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Protest, Bodies and the Grounds of Memory: Taksim Square as ‘heritage site’ and the 2013 Gezi Protests

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Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning. (Yi-Fu Tuan *Space and Place*, 1979: 387)

The current protest movement isn’t about the past; it is about today and tomorrow. It started because a new generation wanted to defend Gezi Park, a public green space, against the violent, abusive manner in which the government sought to sacrifice it to the gods of neo-liberalism and neo-Ottomanism with a plan to build a replica of Ottoman barracks, a shopping mall and apartments (Edhem Eldem, ‘Turkey’s False Nostalgia’, *New York Times*, 2013).

Introduction

The 2013 ‘Gezi’ protests catalyzed by the Turkish government’s plan to redevelop Taksim Square, in Istanbul, provoked worldwide media attention. The Square, an urban deposit of 1930s and 40s Republican town planning and a modernizing vision of Turkey, was to be reconfigured. This involved razing Gezi Park [Figures 1 and 2 near here], one of the few green spaces in the megacity, and building upon the site a reconstruction of a late-Ottoman-era barracks. A complex range of issues, from environmental concerns to outrage at the autocratic approach and the conservative Islamist administration’s violent intolerance of political plurality under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, transformed this into a dramatic and far-reaching civil and cultural conflict involving fatalities and eliciting the censure of the US White House and the European Parliament (2013), among other international effects. This paper analyses heritage representations produced both by the Istanbul Municipality and by protestors, incorporating new interview data¹ and developing theorizations on relations between heritage, place, identity and protest that complicate the idea of the ‘heritage site’. We advance some general ideas around the spatial dimensions of memory that will be of

¹ We undertook ten interviews, meaning that this is not intended as representative data, but of individual responses to and reflections upon the protests.

use beyond the locality discussed here, developing one strand of the project of bringing together geographical and sociological imaginations (Agnew and Duncan 1989). Alongside this, the paper also adds to critical work on Turkish heritages (e.g. Özyürek 2006, 2007 and the recent, heritage-themed double issue of the *European Journal of Turkish Studies* of 2015), to an expanding interdisciplinary literature on the Gezi Protests (e.g. Moudouros 2014; Örs 2014; Ozkirimli 2014; Gürcan and Peker 2015; White 2014; Hacıyakupoglu and Zhang 2015; Koç and Aksu 2015), and to literature on the unusually profound significance of place belongings in Turkish imaginaries, daily lives and social relations (e.g. Mills 2010 and Secor 2004).

Taksim Square was not the only Turkish site of protest in the difficult summer of 2013 and its aftermath, and some have cautioned against overemphasizing one site and thus oversimplifying complex civil politics (Gürcan and Peker 2015: 35). But it was the first, and formed the reference and imaginative space of the protests in other cities and places. As one common protest chant and slogan used in other sites of related protest in Turkey and elsewhere went: “*Her Yer Taksim Her Yer Direniş*” (‘Everywhere is Taksim, Everywhere is Resistance’), pointing to Taksim Square as the primary symbolic site for political struggle in which different heritages and ideologies clashed. This struggle concatenates with others, as we will show in a brief history. Some of the symbolic meanings of Taksim as place that were mobilized before and during the protests resonated with other contests, between post-World-War-One western occupying forces and Turks; between left and right (as in the Labour Day Massacre of 1977); between secularist and Islamist visions of the state; and between western and non-western identities within the Turkish citizenry, comprising social control around dress and comportment (Büyüksaraç 2004).

In this paper we are interested in representations that relate particularly to constructs or appropriations of place heritage as conventionally understood – we look at the Municipality’s plan to rebuild a historic building, and at protestors’ subversive references to local archaeological remains, historic community presence, Ottoman miniature painting, or to Sufi traditions protected by UNESCO. But we must remember that protestors also made use of apparently alien cultural forms, performing salsa dances, jazz, rap, ballet, and engaging in myriad forms of performative resistance with no ostensible link to ‘Turkish’ official heritage. These mobilizations were nevertheless affirmations of the cosmopolitan freedoms that protestors saw as proper to Taksim, in contrast to official attempts to fix a singular neo-Ottoman, Islamist heritage in place, and with this to control bodies, identities and mores. This opens up a view of protest as a resistant practice of living heritage and as the exercise of people’s historically-grounded claims to presence and claims to threatened freedoms. Civil crises like protests may help us to understand and problematize the spatio-temporal, multi-relational articulations of heritage, and, vice versa, a view through heritage and memory opens critical exposures of socio-political conflict.

Place, Memory, Heritage

Taksim Square is a multivalent site. It is, or has become, an ‘identity place’ as characterized by Whitehead et al (2012; 2015) and Whitehead and Bozoğlu (2015)

where, through representational practices that can be official or not, “place is formed into embodied historiography and material for identity construction.” In other words, place is remade as a source through which people may “construct their own identities in relation to a politically-framed, geographically-located past”, even where the ‘past’ in question extends back well before people’s own lifetimes (Whitehead et al 2015: 15). For an identity place to exist as such, individuals must associate it with historical phenomena of which they are aware, or come to be aware, and which they perceive to be of importance for their identities. In a sense this can be taken as a suggestion in the project of rethinking the concept of ‘heritage site’ beyond the limits of operational designations, classifications and parameters (Smith 2006: 31; Garden 2009). Taksim Square is not a heritage site in the official sense. It appears on no official lists, and there is no interpretation panel to signal its importance. Thinking of a place like this as a heritage site is an awkward exercise in heritage studies, because it does not have the physical, located fixing involved in *a posteriori* museum displays or official designations of specific places as historically important. If anything, in sites of protest and anti-state subversion such as Taksim Square – or to pick another salient example, Tiananmen Square in Beijing (Hershkovitz 2002) – we see a more or less tacit state imperative *not* to engage in conventional heritage practices of fixation and memorialization, for to do so would be to recognize and give voice to dissent, valorizing it as part of ‘history’ (Gambetti 2014). Nevertheless, the centrality of place within state actions, political contest and protest meant that the physical site itself, or the idea of it, becomes a ‘ground of memory’, or, sometimes, of conflicting memories and multiple place identities, such that “what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and change over time” (Massey 1994: 121; see also Ashworth and Graham 2005). This dominant image can also function as a model for contemporary social relations. As Lefebvre notes, monumental space – like Taksim Square – ‘reflects’ the social visions of individuals and suggests to them an illusory consensus based upon these very visions (1991: 220; Büyüksaraç 2005: 3).

Ground memories are evident physical traces, presentations and constructions of place histories that enable, influence or inform human behaviors, beliefs and senses of belonging. The sense of ‘ground’ here is both physical and metaphorical. It is the earth and what is buried in it, what is or was known to be built on it, was erased from it or took place on it. It can be the grounds upon which other times and places are reassembled dialectically. It is the sense, conscious or not, of the historical cultural ground or set of premises from which people proceed to think, feel and act politically. It is not a catch-all for any form of remembering that happens to take place somewhere, but is about the use of the relational power of memory and place within the discursive social actions and representations of identity politics.

‘Ground memory’ is yet another concept to jostle within the already-incoherent and cluttered lexicon of studies of memory in the humanities. But there are still field gaps to be addressed, such as whether social movement and protest studies make enough of place, place history, and memory; or whether memory studies literature has engaged enough with physical places in their localized specifics as memory prompts, referents or tools within social actions and heightened situations

such as protests. We acknowledge here the influence of important studies into the relationality of place, memory and heritage, notably in explorations of Berlin as palimpsest that “shapes collective imaginaries” by Andreas Huyssen (2003: 7) and Karen Till (2005). Indeed, our research aligns with Till’s view of places as “never merely backdrops for action or containers for the past,” but rather “fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene and experience that create and mediate social spaces and temporalities.” This perspective suggests a certain *relational agency* of place, not because of an “essential set of qualities resulting from an internalized history,” but because of “lingering imprints of particular interactions” that can produce new and sometimes unexpected effects (2005: 10) and affects. This too is a compelling basis for theorizing place-people relations in the context of uses and rememberings of the past. But we may then ask: how, when and why are Huyssen’s “collective imaginaries” shaped by place, or do Till’s “imprints” linger? In our alternative terminology, through what processes are ground memories sustained and activated?

These are ways of thinking about relational agency between humans and place in time. Against the idea of place as mere backdrop, and of physical ground itself is inert (except when being dug up), and not sentient or magical, one could argue with Adams et al. (2001) that place has a critical quality of “betweenness” as “the point where human subjectivity meets the forces of abstraction and objectification” (2001: xxii), making things happen and actively bringing things into view in a way that challenges hard constructionist understandings (see also Ivakhiv 2003: 12). This is also to transgress the humanist geography position critiqued by Allan Pred, that place is *just* an “object for a subject” – a center “of individually felt values and meanings” and attachments, rather than a space of ceaseless becoming, forever binding the “formation of biographies” and the “transformation of nature” into contingent relations (1984: 279; see also Cosgrove and Daniels 1998, Agnew and Duncan 1989, Gregory and Urry 1985, Mitchell 1995). While we have little space to add to this long critical debate (and its newer connections to posthuman and non-representational frameworks), one contention of this paper is that place cannot be wilfully or easily remade without contest. People – especially when ways of life are threatened by antagonism – come to activate different memories available or discoverable in place that can be made to represent identities, to support both claims for recognition and specific ethics. This human act of activating latent ground memories can be a deliberative and pre-meditated strategy within social struggle. But our fieldwork interviews show that it can also be relatively unanticipated, and yet occurs as a tactical mobilization of a symbolic resource, and a sometimes-sudden realization that history matters to the struggle that is ‘taking place’.

Taksim: a history of erasure and contest

As Judith Butler has noted in tracing nuanced relations between the Gezi protests and place histories (2014: iii), the physical site of Taksim Square (figure 1) is one of repeated erasures. The Republican-era renovation of Taksim involved the appropriation and selling-off of land granted in 1551 by Suleiman the Magnificent to

the Armenian *millet*, including the Surp Hagop cemetery, some headstones from which came to light during the 2013 works. In 1936 Atatürk invited French town planner Henri Prost to reorganize the urban plan of Istanbul as part of a symbolic and emblematic programme of modernization characteristic of the new secular state. Prost did so, cutting through the historic fabric of the city to create western-style boulevards, avenues, squares and parks such as Gezi [figure 3 near here], or İnönü Gezisi (İnönü Promenade) as it was originally named, after İsmet İnönü, Atatürk's follower who became the second president of the Turkish Republic from 1938. Alongside the razing of the Armenian cemetery, the construction of Gezi led to the demolition of an early memorial, known as *Huşartsan*, to the Armenian intellectuals killed in 1915. This was erected in 1919 and taken down in 1922. In the early 1940s the Halil Pasha 'Topçu' Artillery Barracks were demolished, after they had been in use for some time in the 1930s as a football grounds (Gül et al 2014: 65).

Taksim Square has long been seen by many as an urban expression of Kemalist ideology, from the introduction of Pietro Canonica's *Cumhuriyet Anıtı*, the Monument to the Republic unveiled in 1928, to the development of a number of major modernist buildings in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular prior to the military coup of 1980. This has been comprehensively charted by Gül et al (2014: 65), who note that architecture and urban planning and design were "key visual indicators of cultural modernization" within the political context of a secular republic seeking to replace the Ottoman era that Atatürk had closed by founding the Republic in 1923. As Büyüksaraç notes (2005: 2), the *Cumhuriyet Anıtı* also marked Istanbul's independence after the Wars of Independence from the foreign occupying forces who had been stationed in Taksim. Urban planning and architecture were part of the project to impose a new national identity that was at once proudly Turkish and as advanced as any contemporary western power.

Taksim Square's association with Kemalist ideology was cemented through the development of the *Atatürk Kültür Merkezi* (Atatürk Cultural Centre, or AKM), first begun in 1946 as an opera house. This International Style modernist building was completed in 1969 but closed again after a fire until 1978, with its final redesignation as a multi-purpose arts venue indelibly linked to the founder of the Republic [figure 4 near here]. The façade of the AKM – closed in 2008, ostensibly for restoration but currently dilapidated – became an iconic backdrop to the Gezi protests in 2013, and was hung with banners by protesters. Meanwhile, the Turkish Working Party of the International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement (DOCOMOMO) organized a petition to "preserve Taksim Gezi Park as a modern civic landmark and monument" (2013). Alongside such initiatives from architecture and heritage practitioners were other actions specifically connected to heritage discourse, such as photographic exhibitions of the cityscape and public talks on the history of Taksim. One of our interviewees – a photographer who documented the protests for social media sites – attended these talks and described how his awareness of the history of the area quickly grew, and how this became increasingly integral to his thinking about the protest. Prior to this Taksim had still had an important history for him, as a kind of "home", somewhere

where – as an activist with leftist-alternative political views – he could “relax and be free;” but unexpectedly the protests led him to add further layers to this historical understanding. For example, he had known nothing of the Armenian graveyard, but now understood it within a framework of power relations and the need for solidarity with minorities.

This was a position shared by a number of our interviewees: one, a lawyer, who narrowly avoided prosecution related to the protests, called Taksim Square and nearby Istiklal Street “my village” (“*köyüm*”), having used it as a meeting place from university onwards and felt at home there with a leftist political identity and progressive attitudes towards lifestyle (e.g. alcohol consumption, sexual choices etc.). The interviewee noted that the government was trying to “kick us out”, and that their social group was being actively ‘othered’ (“*ötekilestirilen*”). After the protests the group socialized more in Kadıköy than in Taksim, which had “slipped from [their] hands” (“*Taksim elden gitti*”).

Before his rise to power in 2002 as Prime Minister and effective leader of the Justice and Development Party (JDP)², Erdoğan had previously sought as Istanbul’s mayor to reclaim the ‘lost city’ of Istanbul from its twentieth-century corruption, while also making the city a global economic centre. This would be its ‘second conquest’, resurrecting the Islamic-Ottoman identity that had been erased in the Republic (Büyüksaraç 2004: 6). As Kemalism’s most complete urban, symbolic and architectural expression in Istanbul, Taksim became a key target for redevelopment. In addition to this, Taksim Square has also had a long association with alternative political and social groupings, from activists to LGBTQ (Gül et al 2014: 69; Eken 2014: 434; Farro and Demirhisar 2014). It is one of the few areas of the city without a mosque, which also provoked Islamist official indignation and spawned a long (still ongoing) project to plan and build one (Büyüksaraç 2005). A key part of the redevelopment project was the revived proposal for the reconstruction of the Barracks, responding at once to contemporary economic agendas, to JDP nostalgia for the Ottoman period, and to the desire to dominate existing Republican heritage in the form of the Atatürk Cultural Centre (Navaro-Yashin 2013). This corresponds with a dichotic and competitive split between the secularist-Kemalist and conservative-Islamist political groupings that seems overly simplistic but still has purchase, such that the former “generally celebrate pre-Ottoman and early Republican heritage and reject the significance of the Ottoman past,” while the latter “embrace the contributions of Ottoman heritage and seek to imagine Turkish culture in a way that corresponds to this heritage discourse” (Zencirci 2014: 3). However, as will be seen through interviews with users of the square, more complex positions on heritage and memory emerge.

As many have commented – along with Edhem Eldem, quoted at the beginning of this paper – the JDP’s nostalgic remembering of selected dimensions of the Ottoman past is a syncretic way of reconciling Islamist morality with neoliberal capitalism (Öncü 2007; Butler 2014; Farro and Demirhisar 2014). Indeed, it is notable

² In Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*.

that the reconstructed Barracks building could call to view Ottoman military power while housing a shopping mall, and not the modern secular military whose political power the JDP has consistently attempted to suppress. Nostalgia for the Ottoman era also offers a means of justifying foreign policy and social control at home, for example through reference to the regional primacy of the Ottomans and inaccurate constructions of Ottoman ‘multiculturalism’ (Girard 2015; Mills 2011) reliant on a malleable Ottoman legacy (Carney 2014). In this sense it can also power moralizing, anti-hedonistic discourse opposing alcohol consumption, the exercise of sexual freedoms, liberal codes of dress and body adornment, abortion, and so on, associated by the JDP with the undesirable aspects of a non-indigenous western modernity (Yeğenoğlu 2013; White 2014). Neo-Ottomanism is an open rhetoric. At a 2014 pre-election rally Erdoğan encouraged the party faithful to give their Republican opponents an “Ottoman Slap” at the ballot boxes (Reuters 2014). Indeed, one interpretation of Eldem’s seemingly contradictory statement (the protests were ‘not about the past’, but they were a reaction to neo-Ottomanism) is to point to a chasm between a ‘real’ past and a misremembering of it, or “false nostalgia” (Eldem 2013).

A number of our interviewees considered that the JDP’s remembering of Ottoman culture was a sham or cynical cover for neoliberal agendas and instrumental political control. But this was not to be taken lightly. One noted that this had gone hand-in-hand with the incremental removal of cultural symbols and personal sites of importance, such as the demolition of the historic Emek Sineması (Emek Cinema) in 2013 in İstiklal street, also to make way for a shopping mall. Another interviewee was a relative outsider from İzmir. Visiting Taksim on occasion whenever he was in Istanbul, the interviewee had protested in İzmir “in solidarity with Gezi”. Although not particularly concerned about the trees to be cut down, the interviewee had protested because “historic, cultural, hegemonic war was happening in Gezi”. The interviewee understood Taksim as a ground of historic contest and domination – like a form of colonization with “imperialist” intent – from the Republican transformation of the Square from the 1940s, to the Labor Day Taksim Square Massacre of 1st of May 1977 and, now, the JDP’s redevelopment plans, which we will discuss in detail shortly.

In January 2012 Taksim Platformu (Taksim Platform) was established as a community pressure group to protect Gezi Park, which, as Jenny White notes, had suddenly acquired political significance, having until then been ‘easy to miss and...not much used except by old men sitting on park benches and women pushing babies in strollers’ (White 2014: 197). Taksim Platform organized the first of many peaceful demonstrations in the park in February 2012. Other interest groups (e.g. Taksim Dayanışması – Taksim Solidarity) were established, and the Gezi plans garnered critical attention from journalists and opposition politicians. Taksim Platform applied to the local heritage conservation board³ to protect the park as cultural heritage. This was granted, only to be quickly overturned by a higher committee of the Ministry of Culture in February 2013. In late May 2013 activists –

³ İstanbul 2 Numaralı Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu.

many of them environmentalists – occupied the park as a last-ditch measure (Jost 2013), aware that bulldozers were about to start work. A police raid was made on 28th March, beginning weeks of volatile civil unrest. The protests were characterized by use of violent force by the police resulting in deaths and maiming. The protestors themselves were demographically and politically heterogeneous, and took to the streets for diverse reasons from ecological concerns to workers’ rights, anticapitalism (tactics and tropes associated with the Occupy movement were also mobilised by some), LGBTQ rights and many other causes that did not necessarily cohere ideologically (Gülsüm Acar and Uluğ 2015). Erdoğan was belligerent but wrong-footed by the diverse tactics, causes, and the extent and global exposure of the protests. This along with international censure of the government response led to the partial cessation of hostile police action, although it has often been argued that other punitive actions took its place, including the persecution of protestors and those who helped or harboured them, such as hotel or medical professionals (Amnesty 2014). In June 2013 a Court Order stopped construction of the proposed shopping mall, and Gezi Park for a moment, appeared to survive.⁴

After 2013 Taksim Square has, of course, yet another history and is part of yet another heritage: that relating to the protests themselves (and indeed to civil conflicts that preceded them, as indicated by our interviewees). State attempts to erase the physical traces of the protests from the urban spaces were countered by the prevailing representations of the imagery and iconography of the protests, and indeed the value of social media representations and networks as a resource within protest has become an important aspect of social movement and protest studies (Edwards 2014; Farro and Demirhisar 2014; Dencik and Leistert 2015; Gümüştekin 2015). Alongside comic, fine art and musical performances, graffiti and other ephemeral productions, the cultural memory of the protests was produced as a claim for the historical significance of the protestors’ cause and actions. It also involved the construction of a mythic ‘Gezi Spirit’ (*Gezi ruhu*) indicating solidarity between different social and political groups in the face of the neoliberal capitalism and autocracy of the JDP. Even if the status of key ideas, images or performances is now ‘post-viral’ they form part of a memory repertory associated with the protests. But such memory does not find place in the site of the protests. Without our own recollections of news and social media imagery, it would be hard to imagine what had happened there, but for the faint traces of protestors’ graffiti that survived for some time. As Zeynep Gambetti notes, a systematic erasure of protest memory has been undertaken, connecting with previous erasures and instances of state violence:

They collected all the banners, pictures, and colors one by one to erase them from social memory. They stripped all the trees, each dedicated to victims of state violence; they appropriated the barricades that were named after tens of people who had undergone physical and psychological torture, and they tore

⁴ The Order was later overturned after an appeal from the Istanbul Municipality. In June 2016 Erdogan revived the idea of razing Gezi Park in order to reconstruct the barracks building (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36567872>).

them to tatters. They destroyed the efforts to keep alive the memories of Fikret Encü, who was a victim of Roboski; Metin Göktepe, who was tortured and killed in detention; Dicle Koğacıoğlu, who could not take all the sorrow inherent in this society anymore; and the Surp Hagop Armenian Cemetery, which was destroyed by Turkish racism (Gambetti 2014).

Now, at the time of writing, the park has been closed and the authorities are again at work, with only scant official communication and information about what is going on (Cumhuriyet 2016) and new threats from Erdoğan not only to resurrect the redevelopment project but also to demolish the AKM (Diken 2016). For now, we turn back the clock to a moment of JDP optimism (or hubris) when the Ottoman Barracks building was to be resurrected.

Ground Memories 1: Neo-Ottomanist projections of Taksim Square

The Istanbul Municipality's urban and architectural plan for the renovation of Gezi Park and Taksim Square was an attempt to remake place. In June 2011 Erdoğan announced the Taksim Square project at the 'Turkey On Target 2023' event at the Haliç Conference Centre; showing a digital animation of the planned redevelopment.⁵

The animations show 3D virtual 'flyover' views of the planned development, taking in perspectives within the reconstructed Barracks building on the Gezi Park site, the pedestrianized area to the front and an underground tunnel system to hide vehicle traffic. The animations show a historical progression, incorporating historic, black-and-white aerial photographs of Taksim Square in 1938 and 1942, respectively prior to and after the demolition of the Barracks. In the latter photograph the then-newly landscaped Gezi Park is clearly visible (although at the time it is still treeless). However, it is not mentioned in the captions, which concentrate rather on the erasure of the Barracks, implicitly denying historical status to the park. The next perspective shows the Barracks building restored, as it were, to its rightful place. In the third animation, the area to the front of the reconstructed Barracks includes a geometrical organization of green spaces, at the centre of which is a large flowerbed in the shape of an Ottoman tulip motif. All three animations are set to the same contemporary *Klasik Türk müzikîsi* associated with Istanbul and with borrowings from Ottoman musics, unlike some other official animations of architectural plans in Istanbul in which modernist buildings are matched with contemporary electric or orchestral western music in a filmic vein.

The rhetorical claim of the video was the need to reinstate what had been lost. As stated, the remaking of the Barracks served multiple purposes, one of which was the desire to remake selected aspects of the Ottoman past in the present. A reconstructed building, of course, forms a durable and imposing rhetorical statement, "likely to be used as evidence of presence or claimed continuities" (Macdonald 2008:

⁵ This animation was released by the Municipality on its YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdHLGIFVLXSF8avtflkMrHA> accessed November 2014), followed by amended animations in February and then October 2012. These were removed during the protests on 6th June 2013 (Jost, 2013).

25). It is a demonstration of the power to put something back in place that, while material in form, is enmeshed in a nostalgic project that regulates lives not just materially, but morally too. The restorative urge inevitably involves elements of fallacy not limited to the very different use to which the new building was to be put as a shopping mall. The architectural style of the original nineteenth-century Barracks building was in fact influenced by Western orientalizing architecture, so the reconstructed building would have been a copy of a copy, each one with contorted East-West refractions. Nevertheless, a claim was staked for this history as the ‘true’ ground memory. In speeches, Erdoğan stated that as a result of electoral success his administration functioned as the appointed guardian of history (Amnesty 2013: 5). The opposing Republican People’s Party had “destroyed” the Barracks and turned it into a stadium. He went on, “We claim the original; therefore we will build the historical barracks...It’s that clear.” (Bianet 2013) His statement reflects well Svetlana Boym’s influential explanation of “restorative nostalgia” as an attempt at a transhistorical reconstruction of an illusory “lost home,” representing itself not as the imaginative creation that it is, but as “truth and tradition” (Boym 2001: xviii).

At the time of writing the construction of the Barracks building is still halted, and in the ensuing protests very different heritage representations emerged, characterized by unruly bodies and contrasting past-present orderings. As Bülent Eken notes in his analysis of the politics of the Gezi Park resistance, the protestors committed the sin “of possessing a different memory map for the same place” (2014: 430). We turn to this now, with a show of different histories.

Ground Memories 2: bodies of history

During the protests the Armenian NGO Nor Zartonk erected some makeshift gravestones in Gezi Park, inscribed in Armenian and English with the legend:

Surp Hagop Armenian Cemetery: 1551-1939. You captured our graveyard, but you can’t capture our park! Equality, Brotherhood, Peace, Freedom.

In the same month and afterwards choreographer and dancer Ziya Azazi staged numerous public performances in and around the site of protest in which he performed the Sufi Mevlevi Sema dance, dressed not quite in the traditional Dervish costume associated with this. [figure 5 near here] He wore a gas mask (police frequently deployed teargas), and frequently ended the dance bare-chested, with only the characteristic skirt of the Dervish. But this was of a different cut, on occasion floral or pink, sometimes accessorized with the rainbow flag of the LGBT movement. Azazi associated his performance with the words of one of Rumi’s poems *Sen de Gel* (‘Come, come, whatever you are’ in the Turkish government’s official Mevlana website⁶), reappropriating a key heritage icon in Turkey, and promoting pluralist participation and peaceful cohabitation. As well as participating in documentaries,⁷ he

⁶ <http://www.mevlana.gov.tr>

⁷ E.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pATTupWIE1I>

collaborated with a photographer, enabling the circulation on social media and video platforms of his performance. Meanwhile at the protests some protestors showed off their tattoos of Atatürk's iconic signature to the camera, for circulation on social media, and at the time of the protests a number of tattoo parlors offered free or cut-price tattoos of Atatürk's signature (Ege' de SonSöz 2013). Lastly, the popular history magazine *NTV Tarih* prepared a special issue on the Gezi protests. On the cover was the strapline "*yaşarken yazılan tarih*" ('history recorded live' in *Tarih's* own translation) and a remediation of the iconic photograph of an assault by a policeman on protestor Ceyda Sungur (thereafter dubbed the 'woman in red') in the style of an Ottoman miniature. Each one of these forms of protest relied on representations that brought into place, and into relation, particular histories, bodies (alive, dead, marked, dancing, assaulted), and the resource of media circulation. We discuss each of these in more detail below.

In a published interview, Sayat Tekir, a spokesperson of Nor Zartonk, connected the graveyard protest to the need to signal the longstanding "atmosphere of fear for the Armenians in Turkey" (Tekir 2015) and to counter Erdoğan's version of history. He recalled the Prime Minister's statement that the protestors were ignorant of the history of Taksim and the rightful place of the Barracks. Tekir went on:

The Prime minister of that period had given a speech about parks, 'Those who protest, do they not know the history of this place [?], we are going to build an Artillery Headquarters there', he said. In fact they were going to build a shopping mall looking like an artillery headquarters. We gave a counter-speech about this and said, 'In fact it is you who do not know history.' Part of this area was an Armenian graveyard in the past and it was seized. Just like many other places that were seized. We reminded them of this and we said 'You took our graveyard from us, but we will not surrender our park' and we did not. Gezi Park stands there (Tekir 2015).

Notably, the graveyard was in fact taken from the Armenian Community to create Gezi Park not by the JDP, which had yet to come into being, but by Atatürk's Republican regime. These seeming contradictions were in fact careful elisions on the part of Nor Zartonk, just as Zeynep Gambetti's description of the erasure of traces of protest at Gezi brings into relation instances of state violence perpetrated by different regimes. In our own interview with Tekir he pointed out the continuities between different regimes, such as the Ottoman perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide who continued their political careers in the new Republic, and the longstanding state subjugation of communities through control of territory irrespective of regime. The Park might otherwise have been understood as a symbol of the subjugation and attempted erasure of the Armenian community. But it came to stand instead for a site of belonging, because the threat of its erasure recalled other state acts of erasure connected to group sensibilities. In this way the Park became something to fight for, for the future. At the same time the protest presented a historic claim to presence by

the group – a reminder of a centuries-old bodily occupation of the site subverting Erdoğan's truth claim through alternative remembering.

In our interview Tekir stated:

We knew that Gezi was a place of memory [(“*hafıza mekanı*”), but [in general] people didn't know. Everyone turned the park into something, and got something from it. LGBT people saw this place as connected to anti-homophobia; others saw it as a symbol against other kinds of discrimination... For us it is a place where we wanted remind people of our past – the past that was not being mentioned... If you ask me about what we achieved, we told people about what Gezi Park's public memory was. I heard people saying ‘oh, did you know there was an Armenian cemetery here?’ And when I heard this I was proud of what we achieved. Wherever you dig, you will find the ruins of gravestones, or a church, or even bones. Actually this is true for all of Turkey. This is what we tried to do in Gezi, to tell people who said ‘you do not know history’ that the place has this side to it as well.

Although the Nor Zartonk protest made direct reference to the history of the park as the former site of the Armenian cemetery, Tekir also connected this to a more general narrative of Armenian subjugation, taking in: the 1894-1896 killing of Armenians under Sultan Abdulhamid (whom “today's ruling party admire”); the Armenian Genocide of 1915 (the monument to the victims of which, he recalled, was removed before the construction of Gezi Park); the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink by a Turkish nationalist in the Şişli area of Istanbul in 2007; and the state's recent attempt to demolish the Kamp Armen orphanage in the Tuzla district of Istanbul:

When you think about history and you dig through the pavement slabs you will find Hrant [Dink] on top, and underneath is Gezi Park, and the actual pavement of Gezi is made of gravestones.

While these connections may not have been self-evident to everyone in the representational performance of the protest, they form a complex memory map that positions together a number of violent iniquities from different places and times in one site of protest. As Tekir put it, “these things do not happen without a connection between them; even if our focus was Gezi, we need to protect against the mentality of those who give the name of slaughterers to bridges.” This is a reference to the JDP decision to name the third bridge across the Bosphorus after Yavuz Sultan Selim ‘the Grim’ known for his massacre of Alevis in the sixteenth century, demonstrating a further act of connecting Armenian historical suffering to that of other minority groups. As Tekir explained: “In minority societies memory is very powerful: if something happens it recalls something else.”

Ziya Azazi's Dervish performances seem like an example of the ‘tactical frivolity’ theorized in the study of performative protests as a means of creating the

freedom to upset authority and power structures momentarily, or what Gemma Edwards calls “misbehaving” with cultural symbols (Edwards 2014: 227, 214). Comparably, Gürcan and Peker draw on Bakhtin’s “carnavalesque” and Debord’s “plagiarism” to characterize protest strategies at Gezi as humorous ‘cognitive diversions’ that overturn and expose the incoherence and contradictions of ruling ideologies and government rhetoric’ or “reverse and demystify the meanings and ideological efforts led by [protest] movement opponents” (2015: 5, 115). The Mevlevi Sema Ceremony in which the dance occurs has been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2005,⁸ and Azazi himself received numerous invitations to perform in the following year and in 2007, which was declared ‘International Rumi Year’ by UNESCO and saw large-scale state-sponsored celebrations of the Sufi poet Rumi’s 800th Birthday. Once practiced clandestinely, Sema is a key part of Turkey’s tourism iconography and provision. It is widespread, and paying to see a performance is a staple part of many foreign tourists’ experiences. At the time of writing, an image of dervish dancers is one of the scrolling backdrops for the official Turkish tourism portal and Mevlana has a separate government anniversary website dedicated to it in Turkish and English.⁹ Azazi’s collaborator Deniz Akgündüz has stated that through the dance he “uses the placability of religion as a protest”, and indeed *peaceful* protest was important in discourse as a counterpoint to violent state action. But the performance also turns an authorized (albeit ambiguous) heritage symbol against its main users, asking questions about the ownership, control and use of the past and, by extension, of bodies and the places they inhabit.

In our interview, Azazi discussed at length the Sufi heritage that had inspired his performances, describing the personal research into Sufism and whirling that began in 1999 and took him “from Morocco to India”. He stated: “as I was born in this country [i.e. Turkey] the way I met Sufism was through Mevlana,” but later challenged the narrow conception of Sufism as uniquely connected to Anatolian Mevlevi tradition – a view typical of many Turkish people who were “unenlightened” (*câhil*) about Sufism’s different “geographies” and longer histories. Through Azazi’s own process of enlightenment, whirling had become his “language” both rooted in history but also subject to “renewal,” a practice he characterized as “Dervish in Progress”. But, although profoundly knowledgeable about the history and philosophy of Sufism, he did not neatly articulate his actions at the Gezi protests as some kind of explicit counter-hegemonic heritage discourse. Rather, he stated:

When I went to Gezi as a performer and artist with my background I could not be expected to do breakdance or hip-hop. My weapon is whirling. All of the people who went to the square and performed used their own languages. With the same reflex when I went to the Square I took my skirts, but I also took a gas mask to protect myself. So naturally I became the ‘Dervish with the Gas

⁸ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/mevlevi-sema-ceremony-00100>

⁹ www.goturkey.com; <http://www.mevlana.gov.tr/?dil=2>

Mask'. This is not something I structured before I went. There was only the reflex that I should be there. I just took my tools and went there as an artist.

Although apparently unpremeditated and coincidental, Azazi's performances at Gezi involved complex past-present relations. They were a renewal of a heritage that is territorially wider and potentially more inclusive of groups than in its authorized form. This heritage can be made to speak of peace, and thus against the violence of the state – the same state that celebrates and markets the Sema as official heritage. Key themes that emerge from this, and from Nor Zartonk's protest, were the myriad of discursive connections made through heritage, and didactic impulses to counteract received or official histories, opening them up to different meanings and relations and to wider ownership.

We see this also in the mock Ottoman miniature of Ceyda Sungur's ordeal that re-imagines Gezi as Ottoman battleground, including an Ottoman military camp in the background – another apparently playful appropriation of authorized heritage. [figure 6 near here] The cover image instantly remembered the protest using the language of the form of history privileged by the JDP, also recalling the restorative nostalgia that helped to catalyze disorder. In our interview with Gürsel Göncü, the editor of *Tarih*, he discussed the choice of cover image as a non-partisan journalistic action, noting “we wanted to ‘connect’ a photograph (the woman in red) that had become a symbol with common art productions of the past in order to reflect a perception of continuation; in other words, we wanted to create a declared anachronism.” As Göncü put it, the use of the image was also a “conceptual-topical” means of denying exclusive rights to Ottoman “heritage” (*miras*) and itself a protest about the political use of the past:

The Ottoman heritage is big and precious and belongs neither to the JDP nor to any other party. We did not want to ignore the use of history by the JDP or by any other political party (Göncü 2016: pers comm).

The image's power was not lost upon the publishers, who found it uncomfortable (“*rahatsız edici*”) and auto-censored it for fear of creating trouble, suppressing the issue and then the magazine itself, which was discontinued.¹⁰

The commonplace image of the protestor holding up her or his arm and displaying a Kemalist tattoo relied on a well-known iconography of Atatürk, from his signature in cursive script (also a common car window sticker) to one of the many portrait images that also feature on flags and memorabilia. The tattoo of the signature is significant in this regard, as it connects to Atatürk's introduction of surnames to Turkey in 1934 and the earlier abolition of the Ottoman Arabic alphabet in favor of a modified Latin one in 1928, both part of the process of the replacement of the old

¹⁰ In our interview Göncü stated that the publishers suggested that the magazine had been losing money and that this was the real reason for its discontinuation, but he rejected this as untrue. The magazine has subsequently been redeveloped under his editorship with new publishers under the name *#Tarih* (<http://www.tarihdergi.com/hakkimizda>).

order with a modern Turkish identity. This precise historical significance was not uppermost in the mind of the tattooed protester whom we interviewed (see below) but is nevertheless an important source of the iconicity of the signature. Kemalist tattoos are a heritage phenomenon in Turkey that predates the Taksim-Gezi protests, and have been discussed as a form of opposition to the JDP leadership (Özdemir 2013) in the face of the conspicuous exercise of biopower (Yeğenoğlu, 2013; White, 2014: 205; Gürcan and Peker 2015: 15). After the protests Erdoğan's own antipathy towards tattooing became clear when, in June 2014 he famously rebuked Galatasaray footballer Berk Yıldız over his arm tattoos, which he associated with 'foreign' (i.e. westernized) identities and skin cancer (Cumhuriyet, 2014). State agencies also defines tattoos as *haram* in Islamic doctrine and accordingly discourage tattooing, for example in the FAQ of the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Presidency of Religious Affairs) website (2013).

A 'reading' of these people's representational bodies is that they are a reaction to state biopower and form a message board for "countercultural impulses and beliefs" (Nichols and Foster 2005: 2; Langman 2008: 664), as an expression of subversion and an attempt to reclaim the body as site and to exercise autonomy in relation to it. In this sense the body itself becomes a form of identity place as a site of contest and protest, and through its transformation into 'embodied historiography' via representational practice. This could be taken to signify the new primacy of the body as cultural site, replacing that of the (geographical) place as an identity resource. Contrary to this, we might rather suggest that body and place are discursively and affectively connected. One of our interviewees, who identified as Kemalist, had posed for photography during the protests, proudly displaying his forearm tattoo of Atatürk's signature (although he had had the tattoo for some years). He noted:

I wanted to say that: my body belongs here. You can't send us away. I am here and my history is here and I have a right to be here. In fact I am here to bring him [i.e. Atatürk] back! We need him now! I am proud [of my tattoo] and will show it without fear of anyone; I don't care!

While this is a common example of Kemalist restorative nostalgia to rival the JDP's neo-Ottomanism, in general the protestors' presentation of tattoos to camera in order to create imagery and iconography of the protest is resonant because of the contest of will to exercise control over place, and by extension, over bodies. Meyda Yeğenoğlu has argued that people's "urge to say 'no' to [the JDP's] biological, somatic and corporeal inscription" was a key catalyst of protest (2013), and this is borne out by data from the empirical study by Farro and Demirhisar (2014). In this sense we can speak of the overlaying of identity places – the site and the body – as a discursive claim to power over the symbolic spaces of contested control, which in turn stand for competing propositions about historicized futures and ideal moral orders. To recall Tuan's aphorism at the beginning of this paper, place "*incarnates* the experiences and aspirations of a people" (1979: 387, our emphasis). But it is bodies that inhabit place,

situating such experiences and aspirations: incarnation and situation, or embodiment and placement, exist dialectically.

One of the ways in which place is made meaningful is by its occupation by corporeal human bodies. In the context of protests this can be seen as an act of appropriation (or reappropriation) instigating or entrenching a discursive relation of place-belonging (both ‘this is our place’ and ‘we belong here’) that relates to identity and warrants political action. It is no coincidence that the civil protest is one of the moments when bodies are most forcibly treated, through (in this case) physical attacks, containment, repulsion, the burning of tents and killings. As Zeynep Gambetti has argued, the Gezi protests were strongly marked by a ‘politics of the body’ about resistance to what was scripted for subjects and the erasure of traces of bodies and bodily action (Gambetti 2014). The ultimate aim of this was to subjugate situated bodies, to remove them from place and thus to sever identity claims and expropriate. To claim place-belonging in Taksim, undertaken through heritage representations and embodied action, was to claim political legitimacy and to naturalize one’s ideology as a social good.

Conclusions: heritage, place, protest

This paper has focused on just some of many representations associated with the Gezi Park protest. There are many others, intersecting in multiple ways that we have no space to address, and as we qualified at the outset, not everything was or is obviously about ‘history’ and ‘the past’. However, the representations we have examined function variously as nostalgic claims to place and prescriptive moral orderings, subversive rememberings of occluded or official histories and resistance to forms of biopower. These claims involve notions of historical belonging (of people to places and places to people) and naturalizations of ‘what was’ as it connects to ‘what should be’, in relation to physical-spatial, somatic and ideological dimensions. Even where ‘history’ is not uppermost in the minds of the different actors involved in protest, or the suppression of protest, we argue that it is still active within the situation of that protest, not least in the basic sense that both the catalyst for protest and the impulse to protest must ‘come from’ somewhere – from some grounds. The behavior, policies and dispositions of the JDP – seen by protestors to be anti-democratic or even totalitarian – are in part the result of a historical development, reliance on historical record (‘we achieved x or y’; ‘the majority voted for us’) and on historical sources of inspiration – however contrived – such as the reach, power, religiosity and autocratic organization of the Ottoman state. Meanwhile, the impulse to protest against such behaviors, policies and dispositions emerges from a diffused history of democratic ideals in modernity (or rather a certain take on or reproduction of that history, not shared by the JDP). This involves the transmission and adoption of value concepts perceived as sacrosanct, such as entitlements to individual freedoms, self-determination, human rights and indeed the right to protest.

For political purposes, an attractive, surface property of place is its apparent malleability, its semblance of openness to reworking and remaking, such that it can appear to be a clean ground for identity construction. In this sense, it seems like

memory can be fixed (in the double sense of fixing something in place and time and of repairing something) through the management of the cultural-physical resource of place. This means the selective appropriation and editing of historical stories and images and the removal from view or silencing of things that do not fit. State actors can, in this view, create a place history intended to engender a certain kind of docility – to colonize the very places where people walk, congregate, shop or otherwise pass time with a heritage laden with contemporary political values.

The problem is that what we have termed ‘ground memories’ cannot be systematized, rendered coherent or smooth, fixed or frozen. They are hard to eliminate and tend to re-emerge upon any attempt to do so. Their availability as resources for resistance mean that ideological plays to expunge identity markers and, ultimately, protesting bodies from place are fundamentally problematic: multiple *re*-colonization acts ensue. There is an apparent possibility of strategically erasing and remaking place. But the very cultural grounds of production fatally limit this possibility, and people’s diverse mnemonic and socio-ideological relations to place histories become repertoires for reaction. Attempts to emplace history in an exclusive mode – i.e. by expunging other, uncongenial histories – are situated orderings, moves to make sense and make a single logic of the relationships between past and present. But, as Geoffrey Cubitt (2007: 22) notes, “impressions of [historical] episodes and experiences create overlap and interact with ones generated by things that come earlier or later, giving to the historical process a texture not of orderly sequence but of tangled simultaneity”. Cubitt is talking about historical time, but his insight can be appropriated to suggest also that place is never open, free ground for making meaning. Perhaps Cubitt’s “tangled simultaneity”, unruly like ground memory, also characterizes the “texture of place” (Adam et al 2001). It is indeed suggestive of the variety of temporalities involved at Gezi, from Armenian gravestones to gas masks, and of the multiple connections and points of recall between histories, times and places.

It is here that exploration of the explicit and implicit mobilization of heritage can offer insights to the understanding of certain protests, where a particular heritage is associated with autocracy and contributes cause to protests; where it becomes a symbolic resource that draws power from its social purchase as a common identity paradigm (as in the case of Kemalist heritage), or from its authorized status that can be used to discredit authority. Muriel Girard captures well the sense of the memory grounds we have discussed, in her view that the Gezi protests offer an understanding of how heritage may unexpectedly transcend its “dead beauty” to “crystallize, reflect, and act as the receptacle for a protest movement” (2015: 5).

The 2013 protests were complex events that scholarship and Turkish society are still trying to understand. This paper has attempted to illuminate an aspect of them as a contest fought over (and sometimes on) historical grounds laden with memories and meanings, in which protestors used the symbolic resources of history and heritage representations, powerful because of their status as authorized cultural forms. As we write, Erdoğan has renewed the ‘claim’ to history in Taksim (Diken 2016) and the future of Gezi Park and the Square is again uncertain. So we leave compelling

questions for future research: what new or renewed memory struggles will there be? What is the relationship between place-history contests and permanence? How might the memory of protests endure as a kind of heritage?

Figures

Figure 1 Google Earth view of Taksim Square and Gezi Park. Map data: Google, DigitalGlobe ©2016 Basarsoft ©2016 Google

Figure 2 Taksim Square during the protests in 2013. By Fleshstorm - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=26669700>

Figure 3 Gezi Park in 2016 ©the authors

Figure 4 the Atatürk Cultural Centre in 2016 ©the authors

Figure 5 Ziya Azazi performing during the Gezi Protests ©Ziya Azazi/Deniz Agkündüz, reproduced by permission of Ziya Azazi and Deniz Agkündüz

Figure 6 Cover of *Tarih* Magazine 2013, issue 54 ©Tarih, reproduced by permission of Gürsel Göncü.

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