Everywhere Taksim

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Section IV
The Politics of Space and Identity at Gezi
‘We May Be Lessees, but the Neighbourhood is Ours’

Gezi Resistances and Spatial Claims

Ahu Karasulu

While this paper was being written, the first anniversary of Gezi was being ‘celebrated’ in Taksim in the company of 25,000 policemen, 50 TOMAs (Toplumsal Olaylara Müdahale Aracı, ‘Vehicle for Intervention at Social Events’), teargas, plastic bullets and police brutality. The uniformed policemen and the ‘civilian’ officers with uniform caps, black bags and nightsticks were ‘obeying the given orders, from A to Z.’ The government’s persistence on closing Taksim Square to demonstrations led to a declaration by the Istanbul Governorate on 4 June 2014. According to it, and based on the Law of Meetings and Demonstrations and the relevant by-laws, meetings and demonstrations will only be allowed to take place in Kazlıçeşme (on the European coast) and Maltepe (on the Asian coast). Both are far away from city centres.

Since the protest, Gezi Park, while closed by the police at every rumour of a meeting or demonstration in the Square, has remained as a park. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality’s Taksim Pedestrianisation Project plans, as well as those for the Artillery Barracks, were cancelled by the Council of State in May 2014. Yet, the tunnels underneath the Square, built according to the

1 Ev Kira ama Semt Bizim (‘We may be lessees, but the neighbourhood is ours’) is a graffito from Kadıköy, seen in the demonstrations of September 2013. See http://galeri.uludagozluk.com/g/ev-kira-ama-semt-bizim/. Accessed 15 October 2013.
2 According to Taksim Solidarity, in Istanbul alone, 203 people were taken into custody and nearly 100 people were injured: http://taksimdayanisma.org/basina. Accessed 31 May 2014.
3 In Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s own words: ‘See, they are making declarations. They are calling people to Taksim. […] I am calling here for all my people. Do not fall for this game. This is not a naive act of environmentalism. There is no sincerity here, there is no honesty. There are only ways to stop us from taking the necessary steps to monumentalise Taksim. […] If you insist on coming here, we are sorry but our law enforcement officers have taken the necessary orders, the necessary measures will be taken from A to Z. You will not be able to come there as you did in the Taksim events and Gezi events of last year. Because you have to obey the laws. If a demonstration is not permitted in a certain place, you have to obey it. If you do not, the state will take the necessary measures for security. Then, you cannot say “this happened, and that happened” (http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/gezi_parkina__gelene_polis_geregin__yapar-1194949).
Pedestrianisation Project, have been completed and are now operational. Mayor Kadir Topbaş claimed that the cancellation is not important: ‘Of course we are entitled to make new plans in place of the cancelled ones.’

A year ago, the activists’ resistance to the unlawful demolition of trees in Istanbul’s Gezi Park and to the project to rebuild the historic Artillery Barracks as a shopping centre on the site of the park was met with extreme police brutality at dawn on 31 May 2013. In the days that followed, this spatial claim gave way to protests spreading to 79 (out of 81) cities in Turkey (İnsan Hakları Derneği 2013, 4). As a result of clashes with the police, the police left Taksim Square on 1 June 2013 and the park remained occupied, until it was brutally evacuated by the police on 15 June 2013. The main platform of opposition is Taksim Dayanışması (‘Taksim Solidarity’), an umbrella organisation of 128 different professional chambers, labour unions, political parties and various networks and organisations. Regarding the park and the square, in the widespread protests, claims were not limited to those of Taksim Solidarity or limited to the park and the square or environmental claims. ‘Intervening’ to save a few trees served as a means to vocalise the grievances of many who believe that their livelihood, identity or lifestyle is under threat. Tayyip İstifa (‘Tayyip Resign’) and/or Hükümet İstifa (‘Government Resign’) was one of the widely heard slogans. In many other cities, the party buildings of the ruling AKP became the target of the protesters. As a popular uprising, this was unexpected and unprecedented; it was multilayered and multifaceted and was further triggered by police violence (Karasulu 2014).

Indeed, it seems to me that the word ‘resistance’ should be used in the plural, to address different events, different actors, different claims and different actions. Given that the motivation behind the protests was not just a few trees, and despite recent events, it can hardly be said that the resistances have come to a halt, or that the collective action has been entirely demobilised. In an attempt to name and frame this, I will refer to this episode using the broader concept of contentious politics, and I will

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6 For a chronology of protests in various cities, see Bölbükaşi 2013, 12-329.
7 Resistance is defined as ‘a response to power [...] a practice that challenges and negotiates, and which might undermine power’ (Vinthagen and Lilja 2007), and is often used interchangeably with protests throughout the text. It is not wrong to say that resistance falls within the repertoires of contention within the DOC programme.
borrow from Doug McAdam's, Charles Tilly's and Sidney Tarrow's Dynamics of Contention (DOC) programme, focusing on its spatial dimension, and underline the significance of spatial claims.

‘Essentials Are Thus Cast Up’: Space and Contention

As Tilly (2000, 138) sees it, all contention takes place in ‘humanly occupied space’ and, while space is not totally ignored in contentious politics literature, it is not wrong to say that it enters DOC analysis with reference, by and large, to the ‘ecology’ of contentious politics and the strategies it employs.

In a similar vein, for Tilly, ‘the changing locations, activities, and spatial configurations of people themselves constitute a significant part of contention’ (Ibid., 146). Tilly underlines that ‘everyday spatial distributions, proximities, and routines of potential participants in contention significantly affect their patterns of mobilisation’ (Ibid., 138). His emphasis is on the variations between spatial connections among them: in a two dimensional view, in terms of proximity, they are either local or large scale, and in terms of mobility, they are either fixed or mobile. A more fixed spatial scale and a higher mobility would increase the modularisation of

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9 In the DOC framework, contentious politics is defined as ‘episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims when a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or party to the claims and b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 5) As they put it, ‘roughly translated, the definition refers to collective political struggle’ (Ibid.).

10 By and large, to provide an analysis of common points from different historical episodes and social conditions, and to integrate different schools of thought in the field of social movements, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly draw a programme based on events, episodes, mechanisms and processes of contentious politics, where the form and content of contention is analysed referring to types of regimes, political opportunity structures and repertoires of contention. Within the debate this programme has given rise to, it is the geographers that provide the criticism with respect to the conceptualisations of spatiality (Leitner et al. 2008; Martin and Miller 2003).

11 Spatial claims can be seen as a type of ‘program claims’ in the DOC framework. In Tilly and Tarrow’s words, ‘Program claims call for the objects of claims to act in a certain way: to do something, to stop doing something, to make someone else do something, and so on.’ (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 190).

12 In Lefebvre’s words, ‘Forecasts and calculations are inevitably based on partial analyses and records, and cannot match the totality of events. In upsetting these forecasts, events reunite those analyses and conclusions which had become diffused. Movement flares up where it was least expected; it completely changes the situation, which now emerges from the mass of fact and evaluations under which it had been hidden. Essentials are thus cast up, especially those that are known and recognizable. Against this background are projected new elements of social life; these now become briefly visible in luminous transparency.’ (Lefebvre 1969 [1968], 7).
contentious repertoires and detachment of political identities, as spatial scale and mobility affect various mechanisms of DOC; namely, category formation, brokerage, object shift and certification. In other words, scale and mobility affect how claims are articulated, how coalitions are formed between actors vocalising these claims and how these coalitions are related to each other, not to mention how these claims, actors and performances are validated (Tilly 2003).

In an attempt to underline the significance of space, William H. Sewell (2001, 55) posits that:

in studying the role of space in contentious politics, we should be especially attentive to what might be called spatial agency – the ways that spatial constraints are turned to advantage in political struggles and the ways that such struggles can restructure the meanings, uses, and strategic valence of space.

Not only is contentious politics constrained and shaped by space, but also, new spatial structures and relations can be created by contentious politics: ‘insurgents produce space above all by changing the meanings and strategic uses of their environments’ (Ibid., 56).

In his extensive essay, Sewell emphasises the significance of space with respect to its various dimensions: social life is spatially differentiated and spatial location, the scale of spatial processes, time-distance dimension of space, built environment and spatial routines of daily life both enable and constrain co-presence of people engaged in a common cause. Also, spaces have socially constructed meanings that might serve contentious politics as both contexts and stakes, the most important of which is: ‘sacralisation as sites of transcendent significance. In sacred spaces, actions take on an enhanced significance, in the eyes of the participants and witnesses alike’ (Ibid., 65). Space is an object and a matrix of power as well, mapped and marked by the administrative apparatuses of the states and controlled by policing (Ibid., 54-71). In such a framework, following Sewell (Ibid., 88):

contentious politics is a complex phenomenon: at once an exercise of political strategy, a mobilisation of resources, an overcoming of collective action problems, a seizing of political opportunities, and an enactment of collective action frames. But it is also an exercise of spatial agency, an

13 For definitions of the concepts, see Tilly 2003, 222-223.
ensemble of work within and upon spatial structures that produces new spatial structures, meanings, and routines.

Such an ‘ecology’ highlights a few issues following the fact that Gezi Park and especially Taksim Square were at the centre of the Gezi resistances. Taksim Square is significant in terms of spatial agency: it is one of the public spaces in Istanbul that bear the mark of socio-political transformations in Republican Turkey. Designed as a secular public space, it has gained a symbolic importance in vocalising demands in the period of political mobilisation throughout the 1970s, and has also become a main tourist attraction in the 1980s (Baykan and Hatuka 2010).

It is the secular nature of the square that comes into play when plans to construct a mosque are spoken of. Moreover, the banning of all demonstrations in the square, including 1 May celebrations, is understood with reference to the symbolic importance of the square in political struggle. Especially in the context of resistances, Taksim square operates as a sacred space, in the sense that Sewell mentions above: demands articulated there have an enhanced significance, both for participants and witnesses. As such, closing the square to public gatherings with police force and blocking all means of transportation becomes a display of government power.

In the face of recent developments cited in the introduction, insisting on holding a meeting in Taksim square is not a futile act, but an act of resistance against the government’s intransigent efforts to close the square to public gatherings, exiling all sorts of expressions of dissent from the city centre and erasing the political memory of such a space. Indeed, as Tilly (2000, 138) puts it, the governments ‘organize at least some of their power around places and spatial routines. Hence, contentious politics often challenges or disrupts governmental activity, and thereby incites governmental intervention.’

Furthermore, resistance to the gentrification of Tarlabası and İstiklal Street, the pedestrianisation of Taksim square and the rebuilding of the Artillery Barracks as a shopping centre can also be thought of as a response to reshaping the area as a ‘purified’ commercial and residential space. Efforts are also being made to render such a ‘purified’ space more conservative. As Ayşe Çavdar says:

Those in power want to intervene in a space where secular life is symbolically constructed and, as such, they want to take over the commercial networks constituted by this space and win the race, symbolically. Only
by taking over Beyoğlu would they say, ‘OK, I have taken over this city.’ It is not Beşiktaş or Kadıköy, but it must be Beyoğlu.

Finally, following DOC terminology, it can also be said that, throughout early June 2013, closing the square, which is one of the transportation hubs of Istanbul, helped to certify the demands of the Taksim Dayanışması. Also, by vocalising spatial claims in Gezi Park and Taksim Square during occupation, the protestors have built a struggle in the lived space against the way it was conceived by the concerns of capital and authoritarian governance, and imagined a communal life. As such, the park and the square have also served as a broker to align different sites of protest and different claims. Her yer Taksim, her yer direniş (‘Everywhere Taksim, everywhere resistance’) is still one of the most popular slogans of this period of contention, shouted in almost every copresence of people, from football matches and graduation ceremonies to protests and demonstrations. It served as a point of reference even for the government, in denying the legitimacy of the protests, in an attempt to keep up with the majoritarianist rhetoric. For example, former Minister of Health Ziya Müezzinoğlu, in response to a question regarding the slogan chanted at football matches, declared that ‘Everywhere is not Taksim, and resistance is not everywhere. Everybody should hand their resistance and Taksim Square over to the national will’s rights and legality, which is here.’

‘(New Elements) Become Briefly Visible in Luminous Transparency’: Spatial Claims

Tilly mentions, with reference to Henri Lefebvre, that ‘social sites always incorporate conceived and perceived space into lived space. Conceptions, perceptions, and practices then shape political contention’ (Tilly 2003, 222). This line of thinking can be further explored as space, especially urban space, can be thought of as the subject of claims, beyond (but not excluding) locations, proximities, mobilities and means of surveillance. Deborah G. Martin and Byron Miller (2003, 146) posit that:

16 See note 12.
17 For definitions of perceived-conceived-lived triad (in other words, spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces), see Lefebvre 1991 [1974], 32, 38-39.
Lefebvre’s conceptual triad of conceived, perceived, and lived space can be a useful lens for the analysis of contentious politics as it recognizes the material spatial dimensions of social life, the symbolic meanings of space and the imposition of, and resistance to dominant socio-spatial orders.

It can be said that neoliberal economic transformation has changed the material spatial dimensions of social life (i.e. spatial practices or perceived spaces), the symbolic meanings of space (i.e. representations of space or conceived spaces) and the imposition of and resistance to socio-spatial orders (i.e. representational spaces or lived spaces).

Following David Harvey (2001 and 2012), the accumulation of capital is realised over urbanisation and, in today’s world, surplus is absorbed through urban restructuring. City spaces are mobilised as a ‘purified arena of capitalist growth, commodification, and market discipline remained the dominant political project for municipal governments throughout the world’ (Brenner and Theodore 2000, 374). As for perceived spaces, planning and urban restructuring decisions are increasingly based on maximisation of private gain; surveillance is increased in public spaces to maintain law and order; punitive institution building, social surveillance and authoritarian governance are seen as a means of silencing dissent arising from economic contradictions; lived spaces become more polarised, with the destruction of working-class neighbourhoods for speculative land development and gentrification as well as the creation of ‘purified’ spaces, as gated communities and enclaves and places of consumption reserved for the elite (Brenner and Theodore 2000; Peck and Tickell 2002; Marcuse and Van Kempen 2000). As Harvey (2012, 16) puts it, ‘this nearly always has a class dimension, since it is usually the poor, underprivileged, and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this progress.’ Such an urban order is what is experienced, imagined and struggled against in terms of lived space. This struggle against the current socio-spatial order can be thought of as a multifaceted and multilayered anti-capitalist struggle (Ibid.).

The above-mentioned effects of neoliberal economic transformation on urban space and socio-spatial order are likely to become an increasingly significant issue in Turkey in the years to come. As the economic growth of Turkey relies on construction, ‘urban restructuring’18 and ‘pharaonic projects’ such as the third bridge on the Bosphorus, the third airport in Istanbul or a Panama-like channel to the north of Istanbul (the so-called ‘Kanal Istanbul’) have become catchphrases to stimulate the construction sector

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18 For a history of ‘urban restructuring’ in Turkey after 1980, see Türkün et al. 2014.
(Balaban 2011 and 2013). In the same vein, projects similar to that of Taksim Square are being developed for the regeneration of symbolically important spaces, such as Haliç Arsenal or Haydarpaşa Train Station, turning them into ‘purified’ touristic and commercial venues. The helping hand of TOKİ, an institution endowed with exceptional privileges (Pérouse 2013), is more visible in opening up new lands to construction and changing limitations to municipal zoning plans. A new page will be opened when the new ‘Law on Transformation of Areas under the Risk of Disaster’ becomes widely used. The new law basically gives the central government (the Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation in particular) the right to label any urban space an ‘area under the risk of disaster’ and, without the need to consult or negotiate with the residents, it can demolish and rebuild the neighbourhood as it sees profitable. Obviously, it will have devastating effects on the urban poor or the working-class neighbourhoods built on valuable land, and it will result in dispossession, whether the residents are owners or lessees.

Regarding the episode of contention spreading to different Turkish cities since 31 May 2013, along with main squares, the protests also occurred in neighbourhoods under threat of ‘urban restructuring’ and where there is an established tradition of political struggle, as in the cases of Dikmen (Ankara), Gazi (Istanbul), Okmeydanı (Istanbul) or Gülsuyu (Istanbul). One can expect more protests, widespread or not, as more neighbourhoods fall under the scope of the so-called ‘Disaster Law.’

For example, Okmeydanı has been a squatter settlement in Istanbul since the late 1960s; today it has 80,000 residents. It is a densely populated area with houses, apartments, workplaces and many informal textile workshops. Although it was declared a historic protection site in 1976, the land, which mostly belongs to the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation, was unlawfully sold to the new migrants. With the Zoning Amnesty Law of 1984, ‘Deed Allotment Certificates’ were distributed to some of the residents. The amount of land belonging to the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation was first exchanged with the same amount of land belonging to the Treasury in 2001 and, in 2010, the decisions on historic protection were reversed and limited to fourteen districts; subsequently, the rest of the area was sold to Beyoğlu and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipalities. In 2012, Beyoğlu Municipality, announcing a renovation plan, started to sell smaller areas of land to residents at a higher

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19 For previous examples of urban restructuring projects, for example, see Özdemir 2003; Pérouse 2011; Kuyucu and Ünsal 2011.
price (Uşaklıgil 2014, 125-135). While the Mayor of Beyoğlu claimed that they will create the newest area of urban life in Istanbul in Okmeydanı, with commercial and touristic centres and a ‘Champs-Élysées of Istanbul’21 (a plan legitimised solely by a video produced by the municipality22), questions regarding the price of land and where the residents in newly declared protection sites will be moved and with how big a share of land remain unanswered. As such, it is likely that the current residents of the area, who are unable to afford houses in their own neighbourhoods, will be exiled. The zoning plans were taken to court and Beyoğlu Municipal Council declared Okmeydanı an ‘area under the risk of disaster’ on 6 June 2014, based on ‘observations’ rather than ‘scientific reports,’ i.e. without any reference to geological research or an assessment of the current building stock.23

In terms of the meaning of Okmeydanı as a place, there are two sides to the coin. Firstly, the neighbourhood is associated with the words ‘tension’ or ‘clashes with the police.’ In the 1990s,24 Okmeydanı became one of the places that faced a heavy police blockade; it has thus been stigmatised and criminalised as a ‘terrorists’ neighbourhood,’ although the presence of armed groups is a matter of self-defence for most of the residents.25

The incorporation of conceived and perceived space into a lived space is not straightforward in Okmeydanı; the neighbourhood is still identified with ‘clashes,’ which are likely to take an upward spiral with more bloodshed. As Alevis have been continuously discriminated against and targeted by the government, the religious dividing lines will again aggravate the tension in the neighbourhood. During the Gezi resistances, fifteen-year old Berkin Elvan was shot with a gas canister and died on 11 March 2014, after spending nine months in a coma. Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral.26 On the same evening, in a clash between those waiting around Elvan’s house and the cemevi and people called out by the AKP-allied ‘Kasımpaşa 1453’ football fan group, 22

23 http://www.evrensel.net/haber/85759/asil-risk-budur.html#.U5SDBChOJLB.
24 Such neighbourhoods are not only criminalised in the face of rising leftist movements, in the daily parlance. Gecekondu (‘squatter settlement’) has been replaced with varoş (‘slum’ with an absolutely negative connotation). While the former stands for self-constructed houses to satisfy the need for shelter, the latter implies violent and ‘dangerous masses’ living on the outskirts of the city. Those masses include Alevis and Kurds who have come to the city through forced migration (Bozkulak 2003).
year-old Burakcan Karamanoğlu was shot and killed.\textsuperscript{27} On 22 May 2014, police intervention in a high-school student protest resulted in the death of Uğur Kurt. Kurt was shot and killed by the police in the garden of the \textit{cemevi}, where he was attending a funeral.\textsuperscript{28} During the protests of the following day, another resident was shot and killed by the police.\textsuperscript{29} Although the leftist upper-side and AKP-allied, more rightist lower-side of the neighbourhood were united against ‘urban restructuring,’ the spiral of violence is said to disrupt this alliance.\textsuperscript{30}

Although it is said that the Gezi resistances have made the processes in Okmeydanı more visible, changing the image of Okmeydanı in the eyes of the middle classes and perhaps giving way to new political imaginaries,\textsuperscript{31} as activist lawyer Erbay Yücak implies, stigmatisation and criminalisation of the neighbourhood make it less likely that ‘urban restructuring’ and the problems of ownership or the planning processes will be discussed. Yet, as Yücak underlines, the only means of struggle is by the residents of the neighbourhood, and one that takes the past relations of the neighbourhood with the Municipality and the residents’ expectations into consideration.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{‘Events Belie Forecasts’\textsuperscript{33} Concluding Remarks}

The foundations of the third Istanbul airport were laid on 7 June 2014. While \textit{Kuzey Ormanları Savunması}\textsuperscript{34} was protesting against the airport\textsuperscript{35} on İstiklal
Prime Minister Erdoğan, in his speech at the ceremony, blamed the protesters against the third airport for being Gezizekalı (‘Gezi-minded’), a possible and quite unwitty wordplay for gerizekalı (‘idiot’):

Last year in May, some Gezizekalı people sprang up. Those Gezizekalıs could not bear this airport. For it is impossible for them to imagine such a gigantic airport. They still want to see Turkey as it was twelve years ago. Turkey has reached a point where it can build the biggest airport in the world. The schools we have built, the divided roads. We are proud of you. Your unity makes some people crazy.

Although this article has focused narrowly on urban struggles (and those in Istanbul), there has been local collective action in rural Turkey against hydroelectric, thermal and nuclear plants as well as new mines. This allows us to say that space is not only a stage for contentious politics but a solid ground for vocalising dissent, in the form of spatial claims. Often, self-organising people defending their livelihood and environment are faced with a government that claims the ultimate right to define the use of urban and rural space, legitimising this right with majoritarianism. The use of urban and rural space aims at profit maximisation: construction is said to represent ‘development’ and ‘welfare’ for the public, if not for the construction groups close to the government.

It is hard to foresee the turn this episode of contention could take in the face of widespread dispossession or a crisis in the construction sector. With reference to space, there is still room for discussion, dissent, alternative imaginaries, struggle and resistance. Gezizekalıness in this sense would suggest new alliances and new means for challenging the current socio-spatial order. As the graffito in the title of this article suggests, such struggles are given life primarily by the residents.

36 Their march along the İstiklal Street (from the Tunnel to Taksim Square) was blocked, as usual, mid-way to Galatasaray by the police: http://www.sendika.org/2014/06/3-havalimanina-karsi-yuruduler-temel-atma-bosuna-yikacagiz-basina/.
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