

THE PRESENTATION OF THE GEZI PARK PROTEST IN *BIRGÜN* AND *CUMHURİYET* NEWSPAPERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Abstract: It is disrupted democratization process because of the fact that the civil society arena which individuals have the opportunity of making one's presence felt under the political power and giving a chance enhancing the consciousness of citizenship get blurred or lose by way of the political power's oppression. In public sphere where restrained by the government it can be confronted with the state authority setting up self-power instead of community power. Thus, it can be also disappeared the public opinion in the re-politicized public sphere, in which people who come together as a public group organize the general issues included relationships between them (Habermas, 2009: 256–257). Starting from this frame in the study, it is discussed how Gezi Park protest is showed on the opposition newspapers in the case of taking place the civil society-state conflict, that the opponent press is expected to take the side of the civil society and to question the political power. In this context it is examined by text analysis method the news of Gezi Park protest published on *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers between 29 May and 02 June, 17 June and 21 June, which are selected as opposition newspapers in Turkish media. In the study it is determined without the newspapers produced the positive discourses both making the citizen liberal and gaining the citizen a representation or not.

Key Words: Public sphere, opposition newspapers, civil society, political power.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the public sphere has an abstract meaning in which the enlightened modernist tradition centralizing people's demands embodies values such as justice, freedom and equality, and dominates social and political life. It is also a common area in which the individual's and the state's self-interests are in conflict (Habermas, 2010: 95 – 96). The public sphere also moves the individuals from the passive position to the active position. In the public spheres the society can express its opinion on social, cultural and political issues and can add their voices to the public debates, so the individuals can play an active role to reach a consensus and to provide the compromise of the society (Mc Kee, 2005: 18–19).

Democratic perspective requires subjecting the different identities that begin to voice their problems to the decision-making process and converting this situation the possibilities of change with a clear bargain.

However, it can be said that the political power which perceives those being expressed in public sphere as a threat to its existence tried to suppress the public sphere through a political authority in the period starting with Gezi Park protest. In Turkey where do not exist the culture of a pluralist and participatory democracy but the implementation of a representative democracy, the political power seem meaningless the individual's and collective identities' expressions about their problems at the Gezi park protest.

Gezi Park protest can be considered as a new social movement by reason of not having the purpose of coming to the power, but having the aim to democratize the power-authority relations and everyday life in public sphere (Alankuş, 1995: 89). The new social movements which have more rich content and demands, isolated from economic interest and also opened to democratic participation is regarded as an important social phenomenon because of having awareness on identity and life style and taking place out of the formal institutional-political channels (Çetinkaya, 2008: 34-35).

Also they need the mass media to increase the controllability of application made by political power and to be the voice those who cannot raise their voice in the society with the purpose of establishing democracy. Especially in societies which have a weak democracy and a narrow civil society contrary to the state, the presence of a free and independent media is important (Dağtaş, 2008: 56). In addition to the means of opposition and the independent judiciary The media plays a role as thirdly agenda forming subject in the reflection of the deterioration (for example, exceeded the bounds of legality, bribery, lying, broaden the scope of power, human rights violations, etc.) within the state (Dağtaş, 2008: 60).

However, the new means of communication or channels that are formed by the way of new communication technologies create reliability problems due to the limitlessness and freedom of the content creation process. On the other hand, not only the media's function of the notification but also its function of creation a public is not possible for the new communication channels that come into our lives with the new technologies. Because the amount and type of information get increase on the web, the information comes apart and individualizes, and it takes time to reach the necessary information about the desired subject (Stratton, 2000: 94).

With such reasons, the traditional media is still regarded as an important and reliable source of the information. However, at this point the relative neutrality of the media emerges as a significant handicap which interrupts the process of providing the information. Here, it is necessary to make a distinction between the opposition media and the mainstream media. The opposition media is important due to its role in organizing and executing the opponent actions in addition to announcing the discourse of opposition, because the main stream media does not report the social movements and the discourses against the political power as news. In short, the opponent actions are unable to be successful without the radical/opponent media (Çoban, 2009: 8). In a democratic society, the existence of the public sphere in a free and equal participation requires the existence of an independent and radical media. Only the independent and free media can provide the information being needed by the public opinion in the public sphere which is open to rationality, critical thinking and discussion (Şener, 2006: 63).

2.METHOD

With this work in which the method of text analysis is used, the representation of Gezi Park protest on the Turkish opponent media -began from Taksim and expanded to all over the country- is tried to search. In line with the propositions of the theoretical framework, *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspaper is preferred as sample with the aim of illustrating how a social movement is represented in the opposition news media not remaining under any pressure from the dominant ideology. The news about the Gezi Park protests published from 29 May to 2 June 2013 and from 17 June to 21 June 2013 on *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers which regarded as the opponent media newspaper is analyzed in context of the study. The study is limited to the news only taking part on the front pages and more about it on the back pages. At the same time the columns published in the newspapers during the Gezi Park protest at that date are included in the study.

There are quantitative findings in the first part of the study, and qualitative findings in second part. In the second part it is tried to determine how *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers represented the Gezi Park protest started as an environmental action and expanded after hard police intervention to the public. It is analyzed whether *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers gained awareness about the protest or not. In the study it is questioned the discourse of the opposition media about the anti-capitalist social movements in the context the approach to the Gezi Park protest. With the aim of demonstrating the newspapers how to reflect the anti-capitalist social movements it is analyzed which theme is given priority in the news, how actors involved in the protests are defined and whose voice is given the priority.

3.RESULTS

3.1 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Between the selected dates during Gezi Park resistance movement 47 the news were published at *Birgün* newspaper and 59 the news published at *Cumhuriyet* newspaper. Also 9 columns took place at *Cumhuriyet* and 10 columns at *Birgün*. The study is limited with news taking place at the front pages and their remaining parts at the back pages. There are some statistics here:

Birgün newspaper; 29 May 2013: 1 news, 30 May 2013: 1 news, 31 May 2013: 1 news, 01 June 2013: 1 news, 2 June 2013: 4 news, 17 June 2013: 6 news, 18 June 2013: 7 news, 19 June 2013: 10 news, 20 June 2013: 10 news, 21 June 2013: 6 news; it is examined 47 news in total.

Cumhuriyet newspaper; 29 May 2013: 1 news, 30 May 2013: 1 news, 31 May 2013: 1 news, 01 June 2013: 9 news, 2 June 2013: 5 news, 17 June 2013: 6 news, 18 June 2013: 10 news, 19 June 2013: 12 news, 20 June 2013: 5 news, 21 June 2013: 9 news; it is examined 59 news in total.

3.2 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

3.2.1 BEING ENRICHED OF PROTESTORS AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Birgün newspaper announced Gezi Parkı protest which started on 29 May at its front page. It also used some concepts such as ‘groups’, ‘association members’, ‘local people’ instead of ‘provocator’ or ‘activists’ which have the meaning of anarchists or marginalizatives, so it showed its positive thought about protestors. *Birgün* newspaper published a title, ‘leave conquest, look occupation!’ on 30 May. By this way, it is criticised the fascist application of government and it also tried to prove clear and pure intentions of protestors with the sentence “*People who have nothing other than their own bodies protest for country and trees at Taksim Gezi Park.*”

The newspaper justifies the protesters who try to carry out their conscientiously responsibility contrary to the government which destroy trees for building a shopping center and display the disturbing aspects of capitalism with the news of title “The watching is in process at Gezi Park” and “A signature campaign is started” at the 30 May issues. It also tries to increase the affects of protest on public sphere by giving place to presentations of artists, theatre players, singers, actors, lawyers about Gezi Park news. Here are some sample presentations at the 30 May issue of *Birgün* newspaper:

Mustafa Alabora (theatre olayer): “*People must protect this park despite they vote to AKP. We all must oppose to this mistreatment. I appeal to the president here; ‘Let your love of environmentalism.’*”

Orhan Aydın (actor): “*Today is the anniversary of İstanbul’s conquest. Fatih Sultan Mehmet said ‘If someone cuts a tree, we cut his head’. But today sultan maniac prime minister is holding a ground breaking ceremony for the third bridge. In İstanbul, almost 3, 5 million trees will be cut down for the third airport and the third bridge.*”

Ece Temelkuran who participate in the protest actively with her 30 May date column ‘Leave conquest, look occupation’ made a statement ‘Combrates, our Gezi Parkı watch will continue by getting great on Saturday and Sunday, so if you want, go your homes, relax, have a bath, and then come back.’ Her statement has an inviting style at the aspect of raising people’s decision-making power about their future and public sphere in participatory democracy. L. Doğan Tılıç who is writer of *Birgün* newspaper talks about protestors with honour in his a 1 June writing with the title ‘For living independently such as a tree’, and he criticises anti-democratic applications of government by pressurised water with pepper gase which is the last invention of democracy to him. Tılıç’s statement about the conquest of Gezi Park instead of its occupation in his writing is the other symptom which shows that the protest is affirmed.

It is seen that *Cumhuriyet* newspaper tried to draw the protest in a positive frame by describing the participators of protest as ‘citizen’ in its 29 May -when the protest started -dated news with the title ‘Protest the destruction of Gezi’. Similar to *Birgün*, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper describes the protestor’s activities which are consisted against the removal of trees as a ‘watch’, so it refers to ‘citizens’ who preserve democratic rights and values on the park which is a public sphere. *Cumhuriyet* newspaper also give a wide coverage to a large number of civil society organizations and the political parties’ members supporting the protest, such as Gürsel Tekin, the general vice president of “CHP” (the Republican People's Party), Sırrı Süreyya Önder, the deputy of “BDP” (Peace and Democracy Party) in the news. In this way the newspaper tries to expand it on the social ground and to prevent the marginalization of the protest.

Cumhuriyet newspaper given place to the slogans of the protests such as “Taksim is ours, İstanbul is ours”, “Tayyip, pull your hand out of my life” in the news of the heading “Pull your hand out of may life” at the 30 May issue emphasizes being protected the public sphere by the citizens and bring the protestor’s demands of free and independent living into the forefront. *Cumhuriyet* newspaper preferred the heading “The citizens is resisting to the government” and the photographs of people who was exposed to the pepper gase refer to the “publicity” and “multiplism” of the participation in action by showing the Gezi Park as a meeting place where the academicians, the members of parliament, the artists, the intelligentsia and the citizens come together spite of all obstacles.

3.2.2 HUMORIZATION AND SYMBOLIZATION

According to Avcı (2013), Gezi Park protest pioneer to the use of humor as a communication tool. With “the carnivalesque atmosphere” which occuring as a result of humor and irony combination at the protest it is

neutralized the traditional forms of political protest and provided the ordinary people a change to oppose by humor.

In the study, it is seen that *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers regarded as an opponent press keep on this carnivalesque atmosphere at their news about the protest. Gözde Bedeloğlu, the writer of *Birgün* newspaper, put in an ironic critique with the heading “Here, these are always love” which become slogan often used by protester at her column published on 31 May. Bedeloğlu create actually a critical discourse showing that the political power uses the defending tools for loving activators at her column.

Birgün with the heading “The aunt with pot is marginal, too!” criticize ironically the President Erdoğan’s definition of “marginal” about those who joined the protest at the 21 June issue. In this news it is meant that the ordinary people have only the pot as a weapon contrary to the police using job, pepper spray and pressurized water over the public and so the political power is discredited by being created with a humorous smile through the meaning of the title.

It is seemed that *Birgün* newspaper used the heading “RECEPEDIA (Recep Tayyip Dictionary)” to criticize the President Erdoğan who described the concepts according to himself during the Gezi Park protest. With the news the president Erdoğan is criticized by using a popular and humorous discourse, here some examples: “*Alcohol: The mother of all evil, Buttermilk: Our national drink, Reprimand: The prime minister’s loving style, Minority: Those who are obliged to comply with the commandment of the majority, The prime minister: The father of the public (both beats and loves), Gezi Park: The piss-garden, Marginal: Anyone who don’t think like him, Hate speech: The art of eloquence, Provocateur: The activist who use the mask to avoid from the police’s pepper gas, Twitter: Nuisance, Prohibition: Regulation.*”

Cumhuriyet newspaper uses the humour factor especially by the caricatures. The newspaper depicted a “TOMA” (intervention tool for the social events) while irrigating the public instead of the trees with this writing “Wrong irrigating leads to fascism” at the 2 June issue. The discourse of the caricature based on the government being a dictator by violating democratic principles. June 21 issue of the newspaper was made another sense of humour by Mustafa Balbay in his writing. Balbay affirmed that Gezi Park protesters took advantage of the power of humour regarded as a means of opposition in his writing.

3.2.3 REVEALING THE VIOLENCE BY THE POLITICAL POWER AND THE POLICE

Birgün and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers present their news by showing the police violence and pressure on their pages. So it can be said that the newspapers gave place to the Gezi Park protest from the first day on their pages contribute the visibility of the protest. Also it can be said that *Birgün* which presents its news dated May 29 with the heading “Gaz Park Taksim” tries to sparks reaction on the police and point at the police as the attacking side. The newspaper point out the police violence to the protestor by preferring the heading “Police uses pepper spray”, “The police violence”, “Police even resorts to inhumane practices”, “Police even handcuffed the doctors”, “Ethem Sarısülük was killed by a police bullet.”

Cumhuriyet newspaper opposes anti-environmentalist implementations of government with the title ‘Protest to Gezi destruction’ that used on 29 May. The newspaper tries to display the government’s commercial account by mentioning that the government’s implementations come true through income and indicates it with that sentence: ‘Swag’...in ‘urban renewal’ window... ‘Pillage’... in ‘privatization’ window... ‘ It is building a shopping center for you’, its appearance is like ‘ Historical Gunner Barracks’ (29 May 2013, Bekir Coşkun’s column). In one hand *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers emphasise that it must be discussed whether the construction plan of Taksim Gezi Park is proper or not, on the other hand they create a perception about the governments’ anti-democratic practices. They point out that the government try to push their project and rules on public with sudden and unexpected decisions without making any discussion often by using the expression of Erdoğan: “Whatever you do, we made our decision.” (30 May 2013, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper; 31 May 2013, *Birgün* newspaper).

It is seen that both newspapers reflect hard implementations of police that widely criticized at Gezi Park protests on through their pages. In the spot-news of *Birgün* newspaper that published on 1 June it is emphasized that police gone through a person- hunting and public’s confidence to police decreased. ‘Police who attack Gezi Park with ‘TOMA’ with Erdoğan’s command nearly proclaimed martial law. Police blockaded Taksim, continued attacks all day and gone person-hunting in shopping centers and hotels. The public spilled out into the streets.’ It

is seen that both newspapers used active sentences to tell about police's actions to public such as 'attacks (1 June 2013, *Birgün* newspaper)', 'chemical weapon usage (19 June 2013, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper)', 'hard attack (20 June 2013, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper). So they demonstrate police as the active subject and responsible power of its own actions.

3.2.4 COMPARISON OF THE OPPONENT PRESS AND THE MAIN STREAM PRESS IN GEZI PARK PROTEST

It can be said that *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers analyzed in the frame of Gezi Park actions, set an example as public journalism in the process of Gezi actions. It is seen that *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers relocate the citizen to the center in terms of democratic solutions of social problems and bring in the public view and proposals in terms of self-interest without any filtering. *Birgün* goes on producing supportive expressions by "Turkey on Rebellion!" on 2 June. It is seen that *Birgün* creates a fiesta atmosphere as sharing resistance with photos from "Ankara, Eskişehir, Bolu, Antakya, Adana, Antalya, Bartın, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Artvin, Trabzon, Mersin, Kars, Zonguldak, İzmir" and emphasizes that "a real collectivism" is constructed. In addition to this, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper sets an example to positive citizenship journalism by sharing public views directly with public opinion through the title "Twitter Agenda."

It is seen that both newspapers criticise the main stream press in the context of the relationships between the media and the political power. *Birgün* charges the main stream media which ignores the protest and makes news against the protestor with being "partisan" on 31 May by way of the title "We do not want partisan media." *Cumhuriyet* which uses the title "Turkish media plays the three monkeys" judges the main stream media due to its neglect towards events. In the context of the news *Cumhuriyet* newspaper tries to draw attention the neglect of main stream media by presenting the details and photos about the collage students' protest in front of the Doğuş Super Center which supports the political power. *Cumhuriyet* claims giving more news and information to public about the Gezi Park protest than the main stream media with the title "The most news is made by *Cumhuriyet*."

With its 19 June dated news at first page, *Birgün* newspaper reveals disinformation of *Takvim* newspaper described as a partisan in that way : "Takvim which gets reaction because of its pro-government news intended to Gezi Park protest knows no bounds for partisanship. The newspaper captioned its fake news as if it is made an interview with CNN International reporter yesterday. *Birgün* newspaper regarded itself as an opponent press tries to draw attention the disenformation of main stream media which conceals the fascistic politics of government, censors the truths and engages in misleading publication (*Birgün* newspaper, on 17 June, "We call everyone to stand for"). Hayri Kozanoğlu, writer of *Birgün*, indicates importance of alternative media in his 18 June dated article by emphasizing that the main stream media deteriorates. Kozanoğlu announces that the public gives up getting information from the main stream media and discovers the new alternative media tools such as "Halk TV, *Birgün*."

4. CONCLUSION

How protests are served to the opposing media is taken up in accordance with "the new social movement" which is broken out with the caving oh the wall of Taksim Gezi Park in consideration of the date 29 May, 2013 and with coming off some trees, tried to be stopped by police, and afterwards started to question the anti-democratic implementings of the government by spreading out in all country. The announcement of Gezi Park protest to the public opinion, whether the opponent press has responsibility in terms of creating support, fulfilled the task to announce or not and how the expressions related to mentioned protests are built in Turkish press are analysed. In text analysis related in *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers in which restructuring of ideological positions and possession relationships independently from the government played an important role in news expression, findings related to protest played role in Gezi Park protest are represented in a "positive" frame are evaluated. According to this, the expressions related to the events in texts printed by *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* are done over the findings related to that attitude showed by the government is presented in a "negative" frame leaning on the comments of this person and corporations. *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers positioned "AKP" competence in a brasing expression with descriptions such as "running after rent", "dictator", "fascist", "interfering to the life style", "censoring", "using power". On the other hand, *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet*, we can define as an opponent press, considered themselves superior about "accuracy" and "thrustworthiness" by emphasizing the discrimination of the news taken part in the main stream media corresponding Gezi Park protest with folk speech as a consequence of opposing identities.

In conclusion, as to say, the expressions “resistance”, “struggle”, “togetherness”, “interdependence” formed against anti democratic government founded in the news of *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* newspapers is an important position in the struggle of constitutional monarchy and sharing public areas of the ones taken part in Gezi Park resistance and is an important acquisition in the names of “discussion”, “examination” and “smile” on the part of democracy culture. Consequences gained from the studies displayed that on the side of counting people who run into the roads, squares and parks into the real policy and giving them administration in public sphere, what a big importance opposing press, not belonging to huge capital groups, has and these pres corporations need to be perpetuated in order to examine the political administration in society.

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