Football fans at Gezi: counterpublic in the making

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From Habermas to Fanblogs: Exploring the Public Sphere of European Football

FREE Conference
METU, Ankara, April 2014
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1. Introduction

The last days of May 2013 and the weeks thereafter have witnessed one of the most historic processes of Turkey’s history: the Gezi Park protests. Among many mesmerizing aspects of the Gezi Park events, one specific actor of these protest waves deserved special attention: Beşiktaş football team’s fan group, Çarşı, which is known for its protest and overly political stance as compared to its counterparts in İstanbul and elsewhere in Turkey. From the beginning of the protests, (and even before the events), Çarşı played a critical role in forming an organized resistance against police violence, and in making Taksim Square and Gezi Park a “state-free zone”, at least for a while. Çarşı’s organized, agile and firm physical resistance performance was one of the critical factors that rendered occupation of the Gezi Park possible.

The Gezi protests posed innumerable questions and challenges for social scientists. Active participation of football fan groups and their decisive performance at instances of clash with security (mostly the riot police) forces was one of them. This presentation, in line with the conference call, examines the role of Çarşı in the Gezi protests and tries to question the
relevance of Çarşı fan group for theories of public and counterpublic spheres. Without doubt, we have first and foremost Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere* in our minds. To put it more clearly, the major problem of this presentation is to explore the place of contention (and contentious politics) in the making of counterpublics, through a specific focus on the role played by Çarşı during the Gezi protests.

Many theories of (counter)public sphere stress the democratic, deliberative and nonviolent kernel of the process of making (alternative/counter)public spaces. But what if claims for counterpublic is raised against a robustly authoritarian state which is infamous for its systematic and unaccountable use of force against its own citizens.

Our main argument is as follows: contentious politics (with its symbolic and physical dimensions) plays a vital role in the making of counterpublics. In other words, claims of counterpublic is not a flawless and nonviolent (and thus, purely “democratic”) process, as it has partly been asserted by the vast majority of theories of public/counterpublic sphere.

Our research is mostly based on qualitative material gathered from the field:

- in-depth interviews with constituents of Çarşı;
- in-depth interviews with Gezi protestors;
- participatory observation in the Gezi Park and during the Gezi protests;
- published materials on Gezi. More specifically published interviews of Çarşı constituents;
- Çarşı’s online performance in Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 environments. More specifically Çarşı’s Twitter account.

### 2. Accumulation of Contention

This is the story of an urban uprising, the story of a rebel city à la David Harvey. We would like to take you to May 31st, 2013, to Taksim Square, İstanbul. It had already been a week
since a few environmentalist activists had started camping at Gezi Park, in order to prevent the transformation of this green urban space into a shopping mall, by way of revitalizing an old Ottoman artillery barrack. Early in the morning of May 31st, the police attacked this pioneering camp at Gezi with intensive use of tear gas, burning down tents and wounding several activists. By late afternoon of May 31st, the Taksim Square had been converted to a space of urban uprising and resistance. There were thousands of protestors in Taksim to whom the police responded with tear gas, and water cannons. The motivation behind these protests was twofold: on the one hand, people were protesting against extensive police violence; on the other hand they were against having the park’s trees cut down, to make the ground ready for the barrack replica to be erected.

This was a moment of contention and resistance. We start analyzing the Gezi Park resistance by using the concept of contention. Our main reference point is the work of Charles Tilly, and other sociologists from the school political process model, within the literature on social movements. What is the definition of contention? One needs to understand contention as a collective political struggle (McAdam et al., 2004: 5). For Tilly, the shortest way to define contention is to emphasis the “claim making” aspect. It is an episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects. Contention includes condemning, opposing, resisting and demanding. All in all, it defines a moment of tension. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly suggest a distinction between contained contention and transgressive contention. A contention is transgressive, if two conditions are met: “at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors.” If this is not the case “at least some parties employ innovative collective action”, in terms of selecting objects of claims, collective self-representations, and employing unprecedented or forbidden means.

When we focus on the Gezi Park resistance, three points are stated by most of the observers. First, in terms of the numbers of protestors the Gezi resistance was exceptional in
recent history. The only other comparable episode was the workers’ riot in June 1970, also blocking the normal course of daily life in Istanbul. One can conclude that for many, the claims of the protestors were totally just: protecting trees and condemning police violence. None of these claims were related to any kind of particular interest. People saw in these claims, the expression of the general good; hence they were eager to participate. Second, many of the protestors were newcomers in the field of protest. For many of them, Gezi was the first instance they experienced a collective action. In this sense, Gezi Park resistance attracted many amateurs to streets. Third, the football fan groups and especially Başıktas’ fans group, Çarşı, had a crucial role in the Gezi resistance. They were very active during clashes with the police, as a group. Throughout the protests, there were only a few collective Twitter accounts, declaring the position of a certain group. Almost all political parties and groups were silent in social media. Organizations were tweeting about first aid organization, lawyer support for those under custody or broadcasting other types of solidarity messages. Only Çarşı’s Twitter account was vocal about the course of clash. What is more, Çarşı members gave Gezi their already available chant: “Go on, spray, go on, spray. Go on spray tear gas. Strip your helmet, drop your baton. Let’s see who the real man is!” This gift was very significant in terms of concretizing the Gezi spirit.

As already mentioned in the introduction, this paper’s macro level question is the role/function of contention in the making of counter-public. This macro question is accompanied by a series of smaller questions, one of which is the following: what made the role of a fan group so significant in a politically loaded resistance moment. The first answer to this question is about the heritage of Çarşı. Çarşı fans are not afraid of political slogans. Over the years, they held a critical position on many issues, such as supporting Greenpeace’s anti-nuclear campaign, condemning fascism and racism, organizing charity for earthquake victims, among many others. Plus, Çarşı as a group is known to have a leftish discourse.
We believe that this answer, focusing on the group identity alone, is necessary but an insufficient one. Therefore, drawing on Tilly’s emphasis on the role of accumulated experiences in contentious performances, what is necessary is to provide a brief history of accumulation of contention, in the spring of 2013, just before the Gezi resistance. The first instance of contention took place in İstiklal Street, nearby Taksim, on April 7th. The issue was about the demolition plan for one of the oldest and largest movie theaters, called Emek Sineması. Many people from the film industry were joined by others and the protest turned out to be a success. However, the protest was cut short by police intervention, including tear gas and water shot by water cannons. Many critical voices had been heard in the public opinion, disagreeing with political violence.

The second instance of contention took place on May the first, the Labor Day. Trade unions and political groups insisted on organizing the demonstration at Taksim Square but the city governor did not allow this. The groups started their rallies towards Taksim from different locations, but each and every street leading to the square was already blocked by the police. This time police violence was even more intense. Many neighborhoods on the European side of Istanbul got affected by tear gas, and one of the centers of the day’s events was Beşiktaş. For many people living in Beşiktaş the smell of tear gas became something familiar.

The third instance of contention took place on May 11th. It was a game day for Beşiktaş, and a farewell opportunity for Beşiktaş fans to their legendary İnönü Stadium, before its demolition for renewal. Typically, Beşiktaş fan groups gathered at the center of the neighborhood and then walked to the stadium. May 11th was not an exception in this sense. But probably there were more fans than usual there, as it was the last game at İnönü before the demolition. For some unknown reasons the police intervened, fired into the air, and then the center of Beşiktaş became the space of tear gas and chaos. For the policemen, it was very
difficult to regain control. As of May 11th, an old chant of Beşiktaş fans’ has already been revitalized: “Go on, spray, go on, spray. Go on spray tear gas. Strip your helmet, drop your baton. Let’s see who the real man is!”

What do these three moments of contention tell us? The third one was directly related to Çarşı fans. The second one, the Labor Day incident, was also –although less directly-related to Çarşı fans. Still some of them were active in clashes with the police, and furthermore, the center of Beşiktaş neighborhood was the key locus of clashes. Hence, when the accumulated contention leading to Gezi resistance is taken into consideration, Çarşı fans were part of these moments of contention. All these moments, and older experiences of clash with the police in and around the stadium for many years, were moments of “collective learning” for Çarşı fans, if we follow Tilly’s concept. They have learned the detailed techniques of clashes, as well as techniques to manage tension and to keep the group spirit up.

This collective learning process is emphasized by Ankaralı Ayhan, a leading figure of Çarşı, in one of his interviews: “Let me tell you this, this is our training; we are trained (antrenmanlıyız) for this. Ordinary people do not know what to do at the moment of clash with the police. Thanks to game days, and the events of May the first, we are trained. During the Gezi protests, no fan of Çarşı carried cleavers or big gyro knives. We know how far the police can go and we know the maximum effective range of tear gas; therefore we know better than ordinary people how to protect ourselves from tear gas. This is what Çarşı has done; without going too far, staying back.”¹ (Çarşı Geliyooor!, 2013: 57)

Our key informant Metin also emphasized the same point. In his words, the fandom is based on a series of clashes, with the rival fan groups, with the police and with the state: “the tension and the clash is always there.” In Metin’s opinion, one should not distinguish fan groups in this respect. The same situation is valid for Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, Karşıyaka, Adana Demirspor, Göztepe and other fan groups. He thinks that the policemen have a specific resentment for fans, fueled by long working hours. He adds that the ever-present tension does not have a political dimension.

Esat’s narration of Çarşı’s contribution to Gezi is very similar to other narratives.

“Most of the people who came there were novices, in regard to tear gas and struggle against the police. Çarşı is now very experienced with these. That day, while walking from Harbiye towards the police group, we were being repeatedly tear gassed. Of course, we were ready for this, with our head gears, and scarves. We covered our mouths and put lemon drops into our eyes. Those guys there (the novices) were backing off when the tear gas arrived. This was not good. Because we needed to move forward against the police violence, even when we were tear gassed, in order to push them back. We actually achieved this, and this is the reason we were successful that day. We were motivating those guys. If Çarşı is a legend today, it all started that day.”

During the Gezi resistance, Çarşı’s accumulated know-how on clashes and contention has been transferred into politically-loaded collective action. And, as it will be shown in the
next section of this paper, Çarştı functioned as the generator of fun, joy and will/courage to resist with their very existence as a group, and with their songs.

3. Locating Çarştı in Gezi Resistance

So far, we discussed Çarştı fans within the context of accumulated contention. Now, it is time to shift the focus from external dynamics to group self-identification, and to voices of Çarştı people, who were active at Gezi Park.

3.1. What is Çarştı?

Çarştı was established in 1982 by a group of younger Beşiktaş fans, living in the neighborhood. The name Çarştı means bazaar, and it connotes people dwelling around it; hence it implies a tie between the club and the neighborhood. In our in-depth interviews, it was stated that the core group who initiated Çarştı were of diverse political views. However, some of the founding figures, such as Optik Başkan (the Optical Shief, Mehmet İşiklar), were on the left. Eventually Çarştı created its logo with an anarchist A, and its motto became “Çarştı is against everything” (Çarştı her şeye karşı). Since then, Çarştı positions itself as the rebellious soul of Turkish football.

This rebellious soul came into being partially thanks to Beşiktaş fans’ inclination towards the left, during the 1970s. In his pioneering book on Turkish football studies Bu Maçı Alcaz (We will win this game), Can Kozanoğlu (1990) states that in the 1970s, Beşiktaş fans were the only left-oriented group among the big three clubs of İstanbul. They were adapting leftist popular songs to themselves. This leftwing orientation fitted well with the club’s limited financial ability and limited sportive achievement. Beşiktaş was the poorest among the
big three. Later on, when Kurthan Fişek (1980) offered the three-fold classification of fan
groups in Turkey, Beşiktaş was assumed to be the team of laborer people.5

For many years, Çarşı established a reputation for fighting for causes not related to
football. For instance, regarding the controversial plans to construct a dam in Southeastern
Turkey, which will destroy the ancient city of Hasankeyf, they wrote this humorous banner:
“Let Hasan enjoy life, Hasankeyf shall not be submerged” (Bırakın Hasan Keyfine Baksın,
Hasankeyf Sular Altında Kalmasın). In 2012, when the leaders of 12 September 1980
military coup were brought to court, Çarşı decided to request intervenor status in the trial,
with the slogan “12 September has stolen our joy” (12 Eylül sevinçlerimizi çaldı). During the
so-called cartoon crisis -the publication of a cartoon in Denmark depicting Prophet
Muhammad- their banner read: “Çarşı is against Denmark.” There are several instances when
they linked this left-oriented, critical discourse to issues belonging to the football realm.
When Fatih Terim was the manager of Galatasaray, Galatasaray fans liked to call him
Imperatore. Terim did not hide the fact that he had many political affiliations, including close
ties with Mehmet Ağar, a former minister representing the deep state structure. Then, Çarşı
protested all these connections and Terim’s hegemony with the banner “Not empire, but full
democracy” (İmparatorluk Değil, Tam Demokrasi). In 2005, the legendary captain Rıza
Çalimbay was appointed as the manager of Beşiktaş. Fenerbahçe fans decided to ridicule
Çalimbay by recalling his father’s supposedly low status profession: a concierge. Çarşı’s
response to Fenerbahçe was firm: “We are proud of Rızas” (Rızalar Bizim Onurumuzdur). For
many years, an Armenian of Istanbul, Alen (Markaryan), has been a prominent leader of
Çarşı. With his name he is a total misfit in the highly nationalistic realm of football, and
hence, another instance of Çarşı’s rebellious soul.

5 In Fişek’s classification Galatasaray is for aristocrats, and Fenerbahçe is for the bourgeoisie.
Çarşı still enjoys an autonomous position with respect to the club’s establishment. They also enjoy being at the heart of Beşiktaş fandom. In this sense they are a central group, not a marginal one, able to disseminate their discourse to many other Beşiktaş fans. They have a fan blog: forzabesiktas.com. The group has ties with public intellectual figures, and they are proud of this. A Çarşı member states: “When you talk about Çarşı, you talk about a strong intellectual capital, strong people in various fields.” (Çarşı Geliyooor!, 2013: 49) Çarşı fans perceive many intellectuals as members of their group, including the acclaimed movie director Zeki Demirkubuz, the singer Feridun Düzçağaç, the journalist Cem Dizdar. This makes Çarşı a point of attraction for the larger public. When there was a match-fixing scandal in Turkish football in 2011, Çarşı published a manifesto, a call for moral purification, consistency and fair play. This anti-industrial football manifesto was drafted by leftist journalist and writer Rıdvan Akar. The anthropologist John McManus notes, “The sentiments driving their actions—the search for the right slogan, the right organization to support, the ‘right thing’ to do—are more ethical than ideological. The politics of Çarşı operates less as a specific political doctrine and more as a set of ethics; that is, it is framed around moral principles deemed fundamental to humanity.” (McManus, 2013) These ties to intellectuals certainly strengthen Çarşı’s claim for ethical stand.

Our key informant Metin seems to be well equipped with the current general wisdom of social sciences; he believes that there is not one Çarşı, but many: “This Çarşı… is indeed a complex entity. Hard to explain to outsiders, but something you come to know, when you are inside. Now… there is no formal structure. Let me tell you this: there is no inner group of 40 people, 50 people, 30 people, 20 people, you name it… no established staff, no center whatsoever. No core group coming together, discussing plans. No formal structure. And for

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these reasons, there are many Çarşıs at the same time.”

This emphasis on pluralism is even more significant, when we remember the debate within Çarşı in the aftermath of Gezi resistance. Some prominent figures of the group, including Alen, stated that participation in Gezi protests was a mistake, and fandom should not be mixed with politics. Together with his emphasis on the multiplicity of Çarşı, Metin adds that neither Beşiktaş fans in general, nor the Çarşı group can be described as leftists, dissenters, or revolutionaries. In his words, “they are not, and they can’t be.” “But,” he adds, “among Beşiktaş fans and in Çarşı, leftist people are stronger.” He thinks that for this reason, ultra-nationalist symbols cannot exist in Beşiktaş’s stadium, whereas the icon of Che has been accepted as an ordinary thing.

In our research, we have shown our interviewees visuals of tweets by Çarşı’s official account, tweeted during the Gezi resistance.

Visual 1 – Çarşı’s official Twitter account, 4 June 2013

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7 “Bu Çarşı ... çok karmaşık bir yapı aslında. Yani dışa anlatması da zor... ama içindeyken bildiğin... Şimdi... şöyle bir yapı yok, şöyle söyleyeyim: önce bir tane bir işte bir grup yok; böyle 40 kişi, 50 kişi, 30 kişi 20 kişi, neyse, bir rakamla oluşmuş bir kadro, bir merkez falan yok ortada. Hani böyle oturup karar alan, tartışan, hadi bilmem ne yapan bir topluluk falan yok. Böyle bir formal yapı yok. Ve bu yüzden de bir sürü aynı zamanda aynı anda bir sürü Çarşı da var.”

Visual 1 reads: “Çarşı is a soul, and cannot be reduced to a body.” What Metin recalls when he sees this tweet is somewhat the definition of Çarşı: it is a position. It is a way of behaving, a way of choosing your attitude, it is an ethical stand (ahlaki duruş). All the symbols included in this banner, are part of this ethical stand. It is against fascism. It means simply to side with what is right and fair. It is being not opportunistic and not self-seeking (çıkarcı). This is valid for football games as well. It includes protesting the referee for a wrong decision, even if that decision would be to your own team’s advantage.

3.2. What brought Çarşı into Gezi resistance?

This way of establishing group identity is also a reply to the question “what brought Çarşı into Gezi resistance?” For instance one of the founders of Çarşı, Ergin Demir (also known as Çene), wrote in an essay for a fan magazine that: “naturally we are going to rebel against all unfairness we see. Where there is no justice, democratic reaction is legitimate, and you need to suck it up, my friend.”⁹ A similar approach is observable in many entries at forzabesiktas.com, Çarşı’s fan blog.

Çağdaş Sezgin, (May 30): “Rehabilitating a place, which once functioned as a barrack, to be a shopping mall is a comedy. All people, who are able to do so, shall stop by the park. There won’t be a single tree left in the entire (Taksim) square. … This morning at 5 a.m. the police intervened and burnt down the tents.”¹⁰

İlker Yaldız, (May 31): “The issue is not anymore about the shopping mall or about the trees. If this much violence is the response to the most rightful and peaceful demonstration on earth,...

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¹⁰ “Kışla olarak işleyen bir yeri AVM olarak ikiye kıymak komedidir. İmkani olan herkes Park’a uğrasın. Koskoca meydanda bir ağaç daha olmayacak... Bu sabah 5’te polis müdahale etti ve çadırları yakı.” This one and subsequent quotations are taken from Çarşı Geliyooor! (p. 20-21).
tomorrow what will their response be to a protest against a politician, to a workers’ strike, or to a football fan issue! Removal of the right to demonstrate/to protest is a question of democracy and regime.”

Ayhan Aytaç, (May 31): “Friends, this struggle is beyond political divides. It is a struggle about being ‘human’.”

Doruk Kaymak, (May 31): “Really bad things are happening; the police brutally attack people with tear gas. While one group tried to escape, the wall crashed down over them; there are wounded people. What kind of government is that! How people can vote for these guys! I’ve never seen fascism of this kind.”

Our interviewee, Esat, believes that the participation of Çarşı in Gezi resistance, mobilized further people, simply because seeing Çarşı’s participation easily convinced them of the injustice. According to our key informant Metin, the reason why fans did participate in Gezi is related to the very essence of fandom. For Metin, fandom means, above all, giving immediate reactions without too much thinking, and taking sides: “You look at the situation and choose your side. It is like a reflex. 10 people are beating one person in the street. The Gezi process was something similar to this. Gezi happened (işte Gezi oldu). We just said: we must participate. Then we went. The following day the process continued. We said: we need to go again, and we went there again.”

According to Metin, the atmosphere in stadium stands was already similar to Gezi, even before Gezi came out to be. This similarity is not based on political content but rather on formation (biçimsel olarak). In his words, “when the police attack fans in the stadium, you

11 “Sorun AVM, ağaç olmaktan çıktı, dünyanın en haklı ve barışçıl gösterisine bile bu derece şiddet uygulanıyorsa, yarın bir siyasetçi protestosunda, işçi grevinde, tribün olaylarında neler yapılmaz! Gösteri/protesto hakkının gaspi bir demokrasi ve rejim sorunudur.”
12 “Bu mücadele siyaset üstüdür arkadaşlar. ‘İnsan’ olmakla alakalı bir mücadeleledir.”
13 “Çok kötü şeyler oluyor, manılamız biber gazı kullanıp insanlara acmasızca saldıryor polis. Bir grup insan duvardan kaçmaya çalışırken üstlerine duvar çıkı, yaralılar var. Böyle bir hükümet nasıl olur! İnsanlar bu adamlara nasıl oy verirler! Ben böyle faşizm görmemiş!"
don’t care who is rightwing or leftwing. Or, at a moment of celebration, you don’t hug people taking their views into consideration. 30 thousand people share the same feeling.” According to Metin, some football fans were at Gezi, for the adventure, for the enthusiasm, and simply because they loved action. He adds that he does not attribute anything negative on that.

3.3. Çarşı for Gezi Protestors

Our research is not only based on interviews with Çarşı fans; we were also curious about what other people in the Gezi resistance have been thinking about Çarşı. We have already stated that during the Gezi resistance Çarşı functioned as the generator of fun, and courage to resist, for many people. The testimonies we heard during in-depth interviews overlap with this observation.

Ali is an engineer, working as a research assistant at a university. He does not care about politics, but he is fed-up with inequality and wars. In his opinion, people became excited (çoşkulu) when there were fires on the street, or they were more energetic, when the barricades were established. On the same token, Ali continues, Çarşı had an empowering impact. When Çarşı fans arrived, people felt safe and more powerful, simply because those fans were fearless. For Ali, Çarşı was influential enough to lead people into a clash. They had this capacity to direct people, however, they were at the same time not overdoing it (ayrı zamanda çok da şey de değilirdi hani oraya gidelim çatışalım, buraya gidelim çatışalım da değilirdi): “They were coming like a band (bando), and filling people with energy and confidence. We all became Beşiktaş fans. Then, we thought it’s more important to convert our own teams into something similar to Beşiktaş.”

Buğday is working for a private institution as an education specialist. She defines herself as a “person of nature.” She is not particularly interested in football, she does not support a team, but after Gezi she has sympathy for Çarşı. She especially remembers one of
Çarşı’s slogans: “Jump, jump, or you are Tayyip.” She thinks that this was really funny. Rüzgar, an actor, also remembers Çarşı at Gezi with their songs. Especially Çarşı fans chanting “Tear Gas Oley!” in the middle of tear gas was a moment to remember for Rüzgar.

3.4. Çarşı within the park: order enforcement force, or a non-significant group?

When the Gezi Park resistance is analyzed, it is common to refer to two phases of it: the first one is the phase of clash with the police. It is full of tear gas, water shot from water cannons, and percussion bombs. This phase lasts from Friday, May 31st, to Saturday afternoon, June 1st. The second phase starts with the police’s withdrawal from the park, in the afternoon of June 1st, and lasts for two weeks, until the violent police intervention at Gezi Park on June 15th. The second phase is characterized by relative calm within the park. This calm and the absence of policemen enable the protestors to talk to each other, to organize forums and to enjoy music, within the park. In the second phase, there were numerous tents in the park. Moreover, several political groups established their own stands and tried to voice their ideas. Throughout the second phase, many people contributed to the establishment of solidarity networks within Gezi and furthered gift-giving relations (Turan, 2013). The protestors imagined the park as a commune and attempted to convert it into a space without money-exchange. In the in-depth interviews with both Çarşı fans and Gezi protestors, there is a consensus about the key role played by Çarşı during the first phase. However, ideas and observations are diverging with respect to Çarşı’s function in the second phase.

In some in-depth interviews, Çarşı’s role in the absence of police intervention is depicted as next to nothing. According to this view, the second phase was a period when political groups and NGO volunteers were active in the park and a football fan group did not have much to offer for these two weeks. Yet, one should also note the opposite view. Cengiz is a young Kurdish activist. He is close to the Kurdish political movement, and he had
multiple contacts with different people and groups in the park. His perception of Çarşısı’s function is noteworthy. In Cengiz’s words, there was a multiplicity within the park. The tension among different groups was tangible, with a potential for real clash. In his words, their primary goal was to avoid and to prevent fighting (Dolayısıyla biz ne olursa olsun hani kavga etmeyeceğiz.) For this aim, Cengiz continues, some intermediary groups were situated in between BDP (Peace and Democracy Party, the legal party of Kurdish political movement) and TGB (Turkey’s Youth Union, the nationalist-Kemalist NGO), as a buffer zone. Cengiz tells us that the togetherness of TGB members carrying Turkish flags, and the Kurdish people dancing in round (halay) was the real moment of tension. According to Cengiz, a mutual tolerance atmosphere had been achieved eventually, and in this achievement, Çarşısı had a significant role. Cengiz recalls that some members of Çarşısı had gone to May Day parade before, but for him, Çarşısı is a politically neutral group, and hence could neutralize the tension. Cengiz sees Çarşısı as a group able to create joy and fun and thinks that this makes them a phenomenon. Çarşısı was indeed successful at being the buffer zone between TGB and the Kurds, simply because there are Kurds and Turks within Çarşısı, as well as “fascists,” and all other kinds of political and non-political views. And it is impossible to beat them in fight (Yani Çarşısı mı dağıtacakınız yani...).

This understanding of Çarşısı’s role at Gezi overlaps with another catch-phrase we came across in in-depth interviews: “Çarşısı has been the kolluk gücü of Gezi.” A legalist translation of kolluk gücü corresponds to police force or gendarmerie. But in this context, it is closer to an order enforcement force. This order enforcement capacity attributed to Çarşısı has two dimensions: first, during clashes they acted as a collective force, able to establish a certain parity with the police. Just remember the quotation from Ali’s interview, saying that when Çarşısı was around, its very existence gave people a sense of security. Second, for some of our interviewees, Çarşısı had a role in implementing a kind of order within the park. For instance, it
was the protestors’ collective decision to prevent alcohol sales within the park. And it was members of Çarşı who implemented this decision. A member of Çarşı, (Kabataş) Hakan says: “After the police had withdrawn from Taksim, our guys did their best to discipline the park; but only with limited success. The vendor buys canned beer for two liras and sells it in the park for 20 liras. He tries to win his bread. No difference between a flag vendor, and a beer vendor; both are there to win their bread.”14 (Çarşı Geliyooor!, 2013: 63-64) A leading figure of Çarşı, Bülent Ergenç was stabbed in the park, after he warned a street vendor, not to sell beer.15

When we discussed these observations with our key informant Metin, his first reaction was disagreement. He told us that shortly after the protestors entered the park, Çarşı has returned to the Beşiktaş neighborhood. There, there were some small groups aiming to attack the prime minister’s office. Metin told us that with Çarşı’s intervention this was warded off and those people were guided to Gezi Park, the center of everything. According to Metin, no other role was played by Çarşı at the park. In his words, “it was like a 90-minute game, we started playing with the whistle. 90 minutes later, another whistle, and the game was over for us. We felt we were the winner. The game was over, so we went home.”16

But after hours of talking, at the last phase of the in-depth interview, Metin shared another state of his mind from the Gezi days: “One day at the park, probably the second or the third day of the commune, we started hearing of many incidents, like theft, or I don’t know, you name it… Of course, I started to think, we need to do something. Because there were many people camping there, living at the park for 24 hours. There were some small crimes. I

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14 “Taksim’de polisin çekilmesinden sonraki süreçte de bizim çocuklar orayı disipline sokmak için uğraştular ama o da bir yere kadar, adam iki liraya bira alıp yiami liraya orada satıyor. Ekmek parasi, bayrak satanla bira satanın arasında ne fark var adam ekmek parasi için çalşıyor.”
have politically aligned myself with anarcho-syndicalism for a long time now. After a while, I recognized something and I said: wait a minute, I am planning to establish a police force! I was horrified. Okay, there was a situation. You had to do something about it, and I had many ideas. And I suddenly realized that my solution was to establish a police force, the park’s autonomous police force. … This was the point I reached, but I rather disliked this point, disliked this solution I came up with.”

This state of mind, caught between the necessity of a certain order and an old loyalty to challenging any type of authority, is a telling one about the difficulties encountered by the protestors. It also tells something about the role of Çarşı in the second phase of the Gezi resistance, probably something more important than a non-significant group.

To discuss Çarşı’s contribution to the second phase of the Gezi resistance more thoroughly, three instances are to be recalled. The first one is the POMA (visual 2 and visual 3).

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Visual 2 – The excavator controlled by the protestors

Visual 3 – Çarşa’s official Twitter account, 6 June 2013
Throughout the Gezi resistance one of the most frequently used words was TOMA, the official name for police water cannons. When the calm was established in the park, clashes with the police were ongoing in and around Beşiktaş. On the night of June 2\textsuperscript{nd}, after midnight, a couple of people took control of an excavator nearby Dolmabahçe Palace and İnönü Stadium, and using this captured excavator they pushed back the police water cannons. This image has turned out to be yet another social media success for Çarşı. Many people, in different cities, shared the excavator’s picture with its given name, POMA, and they declared their sympathy and support for Çarşı. Our key informant Metin reads this event as a good instance of creation of an urban legend. He states that people who controlled the excavator were not directly linked to Çarşı. But he also adds that Çarşı had an imprint on the event. They named the vehicle as POMA. POMA directly refers to TOMA, which stands for \textit{toplumsal olaylara müdahale aracı}, vehicle to intervene to social riots. As for POMA, it stands for \textit{polis olaylarına müdahale aracı}, vehicle to intervene to police incidents. For TOMA, the threat is the public, whereas for POMA, it is the police. POMA is a great example of Çarşı’s creative humor, something which contributed a lot to the soul of the resistance.

The second instance was the \textit{kandil} cookies distributed by Çarşı as gifts. The night of June 5\textsuperscript{th} was The \textit{Lailat al Mi’raj (Miraç Kandili)}, a holy night for Islam (visual 4 and visual 5).
When Metin sees these visuals, he tells us that the original intention was to thank the imam of the Dolmabahçe Mosque. Before visiting the mosque, they distributed Kandil cookies at the center of the neighborhood. What was the reason to be thankful to the imam?
The avenue right in front of the mosque had been one of the main centers of clashes, and many protestors were injured nearby. The imam had opened the doors of the mosque and allowed health professionals to convert the space into an emergency room. The medical assistance provided in the mosque was crucial for many wounded people. In Metin’s words, “we went to the mosque (the night of Kandil); the imam came to the door and made a speech, and expressed his thanks. He gave a very nice talk, a very elegant talk. He stated that he is not a hero. He considered his act as something normal and necessary.” Çarşı’s decision to express their respect for this holy night was important in terms of countering the cultural divide between Gezi protestors and conservative people, which was overemphasized by the government.

The third instance was the rally organized by Çarşı on Saturday, June 8th to celebrate both Optik Başkan’s (the Optical Chief, Mehmet Işıklar, the legendary founder of the group) birthday and the Gezi resistance. It started at Beşiktaş and ended at Gezi Park, Taksim. At the end of the rally, Çarşı put up a huge banner that read Optik on the occupied opera building, and torches were fired.
According to Metin, the aim of the rally was to commemorate Optik and to terminate the Gezi episode for Çarşı. “I have never seen such a crowd. It was a huge crowd. It was something comparable to Hrant Dink’s funeral. Our friends organized a camera recording to make an estimate about the number of people there. It is said that 170 thousand people were there… Though, I am not sure if this is true.”

Esat, who does not have a political affiliation, attributes more meaning to the Saturday rally. For Esat, the rally resembled an ordinary birthday party, where you also invite friends who are not close to you. “All the people at Gezi were our new friends,” he continues. “Some of them had never been to a stadium, and even those were trying to chat with us about football. … As you can see the crowd is huge. I repeat: everybody is there and there is no disorder. And there were many Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray fans.”
4. Preliminary Remarks

The story so far raises some crucial theoretical questions regarding the place of contention and contentious politics in the making of counterpublics. In this final section, rather than a thorough discussion of the issue, we will share some preliminary remarks—to be elaborated in the final version of this paper. Problematizing the role played by the Çarşı fan group in the Gezi resistance, this paper comes up with three preliminary conclusions:

The first point pertains to the centrality of the struggle in and over the urban space for social movements and contentious politics. Contentious politics is produced and expressed primarily in urban settings. For those urban subjects who lack institutional power and formal conduits to influence politics, the street becomes the ultimate area to perform and communicate discontent (Bayat, 2010: 11). There is an inevitable clash between “street politics”, and forces which aim at commodification, pacification and gentrification of urban space (or “urban commons”, Harvey, 2012). In this clash, Çarşı, with its accumulated experience of contention, played a leading role in the politicization of urban space.

Related with the first point, the Gezi Park protests and the role played by Çarşı, underlined the need for reassessing theories of public and counterpublic sphere which mostly omits, neglects and rules out contention and violence (with its symbolic and physical dimensions). The protestors who occupy urban commons, parks, lands, buildings; who march in the streets, all challenge the state authority and encounter reprisal. Then either the state violence (which is mostly excessive, arbitrary, and foundational in Turkey) will repress transgressive forces as a whole, or contenders will bring their claims, and contend with rulers through the use of action repertoires, which includes organized resistance to organized state violence. To use a Benjaminian language, the “law making” violence of contenders will clash with organized “law
preserving” violence of the state (Benjamin, 1996). Çarşı, as the most organized and experienced of these forces came to the forefront during the Gezi protests and organized the resistance which made occupation of the Gezi Park possible. It might not be an overstatement that, the course and outcome of this clash will define to a great extent the current state and the future of subaltern counterpublics.

The final point pertains to the role played by social media in the Gezi Park protests and Çarşı’s use of social media, especially Twitter. As it has been noted by many scholars, new media technologies, as networks of outrage and hope (Castells, 2012) played a vital role in the formation of contemporary social movements. During the upheaval and days of chaos, Çarşı’s Twitter account and fan blog ForzaBeşiktaş (http://www.forzabesiktas.com/) emerged as two of the most reliable and stable addresses to visit. Especially the Twitter account was instrumental in moral and strategic terms; and in furthering the contention. Çarşı accounts also functioned as deliberative spaces within the Twittersphere.

As noted, these three points are preliminary remarks which need further elaboration, and which must be supported by further facts and relevant evidence.

References:


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