Digital traces of 'Twitter revolutions': Resistance, polarization and surveillance via contested images and texts of Occupy Gezi

Abstract

Protest movements have recently been ignited by social media and are commonly, and somewhat hyperbolically, referred to by mainstream media outlets as 'Twitter revolutions'. This paper points out how social media has been a battleground for disseminating contending versions of reality across the world not only during 'Twitter revolutions' but also in their aftermath. To articulate the enduring impact of popular social movements and examine how protestors and governmental supporters contest their meaning and significance over time, the paper examines the digital traces of Gezi Park protests (2013) after the mobilization has dissipated. The digital traces of the Gezi protests act as critical digital artefacts of contestation with actors on both sides (in the case of Turkey, pro and anti-AKP government). These digital traces are reanimated by actors on both sides to build support, assert truth claims, foster identity/community and/or demand recognition. The paper uses a content and multimodal analysis of texts and images on Twitter, shared through popular hashtags on the protests when the protests' alleged leaders faced a trial in 2018 and 2019.

Keywords: digital traces, Twitter revolutions, polarization, resistance, surveillance, Occupy Gezi

1)Introduction

Protests unfold in a given time and space, but they live on in symbols, cultural artefacts and memories, and can be re-appropriated by protestors and opponents to build political capital. Protest movements such as the Arab Spring have been ignited by social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, and are commonly referred to as 'Twitter revolutions' (see Mozorov, 2009; Christensen, 2011). The consequences of the early 2010s protests have continued to

transform people's everyday lives, political identities and their social media practices including activists and their opponents. As an example, the Gezi protests are still at the forefront of the Turkish agenda after six years and social media users continue to engage with the memory, iconography and symbols of the protests on a range of digital platforms. This article demonstrates how digital traces of texts and images are contested by diverse actors across time on social media. Users take advantage of this mutability (Rose, 2016) to present a particular narrative or elaborate an argument, which supports a certain worldview. The paper argues that the digital traces of the Gezi Park protests act as critical digital artefacts of contestation with actors on both sides (pro and anti-AKP government). The article is concerned with how these digital traces are not temporary trails which disappear over time but are reanimated by actors on both sides to build support, assert truth claims, foster identity/community or demand recognition. To preserve traces on digital platforms becomes a critical issue specifically due to intensive pressure on internet freedoms, which causes the disappearance of initial traces of the protests.

In examining the digital traces of protests in their aftermath by using a content and multimodal discourse analysis of texts and visuals, our research fills a gap in the existing literature as most of the previous literature on digital political voice related to social movements focus exclusively on the peak of protest activity (see Khondker, 2011; Varnali & Gorgulu, 2015; author2, 2019). Our research methodology captures the visual and textual expression of social movements' messages when their political expression becomes more latent making it easier for an authoritarian state to arrest activists. More specifically, our paper interrogates the political discourse in Turkey following the Gezi Park protests, by analyzing texts and images shared through popular hashtags and mentions related to the protests when their alleged leaders have faced a trial in 2018 and 2019.

In this paper, we seek to show how Gezi Park protestors and their opponents imagine or reimagine the events of 2013, their legacy and their enduring appeal, not least as a resource to galvanize others to act or react in the material or digital spheres. Following Milan (2018: 509), it is crucial to foreground 'the role of human agency and meaning-making activities through protest. In the context of datafication, likes, shares, check-ins, selfies, and other forms of expressivity, interaction, and affectivity on social media are only some of the visible digital traces disseminated by users on the Web in an equivalent of virtual footprints.' Our research explores how digital traces are seized, re-animated and re-appropriated for specific performative and expressive purposes, namely, to establish meaning, build solidarity, raise awareness and deliver hate speech. The article argues that digital traces exist on social media as a legacy and testament to the Gezi park protests in 2013, whilst identifying 'the visual as an ongoing site of struggle' on social media platforms (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune, 2013).

Interrogating how traces can be protected or re-imagined and the trajectory of online traces of protests, the article brings a novel perspective on social media and its relation to memory as well as its affinity to social and political change. "Images of protest in the news rely on a selective portrayal in the sense that they are usually limited to a few archetypes such as the rioter, the picket or the performer" (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune, 2013: xiv). The article goes beyond this simplistic presentation of archetypes of actors in protest movements by not only looking at the re-appropriation of texts and images on digital geographies in the aftermath of the protests, but also capturing how some of the shared visuals and texts are corrupted or fake stories that actually were not viral during the peak of the protests. The paper illustrates the ways Twitter users contested the meaning and significance of Gezi over time and voiced polarized views about the protests, particularly in the aftermath of the failed coup in July 2016. During this time, the Gezi activists mobilized empathy, togetherness and solidarity by continuously taking the Gezi protests as a symbolic reference point, while anti-Gezi protesters mobilized

violence, hatred and anger on digital platforms. Gezi activists posted texts and images on Twitter to mainly point out that the protests were a leaderless mobilization. The anti-Gezi groups, however, displayed instances of how internal and external enemies were at work in mobilizing the Gezi protests from above. Using fake images and videos, this group portrayed the protestors as 'dangerous and violent others' with an aim to support the recent raid of the alleged leaders of the Gezi protestors.

We argue that social media platforms can neither take credit nor blame for single-handedly transforming social processes or for turning around events. We neither intend to applaud the successes of social media nor rally against their insidious affects; the aim here is to systematically analyze social media mechanisms as sources of transformation (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 11) and contestation in relation to protest movements and their symbols. This article also does not seek to determine whether digital media augments polarization or solidarity or not but seeks to uncover how digital media is harnessed by actors seeking to shape meaning and engage in consciousness-raising whilst contesting and reanimating the texts and images of the protest movements. In this light, the first part of the article introduces the background of resistance and polarization in Turkey in relation to the Gezi protests. The ensuing section theorizes digital traces to inform the conceptual framework, while the next part foregrounds the methodological approach of the research. The following two sections analyze digital traces of the protests in the form of discourses and images in 2018 and 2019 when hate speech, allegations, contestation and polarization were at a peak in Turkey and across the world.

2)The Gezi protests as a response to rising authoritarianism

From a historical perspective, the 1980s were marked by the proliferation and mainstreaming of radical right-wing parties across the globe, such as Thatcher in the UK, Reagan in the USA

and Özal in Turkey, united by their anti-communist and neo-liberal agendas, populist politics and ethnic nationalism. In the 2000s, far right parties received large and enduring electoral support in Europe including Eastern Europe, such as the Front National (France), the FPÖ (Austria), and the Danish People's Party (Denmark) (Rydgren, 2017: 485). Election legislation and party coalitions, levels of immigration and unemployment, gender and education level of voters, and dissatisfaction with the functioning of mainstream parties and democratic institutions help account for the increasing popularity of far-right parties (Doroshenko, 2018: 3187) as well as their gradual mainstreaming. Following the 2008 financial crisis, populism has made historical electoral advances across the globe, including Trump, Modi, Putin, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, Salvini, Orban and Oli with generally xenophobic tendencies combined with corporate power (Wallgren et. al, 2020: 178) and increasing use of religious references. Like its global counterparts, the populism of the ruling party AKP (the Justice and Development Party) is neoliberal, authoritarian, and nationalist in character and in constant search for internal and external enemies in order to galvanise supporters (Özçetin, 2019: 942).

The driving social force of the Gezi protests 'was the alienation of non-conservative citizens (e.g. secularists, liberals, and Alevis) from the authoritarianism of the AKP governments (2002-present). This represents a social force opposed to the AKP's construction of a new collective identity and political regime—the New Turkey' (Goksel & Tekdemir, 2018: 382), which primarily rests on a neo-liberal and Islamist political agenda. The Gezi protests initially unfolded as an opposition to the radical urban restructuring programmes and the commodification of urban space (Kuymulu, 2013; Karakayali & Yaka, 2014), symbolized by the intention of protestors to protect the trees in the Gezi Park as the government intended to transform it into a shopping mall and artillery barracks. This reaction turned into a wider political mobilization, which opened new and ongoing possibilities in claiming the rights to the

city and media to stand up against growing authoritarianism (author2, 2019a; 2019b; author1, 2018; 2019).

'Approximately 3,600,000 activists participated in protests held in 80 out of 81 provinces. Moreover, the number of Twitter users in Turkey increased from 1.8M to over 9.5M in the first five days of the Gezi protests alone in May 2013' (Yaman 2014: 21) while over 13 million tweets were shared with hashtags such as #direngeziparki (#resistgezipark) in the same period (Saka, 2019: 33). Political hashtags on social media, specifically on Twitter, came to prominence in events such as the 2009 Iran presidential election (#iranelection) (Small, 2011) or the protests that constituted the Arab Spring (see Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Khondker, 2011; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013: Bruns et al., 2013). Similar to the 2013 protests in Brazil, Bulgaria or the umbrella movement in Hong Kong in 2014, social media, especially Twitter, has been attributed as one of the main sources of the Gezi uprising (Demirhan, 2014; Hacıyakupoğlu & Zhang, 2015; Mercea, Karatas & Bastos, 2017; Saka & Karatas, 2017) and other social movements in Turkey in the 2010s that paved the way to the uprising, such as environmental activism (Şen & Şen, 2016). Research has also demonstrated how protestors during the Gezi protests used images to challenge the government's representation of the protests as lawless thugs and to present a pre-figurative vision of Turkish society which was participatory, open, inclusive and democratic (author1, 2020; author2, 2019b).

The 'right to the city' during the protests entailed the right to the media with an aim to go beyond the 'penguin media'[1] in Turkey, wherein activists created their own media content and used technology as a means for their own ends, which had been the most common and crucial features of 'Twitter Revolutions' such as the Arab Spring. Citizens turned to social

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[1] The mainstream media was referred to as 'the penguin media' during and after the protests. When millions of people protested the government on streets, TV channels such as the CNN Turk chose to showcase documentaries on penguins.

media networks when it became apparent that mainstream media had been co-opted and was untrustworthy, pushing misinformation, propaganda, and lies. Gezi activists attempted to challenge the narrative presented by the government, government supporters and mainstream media in the government's support. In the face of the concomitant dismantling of the mainstream media, we see the emergence and development of an alternative, critical and autonomous new media landscape, which Ataman and Coban (2018) describe as a kind of counter-surveillance institution. Digital media in Turkey, especially Twitter and Facebook, attracted citizens seeking the truth over events in Gezi Park, the issues of police brutality and the erosion of civil liberties. People who wanted a space to discuss events unfolding in Istanbul and elsewhere, connected with fellow citizens, expressed solidarity, and built resistance. Activists engaged in live historicizing of the park occupation through social media for example through image circulation on Twitter, video dissemination on YouTube, discussions on Facebook page forums, as well as drone footage, creation of alt-media TV, live streaming and documenting events digitally as they unfolded. Trolls and AKP supporters also harnessed social media to engage in manipulation, insult and accusation (Bulut and Yoruk, 2017), whilst using digital surveillance technologies, which in turn triggers restrictive consequences for citizens located in the ranks of Turkey's opposition (Saka, 2019: 68).

3)Methodology

In delineating the complexity of online user engagement, this study poses critical questions on the social and cultural dynamics of digital activism by selecting the most popular hashtags in the aftermath of the protests when the alleged protest leaders were put on trial. In order to examine the textual and visual discourse that digital publics generate through Twitter hashtags in this period, we depict the most ubiquitous terms in Tweets following selected hashtags. Through tracing these terms, metaphors, narratives, images and categories of social representations, we portray how public philosophies informed by the memory of collective

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action forges its proponents and opponents and hence serve for solidarity, polarization and state surveillance. In this study, Twitter was selected as it 'affords an opportunity to generate broadly applicable insights' (Tafesse & Wien, 2017: 6) as a platform for both textual and visual expression. While the majority of existing research on Twitter looks at the peak of political events as case studies (see Yardi & Boyd, 2010; Wilson & Dunn, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2017), we propose that social movements are constituted of broader cycle of events in their online and offline effects, following the conceptual framework of Tarrow (1993). Tarrow's (1993: 284–286) concept 'protest cycles' imply a sequence of stages in social unrest by producing new or transformed symbols and frames of meaning around which subsequent mobilizations take place. This study identifies Twitter as a digital geography, arguing that 'web not only functions as a place of freedom of expression and opposition' (Saka, 2017), but also acts as a competitive and performative space where competing views meet, intersect and/or coalesce.

Both pro-Gezi and anti-Gezi advocates have used a shared set of neutral hashtags e.g., #Gezi or #GeziPark as well as common sets of non-neutral hashtags e.g., #DirenGezi (#ResistGezi) #GeziyiHatırla (#RememberGezi) #GeziyiUnutma (DontForgetGezi) or #GezicilerFransaya (GeziProtestorsGoToFrance). While the pro-governmental camp used some of the popular hashtags on the Gezi Protests to villainize the protests/protestors such as #GezicilerFransaya (#GeziProtestersGoToFrance), other hashtags such as #GeziyiHatirla (#RememberGezi) and #GeziyiUnutma (#DontForgetGezi) became sources for the pro-Gezi activists in order to memorize the resistance and its culture following its demise. Similar to the Kefaya movement in Egypt, as identified by Lim (2012: 238), the Gezi protest's becoming inactive does not mean that its impact was lost as its creators and opponents 'continued to communicate, deliberate, and spread information online'. To be clear, contestation over the meaning of Gezi continued well after the protests dissipated in July 2013. We argue that new digital technologies make instant recall possible, hold the promise of endless storage capacities

(Askanius, 2012: 16), and afford further opportunities to disseminate fabricated images and news, which reworks the memory of the protests.

In order to collect Gezi-related Tweets between 19-27 November 2018, 23 February-6 March 2019 and 12-13 May 2019 when Gezi-related hashtags hit Twitter trends for Turkey (https://trends24.in/turkey/), we made use of Mozdeh software to download Tweets using Twitter's API. Overall, 6856 Gezi-related Tweets were collected using the hashtags #HepimizGezideydik (#WeWereAllAtGeziPark), #GeziyiSavunuyoruz (#WeDefendGeziPark) and #GeziYargilanamaz (#GeziCannotGoToTrial). Nearly all the Tweets were in Turkish except for a few in English. As one of the authors is a native speaker of Turkish, the texts of collected Tweets were examined in Turkish using Excel and Nvivo for coding purposes. Only the most popular Tweets were translated into English by the same author. While Excel was used for a content analysis of the users' political opinions related to Gezi, Nvivo helped to qualitatively code the data. 69% of the collected Tweets represented pro-Gezi political opinions, while 22% of Tweets were against the protests. The remaining 8% were either unrelated posts like adverts or they were automated and/or meaningless messages (See Table I and II).
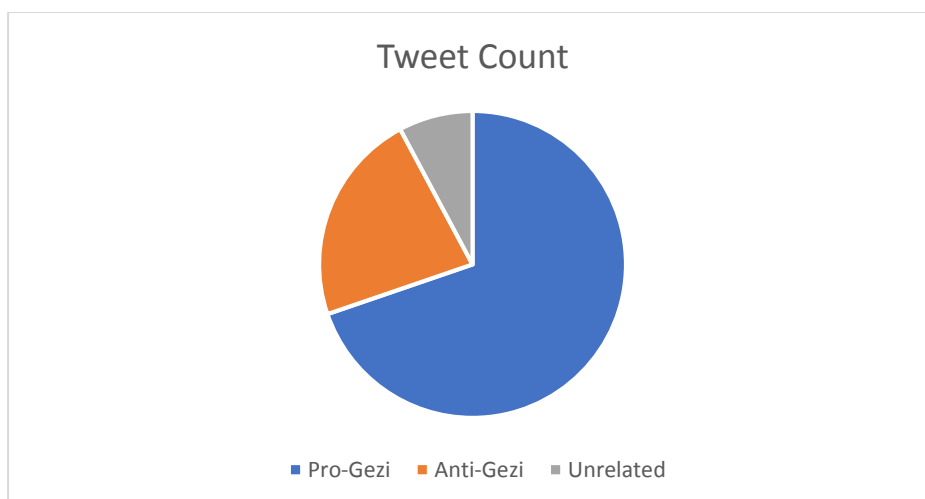
Table I & II : Political opinion on the Gezi protests when the protests are raided in 2018 and 2019

Political Opinion	Tweet Count
Pro-Gezi	4782
Anti-Gezi	1538
Unrelated	536
Total	6856

In addition to circulated texts, the paper analyses the images shared along with the hashtags. 327 images shared on these Tweets were collected employing the software Webometric Analyst (Thelwall, 2014). We have chosen the most popular Tweets for an in-depth analysis. Although the most tweeted image may not be the most influential, they became the most visible representation of the events in this period. Pictures, portraits, photographs, and videos of protest, like media texts, are a key strategy used by protestors to communicate with different audiences, sometimes with ambivalent consequences given the complex and contentious reception of culturally coded visual frames (Doerr & Milman, 2014: 422). As such, the article also uses multimodal discourse analysis to deal with 'contested' texts and images shared through hashtags and mentions on Twitter.

Multimodal discourse analysis combines the study of language with other resources such as images, gesture and sound (O'Halloran, 2011: 120). Doerr (2014) argues that social movement scholars who focus on narrative, discourse, framing, and performance tend to show how activists actively construct and mobilize collective memory but that we know much less about interactions between multiple layers and forms of remembering stored in images, stories,

or performances, or discursive forms. In addition to putting forward political messages, 'social movements produce and evoke images, either as a result of a planned, explicit, and strategic effort, or accidentally, in an unintended or undesired manner' (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune, 2013: xii). The use of images in protest is nothing new (Pinney 2004; Reed 2005) but the scale and scope of visual images have proliferated through the spread of digital media (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Images in the form of photographs, memes, screen grabs, selfies, and video stills, amongst others, have emerged as a common currency for protestors on social media. An emerging strand of literature examines visual culture and protest (Memou 2013; Doerr, Mattoni and Teune 2013; Rovisco 2017), exploring the power of particular images for protest movements (Olesen 2018) and how images help protestors communicate their ideas on social media (author1 et al 2019a; Aiello and Parry 2019). Visual images thus emerge as a site of struggle over representation (Doerr, Mattoni and Teune 2013) with agency centred on how and why protestors, as well as their opponents, use images. The challenge is to develop a rigorous and abductive methodological approach which codes and categorises images in a systematic manner in order to accommodate this flexible meaning-making and the processes which underpins this action. Shared images in our sample represent a planned and strategic effort of pro-Gezi and anti-Gezi users to make their political statements. Some of these images distort the actual 'digital traces' and disseminate pseudo-facts, pseudo-realities and conspiracy theories in the same strategic manner.

4)Digital Traces

Through our everyday activities on social media, we leave digital footprints or traces behind in the form of texts and images, which comprise an archive. A trace can refer to a unit of information, an object, or can refer to an action or a process and as such can be described as 'fragments of past interactions or activities' (Reigeluth, 2014: 250). Digital traces capture the lingering and residual imprint of previous activity leaving a mark of prior interactions and

digital activity. Producing traces is 'an inevitable by-product – if not an integral part – of communicating in the "information society"' (Reigeluth 2014: 249). These traces are important as information, which is why data processing companies and organizations are interested in this kind of aggregation (Hepp, Breiter and Friemel 2018: 440).

However, there is a broader challenge to understand how digital traces are re-appropriated and re-animated by actors seeking to make claims or to challenge the meaning of particular events. Survey evidence shows that dramatic social or political events, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King or the attacks in New York City on 9/11, tend to polarize attitudes (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). While Yardi and Boyd (2010) were interested in interactions between mainstream news sources and Twitter users in relation to polarization, we are concerned with popular protests and Twitter users related to current cultural wars in Turkey on a mundane level. Digital traces are potential 'multimodal symbolic artefacts' (Milner, 2013: 2359). They are connected to memory work and are the products of the 'remix culture' of digital media (Bayerl & Syoynov, 2016). These traces help to create narratives about the past that avoid nuance thus 'may concurrently lead to polarized and antagonistic representations of the past' (Smit, Heinrich & Broersma, 2018). Digital traces created by protestors are never neutral as they are rendered in a moment of rupture and carry a high potential to foster (future) dissent as a historically structured conception of memory and identity.

A trace is thus not an isolated object, mark or thing, offering us a direct access to the social world (Hepp, Breiter and Friemel 2018: 443; Van Dijck 2014). It becomes actualized only through the social processes of interpretation, conflict and subjectification (Reigeluth 2014: 252), while signifying digital artefacts of contestation where meaning, consciousness, memory, and world-making collide. It is the interplay of the actors and digital platforms, which have the potential to reveal how protestors attribute meaning to protestors after the intense

protest action has dissipated through evoking, reanimating or re-appropriating discourses, ideas, norms, claims, symbols of the protest movement. Digital traces, once created, do not belong to any one actor and can be seized upon, re-appropriated and given new meaning and significance by a diverse range of actors. The power to control and mediate the meaning of digital traces is a political act with the capacity to build solidarities or augment societal polarization or hate. This is partly because social media campaigns during trials of the alleged leaders of the Gezi protests were ingrained with negative information and fake news.

5)Twitter, Occupy Gezi and the traces of ongoing resistance

Protestors and their opponents engage on digital media through performances of communication and commemoration. Milan (2018: 519) demonstrates that 'digital traces 'rematerialize' the meanings produced by social actors' and in doing so protestors re-appropriate digital traces to try and recuperate their perceived agency. Due to increasing polarization in Turkey and the AKP government turning the screw of social and political freedoms and basic civil rights, including the Internet freedoms, digital traces of the most significant popular uprising in recent political history, namely Gezi, has become highly contested. Milan (2018: 517) argues that digital traces are narrative builders which turn raw data into collective narratives through a process of interpretation and creation on digital media. When Gezi Park protestors invoke and re-appropriate the memory of the protests, they engage in narrative-building and re-interpretation of the protests on digital platforms. This is acutely important and empowering in a context of rising authoritarianism, eroding of civil liberties and restrictions on free press, including the imprisonment of journalists (Turkey jails more journalists than any other state) and academics. The memory of Gezi Park and 'Gezi Spirit' becomes a rallying cry for people to re-awaken dormant political agency.

With a view to reawaken dormant political agency, the overall narrative of the pro-Gezi tweets focuses on first affirming the self-identity of protestors, second seeking recognition of others through awareness raising and third critiquing ongoing and rising authoritarianism in Turkey. The most crucial shared aspect of the pro-Gezi Tweets was their insistence that the Gezi protests were a leaderless uprising that manifested through the participation of millions of citizens across Turkey. Eslen-Ziya and Erhart (2015) describe the leadership during the protests as a post-heroic and collaborative leadership. In appropriating the digital traces of the Gezi protests, the Tweets intended to re-narrate the protests to show that protestors did not go out to protest the government upon the call of a specific individual and/or a political organization. While the same attitude was a crucial component of the park occupations to show the police and other state institutions that it was not a bunch of isolated and opportunistic çapulcus ('looters') protesting, but millions of ordinary citizens, this trend was the main narrative of the digital commemoration in the aftermath of the Gezi protests when their alleged leaders have been accused for overthrowing the government in 2018 and 2019. In our sample, the most shared Tweet was retweeted 291 times on 12 and 13 May 2019:

> @fikirkulupleri Gezi resistance was not a conspiracy that someone organized behind closed doors. It was a popular social movement against the destruction of the AKP government. Gezi is the future of Turkey. It cannot be put on trial. #GeziYargılanamaz (#GeziCannotBePutOnTrial)

The Tweet condemns the attempts to ascribe the protests as under the leadership of certain individuals that were previously active in NGOs, unions or political organizations. Gezi developed without the initiatives of leaders but of communities such as the Taksim Solidarity Network, which only functioned as a symbolic initiative in order to negotiate with the governor of Istanbul to lessen the police violence or with the government to change its authoritarian

policies. 'Like previous movements, such as the Global Justice, Occupy's aversion to hierarchy and central leadership was accompanied by a rejection of the role of the spokesperson and the authority attached to it' (Kavada, 2015: 881). During the Occupy Wall Street protests, as it was the case of the Occupy Gezi, discussions were always open while the workings of the movement were intentionally transparent. Notes of working groups were published on the internet for any interested party to access (Watkins, 2012: 11). However, like the recent raid of the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong (2014) in 2019, the Turkish government also aims to blame certain individuals and political organizations and corrupt the traces of the Gezi protests. Occurring a year after the Gezi protests, the umbrella movement burst out in order to make elections more open and aimed for the stepping down of Hong Kong's leaders in a similar fashion to the Gezi Park. Recently, a Hong Kong court has sentenced the alleged leaders of the movement to prison terms of up to 16 months. From a similar perspective, the Turkish government, by punishing the Gezi protestors, aims to instill fear among individuals and communities that have the potential to voice their dissidence.

Along with the abovementioned text of the Tweet of Fikir Klupleri, the most shared image below was retweeted 291 times.

Image I: Crowd at Taksim Square, May 2013

Image I specifically draws attention to the crowds that populated the Taksim Square. Rather than focusing on faces or close-up images of the protest camps, the image shows the united square movement on Taksim Square next to the Gezi Park using an extreme long shot of the area from potentially a drone over the top of the demolished AKM building. Unlike media analysis of text documents, the analysis of images used by activists requires a deeper reflection on the meaning of distinct visuals used for specific local protest events (Doerr & Milman, 2014: 422). The Turkish flag forms the central object of the photo, which consolidates the 'unification' of this flagless movement under an existing flag of the nation. During the protests, the protestors commonly used the flags of Kurdish movements, LGBTI+ communities or other flags as much as the Turkish flag, which is a proof of the 'cosmopolitan and inclusive character of the Gezi protests' (author1, 2020). However, the chosen image in these Tweets included a Turkish flag in the center, potentially to show that the protestors are not enemies of the state and prevent the prosecution of the alleged leaders. Arguably, this image intends to address accusations that Gezi protestors were anti-Turkey and/or unpatriotic.

The second most shared Tweet in our sample was a Tweet by Erkan Bas on the 19th November 2018. Bas is currently an MP of the TIP party (Turkish Workers Party) in the parliament, whom initially entered the parliament as an MP of the pro-Kurdish party HDP. During the Gezi protests, he was detained along with thousands of other protestors and he has an ongoing trial about being one of the leaders of the protests. Retweeted 242 times, his Tweet aims to show that the Gezi protests were a wider protest movement and that he was not a leader:

@erkanbas Just because we participated in the Gezi protests, an informant gave the police our names. Like we have always said that #WeWereAllAtGeziPark and we are proud of it. Four years ago when we restarted our journey, we said 'my right side rots

but my left side is so alive'. We do not have anything to say about the limits of the decay today.

While most important aspect of Bas' commonly retweeted post was its insistence that the Gezi protests included millions of protestors not a few people or leaders, it also aims to show how common citizens are divided and became enemies of each other in the atmosphere of fear and paranoia created by the AKP government. In many of his speeches, Tayyip Erdogan individually addresses the local mayors and officials to inform police or the party (AKP) about potential ongoing terrorist activities or traitors. Bas, in this regard, also criticizes the decay and destruction created by the AKP government on especially a cultural and everyday domain, where ordinary citizens became part and parcel of the wider reach and functioning of the state surveillance.

The second most Tweeted image was of the young people who lost their lives due to heavy police violence during the Gezi protests. The seven different versions in these Tweets originated from the Gezi martyrs drawing by Faruk Tarınç.
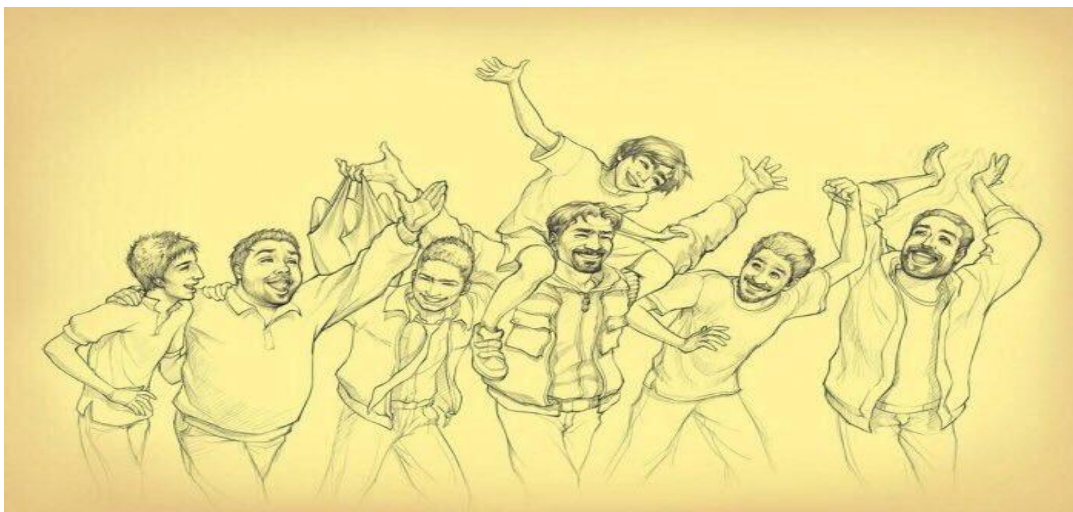

Image II: Gezi martyrs

The two-fold aim in using the image II is to highlight the solidarity dynamic within the protests whilst informing the public on the ongoing trials of the youth that were killed during the protests. As an example, Abdullah Comert's trial was taking place in May 2019 in Balikesir, which is a little city in inner Turkey. Balikesir is a city where inhabitants predominantly vote for right wing parties, where not so many activists live and therefore not so many people could participate in the trials. In isolating the trials from the wider public, the government aimed for the forgetting of the traces of the protests and justify the acts of killers in its re-narration of the uprising. 'Visual images are much more than supplementary material accompanying the written message' (Özcan, 2013: 428). In using Image II of the young people that were killed during the protests, the aim was to commemorate the losses visually and therefore create 'responsibility', hope and solidarity across other activists. Along with this image, Abdullah's name (and the common abbreviation of his name Abdocan) was used 128 times to call for the trial. The image has become a powerful icon for protestors to remember their dead whilst serving to mobilise presence and solidarity in a desperate situation where physical presence during the trials was hard. Thus, the dead of the movement call the surviving protestors to help their actual and potential prisoners and the visual image shows these young dead people joyfully, which is also a powerful symbol of resistance to death and repression. A joyful commemoration of loss and death functioned as a reference point for digitally remembering the trajectory and legacy of the protest movement.

5)Twitter, Occupy Gezi and the traces of hate and surveillance

Social media can foster both solidarity and polarization based on the legacy and memory of protests. Previous research has shown that Facebook may contribute to depolarization effects for people who primarily use the network for news as they encounter pro and counter attitudinal messages (Beam, Hutchens & Hmielowski, 2018). However, research has also sought to

determine how certain groups in society engage in digital enclaves and use these so-called echo chambers to attract more supporters, incite anger and hatred, mobilize against defined oppositional actors (typically government, institutions of the state, the media, international bodies, regimes, multinational corporations, states, politicians, protestors) as well as more ephemeral challenges (including ideologies, ideas, norms, values) (author2 et el., 2019). The past was and remains as a site of contestation as actors on all sides of a conflict seek to assert authorship over what happened, with an aim to claim the moral high ground and clarify 'the truth'.

As Bail et al. (2018: 9216) point out, despite the hope that people using digital media might be exposed to a variety of sources and angles on political phenomenon, there is a growing concern that digital media exacerbate political polarization because of social network homophily with people preferring to nurture social network ties to those with similar views to their own. In studying 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election, Lim (2017: 424) defines algorithmic enclaves whereby social media users claim and legitimize their own versions of tribal nationalism by excluding equality and justice for others, which deepens divisions among social groups in society and amplifies animosity and intolerance against each other. Lee et al. (2018) show that in South Korea social media indirectly contributed to polarization through increased political engagement with those using social media being pushed toward the ideological poles, developing more extreme political attitudes.

Turkey's socio-political polarization is invariably attributed to the persistence of 'echo chambers' which fuel cleavages along ethno-nationalist, class, gender, and religious divides, as it is the case in our sample. The well-trodden argument is that people engage solely (or primarily) in cycles of consuming and sharing information which reinforce extant political ideas, preferences, interests and opinions and deliberately limit their exposure to opposing

beliefs. On an almost contradictory perspective to 'homely' references considering the protests, the pro-governmental groups aimed to vilify their opponents referring to them by caustic labels such as 'baby killers' or 'gun grabbers', while designating them as the responsible agents for standing in the way of the changes Turkey seeks. Such vilifying framing (Benford & Hunt, 1992) of the collective character of an antagonist/opponent functions to demarcate boundaries between 'us' and 'them', good and evil, and right and wrong (Van Stekelenburg, 2014: 542). Beginning with the caustic labelling of protesters by the then prime-minister Erdoğan during the protests, especially with the word 'çapulcu' (looter), the Gezi activists have been vilified in offline and online spaces. This vilification has continued to inform contemporary Turkish cultural fabric and political agenda, especially on social media platforms. The anti-Gezi users mainly consists of, first, trolls employed (indirectly) by the government, second, representatives of the AKP local branches, municipality leaders or other AKP supporters, third, groups that are members of or sympathetic to the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party, 1969-present), which is the far-right ultranationalist political party that has formed a pact with the AKP since 2018.

While the common narrative of the pro-Gezi users rested on the appropriation of the protests as a leaderless and widespread movement without emphasizing or vilifying any of the groups that have or have not participated in it, the pro-governmental groups used the same hashtag to show that Gezi was a treason, which they framed as similar to the actions of the previously separationist Kurdish armed force PKK. Shared 204 times in November 2018, the most popular of the anti-Gezi Tweets in our sample aimed to account for the power of the pro-governmental forces vis-a-vis the Gezi protestors, which also represents the general nationalist and patriarchal tendency of this camp:

@ObaSiyasi You resisted the TOMA vehicle that only sprayed water, but we resisted the tank that shot a fire! You hung PKK's rags! WE HUNG THE GLORIOUS TURKISH FLAG! You consumed alcohol! We performed ablution! You looted the city and burnt the cars! We did not even scratch the tank that shot a fire on us! You are sold! We are dedicated! #GeziyiSavunuyoruz

In the narrative of the pro-governmental camp, the Gezi protests not only represented a mobilization with leaders, but that this leadership was also depicted as a non-glorious and non-heroic leadership vis-a-vis the leadership and initiative during the attempted coup of the 15th of July 2016. Other than glorifying the struggles against the attempted coup of the AKP, the discourses in this popular Tweet glorify Islamic practices and posit the Gezi protestors' aims against the trajectories of Islam. Like the emphasis of the consumption of alcohol on this Tweet, many other similar Tweets used photos and texts related to condoms and open relationships as an excuse to denigrate the perceived lose morality that was said to characterize the protests. Although a variety of Muslim groups also protested the government during the Gezi protests, the pro-governmental users produced such narratives to manipulate the digital traces of the Gezi protests in such a way that the protests or the protestors were against Islam and the unity of the Turkish state. Thus, the common discourses on these texts and images aimed to depict millions of protestors as a 'terrorist' group. The fact that this camp consistently uses the pro-governmental discourses shows the ways in which digital publics have the potential to foster official narratives about protest movements. This camp also replied to the Tweets of the accused and alleged leaders of the Gezi protests such as Mucella Yapici to denigrate their political identities, their political messages as well as the Gezi protests in general.

The most widely shared image used in anti-Gezi Tweets was Image III. The image shows an alleged composition of the Gezi Park protests with people holding the flag of the

imprisoned leader of the PKK along with others holding the flag of the founder of the modern Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk with a text saying 'Kemalism and PKK hand in hand'. To capture the underlying meanings revealed through this image, the image was circulated at a time when the CHP[2] reclaimed power from AKP in main cities of Turkey in the recent local elections in March 2019. Seven different versions of this image were used along with different texts including the above Tweet. The image together with the text aims to villainize not only the Gezi protests/protestors but also denigrates CHP supporters' potential pact with the Kurdish groups. The image also intends to intentionally pick out the specific communities or individuals that have protested by making use of a close-up or a medium shot of the protestors. From a broader perspective, the image attempts to insult leaders and councils of the Kemalist party CHP in order for the AKP government to reclaim power and to consolidate legitimacy by declaring non-supporters of the AKP as terrorists. During this time period, the AKP government did not accept the results of the mayoral elections of Istanbul and sought for a rerun of the elections. As such, the image disseminates a distorted trace of the protests by using a fake event as its basis.

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[2] The Republican People's Party (1923) is the oldest political party in Turkey, which is a Kemalist, social-democratic political party that has also been statist.

Image III: Anti-Gezi Image

The second most shared Tweet of this camp used a shorter text and presented a video rather than an image, which was not a widespread video during the time of the protests.

> @ruyaselcuk This is for those who say #GeziyiSavunuyoruz :/ TOMA hits and scores
>
> a goal! 😊😊😊 https://t.co/haZJXDHyUv 162

Like the most popular Tweet of this camp, this second most popular Tweet also intends to non-glorify the aims and intentions of the protestors. It also turns the Gezi protests into a masculine game of power where the aim is to compete for the most heroic and patrimonial position in the hierarchy. The common video shared on these Tweets (represented by the screen-shot images IV and V) is a male protestor that challenges and stands by a TOMA vehicle who then is exposed to heavy physical violence by the water coming from the vehicle. By using the above Tweet, the anti-Gezi users make fun of this protestor with discourses such as 'gezizekali' (Gezidiot). Along with such discourses, the-anti Gezi camp also used the hashtag #HesabiSorulur (#YouWillPaythePrice) to curse and threaten the protestors and the potential Gezi-leaning public for their potential future acts.

Images IV and V: TOMA vehicle

In her research on visual images depicting Muslim women in German media, Özcan (2013: 428) identifies the analysis of visuals as a source of imaginary contact with different religious and ethnic minorities. The video above creates an imaginary contact of the police (representing the state) with the general pro-Gezi public, bolstering the idea of the 'strong state' vis-à-vis 'weak marauders' and legitimizing state-sponsored violence and surveillance against its own populaces. More broadly, the anti-Gezi users employed visuals as a way of securing the regime's stability whilst consolidating the nation state's aims of securitization. In focusing on right-wing visual communication through Twitter, the visuals here show the AKP supporters' claims to truth and authentic patriotism in relation to the 'history' of treason to Turkish state and 'gender roles' of 'glorified male tank driver' and the weak/feminized looter (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017: 254).

6)Conclusion

Although it has been years since various 'Twitter revolutions' took place, their impact is persistent as they may potentially function as resources for future mobilizations whilst impeding the agendas of the far-right governments and mobilizations. The recent arrests of the alleged leaders of the Gezi protests in Turkey and the umbrella movement in Hong Kong exemplify these tendencies across the globe for the prevention of left-wing and widespread protest movements. While divisive societies form the existing networks of political

communities today on a global scale, the ways these divisive societies function and the ways images and texts of social movements are contested on digital platforms contribute to an understanding of the ways different communities use digital platforms for political expression. The political discourses and accompanying images and videos of activists and their opponents highlight the movement dynamics that these groups seek in the era of authoritarianism. Digital traces of the Gezi protests foster (future) dissent as a historically structured conception of memory and identity in the sense that the Gezi activists adhered to the non-heroic leadership practices that have emerged during the protests whilst using a less radical trajectory following the protests, in order to keep activists safe from state scrutiny and surveillance (i.e. using an image with a Turkish flag). On the other hand, the anti-Gezi users share fake images and unpopular videos from the protests to target and denigrate the protests and to support the government in their prosecution of the alleged leaders.

In engaging with the digital traces of popular social movements, in this case the Occupy Gezi, the article highlights how the activists or the pro-Gezi communities continued to use the Gezi protests as a reference point to raise consciousness about non-heroic and collaborative social and political change in the face of the other parties' efforts to villainize not only the Gezi protests and the protestors but also the newer ones that may arise today. The paper pointed out that intensive pressures on Internet and decreasing overall media freedoms cause the disappearance of the initial traces of the Gezi protests. The visual and discursive traces of toxic masculinity, nationalism and religious fundamentalism attached to hashtags on Twitter account for the ways the pro-governmental sources aim to shadow, isolate and alienate the leaderless, multiple and diverse characteristics of the crowds that have composed the movements although pro-Gezi users also resorted to nation state symbols such as the Turkish flag. Overall, the article shows that at a time when populist movements are on the rise globally, a conceptualization of 'digital traces' of widespread social movements contributes to research in digital media and

political engagement, by showing ongoing strategies and tactics in disseminating the political

messages online in the interests of their imagined and potential audiences.

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