

**Online Participation and Dissent in Turkey:  
From the Gezi Protests to the 15 July Coup Attempt**

**Oylun Apak**

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Philosophy**

**Department of Media and Communications**

**Goldsmiths, University of London**

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## **Declaration by Candidate**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signature

Date: 7 November 2020

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## **Abstract**

How do people use smartphones and online social networks to participate in social movements? The role of online social networks in political participation has previously been made light of with concepts like ‘clicktivism’ and ‘slacktivism’ which emphasise the authenticity of all offline activity over online practices. This thesis challenges the concepts and terminologies that reflect the dichotomous understandings of the online vs. offline worlds by questioning the scientific validity of the exaltation of street over online participation. The project proposes a more integrated understanding of participation in politics through an overlapping of online and offline actions and consequences with the help of two case studies concerning the recent political history of Turkey, namely, the 2013 Gezi protests and the 2016 attempted coup.

Video posts created by participants in each case have been analysed to understand video capturing and posting strategies and how different content has been created in anti- and pro-government political situations. The findings from these studies are interpreted with reference to the legal trajectory of Internet technologies and online social networks in Turkey and reveal how this changing online landscape acts both as a perpetrator and a product of certain political participation strategies.

By proposing the concept of ‘meta-activism’ as key to understanding the inevitable role of online actions in political participation in the contemporary world, this thesis aims to demystify the purist notion of activism as a street-based practice. This thesis also contributes to discussions about online vs. offline participation under unusual political circumstances by presenting a specifically non-Eurocentric perspective on the practices and consequences of online participation in politics as well as bringing

together findings from two very distinct cases of political upheaval in Turkey's recent history.

**Keywords:** online social networks; social media; social movements; activism; Turkey; Gezi Protests; 15 July; coup; personal videos; Vine; Facebook

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## **List of Acronyms**

ADSL: Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

API: Application Program Interface

BTK: Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu (the Information and Communication Technologies Authority)

CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

DNS: Domain Name System

DSP: Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Left Party)

EU: European Union

IP: Internet Protocol

ISP: Internet Service Provider

MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

OECD: Organisation for Economic Development

OSN: Online Social Networks

TIB: Telekomünikasyon İletişim Başkanlığı (the Directorate of Telecommunication and Communication)

TUIK: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (Turkish Statistical Institute)

UGC: User-generated Content

URL: Uniform Resource Locator

VPN: Virtual Private Networks

3G: Third Generation (Wireless Mobile Telecommunications Technology)

4/4.5G: Fourth Generation (Wireless Mobile Telecommunications Technology)

## **Introduction: From the Summer of 2013 to the Summer of 2016**

The general objective of this dissertation is to address problematic determinations and bias that have resulted from the application of dichotomous perspectives on the usage of the Internet and online social networks for social change. How do people participate in social movements at a time when smartphones and online social networks have become banal aspects of daily life? How does the self-reflexivity afforded by these technologies alter the individual as a participant in social movements? Is it conceptually viable to differentiate, separate and establish a hierarchy between online and offline actions or can a more fluid understanding of individuals' actions at the online/offline nexus be imagined? The thesis takes on the task of answering these questions by taking a close look at how ordinary people have used video-recording and sharing features of online social networks to participate in the 2013 Gezi and 2016 anti-coup movements<sup>1</sup> in Turkey. By providing empirical analysis from two social movements that occurred under distinct political and societal circumstances, this dissertation aims to demonstrate that online social networks are not inherently emancipatory or degenerative. The adoption of online social networks by different users and under different circumstances can lead to an enhancement of the existing characteristics of said users and circumstances instead of transforming them. The particular power of online social networks to achieve this lies in the opportunities they provide for ordinary people to create and share high-quality content—in this case video posts—through the ubiquitous use of smartphones. This

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<sup>1</sup> The term “movement” is used to express the longevity of the political sentiments and acts that emerged during the initial protests in both contexts. The date ranges chosen for the empirical studies thereby reflect a period of time that exceeds the duration of offline protests.

dissertation, will also propose the concept of meta-activism as a solution to understanding the role of online practices in social movements.

The function of online social networks in terms of users' participation in dissent has been studied against the backdrop of social and political movements including the Arab uprisings (2010-2012), Black Lives Matter (since 2013), #MeToo (since 2017), Iranian Green (2009-2010), Indignados (2011-2015), Occupy (2011-2015), and Gezi (2013) movements respectively. When it comes to considering the capacity of online social networks to achieve freedom of speech and widespread recognition for political and social movements, some theorists have dismissed online participation as ineffective, regressive or even harmful (Morozov, 2009; Gladwell, 2010; White, 2010). Some studies have focused on the non-emancipatory aspects of online social networks (Fenton & Barassi, 2011) and on the exploitation of their users as free labourers (Fuchs, 2013). Other commentators have combined empirical work conducted in different contexts with a critical perspective on techno-deterministic and cyber-optimistic visions of the role of online social networks as emancipatory tools while acknowledging the paradigm shift in political participation in the age of the Internet, especially given what is known as 'Web 2.0' (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010).

This thesis begins by questioning the divide between online and offline practices regarding political participation and argues that in the era following the ubiquity of 'smart' camera phones with 3G and 4G internet connections and access to applications and services provided by online social networks, such a divide is no longer relevant for those individuals using these means to participate in politics. By considering the online and offline actions of smartphone-yielding individuals as reciprocal – by which I mean that online and offline actions of smartphone-using individuals influence and are influenced by one another – it is possible to see the

potential of these commercial media in the hands of the people. It is also necessary to consider context-specific factors by referencing historical accounts and empirical findings to understand the diversity of circumstances under which political participation takes place around the world. The empirical work presented as part of this dissertation deals with two political movements in the recent history of Turkey, namely, the Gezi movement of 2013 and the anti-coup movement of 2016. Hence, it is necessary to acknowledge the political climate as well as its effects on civic life such as the level of freedom of expression available to citizens and other freedoms and restrictions that shape their participation in politics.

As these two case studies drawn from one country will show, it is advisable to eliminate the dichotomy between online and offline practices when it comes to theory and research into political participation in the second millennium, particularly as these go hand-in-hand and mould one another similar to how any other information technology is integrated into human lives. This dissertation argues that context-specific factors are integral to understanding how mobile camera and internet connection technologies as well as online social networks impact political participation. However, the specificity of such contexts are not limited to the level of the nation state, as the political vision concerned results in certain ‘allowances’ and ‘hindrances’. I use ‘allowances’ as an umbrella term for all legalised and/or legitimised actions under different political contexts, as opposed to ‘hindrances’, namely, all actions that are illegal and/or temporarily illegitimised by a government or other institutions like the military. For example, some forms of freedom of expression were legal but illegitimised during the Gezi protests but they remained legal and legitimised during the coup protests as long as they went hand-in-hand with the government narrative. Another more practical example is the allowance of public

transportation; during Gezi public transportation was shut down to help stop the protests (EuroMed Rights, 2013; Arango et al. 2013) but the government offered free public transportation during the anti-coup protests (Bildirici, 2016; Al Jazeera, 2016).

In addition, obstructions related to a movement can also decide the type of online and offline practices carried out by a given participant. The two case studies that constitute this dissertation demonstrate how easy it can be for repressive regimes to appropriate some of the communication tactics devised by voices of dissent, as well as how different and revealing each type of user-generated content ends up being. They also expose how Internet law and policy can be manipulated to assist in the polishing of ‘social media’ into ultimate sites for the suppression of counter-discourses. Yet, what online social networks are or what can be achieved through their usage is not irrevocably determined by these networks’ structures, design and regulation or by Internet policy at large, but by the people who use them and the contexts in which they are being used.

The aim of this dissertation is not to celebrate online social networks as ‘emancipatory’ tools, rather it is to weigh the allowances and hindrances these networks facilitate diverse voices while testing the potential of user-generated content on corporate online social networks in relation to creating/maintaining messages, sentiments and ideologies. Thereby, the point of analysis is not the technologies themselves but what individuals and groups manage to do with these technologies *despite* their potential repressive or exploitative features.

## **Online Participation in Protest in the Turkish Context**

This dissertation takes as its object of analysis the personal videos captured, edited and posted via online social networks through two separate case studies conducted for video posts produced during the 2013 Gezi protests and during the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. These two case studies' timelines touch on censorship practices as well as the Internet policies developed and put into effect during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, henceforth AKP) from the early 2000s onwards. The periods preceding and between these two cases are significant in terms of the development – and the AKP government's implementation – of Internet policies and laws from 2002 onwards. As such, one of the central premises of this dissertation is that the internet environment in Turkey has largely been defined, regulated and constrained by the AKP government, which has maintained its control of the Turkish National Assembly from the early 2000s onwards. The larger and longer-standing problems of freedom of expression in Turkey can be traced back to the advent of the printing press in the Ottoman Empire and the early days of the Republic of Turkey (Yosmaoğlu, 2003, p.17; Fortna, 2010; p.570); however, the AKP's interventions in individuals, minorities and media actors' access to freedom of expression has been recognised internationally as extremely restrictive (Freedom House, 2019). Following the failed coup in 2016, Turkey's status has been classified as “Not Free” reflecting a devastating impact on the independence of the judiciary, media corporations and academic institutions (Freedom House, 2019). While Turkey's status as “Not Free” can be one of the central motivations in looking at online practices of dissent, it is not the sole aim of this project. I also address the dichotomisation of online and offline participation practices as well as the binary



perspective, namely viewing online and offline lives as separate and distinct from each other in the literature on online and offline participation in protest.

It is not the aim of the study to justify or condemn the usage of online social networks in political participation. Regarding the role given to online social networks in social and political movements, this thesis does not argue for a causal relationship between the usage of online social networks and the number of people on the street, rather it engages in a careful observation of the mutual relationship between the various usages of online social networks and mobile video recording and distribution technologies and the movements in question. These networks and technologies allow for a certain level of freedom of access to content related to the two case studies drawn from the recent history of Turkey, independent of limitations posed by time and place for other types of archives. Furthermore, these online social networks provide relatively more accessible archives compared to physical archives. It is also necessary to consider the implications of ‘smart’ camera phones’ capacity to record high quality images and sound as well as generating material which can be broadcast via online social networks. Prior to advances in these technologies, such meaning-making capacities were monopolised by corporate mass media outlets while the latter also had the power to mobilise people and influence public sentiment according to the commercial and political interests of such outlets. In terms of the tension between the so-called ‘old’ (public and private broadcasting entities) and ‘new’ media (online social networks carrying user-generated content), these two case studies offer a profound contrast: while 2016’s attempted coup saw extended and enhanced exposure of the events on both online social networks and mass media outlets, the Gezi protests were mainly ignored and at best manipulated through the lenses of partisan corporate media outlets. Meanwhile, participants had to overcome issues with internet access

such as ‘throttling’ and website blockages. After July 2016, in the aftermath of the attempted coup, the circumstances that led to the Gezi protests were exacerbated by tighter control, intimidation, censorship, autocracy and despotism at every level of Turkish civic life.

### ***The Use of Social Media in Previous Social Movements***

A contextual consideration of the state of political participation in Turkey calls for a historical and theoretical account of previous social movements that recall the use of social networks during the 2013 Gezi protests and the 2016 anti-coup protests in Turkey. It is crucial to dwell on the use of social networks and digital information technologies during the diverse and complex societal and political upheavals that have taken place in the Middle East and North Africa, referred to here as the Arab Uprisings.<sup>2</sup> These heterogeneous countries with distinct political and public contexts present a variety of cases with different levels of internet access and freedom, online presence, and social network user characteristics. This range of political and technological contexts is reflected in the literature’s various methodologies as usage of online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube or different hardware such as feature phones and smart phones have often been analysed and presented on a country by country basis (Tüfekçi & Wilson, 2012; Bossio & Babawi, 2013; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Bruns et al., 2014). Therefore, the use of the umbrella term “Arab Uprisings” in this dissertation is used with caution in order to avoid generalisations

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<sup>2</sup> This umbrella term is used solely for convenience while acknowledging the variety of the political, social and technical contexts of the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Oman and Kuwait. I consciously refrain using the term “Arab Spring” due to its orientalist connotations.

and as a matter of practicality with respect to the literature on these various political and social contexts.

The Arab uprisings are often compared to the Gezi movement (Gürcan & Peker, 2015, p. 5; Löwy, 2013, p. 162), so much so that this has inspired a considerable amount of the Gezi literature arguing against the relevance of any such correlations any other social movement that has made use of online social networks defined by their integral use of information technologies and the “occupying [of] public spheres and [holding of] peaceful mass rallies” (Gürcan & Peker, 2015, p. 5). Such generic correlations are dismissed with arguments underlining the political and societal differences between these social movements (Löwy, 2013) and to critique the connections made by ‘Western’ media and intelligentsia as reflecting orientalist mindsets (Petras, 2013, pp. 147, 156; Patnaik, 2013, p. 156).

Some thematic parallels that are apparent in the literature dealing with the Arab uprisings and the Gezi protests are: (1) protesters’ acknowledgement of the help of online social networks and internet-/smartphone technologies on the street or elsewhere to express opinions, create awareness, organize protest and expose state violence (Howard & Hussain, 2013, pp. 13, 34; Hacıyakupoglu & Zhang, 2015); (2) the lack of ideological or political affiliation evident in the use of such media (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p. 52; Palencia, 2012, pp. 423-4; Dabashi, 2012, p. 13; Gurel, 2015); (3) relatively more freedom of expression for minorities and the youth (Tüfekçi & Wilson, 2012, p. 375; Salvatore, 2012, p. 352); and (4) the impact of censorship in altering and evolving the online and offline practices of citizen journalists and broadcast media (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p. 87). These patterns provide a valuable reference point for the analytical process carried out as part of

empirical studies of both the Gezi and coup attempt presented in this thesis as these patterns parallel the former context while providing a contrast to the latter context.

Howard and Husain (2013) present a number of categories through which the characteristics and phases of such social movements in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia are discussed. The authors distinguish between the usage of social media by different countries and emphasize, in the contexts of Egypt and Tunisia, that there were five phases of the realisation of the so-called digital media revolutions in these countries: (1) a “capacity-building phase” relating to the history of digital and pre-digital social networks; (2) a preparation phase involving the formation of online public spheres offering the possibility of citizens’ relative autonomy and anonymity ; (3) an ignition phase where an act of dissent is politically and socially amplified by its exposure to the general public via digital media platforms; (4) a protest phase where the online social networks are cautiously used to plan and exhibit the action on the streets; (5) an international buy-in phase made possible by exposure to international media and social networks; (6) a climax phase comprising either the overthrow of the authoritarian ruler or a violent crackdown on the people; and finally, (7) a denouement phase of information warfare where the digital evidence of dissent is attacked in order to be made unavailable to the public by the prevailing regime or other anti-democratization factions (Howard & Hussain, 2013, pp. 103-4). These phases reflect the complexity of the history of the Arab uprisings. The prior existence of online communities and blogs with political content reveal the need for a democratized forum deemed to “produce a formidable potential for mobilizing a broad variety of actors” (Salvatore, 2012, p. 352). Individuals who had been practising autonomous political speech on such online platforms had already suffered from regime attacks before the Arab uprisings took place (Howard & Hussain, 2013,

p. 19; Palencia, 2012, p. 423). The adverse consequences for participation in protest through online channels prove that online participants did not have it “easy” in comparison to street participants.

Hence, these networking tools were not mere blessings bequeathed upon the Arab countries by the Western neo-liberal capitalist *deus ex-machina* to overthrow their despots (Wilken, 2012, p. 186). The need for demystifying essentialist terms – for example, the Arab uprisings’ simplification as a “Twitter revolution” (Wilken, p. 186) – is based on condescending grouping of these revolts which had distinct contexts. Meanwhile, the awakening of the Arabic nations is elaborated in a broader context by Hamid Dabashi (2012) in *The Arab Spring*. Dabashi argues that these uprisings signalled a new, global-level “régime du savoir” whereby outdated postcolonial conceptions will prove incapable of making sense of them (pp. xviii, 251).

Another debate relating the Gezi movement to the Arab uprisings involves the concept of distributed leadership. In the case of the Arab uprisings, this is seen as a result of the online democratic dialogue facilitated by formerly physically and mentally silenced individuals (Salvatore, 2012, p. 350) as well as exposure on international news media and the diffusion of “information technologies” among the publics of the countries that experienced the Arab uprisings (Howard & Hussain, 2013, pp. 19, 33).

The use of online social networks during the Arab uprisings brings into question the demographic active on these networks (Palencia, 2012, p. 421). The inclusion of youth as part of virtual and street dissent, however, is not a result of online social networks but has been made quicker and easier for them through these technologies. The concept of “youth” also reflects a group formerly dismissed as “apolitical” (pp.

423-4) and mentioned as separate from other agents of political dissent, despite their being “both the major victims of unemployment and as the harbingers of hopes for a deep change, cultural as much as political, in a sclerotized gerontocratic society” (Salvatore, 2012, p. 347). These economic, cultural and social grievances are not informed by an accumulation of ideological catchphrases but reflect the lived distress of the youth who, with the aid of online social networks, have created their own forum where they can express discontent while aware that their online activity might eventually be punished by authoritarian regimes but with the confidence that they are not alone and that they could make a difference (Dabashi, 2012, p. 238; Tüfekçi & Wilson, 2012, pp. 375, 377). The democratic and dialogic nature of the expression of dissent on “information networks” allowed the youth of Facebook (“shabab al-feisbuk”) to flourish in their home territory (Salvatore, 2012, p. 349), thereby they were “more joyous, humorous and celebratory in their representation of what they considered to be a ‘youth’ revolution” (Bossio & Babawi, 2013, p. 203).

The role of citizen journalism and blogging has been significant in the digital technologies deployed during the Arab uprisings (Howard & Hussain, 2013, pp. 19, 62; Palencia, 2012, p. 421; Salvatore, 2012, p. 352; Tüfekçi & Wilson, 2012, p. 374). These types of communication also underwent censorship and Howard and Husain (2013) evaluate Internet censorship as the ultimate confirmation of digital technologies’ contribution to social upheaval (p. 69): “The spectrum of state sophistication” in terms of their control over, surveillance and use of the online realm has varied on a state-by-state basis (p. 72). This spectrum of sophistication has resulted in a range of censorship practices, which in turn has inspired a variety of workarounds devised by both online users and traditional broadcast news workers while also resulting in unprecedented connection and collaboration between social

and broadcast media platforms (Ha-nska Ahy, 2014, p. 105). In some cases, traditional media outlets have used bloggers to bypass state censorship by feeding stories to bloggers and then quoting them (Salvatore, 2012, p. 348). As Abdelmoula (2014) observes: “The power of new media complemented and extended the power of satellite television rather than competing with it” (p. 372). This interplay between “new” and “old” media is supported by Bossio and Bebawi’s (2013) argument regarding the online coverage of pro-democracy protests in Egypt and Libya, namely that “global distribution of commercial social media platforms and their linkages to mainstream media” spread alternative news coverage of local protests to the international community (p. 201). They, however, conclude by predicting a looming “battle over representation” between the two media modes (p. 207).

Self- and government-imposed censorship was also a large part of the Gezi protests and shaped the methods with which Gezi participants communicated through online social networks in order to bypass censorship and avoid persecution. However, as further chapters will elaborate, the state’s sophistication with what were once “alternative” methods of participation, culminated in Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s FaceTime call to a news studio during the coup attempt of 2016. This moment was not only a demonstration of the state’s sophistication in the use of digital technologies in dire situations, but also acknowledged the symbolic meanings attached to the use of such methods. The President managed to convey not only the urgency of the situation by communicating through such an informal platform but also achieved shock value and sympathy by performing a non-formal and cutting edge act of participation in front of millions of viewers.

Like the Arab uprisings, Occupy Wall Street and the Occupy movement in general have also been a point of reference for studies of the Gezi movement. The

significance attached to the role of online social networks in the Occupy movement generally understands such networks as instruments communicating events in the so-called real world. There seems to be a consensus regarding the mobilising effects of online social networks (Castells, 2012; Gaby & Caren, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012). In his study of the use of social media during Occupy Wall Street, Gerbaudo (2012) emphasises the instrumental qualities of social media, the role of which has been to “[set] the scene” (p.102) for action on the street and to “mobilise and coordinate participants” (p.103). While Juris (2012) focuses on the different functions of various online social networks, he concludes that platforms like Facebook and Twitter are better at building “a sense of connectedness and copresence” while listservs provide an environment for “more complex communicative exchange, interaction, and coordination” (p. 267). Gerbaudo (2012) emphasises the dialogical opportunities provided by online social networks as their sole purpose in the movement, stating that online social networks gained significance only as a means of sustaining the movement by consolidating what he calls the “‘physical occupiers’ and ‘internet occupiers’ [while generating] an emotional conversation” between these two groups (p.104).

The diversity and expressiveness of Occupy Wall Street-related online communications is another point of contestation. Leaving aside purely instrumental reasoning, Castells (2012) finds that the physical occupations were reflected online through dedicated websites or Facebook groups (p. 177). Gaby and Caren (2012) identify six different kinds of Facebook posts that were used to recruit members to Occupy Wall Street-related Facebook pages and observe that while “confrontational” post and posts that express “solidarity” are the most effective, elite endorsements, polls, and “personal narratives” seem to be less effective at drawing in new users (p.



370). Gaby and Caren (2012) also point out that posts that included pictures were overwhelmingly successful compared to announcements, videos, informal polls and news stories (ibid). While acknowledging that “there is no simple recipe for movements that hope to exploit the power of Facebook” to recruit new members to political networks, Gaby and Caren (2012) state that “dominant” online social networks like Facebook and Twitter can be useful for movements (p. 372). Gerbaudo (2012) evaluates Occupy Wall Street-related communication on online social networks, mainly Facebook, as “uninspired and uninspiring” (p. 115) while Castells (2012) argues that the combination of the physical urban space and “free communication on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter” created a “hybrid public space of freedom” (p. 23). Gerbaudo’s (2012) view is that the Twitter-based elitism of the Occupy organisers and “snobbery” against Facebook and its user-base resulted in the poor turnout of street participants in the early days of Occupy Wall Street (pp.114-116); however, neither Twitter nor Facebook communications were able to attract attention to the movement until events took place “on the ground” (p.116).

These debates on the role of social media in the Occupy Movement reveal a binary understanding of the online and offline whereby online actions related to the movement are usually stressed as instrumental and complimentary to street activism. It is necessary to eliminate this binary perspective on political participation to understand the true potential of online social networks in political movements.

## **Context of the Study**

### ***The 2013 Gezi Protests***

On 28 May 2013, protesters gathered at Istanbul's Gezi Park to contest the unlawful demolition of the park wall and a number of trees by a private contractor following an outcry by the Taksim Gezi Park Association on Twitter. A group of activists pitched tents in the park and began the occupation in the very early hours that morning. Later that morning, the police tried to dispel the crowds gathering at the park using pepper gas. A photograph of the "woman in red" by the Reuters news network photojournalist Osman Orsal taken at this moment became immediate evidence of the treatment of the protesters by the armed forces as well as a symbol of the protests from early on, inciting the unrest of a great many people who stated that they were participating in the protests to protest police violence as well as registering the environmental concerns that triggered Gezi Park's occupation and the movement that followed (Konda, 2014, pp. 20, 34).

On 29 May 2013, during the ground-breaking ceremony inaugurating a bridge on the Bosphorus, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressed the protesters: "...do whatever you will. We have made up our minds and we will do accordingly" (T24, 2013). This public challenge was reiterated when the police forces attacked the 150 people occupying Gezi Park the next morning with pepper gas, removing protesters from the ground to allow for further demolition of the park. After regaining control of the park, early the next morning the police attacked sleeping occupiers of the park by first spraying pepper gas and then setting their tents on fire (Usta, 2015). Video recordings (Gezi Archive, 2017) and images of these events – including police officers lighting the tents – spread across online social networks leading to the prosecution of then-Police Chief of the Beyoglu District, who was sentenced to 10

months in prison for his directive to set fire to the tents (Birgün, 2018). These revelatory videos caused a major uproar that led to thousands of people gathering at Gezi Park and on Taksim Square, with continued violence from the police in the form of water cannon and pepper gas attacks as well as the use of rubber bullets against protesters. Despite major public transportation lines to Taksim being closed off (EuroMed Rights, 2013), the crowds continued to grow to reach tens of thousands of people (Amnesty International, 2013, p.5). Many protesters including journalists and members of parliament were injured as a result of police violence (p.46). As reports, images and recordings of these incidents circulated on online social networks – and despite their widespread censorship on popular TV networks and newspapers – the protests spread to other cities including Ankara, Izmir, Adana and Bursa (Amnesty International, 2013, p.3; Barika et al. 2018). The familiar pattern of police violence also spread across the country. The Konda (2014) Report on Gezi Protests reveals that while 69% of the protesters in Gezi Park heard about the protests from social media, Konda’s July barometer shows that 70% nationally had heard about the Gezi protests from television while 54% of the general public supported the AK Party and then-Prime Minister Erdogan’s claims that the Gezi protests were a plot against the country (Konda, 2014). While then-President Abdullah Gul asked the government to tolerate different opinions and concerns, Prime Minister Erdogan asked the protesters not to further harm local businesses, tourists and customers.

According to the report by Amnesty International (2013), then-Minister of the Interior Muammer Guler announced that in six days 235 demonstrations were held in 67 cities while 1,730 people had been detained by the police (p. 55). The Turkish Medical Association announced that a total of 1,740 people were injured including 22 who were critically wounded (ibid). President Erdogan responded to the events

during a speech at an opening by calling the protesters “marauders” and stating that they would not be allowed to provoke the public (Harding, 2013; Get the News, 2013). Following on from this, during a television interview, the President declared: “There is now a menace called Twitter... this thing called social media is a menace to society.” During the same interview, which took place less than a week after the eruption of the protests, he also noted that anyone who drinks alcohol is “an alcoholic” (HaberTürk, 2015). Erdogan’s verbal attacks on the protesters accompanied by conspiracy theories about the role of “internal traitors and their foreign collaborators including social media, companies and the interest rate lobby” in the protests (Nefes, 2017, p.614) were aimed at alienating Gezi protesters and their sympathisers while increasing “the political fragmentation between the protesters and the AKP supporters” (p. 619).

The Gezi protests also became the basis of serious cases of profiling with the help of loyalist media and government-led campaigns, not only of those participating in the protests but also targeting those who had an influential role in the movement. A significant example of profiling that led to a civil suit was that of Prof. Ihsan Eliacık, whose tweets responded to Erdogan’s comments about the protesters (Yaman, 2014, p. 9). Some members of the Turkish intelligentsia even ended up fleeing the country due to threats from members of the public based on Prime Minister Erdogan or other AK Party politicians’ targeting. Actor/director Mehmet Ali Alabora, writer Meltem Arıkan and actress Pinar Ogun, who all now reside in Cardiff, sought asylum in the UK after receiving numerous death threats (Bird, 2017).

The occupation of the park continued on and off while related protests took place in different locations and under various circumstances until the end of the summer of 2013. From an academic perspective, the 2013 Gezi protests can be seen as having

triggered the proliferation of case studies dealing with the impact of social phenomena on online social networks (Gürel, 2015; Hacıyakupoğlu & Zhang, 2015; Way, 2015; Balaban-Salı & Erben, 2016; Odağ et al., 2016; Oz, 2016; Öztürkcan et al., 2017). Apart from a discussion of the legitimacy of digital participation in political movements or the benefits and drawbacks of the utilisation of online social networks in mobilising citizens, these studies reveal the circumstances under which these tools become vital and how they are utilised to cope with mass media censorship, social and political repression and intimidation, erasure and/or manipulation, and many other tactics used by the AKP government to silence dissent. This dissertation will show that video posts are not mere representations of the collective memory of a fleeting event but also echo the dissent that has disturbed pro-government forces to this day.

This thesis argues that instead of merely trying to control the freedom Internet technologies have afforded voices of dissent, Erdogan has implemented restrictions on the Internet as well as making use of the freedom of expression it allowed through different institutional and collective efforts, such as government-led social media influencers and bot accounts (Erkan, 2014). This appropriation is perhaps best symbolised by his now-iconic FaceTime video call to the CNNTurk studio on 16 July 2016 but the regulatory and legal developments that led to that moment will be explored in Chapter 5.

### ***Neither Tahrir nor Wall Street: General Themes in the Gezi Literature***

An inquiry into the analysis of user-generated content during and after the Gezi protests in Turkey calls for a consideration of a variety of literature written in Turkish

and English from different disciplines that provides insight into the Gezi movement. Regarding the literature on the Gezi protests, while the disadvantages of online social networks are acknowledged through concepts such as misinformation and disinformation (Zıraman, 2013; Tunç, 2014; Hacıyakupoglu & Zhang, 2015) and compromised strategic intelligence (Hacıyakupoglu & Zhang, 2015), the potential of online social networks and internet use is accepted as an overall beneficial apparatus when “used responsibly”. Even though the aforementioned resources denote the critical usage of social networks during the Gezi events, theoretical or philosophical propositions concerning the usage of such media are limited while categorical appreciations and condemnations of social media by optimists and pessimists are quite common in the Gezi literature in the year following the protests. While books that have documented social media posts of Gezi participants by definition appraise and emphasize the use of wit and humour by the protesters, others such as Kongar and Küçükaya’s (2013) popular *Gezi Direnişi: Türkiye’yi Sarsan 30 Gün*, published immediately after and referring to the first 30 days of the Gezi period, express unquestioning appreciation of every aspect of the Gezi resistance and have encouraged future protest. This optimism can be traced back to the fact that most of the early phase publications in Turkish hit the shelves before the summer of Gezi was over and also aimed at further action by the existing protesters as well encouraging new participants through the common (and at times unconscious) deployment of Gezi Park nostalgia. Due to this variety of scientific, pseudo-scientific and non-academic writing on Gezi, a categorisation of the major issues dealt with in Gezi-related writing is helpful.

Previous studies point to five common-asked questions about the role of social media in the Gezi context. One of these is the necessity to demystify the umbrella term

“social media” through specifically customised analyses of different platforms and applications as used for distinct goals by the participants. The sociological study of trust in the use of social media by Hacıyakupoğlu and Zhang (2015, pp. 456-8) makes a clear distinction between the use of Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp and how different modes of online communication via these networks and applications provided convenient for different aspects of street activism such as the dissemination of information and logistical data. This thesis also reveals the extent to which participants on the street made use of their smart phones and how they created safety groups by relying on a system of references with each activist bringing those they trusted into a given street communication (Hacıyakupoglu & Zhang, 2015). Ozturkcan et al. (2017) also base their analysis of social media coverage on Twitter and find that Gezi-related tweets were aimed at sharing information about the protest while generating local and global awareness in response to the scarcity of television and publication media coverage. Perin Gürel (2015) understands humour to have been a distinct medium during the Gezi resistance. While providing a close reading of the traces of the English language within Gezi humour with reference to popular memes and images of graffiti, the author focuses on the two most popular platforms during Gezi: Facebook and Twitter (ibid). It is crucial to understand how different online social networks were utilised during the Gezi protests as these methods reveal unique appropriations of these online social networks and applications. Previous studies on Gezi, focus predominantly on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, hence the discussion of social media in the context of the Gezi movement is constituted by online social networks and direct messaging applications.

Another major question in Gezi-related writing regards questions of class and revolves around the interpretation of the Gezi demographic as “middle class” and

Gezi as a bourgeois movement, an argument that has been exhausted by AKP officials and loyalist media in an attempt to alienate the protesters from the working class public (Gürcan & Peker, 2015b, p. 34). The Konda Gezi Report (2014) revealed the “multidimensional demographic profile of the people who were in Gezi Park” as more female than male (p. 7) with the average age being 28 (p. 8) with the majority of young people who came to the park being “college students in their final years, recent graduates or young professionals” (p. 10). Some evaluate the question of class as a general confusion of terminology pertaining to the Gezi protesters. For Tonak (2013), blurred political definitions both in general and as used in the Gezi context in particular have led to a misreading of the Gezi demographic. He defines the fundamental feature of a working class individual as the marketing of labour power in exchange for fees or salaries to a capitalist institution (sometimes the State), and argues that a description of the Gezi protesters as middle class and not working class is a mere conceptual confusion. Gürcan and Peker (2015b) also challenge the popular narrative of Gezi as a middle-class uprising, emphasising the lack of specifics the term offers as well as its failure to analyse possible class distinctions in the protests. They agree that the educated youth and students who were a considerable driving force behind the protests cannot be categorised under a “middle class” umbrella as most of them and their older comrades who, despite possessing professional skills and educational backgrounds, still worked in wage-earning positions (pp. 328-9). Gürcan and Peker’s book *Challenging neoliberalism at Turkey's Gezi Park: From private discontent to collective class action* also delves into the accusations of middle-class appropriation directed at the Gezi protesters, claiming that this class generalisation is an exclusionist terminology used in terms of an anti-Gezi discourse to communicate to the working classes that the Gezi movement belonged to the educated bourgeoisie (Gürcan & Peker, 2015b, p. 34).



Another common question in the Gezi literature concerns the movement's comparison to its precedents and these debates usually concentrate around the Arab uprisings and the Occupy movement: the perception of Gezi as the "Turkish Spring" due to the Muslim majority in the country as well as its connection to the Middle East and North Africa through geopolitics. This also includes a shared history under the Ottoman Empire and the additional perception of Gezi as the Turkish continuation of the Occupy movement due to the diversity of its participants and their more universal (namely environmental and anti-capitalist) concerns. While there is a variety of political commentary on the Gezi movement's similarities to the events of Tahrir Square, these parallels do not offer deeper connections; however, there seems to be a consensus regarding how in both cases social media was used in more efficient and extensive ways than the so-called Western world understood. Gökay and Shain (2013) explain that the Gezi movement resembled many different non-violent social movements that made use of online social networks, however, the immediate proclamations of the "Turkish Spring" recall then Prime Minister Erdoğan's authoritarian and reckless attitude towards the movement. They also argue that such an interpretation is nothing if not ethnocentric, further emphasising the dichotomy between the so-called Islamic East and a Western-facing bourgeoisie and peoples understood as Middle Eastern. Özüğurlu (2013), on the other hand, argues that the movements considered as part of the Arab uprisings are combatting regimes rather than personalities, and he comments that the spread of the Gezi protests were propelled by Erdoğan's negative public attitude towards the protesters. Despite the comparisons and contrasts that can be drawn between these two movements and the Gezi protests, case studies that focus on the context-specific circumstances (at least on a country-based level) and the multi-layered reasoning behind the eruption of such movements (particularly with reference to the build-up tension leading to the Gezi

protests) are helpful in terms of the degeneralisation and demystification of the forces behind such movements. Such context-specific and in-depth studies have the potential to debunk shortcuts such as “Arab Spring” and “Occupy Everywhere” while revealing insights into the justifications and methods through which people chose to participate in these movements.

This leads us to the other question in the Gezi-related literature concerning the participants’ use of humour. Karakayalı and Yaka (2014) and Gürcan and Peker (2015a) evaluate the Gezi movement by comparing it with other recent political movements and emphasise the transformative role of humour in the protests. Gurel (2015) describes the complex humour as it pertains to the narrative of the Gezi youth as, using the clichéd neologism, reflecting “glocal” citizens, stating that “The sheer amount of linguistic and sociocultural information these short texts require before the reward of laughter mark a specific speech community that is at once deeply local and worldly” (p. 13). Gurcan and Peker (2015a) refer to the popular Gezi-related neologism “Orantısız Zeka/Disproportionate Intelligence” as a cognitive diversion (p. 5). This process “overturns and exposes the incoherence and contradictions of ruling ideologies and government rhetoric through the active utilization of humor in a political context” (ibid). Humour is indeed an important part of the Vine video posts created by Gezi participants on the street and at home, and not only contributes to unique forms of expression but also introduces a variety of figures of speech like the very term “Disproportionate Intelligence”, a pun referring to “disproportionate force” commonly used to describe the police forces’ reaction to the protesters.

Another recurring question concerns the nature of participant behaviour online and offline as performative or as understood through theories of the Bakhtinian carnival.

Ozturkmen and Martin's (2014) study of the role of performance during the Gezi protests from the perspective of a street participant pinpoints particular moments where activists or politicians carried out strategic and consequential performances. Gezi participants' status as both producers and consumers is seen as made up of "improvising actors and members of a stunned audience" and their performance as a dialogical struggle between "activists" and official authority. A considerable number of authors relate the Gezi protests to the Bakhtinian concept of carnival (Sancar, 2013; Ömer, 2013; Walton, 2015). Indeed, Ömer's (2013) account of the Gezi protests posits that – as happens in carnival – participants tried out new roles and habits. Similar analyses of the Gezi movement in relation to Bakhtinian carnival has been carried out by Çelikkol (2014) and Yegenoglu (2013). While I agree with some resemblances between Bakhtin's (1984) carnivalesque and the culture of Gezi Park in terms of breaking down "socio-hierarchical inequality" (p.123) while bringing unlikely individuals and ideas together, thereby introducing eccentric or marginal behaviour into the mainstream; the *profanation* aspect of Bakhtin's (p. 123) carnival is not a readily applicable category in terms of contemporary society's evolved and diverse ideas about obscenity as well as the earthly and bodily. The fourth part of this analogy, thus, risks echoing the AKP government's representation of Gezi Park and the protests as a communion of depravity and its participants as morally deficient. While it is true that participants parodied many aspects of political and social life in and outside of the park and that the notion of participants living "a carnivalistic life" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 122) can provide us with a useful understanding of how participation worked in the summer of Gezi, I believe what previous authors describe as the carnivalesque aspect of Gezi Park contributes to the discourse of nostalgia used by Gezi participants to describe this unreplicable event and setting in real time.

These themes highlight important patterns to follow in describing the Gezi movement's participants regarding their technological habits, class distinctions, self-identifications and performances. One of these lines of inquiry most pertinent to this thesis concerns the dominance of humour as a medium which reflects performative behaviour, a behaviour that implies self-awareness while also acknowledging a specific audience through the use of well-chosen cultural signs. The work on the Gezi movement's class background further complicates the participants' identity. These class distinctions may also have altered the way subjects positioned themselves within the Gezi narrative and may have caused them to focus on form- or content-related considerations that would appeal to their so-called audience/circle.

### ***The 2016 Turkish Coup Attempt***

For ordinary citizens, the events of the night of 15 July 2016 started around 22:00 when a small group of soldiers stopped the traffic on what was then called the Bosphorus (now the "15 July Martyrs") Bridge and the Fatih Sultan Mehmed Bridge connecting the Asian and European sides of Istanbul (Popp, 2017). Soon after reports of groups of military officials blockading the streets and increased military aircraft flights started filling online social network feeds as well as mainstream media outlets including the main live television news channels such as NTV and CNNTurk. Despite these unusual occurrences and reports of the state being aware in advance of the putschists' plans (Gültaşlı & Rettman, 2019), officials stayed publicly silent until 23:02 when then-Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım phoned in to a live television programme to declare that the government was doing its job and that those partake in this "madness" would pay the highest price possible for their treachery (Kılıç, 2018).

After this declaration, there were recorded attempts to block riot police forces' exit from their base and bomb attacks on police bases and vehicles by the military factions taking part in the coup attempt, leaving over 50 policemen dead and many injured (Kılıç, 2018). This was followed by a news anchor on the state television station TRT being forced to read the coup declaration on a live broadcast at 00:13 on 16 July 2016 (ibid.). The coup declaration was met by a statement from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a short space of time. At 00:24 on 16 July 2016, the President, calling in via FaceTime on the popular CNN Turk news network, invited the public to gather on public squares to defend democracy and confirmed that those responsible would suffer "the response necessary" (Guardian, 2016).

From the perspective of this dissertation this marks one of the pivotal moments that night as President Erdogan's FaceTime call to a news anchor was broadcast live on CNN Turk can be seen as an appropriation of the social media that he and his government had previously and enthusiastically denigrated. This was also a false moment of truth establishing him as in need of urgent protection while confirming his safety by offering up a display of informal communication by a President, the likes of which had never been used by government officials in Turkey before. The effect of this moment on the crowds that filled the streets in Turkey in the early hours of 16 July 2016 and after will be addressed in Chapter 6 through "a tonal analysis" of video posts concerning the 15 July coup attempt. Erdogan going on FaceTime was not only a message to his followers and critics at home but also a nod to the Western media, which can be seen as both a challenge as well as a foreshadowing of the crackdown that followed in Turkey and the country's breaking away from its Western allies and the human rights philosophies those allies claimed to espouse (Tanir, 2016; Ayasun, 2017; Ahval, 2018).

Eventually, after much destruction and violence against civilians, policemen and soldiers with 241 dead, the coup attempt was thwarted. The events of 15-16 July 2016 were followed by a limited period of demonstrations organised and sponsored by the state and local governments (Sezen & Sezen, 2019). These organised demonstrations were declared to be “democracy vigils” and operated under the influence of local AK Party offices. These democracy vigils constitute a significant part of the post-coup-context regarding the Facebook video posts analysed in the empirical study.

On the other hand, a great number of people who voiced dissent against the President and the government of Turkey, or who were merely deemed suspicious or guilty due to their political and intellectual affiliations, have been purged from the public and private sectors while many have been imprisoned with some still awaiting trial on the basis of a two-year-long state of emergency that has been “replaced with counterterrorism legislation” approved in August 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2017; 2019). Any requests and demands into the investigation of the events leading to and transpiring during the coup attempt have so far been met by disinterest by the President and suspicion over the government’s awareness of and inaction towards the coup plans (Gültaşlı & Rettman, 2019) continue to be expressed by those who can use their freedom of expression without consequences.

### ***Changing Hands and Imaginations: The Co-opting of “Social Media” during the 15 July Coup Attempt***

There is a scarcity of literature dealing with the role of online social networks in the anti-coup movement and the studies that are available tend to focus on the political and social dynamics evident on the night of the coup attempt and the demonstrations

that marked the latter half of the summer of 2016 in Turkey (Konda, 2016; Akinerdem, 2017; Sezen & Sezen, 2019). There is still worthwhile research on the coup attempt and its aftermath that introduces tropes such as the employment of performative tactics by the putschists as well as government officials (Altinordu, 2019; Sezen & Sezen, 2019), the dominance of masculinist ideas and actions (Alpan, 2019; Cicekoglu, 2019; Somay, 2019) and the participation of women in the anti-coup protests (Akinerdem, 2017; Başdaş, 2017; Korkman, 2017).

Multiple studies focus on the creation and maintenance of the 15 July narrative also called “The Epic of 15 July” both during and after the failed coup attempt (Altinordu, 2019; Sezen & Sezen, 2019; Somay, 2019). The success of this narrative in convincing the people is seen by some as the deciding factor in the success of President Erdogan and the AKP government in mobilising the people and thwarting the coup attempt. Altinordu (2019) considers the attempted coup and its aftermath as “a series of performances on the public stage” where “dramaturgical aspects of the coup attempt and of government actors’ responses to it centrally mattered for the course, immediate outcome, and further consequences of ‘15 July’” (p. 8) Applying social performance theory to the putschists, President Erdogan, government officials, and other thought-shaping entities including the media, Altinordu (2019) argues that “meaning work” was produced with the help of the “cultural elements” put forward on the night of the coup attempt, which were retrospectively edited and constructed by these actors (p. 12). Sezen and Sezen (2019) argue that the cultural foundations of this epic narrative were supported by “story, poetry, photography, video, and design competitions; plays, songs, seminars, readings, and conferences organized by ministries and directorates; and other governmental agencies” (p. 126).

Such meaning was also created by both sides of the coup attempt through performances that claimed legitimacy and projected power (Altinordu, 2019, p. 17). Erdogan uses this “‘state of exception’, a temporary suspension of ‘civilisation’ as we know it, of the rule of law” to justify himself as the “Father figure” (Somay, 2019, p. 143). In speeches addressed to the public and the putschists, Erdogan utilised “a combination of paternal persuasion and the threat of retribution” (Altinordu, 2019, p. 17) while these elements when combined helped to produce the people versus the putschists binary (p. 18). This binary is a crucial consideration for this thesis in relation to the anti-coup protests’ representation in Facebook video posts and the homogeneity of their messages. This homogeneity is also the de facto result of a lack of background information and discussion about “the motivations behind [the] planning or the consequences of the coup attempt” (Sezen & Sezen, 2019, p. 126). Sezen and Sezen (2019) argue that games inspired by 15 July also reflect the one-dimensional “heroics performed by civilians,” a narrative maintained by the president and government officials (p. 135). Somay (2019) states that the 15 July events have been “reshaped and reformatted to serve as [...] a founding myth” (p. 161) but as “in every epic, fact and fiction are intermingled to create a narrative of a brand new beginning” (p. 162).

Altinordu (2019) adds that the recitation of prayers and calls to action from mosques, interjected the discourse of religion – or more specifically Islam – into the anti-coup protests by marking it as “a religious struggle” (p. 18). This interjection is significant as an unapologetically religious tone and Islamic ideas such as “martyrdom” and “sacrifice” are recurring expressions in representations of the anti-coup protests. The renaming of the Bosphorus Bridge to the ‘Bridge of the Martyrs of 15 July’ “sanctified Istanbul as a city of martyrs” by redesignating the historical significance



of this iconic landmark and attaching religious imagery to it (Cicekoglu, 2019, p. 114). Sezen and Sezen (2019) add that “religious and nationalistic iconography” were used in fantastical scenarios while “dedications to martyrs” were common in mobile games inspired by the “epic” of the coup attempt (p. 127). In one game, the martyrdom of a player is presented as a respectable outcome as opposed to not being able to stop the coup and, shamefully, surviving (p. 130). Thus, references to religion or religious ideals were not confined to the realm of political discourse, but spread across the entirety of the culture of the anti-coup movement and provided participants with an alternative motivation, namely one different from that of saving democracy.

While religion inspired the vocabulary and imagery of the anti-coup protests, masculinity – especially ‘hegemonic masculinity’ – was an underlying phenomenon in most of these protests. From the father figure of Erdogan to the beheading of young soldiers, the coup protests were filled with many representations of exaggerated masculinity performed by the military, the police and male civilians (Gökariksel, 2017, p.173). Overwhelmingly outnumbering women, “police and civilian men” displayed aggressive masculinities on the streets in addition to the masculine violence performed by the military (Alpan, 2019, p. 77). Signalling an end to the masculinism of the “Every [male] Turk is born a soldier” era, Çiçekoğlu (2019) comments that “[t]his new version of masculinity confronted the military, instead of identifying with it” (p. 97). The secular ideal of the proud Turkish male represented in the figure of the soldier was toppled by a masculinity promoted by the government through “prayers” and “an anti-West sentiment”, when then converged with fantasies of an untenable “New Ottoman” identity (ibid).

On the other hand, Akinerdem (2017) claims that high numbers of women participated in the protests from early on, with some becoming symbols of the

protests against the military coup (p. 191). However, the presence of women in the anti-coup protests did not challenge masculinist ideals as these women, upholding AKP and (Islamic) masculinist hegemony's requirements of womanhood, such as distancing themselves from men and wearing headscarves in public (Korkman, 2017, p.183), were there as "proof of the state's legitimacy and as the desirable (makbul) citizens of Erdogan's 'new Turkey'" (Başdaş, 2017, p.187). Başdaş emphasises that it was not only women who fell victim to sexual violence by anti-coup protesters but also "detained soldiers who were stripped to their underwear, packed on top of each other, and held in large spaces" (p.188).

If one were to choose two ironic broadcasting moments from the night and early morning of the coup attempt, the recitation of the putschists' declaration on state television and President Erdogan's live FaceTime call to CNN Turk would definitely make the cut. The former fulfilled a tradition of coups from the 1960s and 1980s when the sole broadcasting entity in Turkey was TRT (the public broadcaster on radio and television) and "taking control over the public broadcaster had been a crucial step for the putschists" (Altinordu, 2019, p. 20). In 2016, "the complex media structure and decentralized opportunities for information sharing provided by social media" rendered this manoeuvre futile as none of the major media outlets other than TRT followed the demand to broadcast the putschists' message (Altinordu, 2019, pp. 20-21). On the contrary, over the night and early morning of 15-16 July, mainstream media reflected the messages delivered by the president, the prime minister and government officials "without much journalistic distance" (Altinordu, 2019, p. 27). Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım applauded media organisations, stating that, "press and media organisations – print, visual, social media organisations – showed great patriotism" (Schechner, 2016).

It was not only mainstream broadcast media but also as President Erdogan and then-Prime Minister Yıldırım called it, “social media” that played an important role in the events of 15 July. President Erdogan’s surprising FaceTime broadcast on the screen of anchor Hande Firat’s iPhone was an ironic moment bringing the two realms of so-called old and new media together. Not only did the President use the application to connect via a video-call but he and the AKP government continually reached out to their followers on online social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and the iPhone FaceTime application (Schechner, 2016). The role of social media was also represented in the strategic video game *Darbe, 15 Temmuz Kara Gecenin Şafağı* (The 15 July Coup: Dawn of the Dark Night) in which players can “combine a camera and a computer with an Internet connection and craft live-broadcast equipment which can be used to share the events on social media and attract more people to the streets” (Sezen & Sezen, 2019, p. 129).

## **Smartphone and Internet-based Technologies in Turkey (2013-2016)**

### ***Broadband, Cable and Dial-Up Internet***

The following is an overview of Internet access outside of smartphones and other mobile devices in Turkey between 2013 and 2016: Bilişim Teknolojileri Kurumu’s (BTK – Information and Communication Technologies Authority) 2013 Q2 report reveals that land and mobile broadband Internet penetration in Turkey was 10.5%, significantly lower than the OECD countries’ average of 26% penetration (Bilişim Teknolojileri Kurumu, 2013b, p.44). According to We Are Social (2014)’s January 2014 report, there were 35,999,932 Internet users indicating a 45% Internet

penetration across the entire population of Turkey (We Are Social, 2014a). Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TUIK – Turkish Statistical Institute) statistics show that while 49.1% households had access to the Internet in 2013, this rate rose to 76.3% by 2016 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, n.d. a). TUIK statistics indicate that Internet usage in the 16-74 age range was 61.2% in 2016 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2016). BTK's 2016 Q2 report indicated that land and mobile broadband penetration rose to 12,7% —still significantly lower than the OECD average of 29% (Bilişim Teknolojileri Kurumu, 2016b, p.36). Statistics provided by TUIK indicate that rates of people who use the Internet and computers decreased from 2013 to 2016 for all levels of education (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, n.d. b); while the rate of regular Internet users among individuals who use the Internet (including 3G and 4G services) rose from 91.6% to 94.9% from 2013 to 2016 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, n.d. c). The decrease in the usage on Internet on computers and the increase in Internet usage indicate a shift from computer-based to mobile Internet usage in Turkey between 2013 and 2016.

### ***Smartphones and 3G and 4.5G Telecommunication Services***

The analysis of video posts about these two political contexts begs the question of the usage and penetration of “smart” camera phones and 3 and 4G mobile Internet connection in Turkey. According to We Are Social (2014)'s January 2014 report, smartphone penetration was 30% of the general population in Turkey (We Are Social, 2014a). In terms of users' activities on mobile devices, 22% of the population were using social media applications while 37% of users were watching videos on platforms such as YouTube (We Are Social, 2016b). TUIK reports that in 2013, 93%

of households in Turkey owned a mobile phone (including smartphones) and in 2016 this rate was 96.9% (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, n.d. d).

The three years from the summer of 2013 to the summer of 2016 saw a surge in 3G and 4/4.5G subscriptions in Turkey. According to the 2013 Q1 report published by Bilişim Teknolojileri Kurumu, the number of Turkish 3G subscribers had already reached 43,874,972 by March 2013, almost reaching 55% of the total population (Bilişim Teknolojileri Kurumu, 2013a, p. 43). Furthermore, the 2016 Q2 report by BTK, revealed that up until 1 April 2016 when 4.5G was launched in Turkey, 3G subscriptions reached 65,949,652, illustrating that there were an additional 22,074,680 mobile 3G subscribers over three years (Bilişim Teknolojileri Kurumu, 2016, p. 57). The introduction of 4.5G to the Turkish market on 1 April, however, resulted in a rapid shift from 3G to 4.5G, and by the end of June 2016 the number of 3G subscribers was 28,599,109 while the number of 4.5G subscribers had reached 38,597,384 (ibid., p. 57). BTK's results reveal that in June 2016, less than a month before the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, there were at least 67,196,493 3G and 4.5G subscribers in Turkey, just above 80% penetration of either of 3G and 4.5G services among the entire population (ibid.). As these statistics concern the general overview of subscriptions to these services, the numbers are provided solely to indicate smartphone technologies and online social network applications' penetration of the Turkish market when the two different movements first arose.

Focusing on smartphone-using participants provides only limited subject material in relation to the heterogeneous and multi-dimensional modes of participation in the Gezi and anti-coup protests; however, this thesis focuses on the use of this particularly novel technology and the opportunities it provides in order to grasp the complex technical and cultural habits that manifested themselves during each

respective episode. The exclusive focus on this medium also reflects the dissertation's theoretical focus on self-representation and self-reflexivity. Smartphone technologies contributed to the potential for self-reflexivity in digital culture by offering technical resources that allow individuals to create, cultivate and circulate self-reflexive information in a variety of modes. This has involved introducing hardware and software with the potential for users to create content that revolves around their persons. From the user-facing camera and the "selfie," which provided the technical and literal basis for perpetual self-representation, through to GPS technology and compatible "check-in" applications with the use of geotags to provide location data, these functions have come to serve as constantly updated representations of lifestyles as reflected in Papacharissi's (2012) study of "easily replicated presentations of the self" on online social networks (p.1992). However, these online strategies were used in different ways during the Gezi and anti-coup protests. During the Gezi episode, selfies and check-ins served politically strategic roles: while the former was a tool for representing offline or online participation and solidarity with the movement, check-ins in Gezi Park or locations such as Taksim Square represented dissent and proof of physical or spiritual support of the movement. During and after the coup attempt, personal live videos and check-ins were used to prove participants' presence as well as expressing solidarity with the state and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Overall, what made the use of 3G and 4.5G technologies different in each period was mainly the level of intervention and censorship imposed by the state and the participants' reaction to these circumstances.

### *Social Media*<sup>3</sup>

According to We Are Social, in January 2014, social media<sup>4</sup> penetration was 44% and users spent an average of 2 hours 32 minutes on social media platforms (We Are Social, 2014a). The same report indicates that 97% of respondents owned an account on any of the social networks and 75% used it in the previous month (Ibid). In a separate report from 2014, We Are Social observes 74% of social media users accessed these networks via smartphones (We Are Social, 2014b). Top social media platform with 94% was Facebook, yet, only 58% of respondents had used their account in the previous month (Ibid). From May to July 2013

TUIK's report reveals that the top reason for usage of Internet in Turkey was creating profiles, sending messages or sharing of content such as photographs on social media (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2016). According to a 2017 Global Attitudes Survey, social media usage in Turkey was 63% among adults, above the global median of 53% (Poushter et al., 2018, p.16). The same survey reveals that in Turkey 88% of adults between the ages of 18-36 are on social media while only 44% of the 37 year-old or older adults are on social media (Ibid, p.18).

### **Chapter Outline**

This dissertation consists of seven chapters, two of which are dedicated to the two case studies' historical contexts: the 2016 Turkish coup attempt and the 2013 Gezi protests in Turkey. The first chapter constitutes the introduction and includes a discussion of the object of analysis and historical details in order to outline a clear

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<sup>3</sup> The term, social media, used here as direct reference to its use in the references.

<sup>4</sup> In this report, the term social media refers to Facebook, Twitter, Google, LinkedIn, Instagram.

picture regarding the two empirical studies. In order to provide a historical context for the usage of online social networks in political participation, attention is paid to the uses of online social networks in other social movements around the world.

Consideration of the literature on the Gezi movement of 2013 helps to identify the significant methods of online and offline protest as well as revealing how smartphone technologies have been utilised to overcome widespread media censorship in order to issue calls to action, provide evidence of police violence and participant profiling as well as to continue the protests regardless of time and space. On the other hand, previous studies of the 15 July 2016 coup attempt reveal a tension between the anti-democratic environment of the democracy vigils and the anti-coup protests as well as the heavily anti-democratic climate imposed by the ongoing state of emergency in Turkey. Statistics of Internet, mobile technologies and social media penetration are provided for reference.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical basis for my research as well as media and cultural studies at the nexus of online social networks and advanced mobile video-making and distribution technologies. It begins by considering the term ‘social media’ and the related concepts such as platforms, algorithms and affordances. The evolution of the literature on the usage of online social networks in political participation is explored extensively. This is followed by a discussion of the notion of self-reflexivity from the pre-Internet to post-smartphone contexts. The chapter concludes by introducing the concept of ‘meta-activism’ as a central trope when considering the merging of online and offline political participation in the age of the smartphone.

Chapter 3 breaks down the methodological approach I have developed in this dissertation for the collection and analysis of the Vine and Facebook video posts concerning both historical cases. Both case studies rely on a combination of different



methods, namely hashtag, and qualitative content analysis respectively of video posts on online social networks as well as the hermeneutic interpretation of these video posts through a range of distinct themes, perspectives and tones. This chapter also offers details concerning the interpretative schemes informed by the two samples by matching general elements of content observed in the samples with the said themes, perspectives and tones.

Chapter 4 outlines a necessary backdrop in terms of the history of the Internet as it applies to public life in Turkey with reference to the development of Internet policy during the AKP government between 2002 and 2017 and also discusses the Party's contested relationship with Internet technologies and what is referred to as 'social media' by Erdogan and other leading AKP figures from the early 2000s until 2017. This chapter analyses the research on regulatory as well as institutional definitions, the Turkish public's access to both freedom of expression and online information, and the power dynamic between regular citizens and the state as well as the governing AKP. As such, the chapter focuses on the effect of Law No.5651 and the frequency of website and URL blocking in Turkey that this legal provision allows. The AKP's encounter with 'social media' as demonstrated by the smartphone-using Gezi movement participants is seen as triggering the AKP and President Erdogan's acknowledgement of the necessity to take social media seriously. Therefore, it is argued here that this marks the beginning of the first step in a transformative period before the complete appropriation of these tools by the government as evidenced by the sophisticated use of "social media" tactics displayed during the coup attempt of 2016.

Chapter 5 outlines the results of the empirical study on the Vine videos posted during the 2013 Gezi protests and their continuation over the following summer through

themes, perspectives and subthemes. Here I argue that the sample and the interpretative scheme of themes and perspectives demonstrate more diversity in terms of the subject matter and methods of expression used than can be seen in Chapter 6. The chapter concludes that state censorship and the government's attitude towards peaceful protest and freedom of expression in Turkey were the deal breakers in terms of the divergence of these two historical cases.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the empirical study on the Facebook videos posted during the 2016 attempted coup in Turkey. This chapter provides detailed visual and meta-data analyses of examples from the Facebook video post sample that reflect certain tonal and thematic patterns. The results demonstrate the anti-democratic environment of the democracy vigils and other anti-coup demonstrations as a majority of the video posts analysed display pro-government and/or religious sentiment while next to none display anti-government or pro-coup sentiment. The influence of religious rhetoric evident in these videos is seen as both a result of the AK Party's gradual alignment with a less moderate Islamic identity in Turkey as well as its attempted Islamisation of the events of 15-16 July 2016. This is seen in the rhetoric used by the President and other officials including the reference to and repetition of religious tropes such as martyrdom, the will of Allah, and prayers, as well as the mobilisation of local mosques in terms of inviting people onto the streets through continued prayer. Context-based tropes such as Erdoğan as a divine leader, masculinist ideals and martyrdom are examined through examples of video posts. The chapter concludes that a lack of diversity in the participating crowds is reflected in the lack of diversity in the video posts produced and circulated during this movement.

Once the results of the case studies have been compared against the backdrop of the AKP government's Internet policy and digital strategies, Chapter 7 proposes the

concept of meta-activism as a tool for understanding the online expression of political dissent and participation during times of social and political unrest. This chapter also refers to the findings of the case studies in order to emphasise critical distinctions between content created during anti-government movements versus that generated during government-led movements, thereby contributing to future hermeneutic projects in relation to personal video posts online. Consequently, the (self-) representation of participants in each historical context is observed to be significantly different. The chapter identifies enhanced self-reflexivity and everyday expression as a defining aspect of the meta-activist. The notion of meta-activism is presented as a solution to the problem of the dichotomisation of the offline and online realms as well as questions of authenticity and romanticisation concerning the notion of political activism in the field of political participation.

## **Chapter 2. Self-Reflexive Political Participation at the Online-Offline Nexus**

This chapter situates this thesis at the intersection of a variety of literatures from different disciplines and political contexts. The discussion begins with the intermingling of technology and human life in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the new millennium. This is followed by a focus on definitions of “social/new media” particularly its function in terms of creating and spreading user-generated content as well as concepts such as platforms, algorithms. A more specific discussion, of political participation via online social networks, reviews the arguments made by techno-pessimists and techno-optimists while defending the ineffectiveness of such contradictory positions as well as discussing different concepts of political participation and oversights of contextual differences in the literature.

The subsequent sections focus firstly on the online and offline self and self-reflexivity with references to self-representation online including the concept of the selfie. The final section introduces meta-activism as a conceptual device to evaluate political participation and activism at the intersection of online and offline worlds. The reasoning behind the term and the purpose of its usage is explained in order to provide a perspective on the use of online social networks in the two different political contexts presented in the empirical chapters.

The interplay and intermingling of technology and human life has long been a concern for theorists (McLuhan, 2011; Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1999; Papacharissi, 2012; Fuchs, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013). In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan (2011) postulates the “translation” of individuals into “the form of information,” whereby humankind develops “extensions” of information (pp. 85-86). Instead of their previous extensions, namely the man-made mechanical tools that enhanced their physical actions, McLuhan observes that humankind transformed technological

products into information systems (p. 86). The result is a society where “the entire business of man becomes learning and knowing” with the entire world being transformed into “a single consciousness” through the translation of the lives of individuals into information (pp. 86, 90). In addition, McLuhan defends the democratic nature of the medium of electricity and the very power of this property to change human life forever through information technologies.

This physical and cultural integration, specifically, of the affordances of the Internet and smartphones, led to the understanding of all aspects of human life as an amalgamation of human and “the machine” – the term machine being used here as a generalisation for the hardware or the software that provides the technical basis for this amalgamation. To begin thinking about a convergence of the online and the offline or human and machine beyond McLuhan’s theory of extensions, one can look at cyborg theory, which, challenges the distinctions between the human and machine (Haraway, 1991, p. 163). Proposing the erasure of the distinction between the technological and the organic in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Haraway (1991) observes a lack of “fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic” (p. 178) while acknowledging the differences between the cyborg and the human despite accepting that both are fictional cultural constructs (p. 149). People are “material and opaque” but cyborgs are ubiquitous, invisible and “as hard to see politically as materially. They are about consciousness – or its simulation” (p. 153). Haraway’s cyborg is an antidote to dichotomous theories about the digital and the actual worlds, or online activism and ‘real’ activism as “the boundary between the physical and the non-physical is very imprecise” (p. 153). According to Haraway, such a view of the individual provides hope for all ‘otherised’ subjects (p. 163), particularly given that “communications

technologies and biotechnologies become the crucial tools recrafting our bodies” (p. 164). Haraway’s cyborg theory is especially poignant as a reaction against essentialism and naturalism (p. 157) which provide Euro-centric, ableist and positivist perspectives that lack consideration of the variety of contexts in which a diversity of people relate to, live or survive with technology.

Eight years later, Hayles’ critique of posthuman theory has considered the possibilities offered by posthuman theories, including cyborg theory and cybernetics. Hayles (1999) emphasises the need for the posthuman to embrace “the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality” by understanding that “human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival” (p. 5). This preface sets the tone for Hayles’ critique of the “materiality/information separation (p. 12), which is not a question of abandoning the body to achieve a higher consciousness “...but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis” (p. 291). Hayles’ definition of information technology as prostheses, following McLuhan’s definition as extensions, relates to a common trope in the study of Internet technologies that can be summarised as the “technology as a tool” argument which will be problematised in the section regarding political participation via online social networks.

In the latter half of the 2010s when Web 2.0 and smartphones were no longer luxury items – despite the questionable democratic nature of these technologies – the extensions of information proposed by McLuhan have become embodied in these technologies. Considering McLuhan’s ideas at the end of the 2010s, it has become even harder to classify media production processes versus consumption and

producers versus consumers in the same bipolar manner (Castells, 2009). Through the proliferation of user-generated content, Web 2.0 has made ordinary users producers of infinite online content (Fuchs, 2013); on the other hand, online social networks combined with advances in recording technologies have allowed perpetual and enhanced self-reflexive experiences to become banal aspects of daily life (Papacharissi, 2012; Thumim, 2012; Van Dijck, 2013). Such profusion of self-reflexivity is a by-product of the amalgamation of the human and machine that concerns the individual on psychological, social and political levels.

Considering the convergence of human and machine with regards to political participation in the contemporary media landscape, Allan (2013) proposes a rethinking of citizenship in a manner that is recognisant of “a new media ecology” where dichotomies between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ political mobilisation lack “a conceptual purchase” (p.149-150)”. In addition to such theoretical renderings of the consolidation of the real and virtual, there is also a need to acknowledge the increasing physical presence and proximity of technology to the human body in the notion of the smartphone as “[b]eing online becomes the default position especially for the participants who are owners of smartphones (Madianou, 2014, p.674)”.

However, it is not solely a question of the proximity of the hardware but also that of the software that affords such a convergence. Referencing algorithms, Bucher (2018) sees “programmed sociality” as a political and constant reciprocity between machine and human (pp. 8, 159).” Hence, the amalgamation of online and offline worlds or actions manifests on different aspects including the hardware, the software and theorisation of such technologies.

Even though debates about the mutuality of human life and technology, and more specifically real and online actions have come to recognise the human/machine and

online/offline divides as illusory, the following sections will emphasise a tendency to classify or justify online actions through their conception as tools, representations or aids for offline achievements and rarely as legitimate real world actions in and of themselves, specifically, in relation to political participation. Before I touch on the debates surrounding political participation via online social networks, however, a theoretical roadmap of what has been generalised as social media in the literature is necessary.

### **Social Media, Platforms, Algorithms and User-Generated Content**

Following extensive academic debates on its validity and conceptualisation, the notion of social media still generates a variety of questions: Why are some types of media termed “social” when all media serve a purpose based in sociality (Papacharissi, 2015)? Are social media really different from previous media opportunities in terms of producing, publishing and distributing content (Baym, 2015)? Is the “newness” of social media an illusion maintained to boost investment in Internet technologies following the bursting of the dotcom bubble? (ibid) In order to understand these relatively new types of communication, theorists continue to redefine what the “social” in social media means: Lovink (2011) sees social media as a shift away “from HTML-based linking practices,” emphasising the role of the “free publishing and production platforms” in circulating user-generated content (p. 5); Van Dijck (2013) argues that the term “social” refers to the “user-centred” nature of social media platforms (p. 11). The user-generated content argument is supported by many who emphasise the role of social media in encouraging, aiding, producing and distributing unique or recycled content by non-media professionals (Gauntlett, 2011; Baym & Boyd, 2012; Terranova & Donovan, 2013; Fuchs, 2013). Throughout this



thesis and outside of reference to the relevant debates, I abstain from using the term “social media” in order to be able to define what type of media is being dealt with. Hence, I call platforms such as Vine and Facebook “online social networks” that enable and harbour user-generated content. In this project, I also use the term social media with regards to its public deployment in Turkish (*sosyal medya*) in legal language or by Turkish government officials and the President Erdogan when referring to the totality of online social networks, blogs, forums and dictionaries and commercial media-streaming platforms and websites. The different contexts in which the term “social media” is used or avoided in this project are, thus, informed by a tension between the need to relate to a widely used term and a critical attitude towards its generalising effect.

By focusing on user-generated content on online social networks in the form of video posts, this thesis emphasises how so-called social media allow for an unprecedented level of technical potential for production quality and distribution breadth for ordinary users of online social networks and smartphones. boyd (2011) explains this potential through the concept of affordances for “publics transformed by networked media” (p. 42). The notion of affordances was coined by J.J. Gibson (1966) specifically relating to the field of perceptual psychology and later claimed as signifying “what the environment *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*...either for good or ill...it implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment. (Gibson, 1979, p.127)” Gibson (1979) also justifies humans’ changing “the shapes and substances of his environment” in an attempt to change what the environment affords humankind and observes that “this is not a new environment—an artificial environment distinct from natural environment—but the same old environment modified by man (p.128).” Gibson’s initial coinage of the

notion of affordances, thus, indicates an offering rather than determining, a complementarity rather than control, the adaptability of affordances by human beings. Boyd (2011) elaborates on four affordances that “emerge out of the properties of bits” that define content in the context of networked publics: namely (1) “persistence” which represents the automatic recording and archiving of online expressions<sup>5</sup>, (2) the “replicability” or the “duplicability” of content made of bits, (3) the “scalability” or the great visibility of contents in networked publics, and, lastly, the easy access to such content due to its “searchability” (46). The application of the theory of affordances to networked media, thus, emphasises their assumed tool-like quality as well as a reciprocal relationship between the offerer of affordances (in this case, networked media) and the offeree. Boyd’s understanding of affordances focus on the opportunities provided by networked media but others have extended the idea of affordances to hardware (Madianou, 2014).

Madianou and Miller (2012) introduce the notion of polymedia as an umbrella term that shifts the focus from media to its social aspect: “For each individual, polymedia represents their personal repertoire of communication media and of emotional registers (p. 180).” Later adding smartphones to “polymedia”, Madianou (2014), defines polymedia as a way to see media as “integrated environments of affordances (p.667)”, “rather than as a list of discrete objects and technologies (p. 672).” The concept of polymedia, thus, allows one to converge the various aspects of content posted on online social networks from the hardware used to produce such content to the mobile network used to log onto one’s personal account on a specific platform

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<sup>5</sup> As some of the examples discussed in this dissertation will demonstrate, online social networks, despite being quite ephemeral and unreliable archives, have more long-term impact through the extended representation of causes, sites, experiences and outcomes of street protest. However, as other examples will show, the durability of messages on online social networks also has the potential to serve as government propaganda and to maintain the status-quo.

where such content can be post. The concept of polymedia also assumes an immediacy or second-nature quality in this process of content creation and publication by defining “each individual medium or platform in relational terms in context of all other media (p. 670).” Polymedia, thus, refers to both customisable and integrated environments of affordances and the interplay between different elements of the post-smartphone user experience.

The concept of platforms poses another question in terms of the definition of a variety of “content intermediaries” operating on the Web 2.0 such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and the discontinued Vine (Gillespie, 2010, p. 348). According to Gillespie (2010) the polysemy (or the ambiguity) of this term points to contradictions between the business model and public image of the companies that provide such services and more specifically to tensions “between user-generated and commercially-produced content, between cultivating community and serving up advertising, between intervening in the delivery of content and remaining neutral (p. 348).” These tensions are the result of the multifarious functions and objectives that fund, drive and maintain such platforms “more like traditional media than they care to admit (Gillespie, 2010, p. 359).” Analysing them as both “techno-cultural constructs” and “socioeconomic structures,” Van Dijck (2013) defines platforms as “mediators” that configure sociality:

Technologically speaking, platforms are the providers of software, (sometimes) hardware, and services that help code social activities into a computational architecture; they process (meta)data through algorithms and formatted protocols before presenting their interpreted logic in the form of user friendly interfaces with default settings that reflect the platform owner’s strategic choices (p. 29).

From their initiation, the techno-cultural aspect of online platforms are informed by the socio-economic structures of *ownership* (their public, commercial, non-commercial status), *governance* (laws and regulations for the operation of platforms)

and *business models* (the monetisation of online creativity and sociality) (Van Dijck, 2013, pp. 29-41). These facets not only point to the complexity of platforms themselves but of all the actors that are involved in their making, governing, using as well as the cultural production that results from both user-generated and commercially created content mediated on such platforms. Tufekci (2017) argues that while the companies that operate these platforms exercise power over users, being “driven by user demand” they allow for “a new type of networked gatekeeping (p.138).” It is possible to argue that television and print media have also been driven by user demand to a certain degree, however, the nature of online platforms which harbour user-generated content are prone to criticism about certain issues regarding the organisation and mediation of sociality on a given platform being exposed on that very same platform to the very people whom these issues are of concern.

The topics of visibility and searchability are, however, problematized through the study of algorithms which shape the networks that transform boyd’s (2011) publics. Algorithms have been defined as “part of mechanisms that introduce and privilege quantification, procedurali[s]ation and automation in human endeavors (Gillespie, 2016, p. 27)”. Critical of the positivist view of algorithms, Bucher (2018) asserts that algorithms are not as objective or neutral in decision making as they are believed to be (p. 41) but rather (in the case of machine-learning algorithms) are ever-changing experiments that respond to each evolving problem with an original answer which further readjusts the algorithm itself (p. 32). This ever-evolving nature of the algorithm further contributes to its elusive image, but Bucher (2018) emphasises that one need not decode changing algorithms to understand them or their effect on cultural and social production (p. 150-151). The effect of the algorithm may be read in both the kind of content that sifts through and the kind of strategies adopted by

users of OSNs to navigate these seemingly unknown waters. Algorithms do not pacify users. Discussing the effect of algorithms on the exposure of political content, Tufekci (2017) asserts that a live feed on a cell phone can reach millions of people only if the “corporate owners permit it and the algorithms that structure the platform surface it to a broad audience (p.137).” However, the algorithmic control is not met with passivity as algorithms can shape how a movement’s content producers can adapt their production to be more algorithm friendly (p. 154).” The demystification of the algorithms in the minds of the users is the beginning of their reappropriation of said algorithms in service of their efforts.

The dynamics of technology, governance, ownership, description and prescription regarding online social networks constitute only one side of the cultural production on such platforms. I argue that the means provided by smartphones and online social networks to convey a message to greater audiences is a potentiality that begs closer analysis of content produced by users to understand the cultural manifestation of the power struggle between online corporations, their users and the state. Therefore, it remains imperative to acknowledge the power of users for two reasons: (1) to demystify the control of certain states, institutions or corporations over citizen users; (2) to avoid placing overdue emphasis on the platforms whereby content produced and shared via such platforms are disregarded or belittled as side products.

### **Political Participation via Online Social Networks**

In the new millennium it has become barely possible to avoid using, documenting, publishing, promoting or simply evading being recorded, documented, published and publicised on contemporary media. Discussions on the legitimacy of certain types of

media over others in fulfilling the requirements of life after the 2000s have become polarised into cyber-pessimistic nostalgia (Fuchs, 2007; Morozov, 2009; Gladwell, 2010) and cyber-optimistic futurism (Castells, 2009; Shirky, 2011). The opposing ways of contemplating the future of any human-made technology – with no analytical attention paid to the way such media infiltrate the society and thereby transform in a mutually-evolving relationship – are obsolete (McLuhan, 2011, p. 68). More recently, theorists like Gerbaudo (2012), Juris (2012), and Franklin (2013a) argue that such differing judgements about the possibilities provided by the Internet or the products of so-called Web 2.0 are fruitless and/or irrelevant. Franklin (2013a) emphasises the need to override debates relating to the vilification or adoration of the Internet, calling instead for its repoliticisation by analysing specific cases in order to understand “how practices of power and resistance through and over parts of its design, access and use unfold over time and in specific ways” (p.61). Such practices of resistance through the unique usage of online social networks apply to a considerable range of the practices evident in the online videos analysed for this dissertation, especially those concerning the Gezi protests.

Della Porta (2006) elaborates a consideration of advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet or computer mediated communication (CMC) (p. 92) and summarises the uses of the Internet for political participation as (1) instrumental, (2) a means of direct expression of dissent, and (3) bearing “a cognitive function, enabling information to be disseminated and public opinion to be sensitized on issues scantily covered by mainstream media, and also reinforcing collective identities (p. 94).”

Della Porta (2006) also points out that “the cheap and fast means of international communication” provided by the Internet, loosens organisational structures within social movements while bringing costs down and giving the potential to communicate

a movement at the international level (pp. 94-96). It is important to note the perspective from which Della Porta (2006) views the Internet as an instrument and online actions as “expressions (p.94)” but also states that “the Internet is also a means for protest and is exploited for online mobilisation and the performance of acts of dissent. This is the case for online petitions, Web site defacement or cloning, Net strikes, and mail bombings (105).” This view of “online mobilisation” or “online activism” implies a rift between online and offline actions whereby online actions are solely legitimised as actions that concern the isolated online realm and, therefore, cannot take place elsewhere. Regarding the global justice movement, Mosca and Della Porta (2009) observe three uses for the Internet: to mobilise, to manage social movement organisations and to create “a public space open to deliberation and the creation of new collective identities (p. 197).” The “Internet/technology/social media as a tool” and “online/digital activism vs. offline activism” are recurring tropes in the literature concerning political participation on online social networks—specifically in the field of social movements and political participation—and I argue that these tropes enable the perceived isolation of online and offline worlds and actions and hinder a more integrated understanding of a political life at the online/offline nexus. Castells’ (2009) definition of Internet-based communication as “mass self-communication” stresses its potential global reach and multimodality as well as the self-generation, emission and selection of content created for communication on the Internet (p. 70). This definition emphasises the ambiguity between self-intended and global (or viral) communication on the Internet whereby banal depictions of everyday life with little ambition for global reach have the potential to go viral in a perfect algorithmic storm with an appropriate number of likes and shares, followed by exposure to and endorsement by communication hubs such as influencers and

established mass-communication accounts. The autonomy Castells (2012) finds in “the Internet” user (p. 258), understates issues of policy and law as well as systematic Internet censorship and self-censorship on the Internet as a result of external intimidation in non-democratic contexts, all of which degrade users’ autonomy. The Internet user, as autonomous as they may seem compared to the TV viewer or the newspaper reader, is also limited by their actual social autonomy. It is also problematic to emphasise autonomy in relation to such broad cases of collective action both in relation to non-violent and progressive movements, such as Gezi, where “togetherness” (Castells, 2012, p. 253; Gerbaudo, 2012, p.162) is reliant on the appropriation of a variety of shared meanings and actions, and government-led movements, such as the anti-coup protests, where autonomy is performed through a strict loyalty to and repetition/reapplication of the government’s narrative.

Juris (2012) comments that debates about whether “new media” are emancipatory or degenerative in relation to social movements are irrelevant, while clarifying that “particular new media tools” contribute to “emerging forms, patterns and physical forms of protest” and that “virtual [and] physical forms of protest and communication are mutually constitutive” (p. 260). Juris’ statement that the only possible way for short-term mobs generated by “social networking tools” to turn into sustainable crowds and movements with “a collective subjectivity” is through “long-term occupation of public space” (p. 267) may hold for democratic societies where such occupations are not met with threats against human life or wellbeing. This is how Juris (2012) sees a connection between “the virtual and the physical” whereby online work is there to serve the offline work of activists – not as a mutual or collaborative system. While paying due diligence to the contribution of online social networks in social movements, Juris implies that the online actions are there to serve offline



actions or are only worthy if they do so. This thesis challenges these kinds of justifications for using online social networks, and emphasises that, given their mutual contribution to one another, online and offline actions are intermingled while an individual's actions are comprised of a combination of these in the post-smartphone context.

Gerbaudo (2012) opposes both the techno-optimistic and techno-pessimistic views of online social networks' relation to activism and social movements in that they represent an "essentialist vision of social media", one that approaches the term "in the abstract, without due attention to" different local experiences and the extent to which OSNs are "embedded in the social movements adopting them" (p. 5). Gerbaudo claims that the social media practices of 2011's social movements reveal "a use of social media in the service of re-appropriating physical public space" and a type of distributed leadership where "the leaders do not take "centre-stage" (p.158).

I agree with Gerbaudo and Juris' positions that dichotomous ways of valuing online social networks in the context of social movements are both ineffective and promote essentialist ideas about technology which originate from a Euro-centric understanding of the positioning of such communication technologies within contemporary society. Dichotomous positions about the emancipatory qualities of the Internet and online social networks not only equate their qualities with the people who use them but also emphasise social media's role as a "tool" and not as an object of scrutiny, further contributing to its mystification.

The argument between the pessimists and the optimists is further complicated by the variety of political actions and specific political contexts online social networks are used for. Siapera (2010) observes that online identities are not necessarily "progressive" (p. 186); hence, it is not a question of a medium being emancipatory

but the important issue is the people who use it and the circumstances under which they are used in order for that medium to serve a humane purpose. Siapera and Veikou (2013) stress that whatever advantages online social networks provide is applicable to all types of communities whether disenfranchised (migrants and minorities in their case) or extremist (xenophobic and racist) (p. 116) As the coming chapters will reveal, this is indeed the case with the use of online social networks in the contexts of the Gezi and anti-coup movements. Whether the Internet, online social networks, or the smartphones used to access them contribute to social progression “depends on the ways in which people shape and subsequently employ” these technologies (Siapera, 2010, p.197). Siapera and Veikou’s (2013) argument raises important questions about the focus of the analysis of political participation on online social networks being limited to progressive movements.

Bennett (2012) places emphasis on “the rise of a more personalised politics” that could be identified in “heterogeneous mobili[s]ations in which diverse causes such as economic justice (fair trade, inequality, and development), environmental protection, and war and peace are directed at moving targets from local to national and transnational and from government to business (p. 21).” Bennett (2012): “Social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties have given rise to an era of personalized politics in which individual expression displaces collective action frames in the embrace of political causes” (p. 37) I abstain from making a hasty connection between Bennett’s idea of personalised politics and movements such as the Arab Uprisings and the Gezi movement as Bennett’s generalisation of these new age diverse and personalised mobilisations as performed by neo-liberal consumer citizens seem to be contested in these non-Western contexts. Questions of class analysis of Gezi participants as well as the youth of the Arab uprisings have been

discussed in the Introduction chapter. Personalised action need not equate consumer politics or vice versa and the many students and the youth who were prevalent in the Arab Uprisings as well as the Gezi Protests cannot be generalised as consumer-citizens. It is also possible to provide a critique of the idea of “social fragmentation” as well as the idea of a decline in “group loyalties” and, through both Western and non-Western examples, to assert a transformation of group loyalties from top-down blood, name and legal connections to choice- or commonality-based loyalties. In non-Western contexts such as Turkey where such social fragmentation has not been achieved, a different set of challenges for political identification and participation should be considered, especially for younger and traditionally more domesticated subjects who may not be able to practice political participation as independently as their peers in Western contexts.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have found that “more digitally mediated collective action formations often: scale up more quickly; produce large and sometimes record-breaking mobilisations; display unusual flexibility in tracking moving political targets and bridging different issues (e.g. economy and environment); and build up adaptive protest repertoires, share open-source software development, and embrace an ethos of inclusiveness” when compared with more traditional forms of protest (p.25). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) differentiate between collective and connective action by asserting that people who seek more personalised methods of participating in protest are familiar with a different logic of organisation that is “the logic of connective action (p. 29).” Bennett and Segerberg (2013) assume a correlation between the logic of connective action and personalised political expression (p.36) but personalised methods of engagement and participation solely apply to connective forms of political action are left unexplored. The authors see two qualities, namely, *symbolic*

*inclusiveness*, which references personalised ideas that require “little persuasion”, and *technological openness*, which defines the attitude of the participant towards a variety of personal communication technologies, as crucial in the process of connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p.37). With regards to the relationship between personalised communication and protest capacity, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) find that personalised communication showed more overall engagement capacity and strength (p. 73), did not compromise agenda strength (p. 74), and “the personalisation of mobilisation process alone” does not “undermine collective action structure (p. 76).” The pivotal aspect of Bennett and Segerberg’s (2013) argument is the acknowledgement of the role of said technologies as both “organising mechanisms” and as “windows on the larger protest ecology” (p. 95) --indicating an independence of online actions from their supportive role to a more integral one.

Allan (2013) asserts that there is no corresponding relationship between “young people’s involvement in social networking and civic participation” but “individuals conversant in the uses of technologies widely associated with ‘Web 2.0’ will be well placed to advance personalised, affective forms of engagement with issues they consider relevant to their concerns (p.149)” Allan (2013) questions the dichotomy between notions of the “dispassionate reporter” and the amateur perpetrated by the profession of journalism (p. 26). Allan defines “citizen witnessing” user-generated content as both a form of witnessing and as self-reflexive engagement (p.174-5).

While bearing witness is a crucial part of why such content is produced and shared, the purpose behind the witnessing turns its publication into an act of defiance. While the use of the term citizen witnessing may allow for this added quality to the concept, the term “citizen journalism” contradicts the political engagement of individual users by shifting the focus from the act to the content of their production.

From a news-making perspective of political communication, Chadwick (2013) observes the intermingling of so-called old and new media and the struggle of power within this landscape through the concept of “hybrid media systems.” Chadwick (2013) claims that the hybridity of political communication, thus, provides “non-elite actors” with an opportunity to assert their perspective into mainstream news production “through timely interventions and sometimes direct, one-to-one, micro-level interactions with professional journalists (p. 88).” The hybrid media systems theory prioritises news media as the central forum of an understanding of political communication as participation in institutionalised politics. Chadwick’s (2013) utilisation of the notion of political communication situates political and media elites and institutional democratic practices such as campaigns and elections at the focus. Despite the potential of this concept for the perception of a more fluid understanding of new and old media, Chadwick’s (2013) institutional perspective on both media and politics fails to convey the complexity of the struggles for power and attention between online actors and established news media and assumes a one-way struggle for gratification of what he deems “non-elite” actors by “elite” institutions and actors. This hierarchical understanding of the hybridity of media systems is inefficient in demonstrating the actual capacity of non-elite actors to control any national or the international agenda.

Looking at what sort of communication is applied in attempts of accelerating mobilisation through “online media”, Papacharissi (2015a) characterises this communication landscape with the notion of “public displays of affect as political statements” that unite publics “despite and beyond ideological differences (pp. 6, 7, 8)” On the role of play and affect in the “connective polysemy (Papacharissi, 2015a, p.88), Papacharissi finds that tweets from participants of the 2011 Tahrir protests

“blended emotion with opinion and drama with fact” while the accumulation of subjective accounts and interpretations of events molded narratives which defined the events and reshaped the experience of these events by combining the event with its real-time interpretations (p. 56, 63). This simultaneity of experience and interpretation through personalised methods points to a self-reflexive practice that is made possible by the immediacy of feedback in the prosumption of user-generated content. The differences between pre- and post-smartphone political participation shall not be seen as evidence for a techno-deterministic conclusion about one being more effective than the other but as evidence of an apparent change in that way individuals participate, interact with and perform their political identities.

Tüfekçi (2017) warns against making comparisons between “marches from the past with marches of today by using the same metrics for both” emphasising that they are “different phenomena that arise in different ways, and, most important, they signal different future paths (p.61).” Indeed, while pre-cameraphones the physical turnout at a rally might have been one of the biggest symbols of intimidation against authorities, in the post-smartphone era, one person capturing a video of state-sanctioned wrongdoing at a protest and that video going viral can prove a much more permanent and compelling coercion. On the other hand, citizen witnesses or simply people taking photographs in the pre-cameraphone protest environment could not pose as much pressure on authorities as smartphone yielding citizens, each of whom have become (and through very discreet methods) potential photographers, news managers and publishers in their own right.

Tufekçi (2017) touches on some of the previously mentioned realities of the so-called social media called out by theorists like Fuchs and Fenton and Barassi, namely the capitalistic nature of online social networks as privately owned companies marketing

user attention, saying that these platforms “do not guarantee freedom of speech or privacy (p. 137).” Tufekci (2017) asserts the need to acknowledge and explore the “ethics, norms, identities, and compromise” that shape the “choices of design, affordances, policies and algorithms on online platforms” and that “there is no perfect, ideal platform for social movements (p.185).”

Tufekci (2017) provides a perspective that questions techno-deterministic views of these technologies while acknowledging the affordances they provide for documenting wrongdoings by tipping the imbalance in the perceived legitimacy of statements by authorities versus claims by activists (p.6). Emphasising how technology alters human interaction and power equilibrium, Tufekçi (2017) asserts the danger in equating relevant social movements with the technologies used as well as assuming a tool-like, passive and neutral role for technology (p. 124).

It is important to note that a lot of the large-scale studies (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015a; Tufekçi, 2017) are based partially or entirely on studies of Twitter and/or Facebook and with an emphasis on the analysis of (intuitively) written communication on this platform. Even though references to other media (photography, music, video etc.) applied on these platforms are made, these studies are consequently concerned with the reach potential of these platforms (Tufekci, 2017, p. 138) and, thus, refer to online representations of political participation in terms of their offline reflections or achievements. This fascination with reach can be one of the reasons why more artistic or less text-based platforms (Vine, Periscope etc.) or lesser-used features of well-known platforms (Facebook Live) and the ways in which people use their “under-the-radar” qualities end up being ignored in such case studies. This focus on reach is also a remnant of older metrics where the effect of

a message is calculated with newspapers sold or households who tuned in for a television programme.

When exploring how people participate in social movements via online social networks, I do not take reach as a decisive point as I do not see online video posts as in the service of a greater cause. The online video posts analysed as part of this study are treated equally, disregarding the impact of the content or the users who created them. Similarly, the interpretation of such technologies as mere tools or as reflections of the events they were used during further mythologises those technologies.

Defining diverse technological processes and implements as tools disguises their ever-evolving nature and ignores the dynamics of governance and the specificity of local contexts in which such technologies are employed. On the other hand, one cannot rely on the context to define the role of a selected aspect of technology. Social movements (during which online social networks and smartphones technologies have been taken advantage of) have ever-revealing outcomes that cannot be perceived and agreed upon in the short term; thus, defining social movements through the technologies used to participate in them nullifies the nature of said technologies. This thesis aims to demythologise the practices through which such technologies have been used to participate in two very different social movements in Turkey, which can also serve to deromanticise those movements and the understanding of political participation in the post-smartphone era.

### **The Online/Offline Self and Self-Reflexivity**

The idea of meta-activism as a kind of posthuman participation, aided by high-quality, audio-visual technologies as well as live-streaming and image-sharing



platforms, enabled participants to distribute messages of dissent and solidarity, to document and broadcast a gathering, protest or state violence in real time, reflects an unprecedented standard of self-awareness for these posthuman participants in the post-smartphone/3G era. Self-reflexivity as it applies to online social network users is crucial in understanding the smartphone-clad participants of the Gezi and anti-coup movements. Dependence on information technologies not only defines the way individuals work but also how culture evolves. I have previously touched on the techno-pessimist views of the usage of online social networks to participate in social movements. Some of these views were critical of the so-called self-centred nature of such participation (Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Fuchs, 2011; Lovink, 2012); hence it is necessary to explore the general notion of reflexivity and the concept of self-reflexivity in terms of individuals' practices on online social networks to delineate the wider application of self-reflexivity in human life, to understand the different motives and implications of practices of self-reflexivity online and, lastly, to mark the intersection of self-reflexivity and political participation via online social networks.

In his discussion of automation as a result of electric and information technologies, Marshall McLuhan (2011) refers to the self-reflexive cycle the individual becomes part of through such technologies. Automation allows "the consumer" to become "the producer" or, as McLuhan expresses it, "the reader of the mosaic telegraph press makes his own news, or just is his own news" (p. 462). How McLuhan locates self-reflexivity in technology parallels the reality of the users of online social networks who become their own news, by authoring and reading themselves. Another result of electricity and automation McLuhan proposes relates to "the over-all consideration of human unity" enabled by the creation of the single consciousness, "with electricity [humans] extend [their] central nervous system globally, instantly interrelating every

human experience” (p. 472). This idea is particularly interesting as McLuhan (2011) sees reflexivity and an interrelation of human experiences happening in tandem.

McLuhan (2011) does not see the self-reflexivity afforded by novel technologies as posing a danger for the consideration of a greater collective, implicating that these technologies have the potential to nurture both self-reflexivity and human unity.

Bourdieu’s perspective on the concept of reflexivity revolves around scientific practices and education (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 178; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 46) or, more specifically, what he deems the project of a “sociology of sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 182)” which is more generally referred to as a *reflexive sociology*. Bourdieu’s effort in making reflexivity part of scientific practices results from an acknowledgement of “unthought categories of thought” that form the “*theorist or intellectualist* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 69)” bias which limit scientific practice (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 178). A reflexive sociology is intended to liberate intellectuals from their own illusory perceptions about themselves and their practices and ultimately from contributing to symbolic domination resulting from their “epistemocentrism” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 70; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.195). According to Wacquant, Bourdieu’s understanding of reflexive sociology contradicts positivist notions of social sciences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 47-48). Bourdieu’s insistence for a reflexive sociology, thus, deems reflexivity as a desirable trait for a more ethical scientific practice. Bourdieu’s views here also parallel McLuhan’s in that reflexivity leads to a better understanding of humanity through the scientific practices of the reflexive sociologist.

On the other hand, Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity as a tool for social scientists to acknowledge their subjective experiences, bias and methodologies, points to a scrutiny of oneself in service of the analysis of an “other”. However, self-reflexivity

in the case of meta-activism is part of the physical (the simultaneous capturing and viewing of oneself in an image or a video) and intellectual (observing and editing oneself according to self-reflection and outside feedback) in posts on OSNs. These processes are not aimed at the analysis of another entity but at the co-authoring and co-analysis of a collaborative narrative of political views, expressions and actions as they constitute a wider social movement. Bourdieu's understanding of reflexivity has the positive effect of overcoming bias in the study of human beings.

The work of Giddens (1991) on self-reflexivity provides a more specific focus on the self-reflexivity of the individual vis-à-vis other self-reflexive subjects. Wacquant observes that "conceptions of reflexivity range from self-reference to self-awareness to the constitutive circularity of accounts or texts" and Giddens' definitions of reflexivity embraces all of these understandings by taking into account "agency, science and society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 37)". Giddens' (1991) concept of the "reflexive project of the self" postulates that "the structuring of self-identity" (p. 5) is a lifetime task that requires self-awareness and self-evaluation. For Giddens, self-identity is therefore not a "given" but "routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (p. 53). Such definitions of self-reflexivity are instrumental in understanding the structuring of the "activist" self-identity/reflexivity including their bodily (body-image, self-protection, health, etc.) and psychological (self-representation, networking, vanity, etc.) practices prior to the use of online social networks. The individual's ties to a social setting or a network is also part of the structuring of their self-identity: "Self-consciousness has no primacy over the awareness of others, since language – which is intrinsically public – is the means of access to both. Inter subjectivity does not derive from subjectivity, but the other way around" (p. 51). Giddens' ideas imply that any person identifying as an activist

structures their self-identity depending on predetermined examples of this role and will continuously reflect on their own positioning within society not only through self-reflection but also – reflexively – through others’ perspectives. Hence, notions such as self-promotion (Fuchs, 2011; Lovink, 2012) and self-centred participation (Fenton & Barassi, 2011) are not exclusive to those participants who use online social networks but are also applicable to humanity in general.

By postulating the beginning of the self-reflexivity of individuals to the “narcissism of the mirror phase”, Giddens (1984) argues that self-reflexivity is learned “through the positioning of the body in relation to its image (p.85). The relatively recent enhancement of feedback opportunities of an immediate nature through the widespread use of online social networking platforms, affordable audio-visual recording, and playback technologies combined with applications for immediate broadcasting and the availability and accessibility of an unperceivable depth of information online also enhances the potential for self-reflexivity for contemporary political participants. To be more specific, smartphone-wielding participants are able to record, broadcast and view their own street presence simultaneously. This can be seen as a relearning of self-reflexivity as it is experienced through such technologies.

For Giddens (1991), however, feedback and reflexivity are mere tools in the production of the “reflexive biography”:

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly active. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self (p. 54).

While Giddens (1991) is talking about a psychological narrative of an individual’s biography, it is possible to see a tangible reflection of this biography-narrating

process in online social networks (Turkle, 1995; Papacharissi, 2012). In addition, considering Giddens' (1991) perspective on the "reflexive biography" can help question false categorisations of activism. A person who runs to the streets in the blink of an eye, thus, may not necessarily be there for the sake of the cause but to fulfil the necessities posed by their reflexive narrative and might partake in the relevant discourse to support such a narrative. Meanwhile, an individual who does not identify as an activist can "be there" because the cause itself plays an important part in their own biography. Such a distinction of "global" versus personal causes also comes up in Giddens' (1991) concept of "life politics" as "a politics of lifestyle":

To give a formal definition: life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts, where globalising influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realisation influence global strategies (p. 214).

As such, "life politics" signals a deviation from collective to individual forms of political identification.

Giddens' "life politics" concept is useful for this study of the Gezi movement as the movement itself has been deemed to be an uprising against a government threatening the "lifestyles" of those who participated in or sympathized with the movement (Aksoy & Şeyben, 2014, p. 185; Abbas & Yiğit, 2015, p. 62). The "heterogeneity of the [Gezi] participants," who were united by their disdain of the AKP government's practices, reflects individualized bottom-up "life politics" in motion (Karakayalı & Yaka, 2014, p. 118). Collective action was in part made possible by welcoming an infinite variety of demands relating to lifestyle and political freedoms on the part of the participants who saw the demolition of a park and the uprooting of a tree as a

symbol of oppression. The power and impact of a movement such as Gezi could be understood via Giddens' (1991) following statement:

Life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts, where globalising influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realisation influence global strategies (p. 214)

Here, Giddens (1991), like McLuhan (2011), points to a direct mutuality between the self and the global. Applying the concept of life politics in the understanding of the participants of the Gezi movement is also an antidote to the shortcut definitions of the Gezi youth as “apolitical” which has become commonplace within both the pro- and anti-Gezi discourses (Erhart, 2013, p. 302; Emre et al., 2014, p. 437). In addition, the concept of life politics not only proposes a different politics but also calls for a form of political engagement that can serve to describe the non-party-affiliated, non-ideological, and heterogeneous nature of the Gezi masses.

Analysing the practices of reflexive thinking and reflexive self-representation in digital media also requires an understanding of how online social networks have transformed processes of self-identification and self-awareness. Turkle (1995) claims that “computer science” has contributed to “bottom-up, distributed, parallel and emergent models of mind” and that “the Internet” also contributed to “thinking about identity as multiplicity” whereby people were able “to build a self by cycling through many selves” (p. 178). Turkle emphasises her interviewees’ worries about the comparison of their so-called cyber and actual selves. Turkle (1999) marks the time in Internet studies when the self is divided into two parts online and offline and the former, seen as a “screen personae” (p. 192) or “virtual personae” (p. 643) is open to experimentation while the latter remains stagnant (Turkle, 1995, p. 180) and is based mainly on “written” reconstructions of the self (Turkle, 1999, p. 643). This view is

also a result of the way people used their computers and the Internet as a limited and dedicated period of activity involving a human vs. machine interaction and human-to-human interaction based on texts at the time of Turkle's (1995) research as opposed to the way the Internet (as evolved as it is) is experienced on smartphones which are more attached to and more reflexive of physical bodies than the bulky computers of the 1990s. Turkle's (1995) analysis of the reconstruction of selves through MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) emphasises a multiplicity of selves that exist apart from each other and through which the individual travels (p. 209). Turkle (1995, 1999), however, sees online and offline lives as "parallel" and not as intermingled as I suggest in this thesis. These non-intersecting lives are reflected in Turkle's (1999) definition of the self as multiplied (into the physical "real" and all reconstructed "virtual selves") but fragmented as she posits that the separate "virtual" practices of identity as "identity play" can provide constructive reflection on "the real" (p. 647).

In his detailed psychological study on the concept of the self and its effect on the development of egotism, Leary (2004) refers to an age where the signs of practical self-reference such as the beginning of tool-making and the elaboration of body adornments are accompanied by the emergence of representational art (p. 18). Such a primal mode of communication as seen by Leary in tools and adornments is nowadays juxtaposed with the potential of immediate audio-visual self-representation and self-awareness resulting from the banality of access to technologies that provide such experiences. Observing that the concept of the self-evolved in an era that lacked outside agents or technologies that could allow or encourage such reference to the self, Leary (2004) proposes that the conditions of modern life problematize this mental capacity to the point where serious psychological deficiencies and problems such as egotism, depression and anxiety can arise from excessive self-awareness (p.

100). Leary emphasizes that the concept of the self, which distinguished humans from their predecessors and other animals, evolved as a means of survival and it is the change in the conditions under which humans live now – namely, hyper self-awareness – that has resulted in these negative (or self-destructive) consequences (p. 21).

Leary (2004) proposes that the internal conversation is an integral part of the self (p. 27). The internal conversation as a personal negotiation device parallels the representation of such conversations on online social networks whether through language or audio-visual content which make up the reference material of this thesis. This project analyses the self-reflexivity of the Gezi participants which can be traced in Vine loops, Twitter rants and videos on YouTube through such self-conversations that are, so to say, made public. Such conversations can reveal self-awareness on a variety of levels from the physical, such as distress from teargas or physical injuries, to conceptual, such as the depiction of protesters picking up rubbish in the morning to represent the environmentalist and constructive nature of the movement in general. However, Leary (2004) points out that it is not only the self that provides a layer of interpretation by default, but also that an excessive self-awareness resulting from explicit observation interferes with behaviour (p. 35). Hence, when thinking about the self in Leary's terms in the context of online social networks, it is necessary to presuppose factors such as interpretation (or perspective) and performance resulting from such hyper self-awareness.

Boyd (2008) defines “social network sites” as a “networked public” which displays “persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences” (p. 120). Hence, online social networks provide extended periods of exposure for any “speech act”, the possibility to find “digital bodies” with ease, the inability to distinguish between



originality vs. replication, and the “invisible audiences” whose experience is further challenged by the former three properties of such networks. Such qualities of online social networks regarding replicability, persistence and audiences are significant in political contexts whereby the happenings, regardless of their nature, remain open to infinite attempts at re-observation as both digital memory and persistent acts of dissent. The “replicability” of content makes it possible to store historical evidence from various perspectives. Another integral quality Boyd documents about online social networks (Myspace in her case) is identity formation through selective representation and reflexivity, and this very quality of online identity building parallels Giddens’ (1991) “self-reflexive biographies” (p. 54).

Focusing on the concept of self-awareness in the case of YouTube, Wesch’s (2009) identifies “an infinite number of contexts collapsing upon one another into that single moment of recording” as part of the video bloggers’ experiences (p. 23). This means that creators are hyper-aware of the audience, reception and feedback processes that will flow into the production of content. He goes on to argue that this phenomenon can result in a “crisis of self-presentation” (2009, p. 23) in front of the “invisible audience” –or as Boyd (2008) calls it an “infinite audience”. The difference between Boyd’s (2008) “infinite audience” and Wesch’s “invisible audience” is the inclusion of a future self in Wesch’s concept; he observes that the anxiety of pleasing one’s future self is also part of this crisis (p. 24). As long as the vlogger<sup>6</sup> is happy with the output of their past self, this process results in “the construction of an ideal private [realm] outside of all contexts” (p. 25). Gonzales and Hancock (2011) also emphasise the role of “selective self-presentation” on Facebook for users to present themselves

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<sup>6</sup> Video blogger.

in a self-satisfying manner (p. 80). Could documenting the street presence of oneself be key in urging one's future self or one's infinite audiences to participate?

Feldman's (2012a) interpretation of "social media use" as involving a coexistence of inclusion and exclusion breaks with the "binaried view of belonging as a discourse of either/or" (p. 314). The concept of "templatisation" concerns website templates as controlling the boundaries of belonging (p. 308). In the contexts studied in this thesis, it has become possible for users to manipulate these boundaries through multi-modal content not limited by the template such as pictures, video and audio as well as repurposing or appropriating existing elements of the template such as the use of hashtags and geotags outside of their intended purpose. Thus, online political participation as in the case of Gezi and anti-coup protests can turn either belonging (selfhood) or "'bad' belonging" (otherness) (Feldman, 2012a, p.308) into (political) statements. Feldman (2012a) emphasises the blurring of the boundary between the self and the other online, hence, in such environments all observations become a type of reflexive project as what is analysed is both the self and the other.

Thumim (2012) situates the role of self-representation as a political act whereby an individual or collective has the opportunity represent themselves rather than being represented by another entity (p. 8). The notion of an "unmediated self-representation" undermines the role of technology in shaping the meaning making processes while drawing attention away from these processes of mediation which necessitate analysis (Ibid, pp. 50, 56). Thumim (2012) argues that self-representation is both an opportunity and a prerequisite for participation online (p. 137). Self-representation is never unmediated, in fact, it is subject to all three processes of (institutional, textual and cultural) mediation but self-representation has potential to be mediated differently online in comparison to on broadcast media or in museums

and art galleries (Thumim, 2012, p. 154). For Thumim (2012) the contradictory definitions of self-representations as both ordinary and unique and their ability to make sense out of context puts the researcher in a position of discomfort, by making them question their value for analytical attention (pp. 160, 161). Thumim (2012) observes it is necessary to analyse different aspects of mediation in light of an understanding of self-representation as a genre that produces different examples in terms of their “politics, purpose, conditions of production...” which need to be scrutinised (p.167). While different examples of the genre of self-representation may look similar, the analysis of the mediation processes will reveal the “political difference” between them (Ibid, p. 180).

Stuart Allan (2013) observes that in the case of a premeditated modality of citizen-witnessing, the citizen is self-reflexively engaged in purposeful witnessing as an individual who is moved to document atrocities that they are facing due to their professional or personal role in a certain happening (p. 174-5). Allan’s argument reflects that self-reflexivity of the individual places them in a position of power and responsibility, giving them the recognition of the necessity to document a happening. Allan (2013) emphasises the importance of young people embracing “their civic selves” and “contributing to democratic cultures in self-reflexively meaningful, purposeful ways” (p.151). As such self-reflexivity, is not only afforded by the technologies but also is a step toward a purposeful self-identification.

Regarding “presentations of the self” as “networked performances” using trending hashtags on Twitter, Papacharissi (2012) observes that networked technologies enhance the variety of audiences as well as facilitate the exposure multiple voices or personality aspects of an individual (p. 1992). Aiming to maintain “a coherent narrative of the self, individuals become increasingly self-reflective and self-aware

(ibid). Papacharissi explains the ever-changing nature of the self through multiple voices or aspects of one's personality with reference to Giddens' ongoing project of the self, or by reference to the difference between the present and the future self in Wesch's terms. Papacharissi (2012) argues that such multiple voices can result from information communication technologies' tendency to "populate the self with multiple, disparate, and even competing potentials for being" (p. 1992). Tracing the performative strategies in trending conversations on Twitter, the author finds that practices of playfulness, polysemy, authorship, redaction, affect, and improvisation are prevalent among the subjects (pp. 1994, 2000, 2001). Papacharissi's arguments echo Turkle's (1995) view of online selves as open to experimentation and as written reconstructions of the self (p. 643). Papacharissi (2015) sees play in self-representations as a result of "increased reflexivity, awareness of the self and its surroundings, and a desire for security (p. 108)" from misinterpretation. Tweets as self-referential attempts at communicating the private worlds of users to the public and "the personal to the civic" bear "political potential (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 112)." These attempts are personalised and self-referential contributions to a collaborative (rather than collective) conversation (Ibid, p. 113.) Affect is a major aspect of the "expressive and connective gestures" afforded on OSNs (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 113). Consequently, affect, through its declarative power, carries intensity "and expression of how intensely something is felt can be a potentially political act (Ibid, p. 114)." Tiidenberg and Whelan (2017) argue that practices of self-representation include but are not limited to selfies and that selfies do not necessitate representation of one's physical presence. Much like Thumin (2012), Tiidenberg and Wheelan (2017) emphasise the importance of local context and "situational knowledge and familiarity with shared histories and priorities" in making sense of self-representations online

(pp. 149, 151). Tiidenberg and Wheelan's (2017) understanding of "non-selfies" indicates that self-reflexivity does not depend on seeing oneself but can also happen through the assembling of multimodal narrative about oneself. Tiidenberg and Whelan (2017) define online self-representation posts as *intertextual assemblages* made of "content, hashtags, and captions (p. 144)" as well as *multimodal* or as combining multiple kinds of images with multiple kinds of text. These definitions parallel this thesis' treatment of online video posts and the multimodal aspect of online video posts has informed the terminology of their analyses in Chapter 3.

### ***Empowering Self-Reflexivity: A Welcome Side Effect of the Selfie***

One of the most prominent cultural products resulting from access to smart phones and image/video sharing practices on online social networks is the selfie, a term which became the Oxford Dictionaries word of the year in 2013 (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). The selfie is a cultural product that has been and continues to be interpreted in ambivalent ways. The primary example sentence that accompanies Oxford Dictionaries' definition of selfie as of 30 April 2018, points at the moralistically prescriptive attitude towards this mode of self-representation: "occasional selfies are acceptable, but posting a new picture of yourself every day isn't necessary" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). A survey of the literature on the definition of the term and the concept as well as its everyday usage also reveals a similar ambivalence caused by the mainstream media's representation of the selfie as the ultimate product of "pathological narcissism" as opposed to its recognition as a tool for empowerment for otherised and disenfranchised individuals (Senft & Baym, 2015; Katz & Elizabeth, 2015; Brager, 2015; Warfield et al., 2016; Duguay, 2016; Abidin, 2016).

Lüders et al.'s (2010) study on two online genres, the "online diary" and the "camphone" self-portrait," postulates that the genre conventions create a guide for new users to initiate and develop their own unique styles of communication (p. 956). The study also emphasizes the moment when "the digital camera converged with the mobile phone," turning self-portraiture into a mundane practice (Lüders et al., 2010, p. 959), thereby democratizing the genre of self-portrait: from being "a bourgeois, exclusive, high art, the camphone self-portrait has become an extensive everyday art form for ordinary people" (p. 960). The democratisation of the self-portrait in the form of selfies and the promotion of camphones or their more enhanced equivalent, namely smartphones, are crucial when considering the role of smartphones in the Gezi movement. As exposure is democratised, the voices of dissent are expected to be heard more prevalently than before, however, in most cases this very exposure risks more state control and censorship in terms of revealing participants' identities, increasing the risk of being profiled or targeted by the state, or resorting to self-censorship due to the fear of such profiling.

The selfie's direct relation to the body, whether through its representation of the extending arm connecting the proximate subject to the camera and the image (Hess, 2015, p. 1640) or through its "disciplining" effect in terms of its relationship to the camera (i.e. the smartphone) (Losh, 2015), contributes to this ambivalence as the representation of the subject's body evokes contradictory arguments such as the commodification of these bodies in line with hegemonic ideologies (Miltner & Baym, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2015) versus great potential for diverse representations of bodies regarding shape, colour, gender, health, ability etc. (Duguay, 2016; Nemer & Freeman, 2015). However, some multimodal self-representational posts on online social networks have also been defined in relation to this relationship as "not-selfies"

(Tiidenberg & Wheelan, 2017). The samples analysed in this thesis are video posts on Vine and Facebook. The following chapters will reveal the prominence of the “selfie video” and their potential to provide opportunities of visibility and free speech for participation in political culture. Selfie literature thereby offers crucial references for the analysis and theorisation of this dissertation’s Vine and Facebook video posts as many examples from both Gezi and anti-coup video posts make diverse uses of selfie practices in relation to political participation by intuitively applying principles specific to the selfie (a non-moving image which is a personal production and distribution of a visual reference to oneself) to the medium of video, thereby creating “selfie videos”.

### **Meta-Activism: Activism about Activism**

With the contemporary acknowledgement of necessity and obligation for an online existence or sociality complimenting an offline in Web 2.0 studies (Van Dijck, 2013; Fuchs, 2013; Boyd, 2015), a person’s very existence becomes a merging of their virtual and physical being. The danger of neoliberal capitalistic techno-determinism as warned against by Fuchs (2013) also necessitates a demystification of the use of online social networks in political participation through a functional and theoretical analysis of said technologies with regards to their limits and advantages. Therefore, this study undertakes a close-reading of user-generated content (video posts on Vine and Facebook) to track such limitations and capabilities afforded by online social networks in terms of participating in political culture with reference to two specific historical contexts in Turkey: the 2013 Gezi movement and the 2016 anti-coup movement. User-generated content regarding these two historical contexts are complimented by a historical overview of changes in Internet law during the AKP’s

rule and the evolution of the party's "social media"<sup>7</sup> tactics. The analysis of the video posts in these contexts do not depend on concepts such as "thin and thick engagement" (Zuckerman, 2014)"and high or "low cost participation" (Theocaris, 2015) as "whether an act is online or offline often has no simple relationship to whether it is a costly or even an honest signal" (Tüfekçi, 2017, p.203). They reveal self-reflexive modes of participation that make use of smartphone applications and online social networks. Therefore, I propose that meta-activism can be instrumental in thinking about political participation in the post-smartphone era.

Over the years, theorists introduced a variety of concepts that dealt with the intersection of the Internet and online social networks with political participation or activism. Some of these concepts such as *cyberactivism*, *online activism*, *digital activism* and *hacktivism* focused on the activism aspect by placing it firmly in the virtual realm. The notion of cyberactivism or online activism presents a principally separate understanding of online and offline activism (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). Studies on cyberactivism placed online activism as a tool for so-called "RL" (real life) activism by making comparisons between online and offline methods and/or defined exclusively online work (such as hacktivism, online petitions or cyber-protest) as cyberactivism (Ayers, 2003; Gurak & Logie, 2003; Vegh, 2003). These approaches placed online work in the realm of communication rather than seeing them as happening in the physical world. Even though understandings of cyberactivism received a revamp in the second decade of 2000's with the introduction of online social networks (McCaughey, 2014), the term itself remains problematic in defining an activism that does not demarcate offline and online actions. The term

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<sup>7</sup> The term social media here is used to refer to the umbrella term most frequently used by party officials and the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to refer to social networks, forums, collective dictionaries and encyclopedia, messaging apps that predominantly operate online.



cyberactivism contradicts the activist practices of the 2010's and beyond because it semantically poses a limitation on the concept by isolating it in the cyber realm. The notion of *digital activism* also refers to such an isolation of *digital* work including hacktivism, denial of service attacks, hashtag activism, and open source advocacy (Joyce 2010). As a sub-category of cyberactivism or digital activism, hacktivism has been approached as “informational politics” (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, p.119), therefore, concerning the realm of information separate from the physical world. The term hacktivism, thus, could define a very limited set of practices that were isolated in the world of information technologies. Thus, these terms continue to emphasise the value difference between online and offline efforts and legitimise the usage of the Internet and online social networks as a tool or support for street activism. These concepts compartmentalise different modes of activism and, thus, too limiting to define political participation at the online/offline nexus.

Castells' (2012) *networked social movements* provides a cyber-optimistic description of the usage of the Internet and online social networks in the transnational movements of the 2010's and the notion of *mass self-communication* (Castells, 2009) provides a general description for self-representation on online social networks. Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) *connective action* is a category of collective action that is “digitally mediated” however, the concept lacks in its consideration of different types of political action and focuses only on progressive practices which “embraced an ethos of inclusiveness.” (p. 24). This assumption about digitally mediated action, thus, draws a false parallel between the usage of digital technologies in political participation and political alignments and affiliations. Similarly, Castells' (2012) focus on progressive movements such as the Arab Uprisings, the Spanish indignadas, Occupy Wall Street and the Gezi Movement, isolates the concept of *networked social*

*movements* to progressive activism. Additionally, the principle of “digital mediation” in connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), again, confines online actions into the realm of information rather than seeing them as actions in and of themselves. As such, none of these concepts provide a theoretical basis for the consideration of online video posts as acts of protest within themselves, regardless of their references to the physical world.

On the other hand, concepts aimed to redefine the developing aspects of media such as *polymedia* (Madianou and Miller, 2012) and *hybrid media* (Chadwick, 2013) emphasise the diversity of opportunities provided by Internet and online social networks. The concept of *polymedia* (Madianou and Miller, 2012) focuses on the way users navigate their needs and the affordances of a diverse selection of media available to them. However, the notion of *multimodality* (Toolan, 2010) acknowledges not only the variety of users’ communication strategies for and choices of different hardware and software but also provides a model for the variety of the modes of expression within each unit of communication such as Tumblr posts that make use of memes (Tiidenberg and Wheelan, 2017). Chadwick’s (2013) *hybrid media system* provides a description of the power relations between politicians, media professionals and non-media professionals with regards to political communication; however, the hierarchical relationship assumed by Chadwick between “elite” and “non-elite” actors discounts how “non-elite” actors, or users of online social networks, can set the agenda independently and in no particular need for or reaction to such elite media professionals.

The dichotomy between classifications of activism and classifications of media made to reconcile the offline and the online parallel the binarism of their respective claims to subjectivity and objectivity. As the concept of *media activism* (which is a broader

term that encompasses cyber-, digital or online activism) can demonstrate, media(tion) and activism are rarely seen as having the potential to refer to the same activity. One exception to this is citizen witnessing as self-reflexive engagement (Allan, 2013, p.174-5) which conceptually necessitates the witnessing of an event and places value on the act of mediation with regards to its revelatory status. However, one of the arguments I make with the concept of meta-activism is that in the face of mass media censorship, surveillance and unrelenting police violence, recording and broadcasting any unique content which expresses dissent on any online or offline platform is political participation regardless of its thickness, cost or its witnessing value. The terms “recording” and “broadcasting” used here encompass capturing, reporting, posting, sharing, liking, tweeting as well as retweeting and resharing any kind of information depicting a political action (however impossible it may be to determine unique content). Such online action is a mediating action depicting a political action (offline or online) which, consequently, becomes a political action in itself. It is a politically charged action referring to/about another politically charged action, therefore, it is an act of meta-activism.

In this regard, the notion of meta-activism is also a critique of discourses of nostalgia and authenticity present in the understanding and legitimisation of some political activities and the people who partake in such activities (physical participation in demonstrations, belonging to civic organisations, physical tasks related to education and mobilisation) as more superior to others (any online political activity and/or any person who partakes in online political activities) (Morozov, 2009; Gladwell, 2010; White, 2010). It is also a critique of the notion that technology is a neutral tool that can be used to good and bad ends has been criticised for being “too imprecise to be helpful in understanding the role of a particular technology” (Tüfekçi, 2017, p. 124).

Meta-activism pays due diligence to political engagement efforts of ordinary users who were presumed by critiques to be “naïve or deluded” (Zuckerman, 2014, p. 153) by considering participation via online social networks as participation in its own right.

The paradoxical nature of the notion of political activism is apparent in the contradiction between its romanticised image, which is informed by anti-establishment sentiments, and its practical image, as a network of hierarchical organisations depending on the validation of certain individuals as activists, who have secured a seat at this elite club of amateurs in political and social change. The correlation between the requirements to be legitimised as an activist, namely making oneself known as present in certain situations and circles, and the resources of those who most easily attain this identity, such as celebrities, point to the importance of publicising or, in simpler terms, making visible one’s political activities by all means possible. The “professional” activist can be the expert with no necessary personal connection with an issue and, hence, no risk of retaliation (Tufekci, 2014, p. 205). Thus, professional or “real life” activism does not necessitate self-reflexivity, which for both McLuhan (2011) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), is necessary for a consciousness or non-biased understanding of other human beings.

Studies that focus on the commercialisation of social media (Fuchs, 2013), and emphasise this commercialisation as the primary obstruction to any emancipatory potential these media may provide (Fenton & Barassi, 2011), do not refer to the commercialisation of activism and political culture at large (Thompson, 2003; Fisher, 2006; Dauvergne & LeBaron, 2014). This dissertation’s hypothesis is that despite the commercialisation of political culture, everyday people find new ways to circumvent the limitations posed by such commercialisation through genuine acts of resistance.

Sometimes the most striking political acts happen in the midst of and despite commercialised environments: Turkish football teams' fans protesting as part of the Gezi protests (Irak, 2015) or outside of it, at the risk of bans and fines against "ideological propaganda" (Sendika.Org, 2016); spontaneous protests in stores, bars, shopping malls (Kurt, 2013); Gezi supporters raising money to buy a full page ad in the New York Times (McCarthy & Jalabi, 2013); the luxurious Divan Hotel intentionally providing refuge to Gezi protesters (Hürriyet Daily News, 2013). As this project will demonstrate, sometimes the only way for such acts of resistance to be known is via their mass communication through online social networks. The prejudice towards the potential for such circumventions on commercial online social networks therefore lacks reference to diverse contexts, where such circumventions are made possible by not necessarily professional activists but by ordinary people's self-reflexive participation both online and offline.

Hence, this dissertation argues that meta-activism problematises both activism that makes use of online presence and traditional understandings of so-called offline activism such as physical presence/protest/combat at a certain location in a given time period. Meta-activism makes use of online social networks and video-streaming practices provided by them, as self-identification, self-representation, self-promotion and self-reflexivity have the potential for some people to become faster and more convenient through mobile shooting, editing, streaming/posting and viewing technologies. The process of meta-activism involves the identifying, referencing, describing, critiquing, representing and, in turn, prescribing of activist practices.

## **Naming and Defining Meta-Activism**

The ambiguity of the term activism serves to explain a variety of practices such as partaking in democratic processes, performing revolutionary acts, working at a non-governmental organisation and even living according to a set of principles that demand/contribute to (progressive or retrogressive) social or political change (Yang, 2016, p. 2-3). I came up with the term meta-activism as a response to Lev Manovich's (2002) framing of digital media as meta-media. While Manovich sees the abstraction of meta-media as at a lower level compared to the original term media, I do not imply any hierarchical relationship between activism and meta-activism. Meta-activism, however, means activism about activism or activism that refers to activism. Earlier uses of the prefix meta- with this self-referential connotation can be seen in W. V. Quine's (1937) "Logic based on Inclusion and Abstraction" and Douglas Hofstadter's (1979) *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. However, the meta- in meta-activism corresponds more to its contemporary meaning deemed to be "self-referential" (Zimmer, 2012). As discussed earlier, activism may or may not be self-reflexive but meta-activism is consciously self-reflexive, therefore, self-referential. This reflexivity also disentangles the problem of authenticity when it comes to the separation of authentic (commonly seen as old school street activism) and less authentic (online activism) or inauthentic (clicktivism) political participation. The concept of meta-activism demonstrates the conscious self-referentiality of all of these actions and questions the sustainability of theories of classification which attempt comparisons of "marches from the past with marches of today by using the same metrics" as they constitute "different phenomena that arise in different ways, and, most important, they signal different future paths" (Tüfekçi, 2017, p. 61). Furthermore, meta-activism requires a more horizontal comparison across a variety of contexts of political

participation in similar technological contexts. Hence, the first question is whether such a hierarchy of authenticity can be possible between entangled acts of political participation which depend on each other; and, the second one is if these acts are divided and classified according to their claimed authenticity, how accurate can their definitions be while being generalised enough to allow them to represent a classification of worthy vs. unworthy activism depending solely on their physicality and virtuality.

Meta-activism is both a form of writing (a multimedia performance) as well as form of a reading, a manipulation and use of all (old and new) media. Meta-activism makes use of online social networks to initiate action, to form a strategy, to make a statement; it also enables one to see the bigger picture and participants' place within it. Meta-activism is participating *physically* and/or *virtually* through one's smartphone and, therefore, it is being informed of the camera and the screen. Finally, meta-activism merges, records, represents and reviews virtual and physical action as one. In this regard, meta-activism is also a creative form of political participation but this creativity cannot discount its sincerity or value. Contrarily, this creativity is a tactic used to outrun, bypass and circumvent contextual hindrances such as censorship, blocking of access to information, intimidation and profiling.

By regarding political participation through the usage of online social networks as meta-activism, the concept's emphasis on self-referentiality demonstrates online actions, objectives and outcomes as unbreakably linked to offline actions, objectives and outcomes, and vice versa. The self-referentiality of meta-activism, thus, operates on both a conceptual and a definitional level. Meta-activism denigrates the overlapping of activism and cyber-/digital/online activism. Meta-activism is a self-reflexive mediation of an act of political participation and this mediation itself is an

act of political participation. Thus, this mediation is not a sub-category of political participation (as is the aforementioned concepts similar to online activism); rather meta-activism is both mediation and political participation. Meta-activism's status as political participation does not stem from its reference to a more legitimate or original form of participation. Meta-activism is not online activism but encompasses both online and offline activism. Meta-activism also involves the self-reflexivity of the individual and the self-reflexivity of the community/movement they are affiliated with. This self-reflexivity shapes the psychology of the participant through both visual (images of the self) and textual (narratives of the self) means afforded by smartphone technologies and online social networks.

The announcement of future actions such as calls to action as well as the evidence of occurring actions such as live or instant video or image-based broadcasting of street protest can be defined as meta-activism as these online actions are acts of political participation within themselves while referring to other political actions. On the other hand, online commentary such as direct and indirect political messages, satire and reports via writing, drawing, animation or video can also be defined as meta-activism. Depictions of everyday occurrences that may not reflect a political message out of context, are politicised in meta-activism due to the tensions between dominant and alternative meaning making, between narratives and counter narratives. In this regard, the consideration of the contexts under which such actions are taking place is definitive.



## **Meta-Activism in Context**

To avoid ending up in a tautological trap, it is necessary to determine the circumstances under which meta-activism occur, at least as seen in the Vine posts by Gezi participants and Facebook video posts by anti-coup protesters.) As “the true cost of the act requires examining the political context rather than looking only at the act itself (Tüfekçi, 2017, p.203), what is considered meta-activism in one political, virtual or social context may not be considered as such in others. This project tackles this by proposing an axis of capabilities and hindrances that help to compare the circumstances evident in each of the historical contexts where online video posts have been created. The first point of variation is the level of censorship as opposed to freedom of speech in each context to producers and consumers of information on online social networks in particular and on all mass media platforms in general. As such, the high level of censorship and the social media ban during the 2013 Gezi protests is contrasted by the total promotion of information and enabling of social media resources by the government and major internet/mobile service providers during 2016’s coup attempt. The following chapters will reveal the effect of this variation in the level of information dissemination in the very video posts resulting from each context.

While Gezi protests were attended and supported by representatives of rival parties and a variety of non-governmental organisations and political groups, the anti-coup demonstrations were organised through regular government orders to local AKP governments as well as a country-wide network of mosques. This difference in the organisation and structure of the crowds brings us to the second and third points of variation: respectively, political and cultural heterogeneity versus the political and cultural homogeneity of their participant bodies and physical (police violence,

limited/no public transportation) and technical obstructions (throttling and blocking internet access) as opposed to physical (protection by the state, free public transportation) and technical (free internet access and free data gifted by internet service providers) enhancements.

It is important to note that, one of the reasons why low cost actions should be considered as meta-activism – and thus part of activism at large – is the specific contexts under which everyday actions can have a decisive role in the maintenance of a public image and for engendering empathy and identification with a movement. These contexts could involve – as in the case of the 2013 Gezi protests and 2016’s coup attempt – a complete media blackout and/or coordinated manipulation of an event or extreme media coordination leading to homogeneous reports of an event as a result of a dense history of financial and political interests leading to a system of expectations and rewards between media giants and the government or the state. In addition, there is the issue of the self-censorship of individual agents who fear being labelled, cast out of society and even persecuted for expressions or acts of dissent. These include systemic discouragement and intimidation as a result of poor urban infrastructure and transportation, the lack of social integration, and discriminatory social conventions against disabled, under-age, female or non-gender-normative individuals.

As this project will reveal in its analysis of Vine posts by Gezi participants, indirect/non-political statements can become manifestations of political engagement and act as ultimate examples of meta-activism. Hence, meta-activism is not solely concerned with content (evidencing the “thickness” or “cost” of the act) but also with the physical, virtual and political contexts in which such content is created. As acts of meta-activism, Vine posts by Gezi participants depict actions referring to other

politically-charged actions and such acts of meta-activism are, thus, politically-charged and exist as political actions in and of themselves. This is partly because these videos exist in the face of website blockings, internet service outages and other forms of deterrence used by the government to silence activists' voices (Usta, 2014), but also because they remain as re-manifestations of scattered acts of protest, like the pots and pans protests, that would otherwise have remained unseen or unknown outside of their locality.

Some of the personal videos of the anti-coup protesters also have the potential to be considered as meta-activism regardless of their political implications and messages. Some of the videos provide substantial resources for the identification of different aspects of the government apparatus while revealing important information about those who willingly support, follow and act on behalf of that apparatus. However, happening in the safe support and sponsorship system of local and national governments, these pro-governmental posts are not created to reveal such information. On the other hand, video posts that depict the night of the coup attempt are meta-activism while video posts of demonstrations from other times are not. This is due to a changing set of capabilities and hindrances regarding control over media and mobility between the night of the coup attempt and in its aftermath.

This project takes the online and offline hindrances faced by participation in the Gezi protests as a recipe for the application of meta-activism. As such, censorship on the Internet, online social networks, as well as on television, newspaper and radio as well as the life-threatening circumstances that define the realm of offline political action are the two primary reasons for posting videos online as an act of protest that allows self-preservation. Firstly, as censorship is evaded through such dissemination of information, such posts can be seen as both acts of resistance and as circumventing

oppression. Secondly, because political action on the street poses a threat to the wellbeing of protesters due to severe police and vigilante violence, transferring political action to online platforms evades this immediate physical threat. This is not to say that online political participation does not have its own risks such as detainment, being tagged by the state, as well as facing cyber- and real life threats due to the wider exposure of one's actions on online social networks. In some cases, online participation in political action is both a necessity and a solution and, thus, overlaps with offline political activism.

This project reconstructs participation in the Gezi and anti-coup protests outside of, first, the categories of authenticity informing the popular notion of the activist and, second, through the lenses of the production and mediation of actions, ideas and identities of dissent. To begin, all online and offline action need to be seen as complementary and interwoven and all singular acts of political participation online and offline as occurring with reference to each other. Also, it is necessary to consider all legal and physical threats posed to both types of action. While offline action is immediately binding in terms of legal and physical repercussions, online actions are therefore binding in the long term, with the prerequisite of visual evidence of this action that is distributable and accessible by even more agents.

This study considers two specific historical and political contexts with regard to the dissemination of information about a certain online or offline action in media-related axis of hindrances such as censorship, bans, network and ISP related interventions as well as allowances such as the continual promotion of information, unimpeded internet and social media access, and network/ISP enhancements. This comparative analyses of contextual circumstances and content produced and distributed by the participants of each context helps to solidify the definition of meta-activism.

While a majority of the studies of the Gezi protests make a note of the critical role the Internet and online social networks played in the Gezi movement, there is a need to consider the very practical ways in which the Internet has informed the modes of communication, exposure and access, ranging from the extensive use of online social networks during the summer of Gezi to the appropriation of these methods by President Erdogan and AKP government during and after 2016's attempted coup. This thesis compares the use of personal video posts on online social networks during the respective contexts of the Gezi and anti-coup movements in light of the trajectory of Internet law and the AKP government's "social media" strategies. Thereby, the thesis emphasises the political and societal circumstances, which, in the case of Gezi, led to the proliferation of political participation at the online-offline nexus and, in the case of the coup attempt, led the AKP government, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his followers to appropriate this same mode of participation. The differences between these two contexts will reveal the nuances of the concept of meta-activism. The concept of meta-activism in relation to the Gezi movement and the anti-coup protests is aimed at demarcating the overlapping of online activism and activism through the daily usage of smartphone technologies and online social networks. In this regard, the thesis aims to provide an understanding of political participation at the online/offline nexus that is not informed by outdated terminology and concepts that have survived the migration from the online/offline divide. Furthermore, the concept of meta-activism is used to define the potential of posts on online social networks to exist as acts of political participation independent of their service or function for another, more legitimate form of political participation. Meta-activism is also used as a more inclusive term for the consideration of the political participation of

disenfranchised, disabled, dependant or caregiving individuals through online social networks as regular acts of protest.

### **Chapter 3. Analysing Video Posts on Online Social Networks: A Methodology**

How do people use video-capturing, editing and sharing affordances of smartphones and online social networks to participate in protest? How did users of smartphones and online social networks employ such affordances during the Gezi and the anti-coup movements in Turkey? How have the technologically and psychologically enhanced level of self-reflexivity offered by these technologies altered the political participant? What are some of the problematic determinations and biases that have dominated the literature on the Internet, online social networks and political participation? In order to answer these questions, this thesis executes a close analysis of user-generated and/or promoted content distributed on online social networks. In addition, this study emphasises and demonstrates the significance of invisible (non-scrapable) ‘data’ in terms of understanding the contribution and effect of video capturing, editing and distributing features on online social networks available to the public during protests; as a result it proposes a system of non-exclusive *themes* and *perspectives* or *tones* that can aid in the classification of qualitative data such as video posts. These can also be considered in conjunction with metadata-based quantitative research on online social networks in the Turkish context. Despite the temporal and systemic challenges that online social networks pose in terms of the manual collection and analysis of posts in the form of (d)evolving algorithms, access issues and other challenges such as the manual accumulation, organisation and storage of bulky datasets, focusing on such invisible data also reveals how users manipulate and circumvent the very same algorithmic limitations and changes in a given online social network.

Research on online participation via smartphones in the Gezi and anti-coup protests requires one to observe the participants' various online practices in each respective context. This thesis focuses on a small fraction of the unquantifiable volume of unique content generated on online social networks about the Gezi and anti-coup movements. While deductive methods dealing with large numbers of users, posts and big data can serve to identify popular and commercial trends resulting from political unrest on digital platforms, content analysis based on online posts (such as on platforms like Vine and Facebook) informed by simple quantitative analysis can provide an opportunity to explore the cultural and social contexts within which such trends manifest themselves. Hence, a number of big data studies (MediaCat 2013; Siege Arts, 2013; Konda, 2014; Kılıç, 2016; Konda, 2016; Miş et al., 2016; Sozer, 2016; Yeşil et al., 2017; Büyük & Bozkurt, 2020) examine communication hubs, influencers etc., thereby providing maps with practical information about preferred OSNs and quantitative data about users' motivations for, and methods of, participating online. Case studies relying on qualitative analysis contribute to the understanding of participants' online habits in each movement, particularly with regards to their context and cultural content (Emre et al., 2014; Gurel; 2015; Balaban-Salı & Erben, 2016; Hacıyakupoglu & Zhang, 2016; Odağ et al., 2016; Öztürkcan et al., 2017). This thesis makes use of findings from previous studies dealing with big data to help collect unique content relevant to the period in question. This includes sources like SiegeArts and MediaCat who publish quantitative data on trending topics, user traffic and reach on online social networks in order to determine what popular hashtags and geotags to use in organic searches, which in turn help to collect the data. To illustrate this, while the popularity of certain tags are used to determine relevant bundles of information, this study of online participation during the Gezi protests and anti-coup protests does not take into account the influence or popularity



of identifiable hubs or posts, nor does it analyse the frequency or efficiency of their contributions to the posts analysed. As the aim of the thesis is on the unique content generated by individual participants, content created by corporate and collective online entities that make use of online publicity tools such as public pages and verified accounts have, where possible, been eliminated from the analysis. However, individuals' remediation of such content still provides valuable insights into the participants' content-creation process in the two different historical contexts.

This thesis also presents general quantitative results from the extensive content analyses in each sample, however, such quantitative results are not represented as independent findings but are informed by, and contribute widely to, the findings derived from the qualitative analyses by providing an overview of the sample, thereby helping to demonstrate the recurrence of certain themes, subthemes and perspectives. Typically, an interpretative approach encompassing the visual, textual and meta-data analysis of Vine and Facebook video posts can cover a smaller number of online posts than a big data study is able to with the help of a variety of scraping tools. However, this detailed analysis of social media representations during the selected social movements reveals not only proof of otherwise undocumented patterns and characteristics but also makes clear how and why such online social networks were used in different contexts and under a variety of circumstances.

### **The Historical Context**

The historical contexts, namely, the 2013 Gezi and 2016 anti-coup movements in Turkey have been introduced and detailed in the first chapter and, here, I will demonstrate the significance of these two contexts with reference to the research

questions. In order to explain the process of how I have come to include these two historical contexts, it is important to understand the timeline of this study. This project was motivated by an observation of the Gezi movement and the contextual usage of online social networks by its participants. The Gezi movement was the first and biggest widespread social movement in Turkey that coincided with the proliferation of smartphone technologies and of online social networks. Thus, it presented an unprecedented plethora of information online that raised certain questions for me as a researcher about social movements and the nature of activism in conjunction with questions about the potential difference in political participation as practiced via online social networks. Gezi presented a pivotal moment not only as an unparalleled comprehension of dissent in the history of the twelve-year rule of AKP in Turkey but also as a defining moment in terms of the usage of smartphone technologies and online social networks for such resistance against the government and the state.

I began my project in October 2015 and had completed my pilot project of the analysis of Vine video posts by Gezi participants when the coup-attempt took place before our very eyes. In the beginning, these two contexts seemed very different with different levels, directions and durations of power struggles between different actors: the Gezi movement was the diffusion of an anti-governmental protest against first the anti-environmental rent policies and later the police brutality, censorship and attack on diverse identities and lifestyles; the anti-coup movement was a protest against the coup, led by the government, the parliament and citizens (the majority of which were government loyalists and AKP voters). As explained in Chapter 1, it was the aim of the narrative created by AKP to pit these two movements against one another, to equate Gezi participants with coup plotters and, therefore, enemies of democracy and

the state. This in turn would justify the past, present and future mistreatment and wrongful dismissal, detention, prosecution and conviction of students, academics, politicians, media professionals and public servants for expressions of dissent.

I see the Gezi movement not in contradiction to the anti-coup protests because the notion of a coup, as an anti-democratic intervention, is against the philosophies espoused by the Gezi movement. The Gezi movement was a democratic attempt at gaining the attention of the government and the people of Turkey to point out violations of democracy, freedom of expression and lifestyles. The parallelisms attempted by the AKP government between Gezi participants and coup-plotters/supporters are even more ironic because—in a country which had its people suffer en masse from the political, social and economic regression due to the realised coups of 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997—the Gezi movement strived to protect its inclusive and anti-militarist stance at every stage. Despite the differences in the political and ideological dynamics between the two movements, however, both revolved around Erdogan who was a Prime Minister during Gezi and a President at the time of the coup attempt (Carney, 2019, p.141). The movements not only in political reciprocity in terms of a clash of values such as inclusive secularism vs. nationalist religiousity and but also in their attitudes towards leadership as embodied in the figure of Erdogan as an oppressor versus Erdogan as the martyr President.

What is more, the night of the coup attempt and the anti-coup movement interestingly ignited an interest and encouragement of participation on online social networks by the President and the government officials, adding to the widespread exposure of the anti-coup protests on television and print media. Like the Gezi movement, the anti-coup protests also presented a first in the history of Turkey as well as the history of the Internet in Turkey where politicians sought the help of online social networks and

invited their supporters to participate online as well as on the streets. As a humanity scholar, it is important for me to not limit the discussion of online social networks into its solely progressive or an entirely conservative/retrogressive uses. As such, the discussion of the changing methods of participation in the post-smartphone era does not only apply to one direction of politics. I have, therefore, analysed video posts by both Gezi and anti-coup participants, not knowing whether these two sets of users could intersect. The initial research question of how people participated in politics on online social networks using smartphones apply to both Gezi and anti-coup participants regardless of their political and ideological associations.

As explained in Chapter 1, both events marked decisive points in the attitude of the AKP government towards the Internet and, what they deemed, social media so the chronology of these two movements further provided an opportunity to study the development of Internet law and policy in Turkey. The details of the changes in Internet law in Turkey will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Video Posts on Online Social Networks**

Unlike previous video-recording devices such as the handycam or the video-recording cell phones, the smartphone offers the technology to capture high quality images and audio without the need for additional equipment, to edit, watch and post such footage on online social networks via dedicated video editing/sharing apps like Vine or with the video sharing features of popular online social networks such as Facebook. Consequently, the potential to quickly capture, edit and transmit high quality videos has become as accessible for the general public in Turkey as the country wide penetration of smartphones allow. The penetration of smartphones and mobile

Internet usage in Turkey at the time of the Gezi and anti-coup events have been discussed in Chapter 1.

This potential is also critical in terms of its political consequences as explored previously through the concept of citizen witnessing (Allan, 2013). Video is a medium that provides an immense potential for immediacy due to the capturing of not only image and sound but also motion, therefore, has a greater ability to convince audiences. Raw footage embedded with original meta-data has the power to serve as reliable evidence. On the other hand, videos also present the least opportunity for ordinary users to manipulate the audience when compared to texts and photographs. Therefore, from an audience perspective video content is a more reliable representation of reality than textual and photographic accounts especially with regards to the representation of fast-paced and fleeting events such as political protest.

As discussed in Chapter 2, smartphones also present their users with a mediated self-reflexivity that offers the chance to observe oneself and one's actions from an outside point-of-view and in retrospect. Therefore, the usage of smartphones in political participation implicates an unprecedented level of self-awareness and self-reflexivity for participants. This makes it possible for individuals to broadcast themselves as well as to observe other individuals who do the same. As such, the self-reflexivity of smartphone technologies can extend to the reflexivity of a multitude, a group of people who interact with and participate alongside each other.

Appropriately, video posts on online social networks combine the potential of the medium of video for self-reflexivity and immediacy further with texts (captions and comments) and metadata, providing a variety of modes of expression within one unit. Online video posts notably provide the maximum potential for representation on

online social networks therefore, this thesis analyses such online video posts by participants of the Gezi and anti-coup movements. This choice has been informed by individuals' ability to have relatively easier access to technologies that allow them to create unique, intelligible and easily reproducible content that allows for the network breadth necessary for the widespread distribution of self-made content unlike what was previously possible. The relevance of the video-recording, editing, viewing and distributing technologies provided by smartphones in relation to political protests is, therefore, a worthy subject of analysis, particularly when we compare the impact of hundreds of mobile recording devices on the street or at home with that of a handful of bulky cameras controlled by professional camera operators.

### **Selected Video-Sharing Platforms**

#### *“Smart” Devices and Vine.co*

Vine was a video service that provided a mobile video recording application and a website that displayed videos on mobile and desktop devices. The mobile application was available both for IOS and for Android devices from 2013-2016. The application made it possible to shoot “short looping videos” for 6 seconds and allowed for real-time editing and in June 2016 it rolled out experiments such as 140 second video attachments (Newton, 2016). After being acquired by Twitter, Vine was officially launched on 24 January 2013 for iOS and became the number one free app on the United States iOS App Store on 9 April 2013, followed by the launch of an Android version on June 2 of the same year (Souppouris, 2013). Hamburger (2013) observes that Vine's co-founder, Dom Hofmann, is a “film-nerd” who wanted to create an application that “simplified the act of film-making” through “invisible measures”

such as encoding a video while it is being recorded and crossfading audio between different shots, thereby allowing for a faster rendering of visuals and smoother sound-mixing (Hamburger, 2013). Vine's creative approach was also promoted in Twitter's announcement of the Vine application's launch: "[T]he brevity of videos on Vine (6 seconds or less) inspires creativity. Now that you can easily capture motion and sound, we look forward to seeing what you create" (Sippey, 2013).

In January 2017, Twitter announced that the application would become an offline camera application while the Vine archive would remain online, however, the mobile application would no longer allow for the uploading of videos online (Vincent, 2017). In 2017, Vine.co archives homepage claimed that: "Vine creators have shaped pop culture" (Vine.co, 2017).

As an online social network with an application that allowed users to capture, edit and post video content via smartphones, Vine presents a very specific example as a network application that can only create videos on smartphones. Hence, at the time of this study Vine videos could only be captured via a mobile device and, thus, they were consistently original creations of users who turned these into video posts with hashtags, geotags and captions. At the time online social network applications such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and (newly) Instagram had begun to allow video sharing through the importation of videos that were captured outside of the applications. So these applications would allow any footage captured by anyone or downloaded from any source to be shared as one's own video post. None of these applications offered a video capturing or live streaming service. On the other hand, as an application that offered both video capturing and live streaming for long durations, Ustream suffered from a reduced streaming quality and did not provide many opportunities for creative editing or sound-mixing. When these aspects are considered, Vine combined the

creativity and relatively higher quality of a dedicated video-capturing, editing and sharing application with the potential for a wide reach through opportunities to re-share content created on the platform on other online social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. The brevity of the videos challenged users to be creative and concise, which made these videos easy to share and to watch during a period of information overload about the protests. At the time of the Gezi Protests in June and July 2013, as a dedicated video creation and dissemination service with such advantages, there was no alternative to what Vine could offer in terms of quality of video, practicality of use as well as opportunities for rapid creation and consumption of video posts. In time, realising the appeal of this concept, many applications such as Instagram and Snapchat and, recently, TikTok adopted the quick and easy video editing and sharing concepts.

Commentators at the time of the protests and later Saka (2020) observed during and after the protests that Vine became a preferred application for participants (Groll, 2013; Meredith, 2013; Saka, 2020, pp. 37-38). Its focus on video-making and sharing provided not only verbal but also visual and audial self-awareness for its users. This awareness is the basis of the self-reflexive project of meta-activism as smartphone-ready online social networks allow for a significantly higher level of user self-reflexivity unlike previous forms of social media including television channels, newspapers, magazines, fanzines and flyers. Vine was also available on tablet devices which could be used with 3G or WiFi connections during the Gezi protests and Gezi Park's occupation. However, such devices' relative lack of ergonomic convenience combined with the scarcity of battery recharging amenities during the occupation and street protests, lowers the probability of street participants having to use a tablet or other larger mobile device on the streets. It is possible that parts of the sample may



have resulted from participants' usage of such devices, however, as there is no way in my method to determine if a video post has been captured via a tablet device – unless revealed by the user—there may be video posts in the sample which may have resulted from participants' usage of such devices. To make this clearer, the consideration of smartphone technologies and content recorded, edited and distributed through such technologies potentially includes posts created on tablet devices. It is not only the lack of machine analysis that makes it impossible to determine which posts were created through the use of tablets or phones (unless made explicit by the user or in the content itself), but in addition information regarding this difference has no bearing or relevance in terms of the arguments made in this thesis. Hence, the focus on the term 'smartphone' emphasises the representational possibilities provided by this particular device and prioritises its ability to be carried around with little or no effort, unlike a tablet device which calls for relatively more effort. Smartphones' potential to capture image, sound and video, and their ability to connect to popular online social networks via 3G and WiFi connections were put to effective use during the Gezi protests.

While considering possible representation patterns, medium-specific features such as the six-second Vine videos and the time-lapse feature have been taken into consideration in terms of this dissertation's identification of themes, perspectives and subthemes. For example, a Vine post may show a police vehicle approaching protesters with no sign of violence and brutality; however, past or imminent brutality can be expressed in the caption or in preceding/subsequent video posts. Occurrences missed in the editing or cut off given the brevity of the videos have been taken into consideration as far as they were expressed openly through other modes of communication such as captions or comments by the users themselves, the tags or the

meta-data. That said, the research takes as its subject matter a selection of online representations by the Gezi participants regardless of their offline/street positioning or activity. Indeed, the variety of audiences anticipated by the users has informed the differences between themes such as ‘park cleaning’ which are aimed at non-park goers. Others that depict ‘action’ can be intended for other protesters who might be looking for on the ground safety information. In addition, the online social network and application Vine was compatible with mobile 3G and available for both iOS and Android smartphones during the summer of Gezi. The penetration of said technologies have been briefly discussed in Chapter 1.

### ***Vine’s Online Archive and Search Engine***

This dissertation’s findings relating to Vine posts by Gezi participants is based on a pilot study conducted in February 2016. When I began the study of Gezi-related video posts, Vine constituted a consistent archive in terms of allowing one to search videos by using hashtags and geotags. This meant that whenever I opened Vine, even as an anonymous user or viewer, and searched using the same tags, I could find identical video posts unless they had been deleted by the users who posted them. Hence, from February 2016 until the end of that year, I was able to go back to certain video posts and see them again, re-analyse them, and take screenshots of the entire video post. Soon after, the application’s dwindling popularity resulted in many video posts from the sample disappearing, perhaps because users (1) deactivated their accounts or (2) deleted videos related to Gezi in the wake of the coup attempt when the clampdown on anti-governmental discourse in Turkey reached its peak. This demise was also apparent during the coup attempt when the application was scarcely used. As I will explain in more detail, this unpopularity which may have been a result

of the anti-coup protesters' unfamiliarity with or disdain for the application, which in turn might have prompted by the lack of coup-related content on Vine in July 2016, which was the initial reason for my choice of Facebook for the study of video posts related to the coup attempt.

As speculations circulated about Twitter deciding to shut down the video service came true at the close of 2016, I downloaded those videos with the #direngeziparkı (#resistgezipark) hashtag and the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag from Vine.co into a personal archive labelling them with the relevant account, date, tag and caption information. At the time, Vine.co still operated as a relatively consistent archive where video searches with relevant hashtags and geotags generated consistent results using different searches conducted from different devices. However, this Vine feature changed before the videos with #occupygezi hashtags could be downloaded. Hence, even though Vine posts with the #occupygezi hashtag are a part of this dissertation's findings, there is a lack of close video analysis as a result of this change in the platform's access possibilities as these video posts could not be returned to after the initial stages of the study. Instead, detailed multi-modal analyses were conducted of Vine posts with the #direngeziparkı (#resistgezipark) hashtag and the Taksim Gezi Parkı (Taksim Gezi Park) geotag.

Similarly, the changes in user behaviour resulting from the termination of the original Vine services such as users deleting their accounts or posts, has made it necessary to provide visual aids from the archive of videos I accumulated. Hence, while most image examples show the Vine posts as screenshots of video posts from the website, some figures are taken from stills from the videos downloaded from relevant posts on the website.

### ***The Afterlife of Vine.co***

At a methodological level, the sample of online representations is limited by constrained accessibility and the availability of content after over four years of simultaneous accumulation and erasure of Gezi-related content. While Vine originally provided a suitable platform for data collection via hashtag and geotag searches, this feature is no longer available. As discussed earlier, the termination of Vine services has affected both the amount of examples available from the #occupygezi set as well as the ability to re-access some accounts at later dates.

The examples of Vine posts selected for demonstration in Chapter 5 are intended to be a balanced reflection of the subjects depicted based on online representations of street action (including subjects who identify/self-represent as activists, protesters and/or journalists) and subjects displaying general participatory behaviour online regardless of their offline participation.

### ***Facebook's Search Engine and Its Ever-Changing Archive***

Facebook was the platform chosen for the study of videos related to the 2016 coup attempt posted from 15 July 2016 to early September 2016. As previously mentioned, one of my reasons to change the platform in this second case study was the lack of videos posted with the selected hashtags (or other hashtags related to the coup attempt) on Vine. This observation was also in line with the image of Vine as an application that was widely introduced and used during the Gezi protests. While not a dedicated video capturing and sharing application, Facebook, appealed to a more politically diverse group in Turkey. By January 2016, Facebook was the “top active

social platform” (We Are Social, 2016). Thus, it was an ideal platform in terms of its potential reach, especially during an event that concerned the entire population of Turkey.

The introduction of new Facebook features, namely Facebook Live, has made it possible for users to broadcast live videos through their Facebook accounts, thereby allowing the platform to provide a feature that differentiates between regular video posts which can use recycled and/or original visual content and live recordings, which are marked with the ‘Live’ label and are evidently original content as were Vine videos which could not be imported.<sup>8</sup> Like Vine, Facebook Live videos can only be captured via the platform’s own mobile application, making it impossible to import content into video posts marked as such. Given Facebook’s popularity in mainstream Turkish culture, this helped to facilitate the study of participation in anti-coup activities and demonstrations. Facebook was also a natural choice due to practical concerns relating to the online social network’s application program interfaces’ (APIs) (albeit limited) allowances for my research (as will be discussed shortly) as well as subject-led concerns such as the possibility of Facebook Live featuring original user-recorded content similar to what was available on Vine during the Gezi protests. However, this dissertation takes into account those video posts that did and did not make use of the Live feature.

Due to Facebook’s search engine algorithm when this research was undertaken it was impossible to analyse the videos in any chronological order or to recover the same

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<sup>8</sup> In April, 2016 Facebook introduced a change in its algorithm to prioritise Live videos in a bid to encourage original content (Lopez, 2016). Prior to these news, it had reported that the “extension of Live Video to all users [was] the latest move to increase sharing of original content” but Facebook had already tweaked the video serving algorithm for the News Feed to promote original posts, meaning Live videos. (Efrati, 2016).

order of videos during a subsequent search or day.<sup>9</sup> This is due to Facebook's search results continuously changing in order to reflect daily preferences (searches, likes, views etc.) of the user as well as friend users.<sup>10</sup> This issue made it necessary to conduct the searches and take all necessary notes as well as recording images in one sitting to avoid analysing the same video post twice. The lack of chronological listing did not cause problems during the analysis of the sample as meta-data provided the date and time of each post and, in terms of this research, a chronological consideration is unnecessary. However, the inconsistency in the selection of videos that were brought up by the same search during different sittings confined the labour to analysing hours' worth of video posts in one day. Facebook video posts were much longer in duration than Vine posts as Facebook does not seem to have a limit on the duration of the video one can post. Hence, Facebook video posts required a relatively longer amount of time to analyse. Due to the immense number of video posts that were generated by the searches on Facebook and the time constraints resulting from algorithmic limitations, only 140 of over 260 #darebeyehayır Facebook video posts and only 103 of over 395 #15Temmuz (#15July) video posts were analysed. The samples were formed randomly as the analysis began from the last Facebook post in the video search results, which corresponded roughly to the oldest posting, and moved up towards newer videos in no chronological order. Unlike the study of Vine posts, it was necessary to use Facebook's video tab to see video posts with the

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<sup>9</sup> Constone (2015) comments that with the 2015 update to the Facebook search engine users would “get a results page personalized based on around 200 factors including what you Like and engage with, what you've searched for, and info about your identity”.

<sup>10</sup> The latest update on the Facebook Help Centre states that “unique search results” are curated not only according to the user's own activity but also the activity of those they share connections with, the popularity of the content and how recently it has been posted (Facebook, 2019).

relevant hashtags, thereby excluding other types of Facebook posts such as status updates or pictures.

Unlike Vine, Facebook allows one to import external content into video posts, hence searches on Facebook also delivered content that was not recorded by the user. The implications of this on the analysis of the Facebook posts will be explained in detail in the breakdown of themes that were used to classify this unique collection of posts. At the time of the respective studies, Vine and Facebook were different platforms with different affordances and limitations, however, this thesis does not depend on a comparative analysis of these platforms but an analysis of how people participate via online video posts which include the multimodality of communication in both platforms through user handles, hashtags, audio-visual content and captions.

Furthermore, Vine as a more alternative platform and Facebook as a popular platform were extensively used during the respective Gezi and anti-coup movements and provided a bounty of relevant material for analysis. The implications of the differences between the affordances and the limitations of each platform and will further be demonstrated in the following sections regarding the coding of the videos.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical questions about content posted by users of online social networks during the Gezi and anti-coup protests became prominent at the collection stage. I have also tested the methods of collection, archiving, analyses as well as referencing of video posts against the questions presented in the second version of 2012 Ethical Decision Making and Internet Research recommendations by the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Markham & Buchanan, pp. 8-11). As video posts provided a lot of information about the users, attention had to be paid to not breach any personal space, thus, in my research –as in my daily usage of these platforms as a user—I used a personal account, and entered the search terms (in my case a total of four hashtags and a geotag) into the search field of the respective platforms. Therefore, whatever came up in the search results had to be available for a stranger to view at the time the two studies were conducted. The primary reason for using hashtags and a geotag to collect video posts concerned relevance to the topics studied in this thesis; therefore, the data collected would not be analysed out of context. The secondary reason was the assumption that anyone who used hashtags or geotags actually intended their content to be visible to an audience beyond their follower/friend list to “an imagined community of users who are following and discussing a specific topic” (Bruns & Burgess, 2011, p.4).

This would mean that for the users who posted them, these video posts were not intended for private or limited viewership. These video posts are not shared within a gated Internet community that required “access permission” (Franklin, 2013b, p. 154). This intention to reach beyond one’s actual list of connections was further implicated through their use of well-known and popular hashtags and, in the case of the Gezi Park protests, the most relevant geotag possible: Taksim Gezi Parkı (Taksim



Gezi Park). As I accessed these video posts through a personal account, I have not used any intrusive methods that would allow me to see un-publicised content. All video posts analysed as part of this thesis were made ‘public’<sup>11</sup> by their users, which was consistent with their choice of using one or more tags to further enhance their visibility to a wider viewership interested in the relevant topics. The thesis does not provide details on video posts depicting minors and vulnerable individuals but instead refers to such videos generally.

In terms of creating a repository of studies material, part of the analysed Vine video posts have been archived as a resource for the ongoing research efforts. The only reason for making an archive of Vine video was to be able to access those videos after Vine closed down. I only archived videos that were available to general viewing on the website at the time of my initial research. These video files, by themselves, are not my actual object of analysis as the object of my analysis are not videos but video posts as they appear on online social networks. The object of analysis, thus, is prone to change and extinction as such not keeping an archive can be considered as another ethical practice as the ability to delete their data from online social networks (as far as network policies allow) gives some power of choice to the user in terms of the accessibility of their content by the general public.

Considering the purpose and usage of hashtags, it is highly probable that these users did not consider their video posts as private. Yet, it is also possible that users may not be aware of changes to their privacy settings (Oremus, 2018) or of the long-term consequences of publicising their video posts. Therefore, due to the political climate in Turkey and the many incidents of profiling, arrests and prosecutions where online

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<sup>11</sup> A term that has evolved from Facebook’s user privacy settings into everyday social media language meaning that the post has been published for the unrestricted consumption of all users of a given online social network.

posts have been used as evidence against users, both Vine and Facebook users' handles have been anonymised in this thesis with respect to the information they might contain about their "real" identity (Franklin, 2013b, p. 154). In the reference images which are made up of screenshots of their video posts, recognisable images of faces and user handles have been blurred to prevent them from being identified. The thesis only refers to captions or comments if they do not bear an identification of the user and using only information that cannot be used to attack their persons online or offline. The political climate in Turkey has also urged me as a researcher to be cautious of revealing my identity or information about the research to any of these users. The users who posted the videos analysed in the study constitute a diverse group of individuals from different political, religious and lifestyle backgrounds. There is a growing culture of espionage among government loyalists and a plethora of government-led social media accounts. It is impossible to guarantee the safety related to the source of an account on online social networks considering the serious discrimination/retaliation and professional obstructions faced by academics who voice dissent against the government of Turkey.

In this regard, all possible precautions have been applied to avoid harming the privacy and the welfare of the individuals who posted analysed video posts on online social networks while also protecting the researcher.

### **Analysis of Video Posts on Online Social Networks**

The concept of a post on online social networks, comprising of a variety of modes of expression such as image, video, text and meta-data, has previously been explained through the notion of assemblage (Hess, 2015; Thumim and Whelan, 2017). The

variety of information in a single unit requires a combination of methods. Here, I will provide a brief overview of established qualitative methods that could to be combined or adapted for the analysis of online video posts.

The analysis of an online video post begins with a combination of content and textual/visual analysis. This means that the analysis is informed both by seeing these posts for both the “manifest content” and the text open to “interpretation” (Franklin, 2013b, pp. 217, 224). This combination is caused by the nature of the video post as both a vessel of concrete information in the form of the moving images and sounds, as well as of subjective expressions that accompany them. Consider looking at a video post depicting rustling trees; if this video was not accompanied by a caption or a hashtag, one could simply resort to content analysis and be able to convey everything that was being said in that video post. However, if that video is accompanied by a caption about the beauty of the trees and a hashtag related to an environmentalist movement such as Gezi, textual/visual analysis is needed to cohere the signified meanings of all the different components of the video post. At this point, it might also be necessary to apply discourse analysis as it applies to the visual and textual information with regards the political context offered by the hashtag. The juxtaposition of the image of the trees, the political hashtag and the way the user conveys the environmentalist message by emphasising the beauty of the trees can reveal the artistic discourse dominant in both the visual and textual elements constituting the video posts created by Gezi participants.

Because this thesis is analysing a great number of video posts, the second step was to apply “thematic coding” to come up with “candidate themes” emerging from the analysis of content and text (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 210-2, 224). Because I was applying an inductive thematic analysis to the online video posts, there was a plethora

of recurrent candidate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83-4). Consequently, some of the candidate themes made their way into the thesis, in the subthemes categories of both studies, these constitute the more detailed information resulting from the content and textual/visual analysis. This thesis applies a very loose understanding of thematic analysis as the variety of the modes of expression in a video post require varied signifiers of coding. For example, the recurrent patterns of different visual points-of-view encouraged me to use perspectives—a term related to visual analysis—as a category alongside themes to code video posts by Gezi participants. At certain points, dominant discourses that defined participation in Gezi such as art, lifestyle and symbolic are termed perspectives to maintain a coherent and less complicated breakdown of themes and sub-themes. In the anti-coup videos, tones were used to code a variety of visual, thematic references to or the use of discourses of religiosity and pro-AKP.

All the themes, subthemes, perspectives and tones are connected to the research questions in that they answer how people participate in politics via video posts on online social networks. Explaining the analysis of online video posts by using so many references to distinct methods of analysis is a complicated project.

Furthermore, as demonstrated in the example of the video post of rustling trees what type of analysis will be applicable depends on the information offered in a video post, so these inconsistent combinations of methods should be seen as a repertoire of methods within the microcosm of the analysis. Other types of (past, present, and future) online posts, may necessitate different combinations. Some video posts consist solely of videos depicting a singular object, others depict different moments of protest through images of people, teargas and even the ground, some only use hashtags other have both audial and textual information to analyse etc. This is why I

borrow from multimodal narrative analysis which has previously been proposed as an analytical model for online communication (Page, 2010; Toolan, 2010).

### **Multi-modal Analyses of Video Posts as Assemblages**

This project has developed a multi-modal content analysis method which considers a post on an online social network to be an assemblage of visual, audial, verbal and media-specific meaning-making tools (Good, 2013; Hess, 2015).<sup>12</sup> As in an assemblage, in online video posts, the media used to deliver a cohesive message vary. These different aspects need to be evaluated in order to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of the video posts. This method is informed by the way in which online social network posts are traditionally consumed by their users as a unit made up of multi-modal content: video, meta-data, caption and comments. These different modes include not only different media such as writing, video and photography (which all have complex subcategories) but also modes of networked and hyperlinked communication provided by the relevant technologies and applications such as mentions, hashtags, geotags, or emoticons which make up these ‘technocultural constructs’ (Van Dijck, 2013). As such, a single video post is an assemblage of both content created (such as recorded videos and captions) and curated (such as imported videos, tags and links) by the user. In the video posts analysed for this thesis, the video is in the middle or on the left, the date of the post followed by a geotag are on the top left below the user handle, while the caption and hashtags can be seen at the

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<sup>12</sup> Good (2013) and Hess (2015) provide different ways through which to apply the metaphor of an assemblage to online social networks. While Hess (2015) sees the selfie as an assemblage of the “self, device, space, and network” (p. 1630), Good (2013) sees Facebook as a personal media assemblage much like the traditional scrapbook (p. 559). While my approach is more similar to Hess (2015), I do not consider the physical aspects of the process of taking a selfie as part of my analysis.

bottom (Figure 1). These different modes of content are viewed simultaneously and the resulting message of a video post is, therefore, made up of a combination of the messages provided by these different modes of communication.

The individual posts analysed on the relevant online social networks are understood here as the visual reflection of these assemblages with the involuntary contributions such as algorithmic temporal indicators (meta-data) as well as information conveyed by user-generated content such as video material containing visual and audial information, with the location tag and hashtags containing accurate and/or symbolic information, while the caption and comments constitute a written contribution to all of the above.



**Figure 1. Screenshot of a sample Vine video post.**

### ***Interpreting Video Posts: Creating a Paradigm of Themes, Perspectives and Tones***

In order to understand patterns of expression regarding online participation in political movements, during each study I followed the aforementioned methods of coding and analysis to come up with a set of themes and perspective or tones. The final selection of themes in each study were determined through the grouping of bigger sets of candidate themes that came up in the video posts into more generalised and cohesive categories that made sense in terms of the relevant political context. Themes were a way of tagging or coding that would help me communicate the bigger picture that arose from the close analysis of video posts and they generally reflect

what participants seem to be trying to document in these video posts. Perspectives used in the sample of Gezi-related videos were determined from the video content in the video posts and have been used to differentiate between various ways in which the same theme could be represented in a given video post through different camera positions or rhetorical devices such as symbolism, art and performance within texts or videos. Hence, while some perspectives are a reflection of the actual point of view, i.e. where the camera (in this case, the smartphone camera) is placed, other perspectives are applied in a more abstract sense of the term such as an artistic perspective which makes use of art to participate in or document protest.

Tones in the anti-coup sample, on the other hand, emerged as an addition to themes, which failed to reveal the variety in that sample but were quite helpful in revealing the effect of the particular circumstances of that context and in reiterating the implications of the thematic breakdown. Tones, worked at a different level to themes, in that in addition to the content or theme of a video post, they revealed information about the mood of the video post which had the potential to challenge or reinforce the thematic coding. The breakdown of these themes, perspectives and tones helped formulate why users felt compelled to create and share these online video posts and how they achieved them.

## **Multi-Modal Analysis and Interpretation of Gezi-related Video Posts**

### ***Utilising Hashtags and Geotags Related to the Gezi Movement***

The initial collection of a sample of video posts related to the Gezi movement began by identifying significant hashtags deployed during the movement by participants who used their smartphones and an online persona (or account) to participate in the movement regardless of their physical activity. The hashtags #direnceziparkı



(#resistgezipark) and #occupygezi have been chosen from a list of hashtags used during the first 20 days of the Gezi movement as provided by the Siege Arts' (2013) open access Gezi Park Incident Evaluation Report (Siege Arts, 2013). I chose the hashtags for their ability *to express a* timeless relevance in relation to the Gezi movement given the use of specific phrases. While the Turkish phrase *Diren Gezi Parkı* ("Resist, Gezi Park") was one of the movement's most popular slogans, "Occupy Gezi" was used as an English language hashtag to draw the attention of non-Turkish speaking users with direct reference to the widely recognised 'Occupy Wall Street' movement.

While the range of research data is too narrow to determine whether the results generated by the respective hashtags reflect a consistent trend, the following hypotheses suggest avenues for further research: (1) the use of the #occupygezi hashtag might be significant in terms of its language (even simply the users' ability to type in the correct spelling) and the socio-economic implications of using an English language hashtag that refers to an international movement (thereby diminishing its usage by non-English speakers or users unfamiliar with international politics); (2) the selective use or non-use of the #occupygezi and/or #direngeziparkı hashtags alone reveals differing opinions on the representation of the Gezi protests on traditional national and international media outlets as well as online; (3) such concerns also reveal information about the usage of the given application, namely Vine, by different circles.

**Table 1. Number of Gezi-related posts delivered by each tag on given date ranges**

<b>Tag Type</b>	<b>Tags Used for the Search</b>	<b>Date Range of Vine Posts</b>	<b>Posts in Search Results</b>	<b>Posts Analysed</b>
Hashtag	<b>Occupygezi</b>	2 June-21 September 2013	<b>397</b>	<b>397</b>
Hashtag	<b>Direngeziparkı</b>	2 June-21 September 2013	<b>327</b>	<b>327</b>
Geotag	<b>Taksim Gezi Parkı</b>	28 May-18 September 2013	<b>397</b>	<b>397</b>

In addition to the hashtags, the ‘Taksim Gezi Park’ geotag was used in a search to collect a range of Vine posts shot inside Gezi Park as well as other locations. The use of this geotag outside of the park, namely in other parks and elsewhere, reveals the way geotags are used to demonstrate physical as well as virtual presence.

As action takes place on the street and the sole source of information about that action is digital, online, and spreads through a social network, such tools become invaluable in terms of documenting human rights violations as well as promoting participation by evidencing the existence of an opposition. As I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, an extensive analysis of the Vine posts tied to the hashtags and geotag detailed above illustrates examples of meta-activist representation, self-reflexivity and identity formation. A close analysis of the use of multi-media on these channels has informed a system of ‘themes’ and ‘perspectives’ that try to classify patterns of behaviour, representation and communication particular to the Gezi participant as a meta-activist. These thematic patterns reveal a lot about motivation, identity formation, audience-making, and contribution regarding online participant representation in the Gezi movement.

Previous studies on the usage of online social networks during the Gezi protests have informed the selection of Vine as the platform used for the collection of the sample and relevant tags that represented Gezi-related online traffic and different patterns in the participants' usage of online social networks during the Gezi protests. These include Gurel's (2015) study on the complex culture of Gezi participants' bilingual humour and Hacıyakupoglu and Zhang's (2015) study on the issue of trust in social media usage both provide examples of the breadth of themes that dominate the usage of online social networks that participated in the Gezi movement. Using political phenomenon such as the Gezi protests or a complicated period like the Gezi summer as case studies is risky in that their political or social implications in the prevailing political context can overpower the main theoretical focus of the research, namely the use of online social networks in social movement participation. On a theoretical level, it is necessary to establish the concept of meta-activism as the main focus of the thesis as it is my aim, through this concept, to develop a universal method for looking at online participation, i.e. not exclusive to the context of the Gezi protests or the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.

### ***Vine Posts during the Gezi Movement***

Since meta-activism is a political action that refers to a political action, it is also implies the creation and cultivation of an online persona representing a real life participant. Thus, meta-activism eliminates robot participants (bot accounts), fictional personalities, and entities other than individual users such as accounts representing political parties, activist groups etc. This participant identity can be an imagination, a projection, a self-proclaimed title or the reflection of a socially acknowledged identity. This definition supposes that any online participatory attempt is contributing

to cumulative online and offline participation in a protest or movement in the face of censorship, threats, and the non-democratic prosecution of expressions of both online and offline dissent. In order to elaborate on the theoretical basis for this concept, a close analysis of the Gezi participants' online self-representation, self-reflexivity and identity formation is necessary. Such a multimodal approach as mentioned earlier is necessary in order to understand the smallest units of online representation during the Gezi Park protests as there is often more than one mode of expression such as meta-data, tags, captions, videos and comments within individual online posts.

The project takes as its subject matter the multimodal representation of participation via online social networks and the Vine application during the Gezi protests of 2013 from 28 May until the end of September. I use the term "movement" to refer to the extended period of protests between 28 May and the end of June, and which continued to reverberate until the early autumn of 2013. This extended period was marked by fits of intense upheaval and crises, re-awakenings triggered by deaths caused by police violence, unmet public demands, and the government and then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's clampdown on supporters of the movement including the intimidation and defamation tactics used by Erdogan against all its supporters, including those who died as a result of police or vigilante violence during the protests (Amnesty International, 2013; BBC News, 2014).

### ***Themes and Perspectives in Gezi-related Video Posts***

As Table 4 demonstrates, general themes derived from the videos posted between 28 May and 21 September 2013 are divided into three sets that are considered intersectional. This intersectionality is due to the fact that the same video post can be tagged with multiple themes, perspectives and subthemes from different sets. These

themes are used to identify and conceptualise recurring trends in video posts on Vine and, potentially could prove helpful across other online social networks where Gezi has been documented. The three overarching themes are, namely, ‘park’, ‘action’, and ‘other’. Each theme encapsulates a number of subthemes which will be considered in conjunction with a close-reading of the content in question. These themes are informed by the visual and audial content of the videos, the users’ captions, hashtags, geotags and, sometimes, other video posts by the same user.

Firstly, the ‘park’ theme reflects the context-specific act of ‘occupation’ and is assigned to all videos captured inside or in the immediate vicinity of Gezi Park over the period from the initial attempts to uproot the trees on 28 May until the end of the summer where the park was returned back to its ordinary state after a number of protester occupations and police crackdowns. This theme is also used to identify videos that were captured in other parks elsewhere in Istanbul or the rest of Turkey where the occupation of such public spaces symbolised the occupation of Gezi Park during the protests and, also, during the period when ‘park forums’ that focused on conversations about issues related to the Gezi movement were being held at local parks around Turkey. The Gezi protests inspired local communities to rediscover and claim ownership of their parks during the Gezi movement, thereby preserving them as art and performance spaces as well as public forums concerned not only with current events but also offering an opportunity for political and social conversation. This is why this research considers the occupation of remote parks as reproductions or representations of the protection and occupation of Gezi Park.

Secondly, the generalised category of ‘action’<sup>13</sup> reflects the depiction of more tangible and conventional forms of political protests and participation which are based on physical presence, *dans les rues*. This theme is assigned to videos that depict physically manifested social and political action including passive resistance, marches, slogans, police violence, ‘pots and pans’ protests, and the depiction of these physical actions on other media outlets. I argue that the action theme not only offers documentation or evidence of the protests and the police violence in the face of mass media censorship but also that these video posts, self-reflexively, acted and still act as guidelines for protests by providing experiments and experiences of embodied and online protest. While other potential titles such as “witness accounts” are too general to explain the specificity of video posts in which the depiction of or references to confrontational physical action take precedence over physically non-confrontational modes of political participation. The visual and audial content of these video posts, thus, dominate the video posts and have the potential to evoke a phenomenological response from the viewer.

Lastly, the ‘others’ category includes a diverse set of subthemes such as ‘art’, ‘lifestyle’ and ‘symbolic’ which are frequently encountered in online social networks during the Gezi protests. This category is crucial to the study of meta-activism as it reflects the everyday, self-reflexive participation of Gezi participants. The subthemes of the ‘other’ category have been assigned both independently and in combination

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<sup>13</sup> The term action in this category is used with reference to the visual language of the New Hollywood genre of the action film which depicts physical action such as extended violence, physical feats and escape some of which are depicted in the videos assigned with the action theme. While the usage of the term action can be seen as contradictory to the concept of meta-activism in the politicisation of video posts that do not depict real life protest, it is meant to encompass the particularities of a very particular set of subthemes against the rest of the video posts. This term is, hence, not meant to indicate that other themes and subthemes do not depict physical, political or other types of action. The use of this term is ironic in that the premise of this thesis is a critique of the perspectives that undermine the authenticity of nonphysical action and activism.

with subthemes from the ‘park’ and ‘action’ categories. The everyday methods of expressing dissent in this category provide evidence of the anti-party politics, anti-militaristic, and heterogeneous culture that dominated the movement. The themes cover a wide variety of modes of expression inspired by popular culture, the arts, entertainment culture, leisure, education etc. A minority of the videos assigned to the ‘other’ theme depict categorically non-politicised beings such as infants, toddlers and animals who possess no/limited mental or language capabilities to form and express political ideas.

While the reference to infants and children could be an answer to Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s demand from married couples to have at least three children, recourse to the care of pets and stray animals can be read as a lifestyle signifier and a reaction to the unfair treatment of animals in the hands of state shelters. Some of the videos assigned to this theme make use of abstract representations, metaphors, memes, symbols, performances, and parodies. Others reference their settings such as weddings, clubs, bars, restaurants or shopping malls while others reflect certain lifestyle habits such as alcohol consumption, dancing and fashion. Some video posts depict beings (such as infants and pets) who have no amount of control over how video posts depict them and/or are not fluent in a political language.

The following account is a tag-by-tag breakdown of the Vine videos by Gezi participants posted between 28 May 2013 and 21 September 2013. Some videos used both hashtags and the geotag, while others included combinations of the two or made use of only one of the tags. As these numbers are used merely as a guide for the qualitative analysis of the videos and as this research is not intended to provide a comparison of the hashtags, the number of videos that use multiple tags from the sample group have not been provided. Instead, the numbers in the tag-by-tag analysis

of the videos offer an approximation regarding the kind of content linked to certain tags.

**Table 2. Number and percentage breakdown of posts from each tag, assigned a given theme**

Tags	Park	Action	Other
<b>Occupygezi</b>	20 (5%)	272 (68.5%)	106 (26.7%)
<b>Direngeziparkı</b>	19 (5.8%)	238 (72.7%)	71 (21.7%)
<b>Taksim Gezi Parkı</b>	283 (71.2%)	111 (27.9%)	62 (15.6%)

Despite being a Turkish-language hashtag – and thus reaching an inherently limited audience – #direngeziparkı (‘resist Gezi Park’) was a trending topic on Twitter for thirty hours more than #occupygezi (MediaCat, 2013). A search query on Vine using #direngeziparkı identified 327 Vines posted during 2 June-21 September 2013. These results include Vines posted with the hashtag in the caption or in the comments section. Out of the 327 videos tagged with #direngeziparkı, only 19 (5.8%) were shot inside Gezi Park. However, 238 (72.7%) of these videos depicted some kind of protest action or police presence. Seventy-one (21.7%) of these videos included one or more of the subthemes from the ‘others’ theme. From an initial standpoint, it is clear from the considerable number of videos shot in various locations in Turkey and worldwide that #direngeziparkı as a hashtag was used not only by local movement voices on online social networks such as Twitter, Vine, Facebook and YouTube, but also by a large number of participants from different locations identifying the movement with the park itself. Such an emphasis on the park is an environmentalist and political message in the face of the mass commercialism, urbanisation and



privatisation of public spaces in Istanbul. However, it is also a message about the meaning of the park itself for all Gezi participants around the world as the locus of the entire movement.

The more ‘international’ hashtag #occupygezi reflects the representation of the movement online (and in the relevant literature), where the Gezi movement is regularly compared to or seen as an offshoot of the international Occupy movement. A search query using the hashtag #occupygezi on Vine identifies a total of 397 videos posted between 2 June 2 and 21 September 2013 while the frequency of given themes are proportionately similar to those of #direnceziparkı with many overlaps where both hashtags were used in the videos’ caption or comments section. While twenty (5%) of these videos depict the ‘park’ and its surroundings, 272 (68.5%) of them show some kind of ‘action’; and 106 (26.7%) make use of the ‘art’, ‘lifestyle’ and/or ‘symbolic’ themes. With the majority of the videos depict marches, slogans, police violence or ‘pots and pans’ sessions, it is safe to assume that the #occupygezi hashtag was most commonly used to communicate scenes of protest. However, a considerable number of the videos were shot using non-political or non-park-related themes. The proportion of ‘other’-themed videos compared to the total number of Vine posts tagged with #occupygezi are considerably higher than the proportion of ‘other’-themed videos tagged with #direnceziparkı in relation to the total number of videos in the related search results.

The Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag yielded 397 posts between 28 May 2013 and 18 September 2013. Out of these, 283 (71.2%) videos represent the ‘park’ theme, 111 (27.9%) represent the ‘action’ theme and 62 (15.6%) videos employed modes of expression from the ‘others’ theme. Unlike the two hashtags previously discussed, the Taksim Gezi Parkı understandably provides more than twice as many videos for the

‘park’ theme than for the ‘action’ theme. This result is supportive of the argument that the Gezi Park was a space for passive resistance for its occupiers. The ‘action’ theme for this geotag is assigned to videos depicting physical protest or police violence inside or in the immediate vicinity of the park.

A close thematic reading of the Vine posts provided detailed information about life at the park, protests and violence on the street and, more importantly for this project, about anti-party-political culture of the movement<sup>14</sup> and how it affected the different modes of participation. For the purposes of this thesis, each theme has been divided into subthemes that illustrate valuable patterns of online social network usage during the Gezi protests. The list of subthemes are not exhaustive and are aimed at grouping different videos together in order to identify common habits.

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<sup>14</sup> According to Konda (2014), 78.9% of the respondents at Gezi Park claimed having no affiliation with a political party and when asked if they came to the Park to represent a group/political formation or as an ordinary citizen, 93.6% said that they came to Gezi Park as ordinary citizens (p.16).

**Table 3. Themes, perspectives and subthemes assigned to Vine posts by Gezi participants**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Perspectives</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
<b>Park</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Environmental Occupation Carnival Cleaning and Supplies</b>
	<b>Personal</b>	<b>Documentary Play</b>
<b>Action</b>	<b>Frontline</b>	<b>Violence Police Presence Street Protest</b>
	<b>Aerial View</b>	<b>Violence Police Presence Pots and Pans Protests</b>
	<b>Remediation</b>	<b>News, Websites and Applications</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>Art</b>	<b>Performance Graffiti</b>
	<b>Lifestyle</b>	<b>Alcohol consumption Shopping Malls Clothing choices Children Animals</b>
	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>Abstractions Metaphors Memes Icons</b>

The ‘park’ theme is comprised of ‘general’ and ‘personal’ perspectives; while the ‘general’ theme includes depictions of the park that focus on certain practices and

qualities relating to the park's culture, the 'personal' perspective focuses on particular individuals or groups of individuals. The 'general' perspective contains videos of five different subthemes: 'environmental' which is assigned to videos depicting nature or symbols of nature within the park, or in remote green spaces; 'occupation', assigned to videos capturing the so-called banal qualities of the park's occupation by the participants; the 'carnival' theme is assigned to videos capturing essences of the carnivalesque in the Gezi park or other parks, a recurring theme in the literature on the Gezi protests (Şener, 2013; Çelikkol, 2014); 'cleaning' is assigned to the considerable number of videos depicting the participants cleaning the park and its surroundings,<sup>15</sup> 'food and supplies' theme refers to videos that depict various supply centres in the park or donations from different sources. The 'personal' perspective, on the other hand, provides two different subthemes: 'documentary', which are videos that provide relatively more ad hoc depictions of individuals or groups; and, 'play', which are the loosely structured and/or scripted depictions of individuals or groups. The 'action' theme includes three perspectives: 'frontline', 'aerial view', and 'remediation'. The 'frontline' perspective refers to videos shot from the centre of physical action or confrontation, the 'aerial' perspective refers to videos shot from an outside the immediate boundaries of such scenes, usually from a higher level in a building; while the 'remediation' perspective encapsulates videos that depict other depictions of action by mass or social media. The 'frontline' perspective includes the subthemes 'violence' and 'police'. The 'violence' theme is applied to videos documenting violence by the police including the use of teargas, violent action by

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<sup>15</sup> While these videos could be included in the environmental subtheme, a separate subtheme is necessary as such acts are representative of both the environmental concerns of the protesters and the peaceful nature of the protests. These acts of cleaning by the protesters were the participants' way of negating media and government accusations that they were vandals and "marauders".

them as well as the resulting wounds and injuries. The ‘police’ subtheme is assigned to videos depicting the physical presence of police forces excluding brutal physical action. The ‘aerial’ perspective also includes the ‘violence’ and ‘police’ subthemes; however, the perspective changes from that of a victim to a voyeur or documentarian. ‘Pots and pans’ is the third subtheme in this category and it refers to the videos documenting the well-known protests where people in their homes expressed dissent through banging on pots and pans and turning their lights on and off at intervals during the Gezi movement.<sup>16</sup> The ‘remediation’ perspective is comprised of two subthemes: ‘mass media’, referring to videos depicting the Gezi events’ portrayal on mass media outlets, and ‘new media’, assigned to videos representing other mediations of Gezi events on online social networks and blogs.<sup>17</sup>

The ‘other’ theme is named to reflect the diversity and the idiosyncrasy of the modes of expression used in the video posts assigned to it. Some of the videos that came up on Vine depicted no traditionally accepted forms of street participation, whether in the park or on the street, nor did they include any kind of verbal political statement or reference to any event within the ‘action’ theme. Hence, the general label ascribed to these modes of expression is inspired by the ‘otherisation’ of certain modes of expression of dissent often deemed of lesser genuineness and value. It is the aim of this research to prove otherwise, namely that the cost of self-reflexive and creative forms of expression are irrelevant in the face of mass-media and internet censorship as well as given the government crackdown on expressions of dissent on online social

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<sup>16</sup> Such depictions are a valuable resource when determining how and how long such integrated forms of organized protest endured.

<sup>17</sup> These terms have been used as categories referring respectively to TV and newspapers as mass media, and online social networks and blogs as new media.

networks. They become political actions about or with reference to other political actions, making them ‘meta-actions’.

The ‘other’ theme brings together three different perspectives which could also be considered as subthemes: ‘art’, ‘lifestyle’ and ‘symbolic’. The ‘art’ category includes the ‘performative’ subtheme, which includes all performances referring to the Gezi protests, and ‘non-performative’ which is assigned to all videos depicting graffiti, animations and/or illustrations etc. representing the Gezi movement or any kind of political commentary. The ‘lifestyle’ perspective is comprised of five different subthemes: ‘alcohol consumption’, ‘shopping malls’, ‘clothing’, ‘culture’, and ‘children’, all assigned to videos depicting content featuring these subthemes. These subthemes make more sense when considered in conjunction with the political implications behind the everyday content given public discontent against, respectively: the rise of government taxes on alcoholic products and spatial and temporal restrictions on alcohol consumption (Burch, 2013; Economist, 2013); the destruction and transformation of culturally or environmentally irreplaceable spaces into capitalist structures and systems (Aksoy, 2012; Çavuşoğlu & Strutz, 2014; Çınar, 2015); the misogynistic policies of the AKP government enabling violence against women and restrictions on reproductive rights (Dedeoğlu, 2012; Gursel, 2013; Korkman, 2016); government policies restricting the autonomies of cultural, organizational and educational institutions as well as Recep Tayyip Erdogan identifying artists as targets (Lloyd, 2013; Aksoy & Şeyben, 2014). Lastly, the symbolic perspective includes four interrelated subthemes: ‘abstractions’, ‘metaphors’, ‘icons’ and ‘memes’. These subthemes are applied to symbolic modes of expressions that do not represent political content or commentary. The memes

subtheme also includes parodies depicting actual personas including politicians and citizens whose publicised statements had previously been turned into memes.

The subthemes under the ‘other’ umbrella may seem too heavily elaborated; however, each subtheme is created to answer to a particular form of expression. It is important to consider such details for the sake of the project as the differences between representations of overt and covert political acts provide crucial insights in relation to the theoretical framework. For example, while the ‘performative’ subtheme is applied to videos depicting musical, dance or theatre performances which took place in Gezi Park or Taksim Square as organized modes of political dissent, the ‘culture’ subtheme of the ‘lifestyle’ perspective is applied to those cultural activities that took place under non-political circumstances but became political through the use of a hashtag or a comment. Hence, the former representation signals that the recording subject (as Vine only allowed for videos to be shot via the application and did not allow imported videos to be edited) was at the location, in Gezi Park or another public site of protest, thereby implying physical participation in protest or presence in other types of action such as protecting the park or clashes with the police. On the other hand, the latter representation does not imply physical participation at the so-called ‘ground zero’, rather it constitutes a non-politicized act and, depending on the timing, could be seen as a distraction from the movement itself. However, given the political baggage mentioned previously, a non-politicized distraction and its depiction combined with one of the tags in question becomes ripe with political and social content.

## Multi-Modal Analysis and Interpretation of Anti-Coup Video Posts

### *Utilising Hashtags and Geotags Related to the Anti-Coup Movement*

As I have noted elsewhere (Apak, 2018, p. 24), MediaCat's (2016) report on Twitter trending topics on the night of 15 July 2016 has informed the choice of one of the hashtags used in this study: #15Temmuz (which translates as 'July the 15<sup>th</sup>') (Sözer, 2016). The other hashtag in question, #darbeyehayır (translating as 'no coup') was selected because it signifies an opposing political sentiment and was a popular slogan of the time. By doing this, the thesis also takes into account the potential difference between a relatively more neutral hashtag denoting the date of a particular event and a hashtag more explicitly intended as a political statement (no matter how overworked the slogan might have become through exhaustive usage).

**Table 4. Number of coup-related posts delivered by each tag on given date ranges**

Tag Type	Tags Used for the Search	Date Range of Vine Posts	Posts in Search Results <sup>18</sup>	Posts Analysed
Hashtag	<b>Darbeyehayır</b>	15 July-3 September 2016	≈262	140
Hashtag	<b>15Temmuz</b>	2 June-21 September 2013	≈395	103

As Facebook's API delivers a location-based selection of videos tied to a certain hashtag, it is important to state that both searches were conducted over the same week in London. The platform's API does not allow for a chronological sorting system for the video posts, hence all video posts within the date range were analysed in a non-

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<sup>18</sup> Due to the aforementioned qualities of the search results algorithm on Facebook and the design features of the user interface which requires the user to constantly go to the end of the page in order to load more results, these numbers are provided as an approximation and are based on the number of videos I tried to calculate manually while trying not to refresh the webpage (which would once again change the number and order of posts displayed).



chronological order. As the research design did not require a chronological analysis of the content, this did not create issues for the research.

The analysis and evaluation of the content of 140 videos from the search results of #darbeyehayır on Facebook informed the video analysis selection process that the #15Temmuz search delivered. Video posts on public pages and Facebook groups were eliminated from the #15Temmuz list of videos. The reason for this elimination was similar to the reason for choosing this platform: to sample as many personal/amateur and unique videos as possible. This strategic change in the sampling process was intended to facilitate the consideration of more unique content posted by individuals and participants rather than standardised and viral content from stronger influencers such as news sources, the government's bot accounts and propaganda channels. Either way, such content found its way into the sample through personal accounts who preferred to post imported content from such sources. As dealt with in the section explaining the themes related to the Facebook video posts (see *Themes and Tones in Coup-related Video Posts*), this division between *personal* and professional or *media*-sourced videos informed the categorisation of the themes assigned to the sample videos.

### ***Facebook Videos Posts during the Anti-Coup Movement***

Following the study of video posts by the Gezi movement participants, in the summer of 2016 another significant historical event in Turkey led to a massive outburst of protests. The coup attempt of 15 July 2016 occurred a little over three years after the Gezi summer and in an entirely different media climate in terms of the lack of censorship and hyper-exposure of the events of that night and the protests that

followed it, both on Turkish mass media outlets and across online social networks.

This second study, conducted in September 2016, focuses on the participants' visual self-representation during the anti-coup movement through the use of smartphones on the night of 15 July, the early hours of 16 July, and over the course of the two months that followed.

The sample's timespan was determined by the dates over which the collection of samples were conducted. The study was conducted in mid-September and covered 15 July-5 September 2016. This date range allowed the research to include Facebook posts from as long a period as possible while also putting a safe distance between when the study began and the latest date considered within the sample. Hence, the numbers of posts in the two different sets of video posts did not change on the day the sample was collected. While #darbeyehayır (#nocoup) identified approximately 262 video posts, #15Temmuz (#15July) delivered around 395 Facebook video posts. As mentioned earlier, unlike the study of Vine posts by Gezi participants which was carried out in multiple sessions, Facebook's algorithmic characteristics made it necessary to conduct two searches in a single day. Hence, the results depend on a couple of searches conducted on two specific dates and from a specific location through a personal Facebook account.

Similar to the study of Vine posts by Gezi participants, I conducted what I term a 'multi-modal content analysis' of 243 videos following two separate searches conducted respectively with the #darbeyehayır (#nocoup) and #15Temmuz (#15July) hashtags on Facebook. The search conducted with the #darbeyehayır (#nocoup) hashtag determined the approximate period to be considered for the sample collection, namely 15 July to the first week of September 2016, approximately two weeks before the study was conducted.

The study of the videos posted by the Gezi participants and the study of the videos posted by anti-coup protesters reacting to the President's call to take to the streets, have completely different political and social contexts as their subject matter. However, the themes evident in the representations of these events and how people reacted via social media are shaped by the constraints of the particular medium, which in the context of the coup attempt was Facebook. This study includes videos that were created by the people who posted them as well as videos imported from mass media broadcasts or music videos dedicated to the attempted coup and its aftermath. When considering the differences between the study of Vine videos posted by Gezi participants and the sample in question, Vine as an online social network can be compared with Facebook Live as both platforms only allow videos to be recorded via their respective platforms' mobile applications with Facebook Live allowing for much longer videos to be broadcast live. However, and as mentioned earlier, the respective online social networks' modes of communication or the circumstances under which the content was posted on them are dissimilar. My potential elimination of Facebook videos that were not recorded live could provide a set of content more similar to the Vine sample; however, it would also fail to reflect the varied posting habits evident in the context of the 15 July 2016. Such a choice would eliminate the mass of videos posted via regular Facebook video services; after its limited August 2015 launch for "verified" Facebook users, the Live feature became available to the public in April 2016 (Zuckerberg, 2016).

### ***Themes and Tones in Coup-related Video Posts***

One of the main differences between the study of personal video posts by the Gezi protest participants vs. the anti-coup protest participants was the necessity to come up

with a different set of analytical tools to identify patterns within the Facebook video post sample. Since Facebook’s API allows users to import videos into their profile as regular videos (as opposed to Facebook Live videos which can only be captured via the platform’s application), users were able to import professional media footage and create video posts using them due to the variety of footage being circulated by broadcast media during and after the night of July 15. As I have previously argued (Apak, 2018), this context- and platform-specific dynamic made it necessary to acknowledge two different categories of video content sources within the sample that will hereby be referred to as ‘personal’ footage versus ‘(mass) media’ footage. These two themes combined cover all of the videos in the sample. However, the same video post can be assigned to both themes if the video element is a combination of ‘personal’ and ‘media’ content.

**Table 5. Number of Facebook video posts assigned to each theme**

Hashtags	#darbeyehayır		#15Temmuz	
	Personal Footage	Media Footage	Personal Footage	Media Footage
Night of	15	4	17	2
Demonstrations	113	2	18	0
Martyrs	0	2	1	10
Subjective	23	5	12	41
Everyday	10	0	7	0

**Table 6. Number of Facebook video posts assigned with each tone**

Total Number of Videos	TONES	Anti-Coup	Anti-Government	Pro-Coup	Pro-Government	Neutral	Religious
140	#darbeyeHayır	140 100%	0	0	61 43.5%	0	64 45.7%
103	#15Temmuz	97 94.1%	1 0.1%	0	37 35.9%	3 2.9%	50 48.5%

‘Personal’ content was determined by a lack of so-called professional attributes such as a presenter figure, a steady frame, image quality, formal and/or decent language, clarity, information, purpose, and advanced editing techniques; as well as the existence of matter-of-fact evidence such as intense expressions of sentiment and subjective commentary. Finally – but significantly – the individual participant’s voiced contribution regarding the amateur nature of the video determined the existence of *personal* content in the video samples.

On the other hand, ‘media’ content was determined by traditionally recognisable signs such as a channel’s logo, news ticker, a studio setting, and the quality of picture, lighting, sound, language and editing techniques. However, these two categories are not intended to police professional versus amateur representations of participation on the night of 15 July 2016 and after, rather they aim to understand the different methods used in the representation of participation online in terms of imported vs. recorded content. Within each category of footage are five different themes, some of which are adopted from the study of Vine videos posted by Gezi participants while

others were derived from the content analysis of the current video sample. Two themes that correspond to the 'park' and 'action' categories in the Gezi-related themes were 'night of' and 'demonstrations'. 'Night of' is tagged to videos that depicted citizens' experiences on that very night, whether this might be the documentation of the presence of, or violent attacks by, military forces, citizens' presence on the streets or their experiences of that night in their homes. These videos include those that depict people resisting the military crackdown and those captured by people at home recording the bombings by the military planes. 'Demonstrations', on the other hand, is a chronologically determined theme that refers to all videos depicting citizens' street presence at 'democracy vigils' or participation in other anti-coup demonstrations. The dominance of the 'demonstrations' theme (54% of the video posts) reflects how integral the government-sponsored democracy vigils were in shaping users' online participation.

The remaining three themes are 'martyrs', 'subjective' and 'everyday'. The 'martyrs' theme covers videos dedicated to the people who died on the night of the failed coup attempt, including citizens as well as soldiers who became heroes for their resistance to the coup plotters. This theme is also assigned to the videos depicting the death of close ones or the families of the dead, which are in addition tagged with the 'subjective' theme. As explored in Chapter 2, the martyr is a dominant trope in the so-called "Epic of 15 July"; however, this was reflected in only 13 videos (5.3%) in the Facebook video post sample. The latter theme is assigned to videos that depict the users themselves whether through a selfie or a video recorded by a third party, videos that depict personal stories from the night and after such as President Erdogan's visits to martyrs' families, and videos that illustrate a form of verbal political commentary through speech or writings/captions. In other words, videos that were assigned the

‘subjective’ theme revealed information about the user who posted them whether through a political statement or some sort of original content that depicts the user. I created this theme to be able to identify a significant number of video posts that displayed such personal information. While these videos assigned with this theme made up 33.3% of the sample, it is important to note that more than half of these videos were made up of media footage. This demonstrates that users chose to express their subjective views by adding commentary or re-editing recycled footage instead of using original content.

This lack of unique forms of expression is also reflected in the last theme: ‘everyday’. This theme roughly corresponds to the ‘other’ theme from the Vine study. It defines videos depicting everyday actions with reference to the night of July 15 through captions, hashtags or commentary. This theme is assigned to videos that depict some form of everyday participation in the anti-coup protests and thus does not entail its participants to be present on the night of 15 July 2016 or afterwards in the streets. These videos do not carry a clear political statement in the video or in the post’s meta-data; however, they depict metaphorical and/or alter regular images with symbolic, written or audial expressions. This theme was assigned to a mere 6.9% of video posts.

As the Facebook videos posted on and after 15 July 2016 provided more “algorithmically invisible” (Tufekci, 2014) data than can be understood via themes alone, *tones* (Table 6) as another helpful set of determinants were used to understand the sample in question. Tones provided insights into the depiction of the failed coup attempt and the “political and societal confusion” that defines it while assisting in the sentiment analysis of not only the written but also the captured content (BBC News, 2016; Girit, 2016).

As I have noted elsewhere (Apak, 2018), I developed six different tones to assign to Facebook videos in this study, regardless of the themes assigned to them: (1) ‘anti-coup’; (2) ‘anti-government’; (3) ‘pro-coup’; (4) ‘pro-government’; (5) ‘religious’; and (6) ‘neutral’. These tones were assigned in a non-exclusive manner, that is, as one video post could carry more than one tone, these tones were assigned in an unrestricted fashion to 243 Facebook videos (140 #darbeyehayır videos and 103 #15Temmuz videos). While some of the tones – such as ‘anti-coup’, ‘pro-government’, and ‘religious’ were a result of the dominant sentiment observed in the sample, others were created as the antithesis/opposite of these tones to further determine the diversity of sentiment and expression across two different hashtags: a date (#15Temmuz) versus a political statement (#darbeyehayır). However, the tones do not end up revealing a significant difference in the percentage of a given tone or sentiment across the two hashtags. Their contribution is to assist in the overall understanding of the Facebook video posts in comparison with the Vine videos posted by Gezi participants. In order to clarify the process of assigning tones to video posts, a list of factors that determined the tone(s) of a video are classified in Table 7.

As explored in Chapter 2, the dominance of pro-government and pro-Erdogan sentiment as well as frequent references to religion including anti-secular ideas were prominent in the anti-coup movement. The breakdown of the tones assigned to the Facebook video posts further demonstrate the dominance of the AKP government’s 15 July narrative explored in the previous chapters. The effect of this narrative is also solidified by the influence of the protests organised and encouraged by the government as demonstrated in the thematic breakdown.



**Table 7. A breakdown of tone-determining factors**

TONES	DETERMINED BY
ANTI-GOVERNMENT	Hashtags, captions, commentary in the video expressing contempt for the government and/or the president Erdogan.
ANTI-COUP	Hashtags, captions, commentary in the video expressing contempt for the coup-attempt, the military or any entity deemed related to the organisation of the coup.
PRO-GOVERNMENT	Hashtags, captions, commentary in the video including praise for Erdogan, the government and partisan individuals and entities, check-ins at AKP buildings, songs and poems dedicated to Erdogan, laudatory metaphors referring to Erdogan such as “sultan”, “padishah,” and “saviour.”
PRO-COUP	None of the videos in the sample are found to be in favour of the coup attempt.
RELIGIOUS	Hashtags, captions and commentary including Islamic religious expressions and prayer. Videos depicting prayer, call to prayer (the Azan and the Sala), mosques and hymns.
NEUTRAL	Hashtags made of non-statement phrases (such as a date or location), no captions or captions of only an informative nature, imported/media-sourced videos, no commentary in the videos.

## Conclusion

The multi-modal content analysis of Vine and Facebook video posts and the themes, perspectives and tones that have emerged from my analysis demonstrate the variety of online and offline political participation during the Gezi and anti-coup movements. This interpretative scheme representing a variant of messages and expressions found in the video posts is intended to help understand the vast amount of written and recorded data provided by over a thousand different video posts on the two relevant online social networks.<sup>19</sup> While some of the themes that have emerged from my analysis of Gezi-related video posts parallel the key debates in the relevant literature, some themes such as the ‘personal’ perspective of the ‘park’ and ‘other’ themes reveal unexplored or belittled forms of political participation. The analysis of coup attempt-related video posts have revealed the predominance of pro-government and religious tones, which reflect the general debates within the literature. In terms of this thesis, one of the most indicative findings has been the difference between the methods of expression used in online political participation across the two political contexts. The significant difference between Gezi-related and coup attempt-related video posts in the unique forms of expression points to the integral role of different levels of censorship and intimidation by the government. Through analysing examples of online political participation in two different political contexts I aim to better illustrate the concept of meta-activism, thereby aiding the understanding of the different purposes and uses assigned to online social networks by users who participate in social movement through these networks.

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<sup>19</sup> I have analysed video posts 1364 times in total, however, there are overlaps as the same video came up in different searches with different tags. I have not counted the instances where I analysed the same video twice. So the actual number of video posts analysed is lower than the 1364 units I have counted in total. Some of the video posts have been analysed more than once as different tag searches have delivered the same video post that bears a combination of hashtags and/or geotag.

## **Chapter 4. An Overview of Internet Laws and Regulations in Turkey and the AKP Government's Relationship with the Internet**

The history of the Internet in Turkey has been closely linked to the history of the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rule in the Grand National Assembly since 2002 (Apak, 2018). In this chapter, I will explore the general social and political developments that followed the introduction of the Internet in Turkish public life, the Turkish state's and AKP government's attempts to define, regulate and control communication via the Internet and, finally, its investment in the creation of a digital army and its dedicated project to appropriate dissident groups' subversive discourses and tactics. More specifically, this chapters examines the emergence and development of the Internet and the proliferation of online social networks in Turkish public life, its legal definition, classification and regulation with particular reference to attempts and actions related to censorship on and of the Internet, and the AKP government's contested relationship with Internet technologies characterised by simultaneous demonstrations of utter denunciation and downright appropriation.

### **The Era Before Law No. 5651: The 1990s to 2007**

The Turkish public joined the Internet in 1993 and was able to upgrade to cable internet from 1998 onwards and to ADSL from 2003; however, Turkish criminal law acknowledged "informatics crimes" as early as 1991 through an addition to Turkish Criminal Law Article No. 765 (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 3). According to Özkan and Arıkan (2009), the "governments' direct involvement with the Internet in Turkey" began in 2001 when it made reference to "'offensive' [sic] sexually explicit content and socio-politically 'dangerous' [sic] activity" (Özkan & Arıkan, 2009, p. 47). In 2001, the Democratic Left (Turkish title, DSP) government "proposed an

amendment to the press code with the provision of treating the ‘Internet as subject to [the] Press Code’” (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 3). Akgül and Kırılıdoğ also observe that this proposal, which stated that all online communications would become subject to registration with the relevant authorities while the penalties for crimes would increase by half in those cases where the Internet was involved. This was passed by parliament the following year and became the first law dealing specifically with the Internet (p.3). The same year, the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime was, with Turkey’s participation, prepared for signature; however, Turkey did not sign the treaty until 2010 (p. 4). It wasn’t until 2004 when a new penal code concerning internet service providers (ISPs) was passed with “additional provisions on the internet and computer crime [sic]” (ibid.).

From early 2006, a committee formed by the Ministry of Justice to prepare a more comprehensive Internet law made up of delegates “ from public institutions, faculty members from law schools and representatives from internet NGOs”, and started working on the draft bill that would later become Law No. 5651 (ibid). Akgül and Kırılıdoğ emphasise that in the autumn of 2006, “child abuse and child pornography cases flooded” mainstream media outlets in Turkey, leading to the establishment of the Computer Crime Unit at Istanbul Police Headquarters (ibid). The conversation regarding child abuse and child pornography were arguably triggered by the news of the orchestrated rape of a 17-month old toddler (Hürriyet, 2006). This case was widely referred to in the media discussions of child abuse and pornography, along with two separate cases of child pornography possession by teachers that were reported around the same time (Aydın, 2006). An article posted on the website of the daily newspaper *Radikal* on 26 December 2006, stated that “operations regarding child pornography are being held ceaselessly” while recounting several recent and

past revelations of teachers, paediatricians and lawyers possessing child pornography (Radikal, 2006). Akgül and Kırılıdoğ (2015, p.4), however, question the relevance of this emphasis on child pornography in the public agenda, observing that: “The internet pornography issue took such proportions in the media that it looked as if child pornography was one of the most important problems in Turkey. This came across as an orchestrated effort to pass the Internet Censorship Law” (2015, p. 4). Indeed, in a news article by Gülay Özata (2006), the Chief of Istanbul Public Security Branch Office, Internet-Cyber Crime Bureau, Dinçer Ay is reported as stating that there was not a significant rise in child pornography offences rather there had been an increase in the number of operations that targeted such offenses. This agenda regarding heightening the perceived threat of child abuse and child pornography has been interpreted by Akgül and Kırılıdoğ (2015, pp. 4-5) as a significant manoeuvre to apply pressure on parliament and in order to prepare Turkish public opinion for the next big step in Internet policy making and censorship in Turkey, namely, the Law No. 5651 for Law for Regulating the Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications.

### **Law No. 5651 and Website Blocking in Turkey**

Law for Regulating the Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications (Law No. 5651) is often referred to as the first law that established internet censorship in Turkey (Dursun, 2013, p. 3). Enacted in 2007, the regulation delineates “the responsibilities of content providers, hosting companies, mass-use providers, ISP [sic]” as well as providing the legal context for control over website content and blocking (ibid, p. 4). It is important to note for the purpose of this thesis that this law does not necessarily refer/ascribe responsibility to

a content-generating user but rather does so in relation to the “mass use provider” who is responsible for removing the illegal content and risks having access to the relevant website blocked (ibid). While Baybars-Hawkes (2012) cites previous research which has shown that “some blocking orders given by the Courts have no legal basis under Law No. 5651, and are issued outside the scope of the new provisions”, others studies emphasise that the blocking of websites has constituted a “significant threat to online freedom in Turkey” (Karakaya Polat & Pratchett, 2014, p. 75) while “some blocking decisions by the courts (e.g. [blocking of] Google and Facebook) [need not be] enforced by the authorities” (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 1).

More specifically, Law No. 5651 allowed “government officials to block access to websites if their content is found liable to incite suicide, paedophilia, drug abuse, obscenity or prostitution, or to violate a 1951 law forbidding any attacks on the Turkish Republic’s founder, Atatürk” (Yalkin, Kerrigan, & vom Lehn, 2014, p. 275). Yalkin et al. note that on 7 March 2007, YouTube (for more than 18 months) as well as 1,039 social media sites and 6,000 other websites were blocked on the grounds that they violated Law No. 5156 (ibid.). Hence, Law No. 5156 is significant in terms of initiating the throng of website blockings in Turkey’s recent history by allowing for ‘sufficient suspicion’ as the grounds for a given website being subject to blocking (Akdeniz, 2012, p. 246). However, this research is concerned with the bigger picture of censorship borne out of the accumulation of these particular cases of blocking and the underlying motives and messages behind these blockings rather than specific cases. One issue that needs to be addressed is that websites blocked in Turkey are never practically inaccessible to the Turkish public despite their theoretical lack of availability. Whether by twinning the content of these websites with other web addresses (Karakaya Polat & Pratchett, 2014, p. 75) or by changing DNS settings

whenever possible and/or through the use of VPNs to access the relevant websites (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 12), it has often been possible to access blocked websites or URLs. Perhaps one of the most memorable political anecdotes regarding this contradiction is then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan stating to a reporter that he could access and watch videos on YouTube in the midst of the 2008 YouTube ban (Dogan News Agency, 2008). Such a public dismissal of the court orders on the part of the Prime Minister is reason enough to question the validity of the safety concerns cited for the reason behind this particular method of internet censorship. However, this public admission could be related to the Prime Minister's knowledge that YouTube was blocked "due to some content which was deemed by Turkish courts [to be] crimes committed against Atatürk, modern Turkey's founding father" (Karakaya Polat & Pratchett, 2014, p. 75). Hence, Erdogan's declaration could be evaluated by an act of protest against an instance of the violation of the freedom of expression as he once was imprisoned and barred from politics for reciting a poem that the Turkish courts ruled to be a call for sharia rule (Cengiz & Hoffmann, 2011, pp. 4-5). This contradictory stance informs Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP's conflicting stance towards the use of internet communication and online social networks, which will be dealt with in the course of this chapter.

In terms of the AKP's involvement in the regularisation of website blockings, there are several telling dynamics that point to potential motives and rationalisations: firstly, the internet-usage and literacy level of Turkish voters, in particular the AKP voter demographic. The AKP government "mainly relies on comparatively less educated and conservative masses from rural and urban areas" whose only news sources are government-controlled TV channels when internet sources are inaccessible via ordinary means (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 12). Secondly, the use of

these blockings act as political displays of power for AKP supporters while intimidating dissidents and international companies, as these technically legal blockings also serve to “delegitimise” the content and/or content provider (Bozdog, 2016, p. 136) while tarnishing their image in the eyes of their target audience. Although the blocking of global platforms in Turkey has resulted in more and more reactions from around the world (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 12) and European Court of Human Rights ruled that “blanket website blocking violate[s] the right to freedom of expression under the European Convention on Human Rights” (Taylor & Camayd, 2013, p. 1), it becomes necessary to take into account the bureaucratic, political and social contexts in which these blockings are carried out in Turkey.

### **The By-Law on Consumer Rights in the Electronic Communication Sector and Regulations on Procedures and Principles Regarding the Safe Use of the Internet**

Enacted in 2010, the Regulation on Consumer Rights in the Electronic Communication Sector states that “internet providers, content providers, and hosting companies are obligated to abide by order of Presidency of Telecommunication Communication (TIB)” while its Article 10 claimed that “content providers/hosting companies are responsible to offer the usage of internet with some options against harmful contents without any additional charge” (cited in Dursun, 2013, pp. 4-5). Dursun explains that the vague wording of Article 10 was made clearer in the following year’s Regulation on Safe Internet Use (2011) which aimed to put in place four fixed compulsory filters (namely: Children, Family, Domestic, and Fixed Packages) that would limit access only to those websites curated and approved by the government for a specific filter (p. 5). Even though this attempt was initially blocked as a result of widespread protest including objections from the Turkey Informatics



Association and hackers cyber-attacking the government's institutional websites (ibid.), the AKP government's move offered an insight into their long-term plans for the freedom of expression and media consumption in Turkey. After delaying and changing the regulation on the Safe Use of the Internet to halt the protests, the number of filters were reduced to Children and Family and modified to be optional, allowing users to continue benefiting from existing rights of access (Dursun, 2013, p. 5; Baybars-Hawks, 2012, p. 4). Dursun (2013) observes that following the changes to the Safe Internet Use regulation, the TIB (Presidency of Telecommunications and Communications), which was now free to control content published on the Internet provided content providers/hosting companies with a list of 138 banned words and "ordered the companies to block off the internet site considering the Law no. 5651 if a domain name included one of these words" (p. 5).

The years 2010 and 2011 were significant in terms of Turkish politics and the AKP government's increasing control over Turkish civic life. Following a major win in the 2010 constitutional referendum, the AKP won a third consecutive General Election in 2011, albeit with a reduced majority (BBC News, 2011). In an attempt to change the constitution to their advantage, the AKP government managed to make changes to articles that allowed the government to appoint judges and prosecutors to higher courts (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012, p. 309). In the space of two years, the Turkish internet experience had become contested given the AKP government's political and social agenda which saw the Turkish Information and Communication Technology Authority banning sites, including the popular satirical forum Ekşi Sözlük. According to Akser and Baybars-Hawks (2012), in the space of two years, the Turkish Internet experience had become contested given the AKP government's political and social agenda which saw the Turkish Information and Communication Technology

Authority banning websites (p. 313). Some of the most popular platforms targeted by these bans were the popular satirical forum Ekşi Sözlük, which featured “unfavourable comments about the government” (ibid.) and figures related to the government, and YouTube, the latter which was continuously being banned and unbanned by various courts due to videos relating to anti-secular speeches by President Abdullah Gül and PM Erdogan that were released on the video sharing platform (ibid). In August 2011, the government put a “blanket filter” into effect which would allegedly protect “young children from sex, drugs, and violence on the Internet” (ibid).

Following his visit to Turkey in April 2011, Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, reported his concerns regarding freedom of expression in Turkey, emphasising the rise in criminal defamation cases as well as calling for a “review by the Turkish authorities of the Internet Act” and a limiting of “the arbitrary powers of the relevant administrative authorities in interpreting and applying” Internet censorship and website blocking (Hammarberg, 2011, p. 18). On the other hand, Freedom House’s 2011 report, *Freedom on the Net*, defines three areas in which people’s usage of the Internet are limited and/or obstructed: “obstacles to access” regarding the technological and financial cost of citizens’ internet usage (Freedom House, 2011, p. 330); “limits on content” regarding the increasing “government censorship of the internet” via website blockings following “nontransparent” procedures and the manipulation of Law No. 5651 (pp. 331-2); and “violation of user rights” in terms of violations of Turkish Internet users’ constitutional right to freedom of expression and secrecy of communication through the application of Law No. 5651 and Article 301 of the Criminal Code relating to online activities (pp. 334-5). Therefore, another important issue regarding online

freedom of expression in Turkey concerns the population's cyber-literacy. Rabia Karakaya Polat (2012) observes that "those excluded from the virtual world are not only deprived of wider access to information, public services, and other economic benefits, but also of an opportunity to pursue their rights as citizens, including political participation" (p. 590). Karakaya Polat's study reveals that the majority of internet users in Turkey in 2011 were between the ages of 16-24, male, able-bodied, and urban residents. The author also claims that the digital divide was continuing to be a significant problem at the time but was a non-issue for the Turkish government (p. 595).

In 2012, Turkey was ranked as number 148 out of 179 countries in the Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (2012) and cited as continuing its descent (Reporters without Borders, 2012) implying that the propagation of internet censorship was one aspect of the AKP Government's attempt to control freedom of expression and freedom of the press, reflecting the latter's "lack of commitment to democratic principles" (Yalkin, Kerrigan, & vom Lehn, 2014, p. 275). The next significant set of changes to Internet regulation was the Internet Law of Turkey as well as the AKP Government's political strategy which attempted to restrict online social networks carrying content relating to the Gezi protests from the end of May 2013. Akgül and Kırılıdoğ (2015) emphasise that "by the summer of 2013, 1.4 million subscribers had opted for a filter," voluntarily agreeing to have access to internet within the boundaries imposed by the government (p. 10).

## **The AKP and the Gezi Protests: Condemnation of Social Media**

The Gezi protests began on 28 May 2013 as a small protest against the uprooting of trees in one of the last green spaces in the centre of Istanbul, Gezi Park. While it started as an environmental demonstration, the protests were informed by “discontent and anxiety over the government’s policies” (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 2). From the very first day content was shared on social media including the very first depictions of the uprooting of trees to the documentation of the surprising impertinence of the crowd on the very first night, all of which contradicted the news programmes on Turkish TV channels and headlines in Turkish newspapers. Indeed, the AKP Government’s “efforts to block alternative/opposing discourses became much clearer” during the Gezi Park protests (Dursun, 2013, p. 2). On 3 June 2013, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan, who – along with a number of his cabinet members – used Twitter actively, described Twitter as the worst menace to society; on 5 June, supporters of the Gezi Park protests and a number of Twitter users were taken into custody on the grounds of “sedition and propaganda” for sending tweets that informed users of Wi-Fi passwords they could use to go online if they ran out of mobile data or had connectivity issues during moments of resistance, notifications of protest meetings, warnings concerning police presence or tear gas at certain locations, and reporting on police violence (Dursun, 2013, p. 9). However, such specific cases could not overwhelm the significance of the volume and impact of online social network usage during the Gezi protests with “over 17 million tweets sent in the first 10 days,” hence #direngezipark became one of the most tweeted hashtags in Twitter’s history (Paul & Seyrek, 2015, p. 1).

Erkan (2014) proposes that we should not be convinced by Erdoğan’s criticism of Twitter as “[a]t an official party administration level, many party branches already

had [sic] their own Twitter accounts” and that the initial struggle for the AKP government and their followers involved muster the “social capital in digital media battles” (p. 2). As supporters of Gezi protests were active users before the events, they had a head start when compared to both AKP officials and their supporters in terms of cyber- and social media literacy (ibid.). Hence, it was up to the AKP to “learn from their shortcomings” and catch up with the times by hiring/training 6,000 youth members as “social-media activists” to represent the party in the virtual world leading up to the local elections in March 2014 (Kayaoglu, 2013; Kızılkaya, 2015).<sup>20</sup> Saka Erkan (2014) observes that AKP-supporting social media users on Twitter are made of three categories of users: Firstly, trolls who “have the specific goal of attacking opposing or contradicting views”; secondly, hashtag campaigners who constitute the official 6,000-strong social media army announced by the AKP; and, lastly, Twitter accounts that produce conspiracy theories in the guise of leaking “intelligence information” which are then retweeted by other pro-AKP Twitter users (p. 3). This analysis of Twitter usage shows how the AKP and its supporters had become more and more proactive while adopting sophisticated propaganda dissemination strategies on online social networks by 2014.

On 5 February 2014, an amendment to Law No. 5651 envisaging “even harsher measures against freedom of expression on the internet” was approved by President

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<sup>20</sup> Regarding the beginning of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s digital awakening, Emre Kızılkaya (2015) of *Hurriyet Daily News* observes, “The AKP’s first comprehensive digital strategy was an aggressive response to the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013, in which online media was heavily used by demonstrators. Out of anger for not being able to have a grip on social media, at least not as tight as it had on traditional media, the party formed a 6,000-strong digital team in September 2013 to forge public opinion on the Internet, too. The impromptu planning of the AKP’s strategy, however, created a massive, but highly disorganized online force on the ground. The party had initially mobilized its youth branches around the country for its daily agenda on the web, such as pushing a propaganda hashtag onto Twitter’s worldwide trending topics list. The digital organization of youth branches was then overseen by Süleyman Soylu, the deputy chair in charge of party organization, and predated the Gezi Park protests. After Gezi, however, the party saw they needed more than this official, regular army to rule the digital world”.

Abdullah Gül, one of the AKP's founding members (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 11). According to Akgül and Kırılıdoğ, this amendment, "introduced fast banning of websites in relation to privacy and personality rights, access by the TIB to logs of all user activities on the internet, URL and IP blocking, and a new government-controlled ISP union" (ibid.). Bozdağ (2016) explains that the amendment to Law No. 5651 "authorized TIB and the Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communication to block websites within 24 hours after a takedown request – without a court order" (p. 134). This proposed amendment, however, was removed on the grounds of being unconstitutional and delayed until it was passed as part of an "omnibus bill" at the beginning of 2015 (ibid.). In the end, these amendments would not only elaborate the reach of Law No. 5651 by specifically targeting user behaviour on the Internet but also removed one of the last barriers against the arbitrary blocking of websites. The AKP's compulsion to control the dissemination of information via website blocking would thus be ingrained in the governance of the internet in Turkey despite the disregard paid to the fact that the medium through which websites were being blocked still made them practically accessible with little extra effort on the part of the user (Erkan, 2014, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, this was thanks to methods such as changing DNS settings and using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) which help users circumvent access restrictions including website blocks.

According to Google's 2014 Consumer Barometer, Turkey ranked first in the world in terms of social media usage in that same year (Paul & Seyrek, 2015).

Understandably, the changes introduced by Law No.5651 met with a strong reaction on online social networks with people uniting under hashtags such as #direntwitter (resist Twitter) and #direnyoutube (resist Youtube), which recalled the Gezi protests (Bozdağ, 2016, s. 134). Yet, as Bozdağ observes, "the fallout from the Gezi protests"

in relation to escalating police violence and with the March 2014 local elections on the horizon, meant that there were not many street demonstrations (ibid.). As a newspaper observed, Prime Minister Erdoğan threatened “to shut down Facebook and YouTube” on March 6 and vowed “to eradicate Twitter” on March 10, ten days before the local elections, while he denied the authenticity of the corruption allegations triggered by leaked phone recordings (Hürriyet Daily News, 2014). The latter allegations crowded users’ feeds on the aforementioned and other online social networks, in other words the actual recordings were spread via OSNs.

Twitter was banned in Turkey “hours after” Erdoğan’s statement (ibid.). This incident demonstrates that by as late as March 2014, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP government’s ultimate social media tactic was what Erkan (2014) calls “dominating from [the] top-down” in the manner of a “centralized media” (pp. 1-2). However, this time the amendments and provisions attached to Law No. 5651 rendered the process even swifter. Karakaya Polat and Pratchett (2014) have emphasised that “YouTube remained the eighth most popular website among Turkish users despite being officially blocked for over two years” (p.76); showing that this top-down strategy, in fact, has been accepted by certain content providers and users of online social networks as a “dare”, challenging them to access banned/blocked platforms. When the authorities lifted the ban on Twitter following the constitutional court’s ruling that the ban was a “breach of freedom of expression”, Erdoğan’s AKP had already won “resoundingly” (Reynolds, 2014) amidst public allegations of fraud and ballot abuse (Hürriyet Daily News, 2014). At the same time users of online social networks were already able to access Twitter via newly introduced VPN services (Bozdog, 2016, s. 135).

These are the circumstances under which a simple login to an online social network, more organised actions performed to overcome website and URL bans, and the spread of information regarding these technical circumvention methods turn into acts of rebellion or dissent. However, such sophisticated acts of rebellion and technological know-how may not always be accessible to “the less educated and conservative masses from rural and urban areas” whose main resource for news have been television channels, controlled by the government (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 12). Indeed, Bozdağ (2016) argues that blocking websites has proven “ineffective in reducing traffic to banned websites” which at times has helped increase such traffic, such blockings and bans are symbolic acts on the part of the AKP government (p. 136). The foreseen effects of such blockings is “intimidation and deligitimi[s]ation” and the perpetration of self-censorship of voices of dissent while acting as “a demonstration of power to the AKP’s own voters” (Bozdağ, 2016, pp. 136, 137). Perhaps even more significantly, Bozdağ observes that the government can use website blockings as leverage in negotiating with commercial Internet giants such as Twitter to execute the blocking of certain tweets and accounts (ibid.). While such justifications can help explain the AKP’s relationship with the Internet, the episode following 2016’s failed coup attempt reveals many more contradictions and questions regarding the seeming value invested by the AKP in Internet technologies and online social networks.

The contradictory stances demonstrated by the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in terms of their relationship to Internet technologies and online social networks have become more and more evident from 2014 onwards leading up to Erdogan’s FaceTime call to the CNNTürk news studio on 15 July 2016 during the coup attempt. In January 2015, upon the retirement of “some key members of the Constitutional



Court” who contributed to the repeal of the September 2014 amendment *supposedly against “defamation on the Internet”*, the amendments were reintroduced with “harsher measures” and adopted by parliament by 19 March 2015 (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p. 11). In April 2015, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were temporarily banned “until they complied with requests to restrict access to sensitive content, including material related to the abduction and killing of a public prosecutor” after a hostage crisis in Istanbul Çağlayan Court House.<sup>21</sup> In addition Recep Tayyip Erdoğan “filed criminal complaints against more than 67 people for allegedly insulting him online” from August 2014 (the beginning of his presidency) until May 2015 (Freedom House, 2015, p. 1). On 22 July 2015, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were “blocked briefly until they complied with court orders to remove images and videos related to the deadly bombing of a pro-Kurdish protest” in Suruç<sup>22</sup> (Freedom House, 2015 p.7). According to Yesil et al. (2017) 173 URLs were blocked following this attack (p.12). Website blockings in Turkey also affected “alternative news sources that report news on south eastern Turkey and Kurdish issues” and other websites containing a variety of sexually explicit, atheist, and anti-Muslim content through non-transparent procedures (Freedom House, 2015, pp. 8-9). Yeşil et al. observe that “bandwidth throttling, the intentional slowing down of internet service at the ISP level [and] DNS poisoning, a form of hacking or blocking social media sites by surreptitiously redirecting users to incorrect IP addresses” were the two new tools that

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21 This incident refers to the incarceration and execution of a high court chief prosecutor, Mehmet Selim Kiraz, by two members of the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front in April 2015. Kiraz was investigating the death of 15 year-old Berkin Elvan who was hit by a police gas canister fired during the Gezi protests in 2013.

22 A bomb attack alleged to have been perpetrated by a female IS militant on 20 July 2015 killed 30 people during a news conference organised by young activists planning the reconstruction of the neighbouring town of Kobane.

the AKP government used between 2013 and 2016 to limit the dissemination of news and information online (Yeşil et al., 2017, pp. 11-12).

### **The AKP and the Coup Attempt: Endorsing Social Media**

These systematic and diverse tactics used by the AKP government demonstrate the desperation and immediacy with which it needed to apply the 2015 amendments to Law No. 5651. As experienced during the tragic events preceding the 15 July coup attempt, the AKP used a combination of throttling and/or URL website blocking and banning to limit the dissemination of information in the aftermath of the bomb attacks on 10 October 2015 (Ankara), 12 January 2015 (Istanbul), 17 February 2016 (Ankara), 13 March 2016 (Ankara), 19 March 2016 (Istanbul), and 28 June 2016 (Istanbul airport) (Yesil, Sozeri, & Khazraee, 2017, p. 12). The accumulation of these attacks on freedom of expression and access to information online is reflected in Freedom House's 2016 report on Turkey which changed the country's Internet Freedom Status as "Not Free" from the "Partly Free" status it held in its 2015 report (Freedom House, 2016). According to the report, while the number of blocked sites kept rising, "authorities specifically targeted the online accounts of journalists and activists" from June 2015 to May 2016 (ibid.). Furthermore, the report states that "[t]he climate of fear created by widespread government prosecution of online activities has led to an increase in self-censorship, particularly when it comes to criticism of the government or public officials" (ibid.). These observations are reflected in the lack of tonal diversity as evident in the findings from the analysis of video posts concerning the failed coup. The dominance of pro-government and specifically pro-Erdoğan content in these videos reflect both the public opinion management tactics applied by the AKP and the systemic intimidation and prevention

tactics used against the expression and distribution of insubordinate views and information both online and offline.

The failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 marks the moment when the AKP's with these media turned from actions made as political statements or intimidation into actually employing these media as an integral part of their PR and propaganda efforts while applying more effective precautions and methods such as legalising censorship and building a social media team. While in the beginning the Internet and online social networks were mere symbols through which to impose its power, after Gezi they turned into tools for the AKP. As previously explored, until the coup attempt, the AKP and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan dismissed and denigrated the use of online social networks for various reasons while using online social networks to their benefit through an elaborate "social media army" system which helped with the identification and surveillance of agents of dissent as well as extra-judicial intimidation of such agents by apparently non-governmental bodies and persons. The highly-publicised narrative propagating the distrust of online social networks and Internet technologies was broken once President Erdoğan contacted a CNNTurk news anchor via FaceTime on the night of 15 July 2016. One can argue that this symbolic gesture – as with other symbolic gestures such as website bans/blockings and public denouncement of Twitter – addressed the AKP and Erdoğan's followers. It also acknowledged the need to make use of these technologies at a given hour of need and also a public admission of the necessity for a bottom-up approach to controlling online public opinion. The President not only modelled the usage of these technologies for his followers (an example of the right time/way to use Internet technologies) but also maintained his victim image by resorting to such formerly "despised" methods of communication.

This step was in no way aimed at rectifying the image of Internet freedoms in Turkey. In relation to the night of the coup attempt, the Freedom on the Net 2017 report on Turkey suggests that after being briefly blocked between 23:00 and 24:00 hrs on 15 July 2016, the government “ordered ISPs to lift the ban” on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube in order to “help spread President Erdoğan’s call on citizens to defend the country” (ibid., p.7). The report also states that Turkey’s Internet Freedom Status remained “Not Free” by gaining five more points in the “Obstacles to Access”, “Limits on Content” and “Violations of User Rights” categories in the year following the coup attempt (Freedom House, 2017, p. 1). What is more, after the coup attempt the TIB was “shut down under an emergency decree” with all responsibilities “transferred” to the Information and Communication Technologies Authority whose board members are appointed by the government (ibid., p. 5).

In terms of Erdoğan’s FaceTime call with anchor Hande Firat on CNNTurk (Guardian, 2016) as well as other news channels such as NTV, the first question that comes to mind is why the call (FaceTime live video) was not directly projected on to the TV screen but was recorded as a separate call, distinguishing it from more technical forms of receiving interview calls on live television such as interviews led by reporters on location or the voice of the interviewee being broadcast over the image of the live studio. Another question directly related to this one is why the President chose to use FaceTime with video, instead of a regular call accompanied by a photograph on the television screen which is the typical habit in impromptu live interventions on Turkish television channels. Both of these questions imply a necessity to (1) emphasise the use of the specific medium and (2) to show the President in flesh and blood, thereby avoiding potential speculation about his wellbeing as well as his political and physical security. Through the use of a narrative

of amateurisation and victimisation reinforced with the FaceTime call displayed manually on the anchor's iPhone, Erdogan's call differentiated itself from a typical live television call by making it feel like an emergency: an urgent call in distress that was too vital to wait for proper on-screen graphics, traditional introductions and editing. The amateur narrative is further enhanced by the anchor holding a lapel microphone to the receiver to project Erdogan's voice to the broadcast and the screen image of Erdogan being disrupted by other calls coming in to the anchor's phone during their call. Erdogan's face reappears on the screen of the iPhone as Firat rejects the call by tapping on the red phone symbol. The last thirty seconds of Erdogan's call is significant as it indicates a departure from a diplomatic response regarding the coup attempt towards a more personable and passionate tone; Erdogan invites the "nation" to gather at squares and airports. He dares "these minorities" to come with their tanks and cannons and do "whatever they can" to the people. Erdogan goes on to emphasise the power of the people in overall terms. As such this urgent call for help ends on a note of solidarity and patriotism, with the President encouraging the public to face the tanks and weapons from an undisclosed, secure location.

Erdoğan's FaceTime call is also significant in terms of its relation to the narrative of his move from a secure location in Marmaris, where he was allegedly holidaying prior to the coup attempt (Narayan, Karimi, Fawzy & Pavlak, 2016). The haphazard FaceTime call further feeds into the sense of a danger to the President's political and physical security which had been repeatedly emphasised by both Erdogan and the media on the night of and directly after the coup attempt.<sup>23</sup> Hence, President

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23 In an online article from TRTWorld.com (Turkish State Radio and Television's English language division), Erdogan is quoted as having stated: "What is meant to happen will happen. We were already wearing our shrouds." This is a popular saying used by Erdoğan himself and AKP officials as well as their followers to imply their readiness to die for their cause. The article also emphasises the risk of President's abduction or execution by making claims such as: "Coup backers stormed his hotel while

Erdogan's FaceTime call implies that Internet technologies such as 4G connections and video calls can be applied as vital forms of communication in dire situations. In this sense, Erdoğan is publicly adopting the medium by making an example of the right way and the right time to use these technologies. By introducing this "new medium" (4G video calls) to the realm of the "old medium" (a live news broadcast), this call is reaching out to the members of the old medium's audience who might have no knowledge, access to and/or interest in using 4G video-calling technologies. As such, the call became a significant element of Erdogan's public relationship with Internet technologies and social media.

Through the FaceTime connection, the President was also calling on his followers to take ownership of the technology, the medium and the related political participation practices which had previously been associated with the Gezi movement in Turkey as well as other anti-governmental movements across the world. This confidence in the medium is a result of the sterilisation of the online realm in Turkey through years of effort on the part of the AKP and President Erdoğan. March 19, 2015 marks the last set of amendments introduced by the AKP government to Law No. 5651 before the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. As demonstrated in this chapter, this sterilisation of the Internet in Turkey has involved legal and policy changes in favour of keeping secret government officials and the President and his family's dealings while compromising freedom of expression, net neutrality and privacy, as well as the general public's access to information. This has been achieved through laws enabling censorship, throttling, the banning and blocking of websites/URLs, and content removal processes.

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others harassed his jet. That indicated that they would either have brought Erdogan to his knees or assassinated him" (TRTWorld, 2017).

## **Chapter 5. Meta-Activism in the Gezi Movement: Participation in the Gezi Protests through an Online Network's Video Application**

The Gezi movement was the starting point for my interest in the role of camera phones and 3G connections in social movements and the modes of participation these technologies allowed. Because I was at home caring for a family member who had gone through a vital operation and was still receiving treatment during the summer of Gezi, for me the most convenient (and low cost) way of participating in the protests was by following them via online social networks. I spent every minute I could spare online, watching videos captured both on the street as well as those recorded by people from their homes and other locations. Along with the rest of the household, we were avid participants in the pots and pans protests that took place at the time. Most of the time I would not need to check the clock as I would begin to hear the banging of one or two vessels, then I would head to the window or our balcony to join in. For those who believe solely in the authenticity of street participation as activism, I was a clicktivist or a slacktivist. For me the Gezi movement was a central part of my life as I spent my days in front of the computer or on my phone, following the events, resharing what I hoped to be accurate and “positive information” (“kesin bilgi” in Turkish), even creating political memes on Photoshop (a project that, sadly for me, did not gain much traction in the vast sea of memes and graphic art created about the Gezi protests). It took me a couple of weeks before I could take some time off from my family responsibilities and visit Gezi Park and experience the feeling of solidarity there, even for a few hours. However, when I think of the Gezi movement, what I remember is the hours I spent online with my heart racing at the injustice taking place on the streets, snarling at politicians' comments, sometimes applauding brave and intelligent actions on the street while at times cringing at politically incorrect or

unimaginative expressions on the street or in Gezi Park, and thinking hard about a lot of the issues that have become part of this dissertation, especially in terms of the offline and online self-reflexive representation tactics of the participants.

I never believed I participated in the offline action in Gezi as I was only able to visit the park, which at the time had become a somewhat open air museum, for a couple of hours. By that stage the site had an aura of unfulfilled nostalgia and it was as if the protests were over before they actually were, while those who had participated were exchanging “war” stories and revelling at the movement’s beauty and the harmony. This Gezi nostalgia that came too quickly led me to think more about what political participation is or who is considered an activist. The quick formula of political participation as “being there” and “being present” no matter what did not offer a sustainable solution, especially in the post-2000 world of transnational movements and activism. Therefore, I set out – despite my political affiliation and personal opinions about the Gezi movement – to critically examine *all* participatory practices at the online-offline nexus. For me, the first step was to demythologise participation in Gezi through a rigorous analysis of online video posts created by its participants, which would end up revealing how people’s online and offline political actions not only depended on one another but were also the logical combination since the communication of the true nature of the protests and the protesters to a wider audience was of the utmost importance in order to cultivate sympathisers and to recruit others.

Almost two and a half years after the summer of Gezi, I conducted an empirical study on Vine in order to determine if there were patterns in how videos were used on online social networks during the Gezi protests. The study was led by the question of how people around the world used online social networks to participate in the Gezi



movement. This study has provided insights into the participatory habits related to the Gezi movement. The results not only show the difference between the documentation of offline presence in both the protests and the general expression of dissent, they also reveal certain themes that identified Gezi's particular culture during the summer of 2013. The following analysis will show why and under what circumstances online and/or offline actions should be considered as meta-activism while emphasising some crucial points about the contextual factors in the Gezi movement as compared to the anti-coup movement. First, I begin by asking why Gezi participants would post videos on any of the online social networks. Then, I discuss what type of context-specific political, social and communicational factors were reflected in the video posts. Following this I provide examples from various patterns of representation in the sample of video posts. Finally, I discuss the implications of these patterns on the understanding of how people participated in the Gezi movement through the usage of smartphones and online social networks.

### **Primary Motivations behind Vine Video Posts**

At this point, it is necessary to demonstrate that sharing video posts about the Gezi movement was crucial for two overarching motivations, namely, participation in/support for the movement as well as protecting the image of the movement and its participants. One of the most primal reasons for posting videos is to locate oneself within a protest or a movement, disregarding whether that location corresponds to ground zero or not. In the context of the Gezi protests, depicting oneself in street or online participation is not solely aimed at reporting attendance but also to indicate support for the movement by putting oneself in both physical and non-physical danger. McGarry et al. (2019) note that the government would even use pictures they

found on confiscated mobile phones to prosecute protesters (p. 291). As demonstrated during the Gezi protests when 38 Twitter users in Izmir were detained and “investigated under Penal Code articles 214 (encouraging the commission of a crime) and 217 (encouraging breaking of the law)” (Amnesty International, 2013, p.50), there was little rhyme or reason as to how and why certain people ended up detained, arrested, targeted or prosecuted by the state and for what type of online or offline actions, whether they were related to the Gezi protests specifically or in support of the movement in general. Hence, these types of video posts acted as motivation for other participants and supporters of the Gezi movement while posing a challenge to the government’s undemocratic and defamatory tactics (McGarry et al., 2019, p.289).

A recurring point of contention between the AKP government and participants’ respective representation of the Gezi protests concerned the magnitude of the crowds and the ubiquity of the protests. Prime Minister Erdogan attempted to belittle the size of the crowds and the conviction of the masses in Gezi by calling them “just a few marauders” (Harding, 2013; Get the News, 2013) and threatening that he was barely retaining “50 percent” (referring to his voter base) at home (Hürriyet Daily News, 2013). The mainstream news outlets under the government’s watchful eye emphasised these statements and through manipulated representations of the protests and protesters enabled these statements to influence the television-watching<sup>24</sup> and newspaper-reading majority of the Turkish population. Video posts had the potential to counteract these messages by providing visual evidence of the kind of people who were participating in the Gezi protests (McGarry et al., 2019, p. 285) and the enormity of the crowds involved, not only in the park or in Istanbul but also in many

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24 Konda Gezi Report (2014) states that 80 percent of AKP voters surveyed embraced the television as their primary news source compared to 60 percent of the voters of the opposition CHP and 61 percent of MHP voters (p. 27).

cities across Turkey and around the world. Hacıyakupoğlu and Zhang (2015) have observed that for the interviewees in their study, videos were the most reliable source of online information as opposed to written information and images which needed to be double-checked for accuracy (p. 459). Protesters were willing to create and distribute the video records and the accompanying information in these Vine video posts of their presence and of people other than themselves due to these two motivations. Both participation/support and maintenance of a collective image require self-reflexivity, albeit on different levels, including the self-reflexivity of an individual and the self-reflexivity of a multitude. Öztürkmen and Martin (2014) explain that their participation in the Gezi protests reflects their being “both improvising actors and members of a stunned audience” of a performance (p. 39). Gezi participants, thus, were aware of their image in the eye of the public not only because of the technologies that afforded them to broadcast their participation but also because of the tactics used by the AKP government to taint that image. The maintenance of a respectable and relatable image (in both physical and immaterial senses of the word) became part of participation in Gezi. At precisely this point selfies and images of one’s bodily parts become significant methods in placing oneself within the frame of one’s environment, namely as part of the multitude. These self-reflexive images thereby superimposed their subjects onto the culture of the Gezi movement at the intersection of online-offline participation, and placed responsibility on the participant to uphold its collective impression through every individual contribution.

## **Context-Specific Factors Reflected in Vine Video Posts**

The analysis of Vine video posts reaffirmed some of the circumstances reflected in the literature on the Gezi movement explored in Chapter 1. These context-specific circumstances included mass media censorship enforced by the AKP government; police brutality and physical violence towards protesters; an atmosphere of intimidation by the government that bolstered the fear of profiling and, therefore, self-censorship; and, the tension between the government's hegemonic attitude epitomised in then-Prime Minister Erdogan and the leaderless outlook of the Gezi movement. Among the Vine video posts which have been analysed as part of this study, the state's censorship and violence comes up as a recurring factor shaping participation in the Gezi movement. The dominant tactics used by participants included the depiction or reporting of protests and police brutality as well as the usage of symbolism and "disproportionate intelligence" in the hope of bypassing censorship and evading prosecution. This is evidenced by the Konda Report on Gezi in which half of the respondents stated that they decided to go to the Gezi Park after "seeing police brutality" (Konda, 2014). The Amnesty International (2013) report on Gezi confirms that the Turkish mainstream national media reported little on either the protests and or the protesters' perspectives in an example of self-censorship while the international media was accused by the Turkish government of "misrepresenting the events and attempting to inflame tensions" (p. 6). Therefore, it is logical to argue that those who learnt about the Gezi movement via television were informed mostly by the government's representation of the protests while those who actually saw police brutality happening in Gezi and took action afterwards did so thanks to images and videos circulating on online social networks and alternative news sources.

Censorship and violence caused by police brutality are the two defining factors of the Gezi context that makes online participation a form of meta-activism. Many of the representations of Gezi Park and other aspects of the protests as well as unique and staged representations of political commentary online can be considered meta-activism. Understanding that these views and images could not be distributed as widely were it not for smartphones and online social networks makes these actions as important (if not more so) than occupying Gezi Park. It is through the communication of these realities to a wider audience that the Gezi movement built its follower base and contributed to the validation of their image in the public eye (Hacıyakupoğlu and Zhang, 2015; Barika et al., 2018; McGarry et al., 2019).

Another factor tied to censorship and police violence is intimidation by profiling. Many people who voiced their opinion about the protests online or on television, risked their statuses, jobs, peace and wellbeing. This type of intimidation affected representation of Gezi in two distinct ways, including: (1) self-censorship as observed across mainstream television and news media; and, (2) in symbolic methods of representation that aimed to evade such dire consequences. As this chapter will illustrate, Gezi participants countered censorship and profiling through the use of humour and symbolism (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014; Gürcan and Peker, 2015a; Gurel, 2015).

Another significant aspect of the Gezi movement reflected in online video representations is its lack of a leader. Like the movement itself, these video posts depict participation in the Gezi protests without any reference to a leadership figure. Instead, these videos reflect a multiplicity of identities given their diversity. The creative forms of communication adopted by the participants generated unique content and a variety of messages that embraced the main principles of the movement

such as non-violence, care for the environment and all living beings, and harmony between different political views and affiliations, religions and ethnicities. The variety of each of these messages carry a reaction to the systemic attack on social and political freedoms and on the environment by the hegemony of AKP and the state.

These general principles related to Gezi are expertly performed through diverse practices and received widespread distribution on online social networks as well as other types of media outlets that allowed for their communication. This factor is represented in many videos which did not depict actual protest or direct political messages but reflected participation by representing art, performances, metaphors, mundane activities, children, animals, nature, weddings, bars, concerts, shopping centres etc. It should be noted that all of the video posts in the Vine sample make use of original video content which has been created by the application's user. Such content reference a range of subject matter, despite a majority of the video posts having been assigned to the 'park' theme, the video posts reveal a very diverse range of unique content created by different users. This is also reflected in the countless combinations of subthemes and perspectives that I have created to establish patterns in such unique content. The following section provides some examples from the sample of Vine posts which show how Gezi participants used video posts on online social networks to participate in the movement.

### **The 'Park' Theme and the Role of Relevant Video Posts**

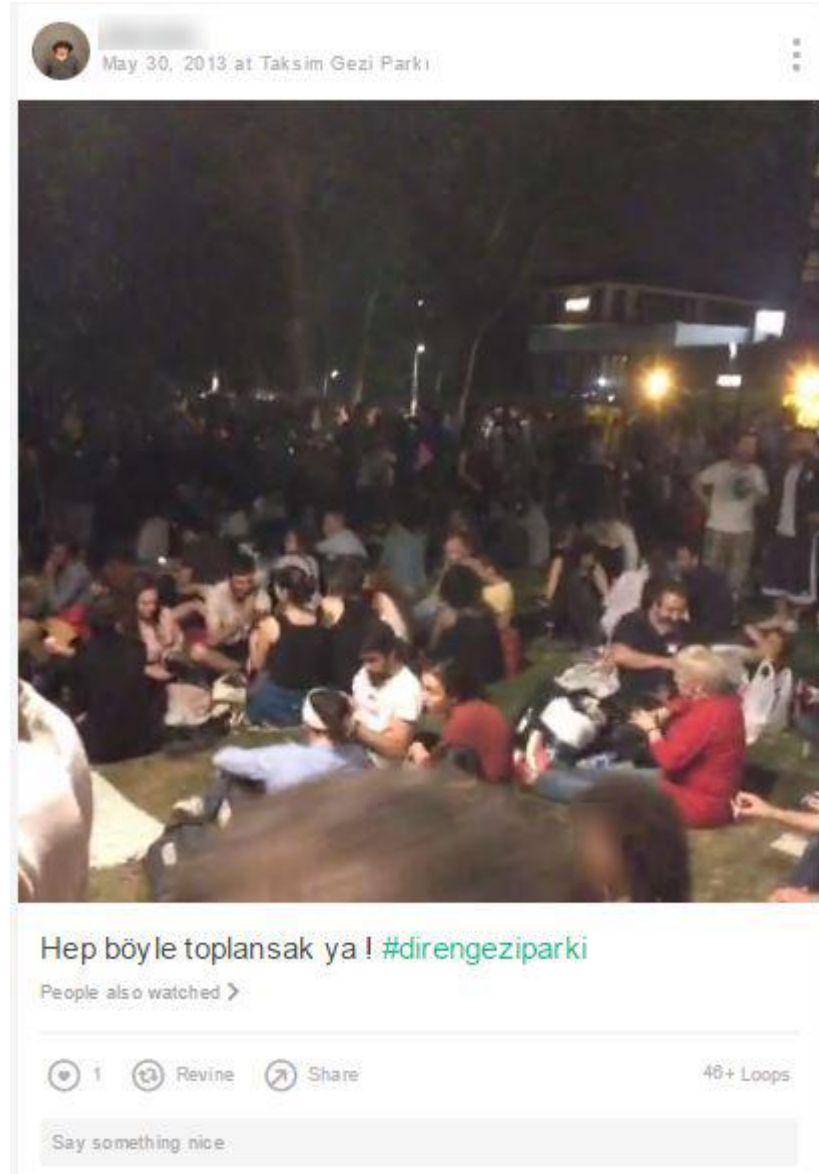
The videos assigned with the park theme touch on a contradiction with regards to their visual content depicting individuals and crowds going about daily tasks or rituals which may be evaluated as apolitical out of context and the depiction of the user's presence in or occupation of the Park which is one of the primal modes of

participation in the Gezi movement. Vine with the Taksim Gezi Park geotag and #direngeziparki hashtag posted by A.<sup>25</sup> on 30 May 2013 is made up of various shots from the Gezi Park at night with some of these images show people sitting or walking around the park while others show dancing to a live band's music (Figure 2). Such posts reveal a lot about life in the park—including mere presence in the park as the marker of people's occupation of the park vs. the police occupation of the park—as a summertime festival, where people are enjoying themselves peacefully. This video illustrates the general perspective in the 'Park' theme and is an example of the 'carnival' and 'occupation' subthemes. In the caption the user remarks on their wish to be able to gather like this all of the time. Such videos depicting the carnivalesque (Ömer, 2013; Sancar, 2013; Yegenoglu, 2013; Çelikkol 2014; Walton, 2015), peaceful and even banal (McGarry et al., 2019) aspects of the park provide evidence of the self-referential nostalgia that was part of the Gezi culture. This nostalgic perspective could also be a part of the participants' project to publicise the park for the purposes of (1) gaining more occupants and (2) controverting the government and mainstream media outlets' representation of the protests and protesters. The aim of this video post could, therefore, be to reveal the safety and the civility of the crowds in Gezi Park to those audiences who could be deliberating on their potential participation as well as those that would not consider doing so. The potential target audiences of such video posts could include someone who was "there" and was reminiscing about the park life as well as someone who was either unfamiliar with the protests and is up for recruitment to the cause, on the fence about going to the Park or to another street protest location and looking for motivation, or willing but unable to partake in street protests but is following or participating in the movement online. In

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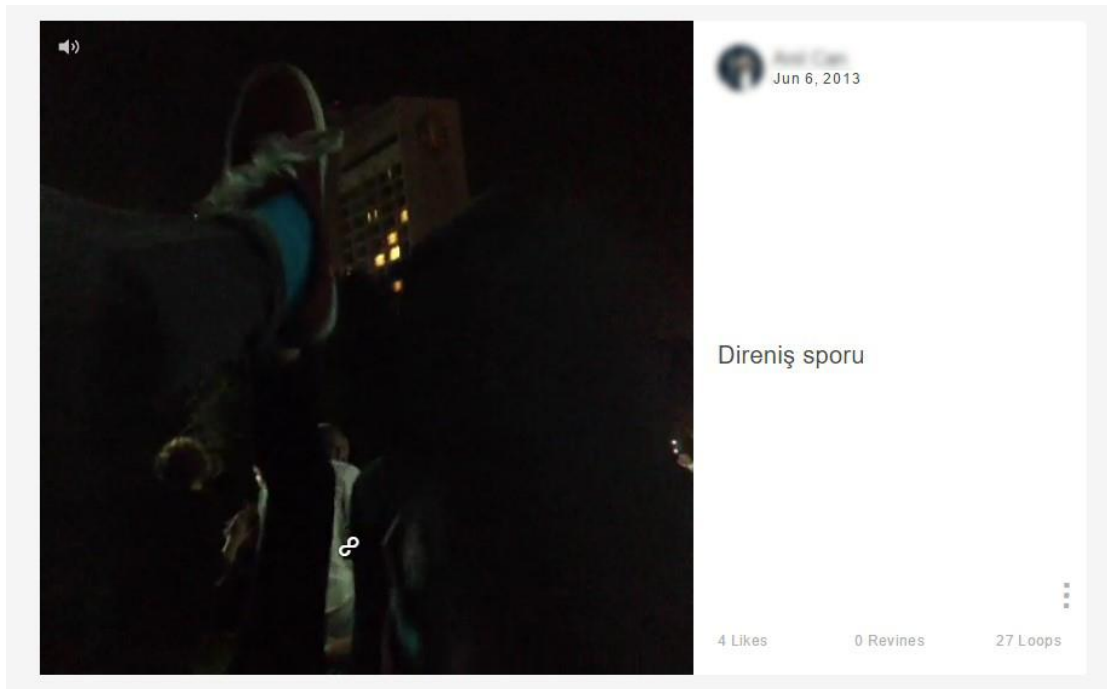
<sup>25</sup> All user handles have been anonymised.

addition, they could be someone who has seen the protests on television and is comparing notes with what is being said on mainstream media outlets about the protests, or someone who has only seen the protests on television and believes that the protesters are “terrorists” or “marauders” who have been tricked by foreign forces.



**Figure 2.** Vine post by A, 30 May 2013, geotag Taksim Gezi Parki, <https://vine.co/v/bYDnKwHH6rJ>





**Figure 3.** Vine post by A.C., 6 June 2013, retrieved from the Vine.co archives (originally posted with the geotag Taksim Gezi Parkı)

Another video that depicts the similar passive resistance of some of the ‘Park’-themed videos is A.C.’s Vine post from 6 June 2013 captioned “Resistance sport” with the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag. A.C.’s video depicts a pair of legs (supposedly his own) air cycling in the midst of a crowd of people sitting in an open space as we hear the short and playful utterance “*Sports!*” and this is assigned to the ‘Park’ theme (Figure 3). In terms of its subject matter, the video post depicts the idleness that is a practical side-effect of being present at a location for long hours for the sake of occupying it. McGarry et al. (2019) state that the depiction of “mundane activities become acts of resistance” when represented under hashtags related to the Gezi protests (p. 296). An analysis of the videos and captions of the user’s other video posts reveals that this video might, in fact, not have been shot in the Gezi Park; however, the geotag was used symbolically to refer to a symbolic occupation as part of the causes of the Gezi protests. This is one of the many instances where meta-data

analysis could not solely reveal the message behind the use of the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag. Geotags can deliver content not captured at the alleged location. This feature allows Gezi protesters to “occupy” the park digitally even when it was impossible for them to enter the park due to police interventions. Ironically, this meta-data geotag reveals support for the protests while abandoning its original purpose of providing factual information about the user’s location, hence, geotags can become more like hashtags as they constitute messages in their own right. In this sense, the “Taksim Gezi Parkı” geotag played a symbolic function very much in the fashion of the actual park it refers to. This video post exemplifies how Gezi Park represents respect and love for the environment and is also a “symbolic place and a source of identification for a dispersed public of sympathisers” (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.122). Therefore, and as occupations and public forums at other parks around Istanbul demonstrated during and after the protests, it must be saved (Tahaoğlu and Yöney, 2013). In A.C.’s video post, Gezi Park is simultaneously referred to through the user’s occupancy of another physical park as well as the park’s digital reflection as represented in the geotag. Once the geotag abandons its original purpose, it is unreliable data for studies based on generalised interpretations of such tags. However, close analysis of video posts reveals more meaning than a single piece of meta-data in a big data study.

This video also reveals a “not-selfie” (Tiidenberg & Wheelan, 2017) or a kind of selfie without the face, reminiscent of the popular trope of posting vacation images of feet which became a prominent category of self-representation on online social networks in 2013. Images of feet can be viewed as both a subcategory of the selfie and as a completely different and contradictory method of depicting oneself in a given environment. Like the selfie, images of feet are evidence of presence; unlike the selfie, the viewer’s gaze turns away from the videographer towards the

environment. Images of feet are a more convenient way of capturing oneself in an environment due to the positioning of the camera phone-holding hands in relation to the feet of the user. It is also a method to create first person point-of-view photographs and videos where the viewer can superimpose themselves in the environment captured. Conveniently, these images hide one's face and identity while conveying presence at a particular location. The videographer remains as the subject-object but the point-of-view is not limited to their face. Unlike the selfie images, images of feet present a more open-ended form of self-reflexivity where the videographer invites the viewer into the environment by sharing their point-of-view. These types of images are thereby self-reflexive more in terms of their perspective than a reflexivity of user identity while making the scene more personalised by depicting evidence of presence and more relatable by positioning the viewer in the shoes of the participant through a point-of-view frame.

### **Examples of Vine Posts of the Police Presence Inside and Outside of Gezi Park**

The issue of the presence of the police is representative of the atmosphere of intimidation enforced by the AKP government and the state, despite the lack of physical altercations between the policemen and civilians in these videos, their recorded presence in great numbers and with riot gear and vehicles in the public space encapsulates the clampdown on the Gezi protests. Some of the videos in the sample make use of footage from the frontlines in order to create videos with the 'symbolic' perspective. For example, a video posted by A.T. on 31 May 2013 and captioned "Orantisiz guc kullanmaya uygun adim" (Quick time to disproportionate force) depicts the casual steps of a number of policemen as they walk past with their intimidating equipment and helmets hanging from their hands, in a moment of calm

before the storm (Figure 4). The video and the caption convey the sense of threat through word play and the robot-like march of the policemen whose boots seem even more intimidating in the absence of their faces. I have assigned this video to the 'frontline' and 'symbolic' perspectives and the 'police', 'violence' and 'metaphorical' subthemes as such videos need to be analysed as they are as well as through assumptions of intentionality. It may well be that the user tried to film the presence of the policemen and had to lower her/his phone to hide the fact that s/he was filming them. It could also be that this choice of frame was an intentional, aesthetic choice.



**Figure 4.** Vine post by A.T., 31 May 2013, geotag Taksim Gezi Parki, “Quicktime to Disproportionate Force”, <https://vine.co/v/bYxAQ16W993>

Of the videos studied, there are those that depict police officers or their vehicles in inactive or non-violent situations, and the frequency of these images become signals of the common trauma caused by perpetual acts of brutality directed at the protesters at every stage of the protests (Letsch, 2013a; Arango, 2013). While depictions of violence by the police are used as evidence, videos representing non-violent police are symbolic of the participants’ feelings of alarm as they encountered the threatening vehicles (water cannon vehicles, buses, all-wielded steel ‘Akrep’ vehicles) and great

numbers of police officers on a daily basis from the protest's inception. According to a study conducted in Gezi Park by Konda (2014), 49.1% of the participants decided to go to the park after they "saw the police brutality" as opposed to the 19% who decided after the tree uprooting attempt and 14.2% after hearing then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments (Konda, 2014, p. 18). On the other hand, 6.2% of participants claimed that the reason they occupied Gezi Park was because they were against police brutality as opposed to 34.1% who claimed they were there "For their freedom" and 18.4% who were there because of "abuse of rights" and "to demand their rights" (p. 19). Hence, the sense of intimidation from the ongoing presence of police forces on the streets is a recurrent feature in the videos posted by Gezi participants.

A number of examples of such videos which are both signs of this traumatised depiction of the police forces and evidence of the deliberate intimidation before a crackdown in Gezi Park were posted by S. with either the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag or #direngeziparkı hashtag on 30 May 2013. These videos are all assigned the 'park' and 'action' themes as they depict police presence at the Gezi Park barricade. The first video with the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag shows a number of armed and equipped police officers leaving the park and walking towards Taksim Square (Figure 5). The caption reads: "*Where are these police officers going, with cylinders in their hands.*"<sup>26</sup> Despite the lack of violence in the acts visually depicted in this post, the caption confirms the foreshadowing of conflict provided by the police officers' helmets, shields and bulletproof vests. This foreshadowing reflects the history of

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<sup>26</sup> S. uses the word "tüp" which in Turkish translates as canister or cylinder, more generally a vessel used to store gas. The user could be referring to teargas cans or cylinders carried on the backs of policemen to use against protesters.

clashes between police forces and protesters at many different moments of political conflict in Turkey.



**Figure 5.** Vine post by S., 31 May 2013, “Where are these police officers going?”, <https://vine.co/v/bYFQ3tziXb2>

The second of these consecutive posts shows a number of police officers waiting inside the park behind a police barricade from where the video has been shot (Figure 6). The video’s visual message of the occupation of Gezi Park by the police and the consequent exclusion of passive protesters from the park is emphasised by the opposite sides of the barricade and accompanied by a question: “*Opposite sides of the barricade! When did obstacles, guns, bombs come between us? :(* (#direngeziparkı #DirenGeziParki.” This question signals the separation of the participants from two significant entities: firstly, their detachment from a public place and secondly, the separation from the civil servants. This video post is not only lamenting the violence that has come between people and their freedom to protest but can also be interpreted

as reproving the hostility between the police forces and the people. Hence, the video can be an example of how criticism of the police forces' violence is balanced with an acknowledgement of the policemen's professional obligations.



**Figure 6.** Vine post by S., 30 May 2013, with the #direngeziparki hashtag  
<https://vine.co/v/bYF0bLrm7zD>

The message of the following Vine post by S. contradicts the hesitance and ambivalence of the previous posts (Figure 7). Posted on the same date, 31 May 2013, the Vine video is dominated by images of the police forces on the opposite side of the barricade while the caption reads: “*There are some civils inside, you cannot hear it but they are discussing how they can chain [people] if there is resistance!...*” Whether the user is referring to undercover officers or actual civilians using the word *siviller* is unclear as the Turkish word for civilians, *sivil*, is also a shorthand for undercover policemen. Yet, the feeling of verbal and physical intimidation by the police is depicted through a number of shots of a variety of officers and plainclothes



individuals behind the barricades. Unlike S.'s first Vine post, there seems to be a greater level of urgency on the part of the user to capture as many of the subjects as possible. The post is also different in terms of its intention to provide a variety in people's faces behind the barricade and the sense of regret from not being able to record their discussion audibly comes through in the captions. This Vine post from the early days of the Gezi protests, like many other posts on a variety of online social media platforms, attempts to convince the audience of the impending police brutality despite the passive images of police officers standing in front of the camera lens.



**Figure 7.** Vine post by S., 30 May 2013, with the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag.  
<https://vine.co/v/bYF9TVP9bnO>

Another Vine post by S. from the next day, 1 June 2016, with the Taksim Gezi Parkı geotag shows streets populated by police officers and litter through point-of-view shots from a moving vehicle. The video depicts regular civilians and different groups of officers in a variety of locations while focusing on what look like piles of waste. The caption elaborates on these images: “*Last night’s remnants in the square and yet,*

*again, armed police officers waiting!...*” Through this caption these passive scenes are transformed into threatening images. The sense of past and impending danger in these depictions of the police presence is evidence of the urgency of these users’ attempt to communicate police brutality against Gezi participants in the face of an absolute commercial media censorship. While depictions of street clashes show participants in action, the police presence videos show participants and other civilians as passive. As such, Vine posts depicting the police presence point to the state’s fundamental violence regardless of the participants’ actions. Video posts that do not show direct violence also remind us that participants may not be able to record videos while defending themselves against or running from the police.

These video posts are also indicative of a reaction to an ongoing systemic problem and its effect on society whereby citizens no longer see the police as protectors but rather as fear-inducing figures and adversaries. This is also because riot gear has become commonplace around the world. In addition, riot gear such as helmets, shields, vests, water cannons and other armoured vehicles appear absurd in the midst of unassuming passers-by on a regular working day in the city and even against a crowd of young and old, peaceful protestors. However, this absurdity is broken once the violence foreshadowed by this policing equipment is fulfilled; this feeling of the absurd is then transformed into a feeling of disbelief and paranoia. The public, thereby, begins to see such policing precautions as a threat to their wellbeing and such images – and even the passive presence of a multiplicity of policemen and/or women (even though such dedicated groups seldom include female officers) – become symbolic of violence against protestors and other members of the public. Hence, while from a professional news standpoint these videos do not depict

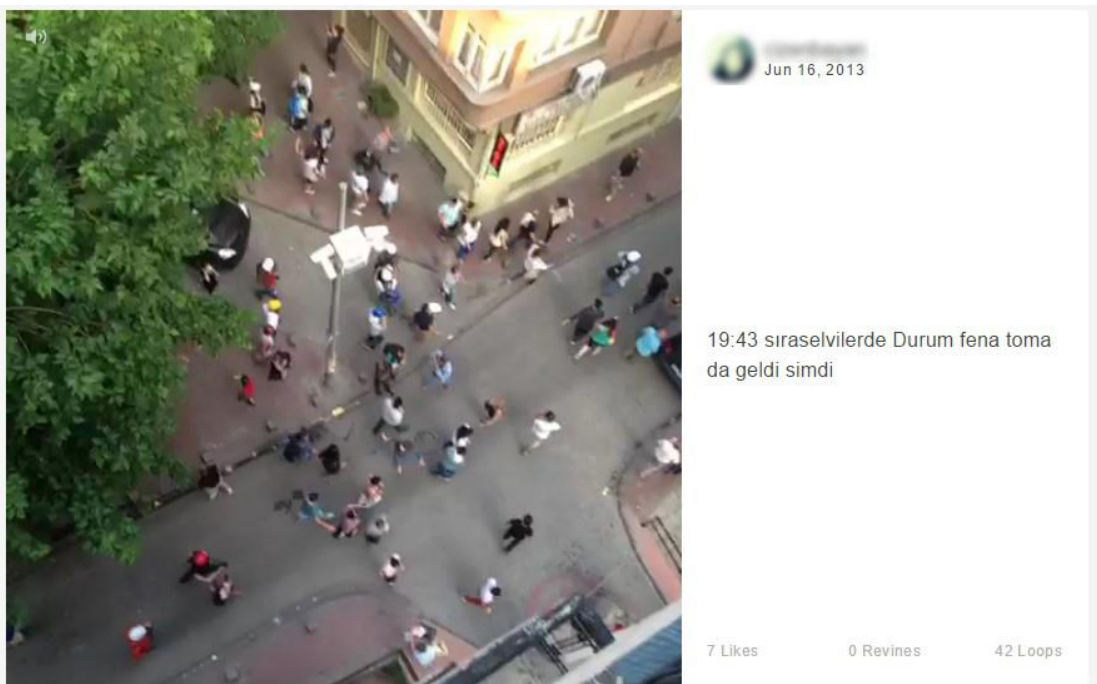
violence, they signal such violence via foreshadowing or by making symbolic connections.

### **Police Brutality in Vine Posts by Gezi Participants**

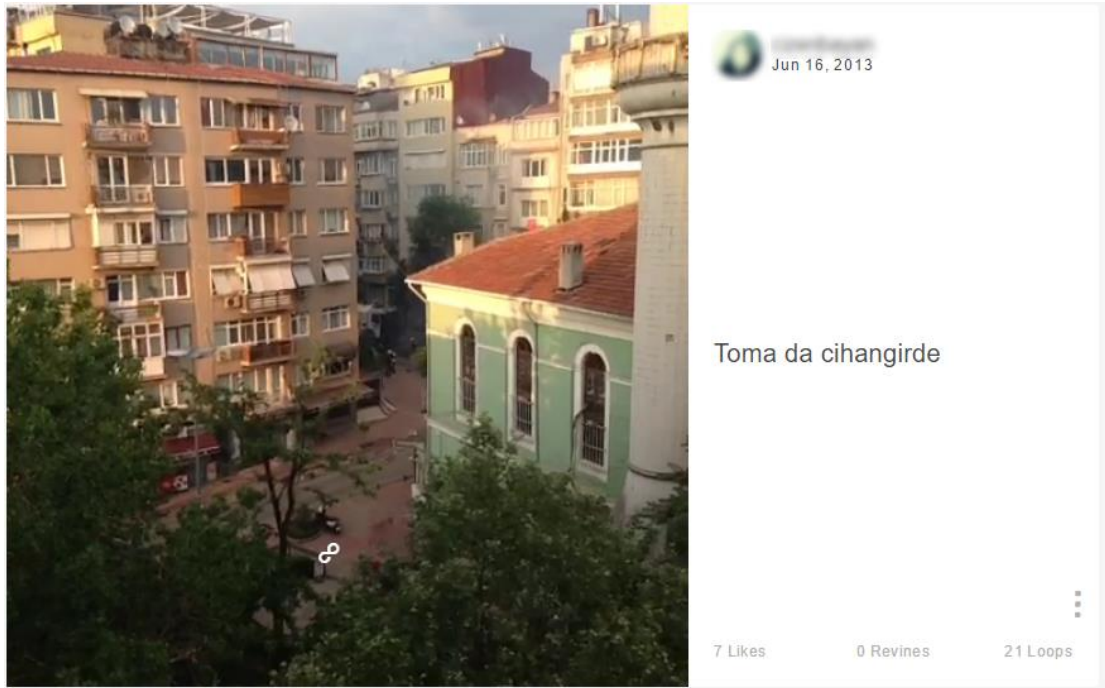
Such passive images of the police forces and Gezi participants are juxtaposed with Vine posts depicting police brutality and protest marches. Amnesty International (2013) has reported that the police use of “water cannons, pepper sprays and tear gas in a clearly unnecessary and disproportionate manner” was revealed by both television footage and videos shared via online social networks (p.16). A series of Vine posts by C.B. from 16 and 17 June 2013 depict the street clashes from the balcony of a building in the Cihangir neighbourhood, which was one of the most heated sites close to Taksim Square where protesters retreated to during clashes with police. The Vine posts by C.B. depict repeated moments of police brutality and protesters’ struggle to run from it, thus they have assigned the ‘action’ theme and the ‘aerial’ perspective.

The caption of one of the posts from June 16 reads “*19:43 the situation is bad in sıraselviler anti-riot vehicle just turned up*” referring to the police forces repelling Gezi protesters with teargas canisters on Sıraselviler Street (Figure 8). The final shot shows one of the gas canisters flying in the direction of the protesters’ fleeing towards Firuz Agha Mosque in Cihangir Square. Other posts by the same user from the same day also depict the backward and forwards movement of the Gezi protesters and the police forces. One post captioned “*Anti-riot vehicle is in Cihangir*” depict the teargas explosions and an anti-riot vehicle approaching Cihangir Square (Figure 9). Cutting through brief shots of teargas explosions, escaping protesters and the

approaching anti-riot vehicle, the video ends with the sound of a teargas rifle being fired. In C.B.'s last post of the same series posted on 17 June 2016, the clashes between the police forces and the protesters continue into the night. This post does not have a caption but instead depicts the water cannon approaching Cihangir Square while spraying water at a group of protesters. The aerial perspective appears to be useful in depicting police brutality because not only are the protesters on the street unable to take out their smartphones and record a clear video while running away from teargas or water, but this point of view also reveals the dynamic between the police forces and the protesters in flux through the recorder's uncompromised perspective. This perspective also allows the viewer to depict the discrepancy between the equipment and weapons used by the police force and the shields, helmets and masks contrived by the protesters, if they are wearing any at all.

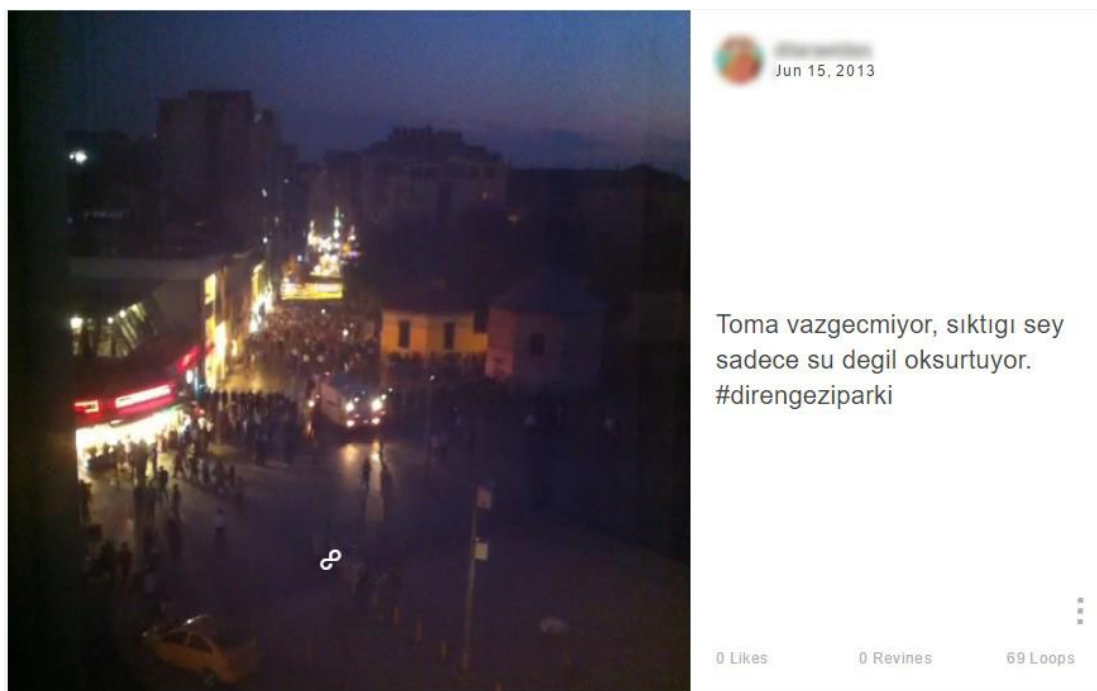


**Figure 8.** Vine post by C.B., 16 June 2013, with #direngeziparkı hashtag, <https://vine.co/v/hB5pjBwwwLp>



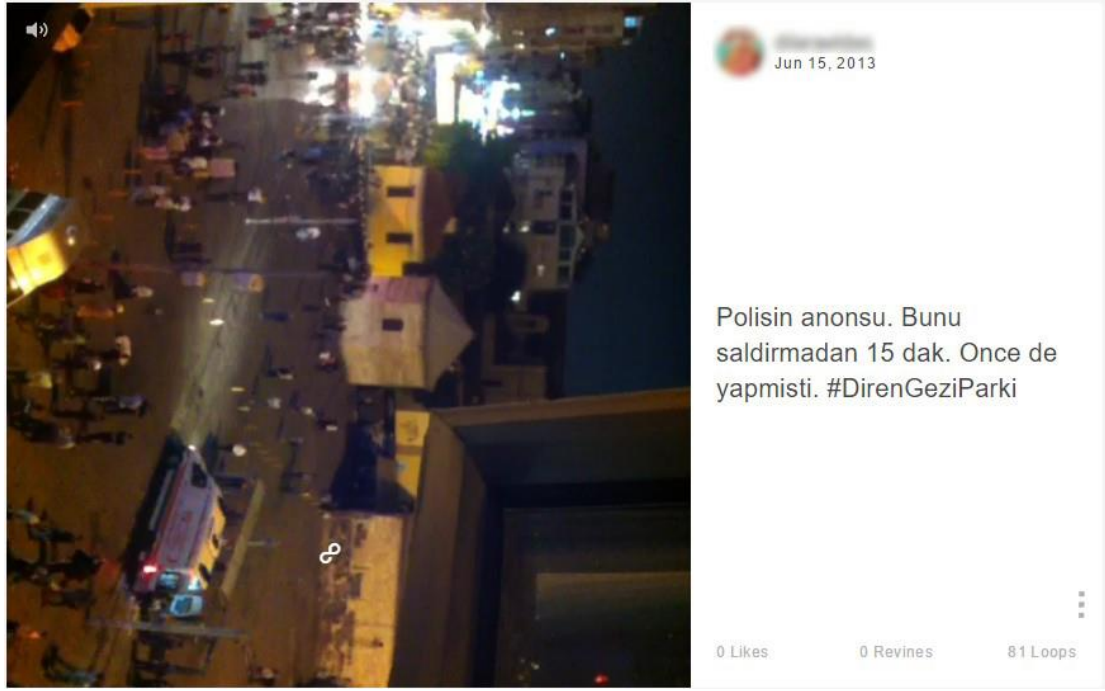
**Figure 9.** Vine post by C.B., 16 June 2013, with #direngeziparkı hashtag, <https://vine.co/v/hB5pt1JiLLu>

Similarly, a series of Vine posts by D.E. from 15 June 2013 with the #direngeziparkı hashtag makes use of an aerial view to show the positioning of the police forces in Taksim Square (Figure 10). In the post captioned “*Anti-riot vehicle is not giving up, whatever it is spraying is not only water it makes you cough #direngeziparkı*”, the video clearly shows the cannon spraying the protesters accompanied by the jeers from what seems to be the front of a considerable crowd on Istiklal Street, possibly the longest commercial and touristic pedestrian street in Turkey. From the user’s protected point of view, we see a group of police officers standing next to the water cannon. However, the information in the caption is crucial in communicating aspects of this situation which cannot be demonstrated solely through the video. As such, different components of a Vine post such as a hashtag, a caption and the visual and audial content come together to convey an ultimate density of information.



**Figure 10.** Vine post by D.E. from 15 June 2013 with #direngeziparki  
<https://vine.co/v/hBm57lOatpm>

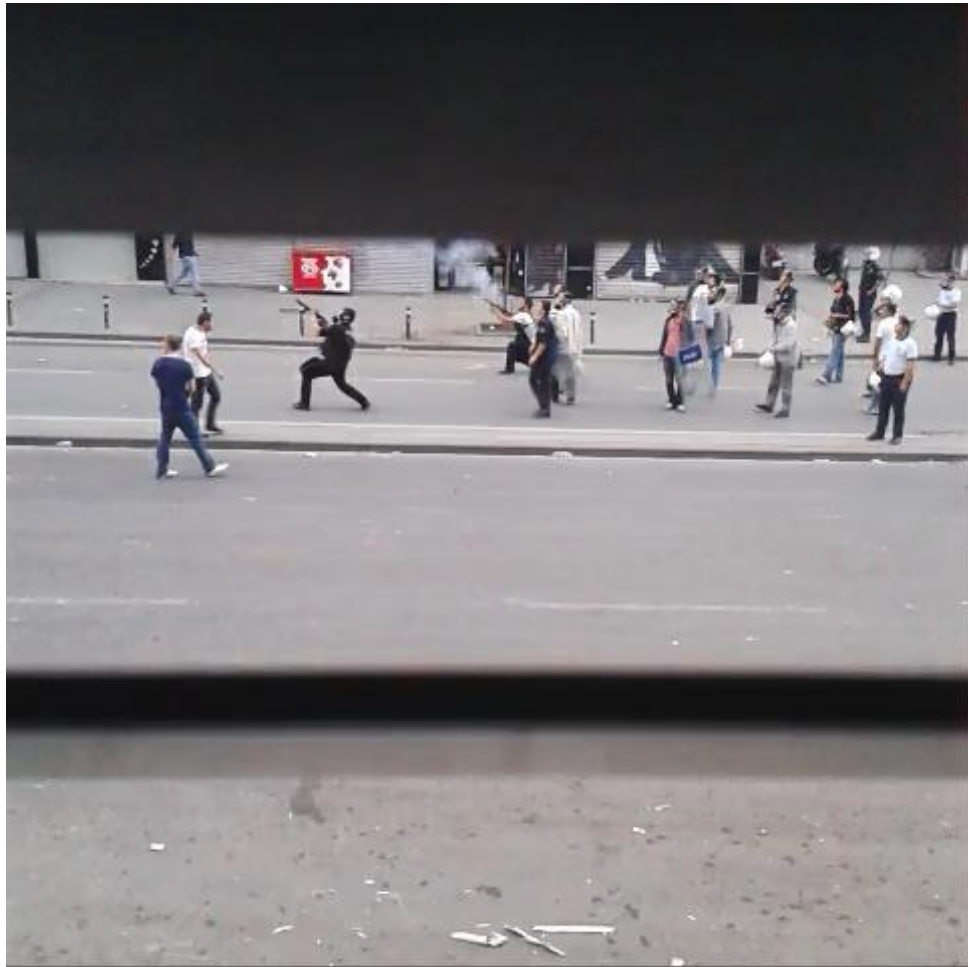
The next post by D.E. depicts an announcement by the police forces stating that the police would not interfere as long as the protesters dispersed in silence, telling the crowd not to force their luck while the caption reads: “*Police announcement. They did the same 15 minutes before they attacked. #DirenGeziParki*” (Figure 11). The ironic discrepancy between the police announcement that we hear and the information revealed by the user reveals the way in which police brutality is trying to be swept under the rug. The theatricality of the actions of the state and the media while trying to cope with the unexpected spread of protests during the Gezi summer, is reflected in the depiction of absurd moments that could have otherwise been forgotten.



**Figure 11.** Vine post by D.E., 15 June 2013, with #direngeziparki hashtag  
<https://vine.co/v/hBmHFqOjH2Q>

D.E.'s third Vine post tagged with #direngeziparki from the night of 15 June 2013 shows a now empty Istiklal Street with the police forces grouped towards the left of the screen on Siraselviler Street. It is possible to hear the chants of the protesters towards the end of the video, however, it is the caption that ties the story of these videos together: "*They repelled Istiklal, now it is Siraselviler's turn. The anti-riot vehicle is in 22.45 #direngeziparki*" Once again, the recorder's secure position on the upper floor of a building in Taksim Square allows them to capture important moments during a night of protest. There are a number of videos that make use of the 'aerial' perspective to record police brutality and action in ways that could not be possible by protesters or reporters on the street. Among such videos that make use of this perspective is H.'s Vine post from 16 June 2013 with the #occupygezi and #direngeziparki hashtags which is no longer available on the Vine.co archive (Figure 12). The captions inform us that the footage was shot in the Harbiye district while an

anti-riot vehicle drives by and two police officers shoot their teargas rifles towards an unseen location.

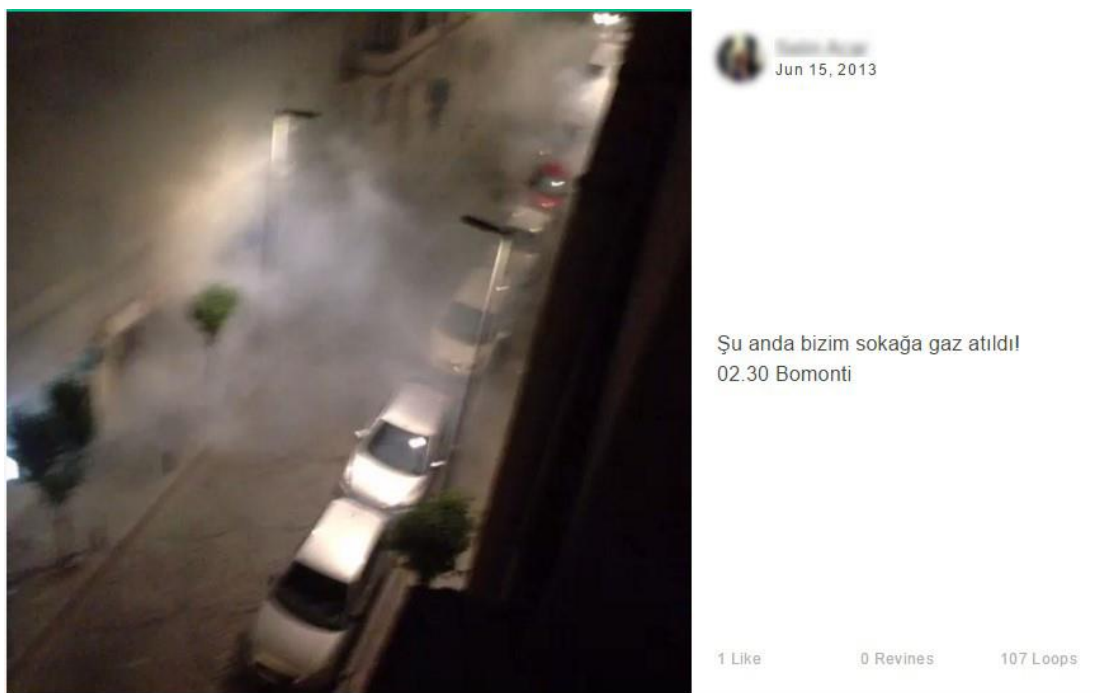


**Figure 12.** Still from a Vine post by H., 16 June 2013, with #occupygezi and #direngeziparki hashtags (post no longer available on Vine.co)

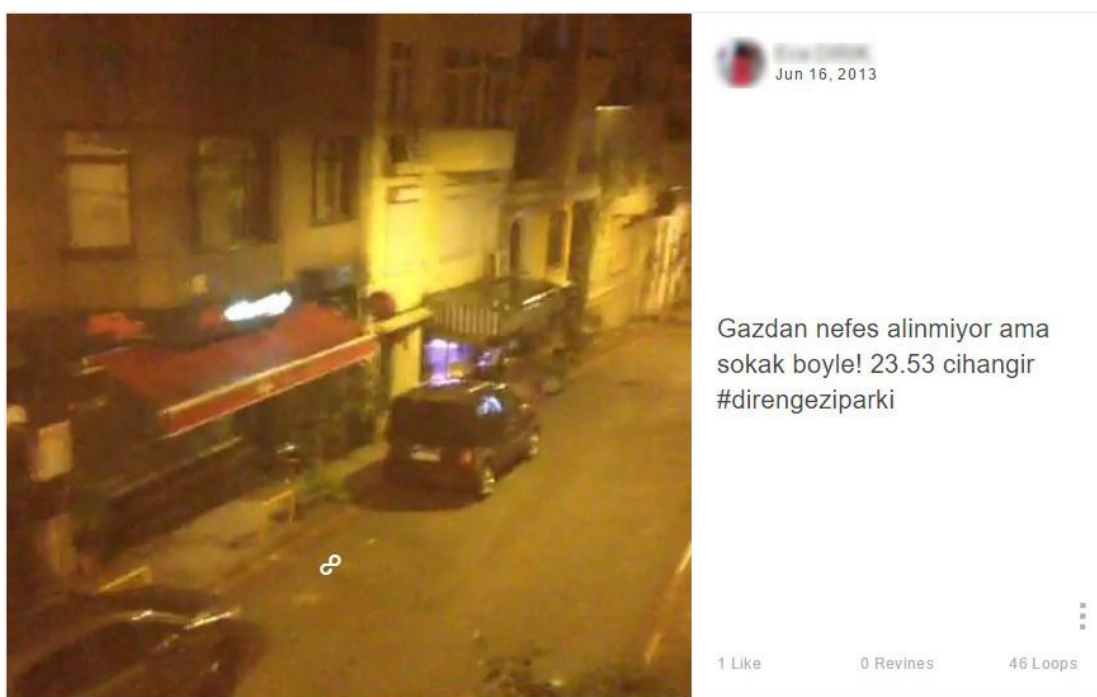
As clearly demonstrated in the videos of Vine posts by C.B. and D.E., protesters on the street have to fall back at every attack and try to reassume their original position after the police forces recede. In such a cycle of action, Vine posts assigned with the ‘aerial’ perspective show that uninterrupted and uncompromised documentation of police violence is sometimes only possible by being outside of the action. This is not only due to the lack of a wide ‘frontline’ perspective but also due to the physical hardship and panic caused by water and teargas attacks affecting the recorder on the



street. The ‘aerial’ perspective is also used to record redundant use of teargas and other weapons by the police forces. A Vine post from 15 June by S.A. shows a side street in the Bomonti district filled with teargas as some people yell down at the police forces in anger (Figure 13). A similar post by E.D. from 16 June 2013, however, depicts a much louder protest from the residents in Cihangir (Figure 14). The caption reads: “*It is impossible to breathe from all the gas but the street is like this! 23.53 cihangir #direngeziparki*”. The video shows the fading teargas in the streetlight accompanied by the loud treble from people banging pots and pans in protest. Like S.A., E.D. also records the time, 23:53, further emphasizing the significance of the number of residents affected by and objecting to the excessive use of teargas in what appear to be completely empty streets. These videos are evidence that police forces gassed the more residential side streets at odd hours even when the same streets appeared completely empty. The excessive use tear gas resulted in the death of Abdullah Cömert, who was hit on the head by a gas canister (Amnesty International, 2013, p.21). By 10 July 2013, there were 8,000 cases of injury at the site of the demonstrations while five people were killed by the end of August (p.6). These video posts, therefore, are both documents and evidence of the disproportionate violence directed at peaceful protesters by the police.



**Figure 13.** Vine post by S.A., 15 June 2016, with #direngeziparkı hashtag “Our street is being gassed right now! 02:30 Bomonti”, <https://vine.co/v/hBAPdiImpTP>



**Figure 14.** Vine post by E.D., 16 June 2013, “It is impossible to breathe from all the gas but the street is like this! 23.53 cihangir #direngeziparkı” <https://vine.co/u/952323730229596160?mode=list>

These video posts take on the self-reflexive project of “purposeful witnessing” (Allan, 2013, p. 175). The people who capture these videos through Vine are trying to provide evidence of police violence quickly. Providing additional information about the location and the time demonstrates that they are aware of the minimum audience expectations for inducing a sense of veracity and immediacy. Allan (2013) interprets the citizen witnesses who see themselves as part of a group or movement go through a shift in their positioning toward “a more self-conscious journalistic role as an extension of an activist commitment” (p. 125-6). Therefore, this politically conscious form of citizen witnessing is positioned between an everyday citizen witness and a journalist trying to uphold standards of professional objectivity. This form of witnessing is also a type of participation informed by a self-reflexive sense of duty to “strategise about how best to re-inflect their conditions of visibility” (Ibid). I call this subjective form of participatory witnessing “meta-activism” and argue that is not an extension or side project of activism but one of the integral parts of activism itself, especially in non-democratic contexts ruled by state hegemony and censorship. The accessibility of quality video capturing, editing and sharing offered by smartphones sustain the potential for more and higher-quality witnessing and participation. Meta-activism, thus, encapsulates both witnessing and participation and these two capacities often overlap when representation of obscure or counter-hegemonic information becomes participation and when participation constitutes the recording and spreading of information about the movement.

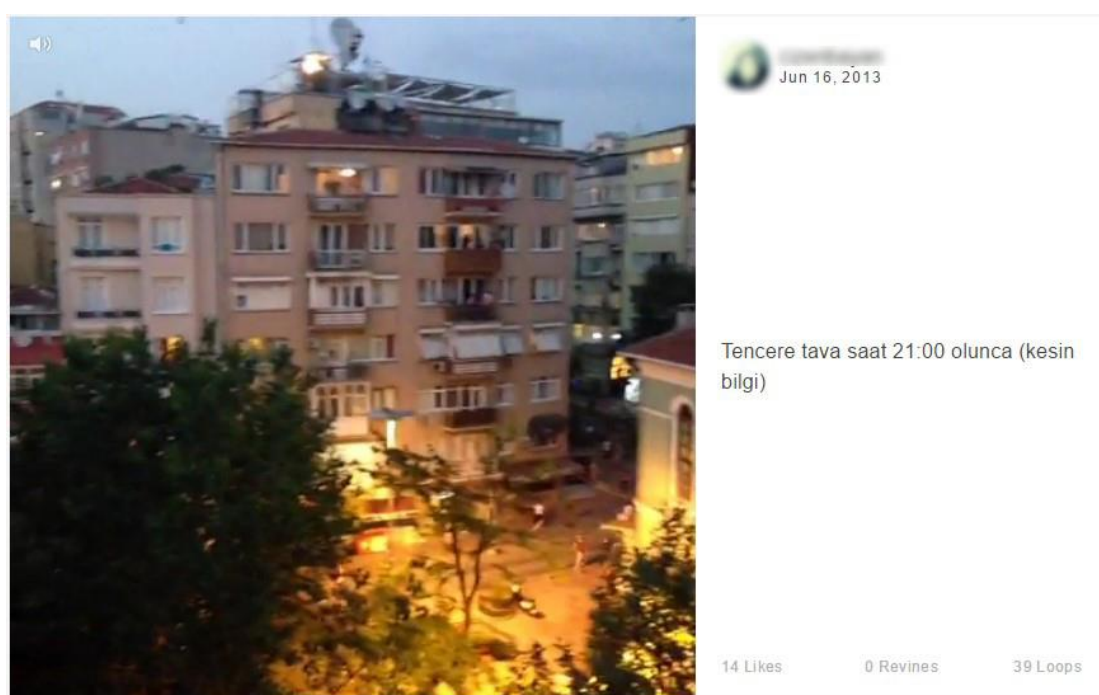
### **Pots and Pans Protests**

Apart from videos depicting pots and pans protests against police violence, there are a significant number of videos depicting exclusively *carcerolazo* or pots and pans

protests by participants which were regularly held at 21:00 during the summer of Gezi. Discussing “moments of collective effervescence”, McGarry et al. (2019) emphasise that sometimes the only way to “make a moment, ritual [or] practice” visible is to take a picture of it (p. 286). This rule also applies to sporadic acts of protest such as the pots and pans protests. There is no record or no scientific method of determining how long these protests lasted, as they occurred in numerous locations place and at different times when residents would go to their windows and balconies to partake in this act of protest. Alongside Vine posts depicting protesters partaking in pots and pans protests, on the streets and in support of other people on the streets, there are a number of posts that solely depict pots and pans protests in various neighbourhoods across Turkey. Depending on the recorder’s positioning in these videos and whether the Vine video is shot from the street or from a residential location, some of these videos are assigned the ‘aerial’ perspective while others are ‘frontline’. Therefore, there instances where the pots and pans protests take place in support of people in the street and outside of the regular pots and pans hour where vocal communication cannot or will not be heard or where the banging of metal vessels against wooden or metal spoons seems to be the only way to ‘wake’ the neighbourhood up to what is going on in their street or another streets around Turkey. As such, pots and pans were also used to call other witnesses to their windows if something sensational – like violence against people or violent arrests – are taking place outside and when the situation needed more eye witnesses.

C.B.’s Vine post from 16 June 2013 bears the caption “*Pots and pans at 21:00 (positive information)*” (Figure 15). “*Positive information*” or in Turkish *kesin bilgi* is a catchphrase widely used during the Gezi protests to communicate the reliability of a piece of information online or via other communication channels. As in this case, the

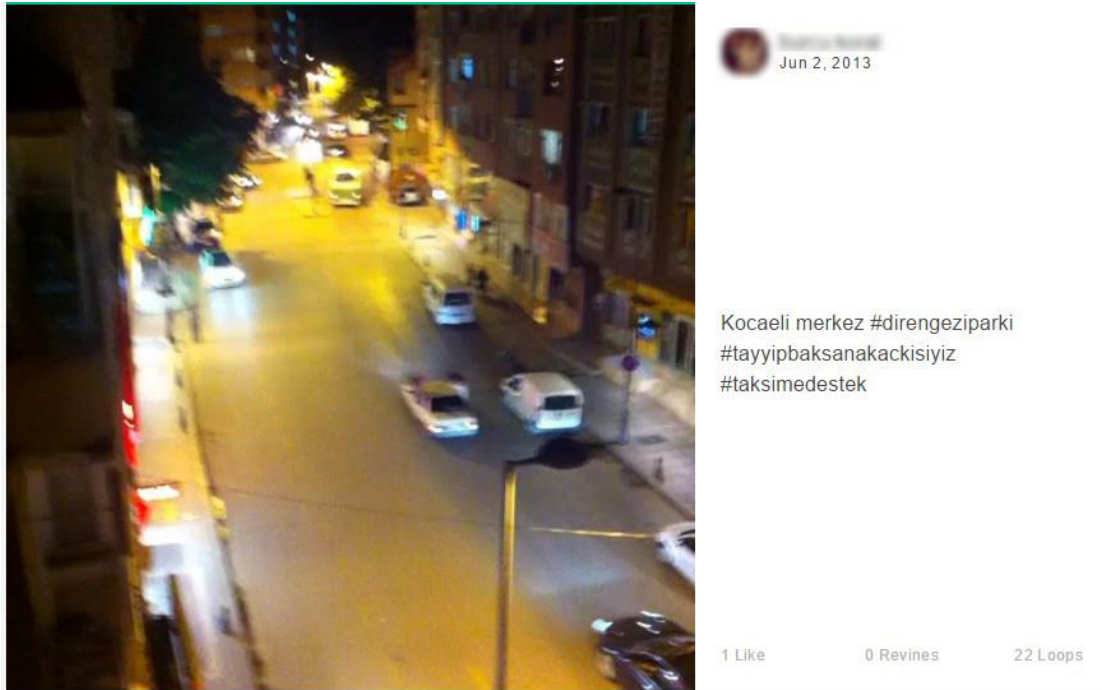
phrase is still used in a tongue-in-cheek manner to refer to the inevitable spread of misinformation during the Gezi protests. The post makes use of this loaded phrase to promote the pots and pans protests happening in Turkey while the video pans the streets around Cihangir Square to convey the general participation. These posts are typically aimed at capturing the massive amount of support for and participation in the Gezi protests, which was also demonstrated away from the streets and especially in domestic spaces.



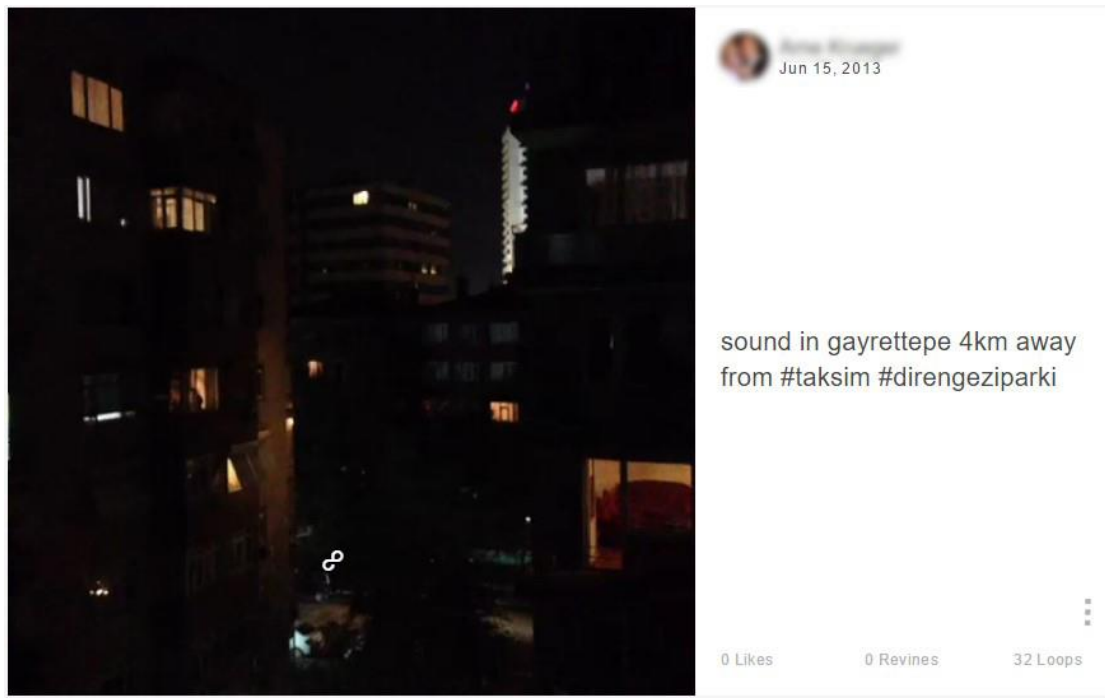
**Figure 15.** Vine post by C.B., 16 June 2013, “Pots and pans at 21:00 (positive information)”, <https://vine.co/v/hBJmxYldhE>

The captions of some of these posts allow identification of the location and time of the protests as documented by the users. Vine posts by B.K. from 2 June 2013 shot in the city of Kocaeli (Figure 16) and A.K. from 15 June 2013 with the #direngeziparki hashtag shot in the Gayrettepe district in Istanbul (Figure 17), depict typical pots and pans protests in residential neighbourhoods around Turkey from an ‘aerial’

perspective. The reason for providing such detailed information could be to differentiate between and show the variety of places and number of times such protests took place. The images of numerous lighted windows and metallic banging can appear repetitive unless such specifying information is volunteered by the users.

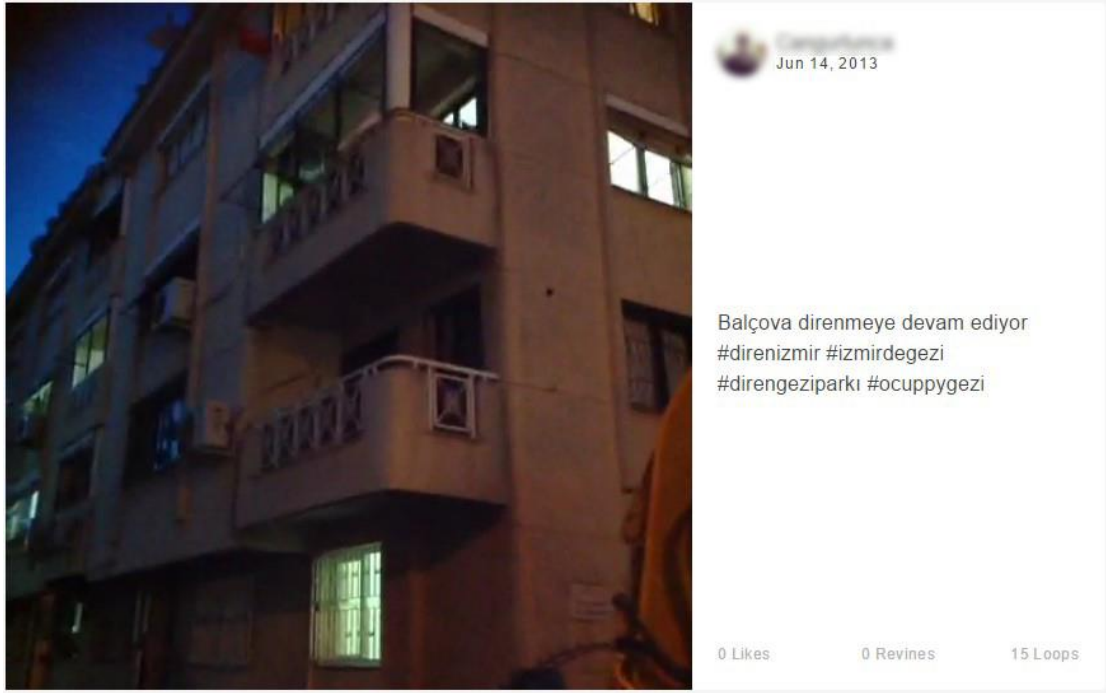


**Figure 16.** Vine post by B.K., 2 June 2013, “Kocaeli Central #resistgezipark #tayyipseehowmanyweare #supportfortaksim”, <https://vine.co/v/b3hbw903zu>

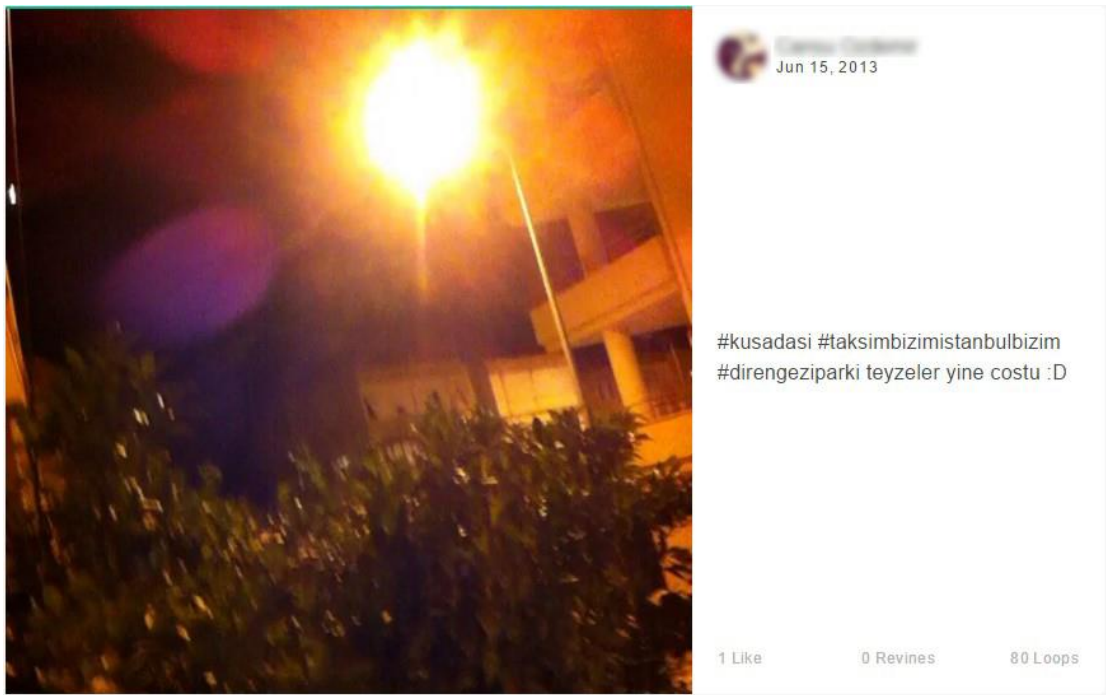


**Figure 17.** Vine post by A.K., 15 June 2013, <https://vine.co/v/hBm207tY7Zp>

Others posts like C.T.'s on 14 June from the city of İzmir (Figure 18) and C.O.'s 15 June post from the city of Kusadasi (Figure 19) depict the protests from the street. As these posts do not contain any street action they are not assigned the 'frontline' perspective. The caption from C.O.'s post is, however, significant in its identification of the main actors in the pots and pans protests. Referring to the protesters as "aunties", this post pays homage to the unrelenting force of mature women behind these widespread actions of dissent. A couple of Vine posts show people from the same household participating in the protests, thereby humanizing the sharp noise by showing where it is coming from. A post by A.S. from 16 June 2013 while the #direnceziparki hashtag focuses on the hands of a pots and bangs protester as its caption reads: "*Evening comes and they go crazy #direnceziparki*" (Figure 21Figure 20). B.E.'s post from 15 June similarly focuses on the protester's hands before panning towards other buildings to show where the rest of the noise is coming from (Figure 21).



**Figure 18.** Vine post by C.T., 14 June 2013, “Balçova continues to resist #resistizmir #geziizmir #resistgezipark #occupygezi”, <https://vine.co/v/blyv06hDqvq>



**Figure 19.** Vine post by C.O., 15 June 2013, #Kusadasi #taksimoursistanbulisours #resistgezipark “aunties become exuberant again :D”, <https://vine.co/v/hBmY0gOKipd>





**Figure 20.** Still from a Vine post by A.S., 16 June 2013, “Evening comes and they go crazy #resistgezipark” (post no longer available on Vine.co)



**Figure 21.** Still from a Vine post by B.E., 15 June 2013, “Bahcelievler (a borough in Istanbul) has gone crazy #resistgezipark” (post no longer available on Vine.co)

The Vine posts that depict pots and pans protests from residential locations are assigned the ‘aerial’ perspective. Similar to other videos making use of this perspective, Vine posts of pots and pans protests reveal a wider visual perspective, often encompassing an entire neighbourhood as well as a relatively reduced sense of danger compared to other videos assigned to the ‘action’ theme. In reality, the threat against such protests posed by President Erdogan’s encouragement to locals to inform on their neighbours and take legal action against the disruption caused by their protests (Daloglu, 2013) posed a real threat to one mother and her two children who were taken to court for “*disturbing the peace*” (Usta, 2014). It is significant that depictions of the pots and pans protests seldom show the face of the protester even

before Erdogan's advice to informants on 19 July 2013. While hiding the identities of protesters were crucial in certain cases, some videos assigned the 'other' theme made use of the indirect message of their posts and chose to reveal their faces and those of others as well. These videos appear to be trying to depict the enormity of the pots and pans protests in residential neighbourhoods away from both the main streets where demonstrations took place and from urban centres. This aim is made clear by certain aesthetic choices on the part of the capturers such as panning in order to show an entire neighbourhood or a multiplicity of buildings where the viewer assumes these banging noises are emanating from. This assumption is also supported by the sight of lights being turned on and off in some apartments, a traditional act of protest that usually accompanies pots and pans protests. Akay (2003, p. 7) reports that turning lights off became a popular practice during domestic protests following the Susurluk scandal in Turkey during the 1990s when citizens were encouraged to switch their lights off for a minute every day at 21:00 as part of the "1 Minute of Darkness for Permanent Light" campaign against state embezzlement and corruption. As the protests spread, longer durations of switching lights on and off were accompanied by the blowing of whistles and banging of pots and pans from window ledges (Akay, 2003).

Pots and pans protests were highly dependent on the local conditions of protesters so the depiction of these protests were important in their representation of dissent in densely populated urban centres. Pots and pans protests were a physical form of communication between residents that provided information about not only their political views but also their acknowledgement and disapproval of tactics used by the AKP government, the police and the state regardless of their ideological alignments. They were also a tactic to bring politics into the home, through a scheduled

intervention, whereby not only those who could go to Gezi Park or who already followed the events on the Internet but also minors and vulnerable individuals could participate in the movement. The video posts depicting these protests were in turn significant in their role as support for other online and offline participants as they demonstrated the reaction of multitudes that may remain invisible to the rest of the movement. In this regard, videos depicting pots and pans protests also combined witnessing and participation.

### **Vine Posts Assigned to the ‘Other’ Theme**

There is a rich variety to the videos predominantly assigned to the ‘other’ category’s themes, perspectives, and subthemes. In these videos the most ordinary acts sometimes become political messages when considered in context, however, and as Gurel (2015, p.13) observes in her study of the complexity of the humour of Gezi culture, the messages are densely interwoven with contextual as well as cultural content. Despite the intricate detail attempted in the categorisation of the themes, perspectives, and subthemes, these elements are always considered in conversation with each other as no video is made up of a single theme and, at times, two different perspectives are evident in one video. A good example of this is a video by S.K. posted on 3 June 2013 with the Taksim Gezi Park geotag, which shows a group of people walking in the street blowing horns and making noise with the caption “Mordorun kapilarına yururken” roughly translated as “*Walking to the gates of Mordor*” (Figure 22). Through the metaphor of Mordor, the participant creates an instant connection with any audience familiar with *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1954; *The Two Towers*, 1954; *The Return of the King*, 1955) or the popular movies adapted from them, which depict Frodo and

the fellowship's gruelling yet triumphant quest to Mordor to destroy the "One Ring" (Peter Jackson, 2001). The meaning behind the metaphor is that the protesters are the fellowship of the ring who will stand up against police violence to protect Gezi Park from the clutches of mass urbanization.<sup>27</sup> This particular post combined with the geotag and the humorous metaphorical caption informs the Gezi audience that the user is walking to Gezi Park or any other place of protest where police action is anticipated. This single video makes use of the 'frontline' and 'symbolic' perspectives as well as the 'violence' and 'metaphorical' themes. Even though elements of violence are not depicted within the video, the facemasks hanging around protesters' necks considered alongside the video's caption foreshadow the potential threat of teargas at their location. Furthermore, the cacophony of the horns and the banging of metal anticipate the imagined epic battle looming at the end of their quest. When the date of this post is considered, it is safe to say that these participants knew what to expect as it supposedly depicts the seventh day of the protests; this knowledge is reflected in their choice of a well-suited metaphor. This post not only represents the moment when it was recorded but also previous and future moments of participation which are depicted through signs of experience and caution.

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<sup>27</sup> References to Peter Jackson's film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* were a popular source of humour in Gezi's culture. After a reoccurrence of this popular metaphor in December 2015, the Turkish judicial system made history when it passed a decision to appoint 'Gollum experts' to determine whether Bilgin Ciftci's viral comparison of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Gollum through a series of collages was in fact an insult. This occurrence led director Peter Jackson to comment in defence that the pictures in which Ciftci made use of the benign alter ego, Smeagol, and not Gollum.



**Figure 22.** A post on Vine.co by S.K., 3 June 2013, geotag Taksim Gezi Parkı, <https://vine.co/v/b36nTEXd3pT>

The video post references the past through its reliance on a popular trope that corresponds to the cultural history of a specific demographic: those who are familiar with *The Lord of the Rings* books and/or films enough to recall the significance of Mordor as a feared and fateful destination that must be reached in order to save Middle Earth. The post simultaneously references the future as it builds on the analogy of the war fought by the Free People of Middle Earth versus Sauron and his following. This is also a sign of the experience of the protesters have had having

faced the offline and online wrath of the police forces, including in Taksim at Gezi Park and its surrounding areas and elsewhere such as Besiktas and Ankara, which became micro Mordors where fateful confrontations took place on a regular basis.

This metaphor also works in terms of its reference to ongoing realities concerning the protests and the police and the government's harsh clampdown on all opposing entities. This includes: the disproportionate violence of the professionally armed police seen in the image of Sauron with the ruling ring and the fabricated army of death machines that are orcs and Uruk-Hai pitted against the makeshift armour of the protesters. This is also reflected in the amalgamated image of the fellowship with the hedonistic and peaceful hobbits, ingenious elves, ambitious dwarves and, also the apolitical Ents. Hence, this metaphor holds up well in the self-identification of a variety of Gezi protesters versus the government and police as well as those who did not support the Gezi movement. Anyone who identifies with or internalises the causes of any of these fictional groups against Sauron can find a place and purpose for themselves within the movement.

A very different video in terms of its subject matter posted by M.R. (Figure 23) shows a group of men and women in swimwear jumping into a pool in unison while shouting the exclamation "*Hulo!*" This exclamation became extremely popular (its Turkish transcription: "#Hüloooğğğğ" was a trending topic on Twitter) as a symbol of government supporters after the news video of a woman proudly shouting "*We are with AK Party! Hulo!*" at the Justice and Development Party's rally after the Gezi protests went viral.<sup>28</sup> Such videos captured in non-political settings offer an "in

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<sup>28</sup> This excerpt from a news piece led to the words of the woman being interviewed to become a viral meme that was later used in politically incorrect memes, parodies and videos about the Gezi movement. A version of the viral video, published on YouTube by Dogukan Arsy on 16 June 2013, can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-PRJ6og4n0>

between the lines” commentary. As a display of a certain lifestyle with men and women swimming together combined with the politically-incorrect mockery of an AKP supporter, this video has a clear political message about the boundaries of the movement, the importance of protecting lifestyle freedoms and gender equality. However, the method of expression fails to adhere to the inclusivity promised by the philosophies of the Gezi movement, showing that the complexity and contradictions in the messages behind the Vine videos post by Gezi participants were not uncommon.

These types of symbolic representations of dissent are self-reflexive in that they reflect a level of self-censorship or a level of self-awareness that is required to narrativise the visual depiction of non-sensational actions into stories interwoven with topical and contextual references. Therefore, they do not merely witness an event and transmit it as it has occurred but manipulate that event into a complicated message that rewards a very specific audience. As such these examples are what Gezi participants referred to as disproportionate intelligence, a self-reflexive appreciation of the ability of the movement to maintain a rich culture of inside jokes as an act of protest. The complexity and the variety of the references in these types of video posts, constitute a type of cultural activism. Hence, meta-activism emerges as a self-reflexive and creative form of participation between the digital and material worlds.





**Figure 23.** Vine.co post by M.R., 9 August 2013, with comment “Hüloooooğ! #direngeziparki”, <https://vine.co/v/hh53JvXLtKi>

## **Depicting Spontaneous and Sporadic Acts of Protest**

In the sample of Vine posts studied, posts that document spontaneous outbursts in restaurants, bars, clubs, public transportation and shopping centres are not uncommon. These posts not only question the spatial and temporal boundaries of protest but also provide much needed visibility to such transient outbursts. Through these documentations it is now possible to see the variety of individuals and messages embedded in such acts of protest. These posts are also significant in terms of reflecting the *life politics* (Giddens, 1991) that dominated the Gezi philosophy. However, these acts of protest are not simply related to lifestyle freedoms but are reactions to complex projects that are intended to reshape Turkey's culture and economy. One of the patterns that emerge in the depiction of spontaneous protests in public locations are those that occur in spaces that allow alcohol consumption in public such as restaurants, bars and clubs.

Legislation approved by the government on 24 May 2013 amended certain legal clauses regarding alcoholic beverages. As a result, a series of temporal, age-based and spatial restrictions on the advertisement, sale and consumption of alcohol meant that (1) alcohol would furthermore be censored on all official media outlets, including fictional media products, and that alcohol consumption should not be visible from outside of the institution where drinking is allowed (Resmi Gazete, 2013). These changes were met by complaints from alcohol trading institutions like bars, restaurants and clubs that relied on al fresco facilities as well as shops which were no longer allowed to sell alcohol between the hours of 22:00 and 05:00 (Letsch, 2013b). The changing of the law regarding alcoholic beverages was therefore not a direct attack against lifestyle freedoms but a transitional measure that would first affect

Turkey's economic and then cultural landscapes.<sup>29</sup> In 2010, 2014, 2015 and 2016 (BIA News Desk, 2016) several cases of reported attacks on institutions such as galleries and events demonstrated the cultural and social implications of the AKP's politicization and demonization of alcohol consumption.<sup>30</sup> It is important to take these into account while analysing the next group of videos assigned with the *alcohol consumption* subtheme.



**Figure 24.** Still from a Vine post, 22 June 2013 with #direngeziparki hashtag (post no longer available on Vine.co)

C.S.'s Vine post, dated 22 June 2013, shows a young man sitting at a table while clapping and chanting along with others around him before several brief shots reveal the surrounding area (Figure 25). To those familiar with Turkish culture, it is not hard to spot the glass of raki on the table behind him, or to understand that this video was

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29 As Laura Pitel (2015) has observed, "Champions of Turkish wine warn that the current climate is damaging the industry and exacerbating cultural rifts."

30 These include the 21 September 2010 attack on an art fair in Tophane, Istanbul.

taken at a restaurant or tavern where alcohol is consumed in the open air. This post was shot in the Besiktaş's Çarşı area populated by a considerable number of traditional taverns that serve alcohol, mainly raki, with mezes to customers with all sorts of street musicians in attendance. It is possible that the patrons are performing the daily pots and pans protests in a different context.



**Figure 25.** Still from a Vine post, 30 August 2013, with #direngeziparki hashtag. Another Vine post assigned to the ‘alcohol consumption’ subtheme, shows the popular Ayvalık nightclub, Gossip, with the caption: “*Gezi park in Gossip #direngeziparki*” (Figure 26). Ironically, the club attendees are chanting a well-known verse from the Gezi protests. Vocalized when police forces gathered or during severe teargas attacks during Gezi, it challenges the police by mocking the ease of shooting teargas and asks the police officers to “*remove their helmets*” and “*leave their batons*” to see who “*the real fella*” is. Thus, this post echoes not only the non-verbal pots and pans protests but also protests that openly supported the Gezi protesters

while demonstrating that they were performed in apolitical spaces. The date on which this Vine was post, 30 August 2013, is also significant in terms of documenting that such spontaneous protests occurred up to almost three months after the Gezi protests started.

A very distinct example of alcohol consumption videos also makes use of the performance art subtheme. A vine post by G.H. (Figure 26) from 18 June 2016 depicts a band in what appears to be a dive bar performing dissident rock legend Cem Karaca's song composed to a poem by Nazım Hikmet Ran's poem, "The Walnut Tree". The video shows the band singing the lines: "*I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park, neither you are aware of this, nor the police.*" Despite the lack of a caption or comment by the recorder, the message of this Vine post is manifested in its deep and complex layering of information in the song lyrics as well as the artists referenced. Six seconds, then, can evoke the memory of a century of struggle for freedom of thought as both Cem Karaca and Nazım Hikmet were punished by the state in different ways for their views. Perhaps bearing a less direct reference to alcohol consumption, these Vine posts also imply the cultural aspect of nightlife creating a space for dissent. Alcohol consumption and its depiction on online social networks stands against the censorship of the depiction of cigarettes and alcoholic beverages on national television initiated by the AKP government. In opposition to such censorship, the depiction of alcohol consumption in videos related to Gezi reference both the AKP government's attack on certain freedoms as well as Erdogan and other AKP officials and followers' attempts to denigrate the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and his cadre as "*alcoholics*".<sup>31</sup>

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31 The president famously declared that all people who consume alcohol are alcoholics in an interview with media mogul Fatih Altaylı which took place in the heated days of the Gezi protests.



**Figure 26.** B Still from a Vine post, 18 June 2013, with #direngeziparki hashtag

On the other hand, a different Vine post by C.B. from 5 August 2013 reveals a significant moment from the summer of Gezi as documented by the user (Figure 27). The video shows a brief instant from the Roger Waters concert in Istanbul where a tribute to the martyrs of Gezi (along with other human rights activists and victims of state terror) are projected on a colossal screen referencing “The Wall”<sup>32</sup> as the audience chant “*Everywhere is Taksim, resistance everywhere!*” This Vine, unlike others, displays a relatively more organised commemoration of Gezi, which motivates the audience to protest during a concert. In fact, this moment could be one of the most lavish endorsements of Gezi; yet, unlike the “democracy vigils” sponsored by local government bodies and, ultimately, by taxpayers, it is funded by a

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<sup>32</sup> This screen referenced the three-part rock opera “The Wall” that Waters wrote as a member of Pink Floyd.

foreign artist and the concert-goers. Vine posts that marry protest with nightlife, art and entertainment are also significant in terms of the Gezi movement's relation to the cultural and the carnivalesque, as Vine posts assigned with the 'park' theme have demonstrated, as for Gezi's participants, art and dissent go hand in hand.



**Figure 27.** Vine post by C.B., 5 August 2013, with #direngeziparki hashtag  
<https://vine.co/v/hb6d1VBPP6x>

Another type of setting that witnessed spontaneous protests during the summer of Gezi was commercial centres. Examples of political messages brought into nominally non-political settings include the Vine posts that document spontaneous protests in shopping centres as depicted in S.H. (Figure 28), B. (Figure 29) and C. (Figure 30) posts shot in the Kanyon shopping centre in Istanbul. C.'s Vine post shows a protest aimed specifically at the Starbucks coffee shop. Similar to the protest against Starbucks in C.'s video, C.K.'s video (Figure 31) posted on 20 June 2013 also shows people in a popular shopping district, Bağdat Street, booing Starbucks after

widespread social media recordings of a Starbucks branch near Gezi Park locking its doors to protesters fleeing the police, after which there were calls to boycott the coffee chain. Such protests resembled those in bars and pubs in terms of their dispersion and impulsive nature but were different in their deliberate choice of locations to protest against, namely, branches of corporations.



**Figure 28.** Vine.co post by S.H., 4 June 2013, “Cheers Tayip, the marauders are here! #bubirsivildirenis (this is a civil resistance) #hukumetistifa (government resign) Kanyon on their feet!” <https://vine.co/v/b3DPtvrIYWZ>

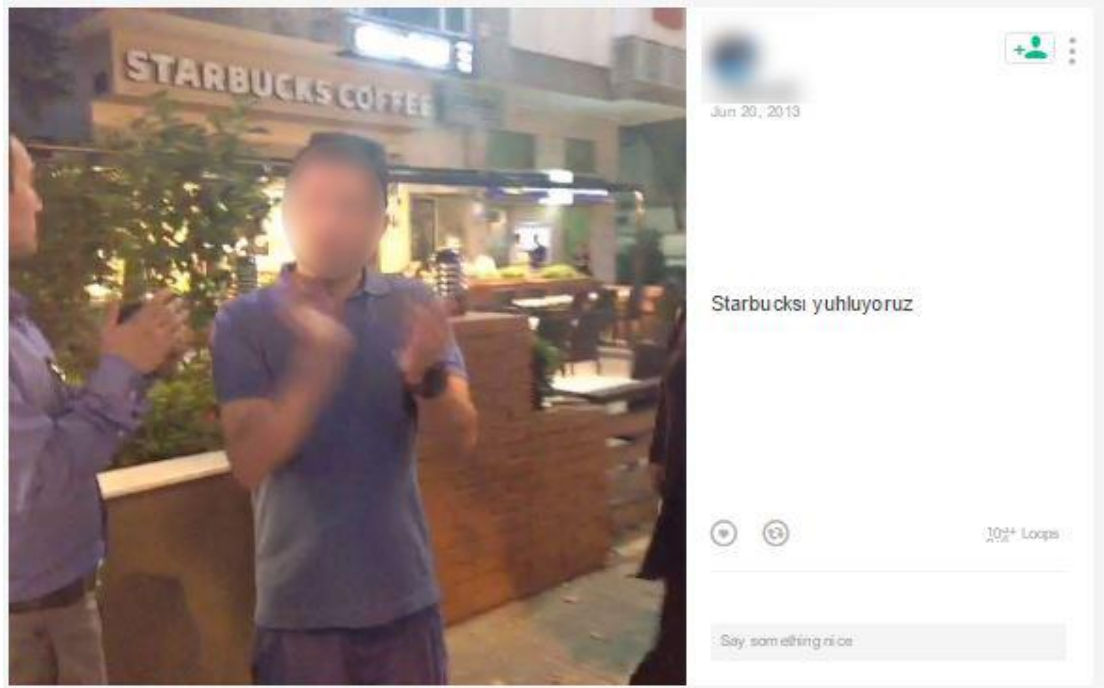




**Figure 29.** Vine.co post by B., 5 June 2013, geotag Kanyon "Kanyon right now #bubirsivildirenis (this is civil resistance) #occupyturkey #direngeziparkı" <https://vine.co/v/b3YhhHKWhBl>



**Figure 30.** Vine.co post by C., 5 June 2013, “#Direngeziparki #bubirsivildirenis (this is civil resistance)”, <https://vine.co/v/b30vVOiZzHY>



**Figure 31.** Vine.co post by C.K., 20 June 2013, “We are booing Starbucks”, <https://vine.co/v/huhQrHFLHEE>

These types of outbursts in commercial centres challenged the idea of organised protest, thus they were usually depicted thanks to participants’ documentation and reportage posted on online social networks. As examples of meta-activism, these video posts can be argued to bear more significance than the acts they visually captured because the video posts were enduring but the protests were not. The video posts also promoted the normalisation of protest to the point that any public space at any time belonged to the people, therefore, emphasising the outrageousness of the police brutality directed towards protesters. They also reinforced the reflexivity of the movement in terms of different individuals’ perception of the amount of support in places outside of the protest site and as a normalisation of the people who supported the movement despite the government’s contrary efforts.

## **The Implications of Gezi Participants' Vine Video Posts**

During the heated days of the Gezi movement, social network profiles became a political sphere where the regular “selfies” and other types of commonplace avatars were replaced by pro- or counter-Gezi visual data. In addition, posts on online social networks were dominated by links to articles, footage or announcements of online petitions and calls to action, expressions of urgent need in the occupied areas, pieces of intelligence or information, calls for help, denouncements of police violence and censorship, and messages of solidarity. As such, where these profiles were only platforms recreating individuals who could be considered as agents “made of information” (McLuhan, 2011), video posts transform these agents into information by reproducing and representing them on online social networks. Thus, these self-reflexive forms of representation became a platform for the prescription, description and exhibition of political selves, political identities, of oneself as both human and information.

As this examination of Vine videos demonstrates, there are multiple layers of information in the representations of online participation created, viewed and distributed by Gezi participants. These layers of information are presented within the information assemblage of a video post on Vine. Videos on Vine are juxtaposed with hashtags, geotags, avatars, captions, loop numbers and comments, thereby making these online social networks extremely complicated media to break down into a given formula. This is why the multi-modal content analysis of the Vine posts by online Gezi participants is important in understanding the complex habits involved in the fluent usage of such media for participation in online and offline protest. Such an in-depth analysis of the content produced, shared and consumed by the Gezi movement's participants is crucial in setting the historical background for the concept

of meta-activism. Emphasising online social networks as sources of misinformation, Hafdell observes that “social media usage on the ground was complex, revealing both the potential and the limitations of social media as an alternative to mainstream media” (p.6). The study of the Gezi participants’ Vine posts reveals the importance of hashtags in communicating the chain of events. Informed decisions such as providing time and location information can turn a number of 6-second videos into an intelligible account of events, which may have not been recorded otherwise. These video posts are not mere representations but multimodal acts of participation, of meta-activism that lead to online as well as offline achievements and consequences.

As the literature on the Gezi protests and the Vine posts has suggested, playfulness and improvisation are the two characteristic practices of Gezi participants’ online activity (Karakayalı & Yaka, 2014; Gurel, 2015). Humour, playfulness and improvisation became a form of dissent as the Gezi movement excelled in terms of online and offline non-organisation and polyphony. Indeed, many self-reflexive representations take themselves lightly, however, their lack of seriousness “should not be interpreted as a sign of political vacuity” (Markham, 2014, p.91). Besides this playfulness, the Gezi participants also demonstrated everyday habits (McGarry et al., 2016), hence their “lifestyle politics” (Giddens, 1991) evident in video posts depicting life at Gezi park and videos capturing traditionally non-political environments like restaurants and shopping malls.

The Vine posts analysed as part of this thesis reveal that participants use online social networks to announce physical participation, thereby documenting sites of political action such as the occupied park or streets while encouraging further participation through the depiction of the movement’s positive aspects. In addition, this helps to provide evidence rebutting attempts to smear the movement while documenting

violence or the presence of police forces in a particular location, to express political messages verbally and symbolically, and to maintain the visibility of diverse participants. On the other hand, participants also depicted the negative aspects of street participation, such as police brutality which would otherwise be swept under the carpet by loyalist media outlets. Last but not least, participants used online social networks to document fleeting or private moments of participation and solidarity that served to maintain a sense of “togetherness” (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). As such, these findings reveal how online social networks were embraced as platforms reflecting urgency in terms of the wellbeing of protesters on the street as well as providing platforms for free speech and self-representation in ways that would otherwise have been impossible.

## **Chapter 6. From the summer of 2013 to the summer of 2016: A Study of Online Videos Posted during the Coup Attempt**

### **15 July 2016 and Its Aftermath**

According to Al Jazeera's (2016) timeline of the night of 15 July 2016, it was in the early hours of the evening when people on online social networks like Twitter and Facebook started posting about irregular congestion on the bridges over the Bosphorus in Istanbul followed by reports of the presence of military personnel in Istanbul and Ankara (Al Jazeera, 2016). What followed was a night of confusion for the Turkish people as national channels began live coverage of the events followed by the putschist military officers' invasion of their studios and offices. A statement from the "Yurtta Sulh Konseyi" (Peace at Home Council) read on the state channel TRT (Turkey Radio and Television) claimed that this was an attempt by a faction of the Turkish armed forces to "take over the administration of the country to reinstate constitutional order" (Al Jazeera, 2016).<sup>33</sup> It was just past midnight when Erdogan, from an undisclosed and secure location, joined a live broadcast on CNN Turk via FaceTime, shown on the screen of the anchor Hande Fırat's iPhone and encouraged the people of Turkey to take to the streets (Guardian, 2016). A series of bombing attacks on the Turkish Parliament and several other locations as well as clashes between the military forces and civilians continued until the break of dawn (Al Jazeera, 2016).

As I have observed elsewhere (Apak, 2018), professional media footage as well as security and amateur footage were widely circulated not only through the extensive live coverage on national broadcasting channels but also via online social networks

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<sup>33</sup> The only online written source in English for the entire text of this declaration can be found in the Peace at Home Council's Wikipedia page ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace\\_at\\_Home\\_Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_at_Home_Council)).

such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Periscope and Snapchat, thereby making the events all the more visible to the public. As this exposure on online social networks was evident during the alleged throttling of social media during the coup attempt when Turkey Blocks (2016) tweeted that Twitter, Facebook & YouTube were “blocked in #Turkey at 10:50PM after apparent military uprising in #Turkey...”, it is possible that those who were able to use these platforms did so via virtual private networks (VPNs) (Wong, 2016). However, there was no indication of such obstruction in term of the news circulation on mass broadcast television. As mentioned earlier, the only television channel affected was the public station TRT while the rest of the broadcasters continued covering the coup attempt or broadcasting according to their usual programming schedule. In the case of CNN Turk (2017), the channel continued to broadcast live via a camera left rolling in the newsroom and a collar microphone left recording during its raid by military groups, depicting the verbal and physical tension between media professionals and military officers on and off camera.

As I have remarked elsewhere (Apak, 2018), the government and President Erdogan’s attitude to the media exposure of violence against both people and protests was completely contrary to the kind of exposure that was allowed or achieved during the Gezi protests. As I was following the events live on online social networks, I was quite surprised by how President Erdogan’s public approach to online and offline media exposure and protest on the streets had evolved since the Gezi protests in 2013. In contrast to his appreciation for the media’s transparency and the mobilisation of the people against the armed forces during the coup attempt, Erdogan countenanced extreme media censorship, denounced social media as “a menace to society” and dismissed people on the streets during the Gezi protests of 2013 as terrorists and



marauders (Letsch, 2013; Schechner, 2016). Not only was there a shift in the government and President Erdogan's attitude towards (social) media exposure, but he also expressed his newfound enthusiasm for people's mobilisation through platforms such as Twitter and FaceTime, thereby making the discrepancy all the more conspicuous.

Erdogan's wish for "every citizen in Turkey" to take to the streets during some of the most dangerous hours on the night of 15 July 2016 broadcast via a FaceTime video call to a CNN Turk anchor had a significant shock value as it did inspire and influence his followers (Guardian, 2016). This was followed by a tweet from Erdogan's Twitter account inviting the nation to squares and airports to look out for democracy and to support the national will (RT\_Erdogan, 2016a). I have argued (Apak, 2018), one way of understanding the influence of the President's involvement in online social networks is to look at the video posts created by people both on the night of 15 July and after depicting demonstrations and rallies sponsored by local governments and to consider the kind of messages being communicated in these video posts. This chapter will examine the various methods used by anti-coup protesters to create and share personally recorded online content using smartphones or curated content such as media or secondary footage. This includes footage from that night, the "democracy vigils,"<sup>34</sup> and on a daily basis following this mobilisation of the people against the putschists (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016).

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<sup>34</sup> The demonstrations that took place after the night of 15 July 2016 were named "democracy vigils." Asli Peker Dogra (2016) observes, "In many places, the Sela's and announcements continued for days after the coup attempt itself was defeated. In fact, the announcements urged people not to get lax, and to continue to guard democracy and stay on the streets. The public gatherings, now named 'Democracy Vigils', continued in cities and towns across the country. In later days, in Ankara and Istanbul, some of the announcements specifically encouraged people to gather in Kizilay and Taksim squares, the main centers of the two large cities with political significance. Public transportation was made free to help people easily access city centres. Free food and water was provided in various places for those attending Democracy Vigils. After almost a week of nightly gatherings, on July 20, as President Erdogan chaired back to back National Security Council and Cabinet meetings, pro-government

Following the same structure as Chapter 4, this chapter will first explore the primary motivations for posting online videos on the night of and after the coup attempt. Then, specific aspects of the context of the case study will be discussed. This is followed by a closer look at examples from the sample of video posts to illustrate the recurrence of certain patterns. The chapter will conclude with a considerations of the implications of the findings.

### **Primary Motivations behind the Facebook Video Posts**

As different as the Gezi and anti-coup movements are, so were the motivations behind why participants of each movement captured and shared video posts online. In this section, I outline three primary motivations that are informed by the analysis of the video posts: encouragement to participate online by politicians, to document street presence as support for the government and intimidation towards the putschists, and to document citizen account of the events on the night of the coup attempt where professional news outlets had limited access to certain areas.

Perhaps the most readily evident motivation behind posting videos during and after the coup attempt was President Erdogan's strong presence on what he calls "social media" including his face appearing on FaceTime on different anchors' phones and frequent statements made through his Twitter account.<sup>35</sup> As heard on one of the video

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crowds awaited in city squares for what was supposed to be a very important announcement, as indicated by Erdogan the previous day. When Erdogan finally made his appearance on TV around midnight, giving the news that a State of Emergency was declared, the same crowds on democracy watch cheered jubilantly".

35 Erdogan's coup-related tweets begin by inviting the people to the streets to "defend democracy and national will" (RTErdogan, 2016a) and the next tweet attempts to reassure the public by stating "this attempt will be repelled with God's will" (RTErdogan, 2016b). The next tweet claims that "these traitors will pay for their treason" (RTErdogan, 2016c). Two tweets from the early morning of 16 July 2016 are aimed at reassuring the public that the government is in charge (RTErdogan, 2016d) and that people should stay on the streets until "everything goes normal" (RTErdogan, 2016e) (Translated from Turkish by the researcher).

posts discussed in this sample, a question about participants on online social networks asking about what to do during the night of the coup attempt was also directed at President Erdogan during another live TV statement via FaceTime on NTV and NTV Radio (MBA, 2016).<sup>36</sup> He responded with the same words he used in other interviews and on his Twitter account, stating that he was “*inviting the nation to squares and airports around the country*” (MBA, 2016). It is possible that the President did not want to shift the focus of the protests to online social networks and was expressing his desire for the people’s physical presence in those public spaces. However, the next day in his speech Prime Minister Binali Yildirim thanked “*...press institutions, broadcast media institutions, and written, visual and social media institutions*” for demonstrating “*great patriotism and foresight*” (HaberTurk, 2016). While it is not clear if by “*social media institutions*” Yildirim was referring to content creating users on online social networks or social media corporations such as Twitter and Facebook, the inclusion of this term was an acknowledgement of the role of such platforms during the previous night’s events. As discussed earlier, President Erdogan’s appearance through the FaceTime application on the iPhones of various news anchors across Turkish television channels implies a move towards espousing such platforms as worthy of the government’s (and the President’s) use and attention. The fact that the President and other AKP officials’ Twitter accounts were quite active during the night of the coup attempt also shows their acknowledgement of supporters who use these platforms. In this manner, online social networks became platforms where supporters of the government turned the one-way communication of broadcast media into a conversation, asking questions and responding to statements made by the

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<sup>36</sup> The presenter addresses Erdogan: “Esteemed President, your participation is very important...people are expecting your statements...in one way or another, they have begun asking on social media if they should go on the streets...they are waiting in anticipation...” (Akin, 2016) (Translated from Turkish by the researcher).

government and the President. This is supported by data showing that the volume of coup-related conversations on Twitter reached its peak around 2 a.m. following Erdogan's FaceTime statements on live television (Kılıç, 2016).

Another reason for posting videos on online social networks is, similar to the Gezi movement, the need to evidence street presence but not necessarily to fight censorship – which, in this case, did not exist – but rather to intimidate the putschists and support the government. As the analysis of videos below will show, street presence sometimes preceded and at other times reacted to Erdogan's call to action. Nevertheless, with 40.3% of video posts analysed carrying a 'pro-government' tone, support for the AKP government seems to be a primary motivation for posting such videos. Two types of video posts, namely, those that depict the crowds on the night of and during the democracy vigils, and those that depict convoys on the road both aim to demonstrate a high level of support for the government and underline the presence of the participants' persons/themselves on the streets. Another type of video post makes use of professional media footage or professionally created videos imported into Facebook to express support for the government and to protest against the coup attempt. These types of video posts remediate content from other (mostly professional) sources while the content used has sometimes been produced by the government as in the case of E.C.'s (2016) video post from 18 July which recycles a political advertisement shown on air on 18 March 2014.<sup>37</sup> This video was a professionally produced advertisement for the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's election campaign but E.C. captions it "*the summary of 15 July*," implying that the subject matter of citizens coming together to raise the fallen Turkish flag against the

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<sup>37</sup> This date marks the 99th anniversary of the victory at the Dardanelles but the video was originally an election campaign advertisement by the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

voice of Erdogan reciting some of the non-composed stanzas<sup>38</sup> of the national anthem recalls the coming together of protesters on the night of the coup attempt reacting to Erdogan's call to the streets (Millet Egilmez, 2014; E.C., 2016). Following the raising of the flag, President Erdogan appears with the slogan, "*The nation will not yield/Turkey will not be defeated*" while the video closes with the AKP logo (Millet Egilmez, 2014). This video post not only recycles AKP propaganda but also uses the fictional storyline of an election advertisement to fulfil the narrative of 15 July as it is presented by the government.

Another motivation for posting videos was to document witness accounts around the country. Despite the lack of censorship, the coup attempt caught many national news outlets by surprise and some events were only captured by citizen witnesses' camera phones or videos shot by participants which allowed a closer look at the events. This could be the result of reporters' limited access important locations/ground zero due to the curfew imposed by the putschists as well as media outlets' initial confusion given the lack of a public statement by the authorities which led them to assume that the activities of the putschist soldiers were a precaution against an imminent terrorist attack (Altınordu, 2019, pp.139, 144). However, and in contrast to the Gezi context, content captured by participants was widely used by national broadcasters covering the events. Altınordu (2019) comments that "reproducing the Narrative of July 15 in a loyal manner was a means of staying on good terms with a government known for its crackdowns on the media" (p.154).

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38 The Turkish National Anthem was written originally as a 10 stanza poem by Mehmet Akif Ersoy (Nurullah, 2014, p. 35) but only the first two of these stanzas have been composed to be performed during ceremonies. This is the second and official composition by Zeki Üngör (2014, p.36).

## **Context-Specific Factors Reflected in Facebook Video Posts**

When compared to the political and media climate surrounding the Gezi protests, the anti-coup movement was defined by a proliferation of information and maximal exposure across print, television and social media. Apart from the two-hour throttling of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube from 10:50 p.m. and considering that there was a coup d'état taking place, the events were fairly visible to the public while media exposure was encouraged and fed by both the state and citizen witnesses. By dominating both broadcast and “social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter” (Akınerdem, 2017, p.189), the government managed to control the narrative of the events from early on. The AKP government and the President – albeit from undisclosed locations (Korkman, 2017, p.181) – remained at the epicentre of the events via efficient engagement with a variety of media outlets. They also placed citizenry at the centre of this narrative by bequeathing the role of protecting democracy unto them. In this regard, the coup-attempt context differed not only from the Gezi movement but also from all previous coup d'états in Turkey (1960, 1972 and 1980) where the majority of the public obeyed the military curfew (Akınerdem, 2017, p. 189; Altınordu, 2019, p. 148). There was also another difference between these previous coups and the 2016 attempt where the putschist military forces took control of scarce media outlets during the era of a single television channel (TRT, the public broadcaster on television and radio) or when state communication was still dominated by radio. Altınordu (2019) identifies the domination of the government's 15 July narrative as reflecting the putschists' inability to understand the complex media structure in the 2016 Turkey where “decentralized opportunities for information sharing provided by social media” (p. 149) led to the humiliating irrelevance of the putschists' attempt to control mass media outlets using old school military raids. In

the 2016 coup attempt, the variety of media that were available to the public remained undisturbed, apart from public television which was seized by the putschists to broadcast the coup declaration. CNN Turk (2017) managed to continue broadcasting in the midst of a raid, exhibiting the struggle between media professionals and the putschist soldiers to assert their domination. Given that the 15 July coup attempt failed, the images of the putschist military and the state remained separate entities throughout the night, giving the democratically elected government all the benefits of exposure through such media outlets, thereby helping to create the “15 July Epic” (Altinordu, 2019). Thus, control of media outlets remained in the hands of the AKP government which was able to manage that night’s narrative in real time.

The government’s control over media outlets also meant that the violence directed at citizens was displayed extensively, showing the tyranny of the putschist soldiers versus the compassion of the ‘fatherly president’ as despite their control over the use of violence, “the putschists did not have access to the means of symbolic production for most of the night” (Altinordu, 2019, p.149). As there was no counter-narrative that dominated media outlets, there were no entities working at legitimising this violence. Contrary to the Gezi movement, the victims of violence during the anti-coup context were not faced with the manipulation of their intentions by commercial media. In parallel with this, the victims of the coup attempt received appreciation for their actions while victims of Gezi were accused of many wrongdoings. Such condemnation as terrorists or putschists directed at the Gezi participants and victims served to legitimise the disproportionate violence directed at them. However, the violence directed at civilians on the night of the coup attempt was established as a tragedy, simultaneously victimising and heroifying the anti-coup protesters.

## **Depiction of the Self in Crowds: Two Women with Political Ties**

As I have argued elsewhere (Apak, 2018), in the general sample of videos analysed for this study, ‘demonstrations’ remains the dominant theme in understanding the content posted with the #darbeyehayır and #15Temmuz hashtags (assigned 133 times in 243 videos). The dominance of these videos parallel the consistent promotion of for the democracy vigils on online social networks (RTErdogan, 2016f, 2016g) as well as mass media outlets in spite of President Erdogan’s statement about the conclusion of the vigils<sup>39</sup> on 7 August 2016 at the Democracy and Martyrs’ Rally (Dogra, 2016). These videos are also dominated by depictions of crowds as opposed to the users themselves – only 14.4% of all video posts in the sample are assigned the ‘subjective’ theme and the ‘personal’ perspective, meaning that videos that depicted the users’ own identities were even scarcer. Looking at the video posts of Y.Z.Y. and N.T.Y. reveals some of the key tropes publicised by the AKP and the President as part of the coup attempt narrative.

I have observed (Apak, 2018) that Y.Z.Y.<sup>40</sup> depicts herself systemically and makes use of Facebook videos to record the happenings on the ‘night of’ as well as during ‘demonstrations’. This participant’s Facebook Live video posted at 23:08 on 15 July 2016 contains her witness account of a peaceful street march (Figure 32). As Y.Z.Y. makes use of diverse tools of communication through her videos as well as in her strategic use of Facebook’s features, the audience is able to identify the exact location and the time the participation took place as well offering instant proof of the

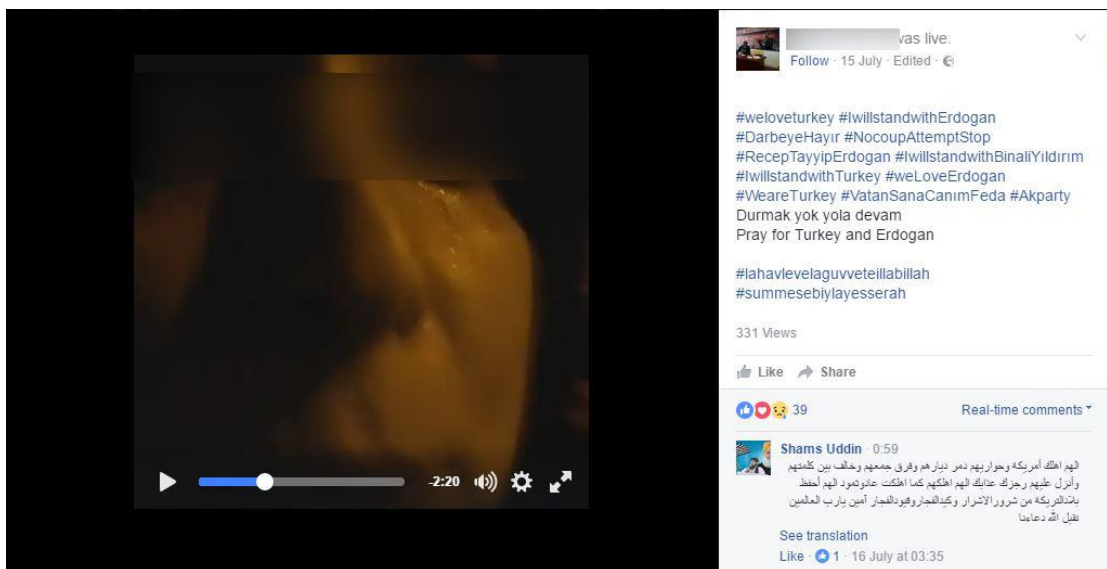
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39 Dogra observes: “President Erdogan himself, in a follow up text message on July 21, reminded people that the Democracy Vigils would continue until further notice. Finally, on a TV appearance on July 30, Erdogan declared his desire to bring the vigils to an end with a massive rally in Yenikapi, Istanbul on August 7” (Dogra, 2016).

40 The Facebook profile name has been transliterated into the Latin alphabet from Arabic script and later anonymised.



participant’s street presence through her live video on Facebook. These qualities, which inform the viewer that these videos are not imported, establish the participant as a legitimate source of information from the streets. Y.Z.Y.’s use of hashtags and captions contribute to the experience of this video: the participant uses Turkish, English and Arabic language hashtags (with the last ones being hashtags made up of Turkish transliterations of prayers in the Quran). As she prays to the camera for the failure of the coup attempt, for the rise of a new Ottoman Empire, and for the fall of those who oppose Erdogan, we hear utterings of “Amen” from others. At one point, she warns those around her, saying they are being “*broadcast live*” and so “*should not remain silent,*” further coaxing them into shouting “Amen” to her statements. This complex amalgamation of references and media communicate a strong message about the nature of the “democracy vigils”.



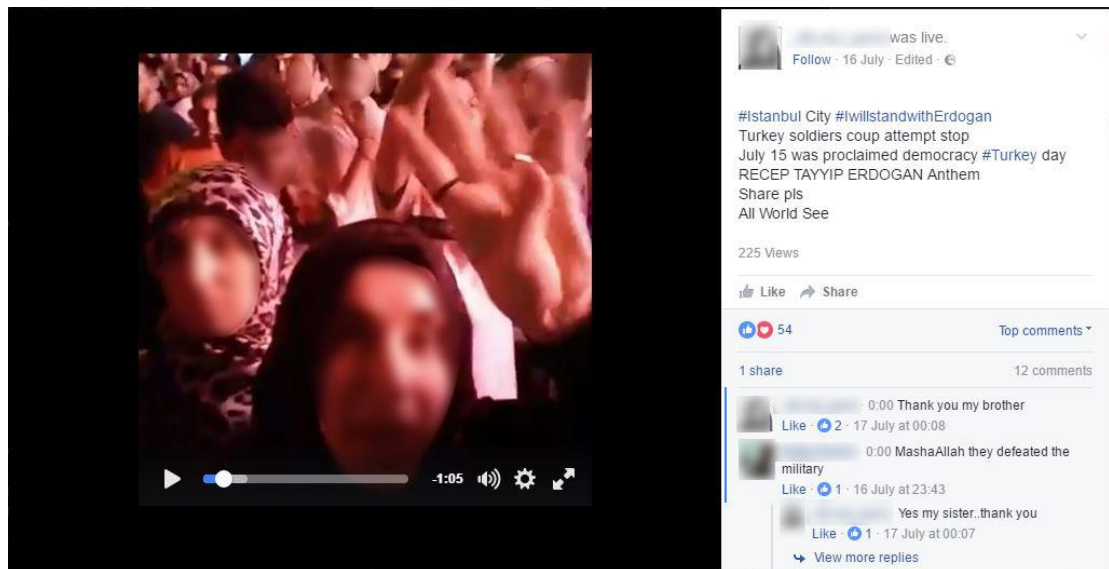
**Figure 32.** A selfie still from Y.Z.Y.’s Facebook Live video from the night of 15 July 2016

I have previously pointed out that Y.Z.Y.’s tone in this and other videos is a consistent combination of anti-coup, pro-government (more specifically pro-Erdogan), and religious tones (Apak, 2018). A significant part of Y.Z.Y.’s videos is

the prominence of the selfie-shot whereby the participant either directly or indirectly faces the camera for long durations in more than one video. In another video by Y.Z.Y. from the night of 16 July 2016, which is assigned to the ‘demonstrations’ theme, a song written for Recep Tayyip Erdogan<sup>41</sup> can be heard blaring out from speakers. The same song is heard numerous times in the videos depicting demonstrations and the night of marches, thereby further emphasising the significance of the president’s call to the streets as well as projecting his image in the videos posted by the participants in the democracy vigils. Y.Z.Y.’s video dated 16 July shows the participant making the Rabia sign while singing a song dedicated to the President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Figure 33). The sign which is now a reminder of the 2013 massacre of protesters in the Rab’a Square by Egyptian security forces is applied to the coup context where citizens have been massacred by the putschist members of the military. The captions on this video explain the significance of the song Y.Z.Y. is singing, namely labelling it the “Recep Tayyip Erdogan Anthem” while she specifies her target audience as “all [the] world”. Y.Z.Y.’s videos are assigned the ‘subjectivity’ theme unlike those depicting such demonstrations without a personal statement or act of self-representation.

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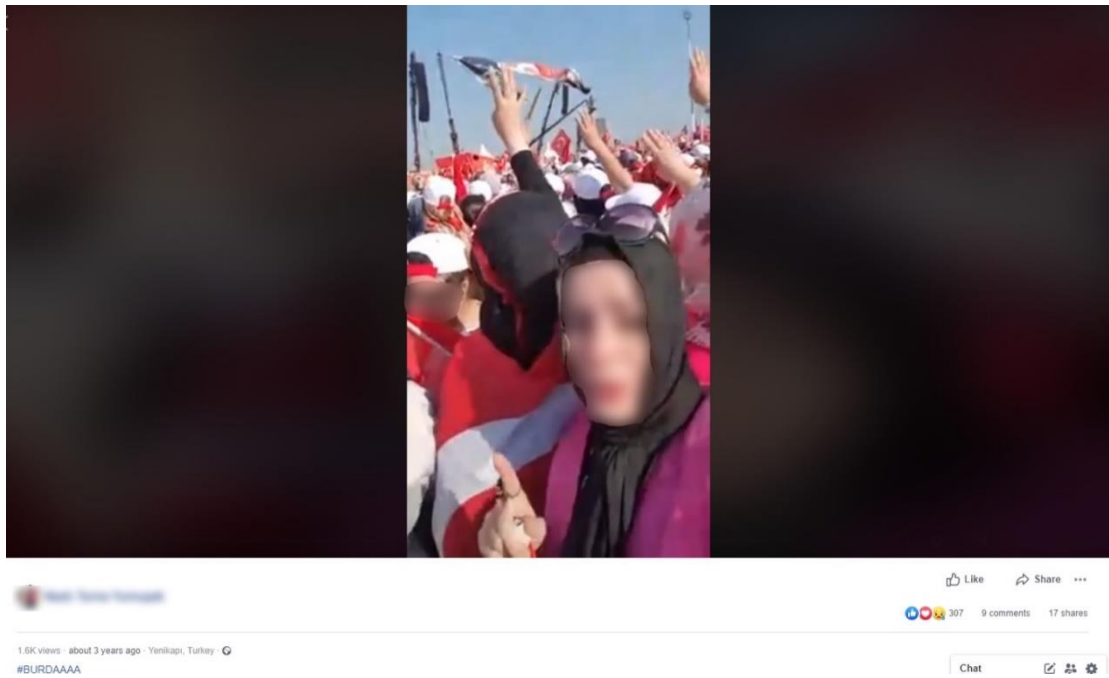
41 This song was written by Ugur Isilak for the President’s 2014 election campaign. The song was arranged by sampling the Nogay March which was a Gokturk war march. The Turkish lyrics refer to Erdogan as the epitome of an honest leader, a friend of the downtrodden and loved and supported by the people. For a YouTube video using the song, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6jL95BaSeM>.



**Figure 33.** Y.Z.Y. making the Rabia sign commonly used by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 16 July 2016

A similar participant is another woman with the handle N.T.Y. Even though her usage of hashtags is not as effective as Y.Z.Y.’s due to unintelligible or alternating spellings of words, one of N.T.Y.’s videos from 8 August shows her during what we can deduce is the “Democracy Rally” that took place on 7 August 2016 (N.T.Y., 2016). In a seemingly endless crowd of people, N.T.Y. is surrounded mainly by other women. She and the rest of the crowd chant “Burada!” (“Here!”) to the recitation of a list of names of those who died during the coup attempt (minus the putschist officers), mimicking an attendance ritual carried out in schools and the military (Figure 34). Her hashtags refer to the dead as “martyrs” and she keeps panning the camera between the stage and her face. As she turns the camera to herself, she utters in tears: *“They are all here... We will break those hands that touched our youth... One by one... Never forgive, never... [inaudible] dogs... until the last home is destroyed, this flag will not descend, these azans will not be silenced...”* (N.T.Y., 2016). This video is assigned to the ‘demonstrations’ and ‘subjective’ theme as well as the ‘anti-coup’

and ‘religious’ tones. Similar to Y.Z.Y.’s videos, N.T.Y. also addresses “*the world*” through hashtags: “...#G[O]R #D[U]NYAAA # G[O]RRR #G[O]RR #D[U]NYAAAAA #BEŞTEN #B[U]Y[U]KT[U]R...”. These hashtags are made up of different spellings of the words “g[o]r” (the imperative conjugation of the verb “to see”) and “d[u]nya” which is Turkish for “*the world*” followed by two hashtags made up of a phrase made popular by President Erdogan. “D[u]nya be[s]ten b[u]y[u]kt[u]r” (The world is greater than five) is a criticism of the United Nations by President Erdogan referring to how the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the United States of America, Russia, the United Kingdom, China and France are controlling the UN as well as all other member states’ fates (Anadolu Agency, 2016). While both women address “the world” in their video posts, N.T.Y.’s video clearly delineates “the world” as foreign powers who are meddling in Turkish politics, implying that the coup attempt was also a result of such meddling or indicated foreign countries’ support for such destructive forces. As explored in previous chapters, these preoccupations about foreign entities were also common in the AKP government and Erdogan’s reactions to the Gezi protests, namely as an uprising organised or instigated by foreign enemies.



**Figure 34.** A video posted on 8 August 2016 of N.T.Y. addressing her viewers during the democracy rally. (The layout of this screenshot differs from the rest due to a recent change in the user interface of Facebook.)

Despite observing *diversity in the female demographic* who attended democracy vigils and contradictory opinions about the prospect of bringing back the death penalty, Başdaş (2017) has claimed that “many seem to support the government’s purge and drive to protest against the coup” (p.187). Başdaş also argues that these women legitimise the government’s status while also acting as examples of citizens of Erdogan’s “New Turkey” (ibid). The profiles of Y.Z.Y. and N.T.Y. demonstrate that both of them were at some point employed by the AKP and had promotional images of and personal photographs taken with Recep Tayyip Erdogan on their Facebook cover pictures and previous or current profile pictures. Despite such admiration demonstrated on their profiles, the video posts of these women also focus on ideas that constitute the AKP and Erdogan’s narrative, such as the confirmation of those who died during the coup attempt as martyrs, addressing and challenging foreign powers who are deemed to have instigated the coup, as well as a general air of

intimidation by threatening vengeance. These ideas are not presented with evidence but recited as unquestionable facts that will be accepted by the viewer.

In this regard, one could say that these videos carry messages that could be deduced as AKP propaganda without direct reference to the party. These video posts also reflect the way the people who created them see the government and President Erdogan, whereby the leader, his delegates, and the vision of the governing party merge into one entity that is praised, protected, and projected. These videos also demonstrate other ideas that come up across the sample of Facebook video posts such as the idea of a new Ottoman Empire which is referred to as Neo-Ottomanism<sup>42</sup> in history and politics, and which reflect the phenomenon of Ottomania<sup>43</sup> in popular culture. References to the Ottoman Empire and a New Ottoman identity go hand in hand with violent and masculinist expressions of power but most importantly the image of Erdogan as a ruler who is commanded by God. Contrary to the Gezi-related video posts, in these videos violence is presented as a means to achieve justice either in the form of revenge implemented by pro-government mobs or more statutory options such as references to the necessity of bringing back the death penalty.

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42 Neo-Ottomanism is not only a rebirth and re-appreciation of the historical heritage of the Ottoman Empire through nostalgia but also a foreign policy tool which has the potential to sever Turkey's alliances with the United States and Europe by reversing the secular ideals the Turkish Republic was built upon while aligning the country's interests with former Muslim nations as well as Muslim minorities in the non-Muslim territories of the former Ottoman Empire (Trifković, 2011).

43 Ottomania refers to the revival of Ottoman-inspired aesthetics and cultural representations that have become popular in Turkey and elsewhere around the world. This phenomenon has influenced a host of television dramas, fashion and decorative trends that have been exported to other countries. This is exemplified by the popular television series "Muhtesem Yüzyıl" (The Magnificent Century), which depicted worldly aspects of palace life in the era of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. Therefore, Ottomania has the potential to generate cultural products that are not in line with the current government's preferred understanding of the Ottoman Empire as a beacon of Islamic ideals (Batuman, 2014; Ergin & Karakaya, 2017).

## **Masculinity, Violence and Religion**

A little over 6% of the video posts analysed depict some sort of expression of vengeance or vengeful ideas about the vaguely described ‘putschists’ or the so-called ‘foreign powers’. There are also less direct forms of intimidation attempted in the video posts analysed, as in the case of a video post by F.K. (2016) where a group of men and women are depicted separately while firing their rifles and guns in the air during Eid (Figure 35). The caption of the video hypothesises: “*if this nation were to use the bullets they fire in the air during the Eid to shoot at the prostitutes, there would not be any impostors left in the country...long live hell for all tyrants*” (F.K., 2016). While the video depicts a couple of women firing rifles, the caption mentions that these are the grandchildren of Nene Hatun,<sup>44</sup> an Ottoman and Turkish folk heroine. The irony of this video post lies in the juxtaposition of a masculinist demonstration of power through the apathetic firing of arms by men and women and the non-traditional depiction of women in the video as heroines who are ready to take on impostors. The practice of firing guns during Eid also signals a convergence between the protection of the country and religion through civil armament. The caption notes that the guns are licensed and lists what one can assume are the names of the people depicted in the video by tagging their Facebook post with the hashtags “#receptayyiperdogan” and “#15temmuz” (15 July) is evidence of the lack of consequences for such violent displays online and in real life in Turkey, as long as they coincide with the ideology of the ruling AKP government and the narrative of the “15 July Epic.”

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<sup>44</sup> Nene Hatun left her new born baby at home to fight against the Russian army during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. The Russian army was defeated and Nene Hatun was found wounded, grasping her hatchet. She died from pneumonia at the age of 98 in 1955. She is buried in a martyrs’ cemetery near her hometown, Aziziye, in the city of Erzurum.



**Figure 35.** Video post by F.K. depicting two women firing rifles into the sky.

I have argued elsewhere that that in M.B.A’s Facebook Live coverage of his taking to the streets in his car on 15 July at 22:41 using the #darbeyehayır hashtag, the audience sees a fleeting image of the driver himself before the camera turns to the road and his car’s speedometer (Apak, 2018). After saying “bismillah” (in the name of God) he sets out on the road, uttering vengeance against the news of the military coup attempt announced on the radio and slaloming between other vehicles on the road. The result is a night of themed video which mixes masculine symbols of power with a pro-government tone and religious sentiment. The driver states that he is “*taking my own tank out on the streets during the military curfew,*” turning up the volume on the radio broadcasting Erdogan’s speech and continues to drive in an aggressive manner through the traffic, uttering religious phrases and looking for “*parallelist*” soldiers.<sup>45</sup> Apart from its depiction of masculinist elements such as

<sup>45</sup> This refers to the naming of Fethullah Gulen and Gulenists who were deemed to be the instigators of the coup attempt according to the so-called “15 July Epic”, acting as a “parallel state” according to the



reckless driving and the loud noise of the engine, this video is also a record of the driver breaking highway traffic law by using a telephone while driving. These and other factors such as the presenter who claims that he does not know what is going on and Erdogan's call to the streets on the radio contributes to an air of urgency that necessitates the participant's masculinist performance. M.B.A. expresses: "*we are filling the squares like lions*<sup>46</sup>...*coups are bygone...we will show you what coup means...we are wasting petrol, these cowards are lining up to buy petrol...*" (M.B.A., 2016). He is referring to a line of cars waiting to buy petrol, assuming that they are filling up their tanks in case of the coup being successful and resources becoming scarce as in the old days of military coups. M.B.A.'s clear distinction between "we" and "them" reflects the dichotomy created by the AKP and President Erdogan, namely, between them and any entity who might not be supportive of their work whether they be putschists, foreign countries, dissidents or, even, the opposition parties. The vagueness with which the enemy is recalled in these videos also serves the purpose of being able to replace the pronoun "them" with any entity who might be anti-government or who might question the narrative promoted by the government about the coup attempt and all of its consequences.

A video post by M.A.D. on 19 July with the hashtags #kuran (*Qur'an*), #dua (*prayer*) and #darbeyehayır, depict a brief selfie moment when we see the participant after which the camera turns to the hundreds of gatherers listening to a verse from the Qur'an being recited on a large stage (Figure 36). The giant banner on the right of the stage reads "*No to coup*"<sup>47</sup> and as the camera pans behind the mass of people

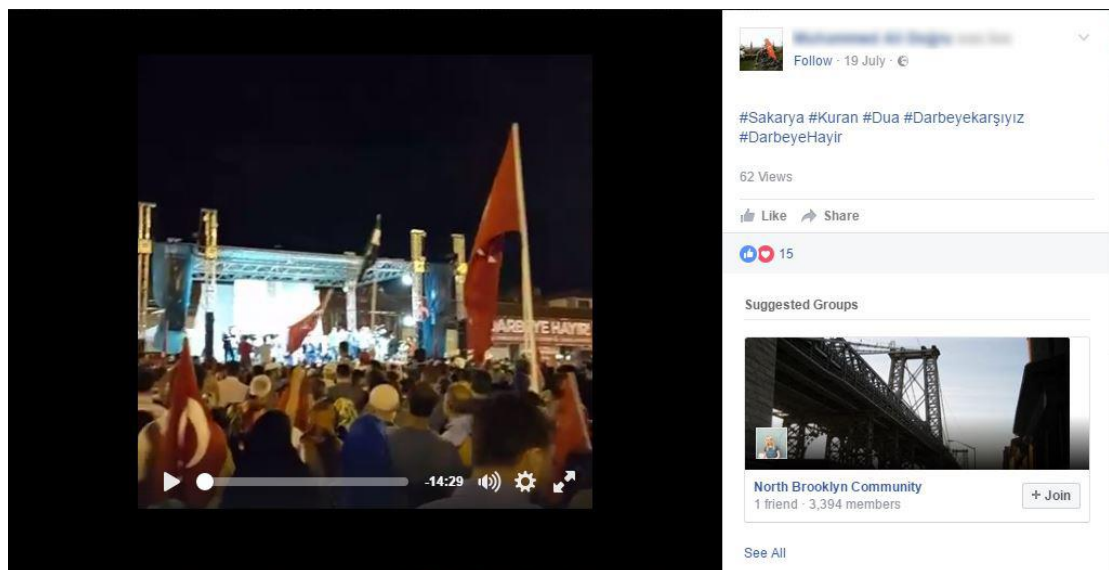
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AKP and President Erdogan following a political falling-out in 2013 between the two former allies (Akkoc, 2015).

46 "Like lions" is an expression used traditionally in Turkish to praise the bravery and strength of men.

47 As there are no articles in Turkish, "no to coup" stands in for both "no to the coup" and "no to any coup".

watching a democracy vigil we see two gigantic banners hanging on the side of a multi-storey building: “*Shoulder to shoulder against the coup*” and “*We will resist the coup.*” At the back, we see a number of white tents and a host of emergency services on stand-by. As the camera completes a 360 degree pan we catch a glimpse of another large banner with the portrait of President Erdogan. Some people are watching the stage, others are recording the recitation while street food vendors are working the crowd. The sound of prayer in Arabic is juxtaposed with a gender-mixed crowd holding Turkish and other flags, casually watching the stage. This video is an example of how central Islamic rituals were in democracy vigils while also underlining how the resources of local government bodies were used to build stages, decorate squares and organise entertainment for those who participated in them.



**Figure 36.** M.A.D.’s video post with #Kuran (Quran) and #Dua (Prayer) on 19 July 2016

However, I have observed (Apak, 2018) that videos with religious tones need not necessarily carry a pro-government tone, as seen in O.Z.’s #darbeyehayir video from 01:00 hrs on 16 July 2016 depicting the sound of the azan, the call to prayer, heard from a window. He simply utters the words: “*It is 1 o’clock. The call to prayer has*

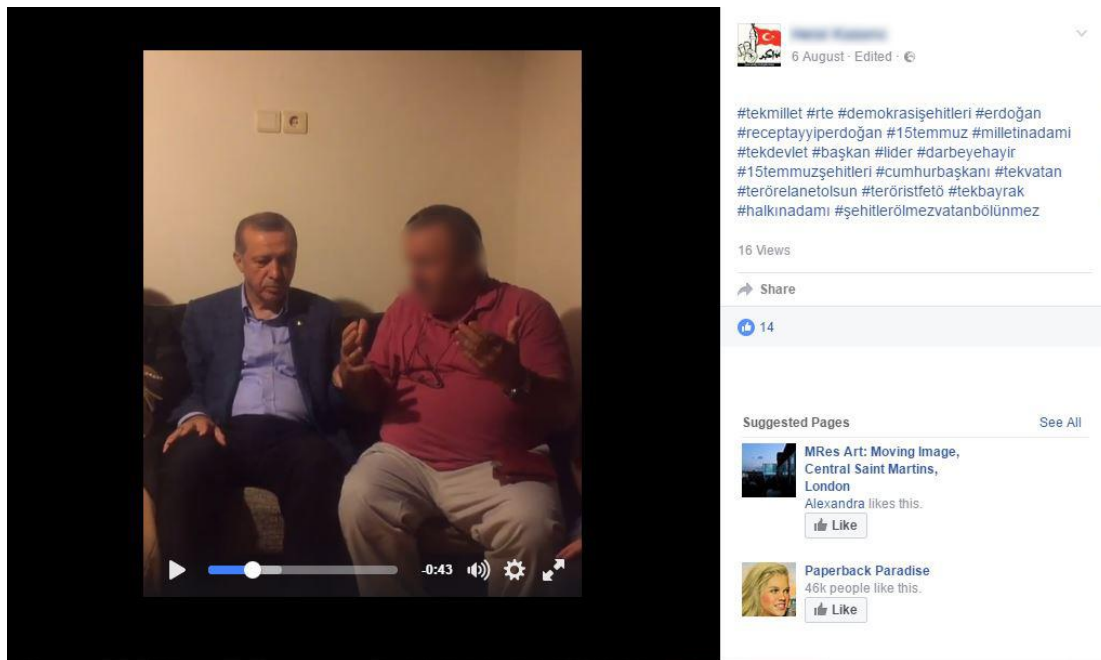
*started.*” The remaining hashtags read: #haydimeydanlara (*to the squares*) #ntv (a national news channel). The words in the “ezan”/call to prayer do not involve a political statement and calls to prayer are a daily part of life in Turkey. The depiction of the call to prayer on online social networks, thus, does not necessarily relate to politics or an affiliation with AKP. However, calls to prayer are politicised on the night of the coup attempt due to AKP’s usage of calls to prayer and other announcements from mosques as a way to defy the coup attempt and to invite people to the streets. This means that if a video post depicted the call to prayer on another day, it would be possible that the user just started capturing during a call to prayer even if what they were aiming to capture was something else. Even if a user depicted the call to prayer on the night of the coup attempt, it would be wrong to assume that it is a political statement if no additional information about the coup or expression of political views were provided. In total the ‘religious’ tone was assigned 114 times in the analysis of 243 videos, defining this mode of expression for a little less than half of the sample in question, namely 46.9% in total. These numbers demonstrate the recurrence of references to calls to prayer, to recitations of prayer as well as religious rhetoric or colloquialisms.

The self-reflexivity displayed in the video posts analysed thus far is – unlike those from the Gezi protests – completely in line with the government’s narrative while the messages presented are frequently similar to one another. There seems to be no need for alternative ways of saying things as freedom of expression had not been disrupted, quite the contrary, this freedom is being protected and informed and sponsored by the government (Gökarıksel, 2017, p. 173; Altınordu, 2019, pp. 156, 160). There is also no need for the participants to think twice about what they are saying as no expression of anti-coup sentiment was or would ever be penalised despite its violent

or provocative content. Sometimes all such participants need to do is record what is going on onstage or around them as the messages propagated by the government's 15 July narrative are satisfactorily expressing their perspective.

### **Erdogan as a Divine Leader: Religious Rhetoric in Praise for the President**

According to praise for the government – and more specifically for Erdogan – are common features in those video posts that do not include subjective elements like selfie shots or commentary by the user/participants (Apak, 2018). For example, a video posted on 6 August by H.K. (a public Facebook page) shows the President on a sympathy visit (Figure 37). As the father of a martyr praises the president, saying that “*he can never make it up to him*” and that he “*gives up the blood of his son*” for the country followed by repetitive thanks to Erdogan who sits and nods quietly. The last words heard from the father in the video are “*you possess divine power.*” The #darbeyehayır video post carries an anti-coup and pro-government tone, which is also emphasised in repeated hashtags condemning terror and referring to Erdogan as “*the man of the people*”. In addition, the video itself reflects a religious tone that seems to compliment the praise of Erdogan seen in Y.Z.Y.’s Facebook video posts. H.K.’s video post made up of personal footage is assigned to the ‘subjective’ theme given its video commentary as well as hashtags and the ‘martyr’ theme for the video’s subject matter.



**Figure 37.** Video posted by H.K. (a public Facebook page) on 6 August 2016

Another video post with a similar subject shows Erdogan reciting verses from the Qur'an in Arabic at another home visit (K.K., 2016). The caption reveals that this is the home of a “*martyr of the homeland*” that the President has just paid a visit to. The video depicts a crowded living room where Erdogan and his wife are sitting on a sofa next to a woman in a burka and a young man; the camera soon pans to show other people in the room who are listening to the President’s recitation and recording this incredible event on their camera phones. In these videos, the religious tone is reinforced by the image of Erdogan as a divine leader and a protector of the Turkish nation as well as other Muslim nations. He is presented as a humane and humble politician who graces the victims of the coup attempt and their families with his presence as well as his Islamic knowledge; however, this also renders him

as a divine messenger, thereby fulfilling the recurrent theme of “being commanded by God” with the coup attempt being a “gift from God.”

On the other end of the spectrum for video posts with a pro-government tone focussed on Erdogan himself as a leader, including videos that depict the massive demonstrations where collective praise to Erdogan is conveyed via speech or song (Apak, 2018). A Facebook Live video posted by A.A. on 17 July with the #darbeyehayır hashtag depicts an ongoing speech praising Erdogan by an unidentified man on a stage at a local democracy vigil. Another Live video using the same hashtag posted by H.C. on 21 July shows a host of AKP representatives being called on stage accompanied by the instrumental version of the “anthem” written for Erdogan. A video by C.S.K. on 20 July depicts the crowd waving Turkish flags to this song. A.K.’s video post also depicts a car ride where Erdogan’s anthem can be heard after another popular song<sup>48</sup> written by the Kocaeli Mehteran (Janissary) band for President Erdogan which features multiple times in videos depicting car rides as well as those recording democracy vigils. These videos praising the government and the President, exemplify the considerable number of times (98 in total) the pro-government tone is observed in 243 videos.

### **Unique and Symbolic Expression**

As revealed in the previous chapter, an important part of the Vine videos posted by Gezi participants embody the ‘lifestyle’ theme; this theme is broadened and renamed ‘everyday’ for the study of the Facebook videos from 15 July to 5 September 2016 using the #darbeyehayır and #15Temmuz tags. This generalisation of the theme is due to the scarcity and lack of diversity in the videos assigned with this theme. Furthermore, this theme is

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<sup>48</sup> The chorus of this song goes “Dik dur egilme, inananlar seninle/Allahın emrettiği yolundan geri dönme” which can be translated as “Do not yield, stand tall, believers are with you/Do not stray from the path commanded by Allah.”

assigned to 17 videos in total, which do not depict a direct form of political or social commentary or action and rather depict mundane situations with references to the coup attempt or to the people who died on the night of 15 July through hashtags or imagery.

A video posted by B.C. on 1 August 2016 shows two men riding on a motorcycle on the Bosphorus Bridge, which has been renamed 15 July Martyrs Bridge in dedication to the people who lost their lives on it (Hurriyet Daily News, 2016). The hashtags read: #köprü (*bridge*) #geçişi (*crossing*) #15temmuz (15July) #şehitler (*martyrs*) #köprüsü (*bridge*).

Through the application of these hashtags, such a mundane activity as crossing a busy bridge becomes an act of remembrance and respect. The meaning of this video is the result of a combination of the elements that make up a Facebook video post: (1) the video content showing an everyday action; (2) the non-expressive hashtags referring to the date of the coup attempt, and (3) the people who died on that day immortalized in the bridge's new name. The seemingly apolitical and ordinary visual content is, thus, politicised through the hashtags.

I.D.'s video using the #15Temmuz hashtag from 22 August makes use of a song dedicated to martyrs playing on the radio as he rides in his car. The effects of the coup attempt and the pain and trauma caused by the events of that night are condensed into a song about the victims of 15 July. This everyday action combined with the music emphasises the memories of the night of 15 July in the everyday lives of the people of Turkey. Another video post by G.V. from August 19 showing a few Turkish flags waving in the wind with the #darbeyehayır hashtag is also assigned to the 'everyday' theme due to the lack of a political context or commentary in the video itself. In the daily life of a citizen the display of Turkish flags is not an extraordinary sight as most public buildings have national flags in front of and flying on top of them; hence, flags can stand for many different political messages according to who appropriates the image. While these videos do not feature open commentary in the form of speech or captions, they are all assigned the 'anti-coup' tone through the *mise-en-scène* and

the message created from the sum of their parts. The former video post establishes its commentary through both the hashtag and the video's audial content, the latter makes use of the hashtag to place a particular meaning on the significance of the raised Turkish flag. While hashtags are used by people to become visible in the stream of content on online social networks, they also have the potential to stand in for non-existing commentary or captions, thus specifying the meaning of such symbolic representations in such video posts.

### **Implications of Facebook Video Posts by Anti-Coup Participants**

The breakdown of themes and tones that characterise the 243 Facebook videos posted from 15 July to 5 September 2016 with the #darbeyehayır and #15Temmuz hashtags (see Chapter 3) is an attempt to understand the methods of representation applied during and after the coup attempt through the usage of smartphones and online social networks. The quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal that Facebook videos posted during and after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey reflect a predominance of pro-governmental and religious tones. These results can be viewed in conjunction with AKP's improved Internet and social media strategies as well as the changes embodied in Law No. 5651. As discussed in Chapter 4, these changes were intended to maintain a tighter grip on online freedom of expression than ever before in the history of the Internet in Turkey. The three years from the Gezi protests to the coup attempt has resulted in the AKP government and President Erdogan's appropriation of online social networks. Both AKP representatives and President Erdogan directed their supporters to social media on the night of 15 July 2016. The aim was not only to contribute to the air of urgency and despair but also to reclaim the online realm from the Gezi protests—proving that online participation can contribute to the government rhetoric as well as the voices of dissent.



For this dissertation, the most significant finding regarding the Facebook video posts is that despite the apparent lack of censorship of various stages of the coup attempt and its aftermath on mainstream, alternative online, and offline platforms, the Facebook video posts reveal a scarcity of unique content and methods of expression. The sample also underlines a scarcity of everyday or symbolic political participation depicting “a form of lived ‘world making’” (McGarry, 2009, p. 299) despite the available technologies while the video content remains descriptive of offline initiatives rather than acting as critical or analytical tools of representation. Facebook video posts related to the coup attempt are dominated by descriptive and commemorative depictions of the democracy vigils organised by local government bodies and re-appropriations of content created by others such as professional media content or amateur content that has gone viral. Therefore, rather than presenting unique messages, these video posts play the role of mere documentations of offline occurrences, unquestioningly copying the scripts provided by the democracy vigils. Such descriptive video posts, rather than standing as political actions or statements, are limited to the understanding of online social networks as instruments calling for street participation in social movements (Castells, 2012, pp. 177-8; Gerbaudo, 2012, p.102; Juris, 2012, p.267).

It is important to note that, unlike on Vine video posts at the time of the Gezi protests, the reuse of existing material was allowed by the video importation feature which is part of the Facebook video-posting algorithm. The dominance of videos depicting demonstrations sponsored and organised by the government show that where there was an opportunity to capture and distribute unique content, the video posts act as non-critical reflections of what was taking place under the democracy vigils’ controlled environment.

In addition, there are parallels between offline and online opportunities since online tools were frequently used to promote and report on offline action during and after the coup attempt. Opportunities for uploading and promoting unique forms of expression were not

fulfilled to the extent they were in the Gezi-related video posts on Vine. Thus, Facebook video posts about the coup attempt and the anti-coup protests do not provide content that makes sense outside of its reportage of the events. While close to the entire sample reflects an anti-coup tone, the level of political critique in these video posts does not move beyond the generic slogans and messages that constitute the narrative of the “15 July Epic.”

I have concluded that the sample of video posts also supports a strong notion of loyalty to the leadership through the image of Recep Tayyip Erdogan by making the President an ethical and political idol (Apak, 2018). There is only one video in the entire sample with an anti-government tone (C., 2016). Moreover, the neutral tone is only assigned to three #15Temmuz video posts that did not carry a pro-government, anti-government, or religious tone out of the 243 video posts in the entire sample. This finding supports the idea that the “pre-figurative form of politics” (McGarry et al., 2019, p.285) signified by the depiction of everyday and mundane activities in online representations of the Gezi protests is in stark contrast to the political activities of the AKP government and its followers. Considering the number of times neutral and anti-government tones have been assigned, it is safe to say that the dominant sentiment in the 243 Facebook videos posted by anti-coup protesters was supportive of the government and President Erdogan. The homogeneity of information thereby renders pro-government and anti-coup sentiments almost identical to one another and aligns the AKP and Erdogan’s political well-being with religious efforts. Such associations have the potential to override opportunities for freedom of expression and provide even more convenient grounds for the grand-scale manipulation of public sentiment in the Turkish political context in the near future.

It is also important to note the lack of self-reflexivity in the users’ *representations of the night of the coup attempt and the democracy vigils*. The two most prominent examples of users depicting themselves in video posts are Y.Z.Y. and N.T.Y. Despite using the selfie method,

both participants represent themselves as part of a greater, homogeneous whole in order to “reinstate their value within the system they inhabit” (Tiidenberg, 2015, p. 1754) through their image as AKP-following *makbul* (“desirable”) female figures (Başdaş, 2017, p.287). While 55% of ‘subjective’ video posts make use of ‘media’ (i.e. recycled) content, only 15% of the Facebook video posts analysed have displayed original and self-reflexive content where the users’ facial image, personal views or stories were depicted. These findings counter theories about both the autonomy of the Internet user (Castells, 2012) as well as arguments about the non-emancipatory consequences for self-centred political participation (Fenton & Barassi, 2011, p.180) by demonstrating that collective participation can result from, or lead to, the representation and celebration of hegemony.

Some of these videos are examples of meta-activism because they are political actions referring to other political actions; this is especially the case for video posts that depict the night of the coup attempt. These videos provide significant details about the atrocities that occurred on the night of the coup attempt from the citizens’ perspective, whether they depict people in their homes afraid which neighbourhood will the fighter jets bomb next or depicting the first person point-of-view of a protester ducking bullets flying in their direction while tripping on unconscious bodies. These videos demonstrate the self-reflexivity of meta-activism in dire situations whereby video posts on online social networks are both citizen witness accounts and reproduction of the resistance and protests of the masses against non-democratic and violent interventions. During a period of time defined by terrifying uncertainty despite the plethora of exposure on the television and radio channels, these videos indicate a purposeful self-reflexivity that aimed to make sense of the events.

Facebook video posts also reflect and/or depict the violence directed at citizens by the military forces, the dominance of the statements and actions of President Erdogan, as well as citizens’ perspectives as evidenced during the protests on the night of the coup attempt.

Therefore, these video posts not only evidence some of the most gruesome aspects of the night of the coup attempt but also provide an opportunity to identify different aspects of the government apparatus well in the aftermath of the events.

The Facebook video posts that depict demonstrations that occurred in the following weeks on the other hand, display a different type of self-reflexivity: a type of self-reflexivity whereby the self is merged into the homogeneous messages and slogans of the democracy vigils, erasing unique individuality and enhancing the AKP government's populist politics and discourses. However, they cannot be considered as meta-activism because the act of mediation does not equal a participation but the evidence of a participation and a reproduction of the government's narrative through the representation of the experience of watching and reacting to propagandistic recitations and performances on the stage at a government-sponsored demonstration. It could be argued that the lack of unique content in this sample of videos is reflexive in terms of the convergence of the interests of the people who captured and distributed these videos via online social networks given the government and mass media outlets' interests. This convergence of interests thereby hinders the possibility and necessity for unique forms of expression with no threat posed to freedom of expression and where clear and homogeneous messages are readily available for citizens to adopt and appropriate as their own.

## **Chapter 7. Meta-Activism from 2013 to 2016: Self-Reflexive Participation in Protest through Online Social Networks**

This thesis has argued that the question of how people use online social networks for political participation is partly dependent on the specific historical and political contexts. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, there are clear differences between the visual self-representation of the participants of the Gezi and anti-coup movements through online social networks. These differences, however, are not due solely to the divergence between Vine and Facebook as separate online social networks (and applications) with varying possibilities for the creation and circulation of personally created video posts; they are also due to the different political circumstances and philosophies which have dominated how these tools were used in each respective historical context. Both online social networks offer at the very least the capacity to record and broadcast through ‘smart’ camera phones, which is the basis on which user-generated content from both platforms has been analysed in this thesis. Participants, even within the same movement, can use video sharing on online social networks to depict all sorts of circumstances and messages from progressive and environmentalist positions to politically incorrect and nostalgic opinions. In more extreme comparisons, online social networks can be used to save lives by sharing reliable information about the presence or crackdown of police or putschist military forces in certain areas or by identifying participants as potential targets for prosecution or harassment.

### **Contextual and Finding-based Similarities**

The analysis of Facebook video posts by anti-coup participants reveal similar methods compared to the Gezi participants’ usage of Vine videos. As video posts ascribed to the ‘night of’ theme show, such visual content is used here as evidence of the protests as well as the

violence that took place. Only 32 out of 243 videos referred to the night of 15 July via ‘personal’ videos, i.e. those which make use of amateur content. (There is no guarantee that these videos have been captured by the user posting the content due to Facebook’s video importation feature.) This may in part be due to news media outlets’ extensive coverage of the coup attempt. For this very reason, video posts using original videos are crucial in gaining more perspectives on the night of the coup attempt. This unwillingness to post videos of original content may also be a result of the fear of the unknown felt during the night which obscured the political result of the happenings and, therefore, the consequences of posting such content. So even though the personal video coverage of the night of 15 July was used in the same manner as Vine videos were deployed to provide evidence of police violence during the Gezi protests, the number of attempted coup-related video posts used for this purpose are considerably lower compared to the Gezi-related videos documenting violence against citizens. Firstly, this is due to the longevity of the night of the coup attempt versus the longevity of the Gezi protests. This finding parallels the two historical contexts’ respective levels of free distribution of information and the urgency exhibited concerning the documentation of events. In the case of the coup attempt, where there is an acknowledgement and plethora of information regarding the violence directed at citizens on online and offline media outlets, there is less need or necessity to document and distribute proof of such violence. On the other hand, the lack of such information during the Gezi Protests makes it a matter of urgency for participants to capture and distribute proof of such violence.

Similarly, Facebook video posts labelled with the ‘demonstrations’ theme parallel the Gezi participants’ motivation to create Vine video posts as proof of their presence inside Gezi Park. Despite the differences between the video posts in the two different political contexts in both the Gezi and the anti-coup samples these types of videos establish participants’ physical presence and may lack a verbal or textual political statement. Demonstration videos are also

similar to the action and park videos in the Gezi sample, in that they are captured as proof of mobilisation or participation during the organised demonstration. It is also fair to say that such proof of participation is itself a political statement in both cases: a pro-government and anti-coup statement in the case of the anti-coup demonstrations, and an anti-governmental statement delineating a variety of political and lifestyle-related messages in the case of the Gezi Park protests.

## **Contextual Differences and their Reflections in the Findings**

### ***Censorship and Profiling***

The political differences between the Gezi protests and the 15 July coup attempt are crucial when considering the dynamics of communication of dissent via online social networks. One of the most important differences between the two contexts is the issue of censorship, especially regarding commercial TV news outlets and control over Internet connectivity as well as the fear of profiling. One of the easier means to block the flow of information during the Gezi protests was to control telecommunication services around Gezi Park and throttle and block websites by reporting or accusing them of ‘terrorist’ activity. This multi-directional mode of censorship was intended to interrupt the creation of content and to block general communication on the streets while preventing the exposure of evidence unfiltered or reframed by government-controlled or loyalist media outlets. This issue alone made the recording and circulating of pro-Gezi content crucial to the maintenance of the resistance both on the streets and online. In contrast, Turkcell, the GSM giant that allegedly blocked mobile signals during the Gezi protests, gifted its subscribers so-called “emergency bundles”

during the night of the coup attempt and for the rest of the summer of 2016 when the democracy vigils took place.<sup>49</sup>

It was not only via statutory means by which the government controlled freedom of expression, a campaign of intimidation and defamation was also used against pro-Gezi voices. As previously noted, the reasons behind why CNN Turk stayed live throughout the military raids on its news studio and offices but broadcasted a documentary about penguins during one of the most heated nights of the Gezi protests, is determined by the socio-political and economic concerns of media executives and other professionals fighting back against systematic censorship and profiling. Whether due to loyalism or fear of marginalisation, the repressive atmosphere surrounding the Gezi protests led to issues of self-censorship. The same factors also resulted in the homogeneous and uninterrupted representation of the ‘15 July Epic’ via mainstream print and broadcast outlets. The video posts analysed as part of this research reveal the effects of the abundance of information that suited the government’s narrative of the coup attempt that was disseminated via commercial news outlets, as opposed to the systemic censorship and manipulation of information carried out by the very same outlets during the Gezi protests. This was also the case for the acknowledgement and reuse of content created by participants in each context. While the traditional print and broadcast media in Turkey remained uninterested in the massive amount of information communicated through online social networks during the Gezi protests in 2013, they were quick to acquire and redistribute amateur footage and information originating from online social media during the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. On the other hand, many personal videos posted by anti-coup protesters on Facebook were imported from professional broadcast material. Hence, it could be argued that the level of information provided on online platforms versus corporate news

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<sup>49</sup> GSM operator Turkcell provided free emergency bundles on the early hours of 16 July 2016 and additional bundles afterwards, all of which benefited a total of 26 million customers and continued to repeat the favour on the anniversary of the events (Turkcell Medya, 2017).



media determines where such content originates from and where it is reused. If more original information is provided on television or radio (which do not have the same temporal limitations as print media), then it is widely recycled online. If the main source of original information the Internet or, more specifically, online social networks, corporate media (including print, television and radio) end up reacting to or incorporating such information.

However, regardless of context, the fear of profiling remained a consistent issue. During both the Gezi and anti-coup movements respectively, anti-governmental discourses or expressions that did not fit with the narrative propagated by the government were not tolerated. This intolerance of critical viewpoints resulted in the expulsion and persecution of many media professionals, artists and academics.<sup>50</sup> These expressions on online social networks have also been used as evidence of the defaming of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in many trials.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Everyday Participation and Unique Visual Content***

Press censorship and fear of profiling, however, led to the Gezi participants' adoption of creative forms of communication. These different modes were used not only to bypass the limitations imposed by the state such as internet censorship and systemic online profiling, but also to put them at the centre of their content through the use of technology, art and humour.

While Gezi participants sometimes had to use online social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, uStream, and Vine to 'occupy' the park or the streets under dire circumstances, anti-coup protesters were invited to the streets with free public transportation, locally

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<sup>50</sup> At the time of the conclusion of this project in 2019, Turkey has been deemed as politically "Not Free" (Freedom House, 2019). Despite the end of the state of emergency which lasted two years following the coup attempt, a new "counterterrorism legislation" which reinforces the authoritarian rule of AKP has been approved by parliament (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In 2018, Turkey also maintained its "world leader" status for jailing journalists (ibid).

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch (2018) have observed that prosecutions for insulting the President on social media have even affected a former MP Feyzi İşbaşaran as well as the main opposition leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

organised events and even SMS messages signed by the President sent to their mobile phones. The safety of the communication environment afforded to anti-coup participants allowed for the direct expression of dissent against the coup attempt and its portrayal as a non-democratic attempt to overthrow the AKP government. Hence, symbolic or subliminal methods were not the only way to protest or to express anti-coup participants' opinions.

This disparity between the permissiveness of the two contexts lead to the most significant difference between the two sets of samples. Out of 1,211 Vine video posts by Gezi participants, 239 involved diverse everyday subject matters which referred to the events through symbolic means while 322 depicted Gezi Park, whether the focus was its carnivalesque aspect, people cleaning the park, environmental issues, or participants' presence. However, only 17 Facebook video posts by anti-coup protesters depicted the 'everyday' references to the events. On the other hand, the demonstrations theme assigned to 54.7% of the Facebook video posts was made up of content that reflected less diverse expressions and more scripted gatherings.<sup>52</sup> These findings demonstrate the substantial difference between the amount of visual content which is unique (that demonstrates a unique point of view or depicts a unique action) or original content (that has been recorded by users and not imported from external sources) in the respective video posts of Gezi participants and anti-coup participants; this may have been the result of the differing levels of censorship and distribution of information that defined each context.

All in all, the encouragement by the president and the government to take to the streets and the confidence of the participants that they had the police on their side contributed to the

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52 Dogra observes the 'democracy vigils': "In the days following the defeat of the coup attempt, the so-called democracy celebrations and democracy vigils began to increasingly resemble pro-Erdogan and pro-AKP rallies. Crowds gathered in city squares were heard chanting to reinstate capital punishment; Turkish flags were everywhere; Islamist banners as well as pro-AKP and pro-Erdogan insignia were common sights. Attacks on Alevi neighbourhoods and journalists were reported in the early days. More recently, a young man was beaten for allegedly not holding a Turkish flag; another for allegedly insulting Erdogan, and the police intervened at a democracy vigil in Hakkari organized by the pro-Kurdish HDP party.

significant difference between the videos of demonstrations posted during the Gezi movement compared to the anti-coup movement. Such confidence on the part of anti-coup participants could be the reason for the scarcity of symbolic expressions in the Facebook video posts. As such, a majority of the video posts tagged with #darbeyehayır and #15Temmuz have quite direct political and/or social messages. This is also a result of the redundancy of self-censorship related to content that expressed any form of opposition to the coup both online and offline.

### *Exposure of Violence*

Violence, another important issue in terms of the way in which the two contexts diverge, is also related to the issue of censorship. It was not the lack of violence<sup>53</sup> but rather the lack of news about the violence committed by the state against its citizens which pushed Gezi participants to such creative measures to maintain a peaceful protest campaign on the streets and online. In addition, the period over which this systemic violence was carried out extended to two months which made it possible for Gezi participants to engage with the issue of violence through progressively sophisticated methods based on their experiences.

By contrast, the night of 15 July 2016 showed people going on the streets to “defend democracy” with the encouragement of Erdogan. Following Erdogan’s call to protest, the resulting violence led to over 208 civilian and military official deaths and over 1,400 people injured across Istanbul and Ankara according to Amnesty International’s (2016) crisis response published on 19 July. The anti-coup participants’ relationship with violence and

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<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International’s official report on the Gezi Protests states: “The Gezi Park protests left a significant trail of injuries in its wake. On 15 July, the Turkish Medical Association reported that by 10 July there had been more than 8,000 injuries at the scene of demonstrations. As of the end of August, five people had died during the course of the protests. There is strong evidence linking three of these deaths to the abusive use of force by police” (p. 6). Violence in the context of the Gezi Protests was an ongoing matter as opposed to the night of 15 July when the terrible massacre of over 208 people by the military forces.

action was informed by (1) the widely-publicized legitimization of action by the President himself; (2) the imbalance of power between the citizens and the heavily armed military groups which defied the chain of command, and (3) the violence of the crowds on the Bosphorus Bridge (15 July Martyrs Bridge) at dawn on 16 July 2016.<sup>54</sup> The significance of these moments is reflected in the themes and tones assigned to video posts by anti-coup participants in this analysis.

The main difference between anti-coup videos tagged with the demonstrations theme and Vine videos posted by Gezi participants of demonstrations and the Gezi Park is the element of danger. Hence, Gezi videos depicting action and more specifically police violence are more in line with anti-coup videos assigned with the ‘night of’ theme where the people are the target of organised violence by armed forces. While a number of Gezi videos depict simultaneous demonstrations and violence, the anti-coup videos assigned to the ‘demonstrations’ theme remain free of violence, at least by the police. However, violent attitudes or what Hintz (2016) calls ‘vigilante vengeance’ by the anti-coup protesters are quite common in those videos posted between 15 July and 5 September 2016.

A total of 16 Facebook video posts by anti-coup participants openly express vengeful ideas about the “traitors” whether they be the instigators of the coup-attempt, members of the Gulen movement, or individuals who simply oppose their political views as in the video posted by Y.Z.Y. at 23:05 on the night of 15 July. In the video Y.Z.Y. recites a long prayer asking Allah to punish those who are trying to take back the country: “*We are all Erdogan, we are all Turkey, we are all believers of Muhammad... Dear God, eradicate enemies of Islam... Dear God, these are your enemies, these are enemies of Islam... Dear God, damn the*

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<sup>54</sup> Press photographs of the mob of people and police officers assaulting and harassing the soldiers on the Bosphorus Bridge circulated widely on online social networks. While many people showed disdain for the violent treatment against these yes-men, the vengeful sentiment observed in Anti-Coup participants’ videos reveal the influence of these images in creating an atmosphere of free expression for aggressive vengeance and, on a wider scale, contributing to the re-introduction of capital punishment to the country’s political agenda.

*USA, damn Israel, damn the UK, damn France, damn Assad damn all and eradicate all”*

(trans. by the researcher). Such discourses of violence are sometimes reflected in references to capital punishment.

### ***Leadership vs. Leaderless Movements***

This pro-government or – as previously observed – pro-Erdogan tone contrasts with the Vine videos posted by Gezi participants. This is not only due to the two contexts’ opposing political agendas where the Gezi participants are influenced by anti-government resistance and the anti-coup participants by the Erdogan and the government call to action against a military coup d’état; it is also due to different perspectives on leadership and society in general. The Gezi movement took pride in being a democratic, inclusive, leaderless and party-less movement. The democracy vigils, on the other hand, were a movement against a vaguely defined group of enemies.<sup>55</sup> Despite claiming to invite all political parties and viewpoints in order to protect and celebrate democracy, the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) and supposedly its Kurdish as well as Turkish followers were excluded from the Democracy and Martyrs Rally of 7 August 2016 (Duran, 2016). Furthermore, having been safeguarded by Erdogan himself and his followers from the night of 15 July onwards, the anti-coup movement did not make any claims about distributed leadership or its lack of a leader.

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<sup>55</sup> This vaguely defined list of enemies grows day-by-day as Erdogan’s purges continue to affect hundreds at a time. Nordland and Timur (2016) report: “The Turkish government on Tuesday expanded its crackdown on political opponents, dismissing an additional 15,000 civil servants from their jobs and shutting down 375 organizations, including nine more news outlets. More than 100,000 public workers, including police officers, teachers, soldiers and others, had already been fired for what the authorities said were connections to a failed coup on July 15 or to terrorists... A government decree on Tuesday said that 375 groups from various cities had been ordered shut down for what it said were links with terrorists, along with nine news outlets. All the financial assets and property of those organizations were to be seized by the Treasury. The decree said that more than 15,000 public employees were to be dismissed, including 338 soldiers, 404 military police officers and more than 7,500 police officers.”

This is observable in the Facebook videos examined in the previous chapter as well in the significant number of those videos with a pro-government tone (98 out of 243). Regarding the Facebook video posts by the anti-coup participants, the amount of openly expressed praise and adoration dedicated to the President in the captions, hashtags and visual content in the sample provides evidence for the prominence of his loyal following within the anti-coup protests. Unlike the Gezi Park Vine videos where the plurality and diversity of the participants are revealed through the heterogeneous activities depicted, Facebook video posts depicting anti-coup demonstrations more often than not show an elaborate stage decorated with the AKP's logo and/or a standardized range of songs blaring from massive sound systems. This also sets the participants from the two different contexts apart in terms of their self-representation habits.

Facebook video posts made up of personal footage depicting the video-posting participants themselves constitute only 35 out of the 243 videos studied. Comparisons between the anti-coup protesters and Gezi participants' self-representation habits reveal a significantly different mode of the respective participants' use of online social networks and smartphone technologies in the different social movements. Therefore, the dominant focus in the videos documenting the anti-coup protests is not the individuals concerned or individual expression but the people on the stage, namely the ideologies being communicated and the homogeneous crowds. Videos reflecting or depicting a given participant's self come up more in the Gezi sample than in the anti-coup one. However, these videos demonstrate that less self-reflexivity or a less self-centred expression and greater focus on crowds does not guarantee inclusivity or emancipation. While the dissident selves are depicted struggling for and expressing equality, peace and the desire for a better future for humanity, the loyalist selves are observed reciting the government's political narrative, calling for revenge and violence. Hence, the lack of

diversity in the anti-coup participants' video posts' visual content recalls the lack of diversity on the streets.

The homogeneity of the crowds and the messages from the anti-coup context also echo the religious tone that defines almost half of the sample in question. The generalised term 'religious' encompasses Islamic references as no reference to another religion is observed in this sample's video posts. Unlike the Gezi participants' videos, the religious tone signals the use of religion as both a communicative tool (as in the organised calls to prayer and to go the streets on the night of 15 July) as well as identifying the crowds on the street through Islamic slogans, song and prayers. The Gezi video posts do not display consistent or formulaic expressions with a religious tone even though some did depict references to Islam or other religions,<sup>56</sup> but this does not mean that the people at the protests were non-religious (Baysu & Phalet, 2017).

### **Meta-Activism and Understanding Participation at the Online-offline Nexus**

Meta-activism takes on two different critical inquiries, namely, the need for terminology and definitions of activism at the online-offline nexus to reflect the move beyond the binarisms of machine/human, real/digital and physical/virtual; and, the "epistemocentrism" (Bourdieu, 1990) in the understanding of political action on online social networks through judgements of value and impact.

The initial point of critique in the definition of meta-activism concerns the theoretical and semantic remnants of the offline and online activism divide. As discussed in Chapter 2,

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<sup>56</sup> The Gezi protests included many religious communities from Turkey including Sunni Muslims, non-Sunni communities such as the Alevi (an Islamic sect that is frequently and systemically discriminated against in Turkey), Jews (including descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who found asylum in the Ottoman Empire following their exile via the Alhambra Decree) and Christians (majority of whom are Turkish citizens of Greek or Armenian descent).

through its definition, meta-activism aims to problematise such solidified terms and theories by semantically and conceptually highlighting the overlapping of online and offline realms in the post-smartphone world. This overlapping is seen as a reflection of all entanglements between the man-made and the so-called natural as no one aspect is independent of the other. As much as the online realm is created by and fed from the offline, the offline realm is irreversibly dependent on and reflective of the opportunities provided by the online realm. Meta-activism reflects the overlapping of the online and the offline in the field of political participation by positioning itself at the intersection of online (cyber-, digital) activism and offline activism.

The second point of critique is much more specific to the subject matter and concerns discourses of authenticity regarding political activism. Such discourses are based on the assumption that the value of human action – in this case political participation – is countable despite the impossibility of direct connections between any given action and supposed results outside of subjective commentary based on historical and personal accounts. Such positivist attitudes towards the authentication of political activism are also prone to leaning on techno-deterministic inquiries that are based on quantified and generalised data that fail to reflect the heterogeneity of posthuman expression and action. What is more, such discourses, through an understanding of human actions through cost and effect, risk romanticising extreme actions over relatively more regular actions, thereby contributing to sensationalisation rather than impact. Such an emphasis on the grandiosity of gestures as a reflection of their authenticity as political participation can hinder inclusivity and the expansion of numbers mobilised for a given cause. By dismissing such discourses of authenticity, the notion of meta-activism aims to shift the focus from the cost or value of certain individual actions to a consideration of political action as an amalgamation of the offline and online practices of a variety of so-called costs.



In this thesis, I have introduced the concept of meta-activism as a way to understand the overlapping of online and offline participation. The findings have shown that video posts by Gezi participants cannot be seen only as information, as these video posts were defiantly demanding attention and made visible a critique of the government and its attitude towards people of Turkey. The visibility of such critique and how it has been captured pointed to the self-reflexivity of the individuals and the reflexivity of the movement. Video posts that used amateur content from the night of the coup attempt were similarly crucial for the safety of individuals as well as the perception of the unravelling of the events by the public in real time. Meta-activism, thus, stands for posthuman individuals' combined practices of activism, witnessing and self-representation motivated and/or informed by context-specific capabilities and hindrances.

## **The Need for Meta-Activism**

### *Necessity of Meta-Activism for Online Actions*

The possibility of an individual taking part in organised political action on the street (outside of their domestic environment) depends on a variety of factors that affect individuals' lives on an everyday basis, including their financial circumstances, social capital or network, freedom of mobility, and physical and mental capabilities. Firstly, an individual needs to be able to "afford" to go the streets in response to a call of action, meaning that certain necessary financial conditions need to be met before street action. These financial conditions have to be able to allow an individual to meet travel costs to the location of a protest (in addition to lodging and food if the location is away from the immediate vicinity of one's home) and the ability to quit or pause work unless the street protest takes place during an off-day. In countries with high income averages and labour laws that protect the basic rights of employees, these factors may not be relevant. However, in the case of Turkey, it is possible to

see instances of how these factors were used to control or encourage crowd mobility during the Gezi protests as well as during the anti-coup demonstrations. During the 2016 democracy vigils after the coup attempt, local government bodies provided free 24-hour public transportation to encourage people to fill the streets until the early hours of the morning. This was an exceptional case not only because of the longevity of the period during which public transport was offered for free but also because of the around-the-clock service provided on public transportation which was an anomaly in Turkey. On the other hand, during the Gezi protests many modes of public transportation were shut down by local government bodies in the hopes of preventing people from participating in street protests. One of the iconic responses to such government attempts to impose limitations on protests was the protesters' march from the Asian side of Istanbul to the European side on foot in the early hours of 1 June 2013. However, regardless of the participants' ability to walk, crawl or fly to reach street action, its financial cost remains a central factor that determines who can or cannot afford to participate in street protest. This also applies to the working conditions of the people who participate in such protests. The ability to leave work is a luxury and data on the Gezi protests show that the majority of the people who were present in the park on a more permanent basis were university and high school students who were not tied to fulltime work. The prominence of night time demonstrations during the protests also reflects this reality. Similarly, the local AKP government organised demonstrations after work hours when combined with free unlimited public transportation were able to attract people from all walks of life to attend these gatherings.

Secondly, an individual's social capital and networks can affect how and if they are able to partake in street action. Despite widespread calls to action being a commonplace fixture on online social networks, the motivation to actually participate in the street also depends on one's social identity and social circle (Hacıyakupoglu & Zhang, 2015; Konda, 2014). While

attachment to a certain circle can enhance one's chances of security and their ability to be in the right place at the right time, isolation can seriously endanger an individual by making them more prone to police violence and detainment without witnesses. As such individuals getting lost in street action is a serious concern for their wellbeing, both on the street and potentially at the hands of the armed forces under such extraordinary circumstances<sup>57</sup>.

Similarly, not being part of a circle or not possessing the necessary social capital that will protect an individual (reputation, acquaintances in necessary positions etc.), can discourage an individual from partaking in street protest, especially under anti-democratic circumstances defined by police violence, unlawful detainment and torture.

Thirdly, an individual has to possess the necessary physical and mental ability to partake not only in street action but also in online actions. However, a crowded environment that is prone to major panic can pose substantial threats to people who live with physical and mental limitations. Depending on the particular context, such mental and physical circumstances not only affect individuals' independence but also their security since even if they can choose to partake in a street protest, they might be in danger of injury due to their vulnerability or, further, harassment at the hands of vigilantes or armed law enforcement individuals.

Lastly, an individual's ability to partake in street action also depends on a variety of other factors that are often overlooked, such as their role as caregivers to others, their right to remain in a given country and their job. In an ideal world, all individuals who wish to do so would be able to partake in street action without concerns about their or their loved ones' finances, security and well-being. This is the breaking point of the legitimisation of street activism over so-called online activism. In many countries and under many circumstances, it

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<sup>57</sup> Amnesty International (2013) reports that, among their interviewees, the majority of the women detained by the police during the Gezi protests were "sexually harassed by law enforcement individuals" (p.16). The case of Ali İsmail Korkmaz, who died as a result of a traumatic brain injury following his beating by four plain-clothes officers and four civilians on a side street during the protests in Eskişehir is another example of the ill treatment of isolated detainees and protesters in the hands of policemen (Amnesty International, 2013, pp. 38-39).

is not possible for people to guarantee that things will not go awry. The differences in the circumstances under which participation in street action takes place thus calls for a demythologisation of “activism” and the romanticised associations tied to this concept. This includes the urge to label street activism as authentic and online activism as a product of capitalism, and more importantly the urge to differentiate between and compartmentalise online versus offline activism.

In this regard, Hayles’ (1999) posthuman provides a great basis for the *meta-activist* as the posthuman subject’s physical presence is only part of their identity and being (p. 291). *Meta-activism* is a struggle not to lose the ability to participate when the very lines of information being severed due to systematic violence and regularised censorship through the use of the information and communication channels provided by technological prostheses. Under circumstances where individuals’ lifelines of information are cut, every act of transmission of information becomes a political action. Hence, every action regarding the communication of a political action is politicised regardless of the physical actions or presence of the communicating subject or the manifest content of the message. Meta-activism can thus be understood not as a sub-category of the activism but as a way of being, thereby functioning as part of an interrelated posthuman group.

### ***Necessity of Meta-Activism for Offline Actions***

While the circumstances discussed in the previous section may be seen as potential setbacks for street participation in political action and necessitate the practices of meta-activism as a so-called substitute for street participation, meta-activism also constitutes the practices through which such romanticised forms of physical participation are promoted, evidenced and protected through enhanced mobile recording and distribution technologies afforded by

online social networks with the help of smartphones. In fact, practices of meta-activism have made it possible to carry out the empirical research that this thesis is based on. These personal videos stand as a relatively accessible archive as long as the continuity and politics of online social networks such as Vine and Facebook allow users access to these data. In both cases meta-activism practices have allowed calls to action on the street (Konda, 2014, p. 84; Hacıyakupoğlu & Zhang, 2015; Konda, 2016, p.9), the recording of violence against protesters (Amnesty International, 2013, pp. 16, 19, 42-43, 48, 67), thereby providing potentially life-saving intelligence to citizens in ways that enhanced and reconstructed street participation.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, meta-activist practices such as the promotion of a cause and related organised actions made it possible for a great number of people to see and hear for themselves about the uprooting of trees at Gezi Park in a matter of hours (taksimdayanisma, 2013). From the very first hours, activists' calls for the occupation of the park defined the nature of the action to be taken: to occupy the park and to defend its integrity through non-violent action. Many videos of the 'Park' theme demonstrate this by acting as reports of the park's occupation, including how people live, communicate, spend their time and engage in political conversations in the park and how they defend it and their right as citizens to be there. It is important to repeat the importance of such information while mass media sources first ignored and later blatantly censored or manipulated the nature of the Gezi participants' street action. As such these recordings provide not only proof that something was going on but also proof that: (1) the state's reaction to the protest was getting out of hand; (2) the media sources that the masses so readily rely on are involved in the government's censorship of dissent; and (3) are trying to

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<sup>58</sup> While the Konda (2016) survey reveals that only 8,8% of the respondents received the news of the July 15 Coup Attempt on social media, the 65% who heard about it on television (p. 9) should have been exposed to Erdogan's FaceTime call. Considering that 52.5% of the people who took to the streets decided to do so upon the President's invitation to the streets (p. 17) places great emphasis on the FaceTime call which can be seen as a symbolic use of social media by the President.

control citizens' understanding of the events by perpetuating and further publicising then-Prime Minister Erdogan's slandering of the protesters. Thus, the widespread distribution of these recordings of street participation were important elements of meta-activism: rather than simply a case of witnessing, creating, editing and sharing information related to the protests were political actions which represented other political actions to reveal, inform, prescribe, and defend the culture and practices of the Gezi movement.

Secondly, personal videos posted on online social networks in both cases revealed the appalling amount of violence projected towards people on the street. While in the case of Gezi, representations of police violence against participants revealed it to be systemic, expansive and prolonged throughout the summer of 2013, in the anti-coup case (represented in videos assigned to the 'Night of' theme) it is possible to see more concentrated episodes of unrelenting violence and threats posed to all citizens through the use of automatic weapons, tanks and fighter jets on the night of 15 July 2016. Mainstream media outlets further benefited from such recordings made on the night of the coup attempt and circulated them widely.

The main difference between the uses made of the representations of violence in each case is the mainstream media's adoption of such amateur material as part of their stories. While military violence on the night of 15 July was widely exposed through news networks and newspapers as well as via online sources that reused amateur/personal videos for evidence, such evidence of violence towards citizens was mostly ignored or misrepresented and manipulated by similar outlets during the Gezi movement. Hence, during the Gezi protests, communicating evidence of violence to a wider audience was even more critical in representations of the action on the street to citizens. It is significant that a great number of the occupiers of the park expressed that police violence and ongoing censorship about this violence was one of their main motives to maintain their occupation of the site (Konda,

2014). Hence, the meta-activist practice of reporting street violence in the face of mass media censorship and threat of profiling by the government also constitutes an integral part of offline activism by evidencing unlawful violence against innocent participants as well as protecting potential participants against such violence by reporting points of action so that they might be avoided by street participants.

It could also be argued that the possibility of such personal records could act as a preventative measure although it is impossible to know if members of the police forces were actually discouraged from acting violently for fear of exposure. One reason to think that the possibility of unknown recordings of police violence being circulated intimidated certain officers is demonstrated by the phenomena that some officers chose to hide their helmet numbers in a makeshift manner while others did not (Radikal, 2013). The revelation of such misconduct by the police to avoid the risk of prosecution as a result of unlawful intervention was also recorded in the photographs taken by anonymous entities who circulated them on social media to the point where mass news outlets like Radikal and Bianet and political parties such as the Republican People's Party (CHP) decided to expose these incidents and take action against such practices (Bianet, 2013).

While such measures prove the significance of personal photographs and videos captured by street protesters, they also illustrate that such evidence alone is not enough to prevent or stop police violence unless the necessary judicial and political care for human life is observed. This is apparent in the case of Ethem Sarısülük who was shot by a police officer on 1 June 2013 in Ankara. The MOBESE (CCTV) recording of the altercation was made public first on online social networks and later on mainstream channels (BBC News, 2014). Despite the images showing the police officer clearly pointing his pistol at the crowd and firing and Ethem Sarısülük (aged 26) falling on the ground at the same time as the police officer turned away and ran outside of the camera shot with his pistol in hand, it took the Turkish courts

over a year and many re-litigation and re-prosecution attempts by the defence team to convict the officer with a little over a year in prison. This sentence was ultimately turned into a fine of 10,100 Turkish Liras in 2016 (roughly 2,700 GBP at the time) and raised to 15,200 Turkish Liras in 2018 (Bölükbaş, 2018). Hence, despite the power of the visual evidence in public protest and support for Ethem Sarısülük's case, in practice the evidence had very limited impact on the prosecution, neither did it deter from violent acts from being committed against protesters, especially because the Gezi protests had been over for five years by the time this prosecution was finalised.

This demonstrates the difficulty of assessing the short term significance of a piece of recording depicting police violence. However, this case also proves the effect of such recordings on the general public and how such evidence can be used to influence public opinion and mobilisation (Bucak, 2014). If it was not for such influence and mobilisation that supported the defence team and the Sarisuluk family, the case could have been set aside due to the Supreme Court's dismissal of the initial sentence due to "departure from the rule" (meaning the case was dropped due to formalities) (Bolukbas, 2018). It is, then, a question of what we are seeking from such visual evidence in today's world. Even though prosecution by such evidence may be complicated, it is still able to highlight an atrocity, to start a conversation or to influence public opinion. Therefore, visual evidence can help take the aforementioned actions which constitute political activism. In turn, such meta-activism practices are essential to activism in general, rendering the offline and online dichotomy even less relevant.

Thirdly, such personal videos on online social networks in the case of the Gezi protests reveal the expansion of the protests from Istanbul to many cities across Turkey and around the globe. Instead of assessing such support in the form of round numbers, participants were able to see not only the amount of people partaking in the same protest but also the variety of



motives behind their protest as well as different protest strategies and techniques. In addition to more intuitive usage of the opportunities provided by these technologies such as the evidencing of protest and police violence as well as Gezi Park's occupation by the protesters on the street, a considerable body of symbolic and sporadic acts of dissent have been documented through Vine video posts. These symbolic and sporadic acts of resistance or dissent range from more domestic forms of protest such as the "pots and pans" protests to metaphorical expressions, inside humour, memes and other symbolic representations of the philosophies and sentiments that informed the Gezi protests of 2013. Thanks to such videos participants could see that there were tweens, pregnant women, elderly and people of reduced mobility who also showed their support and participated in the Gezi protests under a variety of circumstances. Again, these videos reveal that the Gezi protests were not finalised in an abrupt manner on the last day of street action but continued on throughout the country and transformed into a movement that still retains significant political and emotional value today.

### **Concluding Remarks About Political Participation in the Post-Smartphone Era**

The entanglement of online and offline actions constitutes activism in the post-smartphone era. This is the period after the introduction of affordable and high quality video and image capturing technologies and applications as well as online social networks that allowed for their rapid and widespread distribution. This phase also spans from before the Gezi movement to after the coup attempt in 2016. In most contemporary cases the same individual unquestioningly employs offline and online methods in combination to participate in protest. Hence, today meta-activism – activism about or referring to other practices of activism – is an essential part of activism.

Given contextual circumstances such as censorship, manipulation and/or the homogenisation of mass media outlets, the depiction, representation, distribution and exposure of activism as exemplified by the notion of meta-activism becomes essential to the survival and impact of such activism. Therefore, all actions that refer to such activism contribute to the general effect by circumventing those preventative or manipulative measures resulting from mutual understandings between governments or states and media corporations that secure the former's image and the latter's commercial interests. The public's exposure to non-violent activism through the use of online social networks and other alternative media not only calls into question the state apparatus but also the legitimacy of information, regardless of its source. Meta-activism thereby not only serves the specific cause related to a given protest but also provides counter-perspectives which have the potential to dismantle belief systems reinforced by the homogeneity of mass media production. The idea of meta-activism also dismantles the archaic romanticisation of activism by a process of demythologisation and democratisation of protest and by making political participation more accessible to the wider public to witness, to understand, and to adopt.

The weaknesses of value judgements about online political participation have been underlined by a number of theorists (Juris, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Franklin, 2013a). Indeed, pitting online and offline actions together is a result of cyber-determinism (Fuchs, 2012). Value judgements about online and offline political participation emerge from a dichotomous view of online and offline actions and lives in general. This perspective has its origins in the age of dial-up Internet connections where Internet life and real life were two separate entities and served different purposes in people's lives (Turkle, 1995, 1999). I have also argued in this dissertation that the dichotomous view of online and offline lives and actions is no longer applicable in the post-smartphone era given the ubiquity of mobile Internet technologies. This is not to disregard the digital divide but to underline that for those who do use smartphones,

online and offline lives are very much intertwined and the boundaries between the two have become blurred. Thus, by approaching smartphone users as posthuman (Hayles, 1999), it is possible to see the Internet and smartphone technologies as types of prostheses. Thereby, leaving terms and concepts that were developed for a theorisation of the separation of the digital and the real behind has the potential to expose cyber-determinism.

I have proposed the concept of meta-activism as a way to understand the consolidation of online and offline participation in dissent in the post-smartphone era. By taking online social networks as they are, with their merits and evils, I have analysed how people have been using online video-making and sharing technologies to express dissent and participate in social movements. My aim has been to demythologise generalising judgements about online participation in social movements by looking at two very different cases from Turkey's recent political history. This thesis has shown that context-specific factors play an important role in the way people participate online including the appropriation of said technologies by certain personalities, groups or institutions as well as the manipulation of online realm's legal boundaries through Internet policy and law. Additionally, my empirical research has demonstrated that different contexts give birth to different user habits in terms of the recording, curating and publishing of video content online. This dissertation has demonstrated that the self-reflexive expressions of dissent can contribute to progressive causes and that self-reflexivity does not negate a consideration of one's community; that the effectiveness of these online social networks is not found in their immediate effect but in how they change the landscape of political communication in the long term; and, that the strength of the ties that have resulted from participation on online social networks can lead governments to systematically attack and to attempt to re-appropriate the technologies that enable those ties to be used for their own ends.

My aim in this thesis has not been to portray online social networks as emancipatory tools *per se* because under different contexts these networks can also become tools of surveillance and repression. Instead, my intention has been to observe the potential of user-generated content posted on online social networks to create/maintain messages, sentiments and ideologies that also exist in real life. The comparison of these two Turkish contexts show how easy it is for repressive regimes to appropriate some of tactics developed by anti-regime/anti-governmental movements' use of online social networks. This comparison has been informed by how Internet law has been manipulated to aid in the development of 'social media' into a tool that aids the suppression of counter discourses. Therefore, the fact that online social networks are just tools or that the profiles of users are not habitually dedicated to social or political change do not provide grounds to neglect their political significance.

By looking at both Gezi and anti-coup materials, one can observe the different paths which user-generated content or online social networks can lead to, even in the same country. The same media that were used to spread messages about freedom of expression and political, ethnic, social and sexual tolerance can be used to spread messages condoning capital punishment, political exclusion, totalitarianism, hatred, and Islamist politics. However, this should not limit the analyses of political participation in different political, social and technological contexts.

Apart from the differences between the representations that are a result of people's political alignments, the two case studies have revealed a variety of themes, perspectives and tones which reflect the diversity of participation at the online-offline nexus. These representations range from witness accounts on the street to intelligence about police violence and outrage captured in the privacy of one's home. I argue that this type of participation can be understood through the concept of meta-activism. Meta-activism is neither based solely on the Internet or solely on the street, it is a combination of the offline and online experience of

individuals. It cannot be isolated to the realm of media or to the physical realm. All types of media alter the way people participate in politics; therefore, it is up to the people who use online social networks to efficiently take ownership of these platforms by understanding how they work, what they offer and what can be created or achieved through their use with the acknowledgement of their limitations.

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## **Appendix 1. A Step-by-Step Breakdown of Multi-Modal Analysis of Online Video Posts**

1. Choose a platform.
2. Research relevant hashtags and geotags for the context.
3. Decide and note down the date ranges according to the research question or context.  
Mark down information about the first and last videos to be analysed (if the platform allows chronological viewing of videos).
4. For the first round of coding to determine overarching candidate themes at least 50% of the selection of videos need to be analysed.
5. Break down the video post into its components, namely, the video, the hashtags or geotag, the meta-data (posting date and user handle), caption, and comments by the user.
6. There is necessary order for the analysis of the different components of the video post, however, analysing the video first proves efficient in terms of quickly evaluating the multi-modal information.
7. Conduct visual/textual and thematic analysis of all visual and textual material within the video post.
8. Depending on the context, consider different modes of analysis for the components such as consideration of visual devices or rhetorical devices. Recurrence of these devices can be reflected in the coding (such as perspectives and tones).
9. Note down outstanding examples such as combinations of multiple or unlikely themes, one-offs and contextually irrelevant information for further analysis.
10. Note down major candidate themes in a table with the hashtag information and the date range. These themes are elaborated on with subthemes through the actual close analysis of the entire selection of video posts so leave space to record potential new

themes and subthemes. Determine a manual or digital method to calculate the recurrence of themes.

11. For the second round, repeat steps 5-9 while paying attention to emerging themes and recurring devices of communication used in the video posts.
12. The number of themes and the different codes that emerge depend on the research question and context. Depending on the project, similar themes can be grouped under a more encompassing theme or the irregularity of themes can be highlighted for the purpose of the argument.

## **Appendix 2. Timeline of Internet Law in Turkey (1993-2016)**

**April 1993** Turkey joins the Internet.

**2000-2001** The then-government proposes an amendment to the press code with a provision treating the Internet “as subject to [the] Press Code” (Akgül & Kırılıdoğ, 2015, p.3). With government persistence the first law specific to the Internet is passed by parliament.

**2004** A new penal code is passed, including additional provisions on the Internet and computer crime concerning ISPs.

**2006** The Ministry of Justice forms a commission to prepare an “Internet law” to accommodate missing parts of the criminal law and procedures. The commission starts work in early 2006.

**Fall 2006** A wave of child abuse and child pornography cases is disseminated in the media. The first Computer Crime Unit is established at Istanbul Police Headquarters. Prime Minister asks the Ministry of Transportation responsible for BTK to resolve the problem.

**29 March 2007** The “Clean Internet” Conference takes place in Ankara.

**4 May 2007** Law No 5651 is passed in parliament with no major opposition and comes into effect pending the passing of secondary regulations.

**November 2007** Law No 5651, the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications is fully in force.

**Late 2008** BTK publishes a report providing statistics on the number of websites blocked by the TIB by court orders during that year and by category of offence.

**2010** The Turkish Government signs the Cybercrime Convention from the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, 2004 (which was opened to signature in 2001).

**22 February 2011** BTK announces that the “Secure Usage of the Internet” project will be implemented on 22 November 2011.

**17-25 December 2013** Website blocking gains new momentum after corruption revelations about members of the government.

**February 2014** A bill which increases the powers of the TIB is passed by parliament.

**8 September 2014** Following Erdoğan’s election as President, an amendment to Law No. 5651 comes into force on 8 September 2014.

**2 October 2014** The Constitutional Court overturns critical parts of the amendment as it deemed them to be unconstitutional.

**20 January 2015** Upon the retirement of some key members of the Constitutional Court, the same amendments, reinforced with harsher measures, are brought to parliament.

**19 March 2015** New amendments broadening the scope for censorship adopted by the parliament and has been applied in full force since June 2015.

**8 December 2015** The Constitutional Court nullifies a set of amendments to Law No. 5651 passed in February 2014. This decision entered into force in December 2016.

**7 April 2016** A new Data Protection Law, in accordance with Turkey’s legislation meeting EU standards, is passed and enters into force.

**17 August 2016** The TIB is shut down as part of an emergency decree following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt.