

# Reclaiming the City, Reclaiming the Rights

## The Commons and the Omnipresence of Resistance

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*Kemal İnal & Ulaş Başar Gezgin*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the various reasons, agents, and forms of reclaiming the city in the context of what is commonly referred to as ‘resistance for democracy.’ Since 2011, resistance by what is called the ‘(urban) commons’ as a new social subject/agent, mostly and especially through occupation of squares and parks in the city centers, has opened a new route against capitalism and dictatorships: Reclaiming the city means to capture the city in favor of public interests. The commons in the last years started to produce what might be called a new common sense and a shared sense of belonging to the city. Radical transitions from media activism in the virtual world into the real public sphere through a militant struggle have accelerated the process of reclaiming the cities. While the new radical approach of ‘urban commons’ transformed the cities into “rebel cities” (Harvey), social demands as, for example, affordable and quality housing, increasing the public spheres for the poor, putting an end to capitalist mega-projects, etc., have led to the use of multiple methods from militant fighting at squares to collective negotiations. Immense social problems (e.g., the US-American mortgage crisis, Turkish gentrification and destruction in the name of ‘urban renewal,’ astronomical leaps of housing prices in Beijing and Shanghai, etc.), created by neo-liberal capitalism and preventing the use of urban sites for multiple purposes such as residence, office, schools, parks, etc., turn the cities into sites of resistance. In this contribution, the contextual parameters which contributed to the emergence of massive popular resistances in Arab regions and in some other Western countries (USA, Spain, Greece, etc.), the identity of the

agents or subjects of these resistances, and the forms of resistances are investigated.

## **2. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN URBAN AREAS AND REACTIONS TO THE NEO-LIBERALIZATION OF CITIES**

It can be stated that, in recent years, the common denominator of the massive popular movements that emerged in Arab countries as well as in Western countries has been democracy, the venue has been the city, and the subject has been the commons. One of the inclinations of these social movements is the proposition ‘cities for people, not for profit.’ In other words, it is the planning, production, and administration of cities not for personal economic interests but for people’s public demands. One of the most significant obstacles against these demands has been the neo-liberalization of cities. This has increasingly turned cities into the main sites of economic problems induced by capitalism, such as financial crises, land speculation, commodification, privatization, dispossession, displacement, gentrification, unemployment, housing, mortgage houses, working in precarious conditions, declines in real wages of workers, etc. These economic problems, in turn, resulted in a number of social problems, such as individual isolation, egoism, lack of solidarity, emotional impoverishment, replacement of real-life interaction with virtual forms of communication, and problems experienced by immigrants and refugees. This list may well be continued by adding problems related to environmental issues and food safety (e.g., the destruction of natural areas, pollution, traffic jams, epidemics, genetically modified food, obesity) and problems of democratic rights (e.g., low political participation, ‘dirty’ politics, intertwining of democracy and market values). The reaction to all of these problems appears on two different levels: First, on a theoretical level, i.e., through the formulation of the demand for a public city as a consequence of the critique of the notion of the neo-liberal city and, second, on a practical level, i.e., through popular revolts and resistances.

Regarding the first level, a new route against capitalism and dictatorship has been opened up by a number of theorists that have outlined a critical approach to capitalism within the urban context. Henri Lefebvre expressed the concept of the right to the city as a popular demand the first time in the late 1960s (cf. *Le Droit à la Ville*). He suggested that Marxist

revolutionary theory should not be restricted to the site of the factory as a site of struggle and resistance, but should be expanded to include other urban social contexts. This demand was based on the idea of a city which is less alienated, with which residents are able to identify, which is arranged according to the demands of urban working class people. In the last three decades, these demands outlined in the field of urban theory have been reformulated in a number of cities through these cities' inhabitants. To be precise, as a result of these demands, the rebuilding of cities has become one of the central subjects of struggle and has been regularly articulated through massive popular demonstrations (cf. Harvey 115-19). According to Harvey, the real demand of the rebel cities is that the surplus value produced in cities should be in the control of its producers, i.e., the working class. At the same time, he considers this demand to be impossible to fulfill under capitalist conditions. Therefore, the right to the city requires, first, the optimum strategy for an anti-capitalist struggle; second, both an aim and a consistent method to overcome capitalism today; and third, the organization of the city 'as rebel.'

In the recent past, some other city theorists have repeated the claim that cities are for people and not for profit (cf. Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer), thereby emphasizing the fact that the most important urban problem of our times is the capitalist urbanization process. Cities are increasingly being designed for profit and personal interests, but the public sections of society and their demands are not (or only rarely) considered in this process. As a consequence of this situation, public-oriented organizations located in cities stand out as the new agents of struggle. These agents try to resist various problems on the macro and micro levels, such as traffic congestion, air pollution, commodification of urban goods, and services created by capitalism by alternative urbanization practices, e.g., urban organization forums, slow city-approaches (Cittaslow),<sup>1</sup> urban villages, organic production, or farmer's markets. The history of these urban forms of opposition, which have become well-known in the last decades and are getting more and more common is certainly quite long.<sup>2</sup>

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**1** | However, anti-capitalist critiques of the slow city movement needs to be noted here, as it can be considered as a form of capitalist restoration.

**2** | Harvey lists Paris (1789 French Revolution, 1830 and 1848 French Revolutions, 1871 Commune), Petrograd Soviet (1917), Seattle General Strike (1919), Barcelona of the Spanish Civil War, American urban riots (1960's), European

This urban boiling, resistance, and struggle is thus not a product of the recent past. However, while the heart of ‘hot’ revolutions in the past was mostly limited to the streets and squares, now it can be stated that the scope has been enlarged to cover all kinds of different urban spaces and contexts (parks and gardens, public spaces, underground stations, woods, seashores, suburbs, slums, etc.) as sites of resistance. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the most dramatic struggles have appeared in squares and streets in the last couple of years (especially from 2011 to 2013). In other words, the hearts of the cities—marked by revolutionary activities and Occupy movements that took place primarily and most intensely in city centers—started to beat in the squares (Tahrir, Puerto del Sol, Zuccotti Park/Wall Street, Syntagma, Taksim/Gezi).

The number of people who imagine the city as a ‘social life venue,’ i.e., as a site where one can build a democratic and humane community, is increasing. Indeed, more and more people do no longer regard the city merely as a place to reside, and they consider the option of building these democratic communities as a way to solve various urban social problems (profit-oriented local government practices, gentrification in the name of ‘urban renewal,’ construction of shopping malls rather than social spaces, such as parks, etc.) created by neo-liberal capitalism. The cities have thus turned into rebel cities (Harvey) by the recent protests of people who have been united by urban culture, local citizenship consciousness, rights to city, etc. For ‘the poor’ that were forced to leave their own life zones (slums, suburbs, outskirts, etc.), “the right to city” (Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville*) became the major objection against bourgeoisie’s rendering of the city as a site for the accumulation of profit in many countries of the world. While the situation portrayed by Harvey, i.e., city residents finding themselves in cities that are increasingly divided, fragmented and conflict-ridden, turns every square centimeter of urban sites into the subject of financial speculation, it closes and reproduces the loop of dispossession and deterritorialization of the urban poor majority. While urban sites, such as streets, lands, gardens, orchards, etc., are taken away from the urban poor majority which resides in them, or which are de facto owners and caretakers of them, ‘the right to use the city’ has been increasingly captured by official or private interest groups; and many urban sites have

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1968, Shanghai Commune (1969), Cordoba Uprising (1969), etc., under this long history.

been turned into ultra-luxury niches<sup>3</sup> isolated and saved from the poor with maximum security for the urban rich minority (cf. Hartmann).

In that sense, class and identity conflicts (ethnic, migrant, religious, etc.) get intermingled; and the pseudo-social housing units produced in the past, such as French *HLM*<sup>4</sup> and Turkey's *Toplulukonut*<sup>5</sup> projects, turn into isolated zones lacking some of the municipal services and being excluded from the center and its facilities. But, in fact, they are always on the verge of chaos, which might break lose one day or another, as exemplified in suburban riots in France (2005) and elsewhere. Then, the cities can be viewed as the sites of both extreme poverty and ultra luxury, with the contrasts and conflicts between the former and the latter being

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**3** | Such cases have been observed multiple times in Turkey in the last couple of decades. Especially in Istanbul, the values of urban land have skyrocketed as a result of its transformation into a so-called global metropolis. Urban poor trying their best to survive in neighborhoods such as Sulukule, Küçükçekmece, or Tarlaşaşı have been devastated by the gentrification process. Other cities such as the capital Ankara have experienced the same destructive processes. For instance, Dikmen Valley, which is quite close to the Ankara city center, has been the site of resistance as a response to gentrification in the name of 'urban renewal.' Dikmen district and its resistance have been reported on frequently by various newspapers and documented by a number of academic works. For two outstanding theses on the district and resistance, cf. Aykan and Mühürdaroglu. For other remarkable academic works on phenomena such as 'urban renewal' and gentrification, cf. Adanalı, Doğru, Türkün, and Uzunçarşılı Baysal.

**4** | *HLMs* are the social housing units with affordable rents built for poor, workers, migrants, and ethnic minorities by the central government or local government in France. There are claims that these housing units are inhibiting poor's, workers' and migrants' integration to the larger society (cf. Taieb).

**5** | Turkish social housing units that were built the first time in 1974 by the CHP-MSP coalition government were designed as affordable units mostly for urban poor, just like French *HLM*. Nowadays the Housing Development Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi, TOKİ) under the Prime Minister's Office is supposed to continue this mission; however, it now produces two new forms of property: Firstly, it produces luxury units in addition to social low-cost units, and secondly, capital transfer is claimed to take place to support the pro-government bourgeoisie by cash-cow housing auctions.

highly visible, and with people of various welfare levels living in the same city without any form of social contact.<sup>6</sup>

The marginalized, excluded, and criminalized urban poor populations have been developing various forms of resistance as a response to the neo-liberal attacks on the cities as public sites. The demand for affordable and high-quality social housing units, increasing numbers of parks and green areas, the wish to be offered various local services, such as transportation, culture, and cleaning for free, the demand for a solution for the most pressing problems of the city, such as traffic congestion and air pollution, among other demands and wishes have been turning urban constituents (individuals, groups, communities, organizations, etc.) to commons, i.e., to subjects that reflect together, that demand together, and that take action together (cf. Walljasper). Various poor sections of the society (slum dwellers, villagers, workers, migrants, miscellaneous minority groups, etc.), whose political participation used to be merely formal or pseudo-representational can now take roles in the political scene as directly participating political subjects and, in so doing, move towards direct political action, as they realize that even their most fundamental demands are in fact inherently political. The new conjuncture that we encounter is the redefinition of the notion of citizenship: I.e., in this new era, citizenship has inseparably become identified with the objects through which it defines itself (country, city, street, park, neighborhood, household, etc.) and has turned all struggles—from those on urban sites to those on natural resources in remote areas (e.g., privatization of rivers and forests; threats to wild and semi-wild life, the disastrous consequences of capitalistic mining activities, etc.)—into matters of fighting for rights in general. This situation allows various groups of people oppressed due to, e.g., different political beliefs, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds, to meet and unite under the umbrella of a new collective subject, i.e., the commons.

The construction of new collective structures (communes, solidarity groups, online network organizations, etc.) against the so-called crazy projects driven by the ruling elites, e.g., privatizations, the closure of

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**6** | In his well-known work *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis presents with rich empirical data how the slum areas were formed in mega cities of many of the countries of the world (Mumbai, Cairo, Istanbul, Sao Paulo, Seoul, etc.) evolve into a poverty-based way of living.

common spaces against the public, spatial control, and police surveillance, has created a new source of motivation for a different, alternative type of urbanization. However, the real problem here appears to be the following: Various intellectual and social circles, which are somehow inspired by the so-called failure of real socialism, started to mobilize their followers by promoting a more anarchist and libertarian (i.e., non-hierarchical, horizontal, leaderless) model instead of a more conventional socialist form of organization. The biggest deficit of this new organization form, fetishized mostly by middle class urban activists, is its incompatibility with the demands of the productive classes (i.e., workers and villagers). That the policies suggested by these anti-hierarchical intellectuals (such as Bookchin, Holloway, and others) could not form an effective alternative against capitalism, is one of the major factors behind the failures of the urban resistances in the struggle for social and political victory. Cities which have been subject to and subject of speculative profits (in the 2010s more frequently than in the past) continue to be the sites for class conflicts and struggles despite of all the social gains, past or present (e.g., a limited number of affordable housing units, affordable health services, education, clean environment, water services, etc.).

Although different motives were behind the emergence of the resistances against the transportation price hike in Brazil and the shopping mall planned to be built in Istanbul's Gezi Park, these resistances have easily and swiftly been able to turn into radical protests against the system as a whole. Just like in the years of 1789, 1871, and 1968, the streets, squares, and parks were heated up again in the period from 2011 to 2014; and the cities became the sites of various forms of substantial protests, organized actions, and demonstrations of the mobilized masses that moved back and forth like the unstoppable waves of social forces. The struggle for transforming the city back into a public site where social provisions are secured affordably, at a high level of quality, and in situ became one of the most significant aims of the resisting movements. The claim to the 'right to the city' articulated by those who resisted stood against the capitalists' exploitation of the cities, against their transformation of cities into sites of profit accumulation and into unliveable spaces both from an ecological and a social point of view. This claim provided evidence to the fact that the commons involved in the process of reclaiming the city pursue a distinctly political ideal. What remained open was the question of how to name and position this ideal.

### 3. THE NOTION OF THE COMMONS AND URBAN RESISTANCE

The reclaiming of the city by the commons produced a new common sense that was based on a shared sense of belonging to the city. To be organized as/in commons in cities and to work against neoliberal dominant forces meant to be a direct and true democracy on the local level. The aim was to make public spaces social again in order to create a ‘social city.’ For this, as mentioned above, multiple methods of struggle were used by the commons.<sup>7</sup> During the revolts in urban areas, many agents involved in this process of reclaiming the city introduced themselves as forces organized on behalf of different groups in society: the working class (highly organized, classical commons), the peasant class (with an emergent class consciousness in the fight for natural environment and products, especially in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, as well as Turkey, where constructions of power plants and dams are strongly resisted), armed or peaceful local-indigenous movements (e.g., the Zapatistas, the Brazilian landless movement, democratic participation and armed defense in Rojava, etc. ), the underclass (i.e., the homeless, street children, people in need of care and social support), the youth (i.e., students, young workers, unemployed youth, etc.), the so-called precariat (i.e., flexible and precarious workers without contracts or zero-hour contracts), public employees, the intellectual working class, and others (LGBTI, ecological movements, anti-nuclear groups, social forums, coalitions, and so on). In addition to these groups, middle-class urbanites who want to maintain their quality of life, radical autonomist anarchists, alternative groups, occupiers, cultural activists, housing activists, artists, and small shopkeepers were included in the revolts that set out to reclaim urban spaces during the last years.

The new structures for reclaiming the city produced by the commons were alternative youth and culture centers for free culture, transportation as well as education services (ideologically framed by slogans such as ‘education is not for sale’ or ‘another world is possible’). Revolting people demanded low-cost housing, i.e., affordable housing, local clearing systems (through what has become known as ‘anti-shopping act’), organic production spaces or gardens in cities, farmers’ markets selling organic products (i.e., no intermediate dealers), self-determined projects (i.e.,

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7 | For the detailed information on the multiple methods of struggle used by the commons around the world, cf. Walljasper.

no corporations), and Cittaslow (i.e., the clean, silent, and slow city). These demands created new forms of struggles in cities, especially those organized through the internet or social media,<sup>8</sup> which eventually brought forth what may be called networked resistance that, in turn, led to the occupation of public spaces (peacefully or by using violence), as seen in the movements of the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Indignados, Syntagma, Gezi revolts, and so on. The commons used social forums, coalitions, councils, alliances, movements, networks, NGOs, autonomous groups, initiatives, park and neighborhood forums as new grassroots social organizations in order to create direct democratic cultures and structures. Alternative political structures, such as autonomous groups, communalist living, and democratized habitats, were also regarded as a step towards a more direct democracy.

#### 4. MOTIVES AND REASONS BEHIND RECLAIMING THE CITY

The main question is that about the motives for reclaiming the cities. First, this process of reclaiming was induced by a dramatic aggravation of economic problems such as poverty, unemployment, and insufficient incomes. Second, it gained momentum as a reaction to the severe humiliation of marginal, ethnic, sexual, and migrant identities and their exclusion from the city centers. To be precise, expulsions and forced evacuations from the city centers preceding or accompanying the so-called urban renewal and gentrification processes were used as a social mass destruction weapon.<sup>9</sup> Third, reclaiming the city could also be

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**8** | For a discussion of the contributory or facilitating role of the social media use for the urban struggles, cf. Gezgin, "Istanbul Mobil'ized"; "Sosyal Medya Psikolojisi ve Toplumsal Hareketler"; "Sosyal Medya Psikolojisi ve Şanlı Gezi Direnişi"; "Apolitik Olanın Politikleşmesi"; "The 2013 Gezi Park Protest and #resistgezi"; Gezgin, İnal, and Hill, *The Gezi Revolt*.

**9** | This destructive process is dealt with in a Turkish protest song called "The Shanty and the Skyscraper" ("Gecekonduyla Gökdelen") by Grup Yorum (2008), which depicts a conversation between a skyscraper and a shanty town and thus can be read as a rendering of the urban struggles: "Skyscraper: 'You spread all over the city / Stretching your arms / You shanty, you shanty / Go back to where you came from / You have ruinous walls / You disturb my vision / You have muddy

regarded as a response to the political domination over labor. Fourth, it reacted to the environmental massacre that destroyed green fields to build business and shopping centers. One can add many other issues to this list of issues that the reclaiming-movement responded to: inefficient and short-termist mega-projects (e.g., facilities built for mega-events in cities of unfortunate residents, as in the cases of the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics), the dominant perception of the city (i.e., cities produced/consumed as a form of commodity), spatial segregation (the fragmentation of cities into separate parts financially, culturally, and ethnically), urban renewal (e.g., gentrification, displacement, imposition of mega projects to neighborhoods, the closure of institutions providing local public services) (cf. Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer).

These issues produced many socio-economic problems for the urban poor (as already indicated in the previous sections: an increasing number of squatters as a result of dispossession and deterritorialization, social isolation, new forms of poverty, cultural exclusion, communication on social media only, etc. Moreover, the destruction of public spaces, such as

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streets / You pollute the city' / Shanty: 'We laid your bricks / We mixed your mortars / The skyscraper, that bulk of concrete / We were here before you came into being / I won't move a single step / Stand out of my sunlight / Don't make shadows / That's all I want' / Skyscraper: 'You came when I was not here / Such a good deed you did / You seized the vacant lot / And squatted at midnight / These are all illegal deeds / The bulldozer arrives at your door / Take your belongings and leave / You stayed for long, that's enough' / Shanty: 'Even wolves didn't come here / These lands were totally vacant / Gendarmerie, police swarmed / When we squatted / When you occupied the sky / Which law allowed you? / Mine is the right of living / By which right were you built?' / Skyscraper: 'You all will be demolished / I will take your place / I will be shopping malls / And residence areas / Here is the heart of fashion / There is the finance center / You shanty, I want / Gleaming limousines' / Shanty: 'I hope your dirty profit greed would vanish / All the money and assets are yours / Each and every brick of the neighborhood / Is the honor of the squatters / You are the monument of exploitation / You are the symbol of ostentation / You are the statue of mammon / What kind of a creature you are, skyscraper' / Skyscraper: 'When the world is being globalized / You are still in the Stone Age / We say 'urban renewal' / You will be demolished all together' / Shanty: 'The stones in the bosom / Of the barefoot children / Will turn you upside down / They will rebuild the life'" (translation: IK/UBG).

parks, public buildings, streets, and forests, was planned and executed by the short-term goal of accumulating profit.

The rights to reclaim the cities according to the World Social Forum in Porto Allegre in 2005 (Universal Convention of City Rights) include the rights to work, cheap housing, health insurance and social security, an adequate standard of living, access to all public services, education, culture and leisure time, clean and cheaper water supply, free and quality education, a healthy and safe environment, freedom to travel and public transportation, democratic participation in decision-making, the right to self-expression, and land rights (cf. Brown and Kristiansen). These demands have completely or partially been expressed by many other organizations such as Taksim Solidarity in Istanbul (Turkey), Not in Our Name—Challenging the Brand Hamburg (Germany), My Poznanciacy (Poland), the alliance for the right to the city (USA), etc. The organizations reclaimed the cities either by revolutionary or armed forms or in democratic and peaceful ways that paved the way for the emancipatory social practices with which the commons tried to reconstruct the urban arena as an area of public space. The creation of new local autonomous structures as neighborhood and youth centers, alternative feminist collectives, independent media infrastructures, self-governance projects (cf. Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer), etc., produced a shared conception of the city for urban dwellers.

## 5. GEZI PARK REVOLT IN TURKEY

The Gezi revolt in Turkey in June 2013 first appeared as a reaction to the government's plans to redesign Gezi Park, but, within a few days, took the form of a much more substantial political revolt against the government and neoliberal capitalism as a consequence of multiple acts of oppression and repression by the incumbent government in the recent years. The first demand of the Gezi commons was to stop the construction of a big mall in the area of the park. But they also had other demands, such as stopping the construction of mega-projects in Istanbul (the third airport,

the third bridge over the Bosphorus, a huge canal project in addition to the Bosphorus, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

What happened in Gezi?<sup>11</sup> Mass protests all over Turkey, which lasted for two weeks, led to the rise of ecological and then political sensitivities. The protesters were organized and reorganized by/in Taksim Solidarity,<sup>12</sup> which consisted of more than 120 NGOs, initiatives, trade unions, political parties, foundations, associations, and so on. Taksim Solidarity released a number of declarations as demands made by the commons and the people. This organization was an umbrella organization in a new form, as it did not endorse any form of hierarchy among the commons, while most of the constituents (such as political parties, trade unions, or movements) were hierarchical within themselves. Taksim Solidarity continuously challenged the government by declaring to reclaim the city in favor of the people. But during the Gezi revolt, brutal police violence led to the deaths of many young people. The national and international media witnessed tortures, mass arrests, and lawsuits during the police violence that ran in tandem with the withdrawal of commons from the squares and streets to the park forums and neighborhood assemblies.

The reasons for the emergence of the Gezi protests are manifold. Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, they can be regarded as a critical reaction to the land speculation in Istanbul. Of course, one can add many others to the list of reasons why these protests appeared. They also criticized privatization, corruption and bribery, prohibition regulations by the government for daily life based on a pseudo-religious ideology (bans and restrictions on alcohol, cigarettes, students houses, billboards, clothing, and so on), environmental massacres, media and social media

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**10** | For three book-length editions on the analysis and discussion of the Gezi revolt from the perspectives of the participants from various social, political, and economic positions, cf. Gezgin, İnal, and Hill, “The Gezi Revolt”; İnal, “Gezi, İsyân, Özgürlük”; and Sancar, “Sıcak Haziran.”

**11** | Gezgin’s “Dünyayı Sarsan 40 Gün: Gezi Direnişi’nin Psikolojisi ve Sosyolojisi,” which partially consists of field notes from Gezi Park, can support the response to this question.

**12** | Among these are socialist or leftist groups, movements, and political parties, LGBTI (alternative sexual identities), apolitical and soccer fan groups, anti-capitalist groups, laborers, street children and the homeless, artists and intellectuals, the youth and their parents.

bans, police violence, vote rigging claims in elections, the president Erdogan's (former prime minister) exclusionist and polarizing discourses and practices, threats on secular ways of life, the decline of the welfare state, etc. As the famous Gezi slogan says: "This is just the beginning," because all the reasons leading to the social explosion in Gezi Park and elsewhere continue to press Istanbulites and other citizens hard. That means that debates on Gezi discussions will probably be endless, and would eventually converge with the long-term influences of the revolts in 1968 in Western Europe, especially French 1968, among others. Any discussion about Gezi protests will thus be incomplete.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

Reclaiming the city all over the world in the context of urban settings has been a response to the commodification of the city as a financially profitable space. Capitalism is mainly responsible for various negative socio-economic developments, such as economic exploitation of urban space, the decline of the welfare state, heavy air pollution, speculation on urban land, privatization of public spaces, alienated forms of living, environmental massacres, and so on. Understood as a life of struggle, urban life turns urban citizens into the commons who are involved in different forms of urban resistance against capitalism to create a socially produced city by its 'real owners,' namely the people. This means that one now has to look at the cities from an alternative perspective. Capitalism is powerful, but it perhaps lacks the people as a resource that backs the public grounds in order to organize as commons in fast and efficient ways, reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's poem "General Your Tank is a Powerful Vehicle."

Defending the cities in favor of public interest can push us ahead of capitalist profits. This defense, however, should be based on strengthening democracy not on the formal level, but in people's minds and interests in the first place. It must be our duty to rebuild our cities in new democratic ways as exemplified in direct grassroots movements' non-governmental

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**13** | For a collection of discussions about Gezi Park protests and beyond and especially about what would happen after Gezi as well as its status as a historical turning point, cf. Çakır and Aktükün (2015).

paths. To achieve this, we have three steps for a solution: The first is to raise the awareness of the people by means of identifying the problems in new ways (e.g., by providing a structural explanation with regard to capitalism and its consequences). The second is to realize the potential in the organization and practice of the commons as a new social subject/agent on the road to democracy. The third one is to identify new forms of revolt, ranging from a direct form of democracy to the occupation of urban spaces (i.e., squares, parks, streets, and other sites, where hegemonic power might be contested).

This contribution aimed to elaborate on the conceptualization of the commons and the recent urban movements with regard to the notion of the ‘right to the city’ coined by Lefebvre and further developed by David Harvey. However, the real developers of these ideas are and will be the people which are supposed to make history, rather than take history, i.e., accept it as an excuse for their dispossession and deterritorialization from the materialist dialectical point of view. That means this chapter can never be over. It will be rewritten and extended multiple times to pay homage to updated experiences of urban struggles. Fair enough, right? The city is dynamic, thus any modest attempt to elaborate on urban struggles would have to be dynamic as well. Thus, ‘the conclusion’ is a nominal misnomer. There will be no end to struggles. That is why we can be hopeful. Another welcoming note for the commons...

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