Non-Violent Power of Collectivities: Voices from Tahrir and Gezi

Ali Bilgic, Department of International Relations, Bilkent University

ECPG 2015, Upssala

(Work in Progress)

‘There is something political in the city air struggling to be expressed.’\(^1\)

It is not uncommon for scholars of International Relations (IR) to be caught by surprise by the developments in the ‘field’. Should their guards have dropped, the end of the Cold was ‘unexpected’. So was 9/11, including the violence inflicted on the globe that has been carved out as ‘clashing civilizations’. Authoritarian regimes in North Africa, including Egypt, became useful partners during the War on Terror of the West, rendering individuals less protected against the state.\(^2\) Although it has not generally been considered as such, another dimension of the post-9/11 global politics was the surprising rise of Turkey under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which offered a manifestation of co-existence of Islam and democracy with its neoliberal economic policies *par excellence*. Turkey was finally becoming ‘the role model’ for the Middle East (an argument which appeared immediately after the Cold War to prove Turkey’s usefulness for the changing West). However, the ‘business as usual’ of 9/11 global politics was disrupted, if not completely shattered, by what Hannah Arendt would call ‘an event’. Protests in Tahrir, Egypt, in January 2011, and in Gezi, Turkey, in May-June 2013 revealed the potential of individuals to claim a collective voice and exercise power collectively regardless of their clashing political views, background, class, gender, religion, and sex.

Tahrir in 2011 and Gezi in 2013 (or Taksim Square) were again unexpected for many scholars of IR, whose main concern was ‘stability’ in the Middle East, or were amazed by the role Turkey could play

---

\(^1\) David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 117.

as a role model for ‘Greater’ Middle Eastern geography.\textsuperscript{3} Although it should be acknowledged that both events were products of different social, political, and economic conditions of their own contexts, similarities can be detected between the two. Primarily, neither in Egypt nor in Turkey did the events erupt unexpectedly. Instead, they matured in a process of resistance-building. In the case of Egypt, this preparation process was stronger and deeper than in Turkey, where smaller scale resistance movements had begun to politicize the streets. Secondly, in both cases, the collectivities in Tahrir and Taksim were pluralist and diverse insofar as they challenged political scientists to claim any type of generalizations about the binding political ‘identity’ of the resisting collectivities. Thirdly, non-violent resistance methods, including humour, were adopted against the state violence.

Without delay, West-centric media and canonical academic texts underlined the role of Western technology in the initiation of the events, and of how the ‘oppressed’ non-Western people collectively fought against non-Western ‘authoritarian’ regimes, which had no respect for liberal individualism. There was little, if any, acknowledgement of how the West had previously cooperated with the same regimes. However, Tahrir and Taksim cannot be understood through the Western liberal politics with its \textit{a priori} defined political identities, state-centric approach (as opposed to bourgeois civil society), and colonial outlook to non-Western experiences. This paper aims to show that the events of Tahrir and Gezi can best be understood as processes in post-liberal politics where individuals’ ‘who-ness’ met their bodies and construct a pluralist collectivity in which ‘the everyday’ meets ‘the extraordinary’. The argument proceeds in three sections. First, as a theoretical foundation, approaches of Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler will be discussed together in post-liberal politics. Second, Tahrir and Taksim will be visited through new theoretical lenses. The final section will speculate about what the events could mean for IR scholarship’s understanding new resistance movements.

\textbf{Arendt meeting Butler in post-liberal politics}\textsuperscript{4}

This analysis makes the case that Tahrir and Taksim can be examined as processes in post-liberal politics. Inspired by Richmond and Mac Ginty’s ‘post-liberal peace’ and by an Arendtian understanding of politics, post-liberal politics transcends the state, its narrow and exclusionary, ‘national’ politics, and ostensibly its 'rational' actors interacting within bourgeois ‘civil society’. Instead, it concerns innovative, pluralistic, and inclusionary political spaces where individuals claim


political agency through their ‘everyday’ practices.5 According to Richmond, ‘the everyday is a space in which local individuals and communities live and develop political strategies [of resistance] in their local environment towards the state and towards international models of order’.6 Post-liberal politics rejects the self-other dichotomies of nationality, race, class, gender, and sex, imposed on individuals by modern liberal politics or by what Patricia Owens calls Arendtian ‘what-ness’. In contrast, post-liberal politics operates on someone’s ‘who-ness’, which ‘is their specific, unique, and distinguishing identity that is constantly recreated and revealed in political action and speech’.7

Post-liberal politics unpacks new ways of approaching resisting individuals and collectivities. One of the most crucial openings is to release politics from the confinements of state-level relations and structures and to pave the way for introducing new spaces of politics such as squares, parks, and streets. Rather than civil society in liberal politics, which checks and balances the state, and therefore reproduces state level politics through justification and normalization, these new political spaces are the spaces of politics: not a companion but an alternative political space to the state. Hence, both the ‘liberal’ West and the ‘illiberal’ non-West state’s governmentality methods are challenged. Related to this, post-liberal politics urges scholars to monitor ‘the everyday’ in order to detect resistance to political practices of states that regulate the everyday. As will be shown in the cases of Tahrir and Gezi, ‘everyday practices’ such as cleaning up the garbage in squares became political acts that not only kept the collectivity together but also attracted more people to join the resistance. Finally, as underlined by Arendtian ‘who-ness’, post-liberal politics does not operate based on and reproducing self/other dichotomies. It does not reproduce gendered, classed, raced, and sexed subjectivities, but it transcends them. Dichotomies are created in different political contexts, but post-liberal politics dismantle them through ‘the everyday’. It does not impose the rational, Western, secular individualism of liberal politics over individuals. What kinds of individuals render post-liberal politics possible? Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy can help provide an explanation.

Patricia Owens describes Arendt’s grand objectives as challenging the approach which automatically equates violence with power, and therefore, with domination, and ‘to end the modern fascination with reducing politics to violent domination’.8 She argues that Arendt puts human plurality, with all disagreements and differences, ‘at the heart of politics’, where plural equals coming together to

---

8 Patricia Owens, Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
resist the old systems and to create new spaces of freedom.\(^9\) Therefore, in the Arendtian approach, power, freedom, and politics are interwoven in a way that resistance of individuals in plurality can be articulated in the language of power. However, this power is not oppressing or dominating. Rather, it stems from a plurality of individuals who think and create anew. It emerges when individuals create spaces of freedom.

Power ‘corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert. Power is never a property of the individual; it belongs to a group, and remains in existence as long as the group keeps together’.\(^10\) As power is not a ‘thing’ to be possessed, and only emerges when it is exercised collectively, its potential is limitless. Its actualization, however, depends on action and speech by a collective group in, what Arendt calls ‘the space of appearance’. As Owens highlights, this is politics according to Arendt. Power is ‘what keeps the public realm - the space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence’.\(^11\) When it is not actualized by individuals who are able to act and speak together, power disappears, which eventually leads to weakening and disappearance of the collectivity. When they perform together, power is actualized.

In order to explain why Arendt conceptualizes power as a potential of collective action of individuals, two key concepts of Arendtian understanding of individuals can be stressed. The first concept Arendt gives immense role to is thinking: ‘as the effort to undo systems by continuous questioning’ and as ‘empathy’, the effort to understand others without losing one’s self.\(^12\) Another concept is natality, which refers to ‘the capacity [of individuals] of beginning something anew, that is, of acting’.\(^13\) Natality, which starts biologically at birth, points to the potential of individuals to take initiative, to act, to start something new socially ‘as a second birth’ through speech and action.\(^14\) Each human being has ‘the capacity to initiate a new set of words and actions that are uniquely hers, and no human life can ever be the replica of any other’.\(^15\)

These two characteristics shared by human beings, for Arendt, do not mean it is possible to overlook the modern politics’ targeting and shaping of subjectivities of individuals, who in return reiterate existing relations and structures through performances. However, it means that it is not possible to

---


\(^13\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*.


reduce the ‘human condition’ to normalization and control processes. Indeed, Foucault and Arendt share various principles of modern politics and political philosophy: the rejection of the ahistorical and asocial subject, the ‘normalizing’ effects of modern political practices on individuals, and, most importantly for the purposes of this analysis, the acknowledgement of resistance of individuals.¹⁶ However, while Foucault posits resistance against the normalizing, controlling, and yet productive power, Arendt seeks power in ‘the potential that enables humans to break away, or more precisely, to disrupt the hold of Foucaultian power’.¹⁷ Individuals can critically reflect upon the systems even if they are under their own effect, and launch initiatives to create them anew. In this way, Arendt offers a theoretical foundation for resistance: why do individuals resist? Foucault underlines the importance of resistance by defining sites of power as sites of contestation. However, he never attained power to resistance and never defined what type of power resistance can exercise. Arendt, on the contrary, seeks the concept of power through the moments of resistance of individuals in plurality.

Arendt starts with individuals as targets of controlling processes, but also as resisters who can think and create anew. This makes each individual unique and different, whereas it does not render them ‘powerful’. Power emerges when individuals perform in concert in pluralist spaces of appearance. Arendtian thinking stresses the productive, social and dynamic character of power and links individual to the collectivity without sacrificing pluralism.

While Arendtian collective power provides us with the theoretical and normative perspective for resistance and empowerment in post-liberal world politics, it also has three setbacks, which require Butler’s approach to politics and resistance. Firstly, notwithstanding its fundamental contributions to understanding the power of collectivities, Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy shares the modern ‘scientific’ fallacy that prioritizes ‘cognitive’ before ‘body’. However, following from Butler, many feminists have convincingly showed that the body is a social product of discourses, institutions, and practices.¹⁸ Sasson-Levy and Rapoport argue that with reference to two social movements in Israel that challenged national security legacy and gender relations, the Women in Black movement, bodies were not tools to carry a political message, but were the political message.¹⁹ Their in-depth analysis revealed that rather than being a mere tool, the body is mutually constitutive with social meanings, it reflects and reproduces values and ideas, but more importantly for the purposes of present analysis,

---

the ‘protesting body’ is a site of resistance. Presence of LGBTQ members in Taksim and women in Tahrir was a performance that destabilized not only the oppressive authorities they were resisting but also other members of the protesting collectivity. ‘When bodies hit the street en masse to oppose the status quo, their power can appear either infinitesimal or so spectacular as to arrest onlookers in their tracks’. As will be shown below, their bodily performances and the rendering of their bodies as a site of resistance dismantle identitarian dichotomies. They also constitute a discomforting reminder for other members and non-members of the collectivity: a reminder for self-reflection.

Another dimension related to the fundamental importance of the bodies lies in the possibility of considering bodies as ‘symbolic spaces in which to reimagine vulnerability as a basis for solidarity and tool for social change’. One of the most important contributions of Arendtian political philosophy in understanding new social resistance movements that transcend West-centric, liberal, identity binaries is the avoidance of dichotomizing the individual and collectivity. Natality and thinking of individuals is collectively exercised as power without imposing a hegemonic discourse over individuals. However, another way in which individuals are connected together is the acknowledgement and exposure of bodies to violence. With reference to bodies, the issue of rendering individual bodies vulnerable to violence (verbal or physical) connects the individual with the collectivity by generating solidarity. An ample example of this is the human walls protecting the praying Muslims in Tahrir and in Gezi.

The Arendtian approach, however, suffers from further gaps, which are underlined by Butler. Primarily, it does not focus on the materiality of ‘space of appearance’. To address these problems, Butler argues that bodies gathering together in plurality re-configure the material space that in turn supports resistance. Furthermore, it potentially excludes what is assumed as pre-political and private from the space of appearance. This can result in a reproduction of inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, and us/them dichotomies. 'The everyday' in the re-configured material space renders resistance popular by encouraging more people to join. These issues will be revisited in the case of Tahrir and Gezi.

The cases underline the importance of bodies and bodily performances as a performance of claiming a voice: bodies become visible, are being targeted; bodies resist and become a wall and therefore transcend the liberal politics’ what-ness. Bodies on the street ‘redeploy [public] space in order to contest and negate the existing forms of political legitimacy’ (Butler 2011). It must be noted that this analysis does not oppose Arendt to Butler. In the cases of Tahrir and Gezi, bodily performances meet with natality and thinking (cognitive sides) without prioritizing one over another.

21 Ibid., p. 43.
Arendt is important in understanding how individuals’ creativity brings them together to construct a pluralist collectivity that rejects violence while giving up docility. Butler is essential to examining how bodies become vehicles of political messages, and are reproduced through resistance to construct a collectivity. In these post-liberal extraordinary moments, ‘the everyday’ is performed as political resistance.

**Tahrir and Gezi: Histories of Resistance**

Tahrir Square was built in the 19th century and was used by the successive oppressive regimes as the embodiment of authority and political power. It was re-configured as a space of appearance and an alternative political space where individuals collectively resisted domestic and international power hierarchies. Although for some this showed the Egyptians’ desire to join the ‘modern world’, the events from 25 January to 2 February 2011 were an abrogation of ‘the modern’ and an example of collective resistance in the post-liberal world. In Tahrir, individuals who were not united by a common ideology, nation, religion, or class (their what-ness) formed ‘a functioning social universe, a temporal community’, where the extraordinary met ‘the everyday’. Structurally created self/other dichotomies between genders, classes, and religions were transcended through reproduction of individual subjectivities as members of a resisting collectivity.

Mass protests against the British in 1919, student protests in 1968 and 1972, protests during the Second Intifada in 2001, and anti-Mubarak and -US protests in 2003 in the wake of the invasion of Iraq became integral parts of Egyptian political history. Although these protests sometimes produced limited political reforms (such as in 1968), they generally resulted in more oppression of the opposition in the name of protecting ‘stability’, a catchword of Mubarak’s regime. Nevertheless, since the early 2000s, protests started to politicize the wider public. This gave rise to new resistance movements, such as The Popular Committee in Solidarity with the Intifada in 2001 and the Kifaya (Enough!) in 2004, which opposed the Mubarak regime and brought ideologically different opposition groups together. Structurally disadvantaged groups’ protests were revitalized in the April 2008 ‘Bread Strikes’, mainly organized by workers from the textile industry and joined by students. In June 2010 there were protests about the murder of blogger Khalid Said. The middle class was subjected to police brutality which, according to them, was previously targeting ‘only members of lower classes

---

and the Muslim Brotherhood'. As a result, trade unions and other labour organizations joined by students and the middle class became stronger and emerged as important groups in the 2011 protests. In addition, women, who had been subjected to gendered violence by the regime of Mubarak, invoked their agency to resist in Tahrir.

During the Mubarak regime, urban planning in tandem with the Emergency Laws aimed to depoliticize public spaces such as squares. While the pre-January 2011 protests re-politicized and re-configured Cairo’s urban space as a space of resistance, January 2011 was a political project whose management was previously planned. Starting from 2006, ‘the Academy of Change’, a civil activist group of Egyptians in the UK, collected texts about non-violent protests, which were widely circulated in Egypt. In the months leading up to January, activists adopted three methods that reveal ‘discontinuity with past strategies of resistance: maximum secrecy, new tactics for mobilizing common people, and the adoption of a different rhetoric’. Alaa Abd al-Fattah, a leading activist, stated that the real difficulty before the protests was not gathering liberal, Islamists, and leftists, but getting ‘the people who do not identify themselves with any of these labels' to join the protests. The tactics appealed to the low economic-status groups, which were primarily created by Enver Sedat’s liberal economic turn. The new non-violent tactics rendered the January protests possible. Local individuals’ bodily performances became ‘performances of space’.

The words of the protesters in Tahrir are revealing. Their own accounts highlight how the everyday performances of individuals re-spatialized Tahrir as a home whose doors were open to those who wished to resist. Performances reflected ‘the everyday’, such as teachers opening a kindergarten for protesters’ children. Another protester reflected:

Amid continuous, often creative chanting, young men and women are going around collecting rubbish, one of them telling me 'this is our square, our home, we must keep it clean'. People are forming neat queues – something Egyptians never do – to buy tea at

---

34 Cook, The Struggle for Egypt, p. 273.
improvised stalls. Everywhere everyone is on their best behaviour; a few days later, women will tell me that sexual harassment, an endemic problem in Cairo, is absent from the square.  

The everydayness of Tahrir attracted more people to protest while blurring the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', inclusion and exclusion. According to one protester, 'the everyday' in Tahrir became a tool of attracting more people to join:

When people came to the square, they weren't just protesting against the Mubarak regime. They immediately became involved in the clean-up crew, or with the sign painters, or setting up tents, or with a security detail. Many people who were not affiliated with any party or association joined us in this way.

The everydayness of Tahrir also proved to the Egyptians that there were no 'foreign' powers behind the protests, only regular people like themselves. The bodily performances of individuals re-constructed Tahrir as a 'home'. A participant stated:

During the demonstrations I have seen surprising things: I discovered the huge generosity of Egypt's people. I saw, for example, a guy who loaded his motorcycle with baskets of bread for the demonstrators. Other people came with bags full of taameya and koshari sandwiches. A guy carried boxes of bottled water. Cigarettes were passed hand to hand. And the most impressive thing: people picked up both their own and other people's garbage. Everything was organized so quickly. This is an Egypt I haven't seen before, and it's so beautiful to see...This is the first time I have seen a united people sharing people food, water, and opinion, despite their differences.

As will be elaborated further in the women experiences in Tahrir, the everyday in Tahrir re-constructed the space as a secure space for women to claim their voices by removing the self/other dichotomies. A similar experience for LGBTQ can be observed in Taksim 2013.

History of Taksim Square and Gezi Park has strong parallelisms with Tahrir in terms of the space's relations with modernization. The first city planning was performed by Western city planners during the imperial period of the 19th century. Unlike Tahrir, the square they designed was the Beyazıt Square in the historical peninsula, which was closer to Beyazıt Mosque and local markets. Taksim, which means ‘allocation’ in Turkish, was designated for water distribution purposes replicating the Byzantium infrastructure. The modern water allocation system was completed in 1839 shortly after building barracks (Topçu Kışlası) and a courtyard. With the establishment of the Republic, in 1926,
the new modern and secular public space found its spatial embodiment in the old imperial capital in Taksim. A statue of Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, was placed in a space surrounded by modern buildings, which replaced Beyazit as the square of the new state. Eventually the barracks were demolished and Gezi Park was built in their place.

The re-spatialization of Taksim by governmental political projects continued after World War II, when Turkey positioned itself with the free liberal world. As the economy liberalized, Hilton Hotel was built next to the Park. Today, Hilton’s walls are decorated with photos of mainly American artists such as Louis Armstrong, who visited Turkey and played jazz at Hilton to the emerging bourgeoisie of Turkey. In the 1960s and 1970s, Turkey was again in political transformation, and Taksim became the locus of left-wing opposition (Islamists were gathering at Beyazit Square following the Friday praying). In 1977, when Turkey was in political turmoil, 1 May celebrations were targeted by ‘unknown’ assailants who left 34 people killed. Since then, Taksim Square was closed to public protests until May 2013, when the public itself re-opened it and spatializing it as the home of the resistance.

However, the political atmosphere in Turkey before the protests was different to the one in Egypt. In the Egyptian case, the streets and squares had been politicized for approximately ten years during which the opposition (in its pluralism) learned how to protest intelligently, without using violence, and by integrating poor social groups into the opposition. In contrast, it was not possible to observe such a preparation period in Turkey. The largest and most recent biggest protests, called ‘the Republic Protests’ in 2007, were mainly against the election of Abdullah Gül of the pro-Islamist JDP as the president of the Republic. Although these protests were indeed popular among certain political groups, such as Kemalists (representing the secular, statist Republic against the Islamists), they failed to convince the larger population about an Islamist threat. In addition, slogans such as ‘Military to the Duty’ alienated liberals from the protests. As a result, it was easier for the JDP government to dismiss these protests as ‘pro-coup and elitist’.

In the economic realm, Turkey’s economy was experiencing its most successful period during the AKP years following the devastating 2001 economic crisis. With the political stability provided by single party governments, the economy recovered: GDP and GDP per capita increased and inflation decreased. This economic ‘miracle’ depended on the construction business, which in the short term created employment opportunities along with high income for those who invested in it. Shopping malls were built all around Turkey to attract consumption, and privatization continued. However, this economic miracle did not result in manufacturing production in Turkey. Urbanization plans were

---

42 Ibid., p. 56.
important parts of new economy in Turkey. When the AKP government announced the Taksim Pediastrization Project in 2011, their plan was to re-construct the Topcu barracks in Gezi Park, which in fact, would be a shopping mall in the cloak of old barracks.

Regardless of economic ‘development’ in some sectors, development without production that was based on construction and consumerism embodied as shopping mall inflation (in 2011 there were 279 in Turkey, 109 only in Istanbul) did not address the unemployment problem especially that of the university graduates. According to official statistics in Turkey, the recent unemployment rate has been approximately 9% (13% in 2009, decreased to 9% in 2013). The unemployment rate in the non-agricultural sector, which comprised the main participants of the protests, was approximately 10%-11% annually. Unemployment was a ‘life shattering experience’. Hatice, a protester, stated that ‘it is difficult to construct your life when you are unemployed. We cannot show our professional and creative abilities, and we have no income to live in dignity’. The situation was equally difficult for Ali, an archaeology graduate who felt that his profession was not valued because, in his own words, ‘the neoliberal economic expansion and the urban speculation neglect even the economic importance of culture’; or Ela, an urban planner, who concurred that ‘even when we get to find work, for example in a municipality’s planning office, we cannot put in practice our creativity, as the proposed projects go against the requirements of the financial and real estate speculations’. As the (un)employment condition determined the lives of individuals, joining Gezi became a resistance that transcended the boundaries between the private and public lives of participants. This is visible in Ali’s statement:

I am fighting for my dignity. I do not want to be controlled by a condition of employment that does not correspond to my aspirations. But I participate in events because I do not want to be told by the government how I should behave in my private life, how I should behave in the street, or when I see my friends.

Ali’s words about the ‘private life’ were underlined by the pre-Gezi policies and discourses of the JDP and pro-JDP cadres with reference to certain issues three of which were highly striking. In 2012 and 2013, the AKP politicized two matters, which were considered as an intervention to the private lives

48 Ibid., p. 180.
of citizens. The first issue was the regulation concerning restrictions on alcohol sale, and the second concerned the attempt to illegalize abortion. Both acts were strongly defended by then PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan and both created street protests. Thirdly, a few weeks ago the protests, an incident occurred at an Ankara subway station where an announcement was made to warn a couple who were kissing to act ‘morally’. This resulted in a ‘kissing protest’ in the Ankara subway.

As the objective of reproducing of individual subjectivities and their bodies according to politically (neo)Ottomanist and economically neoliberal ideologies became clearer, Gezi gave the opportunity to individuals to resist through their creativity and their bodies in re-spatialized Taksim as a space of freedom. The (neo)Ottomanist-liberal social engineering project operated on the principle of constructing multiple ‘others’ such as ‘Kemalists’, ‘the elites’, ‘the Istanbul media’, ‘international interest lobbies’, ‘feminists’, and more generally ‘non-Muslims’.49 The protests distorted the identititarian dichotomies on ‘what-ness’ created by the Neo Ottomanist-liberal ideology in the moment of resistance.

The JDP as a hegemonic project of appropriation of political Islam within the parameters of a neoliberal model was a social engineering practice.50 It reframed the society, cut ties with the Kemalist social engineering project and its history, promoted shopping mall consumerism, reproduced subjectivities along the new project, and turned bodies, especially female bodies, into political objectives to be conquered. Surely, an important dimension of this project was (and is) spatial reproduction. According to Gürcan and Peker, ‘one of the main pillars of the JDP government in the last decade has been the massive reorganization of space along neoliberal lines through infrastructural investments, construction projects, and the wholesale restructuring of urban landscapes’ such as Canal Istanbul (an artificial canal connecting Marmara Sea and Black Sea), TOKI (Housing Development Administration) projects, shopping malls, highways, and so on.51 ‘Islamizing’ Taksim was an integral part of this cultural-economic policy by building barracks, a mosque, and a mall replacing the Republic’s Kemalist Taksim.52

49 These are the target groups that then PM Erdoğan often highlighted in his speeches.
52 Ibid., p. 77.
Gezi protests as a reaction to this project were not against Islam, but the political Islamist-neoliberal authoritarianism. It should be noted that the respatialized Taksim and Gezi Park was a secular space where individuals were not excluded because of their religious identities. In spite of the governmental attempts to present the resistance along the lines of ‘Islam vs. secularism’ (another otherization attempt), the pluralist collectivity shattered this articulation. Nermin stated that ‘I am not against Islam. I am for individual freedoms for all. If a girl wants to wear the veil at the University, I fight so she can do so’. Another protestor from the movement called ‘Anti-capitalist Muslims’ revealed why they were there: ‘We hope for a new social life, based on solidarity and not on neoliberalism imposed by the government.’ Similarly in Tahrir, identity dichotomies which had been constructed in Turkey over decades such as Islamist vs. secular, Kemalist vs. Islamist, Turk vs. Kurd, men vs. women, were abandoned in that particular space and time. Gündüz concurred with this revelation: ‘I am living a very important experience. I learnt to talk to others, I don’t fear them anymore, I don’t need to defend myself, they do not oppress me. We debate in this forum about our freedom to live as we wish to, without being afraid of the rulers. Even if we are afraid of violence’.⁵³

**Claiming a voice in and through Tahrir and Gezi**

The experiences of Tahrir and Gezi shared certain commonalities and also differences. Underlying economic problems, compartmentalisation of societies based on ‘what-ness’ of individuals (identity dichotomies), pre-event preparations with the aim to re-politicize public spaces can be considered as common characteristics. During the protests both squares were respatialized as the home of resistance through ‘the everyday’ performances of protestors (for the Gezi case, see below). However, a certain difference must be underlined. In Turkey, state intervention in individuals’ private lives and bodies became a more prominent reason for resistance. The protestors in Taksim targeted not only authoritarian decisions of the state about Gezi Park, but also a specific political-economic social engineering project. Notwithstanding this difference, women in Egypt and members of the LGBTQ community in Turkey became part of the post-liberal resistance through their bodily performances. Their bodily presence in both squares shaped the nature of the resistance from a gathering of ‘what-ness’ to a society of ‘who-ness’, and resulted in an Arendtian collectivity where pluralism defied homogeneity, oppression, and violence in respatialized squares.

**Women in Tahrir and LGBTQ in Gezi**

At the beginning of the protests there were identitarian cleavages among the protestors in Tahrir. Their what-ness was shaping their views about each other. For example, a feminist activist about other female protesters belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood illustrated this:

---

There would be a group of women – whom I would have once avoided and labelled them as Muslim Brotherhood – walking in a group around the Square with strength and vitality calling for the downfall of the regime. I joined them as they passed beside me in the sea of people in the square. Remembering the protests of students who called themselves the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood and how the young women would walk silently after the men, I would be infuriated.  

However, under the threat of physical violence by the police, female bodies from different socio-political and economic backgrounds and with different identities stood up together against police brutality and violence:

The first time I was in Tahrir in the middle of the waves of people I was about to be trampled on, and suddenly this guy standing beside me lifted me and put me on the curb we were standing next to so I would be a bit higher. I don't remember his face. What I remember was that I wasn't scared, or straining my brain to react fast. My sister got on the curb beside me and a woman whom I personally would never have thought I would accept - or she would accept me - put her arm around my sister's shoulders, hugging her, embracing her warmly, as we all stood there chanting and singing. Friends who witnessed one attempt at harassment at the Square told me how everyone taught the guy a lesson he wouldn't forget any time soon.  

The same feminist activist who had been suspicious towards Islamist female protesters stated:

Now, these women I joined and others are making history, shouting and singing and sending out trills of joy without thinking that a woman's voice shouldn't be heard. This revolution proved that Egyptian women have a voice which they aren't afraid to use.

Indeed, what-ness was transcended through the bodily performances of women, and their gathering became a pluralist collectivity. A protester, Muhammed Ramadan, tells of the plurality of body politic by stating that 'in my whole life I'd never seen protests like that. Girls! Some wore hijabs, some didn't, Christians, Muslims — I'd never seen that.' Another protester concurred that 'I saw all these different and surprising kinds of people protesting and thought, wow, this can happen.

The respatialized Tahrir Square was not simply a resistance to the Mubarek regime. In addition to that, it was an opportunity for Egyptian women to claim their voice against authoritarianism, patriarchy, and violence stemming from these structures. Their protesting bodies became the political message to society. A feminist activist’s reflection on the movement in Tahrir is useful to make this point:

---

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
During the weeks Egyptians have spent in Tahrir square, we have come to see another side of us as a people. In Tahrir square there was no harassment, there was no division in religion, age, social status, educational status or gender...Women were side by side with the men and no one stopped to question someone's gender. There was something bigger holding the people together. Personally, I was always apprehensive about walking in the streets. The possibility of someone grabbing you or maybe worse was on my mind all the time.\(^59\)

Tahrir was indeed a home for some women, as an intimate reflection of a female protester, Marwa Faroak, shows: ‘One of the things that gave me an incredible sense of wonder was how safe I felt...Tahrir Square became safer than anywhere else for a woman to be.’\(^60\) Mona Ahmed Saif, blogger and activist, concurs:

\[
\text{I felt accepted and welcome for the first time by young men in my country. They treated me as a peer, and it was great getting into political discussions with random guys in Tahrir square feeling completely at ease and safe.}
\]

Mona said that the experience in Tahrir changed her: ‘It changed how I see myself among a crowd in the streets of Cairo. It changed my body language in public. I became stronger and more confident while dealing with others...I walk around alone late at night feeling safe. I haven't had a single sexual harassment incident.’\(^61\) The women protesters, in spite of their ideological differences, reconstructed Tahrir as a material space of appearance and acted collectively in solidarity. A similar experience can be observed for the members of the LGBTQ community in Taksim 2013.

In the words of protestor, before the Gezi resistance there was fear and frustration because of physical and structural violence such as marginalization among LGBTQ community in Turkey. Çaglar stated that ‘I have to pay attention to my behavior at all times. Even a small mistake, or acting off guard, could cost my life. Many have been beaten because of it’.\(^62\) In fact, the murder of Ahmet Yıldız in 2008, Turkey’s first gay honour killing, was still real for the participants. However, during the Gezi resistance the park and the square 'became a space of freedom, recognition, respect, acquaintance, and embrace'.\(^63\) The similarity of this reflection with a female protestor’s reflection about Tahrir and its inclusiveness is remarkable. In both cases, anti-regime protests became an opportunity for them to make themselves visible, and through this visibility to receive respect and recognition. This is the point where individuals bestowed with natality and thinking formulated resistance methods through which their bodily performances remained central. ‘The everyday’ was their method.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{61}\) Magdy, ‘Egypt: The Two Faces of Liberation’.
Like in Tahrir, the bodily visibility of individuals in Gezi was increased by performances in contribution to the construction and maintenance of the everyday:

For the following two weeks, until the police came back to “clean us out” from the park, the LGBT Block was present in the occupation to provide for a fully fledged infirmary service, as well as to distribute free food and beverages twenty-four hours a day...These means were essential for us to maintain LGBTQ visibility in the daily life at the park, and such attempts opened up ways in which new acquaintances became possible.64

LGBTQ rights activist Sezen Yalçın concurred:

The day ... the different groups settled into the park, the LGBT Block (as we call ourselves) set up a booth and spent our days and nights ... not only distributing food, drinks and other supplies but also making ourselves visible as LGBT people reclaiming our rights. We got in very close contact with different social groups: Muslims, radical leftists, football fans, etc. The more Erdoğan hardened his speech and his use of force against the protestors, the closer we got with different groups. It was important for LGBTs as we became part of a wider public opposition. It is true that in the last couple of years our parades were very crowded and exciting, but we were always by ourselves and once the parade ends, our sovereignty on İstiklal Avenue ended. But this year, starting with our presence at the Park, we knew that we would not be alone at Pride, and this is what happened.65

On othering, Şehriban underlined:

And I want to add one more thing; we are very familiar with the “marginalization” policy of the state; they tried to implement the same thing at Gezi. It is the same policy as the one that is being implemented on us: othering. Actually, this was something like the state’s exposure of the individual and we already know that the state has been using this policy for years.66

Yurdakul stated:

There are cases when transvestite funerals cannot include a burial. But I have never seen so much support for these people as during the Gezi Park protests. When people tasted firsthand the experience of what it is like to be pushed to become the “other,” they better understood the challenges of these suppressed people, and the heterosexual community has earned a sincere empathy for them. I am more hopeful for the LGBT community than I have ever been prior to May 31.67

64 Ibid.
65 Available at http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/Her-Yer-Taksim!-Feminist-and-LGBTQI-Engagement-in-the-Gezi-Park-Protests
67 Daloğlu, ‘LGBT Turks Seek to Capitalize On Gezi Good Will’.
Individuals’ experiences show a great deal of resemblance to women’s experiences in Tahrir. They claimed their voice and earned it through resisting. As Daloğlu stated, ‘this holds true especially for our trans friends, who are the most recognizable and whose visibility in public space doesn’t come with nice experiences at all. Their memories are “bejeweled” with non-recognition, denial, hatred, and murder. The reason Şevval calls this experience “one of the most interesting experiences in her life” is because such a moment, which is touched with effects of recognition and reliance, contravenes the general themes of collective memories of trans individuals in Turkey: the themes of insecurity, of misrecognition, or of not being recognized at all.  

Surely, the process of claiming a voice proved to be difficult given the stereotypes and hostility towards the LGBTQ community. However, the experiences in Gezi strongly underlined the importance of bodies in resistance transcending stereotypes and hostility: ‘LGBTQ individuals who participated in the resistance could reach people and make them understand that we are not three eared, five eyed weirdos or freaks... A participant of a large soccer fan organization, Çarş, told one of our trans friends that he used to swear at prostitutes and transvestites before, but now he will never do that again, since he came to know them and they were able to touch each other.’

LGBTQ community indeed appeared to earn the respect:

The so-called “sissy boys” who carried the wounded ones out of the clash zones, the previously slanged transwomen who supplied medicine and food to the barricades, and “fags” who apparently showed the courage to sit in front of the police water cannon trucks like all those “tough guys,” all gave rise to a substantial crack in hate speech, and the homophobic and transphobic collective memory woven by it within and hopefully somewhere out of the space of the resistance.

LGBTQ presence and their performances created new resistance methods that breaking the masculine way of resisting through violence. This non-violent character of resisting through humour, for example underlines the fact that so-called apolitical, everyday performances can be converted into effective resistance methods against violence:

I think the masculine protesting style of the left was broken. It showed that it is also possible to protest by saying “Ayyy ayyy” or by reading books. All this may be understood as passive resistance but it turned into something like “we can resist by dancing as well”

These performances transcend the boundaries between public and private, body and mind, political and prepolitical. One of the most remarkable examples of these resistance methods was the human wall in both Taksim and Tahrir.

*Meanings of Human Wall*

---

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 İşeri and Çetin, ‘LGBT “There is no violence where the state isn’t present”’. 
In the case of women and LGBTQ, Tahrir and Gezi were spaces of freedom through which their bodies became visible. Their bodily presence, however, did not grant them respect, equal treatment, acceptance, and acquaintance. In both cases, individuals performed to contribute to the everyday in resistance and made their bodies vulnerable in the defence of the collectivity against police brutality. In their cases, bodily performances in the re-spatialized squares addressed their marginalization and the violence stemming from it in a pluralist collectivity where creativity was upheld. However, their bodies were not simply tools of their identities and ideologies; their bodies and performances were a political message. ‘The body produces, elaborates, and articulates political ideologies. It does not only serve as a medium for change but also realizes it’.\(^{72}\) Their collective power emerged from and through their bodily performances. These bodies belonged to individuals defined by Arendt: creative, pluralist, active, resisting in solidarity. There was a moment both in Tahrir and Gezi when the bodies became the political message and realized the politics of resistance that dismantled dichotomist identities.

Nearly a month before the Tahrir protests erupted, a church was attacked and burned down in Egypt. When the Christian protesters in Tahrir built a protective wall through their bodies surrounding the praying Muslim bodies, the Western media reminded their audience about the attack and about how the Christians ‘joined hands’ with Muslims against authoritarianism.\(^{73}\) However, this West-centric approach still operated based on the Christian-Muslim dichotomist identities, which cooperated against the common enemy: the authoritarian regime. When protesters from LGBTQ and left-wing groups constructed another protecting wall around the praying Anti-Capitalist Muslims in Gezi, it was considered as a strategic move of the resistance which hindered the governmental discourse of Muslims vs. ‘the Others’ dichotomy. Notwithstanding the merits of these approaches for understanding these performances in Tahrir and Gezi, they miss the focal point, which has two dimensions.

The first dimension concerns the praying Muslims. They rendered their bodies vulnerable for a possible attack by kneeling (a part of Islamic praying). Without slogans and banners, their bodily performance removed the boundaries of public and private, body and cognition, secular and religious, and political and pre-political. Praying five times a day is ‘the everyday’ for a practising Muslim and by praying in the square; their ‘everyday’ became their resistance method. Their resistance resulted in a new form of resistance, which exemplifies post-liberal politics based on Arendt’s who-ness with Butler’s bodies. Other protestors built a human wall surrounding the praying

\(^{72}\) Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, ‘Body, Gender, Knowledge’, p. 399.

\(^{73}\) For example, see [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1353330/Egypt-protests-Christians-join-hands-protect-Muslims-pray-Cairo-protests.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1353330/Egypt-protests-Christians-join-hands-protect-Muslims-pray-Cairo-protests.html)
Muslims through their bodies. In this way, bodies became the political message of solidarity emerging within the pluralist collectivity. The human wall members rendered their bodies vulnerable in order to render Muslim bodies less vulnerable, without sharing religious and/or ideological commonalities. This was a moment when both Tahrir and Gezi bodies became a site of resistance, where new politics were emerging based on solidarity for differences. Transcending the dichotomist identities (what-ness), each individual expressed their natality through their bodily performances. This was the moment when the everyday met the extraordinary.

**Learnings from Tahrir and Gezi: Resisting Bodies and Minds in Post-Liberal Politics**

This analysis aimed to attract attention to the new resistance methods, which showed striking resemblances globally. It was argued that marginalized individuals claim their voice through ‘the everyday’ performances in pluralist collectivities while respatializing squares, parks and streets. Experiences in Tahrir and Gezi lead to three conclusions that urge us to reconsider our conceptualizations of individual, collectivity, resistance, and politics.

Firstly, while being objectified by coercive and productive powers and sometimes violence, individuals are not docile bodies. Through their natality and thinking, they can formulate new resistance methods even in the most mundane practices such as collecting rubbish. In the extraordinary moments of resistance, such as in Tahrir and Gezi, these ‘everyday’ practices become a method of resistance, a way to become visible, a strategy to claim a voice. Secondly, the bodily performances of individuals contribute to the construction of a pluralist collectivity where the ‘what-ness’ of individuals do not become a fault-line. In the human walls, the vulnerable bodies were the political message that their ideological/political/social differences are richness of the resistance. This Arendtian pluralist collectivity does not operate on a homogeneous identity, which would be potentially exclusionary and oppressive (such as political ideologies, religions, and nationalitie). It is likely that because of this inclusionary pluralism manifested as ‘the everyday’, these resistance movements became popular while producing substantial political consequences. The most important consequence was that previously marginalized groups claimed their voices through these resistance movements. The bodily performances of these groups not only marked their political and social integration into the wider society, but also contributed to the construction of more pluralist collectivity. Their presence was a source of self-reflection for other participants about their stereotypes, and exclusionary and derogative behaviours. Finally, post-liberal politics shift our attention from state-level politics, accompanied by bourgeois civil society, to a pluralist politics where the squares, streets, and parks are respatialized for resistance through the everyday
performances of individuals. Tahrir and Gezi experiences have important manifestations of spacing practices in urban politics, which currently surpass national boundaries.