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The Gezi Resistance and activist citizen reporters

DOI 10.1515/commun-2017-0004

Abstract: This study discusses how activist citizen reporters in Turkey, who initiated a brand-new alternative new media practice, transformed news gathering and writing activities in the process of the Gezi Park Resistance, which erupted in Istanbul in June 2013. A handful of citizens, outraged by the police violence as well as interested in human rights from a journalistic perspective chose to create their own make-shift media outlets or to become medium themselves. They gathered and simultaneously disseminated news and broadcast live on many occasions mostly through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and livestream, in the absence of traditional mainstream and/or alternative media. They also contributed to the solidarity of the resistance. In this context, the theoretical framework of this study is based on concepts such as alternative media, citizen media and citizen journalism. Likewise, concepts like democracy, citizen and journalism are also re-evaluated from a radical perspective. After theorizing ‘Çapulcu Media’, a local variant of the Rodriguez’s ‘citizen media’, constructed in the Gezi Resistance by a few activist citizen reporters, this ethnographic study concentrates on their activities in the field as well as the process of their identity formation based on data collected from in-depth interviews and continuous attention given to their social media accounts. Finally, this study aims to develop a critical understanding of a radical variant of citizen journalism in the context of contemporary Occupy movements.

Keywords: Gezi Resistance, citizens’ media, citizen journalism, activist citizen reporter, alternative new media, media activism

1 Introduction

The Taksim Gezi Park Resistance, which erupted in Istanbul in June 2013 and rapidly spread to the entire country, can be considered in congruence with

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other recent occupy movements taking place in various geographies of the world, or it can even be considered, from a wider perspective, as part of the global struggles against Neoliberalism. Following in the footsteps of Castells (2012), Gerbaudo (2012), Juris (2008), Langman (2005), and Lievrouw (2011), in this article we deemed the Gezi Resistance and occupations that took place first on Taksim Square but then spread to other parks, towns and squares in other provinces of Turkey to be a part of contemporary democratic social movements. Instead of a strong sense of common identity and preferably face-to-face communication between the participants, the main characteristics attributed to social movements in classical literature, we have an understanding of ‘new social movements’ as being a new hybrid type of movement based on intense communicative relations supported by new media technologies and intensified bonds, cemented through shoulder-to-shoulder struggles in occupations, rallies, and at barricades.

In this respect, neither Juris’ (2008) ‘networked social movements’ concept that focuses on horizontal relations without a center formed between individuals based on communication technologies, nor the unity-based ‘popular movement’ concept asserted by Gerbaudo in reference to Laclau, which addresses the whole population asserted, are adequate to define the Gezi Resistance. In fact, it was the outcome of an almost year-long struggle by an umbrella organization, Taksim Solidarity, which has over a hundred members – mainly representatives of urban and ecological movements, the Istanbul Chamber of Urban Planners, along with various other social movements and NGOs – and during which political parties only acted as passive members/observers. Furthermore, it is also the manifestation of an enormous, widespread rage which mobilized the masses to join protests on squares and streets against violent assaults by the police on individuals protesting against the ideology-based destruction of Gezi Park and the trees in the park by the AKP government. In fact, the police has increasingly evolved into a private security force working for the AKP led government. Therefore, when the Gezi Resistance is considered from a wider perspective, the “movement of movements” concept used by Harvey (2012, p. 119) in reference to Mertes, and by Mertes (2004, p. vii) in reference to Klein (2001), or Langman’s (2005) ‘internetworked social movements’ concept, which is sensitive to the organized structures of social movements, seem better equipped to explain the Gezi Resistance. In the context of Turkey, this expression represents the multitude; both the differences and the fragmentation within it as well as with the unity and the integration of those masses against the neoliberal economic policies, and political Islamist ideological stance, of the government.

From this perspective, and in line with many studies on the Gezi Resistance, the media, particularly the new media, play a vital role in these contemporary movements. Be it radical or reformist, all techno-optimistic approaches generally live on certain authentic qualities of the new media in which each individual citizen is able to contact any other through the networked structure of online channels; fluid and temporary organizational forms appear almost without requiring any mediation or representation or, even leadership.

Another common aspect of recent social movements is the diversity of social groups involved and their discourses. A glocal 'front for life', sensitive to locality and temporality uniting class struggle with humanitarian, environmentalist and identity struggles, is being established to combat the general assault by neoliberal economics and policies on all living beings on earth. The slogans, such as 'We are the 99%' on the banners of movements whose participants are organic members of this front might capture the concept of the power of overcoming differences in order to fight a common enemy. However, it is sometimes governments that contribute to activists' efforts to construct a common identity and self-definition, as is the case with the 'çapulcu'.¹ Nevertheless, constructing an activist identity within any contemporary social movement requires new methods and solidarity tools to be able to overcome the power of the 1%, who have most of the instruments needed to marginalize insurgent citizens. The new media, at this point, lend a helping hand to all optimists, be they radical or reformist.

'Çapulcu' media were born online at the very spatial center of the occupation as the media of the resistance and as an alternative to the holding media that have become known as 'the penguins' in reference to CNN Turk broadcasting a penguin documentary instead of reporting on nationwide protests during the Gezi Resistance. Meanwhile, 'the partisan media' acted as the PR agency of the AKP government via fabricated news. Nevertheless, çapulcu media were not only the most trustworthy source of information regarding the movement, but also facilitated the coordination, solidarity and organization of the activists, made it possible for them to defend themselves against state violence and, as is stressed by Paolo Gerbaudo (2012), became the most significant symbol of affection among them.

As stated above, it is possible to say that the media have taken on different meanings from the perspective of current social movements. Thus, the meaning and functions of the media have diversified and expanded beyond the confines

¹ This pejorative adjective was deconstructed and adopted by activists; with the help of world-wide support for the movement, the stigma "çapulcu" (looter) has become a common identity defining Gezi activists at the glocal scale.

of the ideal of liberal press theory, which limits them to state-centered power politics. In this ethnographic study we will dwell on identity formation processes, and the field activities of ‘activist citizen journalists’ we deem fundamental components of the *çapulcu* media. We aspire to present an alternative conceptual framework wherein we re-evaluate concepts such as democracy, the citizen, media and journalism. Therefore, we aim to contribute to alternative and new media studies with a critical evaluation of the concept of ‘citizen media’ and ‘citizen journalism’.

2 *Çapulcu* media and citizen journalists

Çapulcu media, with its content and physical location, laid claim to a space left empty by the mainstream Turkish media. In doing so, it constructed itself as the media of the movement during the Gezi Resistance. Based on certain theoreticians (Castells, 2012; Downing, Ford, Gil, and Stein, 2001; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2005; Kidd, 2005; Langman, 2005; Lievrouw, 2011), we intend to expand the definition of the alternative new media by including activist citizens, who act or participate as both media producers and consumers in the networked architecture of the new media. However, we do not focus on alternative media as an institutional structure nor do we analyze the media texts produced through these outlets. Rather, we examine the apparently most dissident of samples constituting the radical alternative media: activist citizen reporters that, in our view, constitute the building block of *çapulcu* media.

We aspire to contribute to the literature on the significance of the alternative new media in the Gezi movement, partly following Rodriguez (2001), through an analysis of narratives of ‘citizen journalists’ on their identity, image and roles via the intense relationship they have with the new media. Another reason for us to focus on the citizen reporters, who were ignored even by alternative media channels themselves during the occupation, is because we consider them as an essential element of Gezi Spirit, which, even if it was for a short span of time, invigorated the ideal of a grassroot/direct democracy. So, we may get rid of the “99 %” part as it was just there to strengthen the idea of direct democracy within the sentence and partly a reference to the popular banner of the Occupy movement. In this respect, the best way to study the grassroots perspective of *çapulcu* media is perhaps through activist citizen reporters becoming the media themselves.

These activists documented the local government’s illegal construction attempts in Gezi Park, the resistance of a group of activists protesting against

this and the subsequent police assault. They transmitted and broadcast live what was going on mostly through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and livestream. They called people to solidarity to save the park via emotional shares. With the expansion of the movement, the number of activists acting as reporters at the center of the movement increased and they started to be considered serious news resources with their tweets, photos and live broadcasts on what was happening, especially in Istanbul.

Although leftist media collectives might be considered a part of ‘the alternative radical media’ (Downing et al., 2001), Rodriguez’s (2001) ‘citizen media’ concept is needed to understand the activist reporters of Gezi Resistance, which is extremely new and authentic, at least within the context of Turkey. Therefore, their organic relationship with recent occupy movements and the experience of participation of people from multiple identities requires a new perspective. Rodriguez, drawing on the post-Marxist theories of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) – having similarities with the socialist-anarchist tradition with respect to a grass-roots and participative approach to politics – stretches the concept of power to all spheres of life based on ‘radical democracy’ and suggest a re-evaluation of individuals as political subjects. Furthermore, she asserts that the subaltern identity cannot remain stable within power positions and struggles penetrating all spheres of life. Therefore, she thinks of attempts adopted by subaltern as political action. This includes action against all types of hegemonic discourse and to redefine their identities. She thus defines the concept of ‘citizen media’ as a space of political action of the citizens for the citizens.

The concept of the citizen is fundamental in radical democracy theories and it points not only to a legal status but also a constructed political identity. This construction is an ongoing activity and, during this process, the person changes both the self and its surroundings as well as the social environment. This transformation produces power. It is worth stressing the parallels between this post-Marxist definition of the citizen and the active citizen of Bookchin-inspired communalism (Biehl, 1998), which learns how to make politics through the very act of engaging in politics, stemming as it does from the Athenian democracy, or the voluntary participants of Chomskian (Chomsky, 2012) anarchism. Briefly, the political subject that is at the center of Rodriguez’ citizen media can explain itself through various actions that might lead to collective transformation of symbolic codes and identities that have come to be justified in history via traditional social relations (Rodriguez, 2001, pp. 19–20). In this respect, the citizen media display a radical democracy perspective within the conceptual framework of the alternative media.

Citizen journalism also seems to be an umbrella term, like ‘the alternative media’ or ‘the citizen media’. It mostly refers to “ordinary people uploading

content about current events to online platforms” (Rodriguez, 2014, p. 200). Rosen’s (2006) widely cited definition, on the other hand, goes as follows: “When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that’s citizen journalism.” Rosen believes that the relational media of citizens, who can communicate with one another in a horizontal and decentralized manner without having to be attached to the central media where power is crystallized, is a *de facto* realization of the famous first amendment article of the US Constitution. Such technooptimistic liberal readings do not have any correspondence in the mainstream media, however. Instead, the mainstream media mostly prefer a technology-based commoditized naming. The citizen journalist refers here to ‘users’, and her or his function – if what is produced is raw-material for news – is reduced to providing content to be processed by a professional journalist: *user-generated content* (Allan and Thorsen, 2009, p. 4). Nevertheless, Hermida (2014) poses the following question in a way to make us consider the parties involved in this tension in a binary opposition: “Is ‘the most trusted name in news’ today a veteran anchor on television or an undergraduate tweeting from Tahrir Square in Cairo?”

Academics, journalists, authors and activists such as Atton (2006), Forde (2011), Kidd (2005), Lievrouw (2011), Radsch (2011, 2013) and Rodriguez (2014) concentrate on citizen journalism practices mostly from the perspective of the alternative media and social movements. Following this line of argument, we also propose that the practice of activist citizen journalism can only be understood with respect to alternative media and social movements.

When we deem it unnecessary to relate citizen journalism to an organizational and/or collective action, as is done by Radsch (2011, p. 64), we require a new conceptualization regarding both the quality of the action and the activists. On the other hand, when the act of journalism is isolated from hierarchical organizational processes such as gathering news, writing it down, editing and disseminating stories, and when cleared of the idealized professional codes even many alternative media organizations attempt to follow, it is noteworthy that concepts such as ‘journalism’ and ‘journalist’ are deconstructed. At this point of the argument, we confront another question: How can we differentiate Radsch’s ‘blogger citizen journalists’ from Gerbaudo’s (2012) ‘social media activists’, or do we need to differentiate them at all? In this respect, we propose using the concept of citizen reporters used by Rodriguez (2014) without a specific definition to identify political activists, whose identity and action cannot easily be understood as part of mainstream or alternative journalism. Moreover, the citizen reporters of *çapulcu* media, although activists, can be differentiated with regard to their devotion to content and newsworthy events in their close

surroundings, and involving participants of the movement and wide social circles, in particular from Gerbaudo's social media activists, whose primary concern is not news.

Finally, we suggest defining the citizen reporters of social movements or more specifically the citizen reporters of *çapulcu* media as follows: They are voluntary reporters acting in an internet-based decentralized symbolic network of the resistance, following news related to the event to collect information, writing it down and sharing reports as part of a collective consciousness and feelings of solidarity, as well as making news in their surroundings as activists and acting as news media through their accounts (web sites, blogs, micro-blogs). Such a definition, therefore, gives emphasis to *citizens as media* instead of Rodriguez's *citizens' media*, and suggests discussing the place of news and reporting in the network society from a different perspective.

Our objective is to adopt a cultural perspective and an ethnographic method as part of critical media studies tradition to understand how activist citizen reporters make use of media. Evaluating this practice with respect to its interactions with the political, cultural and social context it is embedded in, we aspire to shape a fully-developed understanding of the identity constructed by persons, as active citizens and alternative media reporters, as well as the characteristics of this identity. In this respect, we argue that citizen reporters constitute a new field to be studied at the theoretical intersection of networked social movements and alternative media studies, with respect to their differences from the organizational perspective of citizen journalism. Furthermore, the level of consistency between the ethnographic data below and the definition we suggest will come to light.

3 Methodology

In our research, we make use of a cultural studies approach that has strong Marxist orientations with close affinity to discourse-oriented Foucauldian post-structuralist anarchism (Downing, 2003, p. 250; May, 1994) and actor-oriented Marxist phenomenology (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005, pp. 163–170, 191–192, 223–226). We focus on a small part of the 'life-worlds' (Habermas, 1987) of the active participants of our theme, 'citizen reporters'. Moreover, the concept of 'experience' developed by Negt and Kluge (1993), which refers to a capacity to resist with a reflexivity, comprising experience and alternative imaginaries against the assault of modern consumption culture, have helped us to better understand our subject matter (Hansen, 2004, p. 150).

The discourses experiences we deem valuable as part of our theoretical approach can be read as cognitive and affective expressions of a communicative practice unique to the Gezi Spirit, whereby our interviewees constructed their political and cultural identities as activist citizen reporters. In our study, we aim at understanding these identity construction and action practices through the stories our interviewees shared with us. Our cultural approach orients towards the ‘media practices’ of activist reporters (Couldry, 2004) and/or “agency and actions of [reporter] members of the movement” (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 150).

This methodological approach facilitates our conception of the transformation of the culture of professional journalism and, thus, the discourse it has gone through; also serving as an ideological super-structure in line with Althusser (1971) and a constituent social practice in line with the cultural studies perspective (Carey, 1992; Russel, 2011). Establishing this transformation via counter-hegemonic reporting practices that have emerged at the intersection of the alternative media and contemporary social movements with respect to citizens/activists/reporters in the field might indeed provide us with a critical conception of transformations in the culture of journalism.

The main reason for initiating this research is the belief that our social constructivist methodological approach, which leans on the conviction that knowledge is produced by living subjects as part of their authentic history and cultural conditions within social processes, and that their conceptions of the world reflect these authentic processes (Gill, 2000, p. 173), could deepen alternative media theory and bring further efficacy to the practice. Following Marx, we believe that accurately grasping the world in which we live is the basis for a critical discourse and for counter-hegemonic political action.

As part of this theoretical and methodological background, we conducted in-depth interviews with citizen reporters. Rather than the many interview techniques frequently used in qualitative research, we decided to adopt a different one that we deem to be more sensitive to both the narrator and her or his story, namely ‘the episodic interview’ method (Flick, 2000). This method combines the strength of the standard semi-structured in-depth interview, which gives room to certain pressure regarding the use of time and the subject matter and leans on a relative neutrality with respect to the position of the researcher (Brennen, 2013; Gaskell, 2000), and the ‘narrative interview’ which is not structured and gives room to exposing strategic communication of the interviewee (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). The episodic interview method leans on a methodological conception compatible with our post-structuralist theoretical approach of claiming that the agency of people shall be considered with respect to their conflicting relationship with the limits of hegemonic categories.

With the help of this method, we attempted to gain via pre-established interview guidelines information on their past and present opinions, emotions concerning the media, and their experiences as media consumers; their ideas on the role of media in the Gezi Resistance and their experiences as activists regarding this role; their media activities within the framework of the citizen reporter identity they had constructed during the resistance.

In our study, we focus on citizen reporters with a definite audience who follow significant events and subjects related to the resistance in a relatively regular manner and make live broadcasts, rather than the hundreds of activists involved in an activity that can be regarded as ‘active witnessing’ (Atton and Hamilton, 2010). As far as our research indicates, there are twelve such citizen journalists in Istanbul, three of them being women and nine men. We contacted them on social media and briefly told them about our research. Seven of them, including one woman, positively responded to our interview request. The educational background, age, occupation and advanced new media skills of the interviewees matched the characteristics attributed to individuals dominating contemporary social movements.

On the other hand, even though most of our interviewees were male, there is no research data in the literature asserting that men are more proactive and form the majority of participants, and the Gezi Resistance is not regarded as a movement led mostly by men. Furthermore, even if Gezi was not a feminist movement, women were as active at the forefront as men. With famous characters such as ‘the woman in red’, ‘the woman in black’ and ‘the auntie with the sling’, they have also taken their place in the ‘Invincibles’ of the movement along with men. For example, the famous theater actress @Pınar_Ogun, who departed Turkey after being targeted by the AKP’s partisan media and with whom we therefore could not get in contact, is a 29-year-old woman who studied music and performance arts at university and was one of the first persons to start live broadcasting within the Park and, who thus informed the rest of the world about what was happening from the very beginning.

@barikathaber	Man	32	University	Research Assistant (media department)
@blackperisi	Woman	28	University	Documentarist
@yanniskronos	Man	28	University	Student / intern (at a media institution)
@kiyametprojesi	Man	23	University	Student (media department)
Nabermedya	Man	21	University	Student / international media activist
@omurdenden	Man	29	University	Engineer / part-time DJ & Latin dance teacher
@toyotagibiadam	Man	27	University	Student / previous media experience

Each interview lasted an average of 3 hours. We regularly followed the social media accounts of participants following the interviews and contacted them from time to time regarding our subject matter. Thus, we had the chance to closely observe the change in participants with respect to both journalism and activism.

Before all interviews, we gave ample information about ourselves and our research. We used two voice recorders considering the possibility of technical obstruction. Texts acquired after transcription of interviews are evaluated via narrative analysis (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2007). First, we marked how often similar categories and keywords related to the theory used in our research were used. Then, the themes thus attained were analyzed via the narrative analysis method.

4 Data and analysis

In light of the data acquired, it is possible to say that the citizen reporter identity constructed during the resistance is in line with post-structuralist theory in general and social constructivist theory in particular. We could detect, by observing the social media accounts of our participants, how the citizen reporter identity, whose construction was our main concern in the interviews, weakened, regressed, became indistinct and disappeared when the political groups involved in the movement returned to their daily political activities. However, this does not mean that the populist, solidarist, participative, and libertarian characteristics of the citizen journalist identity constructed during the resistance have equally disappeared. On the contrary, both the conceptual references and episodic narratives of our participants show clear signs that such characteristics are strong parts of their political identity. The narrative of the social movement to which our participants contributed penetrated their identities and became integrated in the multi-layered dialogical structure (Bakhtin, 1981; Freire, 1970) of the movement and its narrative.

The most frequently recurring themes in the interviews are categorized under the main titles, namely citizen reporter and activist citizen. Under a third title of activist citizen reporters, we compiled such themes belonging to the intersection of activism and reporting. These themes refer to two different and frequently overlapping discursive domains in which our participants constructed their narrative identities. Therefore, a meticulous analysis of the themes in question will reveal the relational nature of citizen journalism within the narrative of the Gezi Resistance.

As a result, all themes can be discussed under the theme of democracy and citizenship, a very ancient alternative to the sovereign liberal democracy based on general elections in Western capitalist societies. Just as the citizenship and direct democracy understanding in Ancient Greece did not allow for any distinctions between amateurs and professionals, it is very significant for contemporary libertarian social movements that a conception of the citizen reporter rejecting the division between amateur and professional gradually becomes an indispensable part of this narrative. Therefore, we need to consider direct democracy as a flexible, even all-encompassing concept, open to development, in which the identity of active citizens is situated.

4.1 Citizen reporter

The data we have thus gathered reveal five prevailing themes under the title of ‘citizen reporter’: media, news, credibility, responsibility and voluntarism. Below, we analyze our data accordingly.

The media, with respect to the subject matter of the study in question and as the primary activity of participants during the resistance, is the most frequently used concept in the interviews. Additionally, as explained above, the perception of the Gezi Resistance as a ‘media war’ between the government and the activists had a fundamental impact, especially on our interviewees. During this process, our participants, apart from one defining himself as an anarchist from the very beginning, stated that their opinions on the media drastically changed during the resistance. The gap between their expectations, especially of mainstream media, and the reality gave way to an intense rage:

The uprising spread to 79 cities, there has never been anything similar to that in Turkey before but the media are not there. (@toyotagibiadam)

I take a look at the mainstream media, there is nothing. Cooking shows, penguin documentaries, sports news, so on and so forth. Daily life continues on professional channels such as NTV and CNN having serious mottos. Yet people are on the streets; there is a war going on outside. (@blackperisi)

I check the news in the meantime, but there is nothing. In the social media, we have many calls to action, but there is nothing on national channels; no news in newspapers. (@omurdenden)

This surprise and rage on the side of our participants, who can be considered media literate persons familiar with the structure and functioning of the mainstream media, is indeed out of the ordinary. It seems that this surprise stems from two interrelated causes. If the first cause is the need for trust towards the

normative role of the mainstream media with respect to dispensing news, the second cause is that the extent of dependency on, and fear of, government in the mainstream media had never been truly grasped until the Gezi Resistance. An orientation towards the alternative and social media was a rapid and direct response to this lack of trust.

We have realized that there are two main reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, the traditional alternative media, although backed by websites, were far from able to meet the emergent needs. The resistance was going on without a break in hundreds of squares and streets in dozens of cities. The traditional media do not have the means to respond to the networked time and space perception of activists through their form, style and content. Secondly, the majority of independent citizens not having ties to political organizations engaged in direct and unmediated contact with the resistance, in response to social media calls. The bond of activist citizens, who had mostly resisted without the need for representation, was shaped behind the barricades, on streets, and in the network solidarity channels of the social media. In that sense, we can say that an interwoven, liquid and hybrid network (Amor et al., 2013, p. 4) or a hybrid public space (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 74) was created, both in the streets and online.

In the above-mentioned sense, our participants are not that different; they were the providers of necessary data to the network as its active citizens. As stated by Deluca and Lawson (2014), an Occupy activist using his smart phone can make news in various formats regarding the resistance (texts, visuals, videos), and this can be shared by an extensive online audience (pp. 369–370). At this point, their most noteworthy characteristic is that they have certain previous media experience, although not in professional journalism. There are those who had previously published socialist newspapers (@toyotagibiadam), broadcast from the Bosphorus University Starbucks occupation (Nabermedya), worked as a reporter and documentarist for a large news channel (@blackperisi), worked as a news cameraman at one of these channels (@barikathaber); published newspapers as a child, more like a family magazine (@omurdenden), had reporting experience in the art/culture sector (@yanniskronos), and reported on the destruction of Cinema Emek in Beyoğlu, Taksim right before the Gezi (@kiyametprojesi). Therefore, we believe that both the value they attributed to news and their past experiences had a significant impact on their actions as activist reporters during the resistance.

It is indeed difficult to evaluate news made by activist reporters during the Gezi resistance as ‘news’ with respect to traditional conceptions of reporting. News made by *çapulcu* reporters does not resemble news in the traditional sense of the term, either in terms of values or professional codes (objectivity,

accuracy, neutrality, credibility, etc.) or form (5Ws and 1H) or style (broadcasting language). However, live and momentary images also including answers to ‘who, what, where, when, how’ questions shared by activists transforming themselves into the media in network societies where people less and less need or trust in representation are deemed to be ‘credible’ enough by ‘the active audience’ who receive their respective answers to the question ‘why’. The practical transformation of alternative journalism in this historical process resulted in the development of a new approach to trustworthiness and credibility for reporters and their readers/followers (Atton and Hamilton, 2010, p. 96; Russel, 2011, pp. 146–150). This trustworthiness, as already underlined by our participants, depends mostly on live and momentary images. The main concern of activists directly involved in the event and constantly sharing visuals from different angles is not to be neutral or objective, but to share a partial truth about the moment in a way that would appear as trustworthy as possible. We might say that the most prominent way to gain trustworthiness in the network(s) they are involved in is transparency with respect to their own positions and the visual evidence they themselves collect.

As I am a skeptic, I never wrote anything without also backing it with photos ... After a while even photos might be misleading. People want to see videos. (@blackperisi)

You cannot also make sentences as it is done. Instead, (what I say is) I saw it, I tell you I saw it! That’s the way I make news. I make news of things that I have seen. Why would I make news without actually seeing what is happening? (@yanniskronos)

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the activists’ capacity to decide on the trust-worthiness of the information floating daily on social media increased due to the emergent critical collective mind and digital literacy skills, as emphasized by Russell (2011, pp. 149–150) with reference to Jenkins (2006) and Lankshear and Knobel (2008). As stated by Russell, “on the web, network publics gain the ability to identify valuable information and call out bad information” (2011, p. 147). Our participants also give examples of negative experiences they encountered. We might suggest that our participants, in claiming they had learned from their mistakes, have developed a rapid and practical ‘alternative media ethics’. In this respect, the skeptical argument based on mainstream journalism theories arguing that activist citizen reporting has basic ethical problems regarding accuracy, trustworthiness and validity needs to be scrutinized. Activist citizen reporters, despite their inadequacies, learn lessons from their mistakes, learn rapidly and are capable of adapting to new technological developments in their activities. The tests they have successfully passed within the networked structure of the modern social movements and their acquired trust-worthiness in society, stemming, above all, from their position as

citizens of this network, need to be taken into consideration in developing conceptions concerning the future of journalism in the network society.

I realized that after a while, even a sentence you utter might make a great fuss. Then, I attempted to share information very, very meticulously. (...) if I wrote a tweet saying that there is an event or something going on, it would immediately go viral. People follow you and you turn into a trust-worthy resource. (@omurdenden)

Responsibility is another theme frequently underlined by our participants. The self-esteem of our participants identifying themselves with the resistance seems to be attached to the feeling of responsibility they have towards the resistance and other activists. An extraordinary self-sacrifice accompanies the stories of events that they broadcast, of course with individual variables, which is not so common in professional news.

During the day, I am at work and at night I am in the resistance. I come home; take off my make-up and go out; I make news until the break of day ... That's on amateurs like us because they [the mainstream media] do not do their job. It's up to amateur but honest reporters ... It's like, there are friends who are not living in Istanbul and they follow you. I feel a huge pressure on me. (@blackperisi)

I think that now I have a mission. There are those following us and asking us questions, believing that we have a mission ... The police hit me with plastic bullets, I fell down. They beat the hell out of me. Everyone shouts at me, "don't go, don't go", but I cannot not go. I have to go. (@yanniskronos)

Especially in certain events with intense emotional weight, the role as reporters they themselves chose had an empowering impact on them. They acted knowing that they had become the eyes and ears of resisters in the absence of media. Their main motivation was neither a career expectation in journalism nor financial gain or to become social media celebrities. Instead, the primary motivation was the intense solidarity and cooperation among activists. Moreover, some of the participants also mentioned how they felt responsible towards the social media audience that had started to follow them during the resistance; this feeling of responsibility varies according to the psychological pressure they felt exposed to. As referred to by Atton (2006), this is one of the main constituents of the alternative journalism practice; to orient towards the notion of social responsibility (pp. 13–14). Moreover, old friends/followers might also have expectations concerning the continuity of the journalist role they had themselves constructed. However, in the absence of additional features promoting the feeling of responsibility associated with the activist citizen identity, their role as reporters and the related responsibility would not be permanent.

The temporariness shall further be evaluated with respect not only to responsibility but also voluntarism. Apart from two of them, none of our partici-

pants have a stable job. One with a stable job lives from hand to mouth. Despite these financial conditions, the voluntary contribution of activists, having taken the initiative to undertake a role as the reporter of the resistance without any financial expectation, is an important component of their identity.

Briefly, the citizen reporters we talked to are activists taking initiative to collect and produce information via voluntary reporting activities in favor of activists with a sense of responsibility towards them so as to take up the slack in the absence of mainstream media. They lost their function once the resistance lost ground. However, what they produced was archived, in Radsch's (2013) terms, in cyber-space (p. 190) and left traces in the collective consciousness.

4.2 Activist citizens

Under this title, we are going to focus on two themes, these being, respectively; *çapulcu/resister and socialist/anarchist*. These themes, apart from the above-mentioned categories, refer to certain characteristics that are more comprehensive and permanent and better qualify our participants.

Çapulcu, as stated above, has become an identity re-appropriated by activist citizens as an indicator of discursive resistance against the government, which attempted to stigmatize them: "Çapulcu can be the only title that unifies everyone ... I like it because we had a similar term back in 68" (@yanniskronos).

In Turkey, where there is an ongoing assault on all basic rights including the right to live, almost all activities activists engaged in were resistant to the sheer violence of the government from the very beginning. Therefore, it seems better to use the term 'resister' than 'activist' to define those attempting to protect rights constantly taken away from them by means of state violence and civil violence backed by the state. Activism aims at furthering basic human rights. It is worth emphasizing the fact that our participants also use the term 'resister' instead of 'activist' ("was tweeting under tear gas" [@yanniskronos]).

While attributing vital importance to their shoulder-to-shoulder struggle on the streets for basic human rights outside the institutions claiming to represent them, our interviewees do not intend to devalue or stigmatize the institutionalized opposition, whether radical or reformist. In fact, more of our interviewees resist severe state violence in loose solidarity with other political organizations, rather than the self-proclaimed autonomous activist individuals frequently referred to in the literature with respect to their unorganized character.

As for the fundamental characteristics of the opposition adopted by our participants, we observe parallel ties with a socialist anarchist narrative similar

to the one proposed by Downing. Although one of them openly said that he was an anarchist, and two of them socialists, we might argue, based on their narratives, that all of them long for a libertarian socialist society leaning on anarchist features such as personal autonomy, horizontal organization and participatory democracy.

Briefly, the activist citizens contributing to our research are reporters of the resistance who took the risk of resisting the violence of the state; acting with the hope of becoming free individuals of a solidarist society while avoiding creating divisions within the movement. Although they lost their function as reporters with the retreat of the resistance, they continue to conserve and defend these hopes.

4.3 Activist citizen reporters

The last theme of our study, if we consider above titles as independent sets, can be considered the intersection between the of them. Under this title, we need to analyze three themes: Rage, Solidarity and Organization/Autonomy.

Rage is an intense emotion that we had the chance to closely observe in almost all resisters against the arrogance of the government and the violence of the police state. There is ample evidence of the place and importance of this emotion in social mobilizations in the contemporary literature on social movements. The *Indignados* (outraged people) movement, which ignited a political transformation in Spain and the “*aganaktismenoi*” (outraged people) movement in Greece, the agent of a similar transformation, reveal that rage is a central emotion in anti-systemic struggles. As stated by Hessel (2011), rage is an emotion at the center of the motivation to resist (p. 7). All around the world, Occupy movements are based on emotions like solidarity and cooperation, and “at the individual level, social movements are emotional movements. Insurgency does not start with a program or political strategy ... But, the big bang of a social movement starts with the transformation of emotion into action” (Castells, 2012, p. 13).

Naturally, rage also gives way to insurmountable pain and reproduces a vicious circle whose initial energy comes from power. Rage stemming from state violence gives way to more violence and to activists’ getting injured, becoming permanently disabled or getting killed, which, in return, raises even more rage.

May 31. We turned the TV on; I can never forget that moment. There was this guy, with a cap, hitting an anti-riot vehicle. The police sprayed pressurized water and he was flung

back ... I started cursing the police. It was the first thing I saw when I woke up in the morning. We all got enraged. (@yanniskronos)

We witnessed both the destructive and creative force of rage on our interview participants through the stories they told. We have also witnessed the truth behind the statement that rage did not reproduce violence in the Gezi Resistance, but consolidated solidarity amongst activists, who had a culture of humor and joy while mocking the government.

Resisters, at least since Gezi, have started to orient towards network-type organizations as a means to overcome systemic problems. The most important of these are mostly local solidarity networks composed of equal citizens (like neighborhood solidarities) and civil-rights-based (life, environment, women, LGBTI rights) networks. Our participants were also active members of similar network organizations from the very beginning:

We are the first ones having initiated the popular assemblies. While everyone was at home, we insisted on resisting ... If there is but one gain of Gezi, it is that it taught people the value of organized and collective life. (@yanniskronos)

Then we started to act as part of an assembly. I am known as the reporter of our assembly by the way ... It is good that the assembly bears a multiplicity of voices. This is what we mean by 'Gezi Spirit'. (@omurdenden)

Some of our interviewees had previous experience in social service-oriented non-governmental activities. However, narratives regarding citizen solidarities not in favor of hierarchical structures mostly start with Gezi. Firstly, what they say as social media users and resistance reporters on relations they have with their followers and organizations and solidarity collectives involved in Gezi confirms the importance they attribute to horizontal relations and networks as derivative and concrete forms of this horizontal relationship. Moreover, they read this type of socialization and the organizational skills giving way to it mostly through the new media. The significance they attribute to calls for action on social media, photo and video-backed live news sharing, live broadcasts from the field and application-based communication networks among resisters also confirms our opinion that they see the new media and Gezi Resistance as inextricably intertwined.

This evidence has parallels with Schmidt (2005, p. 80), who argues that activist citizen reporting is also solidarity reporting. In this respect, it can be argued that our participants consider solidarity as both an affection based on fraternal feeling in action based on goal congruence, and an organizational model based on voluntary sharing of information and knowledge among equals.

Another significance of the new media technologies for our interviewees is that it enhances their ability to be in touch with various people, institutions and organizations from diverse political backgrounds without giving up their autonomy. Their emphasis on autonomy, although resembling the neutrality claim of professional journalism that has already been rebutted, seems to become the basic component of the activist citizen reporter identity based on a more honest stance via transparency.

The resistance, with its grassroots, spontaneous and pluralist characteristics, encourages our interviewees to re-define themselves and become involved in political action with their own authentic voices and autonomy. Therefore, they do not need anyone or any organization to represent them. They are not involved in the organizational hierarchy of an institution. However, this does not mean that they do not have relations with certain radical leftist organizations. Rather, they have horizontal and personal relations with the organizations they sympathize with, similar to the relationship they have with their followers. They act as mediators for organizations involved in the resistance without taking sides. They initiate solidarity campaigns with injured resisters. They take on organizational roles to enable resisters to have access to health services. They intensify and strengthen calls for action as part of the resistance. They take action to establish citizen networks as neighborhood solidarities in both real and virtual space.

They get involved in all these activities based on the power and trustworthiness they gained through their activist citizen reporter identity during the resistance. Thousands of followers, tens of thousands of shares, personal connections with ‘celebrities’ in politics, the media and artistic world ... They assume all these activities spontaneously based on their personal choices without working for any authority. Apart from a very concrete responsibility, first towards the resistance and then towards the resisters, they do not feel themselves under any obligation. Therefore, there is no guarantee that we will be seeing these autonomous citizens of the resistance in forthcoming movements. However, if so, the place to search for them is not traditional media institutions and/or classical political organizations, but mediated social networks.

5 Final words

During the Gezi Resistance, which was a practice of direct democracy, citizens, being both activists and reporters, made a new reporting practice possible, enabling an efficient information flow via horizontal relations based on sponta-

neity, voluntarism and participation, to gain validity. In their news, they presented information on protests mostly through audio-visual evidence. Having been transformed into the media of the movement, they took an active role in the engagement especially of the resisters, then local, national and global society to become a part of ‘symbolic processes whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed’ (Carey, 1992, p. 23).

In Kidd’s (2005, pp. 154–155) and Dean’s (2014, pp. 135–136) terms, writing on new dimensions, the relationship between activism and activist media in various geographies acquired with the help of new information and communication technologies, *çapulcu* reporters also went beyond making news: They thought of the movement, they made others think about it; they were moved and motivated others. They spread a certain sensitivity towards the movement and informed people about the ongoing and subsequent protests. It is indeed probable that they raised attendance at meetings and protests. They promoted critical reflexivity via their news and shares that reached tens of thousands of people. They documented the cruelty of the state and violations of basic human rights; they produced evidence to be used in lawsuits. Through the live information they shared, they warned resisters of police attacks. They supported the active coordination of solidarity among activists. They took an active role in directing health services to injured resisters. Therefore, citizens made themselves the media in a spatial and temporal dimension that pertains to the resistance, mostly escaping media conceptualizations prefixing ‘citizens’ so as to pave the way for new perspectives to discuss the position of news and reporting in the network society.

Nowadays, the narrative of social movements is composed of a sum of fragmented narratives horizontally articulated, rather than the holistic fiction of the traditional media. According to Castells (2012), this fragmentedness coalesces within fluidity (pp. 121–122). In our study, activist citizen reporters are defined as people contributing to this fragmentary narrative by mediating their experiences. Therefore, they become a constructive part of the collective identity to which they adapt also in the symbolic dimension. Therefore, they are sensitive to the liquidity of the movement. This makes it impossible for them to have a relatively fixed identity at the individual level. We can thus argue, from the perspective of media activism, that the basic problem of the activist citizen reporter identity that has been formed at the intersection of contemporary social movements and new activist media might be temporality.

We need further research that adopts the perspective of ‘the citizens as media’ and we hereby propose that this would more deeply evaluate such a perspective by considering its obstacles and theoretically strengthen conceptualizations of citizen reporting and citizen journalism based on field studies. We

need to constantly and meticulously underline the paradigm difference between the definition of citizen reporters that we believe to coincide with the ancient democracy conception and an organizational and mostly commercial definition of it. This concept needs to be strengthened through further studies at the intersection of the networked movements and alternative media studies.

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