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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the public agency of Çarşı (the fan group of the Istanbul football club Beşiktaş) and its role in the Gezi movement by examining Çarşı's interactions with other actors of the movement. In addition to their vehement support for their football team, Çarşı is also known for promoting and developing welfare projects, and the group was a central figure in Gezi. Although the group clearly displays leftist tendencies, they do not adhere to a particular political agenda. In Gezi, they found themselves in the middle of the protests, clashing with the police. Çarşı became "muscle" in the movement by engaging in physical conflict and guiding less experienced protesters as well as first timers. My main argument is that, Gezi, as a *public square movement*, created a *stage for interaction and performativity* where actors, who do not encounter each other in their normal daily lives, came together and co-constructed not only a collective defence but also a different way of living and relating to each other in the occupied public place of Gezi. By examining how a soccer fan group interacts with the actors of Gezi protests and what role it has in the Gezi movement, this paper will try to discuss the new forms of public agency that emerged out of the Gezi movement.

This paper aims to discuss the public agency of Çarşı (the fan group of the Istanbul football club Beşiktaş) in the Gezi movement by examining its interactions with other dissident actors of Gezi as well as governmental actors such as the police. Instead of focusing on the notions of the *network paradigm* (Castells 2014) and the *detrterritorialized power of subjectivities* (Hardt and Negri 2000: 40) ,which undermine the importance of locality and physical public spaces, in my look at the role and the impact of the soccer fan group in the Gezi movement, I borrow from Nilüfer Göle the category of *public square movement* (Göle 2013). I will also inquire whether we can observe the emergence of new forms of public agency.

As a *public square movement*, Gezi provided a *stage for interaction and performativity* (Göle 2013: 6), where actors who do not normally interact with each other came together and co-constructed not only a collective resistance but also a different way of living and relating to each other in the occupied public space of Gezi. By examining how a soccer fan group finds its place in a public square movement, its role in the mobilization, and its interactions with other actors, this paper aims to discuss the *new forms of public agency* created during the Gezi protests in Istanbul. Following the theoretical framework of Nilüfer Göle, who argues that “[r]ather than the discursive and regulatory or normative aspects of the public sphere, the antagonistic and the experimental dimensions of the public sphere need stressing” (*Ibid.*, : 9), this paper will address the performative moments of Gezi protests that open the way for new forms of public agency and offer the chance for mutual transformations of the actors involved.

The Gezi movement, the role of Çarşı in the protests, and the nature of this soccer fan group will be briefly presented. This will be followed by an examination of Çarşı’s interaction with other actors of the movement as well as with the opposing sides, such as the police. Finally, the degree in which the Gezi movement brings forth a new public agency into collective action and generates new subjectivities through collective experience will be discussed.

The data presented in this article is based on 25 in-depth semi-directive interviews with Çarşı and participant observations, which were carried out in February 2016 in Esperi café (Beşiktaş, Istanbul), a meeting point of the leading figures of Çarşı.¹

Gezi Park: taking the square

The Gezi movement was triggered by the protests organized by the Chamber of Architects and some environmentalists who organized sit-ins and partly occupied the park on 27 May 2013. Gezi² was one of the few remaining green public spaces in downtown Istanbul and a project was underway to raze the park and to build a shopping mall in the form of an army barracks³ instead. Gezi Park is right next to the Taksim Square, one of the most politicized public spaces in Turkey, which hosted countless political rallies as well as being the traditional celebration ground of Labour Day in Istanbul (Labour Day celebrations in Taksim were banned, however, by the Turkish government from 1979 to the present date with a brief exception in 2011 and 2012). Taksim is flanked by the Republic monument⁴ on one side and by the Atatürk Cultural Centre⁵ (Atatürk Kültür Merkezi-AKM) on the other, which is named after first president of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who was also the leading figure in the War of National Struggle as well as in the transition from Empire to Republic. With the republic monument and the Atatürk Cultural Centre, Taksim square not only represents a space where citizens express themselves politically, it is also a stage for the demonstration of the state power. The Turkish government still tries to fashion the square according to its own ideology in order to consolidate its physical presence in the public space.

1 This empirical research was carried out in the framework of a second year MA thesis in 2016, *Du stadium aux rues : construction de l'agir politique du groupe de supporters Çarşı*, Paris 8 University.

2 The park known today as Gezi was opened to the public in 1943 as the “İnönü Esplanade”, named after the Turkish president at the time, İsmet İnönü. A monument of İnönü at the center of the park was also planned but it was left unrealized due to political uproar against the project.

3 The project was going to mimic the 19th century artillery barracks which was demolished to make way for the park after it fell into disuse in the 20th century. It was also briefly used as a sports stadium in the early 20th century.

4 The monument was designed specifically for the square and inaugurated in 1928, with the aim to promote the young Republic. The name of the square was also changed to the Republic Square, but the public continued to call it Taksim.

5 The AKM has been closed to the public since 2008 under the pretext of a renovation. However, during Gezi it was revealed that the interior of the building was completely demolished. Built in 1969, before being closed it was one of the most important cultural institutions in Turkey.

Initially small in scale, the protests grew considerably in size after police forces burned the tents of protesters occupying the park on 28 May, just before dawn. Tens of thousands more joined in the protests in the next couple of days despite heavy and disproportionate police violence. Protests eventually led to the retreat of the police from Taksim and Gezi which were then occupied by activists for nearly two weeks between 1 June and 15 June 2013 (Taksim was taken by the police on June 11, and Gezi, 4 days later, on June 15). During the occupation, activists built various makeshift facilities such as a library, an infirmary, a kitchen and a food distribution area and a media centre. They also organized daily forums in which they discussed short-term internal and organizational issues (e.g., structure of the movement, decision making, spatial organization of the park) as well as long-term issues, such as the future of the movement and further political action. Cultural and artistic activities were frequent: yoga sessions, concerts (held by famous artists as well as amateurs) and artistic performances (such as Ziya Azizi's Sufi-influenced dance) were held. By the fifth day of the protests (May 31) the movement had already spread to every Turkish city with one exception (Bayburt). More than 4.5 million citizens nationwide joined the protests (Bia News Desk 2013).

Gezi Park was thus occupied and turned into a collective living space by very different (and sometimes conflicting) groups and individuals who have their own, more or less, specific and formalized *repertoire of contention* (Tilly 1986: 541-542). Left-wing groups and collectives practiced a more traditional form of political action (marches with slogans and placards); anti-capitalist Muslims organized collective prayers in the public space of Gezi (praying as a form of appropriation of the public space and criticizing the neoliberal policies of the government); Kurds practiced their folkloric dance to which everyone was invited to join; activists from the LGBTI community in Turkey had a more festive performance with colourful placards, flags and funny (as well as dirty) slogans. All of these forms of protestation were marked by an inclusive as well as a pacifist approach. This leaderless and heterogeneous movement was a coalition of many different groups and individuals, and it succeeded in building a movement which turned into something larger than merely an environmental or an urban issue by demanding the resignation of the AKP government. A massive aggregation of different social groups produced a public sphere (both symbolic and physical) in Gezi where they coexisted in harmony (more

or less) and experienced an alternative way of collective living. In short, they “invent[ed] new forms of public agency[,] use[ed] visual arts and performativity, as well as raise[d] new issues relating to faith, the environment and capitalism” (Göle 2013: 1).

The Gezi movement of 2013 was not an isolated or marginal social movement. The period between 2010 and 2013 saw the uprisings in Arabic countries, the Indignados movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. Although they each have their unique dynamics and characteristics, it is possible to observe some shared characteristics: (1) the social movement takes its name from the physical public square occupied (Occupy Wall Street in the United States and Gezi Park in Istanbul) and; (2) the occupation and reappropriation of public squares become the principal symbols and beacons of uprisings (Tahrir Square in Egypt, Puerta Del Sol square in Madrid); (3) spontaneity manifested in the quick and massive mobilization of people in public squares without needing or having an organizational process before assembling; (4) refusal of formal hierarchies (limited delegation, leadership) and adoption of horizontal and decentralized modes of organization, operating according to the principals of radical democracy; (5) the use of new communication technologies in the process of aggregation, dissemination of dissent and condensation of emotions.

This non-exhaustive list of characteristics pushed scholars to revisit the theoretical tools in the sociology of social movements in order to come up with new paradigms capable of comprehending the dynamics of the recent social movements. The notions of “networks” followed by “the ideology of horizontalism” forged by Manuel Castells and his pupil Jeffrey Juris are among the most cited in the analyses on the dynamics of the recent social movements. Another influential paradigm came from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri who identified a new revolutionary social class called the “multitude”.

According to Castells, the revolution in micro-electronics in the early 1960s created the necessary conditions for new forms of communication and cooperation that no longer needed central and hierarchical forms of coordination (Castells 2000). These new forms of decentralized and horizontal coordination affected a range of different

social domains, such as economy, social movements etc., and restructured society according to the model of *networks* (Castells 1996, 2000). This anti-authoritarian spirit is in fact inspired from the culture movements of the 1960s and 1970s that fostered self-determination and self-management principals. Castells points out that, besides the rise of new technology, the “networking paradigm” was fostered by the libertarian and participatory culture of new social movements such as environmentalism, feminism and the student movement (Castells 2004). “By definition, a network has no centre” (Castells 2000:15). The model of networks empowers social groups by liberating them from the top-down logic of hierarchical modes of organization.

In sum, in Castells’s “Network Society”, the “space of flows” overtakes the “space of places” (Castells 1996: 429). I argue that this approach marginalizes the local interactions and the identities constructed *in situ* by favouring *spontaneity* and *auto-organization* as predeterminations. This paradigm does not take into account the *corporeal character* of contemporary activism (the occupation of public squares in recent social movements). Furthermore, although *the ideology of structurelessness* is very much present among the protesters (during the movement) and collectives formed after the movement as an *ideal*, its realization should be (or, is) a debated subject (Juris 2008: 15). In the 1970s, activist and feminist scholar Jo Freeman wrote that informal types of organizations often develop their own kinds of informal hierarchies (Freeman 1972: 2). The ideology of structurelessness thus becomes an astute way of sidestepping the question of leadership and allows de facto leaders to remain unaccountable because of their invisibility. Recent works confirm the thesis of Freeman by pointing out the serious obstacles faced by the activists in the Indignados movement in the construction of auto-regulated (autonomous) consensus-based public spaces: these activists often failed to prevent the emergence of informal elites and thus the principle of equality or horizontality was jeopardized (Castanada 2012; Papa and Milioni 2016). Activists clearly expressed, and express today, their will and ambition to come up with non-hierarchical organizational forms by experimenting with horizontal forms of organization and cooperation.

Similar to Castells’ thesis, Hardt and Negri define a new social class called the *multitude* (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2005). The multitude defines a revolutionary subject

and is characterized by an *irreducible multiplicity*. For them the multitude is the only subject that has the capacity to fight with the already dematerialized capitalist accumulation. As a response to this de-centred and dematerialized “Empire”, the multitude is nomad and have de-territorialized power. The place of the multitude is in fact a non-place and can act *spontaneously* and collectively without being reduced to one identity or one place: “The members of the multitude do not have to become the same or renounce their creativity in order to communicate and cooperate with each other. They remain different in terms of race, sex, sexuality and so forth” (Hardt and Negri 2005: 91). That is the reason why the multitude is free in “self-determination” and “self-transformation”. As Paolo Gerbaudo notes, the theory of the multitude “[...] fails to take into account the *emplaced* character of collective action, the fact that it requires physical locations *as stages for its performances* (Gerbaudo 2012: 28).

I argue that both Castells’s and Hardt and Negri’s notions do not help us understand the core dynamics of recent social movements where the physical space acts as a stage enabling the aggregation of socially and geographically diverse actors and their respective public agency. Rather than focusing on the *networking paradigm* and the *de-territorialized power of subjectivities* which undermine the importance of locality and physical public spaces, I propose to use the category of public square movement in the analysis of the Gezi Park movement in order to (1) stress the importance of the physical public space in the creation or transformation of the public sphere by citizens themselves; (2) make intelligible the *enacted, performative* dimension of the public square from which new collective and subjective experiences can emerge and in turn transform the social fabric of the society.

Departing from Hannah Arendt’s perspective⁶, Nilüfer Göle points out that “Occupy movements appear, make citizens appear and set an example of horizontal engagement with fellow citizens. They disappear and retreat from the public square but their impact seems to persist” (Göle 2015: 140). She continues to add that these movements represent an “[...] opening of a window of opportunity, a microclimate, a pacified atmosphere and a civic attitude generated by [...] collective experiences”

⁶ For Hannah Arendt (1958) public space comes into being with performative construction and reconstruction without which dispersed individuals cannot be gathered and thus public space fails to happen.

(*Ibid.*) According to Arendt, it is the *public space of appearance* which allows the formation of the symbolical public place where individuals construct themselves as a *political subject* through appearing, becoming visible to one another and thus, moving together (Arendt 1968). In short, *the common world* (public sphere in symbolic terms) is only possible through the process of apparition and construction of the *public domain* (public places in physical terms) (Voirol 2004: 93-94; Arendt 1958).

While social movements are labelled according to the nature of the crowd, class origin, ethnic identity, or any sociological category, public square movements are “[...] named after the places they appropriate, occupy, and inhabit [...]. [They] explore new forms of linking the personal to the public agency. The copresence in the public square of different citizens and their enactment of alternative forms of being and living together characterize these movements”. And since “[...] they become the ‘actor’ in action, while performing in public in each other’s presence”, they invent new forms of public agency different from the normative public sphere (Göle 2015: 141). This in turn can create a transformative effect on one’s *public beings* (*manières d’être dans public et publiquement*) by showing her/him a different way to relate to one another and exist in the public places.

What was the role and the impact of a soccer fan group in a public square movement? How did Çarşı become involved? Were there new collective and subjective experiences that emerged in action at Gezi Park, transforming the actors’ way of existing and relating to one another in public places? And, if so, why is Çarşı’s presence and public agency in Gezi relevant? In order to address these questions, we will first discuss the nature of this unique fan group.

Çarşı: Fans of Beşiktaş, Watchmen of the Neighbourhood

Çarşı, the fan group of Istanbul’s Beşiktaş football club, was one of the main and, perhaps, one of the most influential and unusual actors of the Gezi protests. The name Çarşı means “marketplace” in Turkish and comes from the shopping area of the Beşiktaş district. As a central transportation hub with its bus terminus, grand boulevard and ferry port, Beşiktaş is one of the busiest places in the city, but the Çarşı area is different. It comprises mostly pedestrianized streets with cafes, restaurants,

small shops, and bars as well as a local fish market. Taksim is a 40-minute walk away from Çarşı, and Beşiktaş's stadium is located between Çarşı and Taksim. Beşiktaş's İnönü Stadium is also situated in the Beşiktaş district. The fan group has a particular emotional attachment for their neighbourhood due to its proximity to Taksim and the seaside location of their stadium. The fact that they know the neighbourhood quite well was a useful element to exploit during the confrontations with the police forces, such as by entering and occupying narrow streets where large riot control vehicles cannot enter.

The importance of the Çarşı neighbourhood over collective mobilization and emotional bonding is highlighted among the fans. Many of them pointed out “[...] although Fenerbahçe also has its own neighbourhood, Kadıköy (the district where Fenerbahçe is located) is much bigger than Çarşı which makes it more difficult to get together and spend time with one another on a daily basis” (interview with Çarşı member, Doğan). Çarşı is a physical space where fans get together not only for football matches but also for socializing in everyday life. The core group of Çarşı⁷, which describes the founding members and their close friends, lives in the neighbourhood and some of them own or work at the neighbourhood cafés or bars. Cem Yakışkan, the co-founder of Çarşı, for example, owns the *Esperi Cafe*⁸, where most of the fans gather to watch football matches or socialize with friends. *Kazan* is another restaurant and famous place for Çarşı's gatherings, where fans go before and after the matches. And *Abbasağa Park* is another destination where fans meet frequently. Çarşı's bond with the physical space of the neighbourhood is almost organic and represents a strong force in the organizational resources and dynamics of the group. As will be seen later in the article, one of the apparent reasons behind Çarşı's involvement in Gezi was also their will to defend their neighbourhood and the neighbourhood of Taksim, which is not very far from Beşiktaş district, against police intervention.

Founded in 1982 by Mehmet Işıklar (better known as *Optik Başkan*, a nickname that translates literally as *optic president*, the word optic referring to his glasses) and by

⁷ Contrary to what one might think, this core group belongs to the middle class and have jobs in the liberal sectors (lawyers, shop owners, managers in ad agencies, etc.).

⁸ *Esperi* means a type of eagle that cannot be domesticated. This is clearly a reference to the symbol of the Beşiktaş football club: an eagle.

Cem Yakışkan (known as Sarı Cem, which means Cem the Blond) in the Çarşı neighbourhood, Çarşı carries the same name as the neighbourhood. All the founding members originate from a working-class, leftist and socially conscious group. Mehmet Isiklar, a.k.a Optik Başkan, who passed away in 2007, was a leftist high school history teacher in Ankara who eventually left his post in the capital to be in Istanbul to attend Beşiktaş's home matches.

In the late 1970s, when İnönü Stadium was shared by the top three Istanbul teams, Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe (as the latter two were having their stadiums renovated), Optik Başkan and Sarı Cem decided to form a group in order to organize their fellow supporters to spend the night by the stadium to rush for the best seats when the doors open. They would also attack the fans of the *coloured teams* (a term to describe Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe who fancy the colours red, yellow and blue unlike Beşiktaş which is black and white). After the military coup in 1980, the violence intensified until the three groups decided to reach a peace settlement.

Optik Başkan, along with Cem, was responsible for the leftist vein in Çarşı. Although he did not have any activist experience in the political organizations, he was openly identifying himself as a leftist and was (and still is today) highly respected by other fans mainly because of his charity-like actions, such as distributing tickets to those who could not afford it and bringing children to the stadium. He also replaced the letter "A" in Çarşı's logo with the anarchism's symbolic A. This political vein became rooted in years with other leftist fans joining the group. In the 1990s however, many more individuals with different political tendencies and opinions began to join Çarşı. The core group responded to this plurality by transforming their performance in the stadium: they no longer made references to leftist songs and ceased to raise their left fist in the air while chanting. Today, they claim that they do not adhere to a particular political agenda, but, despite the rhetoric, Çarşı is politically very conscious. For them, being the fans of Beşiktaş means that they "[...] protect the oppressed, the ones who need their voices heard. [We] support the youth, endeavour to shift to a more modern, stronger democracy" (Interview with Çarşı co-founder, Sarı Cem).

This careful response about their internal heterogeneity by avoiding or refusing to define themselves according to a specific political ideology comes from their collective experience in the stadium and from their unquestionable love for their team:

“In the stadium, I do not care if I am sitting next to a fascist or a conservative. When we [Beşiktaş team] concede a goal we cry together, when we [Beşiktaş team] score a goal we hug and celebrate together. Throughout the match we cheer and sweat together because this is what it means to love Beşiktaş” (Interview with Çarşı member Engin).

In a similar way, when a need to make an ethical judgment on social issues or to build a social aid campaign arises, Çarşı members act together regardless of their political, social or ethnic belongings.

Today Çarşı is associated with a certain level of compassion and safety mainly due to their rhetoric against social injustice and the aid campaigns they organize. In 2011, for example, Çarşı raised funds in order to buy food and winter clothes for children in Van, a region hit by a major earthquake which destroyed many houses and left the people in provisional tents during the harsh winter cold. In order to attract attention to this issue, Çarşı took off their tops and threw it to the football field during the derby between Beşiktaş and Galatasaray and displayed a banner on which was written: “The children of Van shouldn’t be cold”. They also collaborated with Greenpeace during the 2005/2006 football season by displaying a huge banner which expressed sentiments against a future nuclear plant project in Turkey. This collective agreement on defending the rights of the underprivileged comes from the fact that the fans perceive their team as a victim of numerous injustices: “Beşiktaş’s football players come from a less privileged social and economic milieu. Since the club doesn’t the same resources as Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, other teams try to crush us” (Interview with Çarşı member Engin). One of the fans referred for example to the football match between Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş in 2005 where Fenerbahçe fans displayed a banner on which was written “Mr. Rıza, two loaves of bread and a bottle of milk please” in order to strike at the modest social background of Beşiktaş coach Rıza Çalımbyay (who used to be a star player of Beşiktaş), trying to humiliate him by referring to his father who was a janitor. Çarşı retaliated to this by opening a banner on which we read, “We are all children of janitors.” Due to these kinds of performances in the stadium, aid campaigns and the group’s efficiency in mobilizing quickly in large numbers, their presence in the Gezi movement was therefore expected and did not come as a surprise to many.

Çarşı becoming a part of the Gezi movement

How and why did Çarşı become implicated in the Gezi protests? Two incidents with the police forces in 2013, just before Gezi, played a crucial role in the almost spontaneous mass mobilization of Çarşı in the Gezi Park.

On 7 April 2013 in İstiklal Street, which opens to Taksim square and which is perhaps the most famous street in Turkey, a handful of citizens, including artists, protested the forthcoming demolition of *Emek Sineması* which is a historic movie theatre built in 1884. Among the protesters were some of Çarşı's members who held a banner that said, "Çarşı is against the demolition of *Emek Sineması*". Shortly after, the police engaged the demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons, abruptly ending the peaceful protest. When asked why Çarşı was present in the protests for *Emek*, one of the leftist members of the Çarşı's core group, Efe, answered:

"Because *Emek* is one of the few remaining historical buildings in Istanbul. It is also an important symbol for artists and intellectuals. Before, when you strolled in İstiklal Street, you would see young people discussing, walking with newspapers and books. First concert after the military coup of 12 September 1980, was given in *Emek* by *Grup Yorum*. All cultural activities were banned for two years [1980-1982]. This concert was very important for us. In addition to this concert, I went to film festivals in this theatre. As you probably know, in France the government protects historic buildings, respects the memory of the city. In Turkey, AKP [the governing Adalet Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party] destroys everything; it does not even respect mosques. That is why, as Çarşı, we wanted to protect our squares, our buildings, our parks. Taksim Square is right next to Beşiktaş; it is our neighbouring district!"

This statement points out three important facts: (1) Çarşı knows through everyday experience that locality and public places are crucial to the preservation of a certain life style as well the social fabric of a specific location; (2) the core group of Çarşı is conscious about the government's aim to reshape the architectural and historical structure of the city; and (3) Çarşı does not hesitate to take action to counter such issues —for them, the destruction of cultural and historical citizen habitats is a social injustice.

The second incident before Gezi involving Çarşı happened on 11 May 2013, during

the last match in the historic Beşiktaş İnönü Stadium before its demolition and replacement by a modern stadium (Vodafone Arena). Following the orders of the prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (who at the time was in Dolmabahçe Prime Ministry Office near the Çarşı neighbourhood and was disturbed by the noise of the fans), two police officers fired in the air in order to disperse the fans gathered in the public places of Çarşı neighbourhood. Çarşı, taking this as an insult, threw projectiles at the police who responded in turn with tear gas and water cannons. Humiliated by the police violence during their last match in their beloved İnönü Stadium, Çarşı clashed with the police and chanted “Spray! Spray! Go on, spray tear gas! Take off your helmet, drop your baton! Let’s see who the real man is!” which would become one of the favourite chants of the Gezi protests.

As a seasoned soccer fan group, Çarşı knew very well how to channel passion and excitement into specific sets of actions and raise lively cheers and spirits. They are the *choreographers* of the stadium. As one of the fans pointed out:

“In the stadium, we do not watch the game. Rather we concentrate to channel all our energy to our performance. We also do specific songs and cheers in order to invite other fans [situated at the other side of the stadium] to join us. When someone among us says something racist, we immediately warn him. It is such tiresome work that we [re]watch the match once we go back home” (interview with Çarşı member).

The core group of Çarşı is the head organizer of this performance. Before each important game, a meeting is held to discuss different proposals for performances and slogans. Then, they work on the banners and chants. This means that they have a degree of know-how in collective mobilization (collecting resources, organizing meetings, discussing the actions taken in the stadium and channelling passion into specific sets of performances such as chants, slogans etc.).

As already mentioned, Çarşı had a vast experience in clashing with the police as well as opposing teams’ fans (violent fights with other fans over seats in the stadium in 1980s and, more recently, with the police after the football matches). Their know-how in organization and their ability to orchestrate crowds when coupled with the two incidents mentioned above explain largely, if not completely, the instant and mass

mobilization of Çarşı for Gezi. One of the fans stated that they did not even talk to each other before mobilizing in their neighbourhood or in Taksim Square. For them, the Gezi movement was first and foremost the defence of the Çarşı neighbourhood, since Taksim Square is nearby and there were many protesters marching from the Besiktas port to Taksim Square. Moreover, they oversaw the safety of young protesters who were inexperienced both in clashing with the police and with organizing themselves.

Çarşı's interaction with other actors of Gezi: inventing new forms of public agency and creating new public experiences

A quick observer may declare that Çarşı was the “muscles” of Gezi, which means that they were the ones who faced the police during confrontations which involved teargas and rubber bullets barrages. However, a closer look reveals that they did not only build barricades or face the policemen: they also showed the young and less experienced protesters how to survive under teargas and keep their ground during the clashes. In Gezi, this meant a tiresome effort and significant teamwork against police water cannons, teargas, stun grenades, rubber bullets and beatings. Building barricades and taking shifts at night to observe the policemen were daily activities in Gezi Park. With their cheerful and energetic chants imported directly from the stadium to Taksim Square and Gezi Park, Çarşı played an important role in the motivation of protesters, who were considerably tired and demoralized after violent clashes with the police. In so doing, Çarşı also attracted more individuals to resist the construction project as well as the disproportional police violence. In sum, their actions in the stadium and in their neighbourhood resonates with their public agency in Gezi: sharing know-how with less experienced protesters against police violence and organizing quickly in large numbers in order to prepare for a physical confrontation.

After the retreat of the police on 1 June 2013, Çarşı did not leave the park. To a certain degree, their presence gave a feeling of security to those in the park. They protected the park from hostile intruders who wanted to pick a fight with the

protestors. In other words, Çarşı became the watchmen of the *mini-society* created in the public space of Gezi Park.

Çarşı's considerable ease at joining in and co-orchestrating the protests in a highly heterogeneous crowd highlights the fact that Çarşı had the know-how required to deal with internal heterogeneity in a limited public space. As already mentioned, Çarşı's numbers grew in size over the years with fans from different political spectra and its member base became ever more heterogenic. Yet, they managed to protect the *unity* of their public agency and their collective identity in the stadium and in the neighbourhood thanks to the presence of the core group and its leadership of performances and activities. This core group does not interfere with the political opinions of others. They accept members on one single condition: an immense love and passion for their club. Due to their ability and experience in cooperating with individuals from different backgrounds by uniting them under a common passion, Çarşı became an important *intermediator* in the park, uniting actors from extremely different backgrounds (such as the LGBTI activists and generally male-dominated fan groups that fancy a macho culture) under the same cause: protecting the park from demolition and helping the protesters against police violence.

This role of intermediation attracted the attention of the Taksim Solidarity (*Taksim Dayanışması* in Turkish), which was one of the key actors in triggering the movement. After clashing with the police and seeing how the Çarşı helped bring new protestors and sympathizers to the resistance, Taksim Solidarity proposed Çarşı become a representative of the Gezi occupation. Çarşı refused this offer, pointing out that they “were not there to become the leaders of this movement.” Rather, they “were in Gezi because Çarşı does not stand idle when people are getting hurt just because they demanded their own citizenship rights [such as the right to protest and/or the right to assembly and the right to the city].” They explained to Taksim Solidarity that “it is the *Taksim Solidarity* which should have become the leader and represent the movement” (interview with Sarı Cem). This statement reveals how effortlessly they took a decision based on their ethical stance and, while playing a central role in the defence and preservation of the park, how they preferred to remain equal participants rather than becoming a representative of the movement.

Being accustomed to make ethical judgments explains also why Çarşı quickly became involved in the Gezi Park protests. What's more, Çarşı was well known by the Turkish public for their *framing* of injustice and their ethical stance on various issues, such as their protest against the flooding of the historical site of Hasankeyf or against the humiliation of their coach. As Çarşı became visible in the Taksim square, their presence encouraged more and more people to join the protests. Evrim, a university student, feminist activist and an admirer of Çarşı, said:

“When we [Evrin and the feminist collective] first saw the handful of people sitting near the trees in Gezi Park, we said to ourselves this is the Cihangir elite⁹ who instrumentalize our political action by making a scene and attracting public attention in Taksim. But then when I saw Çarşı in park, I quickly changed my mind because I knew that if Çarşı was there, something important must have been taking place” (interview with Evrim).

Çarşı interacted and got along with other actors in the park through *negotiation*. They coordinated the occupation with the members of LGBTI who were also very prominent in Gezi (especially during the clashes with the police). This was in fact a somewhat surprising alliance, considering the sexism and homophobia observed among soccer fans (Beşiktaş fans included). In everyday life, soccer fans, especially Çarşı, do not encounter members of the LGBTI community and even if they somehow meet a LGBTI person in the street or in a cafe, they do not interact. One should also keep in mind the fact that there has been a number of hate crimes against the LGBTI community in Istanbul, and wandering alone at night as a transvestite is not an easy nor a safe task, which is in fact true for women as well.

How then, did Çarşı handle LGBTI members' public visibility and public agency in Gezi right next to a crowd of predominantly male football fans, and what can be drawn from this unusual encounter and alliance?

⁹ A neighbourhood near Taksim Square, Cihangir is one of the most expensive neighborhoods of Istanbul, with trendy bars, cafés and restaurants.

Two members of Çarşı explain the encounter and interaction with the LGBTI activists as very significant. When asked what they think about the Gezi movement, they directly responded by commenting on their experiences with the LGBTI community.

“Gezi taught me so many things. For example, *before Gezi* I did not respect gays or lesbians. I would call them ‘faggot’. But *after Gezi*, I have gay and lesbian friends. Right in front of our tents [Çarşı tents], there were the tents of LGBT during the occupation. Honestly, believe me when I say it, they were extremely brave. I never saw something like this. They threw themselves in front of the riot vehicles yelling, *we are all brothers and sisters*” (interview with Çarşı member).

The other, intervening ecstatically said, “the LGBTI community opened their houses to me. They literally saved my life!” (interview with Çarşı member).

These two testimonies hint on the significant transformational effect of Gezi on its actors. As Zeynep Gambetti points out, “‘what’ went into Gezi, came out altered. The way the identity was symbolized before acting and after having acted was not the same, since the proliferation of sites of encounter reduced the chances of remaining immune to the effect of others” (Gambetti 2016: 42). This alteration is evident in the testimony of the Çarşı member who specifically used the framing of *before* and *after* Gezi.

Zeynep Gambetti gives the example of two interactions between soccer fans and LGBTI members: the first one takes place in the defensive lines of the Beşiktaş neighbourhood:

“ [...] a bunch of LGBT activists found themselves facing the armour-clad riot police all alone while the boisterous soccer enthusiasts took a retreat. When they caught their breath and came back a while later, the LGBT block was still standing out on its own, swallowing the tear gas and protecting the barricade. The fans also seemed to fully appreciate the fact that ‘the boy in the skirt has a first aid kit’ and were spreading the word” (Gambetti 2016: 38).

Gambetti's second example is the issue of the fans calling the police *ibne*, which roughly translates as faggot. Yet they had to apologize to LGBTI activists, saying "they are the real faggots; you're one of us". The fans started to call the transsexuals *abla* which means elder sister. Fans were thus "[...] signalling that the becoming-sister of transsexuals was at the same time the becoming-brother of soccer fans" (*Ibid.*, 38).

LGBTI activists throwing themselves in front of the riot vehicles yelling, "we are all brothers and sisters", was not only aimed at the police but also to the soccer fans as well. The phrase "we are all brothers and sisters" and "[...] this being here was the performative actualization of their claim to be an actor. They were thus short-circuiting the impracticality of addressing a demand for recognition to the soccer fans" (*Ibid.*, 38-39). Thus, LGBTI protesters were not only confronting the government but also the soccer fans. Consequently, the latter undertook a transformation.

We observe here a disruption of normative aspects of the public sphere where these social groups do not encounter each other in daily life. This disruption took place when (1) LGBT members were physically acting alongside the soccer fans and thus demanding in action their right to be recognized as an actor ("we are all brothers and sisters"); (2) the positive response of the soccer fans who started to produce new appellations when referring or talking with LGBT members, such as *abla* (elder sister) or "boy in a skirt"; (3) the LGBT members were exposed to police violence as much as the soccer fans, if not more. The fact that everyone in the park were subject to more or less the same amount of police violence and the positive response of soccer fans to the presence and resistance of LGBTI members caused a change in the reception of social identities among the protesters. A soccer fan who entered Gezi calling an LGBTI a faggot, left calling them a "boy in a skirt", *abla* or *kardes* (sibling) (*Ibid.*, 42).

The positive and conciliatory attitude of Çarşı cannot be solely explained through the disproportional police violence during the protests. As mentioned earlier, Çarşı does not take into account the political or ethnic backgrounds of their fans when they are in the stadium or the neighbourhood. They cheer, cry and celebrate with each other

because they are all passionate about Beşiktaş. This does not immediately mean that a transsexual or a gay can easily fit in Çarşı in the stadium or in their neighbourhood. It does offer, however, a possible explanation as to why Çarşı is more likely to accept, interact, and negotiate with LGBTI members or feminists, as compared to other teams' fan groups who are yet to show similar signs of an inclusive culture and openness towards the LGBTI community.

It should also be noted that when the interviews were conducted with the members of Çarşı, those who were apolitical until Gezi (and not only leftists and those politically engaged) were also included in the research. This methodological choice revealed that there are in fact nationalist fans who, after becoming part of the Gezi protests, were personally changed after their interactions with others in the park. This does not mean that they completely changed their political views or the way they see the world, but nonetheless interacting with those who are very different from them had a transformational effect.

Fırat, for example, who is an ardent Beşiktaş fan like his father and grandfather confessed without hesitation: "My family is fascist. That's why until Gezi I was a nationalist. But after being in Gezi Park with Çarşı, I decided to be an anarchist and to never vote again." He was somewhat angry with the perception that Çarşı was in Gezi mainly to fight against the police: "Çarşı and me were not in Gezi to fight the police. But we were really afraid that the inexperienced activists might get seriously hurt. So, we joined in the confrontations in order to protect them". This framing also hints at the humanistic motivations of Çarşı's agency in Gezi. Once Çarşı came to the park they were voluntarily or involuntarily changed and transformed through their interactions with others' physical presences and agency.

Conclusion

The question asked earlier in this article was "*were there new collective and subjective experiences that emerged in action at Gezi Park that transformed the actors' way of existing and relating to one another in public places?*" The testimonies from the members of Çarşı and their public agency in Gezi Park seem to have answered this question. The reappropriation and the actors' ways of investing in the

public space of Gezi generated new forms of public agency and thus, new subjectivities. As we see with the example of the Çarşı fan who had lesbian and gay friends only *after* his participation in Gezi, the LGBTI activist who appeared, demanded and practiced his/her constitutional rights by yelling in front of everyone “we are all brothers and sisters”, and the new appellations brought forward by the football fans for a transsexual such as the “boy in the skirt” and *abla*, Gezi Park was indeed an alternative public stage.

During the occupation “[...] they become the ‘actor’ in action, while performing in public in each other’s presence, they invent new forms of public agency different from the normative public sphere” (Göle 2015: 141). It is then plausible enough to argue that the multiplication of the chances of personal encounters and building a collective action together in a public space fostered a pluralistic, inclusive *public* agency as opposed to an exclusive and normative traditional *political* agency. The fact that Çarşı was involved in Gezi Park protests mainly because of humanistic motivations, such as protecting those who are inexperienced in clashes with the police, also marks a disruption of traditional forms of collective action and political agency. Their *public* agency was formed by their desire to help citizens in the Gezi Park, not to align with or join an ideological stance and/or a defined political agency.

Furthermore, the Gezi experience had a transformative effect on its actors by demonstrating through action that a different way of living and being in society is possible.

The power of this collective experience may come in fact from the elimination or neutralization of what Hannah Arendt calls “desolation”, a concept that she uses to explain the essence of totalitarian systems (Arendt 1951). The term *desolation* is distinct from loneliness. While the latter can be the result of a personal choice, the former is imposed and is not the result of a personal choice. The experience of desolation manifests itself with the emotion of absolute abandonment and isolation. For Hannah Arendt the feeling of desolation occurs when the common world (public sphere) and the public domain (the physical public space such as the streets or squares) lose their primary function, which is constructing and re-constructing the

bond between people who, through the work of public spaces (both in symbolic and physical meanings) do not feel abandoned and alone. Desolation indicates, then, a radical loss of belonging to the world. We can read the interaction between soccer fans and LGBTI members as an attempt to build an inclusive public place where LGBTI members would not be excluded and isolated from the common world by homophobia and sexism and, thus, feel connected to others and to their own public appearances.

When discussing isolation and desolation, one should note that Gezi was also a cultural manifestation as well as an experience. For example, an editor of the 140journos¹⁰ news outlet described¹¹ the dramatic effect of a humoristic slogan written on a wall near Taksim which could only be understood by a veteran *Grand Theft Auto*¹² player: “suddenly I realized that I was not alone in my geeky lifestyle and that people like me exist and they came here and wrote this cheat code on the wall [which was « Leave me alone », a cheat code that enables all the policemen chasing you to disappear in the game]”. Such use of cultural references during the Gezi occupation was very common. These references were marked by an intense and colourful use of humour, which starkly contrasted with the authoritarian and tense political culture in Turkey. It was also the same editor from 140journos who added that, “if it was not for Gezi, we would have abandoned the project of 140journos. Gezi gave us hope and the power to continue”.

In today’s Turkey, such interpretations and observations may sound perhaps too optimistic. In 2007 Turkish constitutional referendum, the Justice and Development Party lost a significant number of big cities, including Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya and Izmir. But more importantly right after the public declaration of the debatable results of the referendum, citizens gathered in public spaces of Istanbul to protest against the president and the legitimacy of the referendum. These collective mobilizations were not in fact completely spontaneous, despite what one might think. It was the

10 An Istanbul-based grassroots media outlet that aims to bring people together by transmitting to them non-biased and ad free information. Although 140journos was founded before Gezi, it was their Gezi coverage that made 140journos widely known. Their name comes from the 140-character limit on Twitter which was the primary platform they used. Today 140journos has 155,000 followers on Twitter.

11 This interview was conducted during a research project on alternative media outlets in the University of Paris 8.

12 A hugely famous video game franchise.

manifestation of the long and hard work of the “No Councils” (*Hayır Meclisleri*), which was organized/implemented in more than ten different neighbourhoods of Istanbul. These neighbourhood-based councils or collectivities appeared in the post-Gezi period and, regardless of political oppression, they have continued to debate on how to invent and use more innovative forms of actions in order to have an impact first in their neighbourhood and then on a larger scale.

Earlier in the article, I mentioned that, during the Gezi Park occupation, activists who wanted to express themselves and have an open debate on the Gezi movement and other political, ecological, or local issues organized many forums in the park. In the post-Gezi period, Çarşı and Community Centers¹³ (*Halkevleri*) organized one of the first public forums in the Abbasağa Park, where not only activists but also local residents gathered to discuss political issues as well as problems related to their everyday lives in the neighbourhood. These kinds of citizen forums started to appear in other neighbourhoods shortly after the Abbasağa Park experience. In time, some of them became local collectivities, where activists and residents discuss how to build a grassroots movement starting from the very place in which they are implemented. With the referendum, these collectivities, and local forums transformed to the “No Councils”, changing their name and structure easily and quickly in order to mobilize a maximum number of citizens under the banner of “No”. This different form and understanding of political action thus manifested itself with the desire to create a local community in which the activists, always remaining connected to the neighbourhood and its residents, try to build a local and grassroots public agency as opposed to top-down, traditional and possibly exclusive political agency.

It is not a coincidence that Çarşı was the first one to take the initiative of organizing a public forum in Abbasağa Park. As mentioned earlier, Çarşı has an almost organic bond with the public places of its neighbourhood. The fans know, therefore, *the importance of the locality* for the survival of their group and the continuity of their collective actions. From this point of view, we can say that, in the post-Gezi period, Çarşı, along with the other dissident groups of Gezi movement, contributed greatly to the emergence of this new form of public agency, which consists of gathering in

¹³ *Halkevleri* acts as an umbrella organization covering struggle for citizenship rights including struggle for "right for free education", "right for free medical treatment", "right to housing" etc.

public places to organize open public debates and eventually creating a local grassroots community and setting public actions linked with the local fabric and its residents.

Gezi as a grassroots movement invites us to revisit the notion of political action in order to redefine its meaning and its forms of display in public spaces. The insistence on “local” and non-traditional forms of *public* agency — concerning as well their internal organizational forms and the repertoire of action of the recent public square movements — demonstrates that “one should distinguish the ‘public’ aspects of these movements from the ‘political’ ones, and not underestimate the transformative effect of the former in the political sphere. [...] Its political significance and effectiveness is rooted in its public performativity” (Göle 2013: 7).

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