History, Struggle, and Class: Gezi Resistance

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Introduction

The spatial transformation and vulnerable working/subcontracting process which are created by neoliberal policies raised the number of people who feel this transformation in their body. As much as the number of the graduated students from newly-established universities increased, it is becoming hard to employ this skilled labor with personal services and benefits. The full recreation of the space according to neoliberal way is not affecting the people who lost their houses or neighborhood, but revolutionizing everybody’s life and practices. While the dynamo sectors (i.e. construction and energy sectors) of the neoliberalism always need to destroy and privatize new lands, forests; the space is not becoming a thing that is converting or converted by people; on the contrary, it transformed to a consumption center which jams people and knocks the wind out of people’s wind.

Different Perspectives on Class-Character of Gezi Uprising

Many objections to these transformations have been raising throughout the world and one of the latest and greatest demonstration occurred in Gezi Park-Turkey in June 2013. We witnessed to many discussions over the Gezi uprising’s class character. Some of them named it as a ‘petit bourgeoisie’ movement (Ogun, 2014), whereas some others as a ‘new middle class’ (Keyder, 2013). Prior to how we will define it, it is important that people who both suffered form the neoliberal politics and the discriminative speech of Justice and Development Party (AKP) who is the carrier of the neoliberal politics. There is an obvious situation: in general, the neoliberal politics are not just suffering labors but the whole life practices. When we look from this perspective, we can assert that the Gezi uprising was based

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on the people who have to sell their labor in a way and resist to the transformation of their cities in which they have been practicing their lives. This life practices sometimes come into leaf in the destruction of a historical cinema, sometimes in a removing of a stadium and sometimes in the cutting of trees in a park. Moreover the vulnerable working conditions which leave to the mercy of bosses and the transformed houses and cities are in a great contradiction. As it is seen, both the spatial transformation before Gezi and the conditions of people who involved in Gezi uprising are overly class-based and it is easily seen that all people have cumulativeness comes from the exploitation. When we look at the class positions of insurgents, we generally see the people who don’t have any means of production and have to sell their labor. If we close with this definition, there is no hesitation to say that the most insurgents were labors. But we should think more on the question that ‘is this definition makes the Gezi uprising a class movement?’. It is really hard to find collective and combined demands, because we witnessed with so many different objections in the streets. So, saying that the most of the insurgents were labor is not directly giving birth to the demands were also related with this way and accordingly it doesn’t help us to read the Gezi uprising as a ‘uprising of the working class’ as Boratav mentions (Boratav, 2013).

We should also stress that the people of Gezi who exploited in economic base were also suffered, exploited, marginalized, abased in different dimensions. The authoritarian power structure which is concreted in Erdoğan’s body makes easier both the practicing of the neoliberal politics and revenging the historical challenges politically. Undoubtedly that the discriminative and marginalizing speech of Erdoğan, his support of police violence, his aim of constructing the life over a totalitarian perspective (i.e. anti-abortion law, alcohol arrangement law, official intervenes in the houses of prayers for Alevi’s ect.) were so effective in rising of this uprising. This effect also paved the way of understanding the Gezi as a ‘struggle of honor’ by insurgents (Insel, 2013).

Nevertheless it is good to keep in mind the transformative effects of neoliberal policies that we mentioned shortly before and these cultural codes indissociable and complementary will let to understand us the objections of Gezi correctly. Whatever say the protesters about their participation to the uprising, this indissociable and complimentary features of the economic and cultural bases will stay behind this uprising. Certainly, there are some other protesters who are not accepted from the working class but were annoyed from the speech of Erdoğan and his cultural concerns. However, the mainstream resistance is the resistance who feels this both two repressions into his bodies in some ways. We neither read this uprising as a
working class’s uprising by looking to the economic analyses nor a cultural uprising against Erdoğan cult.

Gezi Experience and Its Effects

Sharing his/her problems with others in the streets and social media provided to create very important contacts and experiences. Every individual finds opportunity to both express himself/herself and hear the others’ problems that they faced. This kind of experience areas points us to mind the E. P. Thompson’s ideas about the class-making processes (Thompson, 1966). The formation which is named as Taksim commune and continued 15 days in the Gezi process left behind very creative and worth-pondering practices. The sense of belonging and protection for cities lived for many years give birth to a reaction which is conceptualized as ‘the right to the city’ by Harvey (Harvey, 2012) and Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1996). People, who took the law into their own hands with Taksim commune, just turn inside out whole things that they feel uncomfortable in the power domain. Solidarity between people rose the maximum, money became the second importance, the culture of kindness improved, the limits of communication and toleration with the different cultures and politics were enlarged, artistic and humoristic production boomed, the crisis in representation that has been going on for many years were resolved by the forum experiences which were a totally self-representation example. What we called about Taksim commune was also existed fully or partially in the other provinces. The name (“çapulcu”, means looters) that is put by Erdoğan for describing the protesters were highly appreciated and with the help of the massive violence, it created the ‘we’ position which characterized the movement. Going to the other neighborhoods/cities for solidarity shows this ‘we’ position concretely.

The discussions mainly go on whether the experiences converted to the consciousness or not. For this perspective the critical thing is not the experiences but its heritage, if available. However, as Thompson stresses, relationality doesn’t always concludes with a consciousness leap, on the contrary mostly it concludes with just the opposite. So, we should pay attention to the relationality even its all kind of contradictions in itself. We can observe that the peculiar experiences that we mentioned shortly before have also been continued after Gezi. The main example is the forums and initiatives which maintained for months. The forums and initiatives in which many issues were discussed and collective decisions were taken were both constituted a model for resolving the representation crisis and got involved in
real problems. One more heritage of Gezi was about gaining the reflective of going out the streets in a case of a problem around the oppressed solidarity. We witnessed this when in passing away of Berkin Elvan who was shot by a tear gas capsule by police when he was 14 years old and lost his life after months; when the government corruptions were disclosed; when mine workers were killed in Soma by the impolicies. In every case people go out to protest. After the miners’ killing in Soma, the families of Kurdish peasants who were bombed by the Turkish army in the border came to Soma to express their condolence. This kind of relationalities can be pointed as the heritage of Gezi experience. The humor and art which are still so powerful in the internet is also one more heritage which attacks to the government’s speeches.

Conclusion

To sum up and go back to the top, the traumatic effect of neoliberal transformation over the working class will form us basis to answer the question that who were in Gezi resistance. Thus, the features that is existed during and after Gezi (especially the solidarity, becoming the second important of money and humor/art which laud the human intelligence) should be marked as class outcomes. While on the one hand Gezi showed what is not wanted by people, on the other hand it tried to construct what is wanted. But if we go back again to Thompson, this situation neither includes the methodological certainty about the future experiences, nor a foresight about the transformation of Gezi experiences to some concrete outcomes. In 2009, privatization victim TEKEL workers (Tobacco and Alcoholic Beverages Company) set up their tends in front of the union and resisted 78 days. In that days some analyzers foresight that the other movements will arise like this resistance. However Gezi occurred in a very different stage. So, we assert that it may happen for Gezi also. Saying that the resistance axis of the next movement will be like Gezi, may misdirect us. What is the ultimate thing is that every opposition which flourishes the experiences will keep in individual and collective mind.
References


