one voice of discontent with one another, storing soft materials of the movement and basically constituting an online version of offline occupied zones such as Gezi Park. To avoid getting tangled up with the "Conservative dilemma" mentioned by Clay Shirky (2011), where government could either ban these online public gathering spaces altogether or producing their own intellectuals and critics to counter the protester's demands or concerns, there just might be a third option that governments could take. This option would be following the steps of the protesters who were occupying the SNS platforms and coming up with an online army that could "liberate" these online spaces from the occupation.

It was claimed by Turkish newspaper "Zaman" that, towards the end of September, afterwards the Gezi movement, government had recruited around 6.000 twitter users to "control" and manipulate the flow of content which he could not do so during the Gezi protests (Dönmez, 2013). Furthermore, it is due to the effect of online public spaces during social movements that these spaces are later labeled as new "battlefront", struggling zones (Doğu Et.al, 2014: 77). The hostility can be seen in the messages of political actors as they accept Twitter and other SNS platforms as battle zones and seeking "online armies" to dominate them just like removing the protesters from an occupied zone.

In an article published by the "Turkish Review", Erkan Saka claims that AKP's quest for Twitter dominance is quite elaborate and organized. Saka suggests that besides the "ordinary" AKP supporters' presence in the online SNS platform and accounts of political leaders such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Finance minister Mehmet Şimşek and mayor of Ankara Melih Gokcek who will be mentioned again shortly, there are other groups of users present in Twittersphere (2014). One of these groups is called "trolls" by both the author and various Twitter users, to refer to pro-government accounts that allegedly conceive false information or express an aggressive attitude towards users who sympathize with the Gezi movement (Saka, 2014).

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[49]" Friends, this is as important as the protests in the streets. Please don't write under "Troll" hashtags and messages."

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The common theme in the tweets send by some of these accounts is that they are strongly taking the government's side in the issues and are on parallel with the announcements made by political actors (Doğu Et.al, 2014: 119-123).

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With high amounts of followers, these accounts also function as "leaders" in the online struggle between pro-Gezi and pro-government users for dominating the platform. They could also function as "spin-doctors" as they provide rather provocative insights and interpretations of the events to persuade the public to support their cause or condemn their rivals. Interestingly, similar Twitter accounts (trolls) were also mentioned by newspapers during Occupy Wall Street movement back in 2011. These accounts were allegedly working to undermine the validity of the concerns of protesters in Occupy Wall Street movement and were actually hired online "muscles" (Seaman, 2011). As to who paid these accounts to do their bidding, the question still hangs over various institutions. Whether the contractor

[50] "Be careful with the stupid "troll" hashtags that young AKP supporters created. They are trying to change the subject away from the issues Gezi protests."
[51] "The Gezi protests have costed us 33 billion TL. Imagine how many trees could have been planted with that amount of money."
[52] "It is true that AKP intervenes with people's life styles. Now you cannot insult Muslims to your hearths desire or degrade anyone who wears turban."

was the government or other third parties whose financial interests were under threat by the movement is still unknown but widely speculated (Grant, 2011; Seaman, 2011).

Similar with "trolls" one another prominent group mentioned in the article is the "hashtag campaigners". The aim of this group of accounts is quite evident by its title that is; creating umbrella hashtags that could be utilized to gather support, challenging the opposition and creating a solidarity among supporters of the government . The "occupation" of Twitter through various hashtags that can harbor emotional solidarity and collective identities among supporters could be initiated by accounts such as these. One of these accounts, @aktakipiorg, quite genuinely express their desire to dominate Twitter in its account homepage by stating that: "Biz burada olduğumuz sürece sosyal medya bize aittir.. Yeter ki sıkıca sımsıkı sarılalım, takipleşelim" [53].Ironically, the same twitter account pleaded in 2nd of June that the protestors should stop all of their online activity and dissolve their occupation of Twitter and that of Gezi Park.

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[53] Social media belongs to us as long as we are here. All we need to do is embrace one another tightly and follow one another on Twitter.
[54] "Just Stop."

Besides these components of government's "Twitter army", a political figure such as Mayor of Ankara Melih Gokcek is also a prominent figure in Turkish Twittersphere. With more than 2.6 million followers and a tweet account exceeding 55.000, Melih Gökçek proves to be a genuinely active government figure in Twitter. His Tweets during Gezi protests clearly draws a line between his supporters who he renders as either "patriotic" or "democratic" and Gezi protesters who were either "misguided" or "treacherous".

[55]

[56]

As a matter of fact, it was the mayor of Ankara who first declared that Twitter is a new battle zone and called his followers to join in with this fight. He stated in July of 2013 that:" …Now the real war is taking place in a place called Twitter. If God wills it, we will make them yield…We learnt how to do this and became the Top Trend 5 times in last year. If we can became the first in that list, world will see our message through Twitter. Even our elders should learn about how to use this platform so we will be victorious" (Haberler.com, 2013).

To become "victorious" in this fight for dominating twitter, it is claimed that the government even bought 18.000 fake Twitter accounts, bots, to boost its ranks.

[55] "I am saying again. Just be glad that we are democratic people who believe in democracy. Otherwise we would have already put you in your place."
[56] "The realm of Twitter cannot be left to traitors to the nation. If we abandon this realm, they would be joyous."

Intriguingly, similar claims have been made by the Prime minister of Turkey as well that is; a "robot army" composed of bots are actually trying to undermine his authority by leading a smearing campaign against the government (Poyrazlar, 2014).

In the light of all the facts and claims mentioned above; The recruited Twitter accounts of importance, "call for arms" announcements for an online battle to gain the supremacy in SNS platforms such as Twitter and fake Twitter accounts to booster the ranks of pro-government users, it can be suggested that during the Gezi movement and afterwards, the government tried to establish/re-establish its authority in online public spaces. According to Prime Minister Erdoğan, since Twitter had become a "menace" during the protests, filled with lies, and should have been cleansed for it to function properly, which would not include anti-government remarks or hashtags.

Even though the government could not censor the content of Twitter directly, since the control of this space belonged to another power holding institution, namely Twitter.Inc, requesting content removal and restricting access to Twitter from Turkey since its demands are met was within its rights. As a result of numerous requests for content removal and banning access to twitter occasionally, Turkish Government's official request from Twitter to open an office in Istanbul had been received with caution by the Twitter officials as an agreement between parties on this issue is still yet to be finalized (Can, 2014).

By trying to determine a" proper" usage, deciding what content should be avaible and what should not due to it being considered as "devious" or "menace" for Turkish Twittersphere, government tries to establish its authority in online public space. Establishing this authority hinges on both official requests from Twitter to act

in tandem with its demands regarding the avaible content and through assembling a "Twitter army" against opposition surfacing in online public spaces.

The spaces, in other words, occupied by protesters through tactics (De Certau, 1984) and utilized in accordance with their agenda, were now targeted by power holding institutions. Whether through applying to international courts or companies themselves for assistance or declaring Twitter as a battleground that is needed to be cleansed by pro-government users, the Turkish government aims to "reclaim" any space within its boundaries, even digital ones, back from protesters.

4.6. Counter Collective identity and Emotional Solidification of Pro-government users

As Gezi protesters formed an emotional solidification around police interventions to protesters and a collective identity through shared grievances and antagonization of government and its supporters, Pro-government users also came up with a similar counter-move. This was done especially under hashtags such as #hosgeldinbuyukusta, which was dedicated for welcoming back the Prime Minister who was returning from its Africa tour in 6th of June 2013. Through the political charisma of Prime minister, the pro government users had formed their own collective as supporters of the government and especially of Prime minister.

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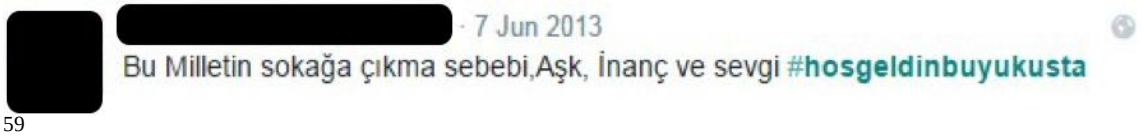
[57] "Stand strong, this nation is behind you. #hosgeldinbuyukusta (welcome grand master) ."

[58]



[59]

This collective identity, as supported by the tweets above by Melih Gokcek, had been formed around the concept of composure shown by the government officials against Gezi protesters. The pro-government accounts are highly connected with official government discourses as in working in an hierarchal way, re-producing the attitude of Prime minister against protesters (Doğu Et.al, 2014). The messages of solidarity, unlike Gezi movement, are focused on one political figure. Even though direct comparisons and a hostile attitude with Gezi Park protesters are rare under this hashtag (#hosgeldinbuyukusta), under other similar hashtags hostile confrontations are visible between pro-gezi and pro-government users.

For instance, under hashtags such as #provokasyonagelmiyoruz and #oyunagelmeturkiyem which were actively used by both sides to voice their inquiries about the recent events, heated arguments took place. These arguments were especially long lived since both parties did not want to leave the control of hashtag, occupation of it, to their adversaries.

[58] "#hosgeldinbuyukusta #we are Erdoğan We are not here to damage or harm, we are here to win hearts."
[59] "The reason this nation is on the street is love, faith and dedication (For Prime minister)".

[60]

[61]

Besides these dialectic messages between users, there were various verbal assaults, threats and swearing that were exchanged between pro-Gezi and pro-government users on SNS platforms. One of the most well uttered swearing between users were, as seen above, were the words "koyun" (sheep)and "alkolik" (alcoholic). By referring koyun to supporters of Recep Tayyip Erdogan the Gezi protesters

[60] "-Their only definition of trees is things that they drink alcohol underneath.
- It is wrong to antagonize oppositional voices as drunkards. Heeding their voice is mandatory in democracy.

[61] "-The front entrance of Dolmabahce mosque has been blocked by riot police. They are injured trapped inside along with doctors and people who had brought medical supplies.
- Damn with your lies. I was just there, everybody was singing.
- You are a fraud."

mentioned the homage that has been shown to prime minister. This remark was due to the understanding that these users were showing a common dedication to prime minister and seeing him as their true leader, in a way similar with how a sheep would follow a shepherd. Against this accusation, Erdogan supporters claimed that most of the Gezi protesters were alcoholics thus not true believers since it is a sin to consume alcohol in Islam.

[62]

The polarization of Twitter was visible for any subscriber of the platform during the time of Gezi protests. Both parties struggled to prove their validity through occupying the online public platform thus gaining visibility. For the Gezi protesters this was rather more vital compared with pro-government users since it was their grievance that the protests were not gaining enough exposure in traditional mass media. Unfortunately during this struggle, or online war as Melih Gokcek would put it, the dialectic conversations which would enable one another to understand their

[62] - The ones who couldn't even find the voting ballot with an intoxicated state are attempting a coup d'état.
- We have been labeled as "fascist", "marginal", "provocateur" and "drunkard" in these last five days. However it is fine since we are not labeled as "KOYUN" (sheep)."

concerns, had rarely occurred. Instead, as both parties were encouraged by respectively; police violence and feeling left out in political decision making process and speeches of the central figure they gathered under, accused one another for being at fault. Nevertheless one common theme they could all agree upon was the importance of Twitter as a SNS platform where collective identities could be built upon shared feelings that could eventually give birth to massive collective actions.

4.7. The Sustainability of Online Public Spaces and Collective Identities

The trending hashtags in Twitter, the hot topics of the day whether they are about events such as; a concert by a famous band, a premier of an anticipated movie or even about a disastrous incidents such as an earthquake, would eventually dissolve their impact in Twitter with time, especially after reaching a "peak" point (Lehmann, Et.al., 2012). Most of these hot topics, hashtags in Twitter would drastically lose their importance after the event they have been dedicated to is over or the necessary steps has been taken by institutions to relieve pain from the disaster zones.

As mentioned before, CEO of the Twitter.Inc states that; the most important aspect of Twitter is to keep people in touch with events and people who are most important to them, and these "events" and "people" are rarely of political nature besides the times of uprisings such as Gezi Protests. During these exceptional events the SNS platforms such as Twitter might offer online gathering places for individuals to raise their voices, discontents and gather around under a collective identity (Doğu Et.al, 2014; 98) after they are occupied by protesters with torrents of content.

However in case of contemporary social movements such as Gezi Movement or Occupy Wall Street, even though this process of dissolvent of the occupation of online public spaces takes longer and could be re-ignited with offline activities such as new clashes with the police or new speeches from authorities targeting the protesters (Babaoglan and Banko, 2013), the grasp of protesters grasp on these platforms will eventually falters.

This dispersion is due to the fact that protesters' tactics for occupation are based on appraising opportunities as they came by (De Certau, 1984), such as utilizing a popular mass media platform that emerged and popularized in the last decade which favors many-to- many communications among its users. Companied with an almost decade long discontent with the authoritarian attitude of the government, these online public spaces had been used to link previously unlinked individuals together, under a collective identity in Gezi protests. However this occupation of online public space could only be maintained for a limited time, since the original design of the Twitter, which is for daily use and basically for entertainment rather than being vassal to a political collective identity, would overcome this occupation of "hot/trending topics". In other words, following Dick Costello's speech, the "most important things for the users" would shift away from the political issues and events with time.

This understanding of online occupation might suggest that the techno-pessimist scholars were spot on with their remarks that; a social movement with no strong links among its participants and lacking a hierarchal structure would eventually dissolve itself. Indeed, Tweets below depict this disappointment and the doubt

among protesters that if the collective identity that was born during Gezi Movement had simply vanished with time.

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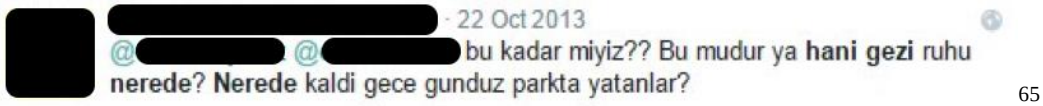

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However, I believe the "Gezi Ruhu[66]" could be sustained not through occupied offline public zones such as Gezi Park or even through online gathering places such as SNS platforms where protesters could determine the agenda for a limited time, but by through the collective identities established during both of these occupations in the summer of 2013. Especially through conflicts with ever present opposing groups, these collective identities could sustain themselves by comparing themselves with their rivals. This rivalry, that re-kindles the emotions that gave birth to collective identities in the first place, can be seen through almost any contemporary major incident following Gezi protests. Twitter, as before, presents a

[63] "Where is the Spirit of Gezi? Where is the empathy? Remember that time that we were angry because nobody was listening? Did we already forget our issue with being ignorant?
[64] Come on, where is the Spirit of Gezi? Remember when we were resisting the injustice and cruelty happening all around the World altogether. Please support
[65] So that's all? That's it? Where is the Gezi Spirit? Where are all the people who were living in the tents in Gezi Park, day in day out?
[66] The Spirit of the Gezi Movement.

suitable meeting place for individuals with different political orientations that feel belonged to different collective identities.

In the case with Turkey, this online "battlefront" mainly consists of pro-government and pro-Gezi movement users which are still holding on to their collective identities even two years after the Gezi Movement. This rivalry had helped preventing the collective identities established through the occupation of both online and offline public spaces by protesters from dispersing themselves completely.

In this sense, the tactics of the protesters might reserve themselves a mobile "place" where they can save their winnings which differentiates from what De Certau suggested (1984) in terms of tactics not being able to save what they have achieved due to a lack of place to sustain what's been achieved. The collective identities were the winnings of the protesters whom occupied SNS platforms such as Twitter and carried their winnings with them even if their occupation of online and offline public places dissolved with time. In other words; even if the "place" was lost with time, as they already belonged to power holding institutions in the first place, what was gained during that occupation could be saved as collective identities that could resurface when the "time" is right for tactics.

The following examples taken from Tweeter during various major incidents took place in Turkey after the Gezi movement clearly signifies the sustainability of collective identities that were born during protests.

4.7.1) After the Gezi Movement, The Soma Incident

Around a year after the Gezi Protests, Turkey faced with a catastrophic mining incident in Soma, Manisa in 13th of May which claimed 301 lives. Due to the high number of casualties, highest number in Turkish history, claims of misconduct regarding the safe guards not being implanted properly by the company owning the establishment and the attitude of government officials against the victims ' relatives, the incident became a highlighted topic in social media (Dillon, 2014). Old collective identities mainly formed during Gezi movement had surfaced clearly during this time with people protesting the dismissal of the government regarding proper regulations of coal mines which let such an incident occurred in the first place, and the pro-government users who were accusing the former for taking advantage of Soma incident to inflict harm on the government for their own agendas, as allegedly they did with the Gezi Protests.

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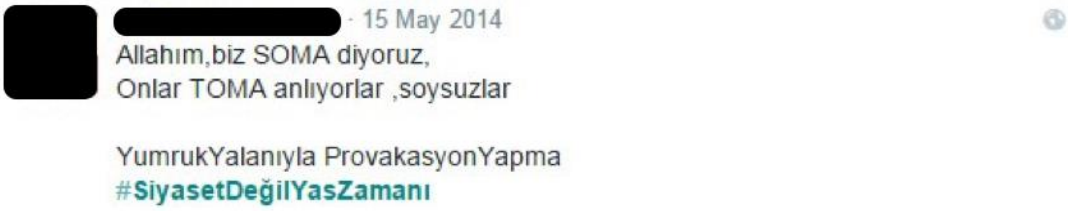
[67] " Never forget Soma , never forget Gezi."

[68] "They shed tears in the name of Rabia (a sign carrying religious conatations and popular among the protesters in Egyptian revolution) but did bothing to prevent the execution of 529 miners. And when we cry for SOMA they say #siyasetdeğilyaszamani (Now is the time for mourning, not politics)."



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Both of these groups were gathered around catch phrases, acting as hashtags, which signified their political stances such as: #Kazadeğilcinayet[71]and #SiyasetDeğilYasZamanı[72]. Other phrases such as;" KatilÇapul Zihniyeti[73]" and "Akitlerin sorunu[74]" were also commonly used phrases during this time in Twitter, mainly to tease one another. It is seen through tweets like these that, the accusations and call for actions uttered by users were targeted against collective identities rather than individuals. A Phrase such as "KatilÇapul Zihniyeti" or "Akitlerin sorunu" clearly states that collective identities born in Gezi protests were sustained with time since they raise hostile attitudes from both sides that are reminiscent from the protests took place two years prior.

Ironically, credit for managing this perk of sustainability should be equally divided between the members of more than one collective identity since even heated

[69] "Instead of protesting in Taksim go and pray in mosques, offer your prayers you insolent bunch."
[70] "Oh my dear God we are saying SOMA, these bastards understand it as TOMA. Do not provacate with lies."
[71] It's not an accident, it is a murder.
[72] Now is the time for mourning, not politics.
[73] The state of mind of Murderous Looters.
[74] The Problem with Ak dogs is.... (A wordplay with the name of a journal known to be close to government, "Yeni Akit". "İt" literally means "dog" in Turkish)

arguments between users with different political orientations contributed to sustaining collective identities.

The accusations made by users against each other or even swearing words that were born or heavily used during Gezi protests are still present between the verbal interactions of users even the Movement had ceased years ago. The accusation against Pro-Gezi voices for harboring "menacing" intentions against government and well-being of Turkey and counter accusations that pro-government users are being ignorant and blind to governments' real intentions, still persists through Twitter and other online public places (Doğu Et.al, 2014).

Furthermore, such a heavy online activity on Twitter regarding the mine incident, with more than 8.300.000 Tweets in less than a week (Cezayiroğlu, 2015), also amplified the attention of the nation further for Soma. An analysis by Somera, a research and consultancy company mainly focused on social media, suggests that as a result of these activities on social media, the incident was kept under public eye for a longer time than it normally would (Cezayiroğlu, 2015). As a result, the collective identities that were formed in 2013 during nationwide protests now had a different ground to sustain themselves since as Soma incident was still discussed, so was the collective identities it had borrowed from the Gezi Movement.

4.7.2. The Twitter Wars Continue

As seen in the examples above, the users with conflicting political stances could see one another's post through the Twitter's hashtag system thus getting exposed to the both sides of the argument (Yardi and Boyd, 2010: 317). Since both these groups

were in constant state of argument with one another, they kept on fuelling the online activity regarding these incidents.

During other major incidents in Turkey such as the corruption investigations of 17th of December 2013 and the death of Berkin Elvan (shot by a gas canister during Gezi protests) in 11th of March of 2014, similar online activities in online public spaces such as Twitter could also be seen. As mentioned before, in all these incidents, in tandem with online reactions to Soma incident and Gezi protests, Turkish Twittersphere seems to be divided into two oppositional voices, in terms of political orientations. During the corruption investigations of 17th of December, the argument was focused on rather this was a coup d'état attempt by a religious organization against government, hiding itself under the so called investigation, or that it was a legit inspection looking into the corruption in the government.

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[75] "Corruption investigations of 17th of December are an attempt to put the rising Turkey into regression, turn it back to its old self."
[76] "Both Gezi and Corruption investigations of 17th of December are strikes against the democracy. I am sorry but instead of usurpers, obviously I will be on the side of people elected by the nation."
[77] "I am adressing people who voted for these people (AKP). They stole all those money and not sparing a dime for you? That's a shame! You should demand your share."

In the case of the death of Berkin Elvan on the other hand, the argument between two opposing sides was focused on the circumstances in which Berkin Elvan lost his life. The pro-government users claimed that he was actively engaged in the Gezi protests and lost his life because of his involvement with the protests whereas their rivals focused on the brutal police violence that Berkin was subjected to. Same with corruption investigations discussions, references to Gezi movement and the collective identities born out of it are common sight here as well.

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It is due to these online activities that the collective identities established during Gezi protests could be partially sustained. Not through one or several hashtags which would eventually lose their "trending" status or neither in one online public space which could not be occupied for long periods of times, but the sustainability of the collective identities could be achieved through carrying these identities to other incidents and being in a state of antagonizing their rivals, whether it's the "Çapulcular" occupying Gezi park illegally or "Koyunlar" who supports the government's actions with a blind faith.

[78] "The Gezi spirit will overcome all obstaces. Never forget Berkin Elvan."
[79] "Our martyries are the ones who died in the service of God. It is not someone who goes to "buy bread" with a slinger in his pocket."

In all the incidents mentioned above; Soma mine accident, corruption investigations of 17th of December 2013 and the death of Berkin Elvan two opposing collective identities which were first seen during Gezi movement, sub merged in Twittersphere and, I believe, were consistent in terms of their characteristics through all these events. Gezi sympathizers and people who were against the attitude and actions of the government were aggressive against the regime and accused the pro-government citizens with their unwavering dedication to government, no matter what the accusations may raise against it. On the other hand, pro-government users of the Twitter and other online public spaces countered these accusations with claiming that their rivals were not "true believers" and were used by some foreign forces who were seeking to harm the government and thus Turkey. I believe that these collective identities were born and strengthened during Gezi protests and were sustained in online public spaces through confronting their opposition with every incident that presented a topic for them to clash with one another.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the 31st of May in 2015, a hashtag named "Gezi2yaşında"[80] had made it into the Twitter's Top Trending list with almost 250.000 tweets send under it within a day (Topsy, 2015). This online activity was not initiated by a political group or a party but by the regular users of the platform whom wanted to create an online memorial to the Gezi protests that took place two years ago. This hashtag, launched at the anniversary of Gezi Movement by Gezi Sympathizers, signified that; the collective identity of the movement which was born through a shared discontent towards the government's authoritarian attitude and was later entitled as "Çapulcular" or "Geziciler", was still present and embraced by many.

[80] Gezi is two years old.

[81], [82]

Even though there was no offline protest or occupation to feed live content to twitter, as it did during the protests, the online activity still fed upon the previous incidents' online content such as photographs or artworks which were already stored in Twitter digitally. The collective identity was forged in both online and offline public spaces during Gezi movement as they were complementary for one another. During the protests the content, especially regarding clashes with the police, were almost immediately relayed to online platforms, mostly through SNS platforms, as the images of protesters suffering under pepper sprays or rubber bullets caused an online uproar. Since soft materials which are required for forming or reforming the collective identities were already stored in online public places such as Twitter, the shared emotions that gave birth to collective identities could be rekindled among Gezi sympathizers even after two years the offline protests ended.

Throughout this thesis it was argued that; the occupations of SNS platforms such as Twitter were essential to the contemporary social movements like Gezi protests. By occupying these online platforms in a similar fashion with their offline counter parts, that is; by inventing new ways of operating within them, protesters utilized

[81] "#Gezi is Two years old # We stopped him from becoming president. This nation did not surrender to them. This is only the beginning, we will keep struggling."
[82] "We were so beautiful."

Twitter as an online public place where the collective identity of the movement could be saved and spread. The design of the platform was not ignored during this process, same with occupied Gezi Park as it still served its designed purpose which was to bring citizens together in a public space, as the occupation of this platform was done through hashtags and "tweets", not by hacking into the website or altering its design. What occupiers did with Twitter was that, they had connected people with what's most important to them which was parallel with the definition of Twitter's goal as it was stated by CEO of the company. As a result, an online version of the occupied Gezi Park in Taksim with all its content digitally stored, became avaible for anyone to navigate freely within and to connect with the movement.

In other words, the kitten pictures and photos of daily routines of users were replaced with photos, videos, artworks and inquiries by users about the Gezi Movement in the Twitter sphere.

What this thesis had attempted to suggest with its notion of "occupation of online public places" was that; neither a techno optimist perspective of SNS platforms such as glorifying these platforms as "protest friendly" by default or condemning them because of their design which makes surveillance of the masses easier than it ever was before, is a sufficient perspective by itself when evaluating these platforms function in social movements.

The advantages and disadvantages of these platforms during times of social movements like Gezi Movement or even when using them casually without a political agenda, will be ever present as long as they exist. It is however, up to users, the subscribers of these platforms, to decide what to do with these platforms, how to

engage with them. During contemporary social movements, as Gezi movement and other occupy movements had shown, subscribers of these platforms chosen to utilize these online spaces in favor of the movement, reflecting and even constructing the collective identity of the movement online. The feat of connecting various, previously unlinked, individuals with one another through the shared emotions and a collective identity could only be done by using an online platform which already had millions of registered subscribers in Turkey even before the protests.

However forming an online occupied public place where everyone could log in, visibility was also required within Twitter sphere hence was the struggle of protesters to make various hashtags into World Top Trending list. This notion of gaining World Wide visibility had created the backbone of all the incoming conflicts between contradictory collective identities in Twitter.

According to a data set acquired by Emarketer Research Company in 2014 regarding the Twitter penetration rates in different countries, Turkey came at the top with %31 penetration rate which roughly equals to 11 million users (Minto, 2014). This means that with a population of 76 million, more than one in each 7 person owns a Twitter account in Turkey. As Turkey goes through a rather "dynamic", if not hectic, period of time in the last few years as a nation with incidents such as Soma accident which took more than 300 lives in 2014, corruption investigations of 17th of December 2013, the Gezi Movement and other related incidents such as the death of Berkin Elvan, the Turkish Twittersphere was rather busy with catching up with these incidents. As a result, it might be suggested that Turkish Twitter sphere had become a rather significant online platform where news about various major incidents could be followed, commented upon and discussed. The importance of

occupying the Tweeter also becomes clear with these statistics since setting the “hot topic” in an online platform where more than 11 million citizens talk and discuss about, is a crucial way to determine “what is important” and “should be discussed” as a nation.

During all these incidents mentioned above, Twitter in Turkey was occupied by torrents of content and numerous users. Not by one single collective identity any more, like during the onset phase of Gezi Movement as protesters were the majority in Twitter, but through their constant clash with one another. The Twitter Wars, in other words, had carried on with each new topic and incident, as both collectives struggle to get the upper hand in dominating these online platforms.

It was suggested that; this usage of the platform as a discussion platform between users with contradicting political orientations, especially during major incidents in Turkey such as Soma accident, had contributed greatly to the sustainability of collective identities born out of Gezi Movement. Even though the occupation of online public spaces, such as Twitter, were dissolved in a similar fashion with their offline counter parts by power holding institutions or due to the design of the platform itself, what was gained during these occupations could be sustained through the identities that had formed during the occupation of these public places.

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