Journalism in Turkey and the Gezi Park Protest: Power and Agency in the Media Sphere

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ABSTRACT

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Désirée Hostettler

This thesis will examine the Turkish media during the Gezi Park protest in Turkey in the summer of 2013. What started out as a peaceful protest that began because of environmental reasons, spiraled into a larger protest against the government more generally. What was unusual about the protest, that makes Gezi Park an interesting object of study, is that the mainstream Turkish media completely ignored the protest, barely reported on it, or contributed to the dissemination of disinformation. The lack of coverage and disinformation that was spread within the Turkish media frustrated the public and social media ended up playing a central role in providing the Turkish people with updates. The lack of coverage within Turkish mainstream media was also in stark contrast to the coverage that did occur in international media and alternative media in Turkey.

This thesis investigates the reasons for the lack of coverage in Turkish mainstream media and whose legacy the media serves. It will examine what constrains and enables Turkish journalists, the role social media plays in a country where journalists face corporate and political restrictions, as well as the role international media and alternative media play in the media ecosystem. This research stems from semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists working in Turkey. As theoretical frameworks, this paper will mobilize Castells' (2012) theory of communication power, as well as the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984; Mosco, 2009).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These journalists go out every day, striving to contribute to some form of change in the vibrant and unstable Turkish media field.

"Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed: everything else is public relation."

-George Orwell

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On the morning of May 28, 2013 approximately fifty peaceful environmental protestors started to gather in the small, but renowned, Gezi Park within the Taksim area in Istanbul. Their goal was to keep the government from demolishing the park in order to build a shopping mall. Over the next few days the number of protestors grew, reaching 10,000 by the third day. The increase in protesters during the first few days was linked to police violence. Many protestors claimed that they decided to join the demonstration after hearing that the police had attacked protestors who were gathering in the park peacefully, camping and reading books ("Gezi Park arastirmasi", 2013). Nonviolent protestors were attacked and their tents burned down in an effort to remove them from the premises (Uraş, 2013). In the end, what started out as a peaceful protest that began because of environmental reasons ended up turning into a summer long demonstration in the park. As well, the one protest spiralled into multiple protests that lasted beyond the summer months, encompassing nearly 3,545,000 protestors, who gathered across eighty provinces ("Treasury presses charges", 2013). The reasons the protests expanded beyond Gezi Park encompass concerns over violence against citizens by government forces, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press. The violent actions the government took against its citizens in Gezi Park led people to rethink the legitimacy of the political sphere and called them to action (Erkoc, 2013).

Even if the subsequent protests were not directly linked to Gezi Park, people had found their voice through the original protest. Protestors came from many different political and religious backgrounds, including apolitical young people, the LGBT community, the Communists, the Kemalists, the Nationalists, the Kurds, the Alevis, and the anti-capitalist Muslims (Ulug & Acar, 2014). Some of these groups are minorities within the Turkish public

that rarely come together under the same roof, but through Gezi they found common causes to rally around that reflected all of their concerns, with the most pressing issues being the violence of the government against its own citizens who were conducting a peaceful sit-in and standing up against the multiple restrictions on freedom imposed by the Justice Development Party (AKP) (Ulug & Acar, 2014). Overall it can be argued that the protests were the result of an eleven-year accumulation of dissatisfaction against the regime (Ulug & Acar, 2014).

What was unusual about the first month of the protest that makes Gezi Park an interesting object of study is that it was not consistently covered in the mainstream Turkish media. As Göle (2013) writes, the fact that the protest was not covered adequately drew attention to the restrictions on freedom of expression in Turkey. "The fact that Gezi Protests were not covered during the most important few days by the mainstream media was ample proof of this (p.10). As Tüfekci (2013) described: "As the situation escalated, citizens who turned on their televisions to see the news about ongoing clashes in the middle of the central square of the most populous city in Turkey instead saw… penguin documentaries and cooking shows" (p. 131-132). To find out what was happening in the park, many people turned to social media, particularly Twitter (Tüfekci, 2013). The lack of coverage and disinformation that was spread within the mainstream Turkish media frustrated the public and led to further protests in front of media organizations, such as the Doğuş Holding office, the company that owns one of Turkey's most famous and trusted 24 hour news channels, NTV (Becatoros & Akin, 2013). The protests led to a public apology by Cem Aydın, CEO of Doğuş Media, which was followed by his resignation a week later. In his apology Aydın admitted that NTV made a mistake and failed to provide good journalism. He said that viewers were right to be upset and should not be blamed for their outcry ("NTV'den özür", 2013). However he offered no clear explanation for the lack of coverage.

Aydın concluded his speech by stating that NTV will have to do all it can to reclaim the trust of their viewers ("NTV'den özür", 2013). As a result of the lack of coverage, the BBC suspended its partnership with NTV Turkey, not wanting to be associated with such style of journalism. As they said in a statement: "Any interference in BBC broadcasting is unacceptable and at a time of considerable international concern about the situation in Turkey the BBC's impartial service to audiences is vital" ("Statement regarding BBC", 2013). Not all European broadcasters followed suit - Deutsche Welle (DW) in Germany, which also holds a partnership with NTV, was critiqued by the German press for not taking the same steps as the BBC (Gottschlich, 2013).

The protest was covered in the international press. This coverage did not portray the Turkish government in a positive light, focussing on the violent actions against unarmed civilians. The Turkish government was not happy with how it was being covered in the international media, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan targeted international media frequently, demonizing the foreign press during speeches and in the local press (Idiz, 2013). Pro-government Turkish media also accused the international media "of using the Gezi protests to destabilize Turkey" (Dombey, 2014, para. 7).

During the protests, the situation for journalists in Turkey was critical. Reporters without Borders reported that 153 journalists were injured and 39 arrested from May until September of 2013 ("Leading Journalists facing", 2014). A Freedom Press Report states that it is hard to pin down the exact number of journalists fired, but they calculate that 59 journalists were fired in conjunction with the protests (Corke, Finkel, Kramer, Robbins, & Schenkkan, 2013). Other reports have said that 22 journalists were fired and 37 journalists were forced to resign ("64 Journalisten", 2013). The majority of the journalists were arrested or fired due to their support

for the protest. Other journalists have faced judicial proceedings. As Corke et al. (2013) describe, the Turkish government "uses the courts to go after offending journalists" (p. 9).

Gezi protestors took upon themselves to report what was not covered in the Turkish press, or what they deemed was not covered correctly, using social media such as Facebook and, more predominantly, Twitter. As Hutchinson (2013) wrote about the protestors:

They have used Twitter to share information about how to survive the protests; Facebook sites provide news updates on the situation in occupied Gezi Park; while photographs of the protests have been shared on Flickr and Tumblr and video on sites such as YouTube. (para. 3)

In order to help, local residents provided their Internet passwords through social media, so that protestors could have free access to their Internet connections. Overall, social media served as a tool to help, inform and support the protestors. Journalists, especially journalists who had been fired from mainstream media, made effective use of social media as a reporting tool. Often the reporting that appeared on social media came about through cooperation between citizen and professional journalists. A slogan that was used often to promote the type of civic journalism was: "There is no media. We are all journalists" (Tunc, n.d.).

The government was not happy with this turn of events and the Prime Minister took it upon himself to declare war on social media. During an interview, Erdoğan referred to Twitter as a menace, which led to the shutdown of several social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter for several hours during the protest (Kotsev, 2013). A couple of months after the height of Gezi Park, the government introduced a new Internet law, which resulted in Youtube being blocked in March 2014. This block was lifted after a two-month ban, but the government still continued to make efforts to shut down social media ("YouTube access", 2014).

What made Gezi Park such an interesting phenomenon is that part of the Turkish public took a stand against their government and people were able to demonstrate that the government was not untouchable. Even though mainstream media was silenced, the voices of the protestors were heard through social media as they continued to protest. This case study is an example of the public being able to influence, and usurp, media institutions that are otherwise ruled by big corporations with ties to the government. This unique reversal of power, even if only for a while, is what captured my interest in the Gezi Park protest and Turkish media landscape. Moreover this is one of the most prominent examples in which the current corrupt situation of the mainstream Turkish media became public.

The Gezi Park protest, the subsequent lack of coverage in mainstream Turkish media, and the coverage that did occur on social media, in the international media and in Turkish alternative media lead me to ask the following research questions:

1. What kind of restrictions did Turkish journalists face during the Gezi park protest and how did this affect coverage of the protest?

1b). Whose interests do legacy media serve in Turkey today?

2. What role do Turkish journalists feel social media plays in reporting crises when legacy media is restricted?

3. How was the Gezi Park coverage in the international media and local alternative media perceived by journalists?

All of these questions are connected to power, political economy, practices of journalism and technology, as they seek to explore what constrains and enables Turkish journalists, and the media landscape in Turkey more generally.

In order to answer these research questions, as a methodology I used in-depth semi-structured interviews with Turkish journalists. Thirteen journalist were interviewed face-to-face or through Skype. Of the thirteen journalists twelve were male and one was female. The interview sample included practicing journalists in mainstream and alternative media, journalists who had been fired from mainstream media and/or imprisoned, and were now working in alternative media or on social media, and one journalist who had always been a blogger.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One has provided context for the study and endeavoured to explain the importance of the Gezi park protest from a journalism studies perspective. Chapter Two will begin with a brief overview of the history and present state of the Turkish media landscape in order to add context to the coverage of the Gezi Park protest. It will move on to examine the theory that has been mobilized in this research that focuses on communication and power. Castells' (2013) theory of communication power and networking power will be used to explore the role social media played during the Gezi Park movement and how a new public sphere and counter-power was established through it. Castells' theory is predominantly specific to social media and the networked society. This thesis will also draw on Mosco's (2009) structuration theory to contextualize what sort of agency journalists feel they have and the options that are open to them outside of mainstream media. Overall, these two theories are strongly connected to power and will be used to trace the links between three major players during Gezi Park: the government, social media and journalists working in Turkey. Finally, since technology was of central importance during the protest, the second chapter will also explore debates around the democratizing potential of social media.

Chapter Three will discuss the methodology and analysis used in this research. As mentioned, this research relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews. A grounded theory approach was used in the analysis of these interviews.

Chapter Four will explore what kind of restrictions Turkish journalists faced during the Gezi Park protest, how these restrictions affected the journalists, and how the coverage, or lack of coverage, of Gezi Park compares to what usually occurs in the overall media landscape of the Turkish Republic. Central to this chapter will be the question of who controls the media landscape in Turkey. Thus this chapter will aim to answer the first research question, and sub-question, in this thesis.

Chapter Five aims to investigate the second research question by looking at the role social media played during the Gezi Park protest and whether social media can be a legitimate mode of reporting when legacy media is restricted. This is of interest, since it was the first time social media was used to such an extent in Turkey. Of importance will be whether journalists view social media as a medium that furthers freedom of the press or restricts it by engendering more complications than solutions.

Chapter Six will explore the performance and impact of both international media and alternative media within Turkey during the period of the Gezi Park protest. It will look at how journalists felt these two types of media covered the protest, what they added to the media sphere, as well as the limitations they faced.

Chapter Seven will include a discussion and a conclusion that will link the findings to the theoretical approaches used in this research. The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the importance of freedom of the press in a democracy, particularly if a country wants to sustain or further its democracy. However, this thesis does not seek to find a solution to the current media

situation in Turkey, but rather strives to start a conversation around this issue and set a path for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following chapter examines the literature that will be used as context to explore the situation of the Turkish media landscape during the Gezi Park protests. The first part of this chapter will briefly explore the Turkish media from past to present. It examines the situation Turkish journalist work under and how other studies have defined the restrictions journalists face. The second part of this chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis - Manuel Castells' communication power and Vincent Mosco's structuration theory. Castells' (2013) theory will be used to contextualize the role of social media and how it was used to pressure the government. A further theory that this thesis will draw on is "structuration" as articulated by Mosco (2009) and Giddens (1984), which refers to how individuals can or cannot assert agency over larger social structures, as well as how they can be constrained or enabled by social structures. This theory will help conceptualize how journalists in Turkey feel about the power they have or do not have over the work they do. Lastly this chapter will deal with literature that explores whether communication technology, particularly social media, can be democratizing, which will be of importance when it comes to discussing the role social media played during the Gezi Park protest.

Understanding Turkish Media

The Turkish media system can best be described as fitting into the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralistic Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Papathanassopoulos, 2007), along with Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, Malta and Cyprus. Characteristic traits of this media category, which is also of importance in the case of the Turkish media, is that the media is polarized, there is no mass circulation of newspapers, professionalization of journalists remains low since education in journalism developed late in these regions, and the state plays a big role

within the media. As the Turkish media faces excessive restrictions, a public sphere as the original theory construes it - free from domination and facilitating rational-critical debate on state machinery and performance - currently does not exist in Turkey (Christensen, 2010).

The media in Turkey has gone through two different stages of control that can be characterized by different types of restriction. The two main stages are:

1) Media under tight government control: Starting toward the end of the Ottoman Empire up until 1980s, the government controlled the media through prior restraint (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012, p. 303). The Turkish press was founded fairly late, compared to many Western countries. The first Turkish language newspaper that we know of - *Vakayi-i Mısriye* - appeared in 1828, during the Ottoman Empire. It was published weekly in Egypt, both in Turkish and Arabic. Under strict governmental control, it served to report on governmental undertakings (Topuz, 2003). From that point on, Turkish media has struggled in terms of freedom. While the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was meant to be a transition to a democracy, journalism in the Turkish Republic did not manage to establish itself as an independent free media, but has always been tied to government in some form.

2) Media commercialization: This process started during the 1980s when Turkey's media started to have fewer direct ties to the government and was bought up by big businesses. Now profit rather than public service journalistic ideals motivate Turkish media and alliances with the political elite have surfaced (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012). Companies providing advertisements have a lot of say over the content of news media, making them a strong force in the complex structure of influence within the media (Topuz, 2003). Topuz (2003) questions how, under such circumstances, we can still refer to the media as the fourth estate. As media expert Ceren Sözleri has said, the ties between media and government are incredibly strong in Turkey

as almost all media bosses are also investors in the energy or tourism sectors. As the state plays an important role in these economic sectors, heads of the media strive to maintain good relationships with the government (Akin, 2013).

Bek (2004) notes that there has been a shift in Turkish media from less political to more sensational news that can be traced back to the early 1980s.

Specifically, after the third military coup of 12 September 1980, a major de-politicization process ended all political activities and organizations and restricted freedom of expression in Turkey. The public was discouraged from discussing politics and encouraged to focus more on religion and popular culture, especially football and the sensationalist press. These were considered to be the antidote to leftist militancy. (p. 374).

Furthermore, the Turkish government's hindering of the media through legislation that restricts journalists from engaging in critical reporting also contributed to a media climate where the discussion of politics was discouraged (Christensen, 2007). Others have also linked the de-politicization of Turkish news to the rapid tabloidization of the media in the 1990s, spurned on by the commercialization of the media, which led to more sensational news (Bek, 2004; Christensen, 2010).

In terms of media consumption, in Turkey the number of newspaper readers is low, but the majority of the readers are between sixteen and thirty-four years old (Bariş, 2007). The Turkish public's media of choice is broadcast media. However, despite a large number of TV channels the content is monolithic (Bariş, 2007).

Today, due to the Internet and satellite dishes, it has become impossible to exclude information or opinions from the media sphere (Finkel, 2000), as the Gezi Park protest has so

clearly demonstrated. Once the public realized that the Turkish media was not reporting adequately on the issue, they turned to social and international media, where there was constant talk about the protest (Saamann, 2013). This means that there are now alternative sources from which the news can be accessed without interference from government or media institutions. Overall, the Internet penetration in Turkey used to be relatively low compared to other countries, however it has increased steadily. According to the International Telecommunication Union, Turkey had an Internet penetration of 45.13%, with an estimated 35, 990, 932 Internet users in 2012. The rise in Internet users is fairly steep when compared to 2005 when the penetration was only 15.57% (International Telecommunication Union, 2013). Overall the vast majority of Internet users have a university education and the average age of users is twenty-eight (Baris, 2007).

To sum up, it would be wrong to assume that the Turkish media was freer and in better condition before the current AKP regime. The Turkish media has never truly operated independently. However, what has changed is that now both corporate and political power are influencing the Turkish media, rather than simply government or state control, and the Internet is affording journalists alternate ways of reporting.

Working as a Journalist in Turkey

The Turkish Journalism Association (Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti) has calculated that as of 2012, going back 103 years, 112 journalists have died in the country. Many of the journalists killed were either of Armenian or Kurdish descent ("103 yilda 112", 2012). Given the Kurdish and Armenian conflict within Turkey and the refusal of the Turkish government to deal with these issues, it does not come as a surprise. The last reporter to be knowingly assassinated was Hrant Dink in 2007, a journalist of Armenian descent. Franklin (2013), in

examining the situation of journalists in Turkey for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, came to the following assessment: while journalists' lives may not be in danger in the same way as in the past, their freedom is.

> In today's Turkey, prison terms have replaced bullets, and new taboos have replaced old ones. This has been the case since the AKP (Justice Development Party) came to power in 2002; the right-leaning, religiously conservative party has steadily grown more powerful, winning nearly 50 percent of the vote in 2011. It has presided over an economic boom – and also a seismic shift in political thinking. (p. 42-43)

In present-day Turkey, journalism cannot be properly performed due to fear, intimidation, bans, imprisonments, blocked access to information and defamatory surveillance (Akser & Baybars-Hawks 2012). Most journalists in Turkey currently work under harsh conditions, without being granted job security and social security (Bariş, 2007). Further problems include: hyper-commercialization, clientelism and a patrimonial relationship between the media (Christensen, 2007; Christensen 2010). The following section examines these ideas more closely.

Forms of Pressure and Restriction

The Turkish media is very monopolized and strongly dominated by large multimedia and multisectoral groups such as Doğan Group, Merkez Group, Çukurova Group, Ihlas Group, Doğuş Group and Feza Group (Bariş, 2007). As Christesen (2007) writes:

> The true shift in media ownership in Turkey came in the mid-1980s, as family-owned media outlets were bought by larger conglomerates. What made this shift significant was that the new owners were a different breed, more interested than their predecessors in

instilling a 'corporate mentality' into operation. In addition, the news owners often had

little experience in the media world. (p. 186-187)

Finkel (2000) observes that the reason for corporate involvement in the media is linked to

the financial interests of its proprietors. Owning a media outlet is not only a business in its own

right, but also a tool for corporations to promote their commercial activities; they peddle

influence in return for credits, incentives and other advantages.

It is important to note that these media owners have enormous power both inside and

outside the newsroom. There is very little job security for journalists and since the media is so

concentrated, getting fired from one media outlet can mean losing all chances of working at

several other media outlets (Christensen, 2007). There are trade unions in Turkey for journalists;

however, their influence is very weak and journalists fear being associated with them due to

pressure from media institutions that they might be fired (Christensen, 2007). Overall, the lack of

union and labour support weakens journalists' professional position and job security.

While restrictions from corporations are very powerful and effective, restrictions

stemming from state control are equally powerful. When it comes to state censorship, journalists

are mainly affected through laws that make it dangerous for journalists who write something the

state disapproves of. As a result, journalists often believe state authorities, financial authorities,

and the government are 'above' them and they do not take a combative position against them

(Christensen, 2010).

According to Akser and Baybars-Hawks (2012), Turkish journalists post-2007 experience

five different systematic kinds of neoliberal government pressures that conspire to silence them:

conglomerate pressure, judicial suppression, online banishment, surveillance defamation and

accreditation discrimination (p. 303). Turning first to *conglomerate pressure*, the AKP requires

the media to actively support the government. When it becomes impossible for the party to control the media, they use legislative measures to pressure corporations (p. 310). The most prominent recent case was the Doğan Media Group incident, in which pro-AKP media attacked Doğan Holding publicly in their news outlets and openly threatened them, in the hopes of managing to intimidate Doğan Media Group. The media institutions of the holding were receiving direct calls from government personnel asking them to change stories or get rid of certain journalists. One of the prominent journalists who fell victim to these pressures and was forced to resign was Oktay Ekşi. Doğan Media Group ended up paying a tax penalty, which totalled almost nine million Turkish Lira (Boyutlu, 2010).

Judicial suppression works simply and effectively: journalists can be prosecuted or arrested for statements they make in any type of media, including blogs, or even telephone conversations (Akser & Baybaras-Hawks, 2012). These arrests or prosecutions function to silence those who are critical toward the AKP government. The Turkish constitution guarantees Freedom of the Press in Articles 27 and 28, and Freedom of Expression in Article 26. The challenges faced by Turkish journalism however, can be traced back to problematic sections within the constitution, such as Article 5 and Article 6 (The Anti-Terror Law of Turkey). As Aytar (2006) writes:

> Article 5 increases penalties for the press and allows judges and prosecutors to stop the publications of periodicals for up to a month. Article 6 also increases penalties for the press for "helping conduct propaganda of terrorist organizations" and makes the proprietors of the periodicals additionally responsible for those crimes. (p. 10)

Other critical sections are Article 301 (Turkish Penal Code) and Article 314 (The Criminal Code of Turkey). Anti-terror laws, the Turkish Penal Code and the Criminal Code of

Turkey, make it easier for the government or any other legislative power to loosely accuse someone of plotting against the government or of terrorism. AKP has often declared that it would restructure these laws, and it did in the spring of 2008, but only with a superficial update to the penal code. In fact, the alteration has been limited to a single definition: the words "insulting Turkishness" have been replaced with "insulting the Turkish nation." Although the new formulation is less equivocal, it still leaves plenty of manoeuvring room for nationalist lawyers and prosecutors to stifle undesirables (Lagendijk, 2012). The rest of the articles remain exactly the same. These circumstances increase the risk that Turkey "could easily turn into a country where everyone is insulting everyone else" (p. 177) and with the alarming rise in the rate of arrests, the path ahead seems grim. As Lagendijk (2012) states, "The Turkish Penal Code, the Anti-Terror Law, and the Press Law, still need a serious overhaul to ensure that Freedom of Expression is fully respected in Turkey and in line with European standards" (p. 177).

At the moment, there are two types of journalists that find themselves imprisoned in Turkey:

1. 70% of the journalists currently imprisoned are Kurdish journalists or journalists who work for Kurdish news organizations (Tisdale, 2012).

2. 30% of the journalists currently imprisoned are journalists who criticized the government and were accused of being terrorists or of plotting against the government (Tisdale, 2012).

In addition to directly silencing journalists by imprisoning them, the fear of prosecution and imprisonment also silences journalists who self-censor for fear of reprisal, which could also include being fired from their media organization.

Online banishment occurs when the government decides to ban certain websites they deem to be critical of, or damaging to, the government. The most prominent example was the banning of YouTube that had several critical videos about the AKP on it; it was banned until 2011, shortly before the general elections (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012). Since that time it has been re-banned periodically, but is, at the time of this writing, currently accessible. Pressure through *surveillance defamation* involves arrests based on phone tapping, Internet surveillance, general voice surveillance or mobile surveillance. Finally, turning to *accreditation discrimination,* around 2007 a new accreditation regime was formed. Certain journalists are now excluded from reporting the news from government authorities, meaning they do not receive access to information or get to do interviews with government officials. A 'safe' media list was released by the government, which detailed which journalists would be granted accesses to the prime minister and government officials (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012).

While these different control mechanisms or models explain the Turkish media landscape fairly well, they are not enough to fully understand the restrictions journalists face when attempting to do their job. Even though most academics see a shift from political to conglomerate pressure, it seems to me that in Turkey both are consistently connected to one another. As well, while external government pressure, censorship and the previous history of the media influence the current state of the media in Turkey, it should not be left unsaid that internal issues such as media professionals' individual expectations, their definition of ethics and professionalism are also at play (Gecer, 2013). The purpose of this thesis is to build on this previous research that has examined the pressures journalists in Turkey face, to examine how government, economic, and ownership pressure conspire to restrict journalists, as well as look at how these types of restrictions also lead to self-censorship in journalists.

While it is clear the government silences journalists who criticize them, it is of importance to look more closely at Turkish media organizations and determine what other forces are at play and if there is any self-silencing within the work environment of journalism. It is essential to examine the multitude of pressures journalists face, and the intricacies of these pressures under the umbrella of government control, especially during a protest like Gezi Park where the restricted situation of the Turkish media became obvious.

Communication and Power

This thesis will mobilize theories that deal with communication and power. The reason it is important to research who or what controls communication is due to the influence of communication systems. After all, as Castells (2007) writes: "the way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are constructed" (p. 238). This offers an explanation as to why the Turkish government is inclined to control Turkish media, including the Internet. To begin, however, Han (2005) notes that power is a contested term.

> With regards to the definition of power there still seems to prevail a theoretical chaos. The implicitness of the phenomenon stands in opposition to a total ambiguity of the word. For some it means suppression, for others it is a constructive element of communication. (p. 7)

Therefore, it needs to be clarified what power refers to in this thesis. Two theories of power will be of central importance: Castells' understanding of networks of power and Mosco (2009) and Giddens' (1984) understanding of agency and power. Power needs to be addressed in this thesis since the protest was a struggle for power in various public spaces - on the Internet, in the media and on the ground.

Networked Power

Castells (2013) defines power in the following way:

Power is the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence

asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favour the

empowered actor's will, interest, and values. Power is exercised by means of

coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis

of the discourses through which social actors guide their action. (p. 10)

For Castells (2011) "power is multidimensional" (p. 774). Each one of the dimensions

(economic, political, military, ideological, cultural) is enacted by specific networks of power. As

power relationships are a vital base of society they cannot be ignored, particularly since

institutions and norms are constructed to fulfill the interests and values of those in power.

Castells argues that in a networked society we are all connected through nodes, which allows for

a shift from centralized power to more dispersed forms of power. Moreover, and central to this

thesis, Castells (2011) maintains "wherever there is power, there is counter-power, enacting the

interests and values of those in subordinate positions in the social organization" (p. 773-4). In

the case of Gezi Park, the Internet, especially social media, or as Castells refers to it "horizontal

communication", is a game changer. With the help of social media, individual communication

between people can create new networks, and help organize a social movement and a new form

of counter-power.

Counter-power and the forms of power within the networked society are of importance to

investigate since, as Castells (2011) writes:

[C]ounter power is exercised in the network society by fighting to change the programs

of specific networks and by the effort to disrupt the switches that reflect dominant

interests and replace them with alternative switches between networks. Actors are

humans, but humans are organized in networks. (p. 773)

Of central significance to this thesis will be Castells' understanding of "networked

power," which is the power of social actors over other social actors in the network (Castells,

2011, 2013). In this case, social actors using the Internet changed the paradigm of the Gezi

protest. While local media was not reporting the protest, coordinated action within the Internet

disrupted and modified the traditional 'gatekeeping' role of the Turkish media as "anything that

reaches the Internet may reach the world at large" (Castells, 2011, p. 780). Thanks to the

Internet, awareness of the protest reached beyond the boarders of Turkey onto a global stage.

Castells' theory will be useful to help situate how, through social media, the protesters

were able to connect to a network and become influential. Whilst media institutions and

politicians were already part of the network society, non-gatekeepers such as protestors were

able to become part of the public sphere through digital technology and networking power. Mass

self-communication, as Castells (2012) describes it, changed the power relationships within the

communications sphere in Turkey.

Structuration

As Mosco (2009) describes, structuration is "a process by which structures are

constituted out of human agency, even as they provide the very "medium" of that constitution"

(p.185). Simply put, the theory conveys the idea that structure and agency go hand in hand. We

are both enabled and constrained by social structures (norms), however at the same time we are

able to influence them. Using structuration one can describe the situation journalists find

themselves in (structure) and examine how they try to assert themselves within the structure

(agency). Structure is comprised of the pressures and restrictions journalists face, such as external pressures from commercial media or the state, or more internalized cultures of self-censorship, as well as censorship reinforced by colleagues. Essentially, structure is the culture the journalists find themselves in. Agency is the power that journalists feel they have and try to assert. How do they try to do 'good' journalism even though they face restrictions? How can they - and how do they - influence the culture of journalism? Thus structuration theory is about power, as agency is intimately connected with being able to assert power, or not. The theory will be used to examine how much agency individuals, or in this case journalists, are able to assert. Structuration theory is particularly useful in connection to journalists in Turkey for the following reasons:

1. It can be used to investigate the overall situation in which journalists work (the larger social structure), and how it is restricted.

2. It can help contextualize how journalists operate within that structure. Are they trying to resist the prevailing norms by publishing information the government, or the companies they work for, do not want them to publish?

What makes this theory particularly relevant for this thesis is the importance structuration gives social change (Mosco, 2009). Depending on how much power and agency the Turkish journalists have, they might be able to create some sort of change. Using structuration as a theory might help understand how strongly (or not) journalists feel about the power they have within their professional and institutional limitations.

In conclusion, Castells' (2011) theory of networking power will help contextualize the role of social media and the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984; Mosco, 2009) will be used to

examine the limitations of the journalists who were constrained by their media institutions, as well as how they tried to exert power.

The Role of Technology

Social media, primarily Twitter, played a central role during the Gezi Park protest. While local mainstream media was ignoring the protest, social media became a primary source of information, both for the protestors and the public more generally, as many of the protestors, acting as citizen journalists, used social media to report on what was happening. As well, many unemployed journalists also used social media as a reporting tool. As such, this thesis will also draw on the literature that deals with the democratizing potential of social media, particularly in terms of how it has been "associated with political uprisings and social protests around the world" (Varol, Ferrara, Ogan, Menczer, & Flammini, 2014). During many protest movements Twitter has played a central role (Varol et al., 2014). Some argue that Twitter poses a threat to those in power, such as during the Iran election protests in 2009 or the so-called Twitter revolution in Moldova in early April 2009 (Hands, 2011). During the Gezi Park protest, I argue that social media similarly was seen as a threat. For instance, Prime Minister Erdoğan attacked Twitter and other social media outlets several time. As *The Globe and Mail* reported:

> Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan lashed out at protesters on the weekend but singled out microblogging social media tool Twitter for his most scathing attack. "Now we have a menace that is called Twitter," he said in an interview on Turkish television. "The best examples of lies can be found there. To me, social media is the worst menace to society. (Kotsev, 2013)

Looking at the issue of technology with a wider lens, whether technology promotes democracy and improves communication has long been a contested issue. Intellectuals of the late 19th century such as John Dewey and Herbert Spencer, viewed developing communication technology as having a capacity to transform, in Dewey's words, "the great society created by industries into a great community: a unified nation with one culture; a great public common understanding and knowledge" (Carey, 2009, p. 110). They believed that communication technology was the key to improving the quality of politics and culture. Leo Marx coined this romantic view as the "rhetoric of the technological sublime" (p. 110).

More recent thinking about social media, including Twitter, has focused on the democratic potential of this technology, as well as its limitations, particularly around empowering people who otherwise might not have a voice in the public sphere. Social media can be especially powering for people who live under repressed governments that restrict freedom of the press and freedom of speech (Allan & Thorsen, 2012). So far, the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall-Street, and, as I will argue, Gezi Park have been examples of this.

Social media and the Internet sphere are especially important when we consider that professional journalists and engaged citizens both co-create a public sphere within their communities of reference. This can lead to a new form of empowerment, in which new voices gain access to the public sphere and tell a form of truth that is different from mainstream media (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). This new form of communication through technology creates a realm of debate where the authority of the state can be called into question (Allan & Thorsen, 2009), meaning that through participatory media technology amateurs can document news going on around them. As Wall (2012) describes:

Because journalism has long been considered the lifeblood of democracy, the rise of the

citizen journalist has an impact far beyond the news industry itself and may indeed be

one of the key journalism innovations in the 21st century. (p.1)

Yet it needs to be addressed that even though much research has been published in which

social media is portrayed as a democratizing tool, other research suggests otherwise, cautioning

that one ought to be careful with generalizations. Van Dijk (2005) points to the digital divide,

and the fact that some people do not have access to social media networks. This can be an

isolating experience.

People who do not have access and are less involved (in social and community activities)

are truly disadvantaged. They are not only missing information, strategic information in

particular, but also particular social contacts and relations required to inform and

stimulate them. (p. 158)

Moreover, he argues that the 'Matthew Effect' - the principle that "the rich get richer" - is

also at work in the network society; new technology still largely serves the upper class, rather

than lower ones. So the question can be posed - can we still speak of the democratizing potential

of social media, when there is a group of individuals that are still excluded from the network? In

the case of Turkey, there are many people who are not part of the online world. Recent statistics

point to an age gap:

The people that use the Internet in Turkey are mostly young people in the 16-24 years age

group. In this age group, 67.7% use the Internet. Of the people in the 25-34 years age

group, 58.3% use the Internet; of the people in the 35-44 years age group, 46% use the

Internet; and of the people in the 45-54 years age group, 25.5% use the Internet. (Latif,

Uckun, & Demir, 2015, p. 46).

What these figures tell us is that there is still a big portion of the Turkish public that depends on traditional media to receive their news. Since broadcast media is the preference of the majority of people in Turkey, this segment of the population likely retrieves their news from television.

This literature that examines the democratizing potential of technology and social media will be used to contextualize how the Gezi Park protest is an example of social media threatening those in power, or functioning as an effective tool to pressure them. Twitter provided protestors with the ability to stand up against the government. However, what this research will primarily focus on is how social media influenced journalists in Turkey during the protest. How much use did they make of it? Did it serve to empower them, or did it endanger them further? Were they aware of what was happening on social media, and what effect did this have on their journalism and the media institutions they were working for? Do they see social media as democratizing or not?

Chapter 3: Methodology

In-depth Interviewing

The research method employed in this thesis is a qualitative approach, specifically in-depth interviewing, also known as intensive interviewing (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). In-depth interviewing is often used if the researcher believes individuals have unique information and important knowledge about the social world that can be ascertained through verbal communication. In order to retrieve that information it requires an active asking and listening process on behalf of the researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006). As Seidman (1991) describes, in-depth interviewing is a way to understand a person's experience and the meaning that comes from that experience.

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth-interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 3)

As Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe, there are matters that cannot be assessed through quantitative methods and cannot be answered simply or briefly, but need more explanation or description regarding the experience. Within this thesis, in-depth interviewing is used to get a richer understanding of the journalists' point of view, in order to understand how they practice journalism within the Turkish media landscape.

Participants: Journalists in Turkey

In the course of this research, I interviewed thirteen leading journalists in Istanbul, since this city was the center of the protest and most major media corporations are based there. Prior to

my departure to Turkey I contacted the journalists to see if they were interested in participating

in an interview and I scheduled meetings with each of them. To limit the bias caused by

interviewing journalists I know personally, I sought out further interviewees using the snowball

technique (Priest, 2010), in which each interviewee suggested two or three people for my study.

In selecting interviewees for this particular study, I strove to interview journalists from a variety

of mainstream and alternative media organizations, journalists who were self-employed,

freelancers, as well as journalists who primarily used social media, in order to get a broader

sense of the Turkish media environment. The following chart lists the journalists who were

interviewed. More detailed information on each journalist follows the chart.

Name	Employment Status During Gezi Park	Media Platform During Gezi Park	Information
Ali Abaday	Employed	Hürriyet Daily News	Former reporter for Hürriyet (Turkish language newspaper) and Hürriyet Daily News (English language newspaper). Currently lives in NYC and works as a freelance journalist. On a blacklist of journalists that have a hard time finding employment in mainstream Turkish media.
Serdar Akinan	Self-Employed	Vaguz.tv	Fired from mainstream media outlets Aksam and Sky Turk. Founded the alternative online platform Vaguz.tv.
Doğan Akin	Employed	T24/P24	Founder of T24 and P24. T24 is an alternative online new site. P24 is a non-profit platform for independent journalists.
Can Ataklı	Freelance	Social Media	Fired from mainstream publication Vatan in 2013. Former news anchor for Star TV. Deputy nominee for CHP. Since 2015 he has been working for the newly established newspaper Korkusuz.

Cem Aydın	Employed - Resigned	Doğus Media	Resigned as the CEO of Doğus Media during the Gezi Park protests. Founded his own social media company and re-established Tarih magazine as #Tarih. It is a print publication.
Gürsel Göncü	Employed – Laid off	Tarih	Laid-off as editor of Tarih magazine after Doğus Media decided to close the magazine. Re-established #Tarih with Cem Aydın. Functions as the editor.
Stefan Martens	Employed	Hürriyet Daily News	Foreign journalist from Canada who works as an editor for the English daily newspaper.
Serkan Ocak	Employed	Hürriyet	Environment journalist and reporter for Hürriyet who directed a documentary "Resist" about the Gezi Park protests.
Sibel Oral	Freelance	Social Media	Cultural editor who was fired from mainstream newspaper Akşam. She currently writes for the alternate online news site T24.
Erkan Şaka	Employed	Blog	Assistant Professor at Bilgi University in Communications. Blogger at "Erkan's Field Diary".
Ahmet Şık	Freelance	Social Media	Reporter who was fired from mainstream newspaper Radikal and imprisoned. He has published several books on the Gülen movement and Ergenekon trial. He now works for a Kemalist newspaper Cumhurriyet as a journalist.
Harun Simavi	Self-Employed	Social Media	Founder of alternative online news platform Diken.com.tr. The great-grand-son of Sedat Simavi, the founder of Hürriyet newspaper.
Mevlüt Yüksel	Employed	Takvim	News director of the pro-government news organization Takvim, which belongs to Calik Holding, whose CEO is the son-in-law of the current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Ali Abaday: Abaday was working on sight during the Gezi Park protest, for the English newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News*. *Hürriyet Daily News* and its Turkish-language counterpart *Hürriyet* belongs to Doğan Holding, a company that encountered several taxation issues prior to

Gezi with the government and thus is more careful about what its media outlets write or broadcast. Abaday is no longer working for *Hürriyet Daily News* as a full-time journalist. He quit because he found out from a co-worker that he was about to be let go and decided to leave in advance to move to New York City. In New York he freelances as a journalist for Turkish media from time to time. He says he currently finds himself on a "blacklist" of journalists, which will make it hard for him to get hired within Turkish mainstream media again, should he chose to return to Turkey. He is on the list, because he is known to be a journalist who is critical of the current government.

Serdar Akinan: Akinan did not work for mainstream media during the time of the Gezi Park protest. He had been fired twice from mainstream media - first *Sky Turk* and then *Akşam.* He was fired from *Sky Turk* because it is a pro-government station and they did not agree with Akinan's journalistic ideals that news should be balanced and all opinions should be represented in the news. He was fired from *Akşam* due to a critical article he published online about the current political regime. He was also publicly attacked by the Prime Minster right after this article was published. Thus, he decided to start his own project; he continued his work as an investigative journalist and invested his savings in a news portal called *Vaguz.tv*. During the time of Gezi Park *Vaguz.tv* was a popular news source. The majority of journalists in this research named it as one of the essential sources for news during the protests.

Doğan Akin: Akin is the owner the prominent *T24* alternative media site. He also contributes to the site regularly. *T24* played a crucial role during the Gezi Park protests, publishing articles about the protest and useful information that was not available within mainstream media. Akin

also founded *P24* a non-profit platform for independent journalists. He believes that all opinions should be represented within the media.

Can Ataklı: Ataklı was a former journalist for mainstream media who was active on social media during the protest. He has a large following on Twitter that he could reach during the protests. Prior to Gezi Park he was the former news anchor for mainstream TV stations such as *Star TV*. He also worked for the newspaper *Vatan*. After being fired from *Vatan* he was not able to find employment in mainstream media, thus he turned to politics and ran for CHP (Republican People's Party) as a deputy nominee. He did not win the election. Ataklı is critical of the current government, which makes it hard for him to find employment. He says he strongly believes that journalism does not exist to write about what is going well, but to investigate what is going wrong in order to better it. In 2015 he started working for the recently established Kemalist newspaper *Korkuzus*.

Cem Aydın: Aydın was the CEO of Doug Media Group who resigned a week after the NTV protests. His media group also owned the prominent magazine *Tarih,* which was closed due to a cover story they were planning on publishing on the Gezi Park protest. The print magazine was later re-established as *#Tarih* by Aydın and its editor Gürsel Göncü, who was also interviewed for this research. *#Tarih* continues to be a print magazine.

Gürsel Göncü: Göncü was the editor of *Tarih* until Doğus Media decided to close down the magazine. Göncü is currently the editor of the new version of the print magazine named *#Tarih*.

Stefan Martens: The only foreign journalists interviewed for this research was Stefan Martens. He hails from British Columbia, Canada and is an editor at the English newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News.* He actively participated at the Gezi Park protest as a protestor and contributed to a variety of alternative newspapers as an editor. Stefan Martens views objectivity as an ideal that is still worth striving for.

Serkan Ocak: Ocak is an environmental journalist at the mainstream Turkish daily *Hürriyet* and the director of the documentary on the Gezi Park protests *Resist*. He actively worked at *Hürriyet* and the on documentary during Gezi Park. He is still employed with the same media. Ocak believes that journalists should aim for objectivity as best they can.

Sibel Oral: Oral was fired several weeks before the Gezi Park protests from the pro-government newspaper *Akşam,* where she worked as the cultural editor. She was fired because she tweeted something against the AKP party and it was reported to management. After she was fired, she was actively using social media to report on the protests. Currently she works for *T24*. Oral is known to be critical toward the current government.

Erkan Şaka: Şaka is an academic in the Communications Department of *Bilgi University* in Istanbul. He writes a blog called "Erkan's Field Diary". He actively reported on the Gezi Park protests on his blog. Şaka is mainly interested in the verification of news and is a strong supporter of freedom of the media.

Ahmet Şık: Şık is one of the most prominent journalists interviewed in this study. He was imprisoned in 2011, along with his colleague Nedim Şener, and released a year later (Gibbons 2012, para. 1). Şık has been fired several times from mainstream media and is known to be critical of the government. He currently works for the Kemalist *Cumhurriyet* newspaper. He has also published several books. Ahmet Şık believes that journalism should be fair and balanced.

Harun Simavi: Simavi comes from a family of renowned journalists. His great-grandfather founded *Hürriyet*. Simavi, who is educated as an engineer, left journalism for a brief time during the Gezi Park protest, to concentrate on his family and engineering. He was active on social media and on sight during the protests. Shortly after Gezi he went on to build the online news platform *Diken.com.tr*. Simavi believes that journalism is about writing how things are, and trying to stick to the truth without covering up or protecting guilty parties.

Mevlüt Yüksel: Of the thirteen journalists only Yüksel works for overtly pro-government media, the newspaper *Takvim*. This newspaper is essentially the mouthpiece of the government.

Prior to the interview all interviewees had to sign an ethics consent form. In this form the journalists were given the option of anonymity. However none chose to be anonymous. The reason the option of anonymity was given is due to potential risks. As the Turkish media environment is currently very restricted, the Turkish government that has the power to reprimand journalists should they say something that the government does not approve of, which could result in a journalist getting fired or imprisoned.

The interviews took place from mid-November 2014 to the beginning of February 2015. The average interview lasted about fifty-five minutes and the face-to-face locations varied according to the preference of the journalists, from office space to café's in Istanbul. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, transcribed in Turkish, and later translated to English by the interviewer. Additional notes were taken based on the interviewer's impression of every interview.

The interviews were semi-structured in-depth interviews. As Priest (2010) notes, a qualitative method, even though it requires a level of intuition and flexibility, still requires analytical skills and a systematic approach. As such, all interviewees were asked similar questions, while still having several open questions that would let them respond in greater detail to issues they found interesting or of particular importance. This allowed for flexibility in the interview. This method was chosen because a solely structured interview would "leave little room for unanticipated discoveries" (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Shaw, 2006, p. 237). Also, in-depth interviews allow one to be more flexible regarding questions, as opposed to a survey, since the interviewer has greater control over the structure of the interaction (Priest, 2010).

There are different kinds of in-depth interviews that vary in form, including structured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Weiss (1994) refers to structured interviews as "fixed questions, open response," and sees limitations to this approach, principally that the interviewer is directed by the questions rather than the response (p. 13). For this particular research the semi-structured approach was selected, because while these types of interviews rely on a certain set of questions to which the researcher wants answers to, it also gives the interviewee enough room and freedom to discuss topics of interest and importance to them, allowing the conversation to move in unexpected directions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy,

2006). This was the ideal method for this thesis, since the aim was to get information on certain topics, but give the interviewee enough room for his or her own thought processes that might lead to the finding of new knowledge or experiences that have been excluded or overlooked in previous research or that might be beyond my understanding, as the researcher, of social reality.

I was particularly interested in three major topics: the role of the Turkish media during the protest and the restrictions they faced, social media's impact on the protest, and the journalists' thoughts on the coverage of the protest in the international media and local alternative media. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore these ideas as well as left room for new topics or findings that I might not have considered. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

Grounded Theory

Although I went into the interviews with certain key themes I wanted to explore - restrictions journalists faced, the impact of social media and the influence of international and alternative media - the analysis of the data followed a grounded theory approach in which the researcher codes data and themes as they emerge (Priest, 2010). Priest (2010) defines grounded theory as follows: "A method of deriving categories from a qualitative data set rather than relying on pre-existing assumptions. This method allows for the systematic, inductive development of theory from qualitative data" (p. 225). While I will be using the theories outlined in Chapter Two to contextualize my findings, I am borrowing from grounded theory, specifically its method of analysis, by assigning codes and categories to data, which are then continually tested against newly emergent themes. The concepts that emerge through grounded theory analysis are then developed through constant comparison with additional data (Dey, 1999). A

central part of grounded theory analysis is coding; this process helps the researcher locate key themes, patterns, ideas and concepts, in order to give textual, visual or audio data a label (code) (Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2006). Throughout the data collection the themes become more focused and research can be concluded when a saturation point has been reached. After saturation, core categories or story lines can be identified (Dey, 1999). Principally, this method of data analysis consists of constant comparison of data. Throughout this process no steps, such as the transcription, data analysis and interpretation, are truly separate from one another; rather, the phases are fluid (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Semi-structured interviews and a grounded theory analysis fit well together, because both approaches leave room for original research and maybe even new discoveries.

Limitations

This is a relatively small study that does not represent all journalists working in Turkey. However it does provide insight into some working journalists' knowledge of what happened during the protests, including how they thought and acted during the Gezi Park protest. It is my hope that this study will be a starting point for a larger study at some point in the future that encompasses a wider range of journalists.

Even though the journalists were aware of the risks that came with doing an interview for this research and seemed comfortable with participating, there might still have been room for dishonesty given the circumstances under which some of them work. During the interviews I did not get the impression that any were being dishonest, however as a researcher I need to raise the possibility as a limitation. There was also only one female participant. It would have been useful to interview more female journalists in order to get a wider range of experience. Furthermore, there was only one pro-government journalist interviewed for this research. While it was difficult

to secure even this one interview with a pro-government journalist, as I found that they are reluctant to speak to researchers, this would be an interesting avenue to explore in future research. Overall, the pool of journalists was fairly diverse, and majority of the interviewed journalists are well-known, high profile journalists in Turkey.

Chapter 4: A Hierarchy of Pressure: Restrictions Turkish Journalists Face

During the Gezi Park protest it became clear that there is a problem within the Turkish media. The Turkish media provided little, if any, coverage of the protest, and the protestors had to find creative alternatives to spread the news about the demonstration. Social media was the dominant platform used to get around the restrictions that journalists and protesters faced within legacy media. This put the government under pressure and helped coverage of the Gezi Park protest gain momentum outside of Turkey's borders, in both the international press and on the Internet. Turkish journalists were not able to report on the protest due to several restrictions they faced. These restrictions will be the focus of this chapter.

More specifically, this chapter will deal with the journalists' perceptions as to why the Turkish mainstream media failed to report on the Gezi Park movement, the types of restrictions journalists faced during the Gezi Park protest, and finally, how the coverage, or lack of coverage, of Gezi Park compares to what usually occurs in the overall media landscape of the Republic of Turkey. During the interviews, it often happened that journalists referred to events prior to the Gezi Park protest as well. Although the focus of this thesis is media coverage of Gezi, these examples are pertinent to the discussion as they were told as examples of the types of restrictions they normally operate under. Thus, they will be included in this chapter. What the Gezi protest unveiled was how effectively the restrictions journalists face have been embedded in the system since the reign of AKP, which started well before the protest. The research found that a number of restrictions impaired the journalists from doing their job, yet none of these pressures are limited to the Gezi Park movement; they existed before and are still arguably active methods of pressure current journalists face. The primary force alluded to by all journalists was government pressure, which is closely related to judicial, ownership, and economic pressure, as well as

psychological pressure which manifests as self-censorship and through policing of colleagues. According to the journalists, the most effective method of restriction is psychological pressure - the fear of getting fired or imprisoned. Several journalists discussed personal instances, or gave examples of their colleagues', as to how psychological restrictions were put into action and left lasting scars amongst other journalists, leading them to behave one way rather than another due to fear and intimidation.

Overall, the core question this section aims to investigate is: What kind of restrictions did Turkish journalists faced during the Gezi Park protest and how did this affect the coverage of the protest? Another purpose of this chapter is to help shed light on whose interests legacy media serves in Turkey. The forms of restrictions journalists faced will be the focus of the second part of this chapter. This chapter begins, however, with an exploration of the failure of mainstream media and how the journalists themselves perceived it. This is of interest because throughout the interviews it became clear that all but one journalist supported the protesters. This journalist supported the government and framed protestors as terrorists, while the others had sympathy for the protest. Interestingly, while there were two polarized views of the protest, several journalists said they were aiming to be 'professional', by which they meant that they were striving to be objective in their reporting.

Gezi Park: Mainstream Media Blackout

While a massive protest was going on in the center of Istanbul, all but one of the journalists in this research said the country's traditional mainstream media failed to report on the incident. Martens, a foreign editor at the English-language newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News*, remembered that *CNN Turk* showed a documentary about Antarctic penguins on TV rather than

the protest. He explained that this created massive anger and the penguin became the symbol of mainstream media - whether it was pro-government media or non-partisan (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). As he describes:

> From the very beginning, the Gezi protests were obviously anti-government, but *CNN Turk* - which should consider itself to be independent or at least non-partisan impartial - refused to show it, perhaps out of fear of the government. In reference to mainstream media, the television channels weren't really looking [at the protests]. I think this angered a lot of people, as people were turning to *CNN International* to find out what was going on in Taksim Square rather than watching *CNN Turk* because *CNN Turk* was showing penguins. Other channels would also have a few bulletins [about] problems in Taksim Square, but other than that there wasn't a whole lot [of coverage]. (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

Aydın, the former CEO of Doğus Media, who resigned during the peak of the Gezi Park protest, said that it would be wrong to say that the media ignored the protest. He said that the media certainly was aware of it, but he pointed out that government pressure had a great deal to do with the relatively little coverage in Turkish mainstream media. "Due to pressure coming from government circles, they had a hard time seeing the event for what it was and had difficulties capturing it [the event]" (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015).

Most journalists described how the Turkish public stopped turning to mainstream media for their news about Gezi Park. As Turkish media continued to ignore the protest, it became obvious that the media was not serving the public, but the government. When the protestors realized that the media they relied on was fearful of the government, they began to take action. As Martens describes:

This went on [the lack of protest coverage] on all the media channels in mainstream

media…. NTV [24-hour news channel] was also not showing much of anything. I

famously remember that one day NTV finally was forced to show what was going

on…when white collar workers in the area basically organized themselves, probably over

Twitter, during lunch hour. Two thousand people in the area went with signs and picketed

outside NTV, saying something like "we don't want penguin media, we don't want

'yandaş' (pro-government) media." It was only then that NTV finally was forced to turn

its cameras on its front door to show two thousand people chanting outside, saying 'get

with the program', and actually show what was going on rather than wilfully ignoring it

or acting like cowards because they are so scared shitless of offending the regime of

Tayyip Erdoğan. (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

Aydın said he was not surprised that the audience reacted like this, since the Gezi park

protestors were their target audience. As he said: "they were an audience that trusted us for

years...thus they felt betrayed" (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015).

The journalists, however, were split as to whether the public was aware of the media

situation in Turkey prior to Gezi Park. Most did think that at least a portion of Gezi protestors

did not trust mainstream media beforehand and immediately turned to social media, especially

Twitter and Facebook, rather than looking to legacy media for coverage of their actions.

However, as Şaka, a citizen journalist and an Assistant Professor in the Communication

Department of Bilgi University pointed out, Gezi Park was a wakeup call for many. Gezi Park

became an obvious example of how controlled the media is, especially for those who were not

certain of it before. "There were many signs of pressure on media and media blackouts on

particular issues before, but I think the Gezi Park resistance is the most important one and the

turning point in this media blackout" (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015). This sentiment was echoed by Şık, a prominent journalist in Turkey who has been fired as well as imprisoned throughout his career because he is outspoken and not afraid to publish information that is critical of the government. During Gezi Park he used Twitter to report independently on the protests because he was not able to work actively in mainstream media. As he said: "Gezi…exposed the media reality of Turkey…. The Gezi period in Turkey led to the identification or the discovery of existing, yet always covered up or not extensively known, problems, which became visible to a broader population" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). Şık says that the coverage of the Gezi Park protests showed just how shabby the Turkish media is, which he says is largely due to "serious censorship and self-censorship" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). Aydın agrees that Gezi revealed the truth about media censorship that has a long history in Turkey. As he said:

> The Turkish media has been underperforming for a long time. We could say that this
> officially became obvious during Gezi. Gezi Park helped reveal this, but actually the
> unfortunate condition of the media lies farther back. Especially the mass media. (Aydın,
> personal communication, January 11, 2015)

All but one journalist said that most people found out about the Gezi Park protest through the use of social media, since mainstream media was either not reporting on the protest or framing the story in a way that was obviously biased. For instance, when the protest was broadcast on television, it was mainly by pro-government news sources, which, according to the journalists who do not work for pro-government organizations, had an agenda to cast the protestors in a negative light. As Martens described:

They would occasionally have something, the more pro-government media....but their thing was basically going there [to the protest] to prove that those that were protesting were either paid by Lufthansa, the German secret service, or were Zionists or the Faiz lobisi. They would go out there and protest that they're all a bunch of vandals and atheists, gay, whatever - I have no idea - and terrorists and so on and so forth. Certainly Takvim [pro-government newspaper] covered it. They conducted an interview with a tree and a fake interview with Christiane Amanpour, saying "this is what she would have said if she talked to us. (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

What Martens is alluding to, is that a lot of incorrect information was distributed within the pro-government press in Turkey during Gezi Park, as well as some ridiculous stories. Most journalists also agreed with this point; however, the one exception was the news director of the pro-government newspaper *Takvim* - Yüksel. He is the journalist Martens was referring to who published and wrote the articles on the tree and the fake interview with Christiane Amanpour. Yüksel defended the government, saying that the Gezi Park protest first looked like a protest that started due to a tree - referring to the environmental reasons that first brought the protestors together - but that it became more obvious during the following days that it was a protest that was directed at the government of the Republic of Turkey.

It became evident that it was a protest created by marginal groups and terror organizations that was directed at the government. Furthermore during the time Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was prime minister, it was a protest against him. Likewise it became apparent that the police spraying gas at protesters' faces and using force on them was all a part of stopping the attempted coup. The police lay that all in the open later on. From

the very beginning our media group [the *Takvim* group] was aware of this situation.

(Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014)

Yüksel's statement seems to confirm what Martens pointed out earlier - the pro-government media blamed the protest on terror organizations and others. It is crucial to note the connections between *Takvim* and the current AKP government. *Takvim* is a newspaper which was acquired by Çalık Holding and belongs to its pro-government media group Turkuvaz Media Group. The CEO of Çalık Holding, Berat Albayrak, is the son-in-law of current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Sezer & Kandemir, 2012).

In summary, most journalists said that the framing of the protest in mainstream media in Turkey was negative, describing the protestors as terrorists and troublemakers. All the interviewed journalists, with the exception of one, were very critical of the mainstream press, saying it failed to do its job. While the pro-government media was framing protesters as terrorists, the rest of the mainstream press either wilfully ignored the incident or reported on it negatively. It became obvious during the Gezi Park protest that the media is not as free as it should be and that a dominate force, the government, seems to control it.

Forms of Control

Different forms of control were used during the Gezi Park demonstration to restrict and funnel the actions of journalists and media organizations. The interviews with the journalists contained the following main themes:

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                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │ Government  │
                    │  Pressure   │
                    └─────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────┐
        ▼                  ▼                  ▼
 ┌─────────────┐    ┌─────────────┐    ┌─────────────┐
 │  Judicial   │───▶│  Ownership  │◀───│  Economic   │
 │  Pressure   │    │  Pressure   │    │  Pressure   │
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 ┌─────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐    ┌─────────────┐
 │    Self-    │◀───│ Psychological│───▶│  Employee   │
 │ Censorship  │    │   Pressure   │    │  Policing   │
 └─────────────┘    └──────────────┘    └─────────────┘
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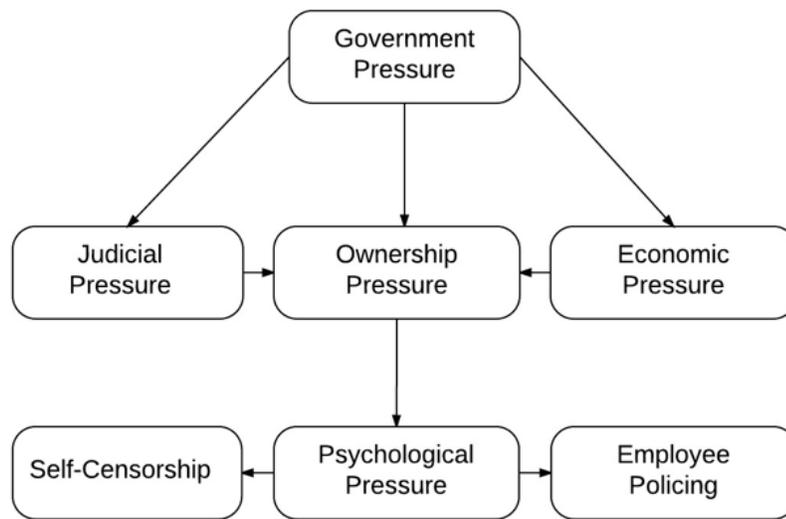
It is hard to separate all forms of pressure from each other, since the government has a hand in most of them, yet this chapter will attempt to draw distinctions, as well as trace the links between them.

Government Pressure

The government manages to influence the media through the use of direct and indirect pressure. Şık described government pressure as "a form of censorship where when you write or say something that offends the government, you will face consequences. This can be anything from arrests to executions" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). This form of censorship is put into play through the use of the judicial system, with which the government has a very close relationship. Direct censorship also occurs when journalists are fired. As Aydın described, some forms of censorship are more obvious than others (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015). By contrast, a less obvious and more indirect form of

censorship would be self-censorship, where one does not need an outside source to stop you from publishing something. This will be dealt with in more detail in a later section.

The type of direct control the government has over the media becomes clearer in personal cases. Akinan is an example of a journalist who was directly attacked by the prime minister [now president] and then fired. Although the incident he recounted was not directly related to the time period of Gezi Park, it still demonstrates how directly the government can attack journalists. Akinan was an investigative journalist who used to work for mainstream media such as *Sky Turk* and *Akşam*, before he was fired. During the Gezi Park protest he invested all his savings into the creation of an online news platform called *Vaguz.tv* that modeled itself after *Vice* and was a prominent web site during the Gezi Park protest. He describes what happened to him this way: "I published a story in *Akşam,* you can find it on the Internet, after that the prime minister cursed at me using my name publicly and they fired me right after" (Akinan, personal communication, February 4, 2015). His experience serves as an example of how journalists can be intimidated by the government in a direct manner and also demonstrates how freely the government is able to attack journalists publicly, without fearing pushback from citizens.

Although there is a history of imprisoning journalists in Turkey, some journalist in this research argued that there has been a tactical change within the Turkish government and the forms of pressure they use. Instead of imprisoning, they now predominantly fire journalists. In this research, Oral, Akinan, and Ataklı were fired from their jobs. Şık was imprisoned and also fired. Abaday was put on a "blacklist" that keeps him from getting hired within mainstream media. Şaka observed that imprisonment actually makes journalists more renowned and thus firing turns out to be more effective in silencing journalists. "If you are in prison, you become

famous and even then it pays, but if you are fired it is not good. Gezi was a good excuse for media owners to fire pro-Gezi journalists" (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015).

The experience of being fired by a media holding was something Şık experienced personally. As mentioned, before being fired he was also imprisoned, which made him internationally renowned. But while prison made him famous, being fired from mainstream media was more effective at silencing him. Although he could find other work in alternative media, these types of jobs do not afford journalists enough salary to live on.

It was not my choice to be removed from mainstream media.… I was truly facing a strict censorship during that period. In order to beat this censorship pressure, I engaged in a fight that had me fired from the whole industry. I was working at Doğan Group, for Radikal newspaper. They had me fired and said the following: "You will not be able to work anywhere anymore" and I said "I know you can do that, you were also doing that in the past," and they did it. Nowhere within mainstream media was I able to find a job. Of course it was possible to work for alternative media, outside of mainstream media, but there were other problems there. It is a very complicated story in Turkey. At places where you can work in journalism, you are not able to earn enough money to eat one's fill. Places where you get enough to eat one's fill, you are not able to work as a journalist; this is such a handicap. (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Other journalists, like Ataklı and Oral who were interviewed in this research were not imprisoned, hence they did not become as famous as Şık. However, they were fired and consequently remain outside of mainstream media. Ataklı became involved in politics and ran for the CHP party. He also just recently started to work for the alternative newspaper Korkusuz, which is not pro-government and belongs to Estetik Yayıncılık [publishing] that owns the

prominent and one of the highest circulating Turkish newspapers Sözcü. Oral published her first book on the Roboski massacre and is working freelance for the alternative news media T24.

Judicial Pressure

As mentioned earlier, judicial pressure is very hard to separate from government pressure due to the government's close relationship with the judicial system (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). This form of pressure is very efficient and the government makes good use of it. Aydın, Ocak and Şık all lamented the unfortunate situation of the judicial system. As Şık pointed out, there are currently over thirty laws that restrict freedom of the press within the Turkish penal law and anti-terror laws. If you write something that contravenes these laws there will be problems and you will find yourself in front of a judge. Stories that would lead to such consequences can be anything that is critical of the government or the government takes as an insult. There are some journalists who take this risk, but some corporations will not publish stories because of these laws (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). Aydın said that Turkey is not a country where you can trust the judicial system and trust the law to protect you; furthermore, companies that journalists work for would not take the risk of upsetting the government for the sake of individual workers. Media organizations would rather please the government than stick up for their journalists or a free media more generally, as they fear judicial repercussions. Companies do this in order to protect their interests. "Even if you are in the right, you cannot defend yourself and a company that employs over 10 000 people…turns its media organization into one that the government favours" (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015). Essentially, the point Aydın is making is that the judicial system and the laws that govern it are structured in a way that makes it hard for a journalist to plead his or her case. However, Ocak, Abaday and Şık all alluded to the fact that they were not surprised or in any way shocked

about this form of pressure, since for the most part, democracy does not truly exist in Turkey, and without democracy expectations to have a fully functioning judicial system seem surreal.

Ownership Pressure

Ownership has become an issue due to several changes within the Turkish media system. What mainly drives ownership pressure is the close ties media owners have to the government due to businesses dealings in other sectors. Şık remarked that many conglomerates that own media do not make money through their media, but other businesses. They use their media to promote these activities and themselves. As Simavi said: "The biggest mistake is that business men are managers of the media. That is the biggest problem" (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015). Ocak added that corporations that aim to protect business dealings with the government control and pressure their media to act a certain way. As Simavi expanded, the major income of companies that own the media stems from the energy sector and banking. Thus, their main interest lies in the regulated market and "when you have dealings in the regulated sectors it is impossible to be a journalist, because with the smallest regulation change they [the conglomerate] win or lose millions of dollars and so on" (Simavi, personal communication, February, 6, 2015). Akın, the editor and a writer of the alternative news site T24, which had a peak number of visitors during the Gezi Park protest, remarked that it easy for the government to control conglomerates. His comments reflected what most of the journalists said, that "because many media owners have business dealing outside of the media," the owners would not dare to do anything to jeopardize these business dealings. One of the most obvious ways to do so is not to be critical of the government (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2015). Akın added that in order not to be critical of the government within the news, media owners sometimes go to unbelievable extremes. Here he is referring to *CNN Turk* that played a penguin

documentary instead of the news during the Gezi protest. Şık traced the source of the ownership problem back three decades:

> This version of censorship became central in Turkey during the 1980s when small, family-owned forms of media became integrated into holdings. The conglomeration brought with it close relations of holding owners to politicians and illegal money. The media did not serve these corporations to make money; instead, journalism became a political clout. (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

> Simavi agreed with Şık, lamenting the loss of family owned media forms to major

holdings who use their media outlets to improve their own capital and reputation. As he described, media owners use their media to further their own profits and control the news flow of company related matters (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015). Aydın also stressed that due to other business dealings corporations have with the government, they cannot stand up against the government since the financial loss would be too much.

As an example of ownership pressure in action, Ocak recounted that several of his journalist friends were on sight during the Gezi Park protest, taking pictures and following the protest up close; however, none of them were able to publish their pictures and stories, because their media organizations would not let them. Ocak linked this to the newspapers' owners having been replaced by people that are close to the government. "Hence they [the newspapers] became government supporters. In the past all was different. Star newspaper, Akşam newspaper…their owners have all changed. The government put the people there that they wanted and this is their understanding of journalism" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). The more newspapers the government owns or pro-government owners possess, the more one-sided and pro-government the news will become. Another problem linked to ownership that was addressed

by Ocak is the constant downsizing of the media because it does not bring in enough money for the corporations. With smaller media organizations it becomes harder and harder to do good and accurate journalism.

Economic Pressure

With the merging of business corporations and media institutions another form of pressure found its way into the Turkish media landscape: economic pressure. Many mainstream media organizations rely on advertising and government related projects in order to survive and stay afloat. This form of economic pressure has a very strong effect on conglomerates that are focussed on business and capital.

Şık explained that economic censorship occurs when big companies are afraid to provide media outlets that are opponents of the government with advertisements "because the moment you provide an advertisement you face pressure from the government" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). As an example of how economic pressure works, Şık told the following story. It dates back to 2007, when he was working at the small magazine *Nokta,* which has since closed down. However, his point in telling this story was that this method of economic censorship still applies today:

> It [Nokta] survived for six months of publication. Zero advertisements; most of the time it made losses and was only doing news. Six months later, when the magazine had proven its success and sold approximately 20,000 copies, which was a record for a weekly magazine, and Nokta was to receive advertisements from three big banks the police raided the office, due to a story published in the magazine. This happened the day the ads went through, and these orders [to raid] came from the chief of defence staff. They were keeping all of us under surveillance, including the workers in advertising. The phones

were ringing constantly and I asked what was happening. I was told that the banks were

taking back their advertisements. (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

In the end, the banks backed out of their agreements to run the advertisements because

they did not want the government to think that they were against them. The following example

by Akinan, who founded *Vaguz.tv*, also reflects this same problem. The site was founded during

the Gezi protest and did active reporting of the protest as it evolved, on site. However, it closed

several months after the Gezi Protest, because it was unable to finance itself and find companies

willing to provide advertisements on the platform. Akinan said advertising is of central

importance to maintaining a media platform and it is hard to secure advertisements when

companies fear advertising with a media outlet that is anti-government or that the government

perceives to be anti-government. Akinan said the standard response he often got was: "providing

you with an advertisement is out of the question" (Akinan, personal communication, February 4,

2015). Akinan said that while there are now ads over Google and similar other options, these

options are not an efficient way to fund a news site. His point is that you need a high number of

visitors on your page to make money and these types of ads often do not generate enough

revenue to fund journalists and maintain quality journalism. His last option was trying to secure

financial help from private sources, however all efforts went unrewarded. If that had worked out,

Akinan strongly believes that they would have been able to keep the website running. *Vagus.tv* is

an example that demonstrates how important it still is to have financial backing if one wants to

keep a news site active, and that economic pressure is a very effective way of controlling

media's chance of survival.

Aydın, however, said there is another problem with relying on advertising, and that has to

do with the expectations of the advertisers. He said that when a company provides a media outlet

with advertisement they assume the media will do positive advertising on their behalf. As he put it: "Because they have provided you advertisement, they expect you to advertise for them in return" (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015). Simavi agreed with this point, saying that companies who advertise in the media believe that they are entitled to positive press, since they have endorsed the media (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015).

Nonetheless, as Ocak observed, advertising is still an important financial source for the media in Turkey. He noted the importance of advertisements for the survival of a newspaper, saying bluntly "if there is no advertisement we can't make any money" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). He went on to say that the government has essentially "cut the advertisement channels" to mainstream media that is not overtly pro-government (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). This, he says, has led to cutbacks within the newsrooms. He emphasized that this form of economic pressure is directly tied to government pressure, even if the government does not appear to be directly involved. "Advertisement sources are cut. They send their auditors with fines. These are all forms of pressure. They [the government] don't necessarily have to call us" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). According to Ocak, many mainstream media organizations during the Gezi protest did not even have enough financial stability to go out and investigate the protest due to severe financial difficulties.

Similarly, Göncü said that economic pressure cripples media organizations. He said that overall most media was not financially equipped to cover the protest, due to a lack of journalists. Cutbacks reflect upon the quality of journalism that is produced. As Göncü explained:

It is the duty of a journalist to cover a story. To produce the content for a story. To go talk to people. Go talk to the police. But none of these functions were fulfilled by the

media. This is a generalized disease in the Turkish media. (Göncü, personal communication, January 8, 2015)

Martens said that without journalists, media organizations have to rely on a 'pool system', which dilutes the quality of journalism.

[At] *Hürriyet Daily News*, we don't have reporters anymore. There were massive layoffs, so reporters left. Basically, here they call it the havuz system, the pool system. Stories basically come in on wires, from agencies. We say 'here you go, there is the news'. We don't call anyone. We don't talk to anyone. And stories just come in. It boils down to what a minister said or the governor said or what Erdoğan said at a meeting, at a press conference with Angela Merkel for instance. It is, frankly, boring to tears. (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

By contrast, the media that is connected to the government seems to prosper, mainly from the advertising losses that other channels face. Ocak said that "advertisements that are cut from us [regular media] go to them [the pro-government media]" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). He added that these media organizations do not face economic problems, because they have the government to back them up or support them (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Psychological Control

Self-Censorship

According to the majority of the participants in this research the most effective form of control was self-censorship. As Oral put it bluntly: "We face a menace called self-censorship" (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014). According to her, it was journalists who

were self-censoring themselves that led to a lack of solid information about the Gezi protest. Şık defined self-censorship as follows:

Self-censorship comes to light when all previously mentioned forms of restriction, governmental, economic, ownership and judicial pressure become internalized. This form of internalization works its way to the very bottom of the hierarchy system within the newsroom. An example would be a reporter refraining from writing a story in the first place due to internal fear of the outcome. (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Ocak agreed with this and further elaborated that some journalists work for pro-government newspapers because they have to, even if they do not agree with the mentality of the organization they work for. He added: "There are not many organizations we can work for as correspondents. Some of them (journalists) truly only work to eat one's fill" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). He said that he himself has not encountered a direct call from the government, but instructions from media bosses usually find their way down the hierarchy to the reporter. With time, he added, a reporter knows very well what stories to write and what to refrain from, thus he or she does not need to wait for a call or warning to come from higher ups. "Hence you [the journalist] already know what you should write and what not. This is problematic, because self-censorship is automatically applied [by journalists] and this is extremely bad for the media" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). He also pointed out that this was a major issue during the Gezi Park protests - the fact that journalists had internalized which topics to deal with and where to censor themselves. Ocak added the explanation that journalists censor themselves, because they know "their work won't get published in their newspaper anyways, thus they didn't concern themselves with the story [Gezi

Park] and sadly this is how low we [the journalists] fell" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Another reason journalists fear self-censorship is due to its invisibility. Göncü said that in the past censorship was often easily visible. For example, when something was removed from the newspaper it was visible to the reader's eyes that the government took something out from within an article, since a blurry spot was often left in the newspaper the next day (personal communication, January 8, 2015). He continues by further explaining that "at least you were able to see it [the censorship by the government], as opposed to today. That is the reason why self-censorship is scarier than censorship" (Göncü, personal communication, January 8, 2015).

Ataklı referred to self-censorship as a psychological pressure or control mechanism that is embedded within journalists, due to warnings the Prime Minister [now President] gave journalists and media owners prior to the Gezi Park movement, and more specifically since the beginning of the AKP administration. The warning was that journalists are supposed to do their job and that they should not cater to 'terrorists' by reporting on them. A 'terrorist', in the eyes of the government, is anyone who opposes them publicly. In the case of Gezi Park, the protesters were stigmatized as terrorists by the government and pro-government newspapers. Ataklı said that journalists adapted themselves to those demands and the result of this internalization became obvious during the Gezi Park protest. According to Ataklı, these kinds of warnings and pressures produce timid or even fearful behaviour in journalists that leads them to refrain from reporting on stories that might get them into trouble. The fact that journalists are wary of losing their livelihoods plays into the psychological pressure of censorship.

Inducing fear as a control mechanism in journalists seems to be extremely effective. Ocak described how fear of reprisal was reinforced during the protest, particularly when *CNN International* reporter Ivan Watson was arrested on live television by the Turkish police.

Ivan Watson was right next to me when he was taken into custody. Detaining him in the middle of all the spectators was no coincidence. I was there. Many other foreign journalists were there. Of course they did not kidnap and torture him, but to detain him there [in the middle of the crowd] and keep him in custody for a few hours, is another form of control. A different form of threat. (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014)

The expectations of the government about how a journalist should act became so internalized that many journalists said that it easily happens that you are self-censoring yourself and are actually unaware of it. As Oral described, after she lost her job she came to the realization that she was always censoring her work without truly realizing that she was actively engaging in self-censorship. She just knew what stories not to report on. When she was told what news not to engage with, she simply followed orders. As she said during the interview: "I was not aware of self-censoring myself, until all this happened [getting fired from Akşam]" (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

Self-censorship is not only practiced by journalists, but also by editors and managers. An example of this was given by Göncü. During the protests *Tarih* magazine was planning on running a front-page story on Gezi Park and similar historic uprisings within the history of the Turkish Republic. "Tarih" is Turkish for history and *Tarih* magazine was a special interest magazine on history. However, Göncü stated that the magazine's management practiced self-

censorship, and actually ended up closing the magazine rather than running the story. As he described:

> During that period [of Gezi Park], Doğuş Publishing Group (which owns the magazine) believed that [the magazine] would create a problem and took this decision themselves, basing the decision [of the closure] on their relationship with the government. When you opened the magazine and looked at it, you could see that it was a reference edition with academic opinions, popular opinions, and local Gezi pictures in a then-and-now format [before the protest and during]. But the owners still refrained from publishing such a special product. They thought that it would be perceived as defiance against the government and they believed they would face some kind of consequence. (Göncü, personal communication, January 8, 2015)

The censored version was later published online during the Gezi Park period (Ziflioğlu, 2013). This was one example of self-censorship at a management/editorial level during the Gezi Park protest, demonstrating that not only do individual journalists censor their work, but management can make effective use of self-censorship as well in order not to jeopardize their close business ties to the government. In this case, it went as far as closing the magazine completely.

Şık argues that at its root, self-censorship stems from fear and self-censorship affects everyone in a news organization: "From top to bottom, everyone is affected by self-censorship" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). As Aydın said: "All publishers have the same fear of coming face to face with the AKP government. When that happens you don't know what to expect" (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015). One can only assume what to expect by looking at what journalists, editors, and publishers have faced in the past.

Employee Policing

Another form of psychological pressure comes from employee policing. Employee policing in the context of journalism refers to journalists spying on one another or reporting each other to management. Oral told the story of a journalist she knew at a pro-government media organization who was tweeting their support of the protests and was turned in by a colleague "When he was tweeting, another reporter did not shy away from ratting him out to the management. The same thing happened to me in Akşam (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014). Oral said that this type of story is quite common - pro-government journalists often end up spying on and betraying journalists who work for pro-government papers, but do not share a pro-government view. Journalists who spy often see it as a way to get promoted to higher positions - getting someone else fired can mean a promotion. As Oral said, "these kind of stories existed. In Akşam these kind of stories were reality" (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014). Thus this type of employee policing is an active form of controlling journalists. In order to avoid facing similar consequences after an example is made out of another journalist, journalists adjust their behaved accordingly.

Ultimately, psychological pressure, as Ataklı pointed out, has been a form of pressure that the government has been imposing upon journalists for the last twelve years (Ataklı, personal communication, November 19, 2014). During the Gezi Park protest, the results of this form of pressure became clear when the mainstream media failed to do their job and report on the protests. The journalists in this research pointed to this type of pressure as one of the biggest problems within the Turkish media system because it is often invisible and internalized.

In summary, the central form of control during and around the period of the Gezi Park protest came from government sources or in forms influenced by the government; all the other

forms of pressure that transpired during that period were sub-categories of governmental control. The journalists' interviews almost unanimously described the government taking a central role in each form of pressure that has been identified, either in a direct or subtle manner. While there were examples where government pressure was used directly, other forms of control take longer to be traced back to the government, such as ownership pressure that seems to be motivated by business ties corporations have with the government, or judicial pressure, which borders on collaboration with the government (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). Even when a company does not have business ties with the government and yet does something to offend it, the government finds other means to discipline these corporations, mainly through economic-related punishment such as fines and pressuring businesses not to advertise with the company. Therefore, ownership pressure is strongly tied to economic pressure. Psychological pressure on the other hand is an indirect form of pressure - the internalization of acceptable work habits through intimidation and fear. During Gezi this psychological pressure proved effective and entrenched. This form of pressure attempts to change the behaviour and actions of journalists as they internalize acceptable norms. This can be seen when a journalist will avoid making the same 'mistakes' as another journalist who has been subject to government repercussions. Journalists in Turkey seem to do this out of a fear of facing the same fate, and they internalize these forms of control that have been passed down in an indirect manner.

Looking to the Past

While these forms of pressure were in use during the Gezi Park protest it needs to be remembered that Turkey has always had problems with media freedom. Most of the journalists were in agreement that Turkish media was never truly free, but is currently facing its most

problematic period. Şık remarked that censorship and forms of pressure directed at the media in

Turkey have been an ongoing problem throughout the history of the Turkish media. The

beginning of the Turkish media can be traced back to the Ottoman times to Takvim-i-Vaka-I, a

semi-official newspaper that was published under the agreement that it shall not harm

government profits. From then to now, if a publication or journalist is suspected of harming the

government, they face punishment. As he described, punishment was often extreme:

> What was done? They were killed or exiled. Newspapers were closed down, bombed, or
>
> depredated. The whole Ottoman and Turkish media history's past has been veiled by such
>
> pressures. What has changed over the last 200 years? First of all, the regime has changed
>
> and has been replaced by a regime called a Republic. From the Ottoman Empire to the
>
> Republic the forms of power have changed. The understanding of journalism has
>
> changed. Technology has changed. Media bosses have changed. But one thing has not
>
> changed - the very first rule from the beginning, the rule of not harming the government.
>
> The understanding of publishing something that goes against that rule has persisted. (Şık,
>
> personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Overall, he makes the point that there was never a golden age of Turkish journalism (Şık,

personal communication, January 14, 2015). He does not directly blame the state of the media on

one specific government, but rather sees it as a continuous mindset of those in power that

journalism shall not intervene with government. Göncü views the situation in a similar way,

pointing out that there has been change, but questioning its impact. "The Turkish media was

never really free. Now they don't kill journalists, but they take their livelihood away. So there

has been a change, but not for the better" (Göncü, personal communications, January 8, 2015).

Abaday says he finds the term "in the past" to be "very ridiculous," since the past continues to exist in the present. As he explained:

> Since the founding of the Republic there has been a dispute between government and media in Turkey. Now we are facing restrictions from AKP, but nothing has changed. Old Turkey continues. The only thing that changed is that before the restrictions came from the military, now they come from AKP. In the past it would be the military calling. I even encountered it myself. Once I was sitting and talking to my editor, when he received a call from the chief editor or his assistant who explicitly asked him to publish a certain story. The next day that story was in all papers. (Abaday, personal communication, November 25, 2014)

Overall, throughout all the interviews with the journalists, a general consensus exists that the media in Turkey was never free and not much has changed. The only thing that has changed are the key players. Currently the government, rather than the military, pulls the strings of mainstream media.

Chapter 5: The Impact of Social Media

Since the Gezi Park protest was not covered adequately in mainstream Turkish media, the Internet, especially social media, played a very important role during the protest. The Internet provided the protestors and journalists who did not have a voice within mainstream media, with a chance to participate in the public sphere. This chapter will examine the use of social media during the Gezi protest, in order to offer an understanding as to what role Turkish journalists feel social media plays in reporting crises when legacy media is restricted.

The chapter starts by examining how protestors and journalists used social media. Throughout the interviews four main themes were found: 1) coordination of the protests, 2) dissemination of news, 3) announcements, and 4) verification of news content on social media. These were the themes that kept reoccurring during the interviews with the journalists and became the key points to understanding the use of social media. The journalists also identified several limitations of social media that they feel need to be addressed. These can be broken down into three main themes: 1) limited freedom on social media for employed journalists, 2) citizen journalists and the lack of professional standards within social media, 3) the digital divide and limited reach of social media.

This chapter will also examine the backlash on social media against a pro-government journalist. It should be noted that while this journalist described the backlash as a limitation of social media, others might position the ability to critique through social media as one of the medium's advantages.

Finally, this chapter will also look at how the journalists position the government's reaction to social media and the journalists' observations that although social media did not start the protest, it played a critical role in propelling it.

Social Media Use During Gezi Park

The following chart depicts how social media was used during Gezi Park by protestors and journalists. It is sometimes difficult to separate the different themes/steps from one another, as often they are interconnected. For example, the announcement of a place where wounded protestors can find help can also be regarded as news. Yet the major function of such a tweet is to get information to protestors in case they need help, thus it is positioned under the category of announcement. However, despite some overlap, the separation into categories helps to clarify how social media was effectively used. To clearly depict the different aspects of social media use that were important, and to explain what task each of them fulfilled, a visual breakdown is helpful.
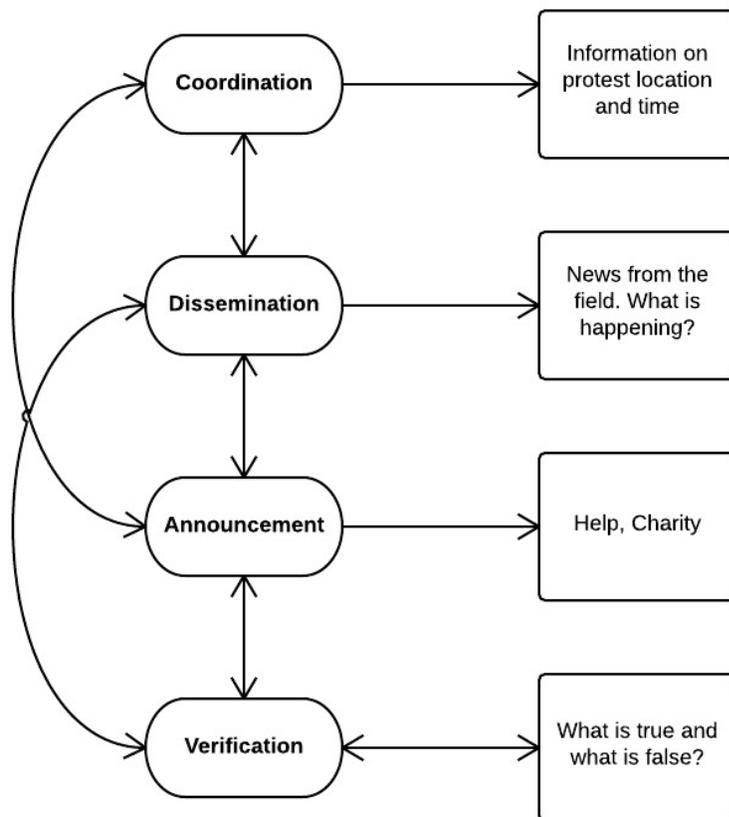
Coordination

The most important way in which social media was used was for the coordination of the Gezi Park protest, particularly in the beginning. The first news about the protest and reports of police violence against peaceful protesters was transmitted through social media. This started the coordination of the protest, which, as mentioned, quickly turned into more than simply a protest against the destruction of a park, but against the government more generally. As Şaka described:

> I remember the exact moment, around 9am, when I came to the office and I turned on my computer, checked my Twitter, and saw how the police were beating those protestors at night. I could sense the electricity, even around here, through others. That was the major source [of news] and until noon that day we got all our information through Twitter. Then we went to Taksim and saw it for ourselves. (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015)

Abaday said that many people joined the protest, because it was trending on social media and it was quickly seen as 'the place to be'. Akinan agreed that Twitter was not only used to coordinate the protest, but also publicized it and drew more people in. As he said, one reason people went was because they saw on Twitter that "everyone is there, I can be there as well" (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2014).

Dissemination of News

The second role social media played during the Gezi Park protest, which was of central importance to the public on and off the grounds, was the dissemination of news. This is a central point, which was emphasized by all the journalists. Social media was the main source for finding out what was going on not only in Gezi Park itself, but also in other cities such as Adana and

Izmir, directly from the protestors within these areas. Martens pointed out that there was nothing about the protests in these areas within mainstream media (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). He furthermore added that: "The only place that you could go to for things was social media" (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Simavi similarly said that Twitter "was an important tool for people to find out what was going on" (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015). Şık agreed: "During that time, the social media organ that was the most prominent was Twitter, because people were able to reach news the fastest on Twitter" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). The speed of news reporting via Twitter was essential to protesters on the ground. Even if mainstream media had covered the protest, they could never have informed the protestors as fast as social media - particularly Twitter - did.

Şaka blogged throughout the Gezi Park protest. After the police violently tried to stop people from protesting he said he was compelled to blog out of a sense of civic responsibility.

> I've never really witnessed anything like this in my life, so we felt that we should go and join the protest. Even some of my students were beaten down at that time, so it became our civic responsibility that we should join in…. At one point I decided that I should cover this and disseminate the news as much as possible. Honestly, I took it very personally that I had to report on this. Although I attended the protest from time to time, I mostly focused on how to disseminate the news on the Gezi Park resistance. (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015)

For journalists who were not actively working in a media organization, social media gave them the chance to use their professional skills. Many of them used social media to report from the protest site or to disseminate news already circulating on social media. Journalists such as

Ataklı, Oral, Şık, and Simavi who were not working at a media organization during the time of the Gezi Park protest were energetically using social media while simultaneously participating in the protest. Twitter was the platform they used most frequently. As Ataklı said: "During that time I was unemployed; I was fired from *Vatan* newspaper due to government pressure, and therefore my place was social media. I wrote non-stop from the scene of the crime" (Ataklı, personal communication, November 19, 2014). Journalists were able to be influential, despite not working in mainstream media, because they had large social media followings already, due to having been practicing journalists at one time.

Throughout the interviews, the impression was given that these unemployed Turkish journalists were using social media far more than journalists working at media institutions. Simavi was participating at the protest and said that social media was of central importance to him: "I did a lot with Twitter. I published news on what was happening to foreign newspapers as well as to the Turkish public, because mainstream media completely neglected this situation. It was like it did not exist" (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015). They all said that social media was extremely influential, and likely the reason they gave social media more weight was because it was their main medium to the outside world, as opposed to the resources that actively working journalists have, such as print or television. They said that some employed journalists might have been too intimidated to tweet or would feel it would be right to tweet their opinion on social media, given that they are working for a media organization. However, of the working journalists who were interviewed, some were still active within social media or the Internet. They were mainly tweeting news, as most of them were aware of that that tweeting an opinion could get them into trouble.

To sum up, even though forms of government pressure threatened or led to the dismissal of journalists from the physical space of work, social media still provided these same journalists a sphere to report from. It can be argued that they had - and still have - substantial influence over their social media followers.

Announcements

Social media was also used by protesters and journalists to make announcements to those in need of help. Abaday, Akın and Şaka were especially impressed by this use of social media. As Abaday said: "Announcements were made as to where to find help for wounded or even Wi-Fi access, from people living around the area" (Abaday, personal communication, November 25, 2014). Oral opened her home up to protesters who sought shelter during the protest and Akın, of the alternative media site *T24*, said that their office, which is in the center of Taksim, became a safe haven for wounded protesters. *T24* journalists were also assisting the wounded with pharmaceuticals. A lot of this information was distributed on social media to aid protesters. As Oral said:

> I live in Kurtulus. There were also protests happening on my street. They used that area to get to Taksim. At that time [during the protests] I took people into my home, people I did not know, but that was not important. (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014)

She furthermore shared announcements on her Twitter feed about where protesters could find help or shelter, especially during the times she was not able to attend the protest.

> While I was not there, when things got worse I shared announcements like 'the doors to this place are open', 'if you require something go to this address'. I shared these kind of announcements. How useful this was I don't know, but I tried to support them as much as

possible, even when I was not there [at the protest sight]. (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014)

Verification

Lastly, Twitter played a central role in the verification process of news and information. As Martens pointed out, "Twitter is a tool for getting news, but how much of it was false? You can just say anything, put out anything" (Martens, personal communication, January 12 2016). Verification thus played an important role and gave journalists who were not actively working in mainstream media during the Gezi Park protest the advantage of using their professional fact checking skills.

Oral was one of the journalists who used her professional research skills to make sure stories that were circulating were accurate. She does not trust news agencies in Turkey since, in her opinion, they are mainly government agencies. She also does not trust government newspapers. She believes that journalists know which sources to trust on social media and which not to trust. She is concerned about how much the public knows about verifying news.

> If something happened and I wrote about it in an exaggerated tone, the public might believe me.... The next important step is to raise the awareness of the public, teach them to write what they see and teach them to be careful about how they write about it. When you write something as news, you need to be careful about the language you use. For example if one were to write that a man died during the Gezi Park protest, yet he actually did not die, but was taken to the hospital injured [that would be problematic]. (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014)

She said that before she would write a tweet on a story such as this, she would do some fact checking first and search for additional sources. This might include calling the hospital and

asking them if someone was recently brought in dead or injured. "I verify first. I am a conscious social media user. There are people like me, but we're not the majority" (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014).

When Şaka blogged about what was happening at Gezi Park, he was concerned with accuracy, verification, and trying to establish what he saw as the correct frame. Foreign media outlets were comparing Gezi Park to the Arab Spring, framing it as a protest to bring down the government, yet for Şaka, it was closer to the Occupy movement as "a limited range of action against some government misdeeds" (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015). Şaka prominently reported about the police abuse and tried to verify any and all of the information that was circulating online. As he said: "I was trying to figure out and verify the news. There was so much information flooding [on social media]. I tried to do my best to verify what was wrong and what was right at the moment" (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015).

He said that his social media feed became a high priority for sharing information during the protests. Şaka also said that he was not alone - there were others on social media trying to verify and validate information that was circulating. "There was this kind of collective intelligence of news and we would verify the validity of information by discussing it collectively [on social media]" (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015).

Limitations of Social Media

Limited Freedom on Social Media for Employed Journalists

Social media does appear to be potentially problematic for Turkish journalists who work in media institutions, and many journalists need to be wary and cautious about what they publish on their social media accounts or they may face repercussions. Several journalists warned that

journalists are in real danger of being fired if they tweet something controversial. Oral said that a

colleague was fired due to a tweet he posted regarding the Gezi incident (personal

communication, December 3, 2014). Göncü provided another example of a journalist who came

under fire for tweeting something that was not in tune with beliefs of those in power. "Recently,

a journalist named Sedef Kabas, her house was raided, searched, her computer was seized, and

she got called in for a statement due to a tweet she tweeted" (Göncü, personal communication,

January 8, 2015). Ocak says the reason he is so careful with his social media feeds is because he

knows it is being watched - as are the social media feeds of all journalists in Turkey.

> At *Al Jazeera Turkey*, approximately 40 people were fired and the majority due to their
>
> tweets. From the Sabah group, ATV, and TRT, a large number of people were all fired
>
> because of their tweets, because of the comments they made. I mean, irrelevant people
>
> were let go of their jobs… because they wrote tweets saying that people were being
>
> attacked by gas. They were dismissed from their jobs. (Ocak, personal communication,
>
> December 17, 2014)

Oral knows first hand what can happen when journalists' social media feeds are

monitored. She lost her job because of a tweet that was not in line with the political leanings of

the newspaper she worked for. Oral mentioned that she was hesitant to work for *Akşam*

newspaper in the first place because it is pro-government, yet because she was to be working as

the editor-in-chief of the cultural section, which is not connected to politics, she felt comfortable

taking the job. However, one morning she was called into the office of the publishing

coordinator who criticized her for a tweet she posted about Prime Minister Erdoğan.

> For years I had worked for many newspapers and I always had a social media account
>
> where I shared my thoughts on news and events, things happening in the country. Up

until then, no publishing manager ever asked why I was posting tweets like that…. I

asked him, "What is wrong with that" and he answered: "How could you write something

like that." What had happened is that a higher up, some representative of AKP saw this

tweet and let the higher-ups of *Akşam* newspaper know that they wanted me fired. Then I

was fired. (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014)

She was in no position to make a claim, because she had only worked at *Akşam* for two

months at that time, which is generally considered to be within the trial period. She continued to

explain that overall, she was fired because her opinions did not fit with those of AKP. "I was

unemployed for a long period of time because there were only two or three newspapers I could

work for and they did not have money" (Oral, personal communication, December 3, 2014). Oral

said she is just one of many journalists who has faced this fate in the world of Turkish

journalism.

Abaday said that social media can be very liberating for journalists who are no longer

employed by mainstream media as it offers journalists a platform on which they can do valuable

journalism.

Those who we call Twitter volunteers or Twitter activists, such as our former journalists

who can't report anymore, or citizen journalists - they go to court hearings and tweet

from there. They truly do great work, because even if active journalists cover this, they

sometimes can't publish certain points and some court hearings are never being heard.

Thanks to those people, the hearings become visible. (Abaday, personal communication,

November 25, 2014)

However, he believes that journalists who are employed need to be careful.

Their first priority needs to be to their employer. They should not use Twitter to report on news before it appears in the media publication/broadcaster they work for and they should not use Twitter for their personal opinion.

Ocak said the way he deals with reporting on social media while working for a mainstream media organization is that he does not publish any news on his Twitter account before it appears on his employer's website. His Twitter account also names the newspaper he works for, so his association with his organization is always clear to his followers (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). Therefore, he is extra careful as to what he publishes on social media, including making sure not to publish opinion, but only facts, and only publishing information he would also publish in the newspaper itself.

Citizen Journalists and a Lack of Professional Standards

Journalists interviewed in this research believe that many social media users lack certain standards of professionalism that can make them unreliable sources of information. As Simavi pointed out: "It is dangerous, because people that use it are generally not journalists" (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015). Most of the journalists believe that citizen journalists need to acquire some journalism skills, such as fact checking and editing, to be taken seriously and because of this, social media is not enough to inform the public, but rather increases the need for professional media.

For Şık, it was citizen journalists who were most important in the media sphere during the Gezi Park protest. Şık connected the state's interest in censoring the Internet to this phenomenon; the state wanted to limit citizen journalism as much as professional journalism. He does see, however, as did the other journalists interviewed in this research, issues with citizen journalism - mainly that a lot of false, unfiltered information can find its way into the social

media sphere. He believes citizen journalists need to engage more in fact checking and information verification.

Şaka also stressed - as did all the other journalists interviewed - that on social media, many citizen journalists lack basic journalism skills, such as editing, verification and fact-checking (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015). He is very concerned that many stories find their way into the public sphere without verification via social media.

> Basically, most of the new media people were not from journalistic circles, so they lacked these principles…when a citizen journalist is reporting she or he is missing some of these principles. Although she or he provides the raw material, it has to be edited and processed. I believe citizens can also have editorial skills, but it will take time. (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015)

In order to be able to trust social media users and citizen journalists, Şaka believes certain journalistic skills - namely fact-checking and research - need to be adopted by citizen journalists.

Simavi summed up social media's role during times such as Gezi this way: "Because there is no fact checking it is extremely dangerous… you should not use it as a reliable source of news, but as a source that points you to the right direction" (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015).

The Digital Divide and Limited Influence

Martens said he was concerned about social media's limited reach. First, he said that the segment of the Turkish population that uses social media is principally made up of a liberal middle-class who are already well connected to the world outside Turkey, unlike the more conservative segment of the Turkish population (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Martens also said that access to the Internet does not exist in villages and smaller places;

people in more rural areas access their news predominantly from television and mainly rely on mainstream media (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Although some alternative television stations did broadcast the Gezi incident, mainstream media did not or they showed negative coverage of the event. Someone from a smaller village would have certainly turned to mainstream television for the news before turning to social media.

Akinan made the point that although the Internet may have some reach in Turkey, it is questionable how much political influence social media users have. He said that Turkey has a huge online participation rate and most users are between the ages of 13 and 35. However, while numbers may be high, he points out that they are not key voters, or in other words people who are most likely to affect change. Key voters, he maintained, are still largely influenced by mainstream media. While there might have been good coverage online and through social media, as he said, "the real power for transformation is still within mainstream media. The big media did not use their power [to convey change]. This is very important to know" (Akinan, personal communication, February 4, 2015). Akinan's remarks point to a digital divide, where some people are online and others are not, a divide which is problematic in a country that is already divided in itself.

Akinan also made the point that Twitter "is a closed world" (personal communication, February 4, 2015). Akinan's point is that on Twitter we tend follow and are surrounded by those who represent our views and thought patterns. Thus, social media, like Twitter, is not the ideal tool to change people's minds. It is a tool in which a certain segment of the Turkish population that shares the same political views has these views strengthened. Because of this, Aydın said that social media furthers polarization within the Turkish media and the public sphere. Overall, while none of the journalists completely dismiss the potential of the Gezi Park protestors to force

change through social media, they all felt that what was happening on social media was not enough to bring down those in power. It was effective enough though to upset them and worry them; the government does see the potential threat social media poses and thus is keen to take control of this domain.

Critique on Social Media: Limitation or Advantage?

Social media was also a platform that was used to mock, shame, and criticize mainstream media, especially pro-government media. An interesting example of how social media was used in this way is Yüksel's experience. Yüksel works for *Takvim* a pro-government newspaper and in contrast to all the other journalists in this research, Yüksel had a rather negative experience with social media. He was mocked on social media during the Gezi Park protests, mainly due to two articles he wrote. One was a fake interview with Christiane Amanpour and the other was an interview with a redwood tree at Gezi Park. He said that people who read his fake tree interview "started writing very bad things about me on Twitter. That day I became the world's mockery" (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014). *Takvim* newspaper decided to support him by creating a hashtag - #direnmevlüt. Translated it means "resist Mevlüt," which was meant to serve as support for the journalist on Twitter. However, despite this support Yüksel's experience with social media was negative and he is not optimistic about the potential of social media. According to him, 'real' journalism is still needed, since hate speech and lies circulate on social media (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014). This is not a surprising observation from a journalist who works for a pro-government newspaper; the government was, after all, extremely critical of social media. Generally pro-government journalists' beliefs are, at least publically, in line with those of the government, which was the case with Yüksel. All his

responses during the interview reflected government policy and platforms. Despite his negative experience on Twitter, Yüksel still has an active Twitter account.

However, while Yüksel was very critical of social media, it should be noted that others might see the ability to critique journalists through this platform as an advantage. While pre-social media Yüksel might have been 'untouchable', or certainly less reachable, through Twitter those who disagreed with him were able to publically raise their voices in a way that, while it may not have changed Yüksel's mind, certainly made him realize that there were those who disagree with him. This example shows how social media offers the public a platform through which people can respond to journalists' work. It also displays how pro-government media journalists like Yüksel were held accountable to some extent through social media.

Government Reaction to Social Media

How significant social media's role was during the protest became extremely obvious from the government's intense reaction. Social media was considered problematic and led the government to shut down social media servers several times. They never managed to shut down the servers permanently, however. This was a dramatic shift in the government's attitude towards social media. As Ataklı mentioned, the party that once made such effective use of social media now views it as their biggest nightmare (Ataklı, personal communication, November 19, 2014). Şaka made the observation that the government attacks Twitter more frequently because of its limited circle of users. As he said:

> I heard from an AKP official that AKP is not banning Facebook, not because of its
>
> cooperation with AKP, but because even AKP voters are using Facebook. If you close

Facebook it will create a bigger reaction than blocking Twitter, which is limited to certain

circles. (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015)

As Şaka described, while Facebook is more popular than Twitter in Turkey, the concern

of the government is that the people using Twitter might be politically influential. While this is

in contrast to what other journalists pointed out as a limitation of Twitter - that its influence is

not great - he contends that while the government recognizes that the Twittersphere does not

reach into all corners of Turkey, they are worried that the people who do use Twitter might be

catalysts for political change.

Twitter is definitely not used as much as Facebook, but the thing is the users are more

urban elites - educated people - and nearly all Gezi Park protesters were Twitter users.

Although demographically [this group is] not a big water base, this is a population that

can shake the public agenda. (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015)

Şaka's observations are very similar to what other journalists had to say about Twitter

and its social impact. Şaka further explained that Twitter is more commonly used for political

issues and that applications such as Instragram or Facebook are used for more fun or social

activities and therefore are not seen as a threat (Şaka, personal communication, January 29,

2015). Yet most journalists did not dismiss the future potential Twitter might have to convey

some sort of change. Yet for now, and during Gezi, Twitter was not enough to reach the majority

of the population who mainly rely on mainstream media.

Conclusion

All the journalists stressed that although social media played a very essential role during

the Gezi protest, it was not social media that started the protest. They found it of importance to

distinguish between social media being of central significance, but not the instigator of the protests, which was coordinated by environmental organizations. What social media did manage to do was manage raise awareness for a protest, which otherwise would likely have been ignored and passed by unnoticed. What makes Gezi Park unique is that it was the first time in Turkey where social media's role was this important. As Akın aptly summed up:

It [social media] played the following important role: The speed of communication surprised the government and the fact that this huge crowd coordinated itself in such a small period of time surprised them more. This was a first for Turkey. There was no other incident where social media was this successful. (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2014)

Şık stressed the significance of social media in a country with restricted media, saying that social media is "the most important instrument to break censorship" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). Many journalists further emphasised Akın's point that this event was the first time social media was efficiently used for a political cause in Turkey, playing a very important role in coordination. As Martens clearly pointed out:

Social media became popular through this event [the Gezi Park protest] and whatever was shared on Facebook or Twitter became news at the time, such as where clashes were happening and where the police were…. There was also incredible human support; some people were opening their apartments or providing information such as where you could find medication….. Social media, I think, was absolutely critical. This is something that we first saw with Tahir or Egypt four years ago now. Social media does not create a revolution. Social media does not put on goggles and what not, and build a barricade.

Humans do that. But as a tool for organization it is critical. (Martens, personal

communication, January 12, 2015)

Overall, social media was essential during the Gezi protest, and, I would argue, is

essential for a country like Turkey where mainstream media is restricted. However, while social

media can be liberating, it still potentially problematic for mainstream journalists and citizen

journalists, who could get fired or questioned by government for their work. There are questions

about the credibility of information that circulates on social media. Finally, there is also the very

real concern of the digital divide and limited reach of social media, which calls into question

how much of an impact it has.

Chapter 6: Alternative Voices in the Public Sphere: International and Turkish Alternative

Media

The following chapter deals with the media during the Gezi Park that did report on the protests: international media and alternative media. This media's influence within Turkey was fairly limited, first because in the case of international media the language used was not Turkish, and second, in the case of alternative media, they do not belong to commercial outlets and do not have as wide an audience. Yet these media are still important to explore since they were part of the public media sphere and protestors relied on these news sources. As well, in terms of the international media, they were representing Turkey to the rest of the world. This chapter begins by examining how the journalists perceived the coverage of the protests in international media. When referring to international media in this thesis, I am specifically referring to media with headquarters outside of Turkey, such as the *BBC* or *CNN*. The first major theme that emerged was that overall the coverage was perceived positively, in that it provided the world outside of Turkey with news about the protest. However, there were differing opinions as to why the international media found the protest newsworthy. While some journalists thought the protest was newsworthy as it was a major political uprising, others suspected the international media was attracted to the protest in large part because of the visual aspect, which made for 'good television'. The second major theme was that the journalists were critical of the international media's coverage, principally because they found that coverage was 1) centralized, 2) superficial, 3) framed incorrectly, and 4) that international media arrived on the scene too late. A third major theme that emerged was that the Turkish government, and pro-government Turkish media, attempted to attack and intimidate international media. Of particular interest were two articles by journalist Yüksel, who works for the pro-government newspaper *Takvim*.

This chapter will then turn to explore the journalists' perceptions of how alternative media within Turkey covered the protest, which includes both off and online media. The first major theme that developed through the interviews is that the journalists pointed to several examples of what they considered successful alternative media that was able to report on the protest. Interestingly, some positioned the online version of a mainstream Turkish newspaper as alternative, noting that it enjoyed more freedom than its hard-copy counterpart. As well, they also noted that English-language media within Turkey enjoyed more freedom. However, they also pointed to several limitations that alternative media face: 1) financial instability, 2) limited reach, 3) polarization and bias, 4) and a tendency in some alternative media to 'copy-paste' stories rather than do investigative journalism. The majority of the journalists still see many issues with alternative media, the most hopeful of which were those who actually work in alternative media.

International Media

It became obvious throughout the course of this research that most journalists believed the coverage that the international media provided during the Gezi protest was much more satisfying than the Turkish coverage of the event. As Şık described: "Compared to Turkish media, yes they [international media] provided good broadcasting. After all they broadcasted the truth. The Turkish media can't even broadcast the truth, which is why they are being discredited (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). Oral agreed that the international media reported information that Turkish media did not, which brought the Gezi protest to the attention of the world. "Not the people here (Turkey), but the whole world was able to follow and knew what was going on. The truth was seen in the international press" (Oral, personal

communication, December 4, 2014). Similarly, Ocak had high praise for the visibility the international media gave to the protest. He noted that the international media constantly emphasized visuals of the protest and that, for the most part, the protest was the top story in their news line-ups. As he said: "They performed much better than we did" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). According to Simavi, the international media also had an effect on local media. He said that *CNN International*'s media coverage was so important that only after they started to report on Gezi, did the protest become news in Turkey (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015).

Aydın said that the reason the international media's coverage of Gezi was good was because it was objective. "They have to be unbiased. Their [Western] lifestyle and culture requires this. I mean, that is the reason their media exists" (Aydın, personal communication, December, 2014). Most journalists felt that international media did what the Turkish media was not capable of doing - report on what was actually going on in a professional, objective way. Within local mainstream media one would have never found out what was going on; it was thanks, in part, to the international media that protestors found a voice, and felt as if that their protests mattered and were newsworthy (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015).

Most journalists shared a similar belief that the international media was interested in covering the Gezi Park protest because it was a significant political protest in the center of Istanbul and, as such, was newsworthy. Ataklı specifically pointed to political reasons as to why Western and European international media showed interest in the Gezi protest. As he explained, the protest was newsworthy because it was an act of democracy.

Let me put it like this: Turkey is an important country for Western and European countries. Turkey is a Muslim country, but it is a country that has fundamental

foundational differences from all the other Muslim countries. First of all Turkey is the

only truly secular country amidst the Muslim world. It is a democratic country, and

furthermore the first amongst all the Muslim countries with a government tradition.

Outside of Turkey, there are not many other Muslim communities that have a government

tradition…. Thus Turkey is not perceived like the other [Muslim] countries. Turkey

attracts attention as a country that aims to join the European Union, a country that wants

to gain importance within the world. With this in mind, what happens in Turkey attracts

the international media's attention no matter what. (Ataklı, personal communication,

November 19, 2014)

Other journalists suggested that the international media deemed the Gezi protest

newsworthy for more sensationalist reasons. Martens believes that the reason the protests might

have caught the attention of the international press, had to do with "great" TV visuals, which

they were able to gather at Gezi, as opposed to other stories that were taking place around the

same time that perhaps lacked visuals (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015).

After all, protests have happened frequently in Taksim square and while one might find a brief

mention of these protests on international media, in this case the protest lasted days and were

violent. As Martens bluntly put it: 'Burning things is great for television" (Martens, personal

communication, January 12, 2015). Şık also hinted at sensationalism when he talked about why

the international press was on site in the first place. In Şık's opinion, the international press came

to Turkey to report on Gezi Park because their news agenda was not filled with other equally, or

more dramatic stories. So while they came to Turkey to report on something newsworthy, they

also came to shoot 'good' footage. He believes that if there were bigger stories in other parts of

the world, the coverage of the Gezi Park protest within international media would not have been as vast (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015).

Critiques of International Media Coverage

Interestingly, the journalists who praised international media were also simultaneously critical of the coverage. Martens noted that while it was great that the international media recorded what was going on in Taksim Square, much of what happened outside of Taksim Square - either in other areas of Istanbul or in other cities - was never shown, which, according to him, reduced the impact of the protest on a global level. "The international media was attaching importance to one part of Gezi, but not the movement at a nationwide level" (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Furthermore, according to Martens and others, the international coverage was superficial. Martens thought the reports could have been more elaborate, instead of simply staying on the surface of the issue. Şaka also said that while he found that the international press did a good reporting on the violence in general, he also felt their coverage lacked more in-depth analysis and accuracy. Şaka also pointed out that there were problems with the way the international journalists framed the Gezi Park demonstrations as similar to the Arab Spring. He saw more connections to the Occupy movement (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015). The Arab Spring was an attempt to bring down governments, whereas this was not the purpose of the Gezi Park demonstrations. In addition to these criticisms, Şaka was upset – as was Simavi - with the fact that international media was not covering the protest from day one. However, despite these criticisms, overall the prevailing thought from most journalists was that the international media did their job as journalists - they were on site, covering the large protest that went on in the center of Istanbul.

Government and Pro-Government Media

Many journalists mentioned that the international media became a target of the Turkish government. As Ocak said: CNN International came. BBC came. And they did a live coverage… and what happened? They became the direct target of then Prime Minister, now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan" (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). Ocak referred to Ivan Watson's arrest, which was described in more detail in Chapter 4, as a tactic of the Turkish government to not only intimidate Turkish journalists, but also show the international journalists that they are not untouchable. The pro-government media also played a part, according to Stefan Martens, in attacking the international press in order to try to make them appear like terrorists or Zionists.

While most of the journalists were satisfied with the international coverage of the Gezi protest, the one exception was the journalist who works for pro-government media. Yüksel played a central role during the coverage of the Gezi Park protest. The newspaper he works for, *Takvim,* and Yüksel himself, came under harsh criticism for some of the coverage that was done during the protest. His first article was a fake interview with *CNN International's* Christiane Amanpour. It was a front page story, published on June 18th, 2013 under the title "Kirli Itraf" [Dirty Confession]. It was about what she *would* have said, if she had spoken with *Takvim*. Amanpour was on the Turkish government's radar, who accused her, through her reporting, of encouraging terrorists and protestors in a plot to bring down the Turkish government. In Yüksel's opinion, echoing the sentiments of the government, *CNN International*'s coverage was unbalanced making it look like the majority of the Turkish public opposed the regime.

> CNN International framed their stories as if the whole Turkish nation was protesting
>
> against the government. In response to that, we did an interview with Christiane

Amanpour. Something we call a fake interview. I was in Atlanta previously and had a picture with Christiane Amanpour. We took advantage of this photograph and put it on the front, as if I'd had an interview with Christiane Amanpour. (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014)

In Yüksel's fake interview with Amanpour, he has her confess that CNN made her cover the incident in order to destabilize the country. Yüksel said that that many people did not realize it was fake news:

On the first page, we made it look like as if I had called Christiane Amanpour and asked her: 'Why did you do coverage that makes one perceive Turkey in a negative light?' And presented it as if she confessed that their business people pressured them to create coverage like that.... In the rest of the article inside the newspaper we said: Dear *Takvin* reader, we conducted a fake interview with Christiane Amanpour. Of course what we have published here is not the truth, but an effort to showcase why Christiane did this and therefore revealed Christiane Amanpour and CNN's lies…. Since everyone saw our front page and did not continue reading the rest of the article, they perceived it as real and it caused quite a stir. (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014)

In Yüksel's second unusual article, he conducted an interview with a tree at Gezi Park titled "Ne Cektin Be Kizilagac" (What did you have to suffer through Redwood). In it he asks a tree how he feels about the protest and whether it has done him [the tree] any good. His justification for conducting an interview with a tree is that: "After all the protestors were there to protect the trees, but to us it seemed like they were doing more harm, so we decided to get the tree's point of view" (Yüksel, personal communication, December, 2014). Yüksel said after this kind of reporting, he became famous internationally.

Within my 30 years of journalism, no one knew me. Then, everyone started to know me. In America, all the news channels made me their news, using lines such as: fake reportage with Christiane Amanpour, sued by Christiane Amanpour, and the journalist that conducted an interview with a tree. We were acknowledged everywhere, because it was important. (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014)

Yüksel believes that his methods of journalism provided important counter-arguments to the negative coverage in the international media. It is also interesting to note that when it comes to his political affiliations, he claims not to be a supporter of AKP, but rather is a supporter of 'good' journalism. Yüksel's articles have been the most prominent and unique examples thus far of a pro-government media outlet trying to disprove the coverage provided by the international media.

Overall, except for the interview with Yüksel, who believed the international media, especially *CNN International*, was colluding with the protestors, all other journalists seemed generally satisfied with the job the international media did during the Gezi demonstrations. The comments from the majority of journalists regarding the international media lead back to the idea that the Turkish media failed to do their job during Gezi Park. With the visual proof of the protest that dominated international media, it became all the more apparent that Turkish media was not covering the protest properly, or at all. Yet, as Martens pointed out, while the international media did Gezi Park justice, its impact within Turkey was minimal. "For people living here it was not the first place to go to. They [Turkish citizens] were going to local sources, generally social media first, before going to any international source" (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Since international media could not provide the locals with the immediate information they truly needed, such as updates on where the police were, how

many people were currently injured, and where to get immediate help, social media was still the main source of news, as well as some smaller local alternative media.

Alternative Media

Turning again to media within Turkey, the media field can be generally seen as split in two - the dominant player is of course mainstream media, but more and more alternative media is also finding a voice. Within mainstream media, as has been discussed in this research, pro-government media seems to be the more financially successful form of media, but there are also newspapers that are not directly affiliated with government that still cave to media restrictions, because they prefer to stay away from trouble. What this thesis has not addressed yet is alternative media that is not affiliated with government and tries to provide 'objective' journalism despite the current situation and threats to journalistic freedom. When I refer to alternative media within this thesis, I include both on and off-line media, essentially any form of media that serves as a possible alternative to mainstream media.

Successful Alternative Media

There were two prominent examples of alternative media that were brought to my attention during the interviews. The first is *T24*, which was founded by Akın. Akın said that the website saw an increase of four to five times more visitors during the peak of Gezi, and he says their readership levels have stayed at the same level even after Gezi. He credits this increase in readership to a "lack of trust toward the media" (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2014). According to Akın, "during periods like Gezi, we make news without sorting out stories, which brought us good results" (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2014). He credits

T24's success as an alternative media site to the fact that they included a variety of different views in their coverage and have a high number of prominent writers. Akın believes that the only type of media that can change the media landscape in Turkey is alternative media, but he adds "we can't say that alternative media has yet been institutionalized" (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2014), meaning that it does not play a prominent role at the moment. Göncü echoed Akın's sentiment, also saying that he sees hope for Turkish media within alternative media. "I see hope here [in alternative media], but it needs to be developed further, I mean it is not something that can be continued with the old habits and customs of journalism in Turkey" (Göncü, personal communication, December 2014). He elaborated, saying that any form of alternative media, including social media, needs to challenge those in power in order to be influential.

The second example of alternative media that was often mentioned in the interviews was *Vaguz.tv*, founded by Akinan. This was an online site that was established at the same time as the Gezi Park protest and used often by the protestors as a source of news. Several journalists, including its founder, stressed that *Vaguz.tv* was a successful alternative to mainstream media, particularly since it was able to show video from the protest site (Akinan, personal communication, February 4, 2015). As Akinan said:

> We made good use of social media and announced it [vaguz.tv] rapidly and successfully on social media..... The fact that we shared video contents, like 'right now I am at Gezi park and the tanks are spraying water at us' [was important]. There is the writing part…but it was the presentation of video that was extremely successful. (Akinan, personal communication, February 4, 2015)

While the above-mentioned platforms influenced the media sphere to an extent, there were also others that were referenced by journalists. These were smaller media outlets and alternative sources that reported on the protest. The chart below itemizes the alternative media sources identified by the journalists in this research.

Television	Newspaper	Online Media
• Beyaz TV • Halk TV • Samanyol TV • Ulusal • Kanal	• Bir Gün • Today's Zaman • Sozcu • Hurriyet Daily News • Evrensel • Aydinlik • Taraf	• T24 • Vaguz TV • Capulcu TV • 140 Junos • ötekilerin postasi • ViaNet • hurriyet.com.tr

Interestingly, several journalists suggested that online portals of mainstream media seemed to have enjoyed more freedom than the print versions, and saw them as a form of alternative media. For instance, Abaday said that *hurriyet.com.tr* - the Internet site of the mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet* - actually provided decent coverage of the protest, up until its leading editor was transferred elsewhere (Abaday, personal communication, November 25, 2014). Ocak, who works for *Hürriyet*, also mentioned that their website *hurriyet.com.tr* covered the Gezi protest in the beginning and had some decent stories (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014). However, as Abaday pointed out, although alternative media outlets may have been covering the protest, their reach was limited. As he said: "*Hurriyet.com.tr* provided good coverage. Other smaller newspapers, such as *Bir Gün*, *Taraf*, or *Evrensel* did their own

stories. They published good stories, but the number of readers they reach is very low (Abaday, personal communication, November 25, 2014).

However, others are more optimistic about the future of some alternative media. Martens said that the newspaper *Bir Gün* was successful because it was there, reporting on the ground. "*Bir Gün,* in terms of newspapers, was important because they were there all the time" (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015). He continued, saying that its success during Gezi Park actually grew its readership:

> Gezi was the making of *Bir Gün. Bir Gün* has been around for about ten years, but its circulation until Gezi was always about 5000 or so. *Bir Gün* was not necessary the newspaper of Gezi, but since Gezi has occurred its circulation has grown about four to five times. (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

Martens also mentioned a website called *ötekilerin postasi,* which played an important role during the Gezi Park protest. He said that the website was closed down several times during Gezi, but in the end gathered a substantial following of about 150-thousand people. He believes it was instrumental in explaining what was going on at the event, and seems to have been a website used and operated by the protestors themselves (Martens, personal communication, January 12, 2015).

Several journalists also pointed out that it seemed as if English-language local newspapers had more freedom in their coverage of Gezi Park than those written in Turkish, including those English-language newspapers with Turkish counterparts that are considered mainstream publications. For instance, Dogan Group publishes the mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet*, but also owns the English-language newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News.* Abaday, who

used to work for *Hürriyet Daily News,* pointed out that while *Hürriyet* was not reporting on the protest, the English version of the newspaper was "trying to provide readers with the truth in an objective manner. They also wrote on the police interferences (Abaday, personal communication, November 25, 2014). Şaka also said that Turkey's *Zaman* newspaper was more critical of the protestors than the English counterpart *Today's Zaman*, which was more positive toward the protest (Şaka, personal communication, January 29, 2015). As such, I have positioned both the *Hürriyet Daily News* and *Today's Zaman* as alternative sources of news during the Gezi protest.

It should be briefly mentioned that Fethullah Gülen, who owns *Zaman* had a falling out with the AKP government several months after the Gezi Park protest. Now the current coverage in the Turkish *Zaman* is also critical of the AKP government, whereas before they supported them. This change of attitude within a newspaper can also be seen in *Hürriyet*.

Limitations of Alternative Media

Financial Issues

One major issue that alternative media face is keeping financially afloat. As discussed in Chapter Four, media outlets that are not pro-government have difficulty securing financial backing. *Vaguz.tv* has since closed due to financial issues; however, even though the website was not able to continue to fund itself, its founder Akinan is still very hopeful. He believes that you do not need to create a major news organization to effect change. As he said: "creating little streams that lead toward freedom are enough" (Akinan, personal communication, February 4, 2015).

Another journalist Simavi, went on to found *Diken.com.tr* after Gezi Park was over. So far this is a successful and influential website that has been able to keep afloat financially

because he is financing it himself. He is not concerned about advertisements because, as

mentioned in Chapter Four, companies that provide media with advertising try to interfere in the

journalistic process. Simavi strongly believes that in the future, people will be willing to pay to

receive news, but until then he will continue to back the website himself.

Limited Reach

The majority of the public still gets their news from mainstream media. This undermines

the power of alternative media. The portion of the public that arguably needed to be informed of

the protest and the media restrictions in Turkey, is still using media that is predominantly

controlled or under pressure from the Turkish government. As Martens said, the problem within

alternative media is that it does not reach readers or viewers beyond their general target

audience. As he said: "Who is watching? Who is listening? People are, but in some ways it

[alternative media] is preaching to the converted" (Martens, personal communication, January

12, 2015).

Abaday also made the point that smaller alternative media outlets, which provided stories

on Gezi Park, do not reach the majority of the public. However, many journalists also said that

while these media outlets probably did not receive much recognition for their news coverage

prior to Gezi Park, they gained more recognition during the protest, because they actually

reported what was happening and this may have had a lasting effect. As Oral said: "I now have

Halk TV on my television 24/7, a station I never used to watch before" (Oral, personal

communication, December 3, 2014). Ocak also switched to alternative media, especially during

the protest:

To understand what was going on during that period I was watching Bugün TV,

Samanyol News, because they were covering it with detail. Of course they were doing so

from their own point of view, but the others were not even treating it as news. They acted

as if nothing was going on. (Ocak, personal communication, December 17, 2014)

Polarization and Bias

Much of the alternative media in Turkey represents the voices of the Turkish minorities,

such as the Kurds, Alevis, or communists. Some journalists made the point that while alternative

media may provide different points of view than mainstream media, it is often biased or

opinionated, and this is problematic. For instance, while Aydın said that opinion and bias is a

problem in Turkish media more generally, alternative media also goes from one extreme to the

other (Aydın, personal communication, January 11, 2015). Similarly, Yüksel said the media is

highly polarized in Turkey, and was especially so during the period of Gezi:

The Turkish media was split in two. One the one side there was the media that wanted the

government to resign, the media that made the protest look like it was the next Arab

Spring - the media that made it look like the majority of the public wants the government

gone. One part of the media did such coverage, and the other part resisted and opposed

this type of coverage. (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014)

'Copy-Paste' vs. Investigative Journalism

Some journalists were not enthusiastic about the potential of alternative media, and made

the point that many so-called alternative online sites simply copy-paste stories from mainstream

media. Yüksel strongly believes that the quality of online journalism needs to be improved.

Although he is not completely pessimistic about the future potential of the Internet, he says that

much alternative journalism is simply copy-pasting stories, which does not equate to good journalism (Yüksel, personal communication, December 10, 2014). Şik agreed with Yüksel, saying that that much alternative media is not yet appropriately equipped to be regarded as quality journalism in that they often copy-paste stories from mainstream media instead of doing their own investigative journalism. As he said: "If you are going to publish stories on your site that you've copied from mainstream media, you should not be called alternative media" (Şık, personal communication, January 14, 2015). However, despite these critiques, some forms of alternative media obviously played an important role in the Gezi Park protest, as there were examples given of alternative media that did try to produce original journalism.

Conclusion

Overall, the journalists believed that international news outlets did a good job reporting on the Gezi protest. This was the opinion expressed during all the interviews, except one - Yüksel. In his case, it can be argued that he is inclined to hold the same opinion as his employer, a pro-government media outlet. In terms of alternative media, four journalists said they had great hopes for alternative media, including two that currently work in alternative media - Akın, the editor of *T24* and Simavi the founder of *diken.com.tr*. Akın sees power for change within the Internet, especially when it comes to alternative forms of media (Akın, personal communication, December 12, 2014). Simavi agrees and hopes that "whatever is regarded as alternative media today, will become mainstream media in the future" (Simavi, personal communication, February 6, 2015). Şaka noted that Turkey still enjoys a relative amount of Internet freedom; however, he questions how long this freedom will last as the government has tried to limit Internet access in the past. Despite this reality, Şaka is still hopeful:

There is a general policy against media and it does not exclude the Internet. The good

thing is the Internet is hard to control, so I believe whatever the government does, some

people will always continue to produce critical stuff. (Şaka, personal communication,

February, 2015)

Şaka mentioned that more and more Internet start-ups are moving abroad, because the

infrastructure in Turkey and economic realities are not substantial enough and this is the only

way online media companies can protect themselves from libel trials. Şık and Yüksel see many

limitations within alternative online media and do not think it will, or should, replace more

traditional sources of media. Göncü, Ataklı and Aydın were not as grim in their prognosis for

alternative media, but for them alternative media can only bring about change if they try to

distinguish themselves from the current format of mainstream media.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has explored the Turkish media landscape during the Gezi Park protest from the perspective of local journalists. Even though mainstream media was restricted, social media and alternative media were able to provide part of the public with information regarding the protest, and international media reported the incident to the rest of the world. This challenge to the intensely controlled Turkish media sphere caught the attention of the government, which then tried to discredit these sources publicly through speeches or within the government controlled media. Clearly those in power sought to control the entire media sphere.

During this research, thirteen journalists were interviewed through semi-structured in-depth interviews. These journalists were asked about their experiences with and observations of the media during the time of the Gezi Park protest. The interviews touched on mainstream media, social media, international media and alternative media. This concluding chapter will respond to the research questions asked in the beginning of this thesis, drawing on findings obtained through the interviews. Furthermore, this chapter will put the findings within a larger theoretical context, drawing on the work of Castells (2012, 2013) and Mosco (2009). The overall findings suggest that the fight for control of the media sphere in Turkey is about power, as the Turkish government tried to retain power over media and social media while the protestors and many journalists tried to exert influence in the highly restrictive media sphere. Castells' notion of 'counter-power' will be used to position the role of protestors and journalists. As Castells (2012) writes: "societies are contradictory and conflicted, wherever there is power there is also counter-power," which is the capacity of social actors to challenge the embedded power institutions (p. 5). Mosco's (2009) theory of structuration, which draws from Giddens (1984), will be used to examine the type of agency journalists tried to exert within the larger structure of the highly

restricted media sphere in Turkey. Structuration will be used to look at how journalists are embedded within the media sphere in Turkey, but also try to exert influence over this system. As Mosco (2009) write about structuration: "We are the product of structures that our social action or agency produces" (p.185). Finally, this chapter will also suggest future research paths.

The first research question this thesis looked at was what kind of restrictions Turkish journalists faced during the Gezi park protest and how this affected coverage of the protest. As a sub-question, it was also asked whose interests do legacy media serve in Turkey today? The findings demonstrated that the Turkish mainstream media during the Gezi Park protest were highly controlled. Hence, it was hard or even dangerous for journalists to provide an oppositional voice within the mainstream media, due to the punishments they might face if they did report on the event and upset the government. The retributions they could possibly have faced included judicial charges, imprisonment, or being fired. Due to these fears, most mainstream media did not report on the protest and when they did report on it, it was from a pro-government angle that cast the protestors in a negative light. Overall this research found that there are five main forms of pressure journalists in Turkey face: government, judicial, ownership, economic and psychological pressure. Psychological pressure includes self-censorship and employee policing. An in-depth discussion with the journalists revealed that all these forms of pressure could be traced back to the primary enforcer of these restrictions - the government. Psychological pressure, especially self-censorship was regarded as the most dangerous and effective form of censorship, primarily because it is invisible and internalized through the powerful use of intimidation. The unspoken threat of having your livelihood taken away is a very efficient way to force someone into obedience. Journalists are aware that being fired means not being able to find another position within mainstream media again. This fear, according to Ataklı, has been

imposed upon journalists since the beginning of the AKP period and has proven successful in silencing journalists.

Overall these findings demonstrate that the Turkish mainstream media is extremely restricted and that it is hard or dangerous for journalists to provide an alternative voice in mainstream media. The conclusion reached in this research is that mainstream media in Turkey does not serve the public good, but rather the government. However, the journalists did stress that overturning the reign of the AKP would not necessarily create a freer media atmosphere; some other entity would likely simply take over. In the past, for instance, the military has controlled the media. This showcases a deeper structural problem within the Turkish media.

The second research question this thesis investigated was the role social media plays in reporting crises when legacy media is restricted. Social media played several significant roles during the protest. Most importantly it was social media that brought attention to the event, however interviews with the journalists also revealed four main functions of social media during the protests: coordination, dissemination of news, announcements and verification. While these are all connected to one another, they can also be seen as separate entities in order to clarify the tasks social media fulfilled that local media were not able to. First social media was used to coordinate the protest. It mobilized the masses. Second, social media was used to disseminate news about what was going on during the protests. It offered a platform for both protestors and journalists who were not employed by mainstream media. It informed the masses. The third use of social media was announcements; this proved to be of great service to protestors, because it provided them with helpful information on where to find help if injured, where to hide and lay low during the protest, and where they could get free Internet access in and around the Taksim

area. It assisted the masses. Finally, social media was used to verify news that was circulating about the protest in order to eliminate false information. It was used to search for the 'truth'.

In terms of limitations to social media, the journalists pointed to limited freedom on social media for employed journalists, a lack of professional standards on social media that brings up issues of quality and trustworthiness, and the digital divide, which brings into question the influence of social media in the first place. It still seems that social media has a very limited and centralized influence on the public. Messages on social media often reach only those who already hold similar views. Furthermore, as the journalists have stated, despite the large amount of people in Turkey who are connected to the Internet, there are large areas that are not connected and social media is restricted to a certain elite. Its limited reach might offer some explanation to how the AKP still managed to maintain power and even gain a higher percentage of votes in the elections following the Gezi Park protest - social media does not reach or manage to sway the part of the population that is still mainly receptive to mainstream media.

However, although a digital divide (Van Dijk, 2005) exists in Turkey, as the Internet reaches a fairly limited, educated, and young elite, I would argue that this does not completely undermine the Internet's democratizing potential. Since without the Internet, the media sphere would have been even more restricted and the segment of the public that did use the Internet to raise their voices would have been excluded from the media sphere completely. Even though it is only a limited segment of the population that has access to this network, as long as it remains uncontrolled it does provide some people with the opportunity to challenge larger networks and structures of power, such as traditional media or government. This includes citizen journalists and activists, as well as journalists in Turkey who have been fired and are unable to find work in

mainstream media. This is a step toward democratization of the media and affords journalists some agency within the larger structure of mainstream media.

Of particular importance in this thesis is that social media offered a sphere for unemployed journalists to engage in reporting and thus still have some measure of influence. While employed journalists had access to social media as well, given the restrictions they face it is likely they were too intimidated to tweet news that would not be in line with their media institutions' beliefs. Some journalists had experienced being fired for their social media use, and during the interviews journalists who were actively working in mainstream media hinted at being careful about what they tweeted. However, a major theme in this research was that even though the government removed journalists from the mainstream media, they were able to have a public voice through social media. All of the unemployed journalists in this research did make use of social media.

In terms of how to theorize the use of social media in the Gezi Park protest, social media's success in bringing attention to a protest, which otherwise would have been neglected, gives weight to the fact that "networked power" is an efficient form of counter-power that can threaten, yet perhaps not necessarily completely dethrone those who hold power (Castells, 2012). In the case of Gezi Park social media proved to be a platform that was used to pose a threat to those in power. News of the protest on social media drew the attention of international media and many others outside of Turkey's borders. For a while social media users, including protestors, citizen journalists, and professional journalists who had been fired from mainstream media, had power to influence the public discourse. While the embedded pressure mechanisms within Turkish mainstream media helped support those in power, such as the government and corporations, social media served as a strong counter-power by facilitating the spread of news

about the protest that was being so strictly suppressed by mainstream media. Thus, non-gatekeepers were able to influence the public sphere, and take some control of it. Without social media the protest would likely never have grown as much as it did; traditional gatekeepers would perhaps have been successful in suppressing the demonstration. Through the networked power facilitated by social media, a major protest was mobilized and sustained. This is the reason that the Turkish government is keen on controlling all media, including social media.

In the end, when we look at a restricted media sphere such as Turkey's, social media plays a major role, no matter how limited its influence might be. It offers a voice for people and ideas that may be overlooked in mainstream media. Looking at this through the lens of structuration, in the case of Gezi social media offered a sphere for unemployed journalists to assert agency and challenge the existing media structures in Turkey. For journalists who have been fired and are unable to find employment in mainstream media, social media offers them a place in which their voices can be heard. This agency is limited, however, because of the restricted reach of social media. Overall, the journalists in this research do feel they have power to assert agency through social media. However, it must also be emphasized that this agency is limited to journalists who are not working within mainstream media; journalists who work within mainstream media structures rightly fear losing their jobs if they post something on social media that is not in line with government policies.

Two other key players contributed to the public sphere aside from mainstream and social media - international and alternative media. Thus, the third research question was: How was the Gezi Park coverage in the international media and local alternative media perceived by journalists? The journalists were generally happy with the performance of the international media, because at least this media held cameras up to the event. This is more than the Turkish

mainstream media did. There were some small critiques that coverage was limited and somewhat superficial, but none except Yüksel, felt that the international media got the story 'wrong'. Pro-government journalist Yüksel was critical of the international media, and furthermore he played a part in trying to discredit them. Overall though, because journalism was so restricted in the mainstream local media, most journalists simply perceived any platform that was able to broadcast the events as good journalism. Also, the international media coverage was an indication to protestors that their demonstration mattered.

Most journalists felt similarly about alternative media, although they also pointed to issues with this type of media, including financial instability, limited reach, bias, and a lack of original, investigative journalism. Several journalists pointed out that alternative media are not well enough equipped to do solid reporting, and as such tend to copy-paste stories from mainstream and international media, which does not make for good journalism. Resources that alternative media can access are limited and it is often hard for them to simply stay afloat or let alone do investigative journalism. But despite these limitations, alternative media do offer journalists alternative platforms on which they can publish stories that otherwise would not be published in mainstream media. Yet, as mentioned, the reach of alternative media is limited and most journalists stressed that mainstream media is still the dominant influence in the Turkish public sphere.

Overall though, several journalists pointed to the growing importance of alternative media and see in it hope for the future of Turkish journalism. Yet, recent events have shown that this hope might be in vain, as the government has recently targeted and shut down alternative media with less influence in the field, such as Samanyolu TV ("Samanyolu becomes latest, 2015). During Gezi Park, however, smaller media institutions seemed to have enjoyed more

liberty. For how much longer, though, remains the question? It is possible that Gezi Park was an event that actually threatened the existence of alternative media and social media even further, because during the protests this type of media demonstrated their potential as a source of counter-power (Castells, 2012) - a way for journalists and protestors to exert agency (Mosco, 2009) against larger institutional structures. Indeed, since Gezi, the government has tried harder and harder to limit social media access ("Internet censorship reaching", 2015; Kasapoglu, 2015).

Overall, since Gezi Park the situation of Turkish media freedom looks more dismal than ever. The government continues to target media that it sees as anti-AKP. In late November 2015 the editor-in-chief of Kemalist newspaper *Cumhurriyet,* Can Dündar and its Ankara correspondent Erdem Gül, were "arrested on charges of being members of a terror organization, espionage and revealing confidential documents" (Karatas, 2015, para.1). They were incarcerated due to an article they published, which reported that Turkey was smuggling weapons to extremists in Syria ("Türkei nimmt top", 2015). Three days later, on November 29th, pro-government newspaper editor-in-chief Hakan Albayarak was fired from *Dirilis Postasi* for a critical article he wrote about the government ("Pro-government-editor", 2015). Earlier in November, 14 television channels went black, and several radio stations were shut down that were operated by Samanyolu Broadcasting Group for being anti-government ("Samanyolu becomes latest", 2015). In September 2015, AKP deputy Abdulrahim Boynukalin urged AKP supporters to stand up against 'anti-government' media, and then praised the subsequent attack on the *Hürriyet*, where young AKP supporters violently attacked the newspaper's headquarters, smashing windows (Akın, 2015).

In order for things to change, the journalists in this research pointed to two main issues. The first is a major structural change - the ties between media, corporations and government

need to decrease so media can establish itself as its own autonomous entity. Second, alternative media is an important aspect of the Turkish media field that needs more financial security in order to expand its reach. One aspect most journalists agreed on is that journalism is fundamental to Turkey's democracy and that while social media is an asset to the media sphere, it is not enough. It is certainly limited when it comes to reaching the majority of the public; therefore what is essential is that change needs to occur within mainstream media. Some journalists, such as Şaka and Göncü, insisted that change needs to come from journalists themselves, who need to assert more 'courage' and continue to create journalism that is 'objective' without worrying about what the government might think. While there are journalists who certainly have put their freedom and their employment on the line in order to do this, given the restrictions journalists face and the realities of what might happen if they do test authority, it is understandable that many might not want to take these risks.

Future Research

This research has focused on one case study - Gezi Park, but future research is of importance when it comes to exploring the ever-changing Turkish media landscape. One avenue for future research that I strongly suggest in relation to the Gezi Park protest is to interview more female journalists within the Turkish media field during that time. For this research I was only able to interview one female journalist. More data on female journalists might have revealed different findings. For example, did they face the same type of attacks from government leaders as male journalists? I strongly suspect that female journalist in Turkey experience restrictions differently, however in this research the only difference I encountered in analyzing the data was that Oral was more openly emotional about the Gezi protest in general and what has happened to her personally, than the male journalists.

It would also be interesting and beneficial to conduct a larger study that includes more journalists. This study was limited in its participants; to gain a more thorough understanding of the issues at play, a larger data set might reveal information that would not be evident within a small data pool. Particularly, in this research only one pro-government journalist was interviewed. It would be beneficial to speak to more journalists who are embedded within mainstream, pro-government media.

As well, as indicated above, the media continues to be restricted in Turkey and I believe new research on the state of media freedom post-Gezi is important. If anything, the government's attacks on media have increased. Göncü believed, back when we did the interview, that media had hit rock bottom (Göncü, personal communication, January 8, 2015); however, it seems as if things can get worse. Further research that continues to investigate restrictions on media freedom in Turkey is necessary.

Conclusion

While this thesis has explored the media in Turkey under the AKP reign, it is not meant to be a political critique of Turkey. It has demonstrated the restrictions media in Turkey are subject to, which events unfolding after the Gezi Park protest seem to underline even further. The result of government and corporate control over the media is that minorities have no voice in the Turkish public sphere and free speech is threatened. The greatest issue seems to be the institutionalization of norms that are incorporated into journalists' behavior through fear and intimidation, which leads to self-censorship. Furthermore, it has become clear throughout this thesis that journalism in Turkey has never been truly free. Throughout time different power figures have controlled the media sphere, such as the military, and it is currently under strict

government control. As Şık said: "The biggest media boss in Turkey is Tayyip Erdoğan" (Şık, personal communication, January, 2015).

Gezi Park is a case study that demonstrates the dismal situation of the media in Turkey, and the goal of this thesis has been to encourage dialogue that will lead to improvement. Media freedom is extremely important for a democracy, and it is important for Turkey, as it is an essential element of freedom of expression. As Gasher, Skinner and Lorimer (2012) note:

> [F]reedom of expression can be seen as 'an essential pre-condition to the creation and maintenance of democracy itself..... A democratic society must not only permit, but encourage, the widest possible participation of all its members in its economic, social, and cultural affairs. (p. 279)

Currently this is not the case in Turkey, as the government seeks to control the media, as well as social media. Turkey needs to find a solution soon as a free, independent media is one way to start building a national identity that includes all citizens. The government needs to let journalists do their job without fear of repercussion in order to encourage dialogue, keep those in power in check, and foster a public sphere in which everyone has a right to participate.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Part 1: Turkish Coverage of Gezi Park protest

- Where were you, and what went through your mind when the Gezi Park protest started taking place?

- Which Turkish news source(s) did you follow during the protest?

- How would you describe the Turkish media's coverage of the protest?

  - How much coverage of the protest was there in Turkish media?

  - (If the participant says there was a lack of coverage) Why do you think there was a lack of coverage in Turkish media?

- Which Turkish media had the best coverage of the protest? Why?

  - Which had the worst? Why?

- How did you cover the protest?

  - Were you under any restrictions?

  - (If participant says he/she was under restrictions) Had you been given complete freedom, what would you have done differently?

- How do you think the coverage of the Gezi Park protest reflects on Turkish media/journalism?

Part 2: Social Media

- Did you follow the protest on social media? If yes, what were your observations?

- How did you use social media during the protest?

- Do you believe that social media is sufficient to take over traditional media forms? Why or why not?

  o Would you say that social media is a blessing or a problem for the future of traditional media?

Part 3: International Coverage of Gezi Park protest

- What did you think of the international coverage of the protest?

- Did international media cover the protest accurately? Why or why not?

  o What did you like/not like about the coverage?

Part 4: Alternative Media Coverage of Gezi Park protest

- What did you think of the alternative media's coverage of the protest?

- Did alternative media cover the protest accurately? Why or why not?

  o What did you like/not like about the coverage?

Part 5: Journalism and Turkey

- What is a journalist to you?

- What do you think is the value of journalism?

- What would you say is the interest of the government or big corporations in media?

- How would you characterize journalism in Turkey?

- How do you picture the future of Turkish journalism?