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‘Cinema as a Common Activity’: Film Audiences, Social Inclusion, and Heterogeneity in Istanbul during the Occupy Gezi

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the ways in which mediating spaces like film festivals function as alternative public spheres when social movements escalate, arguing that the Istanbul International Film Festival and Documentarist right before, during and following the Gezi protests turned into politically and socially inclusive spaces for marginalised groups in Turkey. To account for how audiences and organisers aimed to transform these mediating spaces into socially inclusive and heterogeneous outlets during the Gezi protests, the paper relies on an audience ethnography in the sites of these film festivals from 2013 until 2017 including participant observation, go-alongs and in-depth interviews with audiences, film crews and organizers. Although the spaces of these two film festivals functioned differently, the article shows that film festival spaces generally transformed into cosmopolitan outlets in Istanbul in this period, opening room for a dialogue between marginalised and dominant groups, which was fed by social movements

Keywords

Social inclusion, festivals, counter-public sphere, Gezi Park, Istanbul, cosmopolitanism, audience research, cinema-going

1.Introduction

Although media often acts as a catalyst for fanning the flames of populism and exacerbates the global slide towards illiberalism, alternative mediating spaces, networks and events have the potential to promote inclusion and heterogeneity whereby audiences participate in democracy. In this paper, the main discussion revolves around the ways in which the cinematic activity of film festival audiences transformed into a social and political activity during and following the Gezi protests in 2013 against authoritarianism of the Islamist neo-liberal rule in Turkey. The article points out that alternative mediating spaces, in this case film festivals, can provide ground for transnational human interaction, function as inclusive and exclusive spaces at the same time (Browne 2009), disseminate political messages to their audiences (Sharpe 2008; Laing & Mair 2015) and lead to “counterhegemonic discourses and identities” (Cammaerts & Carpentier 2009, 5). In the absence of a functioning public sphere in Turkey, small political events and festivals turned into counter-public spheres (Negt et al.

1988; Xing 2012) in addressing social, economic and cultural issues whereby traditional protest spaces were increasingly repressed.

This paper looks at counter-hegemonic political engagement in two festivals, namely Istanbul International Film Festival (IIFF) and Documentarist, and their functions as inclusive and heterogeneous spaces in the context of the proliferation of alternative public spheres in Istanbul, such as civil societies, community centres, social movements and art venues, which transformed Istanbul into a cosmopolis in the 2000s and early 2010s. In this period, increasing numbers and influence of social movements around the world, such as the launching of the Occupy movements and Arab Spring, have also changed urban, cultural and media spaces, including festivals. Festivals' merging with global social movements and waves of international migration turned them into sites for civic participation in democracy. At a transformative period in Turkey, film festival audiences used the transnational spaces of film festivals not only with a view to watch films but also to participate in democracy and question the existing social and political norms in Turkish society, particularly in relation to the Kurdish issue, the Syrian war and ensuing mass immigration.

In 2013, the AKP government's increasing repression and restrictions on women's bodies, Internet, or alcohol consumption, turned into a focal point for connecting a wide array of oppositional politics, generating an extra-ordinary dynamic where people from different ideologies, ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations lived, marched, cooked and danced together. It brought together human rights activists, traditional left-wing parties, environmentalists, labour syndicates, anarchists, journalists, students, the LGBTI+ communities, Alevi social movements, Kurdish resistance, Kemalists and feminists, who redefined social justice on the streets of Istanbul and "claimed a certain kind of cosmopolitan status and transnational agency" (Werbner 2015, 7). The paper points out that widespread social movements trigger a sense of cosmopolitanism, global identity and openness, which generates new forms of connectivity and solidarity (Agustín 2017, 2-4). Existing research shows how new social movements cosmopolitanise cities and their attendees and help participants to uphold democratic values and pluralism against the conservative and nationalist visions of rulers as it was in the case of Occupy Gezi in 2013 and the umbrella movement in Hong Kong in 2014 (Suner 2017, 113).

On this background, the paper identifies Documentarist and IIFF as socially and politically inclusive mediating spaces during and in the immediate aftermath of Gezi protests for two interrelated reasons. First, they transformed into more inclusive spaces for different ethnic and gender communities in Turkey and triggered alternative subject formations for

audiences in relation to marginalised identities such as the Kurdish or Syrian. Second, these film festivals have facilitated political action to keep traditional movie theatres and parks alive. One of the events leading up to the Gezi protests was related to cinema and film festivals, the struggle for keeping the historical Emek Movie Theatre (EMT)[i] in Beyoglu, which was mainly initiated by some of the IIFF audiences. Although there was constant resistance in Beyoglu for five years (2010-2015), the EMT was demolished in May 2013, right before the Gezi protests, but the preceding events and alliances created a unique cosmopolitan setting. The Emek movement was one of the events that paved the way to the uprising while leaving its legacy in Istanbul following the Gezi protests, such as creative park activism (Ozduzen 2018; 2019). To account for how audiences and organisers attempted to transform festival spaces into socially inclusive outlets against the authoritarian and populist policies of the government, the paper relies on an audience ethnography in the sites of the above-mentioned film festivals from late March to mid-June in 2013 until 2017, including participant observation and in-depth interviews with audiences and organizers of the two festivals.

This paper thus provides empirical evidence to studies in cosmopolitanism and social inclusion, through an examination of media spaces and political events, by critically engaging with how audience communities embraced cosmopolitan identities around the time of the Gezi protests in one of Istanbul's urban centres, namely Beyoglu. It considers the role of media and mediating practices in nurturing cosmopolitan openness within everyday life (Yılmaz & Trandafoiu 2015, 4-5) and in facilitating a global–local orientation to the world that allows individuals to engage in community-building and participate in communication to create global citizenship (Sobré-Denton 2016, 1715). The paper begins with a detailed explanation of the longitudinal ethnographic methods used, followed by a discussion of Istanbul's history of social inclusion, exclusion and heterogeneity while connecting this to Islamist neo-liberalism in Turkey. The rest of the paper lays out the findings from an ethnography in the two festivals, giving voice to an increasingly marginalised community of audiences and festival organisers, to account for the functions of these spaces, at a time when Turkey lurches towards authoritarianism.

2.Methodology

The ethnographic approach helped the researcher to identify the ways in which cultural and creative communities responded to radical changes in the wider political atmosphere, particularly in relation to questions on heterogeneity and social inclusion in Turkey. Existing scholarship investigates identity formation (Johnston 2011) or knowledge production

(Stadler, Reid & Fullagar 2013) in music festivals by drawing on ethnographic methods. Previous research also captured social inclusion in festival spaces using interviews with festival organisers (Laing & Mair 2015, 265), whereas this research made use of audience ethnography to give voice to both organisers and attendees to account for the sense of inclusion, heterogeneity and resistance within the mediating spaces of the two festivals. My ethnographic observations date back to the early 2010s, but this article relies on audience ethnography at the IIFF from 2013 onwards, in order to pay attention to mediating networks that led to and followed the Gezi protests. As such, the paper captures discourses used in Q&As, panels, protests and workshops in the 2010s Istanbul. The initial fieldwork took place in 2013 and 2014, but I continued to visit the field sites until 2017. Employing audience ethnography meant that I engaged with participants' festival conversations and activities while queueing inside the movie theatres or sitting alongside them during Q&As and screenings. Additionally, I engaged with their protest practices in demonstrations and occupations, which afforded opportunities to expand more on not only their use of festival spaces but also their shifting political identities in protest spaces.

Between 2013 and 2017, I reached out to 68 festival audience members, film crews and festival organisers who were involved in both the Emek movement and the Gezi protests, via a snowballing method, through recommendations of my colleagues and acquaintances from related sectors. I employed in-depth interviewing and participant observation, which involved an attempt at interpreting the meanings and experiences of a group (Silverman 2006). I also used 'go-alongs', which is 'a hybrid between participant observation and interviewing in which fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their 'natural' outings through asking questions, listening and observing. Go-alongs helped me to actively explore research informants' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with their environment (Kusenbach 2003, 463). The sample of interviews consisted of 22-65 age group and within 68 of informants, 43 were female and 25 were male. My informants were regular visitors of the film festivals in Istanbul. Many of them were professionally involved in creative sectors such as scriptwriting, film criticism, photography or curatorship, while some of them worked in other sectors, including higher education, law and information technologies. A few of them were students, some retired and unemployed. During the writing process, due to increasing authoritarianism in Turkey, I anonymised my participants except for the organizers of the festivals.

3.Istanbul's History of Cosmopolitanism and Turkey's Recent Authoritarian Turn

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic cosmopolitanism did not serve Istanbul well especially for its historic minorities such as Greeks, Jews or Armenians. Eldem (2013, 50) argues that the Ottoman Empire developed a culture of plurality, coexistence and cosmopolitanism in its urban centres, which would hardly be found in Europe during the same period. "By the 19th century, Pera (Beyoğlu) housed consular buildings, places of worship, businesses and spaces of sociability to the hundreds of communities making up cosmopolitan Istanbul in the late Ottoman era" (Örs 2014, 493). Barkey (2008), however, observes that the Ottomans constructed an uneasy, productive and diverse but homogeneous and unifying culture. While accepting difference, they built their governance over similarities based on institutional structures. Nevertheless, "when the Turkish Republic was established, Istanbul lost its capital status to Ankara. As the new nation state put Turkishness at the core of its collective identity, Istanbul was cast off as the symbol of the colonial, decadent, and multi-ethnic Ottoman past" (Keyder 1987). Pera (Beyoglu), the epitome of cosmopolitanism, signified a threat to the imagined nationalistic purity (Sandıkcı 2015, 201-202). This trend persisted in various forms in Istanbul's history, for example riots against the non-Muslim population illustrated by the 6-7th September Istanbul Pogrom; organised mob attacks against the Greek population in 1955, which is replicated in the history of the Turkish Republic, directed at the non-Muslims, non-Turks and/or non-Sunnis.

Currently, the marriage of Islamism and neo-liberalism (Rudnyckyj 2009; Karaman 2013) determines the macro transformations from above as well as the shifting paradigm of cultural and political spaces in Turkey. The ruling party AKP (Justice and Development Party, 2002- present) has aimed to transform the structure of state, private institutions and culture in Turkey especially since their second term in office from 2007 onwards. AKP aims to build an Islamist regime which also relies on neo-liberal market economy (Karaman 2013; Batuman 2015). The AKP rule in Turkey not only meant a consolidation of neoliberalism (Bozkurt 2013) but also socio-cultural conservatism (Karaman 2013) based on social welfare management, Islamic solidarity and family values (Atalay 2019, 434). While the president Erdoğan always looked to promote Turkish capital as a neoliberal force in the global market (Kuymulu 2013, 277), "the government's limitations on alcohol consumption, more references being made to the Quran and Islamic sources in daily speech, and the increasing practice of sex segregation in daily life, such as the proliferation of women-only hotels and swimming pools" (Karaman 2013, 8) have set the underlying logic of social and cultural life in this period.

The regime in Turkey is commonly identified as a competitive authoritarianism (Esen & Gümüşçü 2016) following the Gezi protests, which also has broader implications for the cultural fabric, including the production and circulation of media. Competitive authoritarian systems "are ruled by democratically elected charismatic leaders, who resort to aggressive political discourses that mobilise 'genuine nations' against 'old elites' and divide the remaining world into friends and foes. Political parties create consent, service their clients and replace existing independent institutions and state agencies" (Öktem & Akkoyunlu 2016, 470). Gradually after the Gezi protests, the friends of the AKP have been those who identified themselves as Turks and Sunnis, who also adhered to their Islamist, neoliberal and 'clientelist' party politics. Increasingly after the Gezi protests, president Erdogan's speeches and actions reinforced the existing divides in society such as the Sunni and Alevi, Turk and Kurd, capulcu and non-capulcu[ii].

AKP's ideology thus comes closer to the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which has been one of the main characteristics of many right-wing parties in Turkey especially since the coup d'etat of 1980. AKP's pragmatic and populist use of motives from within Turkish nationalism and Islamic culture at the same time as its foreign policy and economic policies, such as its pro-EU foreign policy and neo-liberal economic agenda (anti-protectionist and globalist), account for its neo-liberal ideology (Coşar & Yücesan-Özdemir 2012, 89). Accordingly, during the 2015 general elections and following the 15 July (2016) attempted coup, there has been an increase in the chauvinist movements, filled with slogans like 'one nation, one flag', exemplified through the attacks on the pro-Kurdish party HDP. While aspects of both Ottoman and modern Turkish history rely on homogeneity, Istanbul's recent transformation into a cosmopolis was a short moment when social movements such as ecologic, queer, environmentalist and feminist movements were on the rise in the early 2010s, which eventually led to a bigger uprising in 2013. In this sense, cosmopolitanism in contemporary Turkey implies having an intention to build a peaceful coexistence with various ethnic, religious and gender communities that constitute Turkey. The AKP has seen this trend as a threat to national unity and their power increasingly after the attempted coup in July 2016[iii].

4.Social Inclusion and Heterogeneity in Film Festivals

Against the homogenising and neo-liberal ideology of the AKP government, cultural platforms and events, including film festivals, created new ways of inclusivity and heterogeneity in the early 2010s. Investigations into the functions of different film festivals have been a crucial feature of existing literature on film festival studies (de Valck and Loist

2013; Cheung 2016, 61). Taillibert and Wäfler (2016, 13) historicise the concept of film festivals from the early twentieth century by showing that the word 'festival' was used to talk about 'parties with film screenings', which accounts for a hybridisation between music and film events. Stevens (2016, 22) defines early film festivals as a type of European spectacle consisted of visions of alluring spa towns and star-studded gala presentations. In addition to a historical point-of-view describing film festivals as spectacles, Peranson (2008, 24) identifies film festivals as events, which have advantages over regular art-house screenings in our event-driven culture/age. De Valck (2007, 19), similarly, points out how certain films attract full houses and audience interest at festivals, whereas movie theatres remain unfilled when the same films are released in the art house circuit. This is because, film festivals as spectacles and events, provide their attendees with the opportunities of socialisation and interaction.

In addition to their social functions, film festivals have political uses for their audiences. Stringer (2001, 136-138) defines festival space as a series of diverse, sometimes competing and at other times cooperating public spheres and, additionally, as a new kind of counter public sphere. Cordova (2012, 64) interrogates the context of indigenous film festivals in Latin America, which became sites of indigenous struggle for representation and strengthen awareness on pressing social and political concerns faced by the communities. Furthermore, in exploring different human-trafficking festivals in Calcutta, Nigeria, USA and Taiwan, Torchin (2012, 95-96) underlines the film festival's capability of being a productive platform for promotion, outreach and support for a campaign, whilst engaging in fundraising and community building. Exemplifying the Seoul Women's Film Festival, Kim (2005, 88-89) discusses the issue of recognition and how the film festival is part of this in the sense that it serves as a space for sharing between different actors involved, such as viewers, activists and academics. Similarly, Tascón (2015, 3) examines two human rights film festivals in New York and Buenos Aires, in order to consider how human rights, films and film festivals coalesced on a global scale by bringing together films of a certain kind in a film festival to represent human rights.

Existing research also focuses on the roles that other festivals, like urban festivals (Waitt 2008), ethnic festivals (McClinchey 2008) or music festivals (Rietveld 2010), play in making cities and communities more cosmopolitan and in constructing solidarity networks and activism, as was the case with the Global Peace Film Festival of Orlando (Wahlberg 2015), or the way they can be used as regeneration tools, as was the case of Liverpool European Capital of Culture (Krüger 2015). From a different perspective, Sharp et. al (2005,

1003) show the ways in which public art generates a sense of ownership in forging the connection between citizens, city spaces and their meaning as places through which subjectivity is constructed as it intersects with the processes of urban restructuring. Although cinema is not generally considered public art, film festivals can cosmopolitanise cities while making use of and transforming urban public spaces. As the mainstream public sphere and media were dysfunctional, the audiences used IIFF and Documentarist film festivals as alternative spaces during the Gezi protests, which represented heterogeneity, coexistence and plurality. Social movements in Beyoglu led to the formation of new bonds between the participants, organisers, journalists and international guests, whilst paving the way to an ongoing flow of conversation.

In its history, the founding institution of the IIFF (1982), The Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), has adhered to republican values from its inception onwards (Yardımcı 2005, 27-28), which implies overtly or covertly advocating values of a homogeneous Turkey, a secular Turkified nation. The IKSV (1973) was founded through the sponsorship of one of the richest families in Turkey, the Eczacıbaşı family and company, whose core sectors are pharmaceuticals and construction. It also organises film, music, jazz and theatre festivals and the Istanbul Biennial, representing a monopoly of cultural events in Istanbul and Turkey. In her research on the Istanbul Biennial, Yardımcı (2005, 15) argues that the IKSV was intentionally founded in 1973, which marks the 50th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. Özpınar (2018, 15) remarks that "rather than using 'open' public spaces, the IKSV mostly uses state-controlled or privately-owned public spaces for the Istanbul Biennial (1987). They aimed to change this to develop the Biennial in 'dialogue with the city' in 2013. In the backdrop of the Gezi protests, however, the Biennial retreated from streets and used its common venues run by the state or landlords".

From a similar mindset, the IIFF, a mainstream film festival that has been in harmony with the previous dominant culture of Turkish Republic, has also retreated from the use of public spaces since its foundation. Despite mostly using independent (privately owned) movie theatres in the Beyoglu area, the IIFF has also utilized multiplexes in shopping malls. Documentarist (2007), on the other hand, has solely utilized independent movie theatres while repurposing some of the venues in arcades like Aynaligecit to use them as movie theatres. This small documentary festival has also cooperated with local municipalities to screen 'suspect' films such as its cooperation with Sisli Municipality. Furthermore, the Documentarist used the spaces of the uprising rather than the allocated spaces for the festival during the Gezi protests (Ozduzen 2018, 1045). Documentarist has thus been an activist and

heterogeneous space since its foundation and is run by two independent film enthusiasts, who also organise two smaller documentary festivals named Doc Days and Which Human Rights? Film Festival. The IIFF, as a mainstream film festival, also functioned as an alternative space/media platform in the early 2010s on a special moment in Turkish history: the Gezi uprising, which blossomed as a response to the Turkish state's authoritarian shift. During this time period, many mainstream festivals and media platforms adhered to the clientelist party politics of the AKP by for instance shutting down their documentary sections or Turkish film competition, such as International Antalya Film Festival.

Throughout my fieldwork in this period, the most visible discourses during discussions at the IIFF and Documentarist, were related to the Gezi uprising, Syrian people's practices in Turkey, and the conflicts in the Kurdish region of Turkey, which were increasingly being deemed as 'suspect' issues to be publicly discussed. Azize Tan (the director of the IIFF at the time) defined the IIFF in line with the social movements and recent social and political developments in Istanbul:

> We contribute to the activist culture here by organising a lot of film courses and masterclasses on the recent political issues such as the war in Syria and the refugees from there. We invite relevant activists and filmmakers here. Our actual aim is to discuss 'What can we do?' via cinema. In doing this, we attempt to make sense of the current changes and crises.

Like other members of the audience, the organiser of the IIFF aimed to turn the festival into a counter-public sphere against dominant discourses in the media and in other mainstream public sphere, such as 'Syrian people are given money by the Turkish state' or 'Kurdish people are terrorists'. In the panels and films that ran counter to the official narrative, the practices of cinephilia and political participation overlapped. In 2014, following the screening of *The Return to Homs* (Talal Derki, 2013), the panel entitled 'Making Documentaries during the War' included the film's director Talal Derki and many activists and audience members from Syria and Turkey. The film followed the fatal journeys of the nineteen-year-old footballer Basset and the twenty-four-year-old video activist Osama on the frontline of resistance in the wake of the besiege of Homs. The panel gathered academics, human rights defenders and audiences, which not only brought about questions related to the story and style of the film but also practical discussions on the war and the Syrian communities in Turkey and was full of fruitful discussions over what to do about the war in Syria and refugees, conducted in Turkish, English and Arabic. Similarly, in one of the panels on the political cinema in Turkey in 2014, which included the Kurdish director Kazim Oz and Turkish director Emin Alper, Kurdish films were discussed as a means to make peace and

find solutions for a more democratic Turkey for Kurds as well as other oppressed ethnic and religious groups. Socialisation and social interaction, which in this period were highly politicised, are the key areas that IIFF festival organisers, represented by Azize Tan, also saw themselves contributing to the festival's counter-sphere.

From a similar vein, the co-organiser of the IIFF also expressed the reason why they insisted on creating a space which represented the Kurds and Syrians. Kerem Ayan, who has been the director of the IIFF since 2015 (interviewed in 2014), said:

> One of the most important issues in Turkey is Syrian immigration at the moment, so we organise panels and try to find films on the issue to create an agenda here too.

In addition to social inclusion, agenda-setting was another aim of the organisers. The promotion of the festival as a space for bringing people and films together on timely political and social issues such as the Syrian war created a sense of community, belonging and a more inclusive festival design. In this period, the formation of alternative cultural spaces was identified as a form of opposition by the regime as some of them have signified an opposition to the dysfunctional bourgeois public sphere. In this period, the IIFF not only mimicked the Gezi's practices resting on participation and plurality but also aimed to respond to more recent social and political change in Turkey, including mass immigration from Syria.

During this period, audiences also increasingly turned to Middle Eastern films. Ahmet (editor, interviewed in 2013) elucidates the transformation of his identity as an audience member:

> At the IIFF, I was following European and independent American films mostly as our education system was strictly forbidding us from our own and surrounding cultures. I then started to go to Turkish, Kurdish and Middle Eastern films and IIFF has since broadened my knowledge about these film traditions.

"When the Ottoman–Turkish modernisation started at the inception of the 19th century and when modernisation became the fundamental property of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Europeanization constituted the main normative/political context for the modernising elite to define and justify their vision of state and society" (Kaliber 2014, 32). This has had several indications for the cultural realm in Turkey including the education system. While cultural products from Europe has been looked up to, other cultural products such as the Middle Eastern ones have not been as popular. In the 'Gezi period', Middle Eastern cinema and media were more visible in Istanbul's cultural spaces, which has changed the social and political identities of audiences and has afforded critical perspectives of their own selves and the previous state ideology. This does not mean that film festivals looked away from the

West, but their understanding of their selves become more inclusive of other cultural and cinematic traditions with the help of ongoing social movements.

Prior to this period, Candan (bank employer, interviewed in 2013) was critical about the representation of alienated and lonely individuals in Anglo-Saxon film traditions and traumatic representations of Kurdish identity in films representing Kurds, which for her, signified a Eurocentric subject matter:

> The films on display now go beyond the issue of loneliness in the modern world. I have an urge to watch human rights films in these festivals. Nowadays there are more films on Kurdish geographies both from Turkey and beyond. Yesterday I watched *My Sweet Pepper Land* (Huner Salim 2013) at the IIFF. Pain also gives birth to humour and we should embrace humour too. These types of genre of films on even the most painful issues, make me hopeful.

When I met Candan in the ticket queues and panels, she was trying her best to follow all Kurdish films. She was not Kurdish, but she wanted to delve deeper in social inequalities and injustices related to Kurdishness. Like Ahmet, she was critical about high-brow European films, which was an increasing trend among this community in this period. They were critical of auteur and new auteur films from Europe that relied on the use of a specific visual style to create distance between narrative and viewers with an effort to avoid affect and encourage reflection and introspection. Additionally, it was a common line of argument that most of the films from the region, both Kurdish and other Middle Eastern, utilize dramatic and tragic stories but *My Sweet Pepper Land* was a genre film, a neo-Western set in Iraqi Kurdistan. The screening of the film brought together people from different parts of the Kurdish region in the movie theatre, from Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey and Syria. "'Migrants' ties are established across nation-states, influenced by laws, social institutions and conventions operating at various scales; the local, national and global. These are not neatly divided, but rather integrated in the making and experiencing of transnational ties" (Vathi 2013, 904). Audiences formed transnational ties and used festival spaces for conversation and cultural exchange while creating hope for the future in the region.

During the same period, some audiences of the IIFF observed shifting demographics for the film festival and they spoke about their feelings of content. As an example of this, Tuncay (unemployed, interviewed in 2013 and 2014) said:

> Following the Gezi protests, I have started to see women with headscarves in movie theatres more and more during the IIFF, which made me feel happy. I also see Syrian people around which is equally great. Cinema should be a common activity, not an activity for certain privileged groups.

The demographics in Istanbul, especially the Beyoglu region, were about to change in 2013 and 2014, in the context of Syrian mass immigration to Turkey. This audience community became more cosmopolitan in their activism and understanding of community within the spaces of the festivals, in a similar fashion to shifting demographics of the city. However, the unfolding sense of cosmopolitanism has not been permanent in the face of the broader contexts in which these interactions take place. "The complex power interaction does not necessarily result in a 'condition of universal hospitality', where 'free floating individuals' can shed their attachment to nationalities, to exercise their rights as global citizens" (Budianta 2016, 273). Budianta (2016, 274) problematizes the notion of cosmopolitanism as a precarious and limited opportunity for global encounter. The cosmopolis will treat one differently depending on one's social status – whether one is a female manual migrant worker, a skilled male engineer hired by a transnational company, a mixed international family on permanent residency or a wealthy Asian shopper –. While my informants have considered the changing demographics and culture in the area as a positive development, the IIFF as a festival was transforming into a less cosmopolitan and inclusive space in 2015.

During the IIFF in 2015, *Bakur* (Çayan Demirel & Ertuğrul Mavioğlu, 2015), which is a documentary depicting the Kurdish guerillas' everyday life and resistance in the North Kurdistan (situated in Turkey) was censored at the last minute. This resulted in wide-ranging protests, such as the directors' withdrawal of films from the IIFF, the protests at the Atlas movie theatre[iv] and a forum and screening at Abbasaga Park[v]. *Bakur*'s producer Ayse Cetinbas (interviewed in 2017) recounted how the IKSV as an institution did not stand by them in the process of being censored and targeted by the mainstream media and Turkish state:

> Although the IKSV invited our film to the festival and it was scheduled to be screened until the last day, they did not stand side by side with us and was not inclusive towards our film and what it represented. They left us alone in trying to find a way to reach the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to make them step back from the implementation of the censorship. In the end, we had to boycott the festival and use the streets and parks to raise our voices.

Starting from 2015, in line with the Turkish state's lurch towards authoritarianism, the festival space at the IIFF was becoming more homogeneous and less inclusive. The producers, directors and audiences of 'suspect' films depicting aspects of history, culture and politics of Turkey increasingly felt socially and politically isolated from festival spaces and circuits. The initial festival screening of *Bakur* took place at the Documentarist two months

after its censorship at the IIFF in June 2015. This first screening that took place on the 15th of June in 2015 in the Sisli Municipality's Cultural Centre, with wider participation of audiences, ministers, celebrities, activists, journalists and film crews. The screening started with 'biji berxwedana Kobane'[vi] slogans by the audience members, which represented solidarity with the ongoing Kurdish resistance against the Islamic State in the small border town Kobane in Northern Syria. This screening took place when Kurdish guerillas ceased using guns and went cross-border zones, therefore it was a 'special' moment for the Kurdish 'problem' in Turkey. The documentary is based on the first-hand testimony of lower and higher ranked guerillas during the 'Peace Process', when it was possible for the film crew to enter PKK-controlled zones in Turkey.

Serap (film critic, interviewed in 2016 and 2017) articulated her reasons to support Documentarist more widely:

> In the rising repression and almost absence of the freedom of art and expression and the complicity of film festivals, Documentarist is increasingly becoming part of a wider network of video, film and media activism against repression. We need to find or create alternative avenues that are inclusive and openly support Kurdish or Syrian cinemas like Documentarist.

Serap also mentioned how Documentarist was doing a similar job like video collectives such as Seyri Sokak and Kamera Sokak[vii] in opening a free platform for the circulation of 'suspect' and censored documentaries in the aftermath of the Gezi protests whilst becoming an outlet whereby visual material was co-produced as they organised production workshops for free. In this festival, Syrian and Kurdish political issues and identities were openly raised rather than censored. I argue that cinematic protests moved from the IIFF to Documentarist following the censorship of *Bakur*. From a Gramscian perspective (1971), as one space gets inhabited by government repression, the counter-sphere or anti-hegemony does not dissolve, it moves into a different space. Longer lasting and more effective forms of social and political inclusion were more feasible in Documentarist, Which Human Rights? Film Festival and Doc Days as they invited a multiplicity of ethnic and political groups to attend the festivals, made use of public spaces and have kept a free space for film audiences. For Habermas et al. (1974: 50), the public sphere mediates between society and state and sets the necessary conditions for democracy, in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion. The public sphere mediates between society and state, rendering the state accountable for its citizens and enabling 'rational' discussion of public matters. The theoretical reflections on the Habermasian concept of 'public sphere' "enable us to not only recognise the exclusionary

and class-dominated nature of the actually existing bourgeois public sphere but also to imagine the potential of counter-bourgeois public spheres" (Xing 2012, 65-66). As the dominant public sphere and their extensions were dysfunctional, small events and mediating festivals like Documentarist turned into counter-public spheres in addressing social, economic and cultural issues whereby the traditional protest spaces were increasingly repressed.

Negt et al. (1988, 163) introduced the concept of the proletarian public sphere. In emancipating the working class and representing the interests and experiences of a much larger public, especially less-privileged groups (Negt et al. 1988, 61), proletarian public sphere creates an effective form of counter-publicity. Although the Documentarist is not a proletarian public sphere, it has been an effective counter-public space in hosting Kurdish and Syrian films and opened room for the expression of different aspects of Syrian and Kurdish identities in Turkey. Documentarist in 2014 included a whole section on Syria, even when filmmaking was severely restricted in Syria due to ongoing war. One of the highlights was *Immortal Sergeant* (Ziad Kalthaum, 2014). The Q&A after the screening was full of curiosity and questions related to both the film and what has been happening in Syria. There were many questions about how the director was able to make the film, as it was nearly impossible to record anything in the war zone in Syria. To make the documentary, the director used another film's set, which was authorised by the regime. The Q&A of the film was trilingual, Arabic, English and Turkish and was filled with audiences from Syria and Turkey, which created a conversation between these groups. In 2014, the jury also awarded *Love will change the earth* (Yeryüzü Askin Yüzü Oluncaya Dek, 2014) with the Johan van der Keuken (JvdK) New Talent Award. Directed by Reyan Tuvi, the documentary features footage from the Gezi protests, including different perspectives, actions and voices on the incidents, such as the anti-capitalist Muslims or relatives of people who were killed by the Turkish state during the demonstrations. In our interview, one of the directors of Documentarist, Necati Sonmez (interviewed in 2017) talked about Documentarist's role in the wake of a big uprising and during a regime change:

> Before *Love will change the earth* was censored and targeted at Antalya Film Festival, it was screened and awarded at Documentarist. After this, festivals became complicit and used the screening licence as an excuse as if the Turkish state would provide this licence to political films. Following the censorship, *Bakur*'s screening at Documentarist brought together people from all walks of life. We experienced a similar sense of community and solidarity a year after when we screened *Audience Emancipated: the struggle for the Emek movie theatre* (Emek Bizim Istanbul Bizim

> Initiative, 2016). Even if this screening happened in a more vulnerable period in 2016 compared to *Bakur*'s screening[viii], it created hope and a sense of community.

The screenings during Documentarist became avenues whereby not only dominant groups but also marginalised communities coalesced and raised their voices. Through the public screening of *Bakur*, Documentarist opened room for another group of people in Turkey to be visibly represented in public sphere, the Kurdish guerrillas. In July 2016, when Turkey experienced another turning point in its steps towards authoritarianism, namely the attempted coup, Documentarist still functioned as a socially and politically inclusive space, which is illustrated by the screening of *Audience Emancipated: the struggle for the Emek movie theatre*. Collectively produced by some of the activists of the Emek movement and the Altyazi film magazine, the documentary mainly relies on footage from the Emek movement over the years to capture a sense of right to the city mobilisations in Istanbul in the early 2010s.

Other than showcasing radical films, Documentarist acts as an inclusive and cosmopolitan space because of its political use of public and private spaces. As independent movie theatres in Istanbul have mostly been demolished and the new movie theatres are in shopping centres, Documentarist made use of existing independent movie theatres, consulate gardens, parks and cultural centres while presenting a variety of filmgoing experiences in different types of movie theatres such as a movie theatre in a museum called Salt Beyoglu. The screenings in this movie theatre were free to all and the room also does not have any external doors, which contributes to its promise of an alternative moviegoing experience and creates a counter-public sphere for audiences and people passing by. You can directly walk to this room from the museum, which facilitates an easy flow of people going in and out, while opening room for a dialogue on recent political issues, as this room mainly hosted documentaries from Turkey.

5.Conclusion

Although film festivals may produce high-brow, exclusionary and/or elitist cultures, functions and cultures of festivals can change in certain time periods. Other than creating opportunities as alternative public spheres, they may transform into transnational social and political spaces. The IIFF and Documentarist right before, during and following the Gezi protests turned into politically and socially inclusive spaces for marginalised groups in Turkey. The screenings opened room for a longer lasting dialogue between marginalised and dominant groups in Turkey, which was fed by ongoing social movements, such as the Emek

movement and Gezi Park protests in the neighbourhood as well as Kurdish and Syrian resistances from a distance. Although the emerging sense of cosmopolitanism and inclusivity could not last long in the IIFF and started to fade away in 2015 with the censorship of *Bakur*, Documentarist continued to showcase 'suspect' documentaries related to Kurdish and Syrian identities, while also screening films on more recent social movements.

The merging of social movements and alternative media events, I argue, also cosmopolitanised Istanbul for a short period of time in the 2010s. In this framework, this paper displayed the transformation of media outlets and mediating spaces, particularly film festivals, by making use of go-alongs, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Providing empirical evidence to studies of media events and cosmopolitanism, the paper not only represents lived experiences of audiences, film crews and organisers in real space and time during the peak of social movements in the city, but also represents some interviews from 2017 when the emergent sense of heterogeneity, community and social inclusivity declined. As such, the paper presents a longitudinal perspective of social and political change in the eyes and experiences of marginalised groups/audiences. While insisting on the screening of their films and keeping their inclusive movie spaces via festivals, these audience communities and film crews also repurposed the Gezi Park and some other parks like Abbasaga Park in a bid to screen censored films or gather as communities. Thus, alternative media events cosmopolitanised and brought together audiences. These groups further cosmopolitanised the city with their presence, their films and their cameras even within an increasingly competitive authoritarian environment in Turkey in the late 2010s.

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[i] The EMT (1884), opened as a movie theatre in 1924, was a center of film festivals and political events such as the meeting for the May Day celebrations in 1987.

[ii] Erdoğan used this term (marauders) to describe the Gezi protestors, which was deconstructed by the protestors, taking the meaning ‘fighting for your rights’.

[iii] Following the attempted coup, AKP silenced the Gulenists and other dissident voices, ‘purged over 100,000 civil servants, arrested tens of thousands and seized biggest companies’ (Bekdil 2017, 3).

[iv] One of the main large format movie theatres left in the area. Built as a winter house by an Armenian entrepreneur circa 1870, it was reopened as one of the biggest movie theatres in 1948.

[v] After the Gezi Park was raided by the police forces, this venue became a landmark for forums and events related to the protests.

[vi] Means ‘Long live the Kobane resistance’ in Kurdish.

[vii] Two prominent activist video collectives that were formed around the Gezi protests in Izmir and Ankara.

[viii] The screening occurred right before the ending of the peace process (2009) between the PKK and the Turkish state. It ended after the pro-Kurdish party HDP got 13% of votes on the June 2015 elections. The AKP restarted the war in the Kurdish region.