Spaces of hope in authoritarian Turkey: Istanbul's interconnected geographies of post-Occupy activism

1.Introduction

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People in Turkey are cowed into silence from especially 2015 onwards, since the two general elections, while the failed coup (July 2016) accelerated the pace of this process. This research, however, investigates existing forms of political voice following the Gezi Park protests[i] (May-August 2013) and is concerned with newly formed political geographies in the center of Istanbul, specifically Kadıköy, Beşiktaş and Beyoğlu (Taksim) districts, and the ways in which activists transformed these spaces into 'political parks' and 'spaces of hope'. Whitehead and Bozoğlu (2016) identify Taksim Square as a multivalent site and an identity place in the history of modern Turkey. Previously lower-class revolutionary neighbourhoods such as Gazi, Küçük Armutlu or Okmeydanı and the squares of middle-class central districts like Beyoğlu, Kadıköy and Beşiktaş were the main identity-places for protestors until park activism united parks and independent spaces in Istanbul during the Gezi. This study examines the cross-cutting of various political movements in their use of parks as social and political spaces in the post-Occupy Turkey. Although these movements have not necessarily resulted in concrete achievements yet, using and testing Occupy methods in the Occupy spaces in the post-Occupy period would determine the future of global social movements.

The articulation of 'everywhere' as the all-encompassing political geography of resistance during the Gezi led to the formation of park occupations across Turkey rather than 'isolating' the protests to the Gezi Park. Solidarity networks in local neighbourhoods, political, creative and art events and environmental social movements constituted the Gezi's spatial and organisational legacy but, most importantly, the protests marked parks as political geographies. Previous social movements helped the formation of the Gezi and, in turn, the Gezi enabled unfolding of newer political imaginaries and geographies. This paper argues that following the Gezi, the political parks and woods brought together anti-capitalist Muslims, environmental and ecological activists, academic initiatives, feminists, urban chambers, unions and independent activists, which are represented via their own political voices throughout the paper. It points out that the spatial strategies remaining from the Gezi, such as occupations, participatory methods like forums, creative

dissidence like political concerts, festivals or crowdfunding have been persistent in shaping the post-Occupy spatial activism in Turkey. This paper also articulates how 'Gezi's children' continued to use 'spaces of hope' not only to go against the Islamist neo-liberal policies of the current government but also to question the sustainability and effectiveness of some of the Gezi's 'ongoing set of everyday practices' such as the forum structure. Although the Gezi became the largest and most dramatic protest movement in the recent history of Turkey, ensuing social movements remained comparably small in the face of increasing authoritarianism. Despite smaller in scope, these social movements have been a consistent force in tackling AKP's authoritarian urban politics.

This research makes the case for how people engage with the emergent sites of social movements not only at their peak but also within other 'cycles of moments' (Sofos, 2017) and is based on two phases of ethnographic research conducted in Istanbul from 2013 to 2017 with the 'children of the Gezi'. By using a spatial ethnography, it looks at the performance of spatial activism formed in and around 'political' parks in the context of increasingly authoritarian Turkey to examine the ways in which protest spaces extend, amplify, contribute to, or limit performances of activism. This paper is concerned with how place and space impact on people's translation of their grievances into collective political protest (Routledge: 1996, 2003; Polletta, 1999; Miller, 2000; Martin & Miller, 2003; Leontidou, 2010; Monterescu and Shaindlinger, 2013) and illustrates political geographies of collective action (Staeheli, 1994; Amin 2008; Luger, 2016; Arampatzi, 2017; Eder & Öz, 2017). In the existing literature, networks are identified as more vital components of new social movements than their spaces (Diani, 2000; 2003; Castells, 2004; 2011; 2015; Anduiza, Cristancho & Sabucedo, 2014) but this research shows the ways in which vernacular networks and movement cultures are formed geographically and physical spaces play important roles in shaping their specific functions whilst feeding collective imaginaries of activist networks. Thus, the first part of the paper introduces the notion of 'spaces of hope' in relation to the concepts of 'cycles of protests' and 'repertoires of collective action' within the context of studies on new social movements, which informs the ensuing section on the spatial ethnography used in Istanbul following the Gezi until 2017. The article then conceptualises and historicises contemporary authoritarian urbanism in Turkey and lays out the findings of this study involving key activists with environmental and ecological agendas in

'political parks' across Istanbul to account for the ways the spatial strategies of Gezi fed into consecutive social movements.

2.Spaces of Hope and Cycles of Protests during and following the Gezi protests

David Harvey (2000: 196-199) coined the concept of 'spaces of hope' to 'pull together a spatio-temporal or dialectical urbanism, which lead to conversations about alternatives and possibilities against global capitalism'. While Harvey's account embraces a theoretical perspective, other studies employ the term to bring empirical evidence into contemporary activist spaces and resistances (Phillips, 2009; Novy & Colomb, 2013; Luger, 2016). Luger's research on the Singaporean activist spaces (2016) delineates 'the possibilities of material and digital spaces as sites of political engagement in Singapore since they bring together groups that would not normally come together, thus forming spaces of hope'. While concentrating on offline space-making practices, this study does not capture digital practices of activists in the post-Gezi era. Rather, it suggests that 'spaces of hope' emerged out of Turkey's activist milieu, as cultural groups form coalitions and alliances in parks around specific issues related to perceived social, political and economic injustice due to policies of the Islamist neo-liberal state in the post-Gezi period. In addition to 'spaces of hope', I call the previously occupied parks 'political parks' where identities of protestors transform and intersect while producing strategies to challenge authoritarianism. In his work on the Egyptian and Iranian social movements, Bayat (1997; 2012) defines the spaces of contentious political action as 'political street', highlighting the need in authoritarian contexts to focus on 'spatialities of discontent' or 'how particular spatial forms shape, galvanise, and accommodate insurgent sentiments and solidarities'.

Existing research examines the ways spatio-temporal dimensions of previous action feed newer social movements. Tilly (1986: 176) defines the notion of 'repertoires of collective action' as 'accumulated experience that change continuously because of previous action. These repertoires interact with the strategies of authorities to make some forms of action more feasible, attractive and frequent than others'. Tarrow (1993: 284-286) coins the terms 'protest cycles' and 'heightened conflicts', both of which imply sequence of stages. They characterise periods of social unrest by producing new or transformed symbols and frames of meaning around which following mobilisations take place not only in relations, but also in the streets, villages or schools. McAdam and Sewell (2001) point to the vitality of temporality in

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social movements and use the term 'transformative events' to refer to waves of protests and/or social change. Following Halvorsen's study (2015: 404) with Occupy London, this research conceptualises activism 'not as a moment of rupture but an ongoing set of everyday practices through which the transition to post-capitalist worlds takes place'. While Halvorsen (2015: 403) captures the emergent tensions between occupations as a moment of rupture and a space-time of everyday life, Juris (2012) identifies how Occupy Boston was based on a 'logic of aggregation' that involves the coming together of activists to inhabit space such as squares, boulevards and roundabouts for an indefinite period and 'render these sites iconic' (McGahern, 2017: 92). In the context of the cycle of Gezi, this study stresses the three-fold role of the previously occupied parks that became 'iconic'; forming communities and alliances, unfolding spatial emotions and testing the participatory strategies of the Occupy movements.

The Gezi was formed as an opposition to the radical urban restructuring programmes and the commodification of urban space (Kuymulu, 2013; Karakayali & Yaka, 2014) and opened new possibilities in challenging growing competitive authoritarianism. 'The anti-capitalist dimension was a noteworthy characteristic of Gezi but its driving social force 'was the alienation of non-conservative citizens (e.g. secularists, liberals, and Alevis) from the AKP, which represent a social force opposed to the AKP's construction of a new collective identity and political regime— the 'New Turkey' (Goksel & Tekdemir, 2018: 382). During the uprising, a variety of different groups coalesced, created a 'park culture' (Özdüzen Ateşman, 2015: 695; Özdüzen, 2018: 1043) and instigated networks of mutual aid and solidarity between lived spacetimes of intensity to deal with various implications of the 'New Turkey'. The initial responses on the Gezi deemed the participants as constituting a 'new middle-class movement' (Arat, 2013; Keyder, 2013), but more extensive research described protestors coming from different groups and communities (Kuymulu, 2013; Karakayali & Yaka, 2014; Abbas & Yigit, 2015; Suner, 2017). As Kuymulu (2013) shows, the specific anxieties caused by the repressive and authoritarian government, brought together a whole body of different interest groups, including environmentalists, yuppies, vegans and vegetarians, youth, LGBTI+, anti-capitalist Muslims, the hyper-secular nationalists, Kurds and Alevis. Abbas and Yiğit (2015) also addressed the multiplicity of groups that protested in the Gezi Park with little prior affiliation in the history of Turkey, from Kemalists (that aimed to protect the

Atatürk's way) to Kurds (that intended to protest the Turkish state, including the AKP), as the events created a national swell of sympathy and ownership.

However, 'with an exception of a few examples, the literature on the Gezi hardly discusses the political significance of Gezi's practices and its festive and commune-like character that constituted and sustained the occupation of the park' (Çıdam, 2017: 378). The practices from previous social movements and political geographies helped the formation and consolidation of the Gezi such as 'the struggle to keep the Emek movie theatre' (2010-2015), which relied on activists/audiences' DIY media activities in protest spaces (Özdüzen, 2018: 1043) or the political mobilisation of the football fan group çArşı that brought together community activism with neighborhood-based rhythms and rituals, generating a new urban sociability (Eder & Öz, 2017: 58). Similarly, the Gezi left its own remark on the spatial practices of consecutive social movements in the post-Occupy era. Erensü and Karaman (2017, 13-22) examine how 'the Gezi enabled new political imaginaries that connected various political and grassroots mobilisations across the urban–rural continuum' by for instance concentrating on struggles against HES (small hydro) projects that turned valleys into construction sites as the AKP launched aggressive HES programmes'. Furthermore, Akçalı's research (2018: 7), which rests on her participation in park forums in Abbasağa, Yoğurtçu, Cihangir and Maçka between July 2013 and August 2014 shows how the park forums helped nourish a pluralistic ethos in society and provided safe ground where disagreements could be peacefully negotiated but 'the unproblematised class divide between participants and organisers and the different degrees to which they were affected by existing socio-economic exploitation and impoverishment hindered genuine practices of agonistic politics and the formation of radical political alternatives (Akçalı, 2018: 14). This study captures ongoing conversations in the aftermath of 2014, focusing on how self-identified 'children of Gezi' continuously tested Gezi's tactics and strategies and aimed to respond authoritarian policies by using parks as operational grounds and spaces for visibility even if they have not yet formed radical political alternatives.

3.Methodology

This research relies on a place-based ethnography where spaces become objects of ethnographic inquiry, looking into the social construction of space and place-making. A contemporary ethnography of space, according to Low (2017: 6), is process-

oriented; person, object and community-based; and allows for multiple forms of agency and political possibilities. It explores 'the spatial contexts of the research encounter in everyday places such as homes or living environments (Porter et al., 2010) and less familiar environments such as protest sites (Anderson, 2004)' (Holton & Riley, 2014: 59). Holton and Riley (2014) examine student geographies in England, by using a place-based ethnographic interviewing with students when they are on the move between different student places. Following Marcus (1995), this study is based on a multi-site ethnography, which examines practices of people in motion across locations. While my ethnography was park-based, I moved between parks and smaller in-door places of activism.

My early observations and access to activist networks owe back to my initial ethnographic research for my doctoral thesis prior to, during and right after the Gezi in 2013 and 2014, which captured cultural activism in the spaces of Gezi and in other creative spaces that 'mimicked the Gezi experience'. My ethnographic observations for this research commenced in 2015, followed by my ethnographic interviews and participant observation during the Gezi commemorations, Gezi-related events and demonstrations at the parks in 2016 and 2017 and my participation in some of the Yeryüzü Sofraları (Earth Tables) in May-June 2016 and May-August 2017 to trace in what ways Gezi's communities, strategies and methods in key spaces persisted. While my initial research participants provided access to other members of activist communities through personal recommendation, I also used snowballing method to recruit key activists following the Gezi, which implies that newer contacts helped me reach other activists. With my place-based ethnographic in-depth interviews in 2016 and 2017, I reached out leading activists and key members of civil societies that have been the symbols of the Gezi, remaining active about Gezi-related activities and protests at the parks and independent spaces whilst retaining most of their focus on urban issues. While my field notes during and after my visits to parks enabled recording of everyday activism in protest spaces, in-depth interviews with 31 key activists, whose ages ranged from 23 to 66, opened a space to draw out their sentiments and thoughts about spatial activism in the post-Occupy period until 2017. I chose the research participants based on their use of parks and public spaces with organisations related to urban issues and my general aim was to select the most active participants.

While some of the interviews took place at parks, for security purposes following the failed coup in 2016, I conducted some other interviews in community centres, union offices and local district branches of political parties such as the HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - People's Democratic Party) office in Beyoğlu. In Istanbul, 'Gezi protestors hailed from neighbourhoods dominated by high-income earning secular Turks (Etiler, Nişantaşı, and Bebek) as well as from largely low-income earning worker areas (Gaziosmanpaşa and Ümraniye), radicalised left-wing Alevi areas (1 Mayıs Mahallesi, Gazi, Okmeydanı, and Alibeyköy), and predominantly middle-class ones (Beşiktaş and Kadıköy)' (Goksel & Tekdemir, 2018: 383). Although majority of the protests that constitute the axis of this research, except for Earth Tables, could not reach out blue collar working-class people living in the extensions of Istanbul, the post-Gezi activists differed in age, ethnic and socio-economic background. The common political identification of my informants was HDP, the pro-Kurdish party, not necessarily because they were Kurdish but because of their belief in equality and freedom for everyone. Some of my informants also had organic ties to progressive communities within the CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - Republican People's Party).

During my field visits to Gezi Park (Beyoğlu), Abbasağa Park (Beşiktaş), Yoğurtçu Park (Kadıköy), Maçka Democracy Park (Şişli), Özgürlük Park (Göztepe/Kadıköy) and Validebağ Woods (Üsküdar), I had fieldwork interactions with self-identified children of the Gezi, including Yoğurtçu Kadın Forumu (Yoğurtçu Women's Forum), Göztepe Forum, Kadıköy Kooperatifi (Kadıköy Cooperative), Kuzey Ormanları Savunması (Northern Forests Defense) and Don Kişot İşgal Evi (Don Quixote Squat) as well as the Validebağ Savunması (Validebağ Defense), Anti-capitalist Muslims and TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects). The first four organisations respectively were formed during and following the Gezi whereas the Validebağ Defense, the Anti-capitalist Muslims and the TMMOB commenced prior to the protests. Along with the LGBTI+ communities, Anti-capitalist Muslims and TMMOB became the main symbols of the Gezi and continued to use its strategies and spaces, while Validebağ Resistance was referred to as the 'small Gezi' in 2014, constituting the largest urban resistance following the Gezi. This research, however, does not capture LGBTI+ communities' activism in the aftermath of the Gezi protests and retains focus on the experiences of urban collectives and self-identified 'Children of the Gezi'. Throughout my

fieldwork, I asked interviewees to speak about their role and nature of involvement in local park activism and to reflect on a series of themes such as relations between space and activism, participation and democracy, interpretations of the limits of park activism, particularly with regards to increasing levels of state violence.

Figure 1. Taksim Gezi Park, Beyoğlu Sineması (Movie Theatre) and the Taksim Square (Map data ©2018 Google).

Figure 2. Maçka Democracy Park and Abbasağa Park in Beşiktaş and Şişli (Map data ©2018 Google).
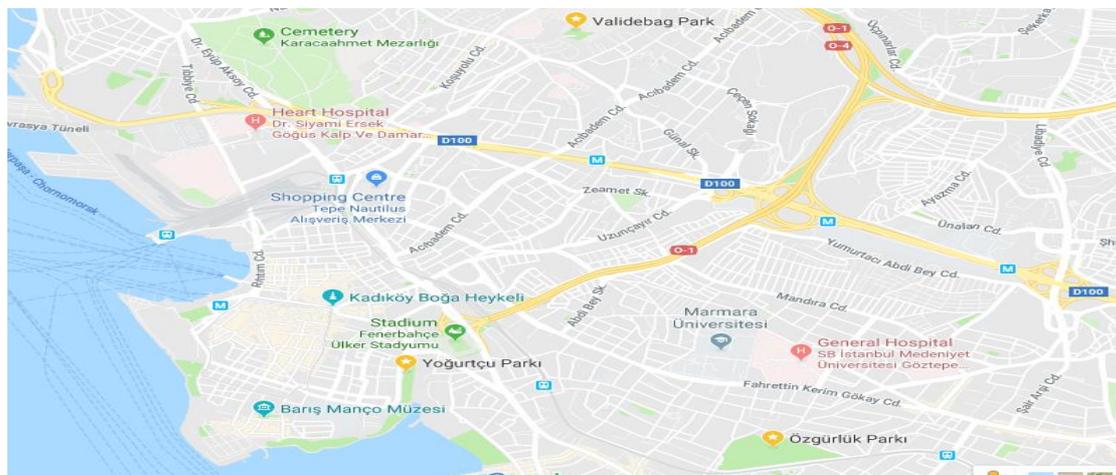

Figure 3. Yoğurtçu Park, Validebağ Park (Woods) and Özgürlük Park (Map data ©2018 Google).

4.Turkey's Authoritarian Urban Culture and Politics

Turkey moved to authoritarianism shortly after the Gezi, which is defined as 'competitive or neo-authoritarianism' (Akçalı & Korkut, 2015; Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016). AKP embraces the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which has been the main characteristic of right-wing parties in Turkey since the 1980s. 'AKP's pragmatic and populist use of motives from within Turkish nationalism and Islamic culture as its foreign and economic policies, such as its pro-EU foreign policy and neo-liberal economic initiatives (anti-protectionist and globalist), account for its neo-liberal and Islamist agenda (Coşar et al., 2012: 89). Islamist neo-liberalism in Turkey started during Özal's period, after the coup d'etat in 1980, later benefiting from the local governments of the RP (Refah Partisi - Welfare Party) after 1994. RP was the first party to adopt political Islam as its direct goal, which was an outcome of the military coup and the neoliberal economic policies of Özal's era since the mid-1980s that relied on privatisation of all sectors. The key members of the AKP such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül were members of RP in the 1990s.

Under Erdoğan's AKP government (2002-…), economic policies also became increasingly neoliberal, leading to further consolidation of this mode of capital accumulation (Tanyılmaz, 2015: 111). AKP adhered to the IMF-supervised crisis management programme and continued this trend in its later periods. Currently, Turkey is undergoing a severe economic crisis in 2018, following a currency crisis fueled by the collapse in Turkish lira. Rather than taking responsibility, AKP relates this to the conspirations of dış mihraklar (external forces) that aim to weaken Turkey and the support for Erdoğan. Bozkurt-Güngen (2018: 1) 'challenges the claim that an authoritarian turn emerged only after the early 2010s and argues that a deeper authoritarianism was embedded in the neoliberal experience in Turkey that facilitated the expansion of the authoritarian repertoire under the AKP governments. Bozkurt-Güngen (2018: 15) calls this 'embedded authoritarianism that limits popular democratic empowerment and was followed by a shift in the predominant authoritarian technique from a rule-based/technocratic strategy to a more discretionary one in the 2010s. After the November 2015 elections, AKP bolstered it with overt coercion against oppositional social forces'.

Furthermore, 'the AKP governments distribute patronage through privatisation and redistribution of rents within the upper income brackets, bringing the "periphery", its conservative, nationalist and non-affluent supporters, to the "centre" and elevating them to a new bourgeoisie, which help them gain the loyalty of conservative and

religious voters. They also punish businesses that are critical of their rule' (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018: 8). Yilmaz and Bashirov (2018: 2) identify the emergent political regime in Turkey as Erdoganism, which has four main dimensions: electoral authoritarianism as the electoral system, neopatrimonialism as the economic system, populism as the political strategy and Islamism as the political ideology. Today, the AKP transforms the constitution and executes the presidential system whilst the culture of Sunni Islam extends via censorship, the construction of mosques, new education system, more references to the Quran in daily speech and increasing practice of sex segregation in daily life, together with the consolidation of a neo-liberal culture by for instance shopping-mallisation (Özdüzen, 2018: 1030-1031). The coup attempt, according to Lüküslü (2016: 638-645) mark a new phase in the imposition of a new form of Turkishness, an Islamised version of national identity, and the creation of pious generations with implications of reframing the Kemalist youth myth into an Islamic conservative one.

AKP also initiated a construction-based growth model beginning in 2002 (Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, 2014: 141) as 'neoliberal urban policies are used to legitimise the enhancement of authoritarian governance and governments use urban areas not only as a growth machine but also as grounds for a socio-political transformation project' (Eraydin & Tasan-Kok, 2014: 111). During the late AKP period, construction-sector led policies and projects spread to vast and widespread areas with aggressive projects such as 'mega projects' or hydroelectric power plants (Alkan, 2015, p. 850). AKP use an authoritarian understanding of urban renewal in various parts of Turkey by building hydropower plants in the culturally and spatially specific context of the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey (Yaka, 2017) or by 'regenerating' Kurdish neighborhoods such as Sur in Diyarbakır following an intense military operation and police campaign that severely destroyed the district (Turem, 2017: 40). The bulldozer neo-liberalism (Lovering & Türkmen, 2011) in Istanbul operated all around the city, from the peripheries to the centre, in order to transform it not only as a centre of commerce, tourism and business, but also to show that it symbolises a brand-new era/regime. Today, the AKP also aims to Islamise Istanbul, which implies the increasing penetration of mosques, the boom of neo-Ottoman style and decreasing numbers of alternative spaces for any other cultural, religious and ethnic groups, apart from the majority Sunni Turks.

5.Post-Gezi spaces countering-the growing authoritarian urbanism

As with the Gezi's main motivation to go against the neo-liberal and authoritarian policies of AKP by using the Gezi Park and other parks across Turkey, the ongoing spatial struggles aimed to challenge multiple aspects of authoritarian urban politics by instigating spatial strategies of urban resistance. Cities not only play a central role within the development of counter-austerity politics (Peck, 2012) in Greece or Spain, but they also assume fundamental roles in challenging Islamist neo-liberal ideologies in Turkey. In her activist ethnographic research with 'bottom-up' democratic politics in the post-Syntagma occupation period in Athens of crisis, Arampatzi (2017: 2158) shows the ways localised initiatives and solidarity structures are formed, countering the effects of austerity on the social reproduction of urban populations, through everyday practices of mutual aid and solidarity-making in neighbourhoods. In the case of Occupy London's two protest camps, as studied by Halvorsen (2015: 401-402), 'the taking of space was the defining act, having become a central feature of diverse uprisings around the world recently, from Taksim Square to Puerta, which involves a tension between moments of rupture, lived spacetimes of intensity that provide an opening to new possibilities'.

Growing literature on the post-Occupy situation questions the tactics and legitimacy of the Occupy, whilst challenging the theoretical and practical validity of existing paradigms to throw light on the emerging social movements (Mayer, 2013, Chou, 2015; Lam, 2015; Arampatzi, 2017). Chou (2015: 46) conceptualises the post-Occupy condition as 'a passage from crisis to crisis' in that the Occupy Movement also embroiled in its own democratic crisis. As an instance of this, Lam (2015: 118-119) studies Hong-Kong's post-Occupy situation in which the prospect of consolidating a democratic model has been remote and the legitimacy problem of the government has further extended amidst divisions within the society as the movement did not result in consensus. Mayer's (2013: 5-6) research on urban activism in the global North following the Occupy, points out that much of the conceptual and theoretical framework traditionally used for understanding the dynamics and potential of urban activism is not helpful in highlighting the reconfiguration of the relations between social movements and local states: what used to be an antagonistic relationship transformed into a more cooperative one, as newly installed innovative urban revitalisation programmes encouraged movement organisations to move 'from

protest to program'. Although 'the protest to program' (Mayer' 2013) has not been feasible in Turkey, the post-Gezi spatial activism transformed from 'crisis to crisis' (Chou, 2015). In especially activists' collaboration with local initiatives, unions and their formation of neighbourhood initiatives in a passage to crisis, this research delineates the tactics and strategies that cope with Turkish state while also questioning the organisation of networks and the shortcomings of the existing practices.

In the same manner with the Gezi experience, the first year of the Gezi anniversaries in 2014 was marked by the multiplicity of intersectional alliances such as those between environmental organisations, political parties and anti-capitalist groups. Likewise, the common slogans in 2014 were 'Thief, Murderer AKP' and 'This is only beginning, we will keep on fighting', which were two trademark slogans of the Gezi. The traditional characteristic of the Gezi commemorations such as the street march and demonstrations took place on the Taksim Square and the Istiklal Street whilst the cultural component of the commemorations such as the Gezi festival and symbolic forums occurred at the Abbasağa Park, Yoğurtçu Park and Don Quiote Squat. Beyza Üstün (Academics For Peace, ecology platforms, HDP & No! Platforms), whom actively used the parks following the Gezi as an environmentalist and academic activist, defined the vitality of the Abbasağa Park and other parks for activist communities and the public:

> Parks are spaces where people rest, run, meet, chat, wait, think and sleep. They are places where homeless people find shelter and animals walk freely. That's why we wanted to keep them via actively using them after the Gezi by organising 'Street Academies' in the face of the totalitarianism of universities and No Platforms! against Erdoğan's presidency campaign.

A consistent theme that my informants alluded to was the idea that parks retained their characteristic as the centre of everyday social activities whilst also transforming into the nexus of political action following the protests. The government declared a State of Emergency for three months immediately following the attempted coup on the 15th of July in 2016 and has renewed it ever since. This enables the AKP to legislate using decree laws that do not require parliament to grant approval. Following the coup attempt, state authorities have targeted 7,429 academic and administrative personnel for dismissal through emergency decrees. Since 'the Academics for Peace' signed the petition "We will not be a party to this crime!" in January 2016, some of the signatories were fired from their jobs, some of their passports were cancelled, they

were prevented from finding jobs, some of them were taken into custody or imprisoned and they currently face individualised court. Despite this coercion, some members of this community formed Street Academies in parks to actively use public spaces with an aim to continue teaching, create visibility, reach out to public and most importantly, claim their right to spaces and education.

My research participants were preoccupied with the use of public and semi-public spaces in alternative and creative ways against the homogenising efforts of the government, such as the foundation of Street Academies and organisation of public lectures in parks against the regime's increasing assaults on journalists, intellectuals, civil society members and especially academics. The park lectures brought together academics, members of progressive unions, students, architects, urban planners, journalists and independent activists. On the other hand, some of these academics, like Beyza Üstün were already part of wider political parties like the HDP and ecology movement. Also, Beyza Üstün was involved in the 'No' camp that was composed of various grassroots organisations from women's movements to Don't Touch My School! initiatives, from unions to political parties including CHP and HDP. Parks and other inner spaces such as wedding halls enabled activists' engagement in practical local no campaigns against AKP in 2017. 'Despite the government's unfair advantages and its alliance with the MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – Nationalist Movement Party), the 'Yes' side prevailed by only a small margin in June 2017, denying Erdoğan the sweeping endorsement he expected' (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017: 303).

Mücella Yapıcı (TMMOB, No! Platforms and women's movements) was active in the organisation of the annual events on the anniversary dates of the Gezi, participated in Gezi-related activities whilst also actively using the rest of the remaining alternative spaces in Istanbul, hence contributing to the formation of new identity places:

> What we do is to use the parks and other public spaces against the violence of the Islamising and privatising state. They want us to spend time at shopping malls when sending our children to religious vocational schools, but we need to get together using our existing urban commons. I go to parks, Beyoğlu Movie Theatre (BMT) and other public spaces to just use them against their ideology.

TMMOB became the voice of those who oppose the commodification of urban land, especially in the built-up areas that formerly belonged to the public, and the loss of urban values and assets (Eraydin & Tasan-Kok, 2014: 120). As the head of

environmental issues research center in TMMOB and spokesperson of the Taksim Solidarity Network, Mücella Yapıcı became one of the most important voices of park forums and Gezi-related demonstrations during and following the movement. Because of her practical work in the parks and the union prior to and during the uprising, she was taken into custody along with her daughter and other members of the Taksim Solidarity Network. I accessed her through activist circles within urban planners which are quite politically active in Turkey and interviewed her in May 2017. On the day, she was preoccupied with another demolition of a residential historical building in Beyoglu and was seeking help from other organisations and unions, which shows her everyday struggle against neo-liberal urban politics of the AKP. To create networks of solidarity, she has also been at the forefront of park activism. Urban commons in the 2010s became symbols of public imagination and solidarity whilst shaping activists' political action and their sentiments, culminating in the Gezi. Urban commons involve "being-in-common" or using resources in shared and non-subtractable ways through "commoning" practices. (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011: 42). Chatterton (2010) defines the act of commoning as a means to promote stronger spatial justice in the city, identifying three ways in which to understand the potential of the urban common; to see the whole city as a common and a site for resistance; to decommodify urban life and culture and to try to build the urban commons by introducing new political imaginaries through struggles in the city. Seen in this light, the commoning of the city can mean both concrete actions in and alternative imaginations of urban space (Lundman, 2018: 4). Following the Gezi, activists continued commoning parks, movie theatres and other public spaces like Kamp Armen, an Armenian orphanage in Istanbul that was home to an act of commoning for 175 days in 2015 following plans of demolition.

       As part of their desire of commoning the city, activists campaigned about the potential demise of the BMT in the summer of 2017, which has been active since 1989 and is one of the remaining independent spaces in Beyoğlu. The campaign was not leaderless as one of the new managers of BMT, Cem Altınsaray, acted almost like the leader of the movement in mobilising people on online and offline platforms. Although the movement had a leader figure whereby the activists referred to in their actions, the grassroots communities equally referred to the Gezi and park activism to express their reasons of participation in the movement related to this urban common.

Can, whom I spoke at the desk to sell BMT loyalty cards in front of the movie theatre in June 2017, said:

> On my first year as an undergraduate student, the Gezi broke out and I became a part of it. I started to get to know Istiklal Street then learnt how I could stand with people that I didn't previously know and how total strangers could behave nicely and sympathetic to each other. The next struggle that I sympathised with was the struggle to keep the BMT. There is a beautiful sprit here at the movie theatre, we stand together voluntarily to sell cards. It all started through Cem's tweet, but the real change can only happen if people use BMT and buy its loyalty card.

Although an important channel for their mobilisation was social media, activists' offline presence in the BMT sparked more visibility and generated financial support for keeping the movie theatre. The collective imaginations of activists took the Gezi as a reference point in keeping public spaces from privatisation and/or gentrification. They created 'a space of hope' from an independent movie theatre on decay. In their descriptions of the small initiative to keep the BMT, activists used words like joyful and beautiful during my visits to this field site. The concept of 'politics of emotions' (see Lutz & Abu Lughod et al., 1990; Zembylas, 2010) deals with various ways in which emotions are individual as well as political and are formed in social, political, and cultural spaces. The joyful and beautiful feelings unfolded through activists' political interaction with and communal place-making practices on commons such as the BMT. Activists protected the BMT as it is in 2017, but it still faces severe financial problems. Although their activities on BMT were not related to the parks per se, activists' use of alternative place-making tactics such as actively using the venue itself and engagement in crowdfunding and creative mobilisation were inherited from the Gezi.

In parks and other symbolic public spaces across Istanbul like movie theatres, activists used conventional ways of protesting such as press releases and marches but they also organised art events and parties in relation to perceived political and cultural problems. In their weekly park meetings since the Gezi, Yoğurtçu Women's Forum activated the Yoğurtçu Park to plan their activities, organise events, create visibility in public spaces and reach out other women passing by. Yoğurtçu Women's Forum was formed out of the call of the Istanbul Feminist Collective on social media during the Gezi. A diversity of women coming from different feminist communities first met on the 26th of June 2013 at Yoğurtçu Park and formed Yoğurtçu Women's Forum when the Gezi Park was active. Since then, they have been an independent initiative which

has collaborated with other women's groups, local initiatives, political parties and other solidarity networks. Selin Top from Yoğurtçu Women's Forum explains:

> Other than traditional demonstrations, we organised women-only parties and festivals in the parks. We also initiated panels on feminist psychology, produced graffiti on the walls of the streets and the parks in Kadıköy. While we used our forums to organise against increasing numbers of women being killed, we also coalesced with other groups to support the Justice and Conscience Watches by HDP taking place at Yoğurtçu Park to promote peace and create newer alliances.

Brown and Pickerill (2009: 28) show that expressing opposition through performance (for example dancing in costume during protests) enables activists to intensely feel and express their protest, perhaps more powerfully than through instrumental mobilisations (such as more formal street march with placards). While instrumental organisation still constituted an important feature of political action in the 2010s, local initiatives, urban collectives, feminist and LGBTI+ communities were involved in cultural forms of spatial activism, for instance throwing parties in political parks or keeping 'watches' with their own bodies, which implies that activists used less instrumentalised forms of political action even in their alliances with conventional political parties. This way, they kept their public spaces from the invasion of the government, felt the spirit and emotions of the Gezi such as 'joyfulness' and 'togetherness' in its symbolic spaces, connected with non-activists around the park, which has blurred the boundaries between activists and non-activists. A lot of women that were only passing by the park, got involved in the Yoğurtçu Women's Platform's activities, which fostered visibility and prospects for a common political opening. I should note that this platform was born when 'the feminist movement became more visible and active in the 2010s, reaching a new level especially after Erdoğan declared that abortion is murder in May 2012, leading feminists to adopt the slogan, "Keep your hands off my body". A year later, the same slogan was re-appropriated by a diverse group of people who came together under the banner of "Keep your hands off my city" to protest Emek's destruction, signalling the importance of establishing commonalities between different struggles through speech practices. After the Gezi, what brought all groups together were parks and spatial activism, so there was a passage from speech to place-making practices' (Cidam, 2017: 385). In this period, feminist collectives such as Yoğurtçu Women's Platform formed out of place-making

practices as they claimed their right to parks and other public spaces with their presence and bodies.

While grassroots organisations used various spatial tactics to protect their public spaces and create alliances in political parks, the Göztepe Forum and forums in Abbasağa Park organised against Islamisation of the city and education system by establishing demos and forums and forming a collective namely Okuluma Dokunma! (Don't Touch My School!). Mainly using 'occupation' as a method and keeping watches against the construction of mosques in green areas, Eymen Demircan talked about the most important actions the Göztepe Forum at Özgürlük Park took following the protests:

> I went to the Yoğurtçu Park immediately after police raided Gezi Park, but shortly after I went to the park in my neighbourhood, the Özgürlük Park in Göztepe, and organised with my local communities. We did not know each other, belonged to different ideological backgrounds, generations and sexual orientations. There were people from Kurdish political movements, Kemalist aunts and uncles, youth and elderly people. It was like a commune experience. We organised forums to solve our problems in the neighbourhood but we were not nostalgic about the Gezi. We organised against the transformation of Tuğlacıbaşı Mosque into an Islamic-Ottoman social complex along with it the formation of Quran courses for kids. We delayed it for three years with our events and demonstrations. There was also a public land of provincial directorate of agriculture in Caddebostan, we occupied this place for a while and prevented its privatisation. Furthermore, we organised against the transformation of the Yeşilbahar Primary School into an imam hatip high school (religious vocational school) along with the parents by using the forum structure. We named the initiative 'Don't Touch My School' and protected it with our months of struggle.

One of the most important achievements of the Göztepe Park Forum, as exemplified by Eymen, was activists' coalescing with parents and older residents, which led to the vernacularisation in the social movement as well as the formation of horizontal and vertical alliances. This resonates with Arampatzi's research (2017: 2162) with the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia in Athens. These place-based solidarities were constructed through struggle and managed to generate 'new ways of relating to others', especially for people not previously involved in political activism. In their research on women's rights in Peru, China, India and USA, Levitt and Merry (2009: 446) define vernacularisation as a process of appropriation and local adoption, arguing that by connecting with a locality, women's human rights ideas take on some of the ideological and social attributes of the place, but also retain some of their original formulation. Older people who voted for the CHP mobilised for the first time

on the streets and created vertical alliances with some Kurdish youth to go against the Islamisation of the education together with the neo-liberalisation of urban space. While the formation of Don't Touch My School! initiatives owes back to the late 2000s, they culminated in the aftermath of the 2012 elections as a response to the radical changes in the education system. Between 2010–2011 and 2014 school years, 'when AKP focused on symbolic grand projects and ideological policy change that have normalised Islamic norms and rewritten Turkey's national identity, the ratio of vocational and technical high schools increased by 23% and religious vocational schools increased by 73%. Parents, seeking a non-religious education, had significantly reduced choices, sometimes being forced into sending their children to religious schools despite their will' (Lüküslü, 2016: 641-643). Prior to the Gezi, various Don't Touch My School! initiatives met in front of the buildings of the provincial directorate of national education or squares. Following the Gezi, however, the main location for these initiatives has been the parks, such as the regular meetings at Göztepe Özgürlük Park to prevent Yeşilbahar Primary School's transformation into a religious vocational school. In this movement, the centrality of discourses in protests related to the education system such as slogan-making was replaced by place-making practices such as occupations and political forums in parks.

The Validebağ Woods also became one of the 'political parks' or 'spaces of hope', whereby activists used and tested Gezi's strategies. The local community around the Validebağ Woods aimed to counter the governments' intentions to transform parts of it into commercial spaces for years since the activities of Validebağ Volunteers began in 1995. Their smaller movements turned into a bigger social movement with the participation of wider public when AKP government coveted some parts of this space to transform into a mosque right after the Gezi in 2014. Although the mosque was built in the woods in 2015, activists questioned conventional party politics and propagandist attitudes of traditional leftist parties within the wider movement that is commonly known as 'Validebağ Resistance'. Arif Belgin, as an active member of the movement, articulated such tendencies within the Validebağ Volunteers that led to what is also known as 'the small Gezi resistance' in 2014:

> The Validebağ Volunteers is an independent initiative, there is no reason for propaganda amongst us. We would organise within political parties if we want to, we all have that kind of consciousness, but we want to remain independent.

Of course, we have politically organised people in our community, but they work independently at the parks and forests. We do not want to spend time on consensus-building between groups from different political traditions. This way, we can take practical political action and protect Validebağ Woods against the government's plans to construct a mosque and commercial enterprises.

Evident here is a tension between 'ecologic' or 'local' initiatives and more conventional leftist political parties in a period when there is a passage from 'speech to place-making practices' (Cidam, 2017), which constitutes the defining features of the post-Occupy movements. Following the Gezi, conventional leftist parties like the TKP (Communist Party of Turkey) intended to discursively dominate the park forums. Concurrent with fighting against the neo-liberal and Islamist ideologies in the ground, activist communities also resisted the hegemonic tendencies of some leftist parties. My informants problematised the interventions of traditional leftist parties on their independent and DIY events in the parks, which might have prevented their aims to create an efficient 'programme' to counter the top-down urban interventions whilst hindering the 'participatory' aspects of their social movements. This points to a 'resistance within resistance' and was a sentiment that was shared across many of my informants following the Gezi as the newly formed coalitions at the Gezi Park and other parks were less hierarchical, more heterogeneous and more practical compared to conventional political organisations in Turkey.

During and following the Gezi, a lot of newer platforms were formed, which continued to use more participatory tactics and were concerned with urban regeneration and the destruction of ecology. Northern Forests Defense was one of the biggest and most influential of these newly formed groups. It was established during the Gezi on the 7th of July 2013 to go against 'the creative destruction' of the power-holders such as the constructions of the 3rd Bridge, 3rd Airport and Istanbul Canal, to protect life spaces and bring together those who fight for ecology and rights. From their beginnings to the present day, the Northern Forests Defense used the forum structure and parks in their organisation. In their initial days during and right after the Gezi, this initiative used the Gezi Park as its spatial base for their weekly Friday forums. As the police forces heavily raided the Gezi Park, the collective started to use other parks to gather together, use and test Gezi's strategies and enable wider participation. Creative practice such as the use of animal masks during

demonstrations was woven through their campaigns such as their ongoing organisation against nuclear power plants.

The Northern Forests Defense took the most important decisions with the help of the forums in the parks. Towards the end of 2014, they moved into their own office in Beyoğlu but they have continued to use parks and woods for forums and camping. Despite all efforts of the Northern Forests, however, the 3rd Bridge and 3rd Airport construction had gone ahead, destroying the only remaining green space in Istanbul, namely The Northern Forests. Deniz from Northern Forests Defense problematised some aspects of the participatory dynamics within political parks and woods in the post-Occupy era:

> While our forum structure gives voice to everyone involved in the organisation, it sometimes leads to taking wrong decisions due to the cacophony of voices. For instance, when ten workers were killed at the Torunlar Center's construction site in Istanbul after an elevator carrying them plunged to the ground in 2014, we went there following an emergency forum at the Belgrade Forests (we were supposed to camp there). We were exposed to so much gas and violence that halted our actions for a while because our members were hospitalised and taken into custody.

Following the Gezi, the structure and operation of their ecological network transformed from one issue to multi-issue actions, including labour, work safety and right to the city. In relation to the participatory aspect of the new social movements, Smith and Glidden (2012: 289-290) describe the participatory dynamics of the Occupy as 'tyranny of the structureless'. While these practices created alliances, Smith and Glidden's research with Occupy Pittsburgh shows that the attention and energy focusing on consensus processes can detract from the work of movement-building. These dynamics might lead to slow decision-making and planning actions with insufficient advance time, complicate receiving support from potential allies and obstruct a discussion of larger strategies as much time is spent on consensus-building among activists who do not share the same strategic goals' (Smith & Glidden, 2012: 289-290). Chou (2015: 47), similarly, argue that 'horizontal and participatory as procedures were, certain individuals and factions nevertheless found themselves alienated, voiceless or left behind'. From a parallel perspective, newer alliances in the parks spent more time on negotiation and consensus-building, which, as it was in the case of the action at the Torunlar Center, might lead to wrong decision-making processes and impede some aspects of the movement-building.

Even after the failed coup in 2016, parks were still the main avenues for contentious political action. In the summer of 2017, the Justice Watches (Adalet Nöbetleri) and Conscience and Justice Watches (Vicdan ve Adalet Nöbetleri) were initiated by two main opposition parties in the parliament, CHP and HDP respectively, to go against the arbitrary detentions of senators, lift the state of emergency and help release two hunger strikers. The march, rally and watches were the most substantial signs of opposition to escalating authoritarianism following the coup. The Justice Watches started in Ankara and ended in Istanbul, but the Maçka Park became the nexus of these watches in Istanbul during the ongoing walk of the CHP senators along with the public from Ankara to Istanbul. While the Maçka Park continued to be a more-or-less 'free' and 'safe' space for CHP's Justice Watches, which created a swell of public sympathy across Turkey, the Yoğurtçu Park was under police blockage during the Conscience and Justice Watches, organised by the pro-Kurdish party HDP. During the 'Justice Watches' of CHP, there were a lot of political events at Maçka Park, from concerts such as the concert of Ataşehir Youth Choir, to screenings of films, from demonstrations to the organisation of Earth Tables. The use of parks in creative and political ways owes back to the Gezi and activists referred to the Gezi in their talks during the park watches. One of the common slogans in the park was 'we are no longer inside our houses, we are on streets to defend and promote justice!', which was directly related to the re-use of the DIY activist spaces. As the buzzword for this movement was 'justice for all', lawyers were at the forefront of the movement. Accordingly, one of the most important marches during this movement took place from the Istanbul Çağlayan Justice Palace to the Maçka Park where lawyers walked with their traditional court dresses in the support of the public. Unions such as DISK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey), Gezi-related groups like Birleşik Haziran Hareketi (United June Movement), or left-wing smaller parties and initiatives ÖDP (Freedom and Solidarity Party) and Halkevleri (Public Houses) also took turns in the watches, which accounts for the vernacularisation through political parks.

Moreover, the 'creativity' behind the Justice Watches was a new addition to conventional mainstream political parties, especially concerning the CHP's party politics, as they have long been status-quoist and statist. 'CHP was perceived to be an advocate of "opposition for the sake of opposition" and not producing credible alternatives to AKP. For instance, they had long blocked potential solutions for the

issue of the headscarf and during the 2004 negotiations of the Cyprus problem, CHP policies aimed to maintain the status quo on the island. Their portrayal of major areas of public policy in black and white ultimately served to polarise political opinion, contributing to a lack of democratic consolidation' (Ciddi & Esen, 2014: 420). Seen in this light, the Justice Watches that involved a multiplicity of participating organisations and wider population whilst relying on the use of sports, body performance and arts in the parks, took its basis from Gezi and instigated alternative possibilities for the future of oppositional party politics. Hunger strikers, however, were never reinstated back to their teaching jobs despite efforts of Justice Watches and Conscience and Justice Watches.

The Earth Tables have not only been a part of Justice Watches with their place-making practices, but they have also been one of the most effective ways of actively using parks and squares. The anti-capitalist Muslims organised these Iftar protests that constituted of 'ground-dining' on the streets with chicken and rice, chips, salad, dates, olives, baklava, cookies and meatballs. Practicing Muslims and non-religious communities have participated in the protests but the noteworthy interest of the latter group unfolded on the first Iftar protest during the Gezi on the 9th of July 2013 by Taksim Square. Approximately 15.000 protestors sat and ate on the ground while collectively expressing their disapproval of the AKP. Earth Tables also functioned almost like food cooperatives as they also offer food to help people with a range of social problems including debt, housing or break-up. When I visited their cultural center in Fatih, they hosted homeless people as well as their members in need. This space was the center for their meetings but Earth Tables also widely socialised and politicised in parks and streets. İhsan R. Eliaçık (anti-capitalist Muslims) said:

> The Gezi Spirit changed our practices, especially in terms of questioning existing hierarchies in society and within our communities. Following the Gezi, we used parks, streets and squares as well as our own community centre for organising Earth Tables. We use public spaces to form communities and our centre to feed and host those who are in need. We also employ these spaces to create an alternative everyday life against capitalism. Through our Iftars and events at the parks and streets, we also build alliances with other communities in and across Turkey, for instance the Alevi foundations in Germany.

While Earth Tables against capitalism that constituted of fasting on the floors in front of five-star hotels as a way of protesting the logic of Islamism and capitalism started

in the summer of 2011, the anti-capitalist Muslims formed alliances with a variety of political and cultural groups and received wider participation and recognition during and following the Gezi. In addition to Earth Tables, the anti-capitalist Muslims were at the forefront of other public demonstrations in and beyond the parks in Istanbul such as the banned 1st of May protests in Beyoğlu prior to and following the Gezi. Partly different from other political communities that I interacted with, the anti-capitalist Muslims appropriated not only the parks in the popular centers of Istanbul, like the Abbasağa Park, but also used the parks around more conservative centres like the Fatih Saraçhane Park. This way, they were able to form vernacular encounters with the conservative populace of Istanbul. These social movements have also created solidarity economies as a strategic alternative to austerity (Arampatzi, 2017: 2064) or neo-liberalisation of religious practices such as the regime's organisation of Iftar meals in five-star hotels. The cross-fertilisation with Alevis was also an important dynamic of anti-capitalist Muslims, which is not a common practice amongst Sunni-Muslim groups in Turkey and it thus points to another form of vernacularisation amongst 'the Children of Gezi' with the help of 'spaces of hope'. Recently, the anti-capitalist Muslims' leader İhsan R. Eliaçık, however, was sentenced to six years in prison in March 2018 and was banned from leaving Istanbul during the appeals period.

6. Conclusions for New Directions in the Post-Occupy Period

At first glance, the only remaining mobilisation might be seen as political rallies in this authoritarian context, but this paper aims to show that spatial forms of activism are still ongoing in Turkey, even if they are smaller in scope and their achievements are not in abundance in an authoritarian environment of violence and fear. Although the post-Gezi period also points to an increasing density of competitive or neo-authoritarianism in Turkey, this research goes against the previous scholarly work on social movement research that sees no opportunity for mobilisation in authoritarian regimes (Foweraker, 1995; Hinnebusch: 2006), by accounting for movement-making in authoritarian contexts. To provide empirical evidence to this claim, this paper brings together glimpses of how self-identified 'Gezi's children' use spatial tactics to fight against Islamist neo-liberalism in the ground from mega-urban regeneration plans to the transformation of the education system. Offering a hint of the emerging forms of political voice and activism in the post-Occupy Turkey, this article sets out

newer forms of spatial engagement within social movements. It aims to show the ways in which activists do not coalesce officially in new social movements but through meetings/encounters in space by making tactical use of certain programmes of creative action and establishing vernacular encounters with new and existing urban networks.

While their initial organisation and internal and external communication owed to their digital tools such as the struggle to keep BMT, the majority of existing post-Occupy urban activism discussed by this article rely on spatial encounters and face-to-face vernacular organisation in 'spaces of hope' in Istanbul. Relying on the repertoire of contentious political action from the Gezi, activists transformed parks into 'spaces of hope' in instigating spatial political action against the neo-liberalisation of city and culture and Islamisation of everyday life in Turkey, such as the Islamisation of education, neo-liberal practices of Iftars and the authoritarian/top-down regeneration of urban space in Istanbul. Following the failed coup, pro-governmental groups also employed the same parks in Istanbul to keep watches against the coup forces but this paper aims to show the ways the Gezi's children created hope out of these spaces. The article also delineates that while some of the Gezi's strategies, such as the forum structure, turned out to be inefficient in the post-Occupy situation, the parks as locations continued to serve as identity-places in the collective imaginaries of activists. An engagement with functional and inefficient features of the Occupy spatial practices would open new dimensions for the future of post-Occupy cycle of social movements.

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[i] For the purposes of this paper, the Gezi Park protests is referred to as the Gezi.