

Afterword

Gezi Park and Taksim Square as Musical Landscapes of Exclusion and Inclusion

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Whether it is termed urban planning, urban change, urban renewal, or gentrification, the transformation of urban land, especially when it is carried out without the participation and consent of the publics that occupy and have a sense of right to it, is vastly politically fraught. And when a given parcel of land is considered valuable, either because the land-use it incorporates is scarce (hence representing high instrumental value), or because it is infused with symbolism, then the stakes are high, as is the likelihood of its contestation. Importantly, that land parcel can aggregate the spatial logics of more than the “local,” becoming the pretext for the conduct of national, and sometimes, global politics. That was the case with the debates over the fate of Gezi Park, which involved, on the one hand, an Istanbul public that wanted to preserve the park’s integrity as a rare green space and a popular “commons,” and, on the other, local, regional, and national states that prioritized urban development and political ends in line with the city’s dual guiding visions of globalism and neo-Ottoman nostalgia. It is essential that these events do not pass without comment.¹

1 | The redevelopment of Taksim Square and Gezi Park started in earnest in 2011. By 2013, and once the full contours of the related projects became known to the public, protests started. They have since dissipated. A mix of legal accommodations of the public’s concerns, and the overwhelming

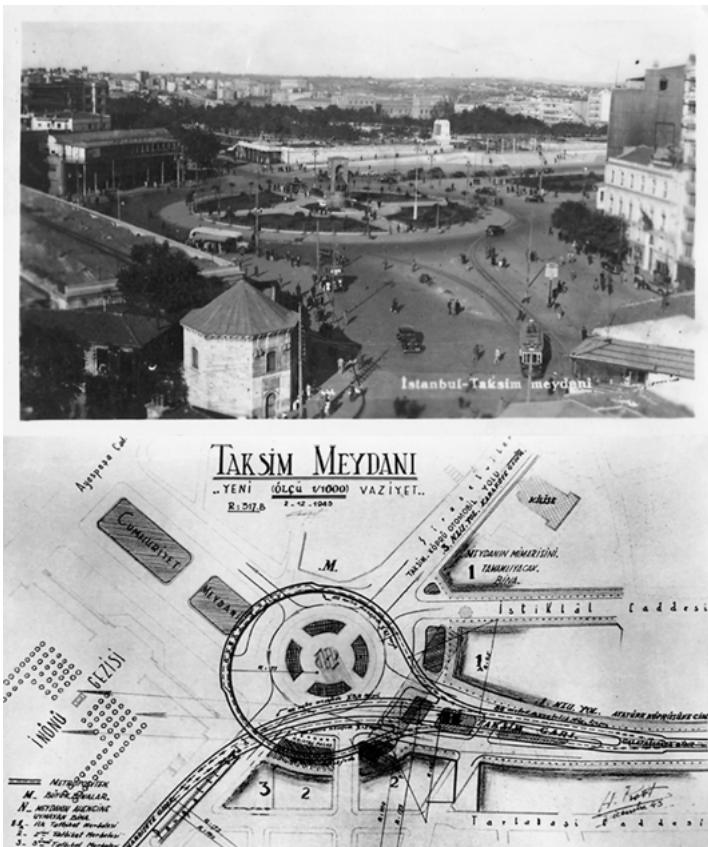
Gezi Park is a highly prized green space in a vast metropolis deficient in that important urban form. A creation of early Republican urban planning reform, the park was an important element in the modernist master planning of Istanbul by French urban planner Henri Prost (1936–51). Commissioned to that task by the President, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Prost visualized significant interventions to the town plan, which would pierce wide thoroughfares through the organic city fabric. Bilsel notes that “[t]he principal goal of Prost’s planning in Istanbul was to address three principal issues: transportation, hygiene and aesthetics. Parks and spaces for promenading and sport received great consideration in the plan.

The planned transformation was visioned along two directions: Restructuring the city as a whole mainly by establishing a new transportation infrastructure, and reshaping the urban fabric by intervening on the building and population densities of the existing centers (Bilsel, 2011: 100). Very conscious of the extraordinary cultural value of Istanbul’s built environment, Prost attempted to walk the line between wholesale modernization for the sake of economic and social development, and the reverential ‘reveal’ and preservation of the city’s architectural and planning heritage.

The modernization of Istanbul can be compared to a surgical operation of the most delicate nature. It is not about creating a New City on a virgin land, but directing an Ancient Capital, in the process of complete social change, towards a Future, through which the mechanism and probably the redistribution of wealth will transform the conditions of existence. This City lives with an incredible activity. To realize the main axes of circulation without harming the commercial and industrial development, without stopping the construction of new settlements is an imperious economic and social necessity; however to conserve and protect the incomparable

sense that the crisis over Gezi Park is the least among other major political-military crises in the country, have displaced the Park from the headlines. Consequently, the reach of scholars into the record of this urban redevelopment has been limited by legal and political circumstances.

Figure 1: (Top) View of Taksim Square, after the completion of the Henri Prost projects, with the monument of the Republican Revolution in the middle ground and Gezi Park in the background (“ferrania” carte-postal, ca. 1954, editor’s collection). (Bottom) Plan of Taksim Square signed by Henri Prost, December 2, 1943 (scale 1/1,000)



Académie d'architecture/Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine/Archives d'architecture du XXe siècle, public domain

landscape, dominated by glorious edifices, is another necessity as imperious as the former (Prost, 1947: 18).

What became Gezi Park was conceived as only one element in Prost's ambitious "plan directeur" for Galata-Péra. In addition to targeted demolitions intended in widening and geometrizing, to the extent possible, Beyoğlu's town plan, Prost visualized a system of new residential quarters and public places (including parks), connected by new avenues. Two parks were visualized: A large park as a centerpiece of a new residential quarter roughly situated on the footprint of an Armenian cemetery, and extending from Taksim to Harbiye. It was foreseen that this green zone, subsequently named Park No. 2, would include sports amenities that would serve the new residential areas. A second new residential quarter was proposed for the land parcels linking Maçka to Beşiktaş. In this area too, a park and sports grounds were planned in the bottom of the valley and residential areas were to be set up on hill slopes (Prost, ca. 1937: 8–11). Preexisting built fabric, including an extensive Ottoman-era artillery barracks, was dismantled in 1939 in preparation for the redevelopment of Beyoğlu.

Since the arc of the Prost Plan reached its conclusion in 1951, Beyoğlu's parks have gradually lost their fully public character to become host to major corporate-owned amenities. The Hilton, the Grand Hyatt, the Intercontinental, and the Ritz-Carlton hotels, and public institutions, such as the Taskısla Campus of Istanbul Technical University, and the Atatürk Library, have been bordering, morphologically transforming, and rebranding Istanbul's (and Turkey's) most significant political space: Taksim Square. Further, the creeping privatism and commodification of park land in a "global city" that has one of the lowest ratios of green space to built land in Europe,² turned

2 | The European Green City Index evaluates 16 quantitative and 14 qualitative indicators across eight to nine categories depending on the region. It covers CO₂ emissions, energy, buildings, land use, transport, water and sanitation, waste management, air quality and environmental governance. In a sample of 30 major European cities, Istanbul was ranked 25th.

the potential loss of much of Gezi Park – itself a residual commons when compared to the grand park that was planned mid-century – into a crisis. Importantly, it became a symbol and one more piece of evidence of overreach by the national government.

Figure 2: Taksim Square – Redevelopment and pedestrianization, 2012

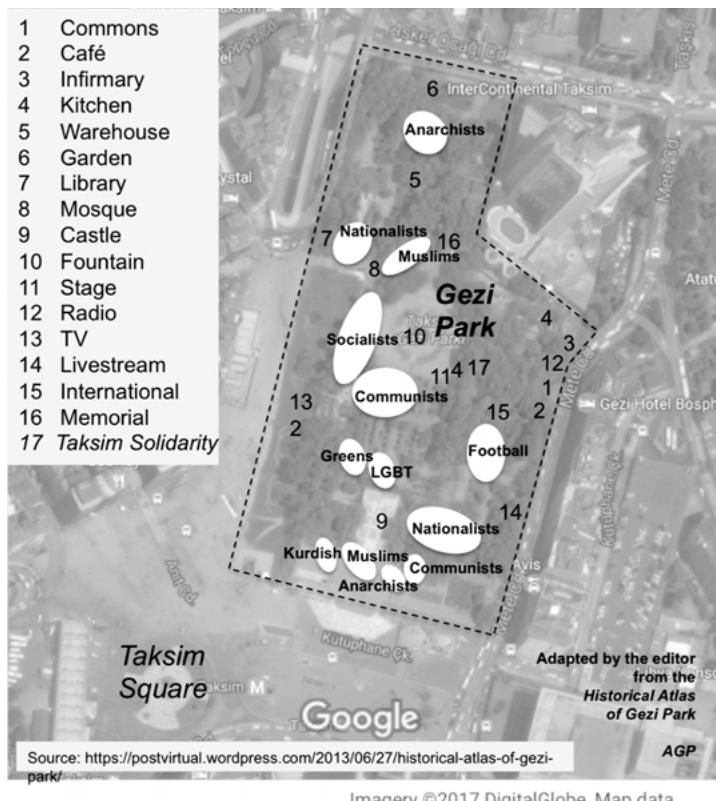


Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, online resource

The re-landscaping of that parcel into a multi-use set of built volumes, which included a shopping mall, an opera house, a mosque, and a convention facility, became politicized further once it became clear that its centerpiece would be build as a neo-Ottoman architectural reminiscence of the demolished Ottoman-era artillery barracks. The ensuing popular protests against the redevelopment of Gezi Park spilled over to protests of the national government's broader neoliberal (and increasingly illiberal) agenda. Music would become one of the public's instruments of political expression and resistance.

Ece Temelkuran points out that the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations and ensuing violent reaction by the state became a fount of

Figure 3: Encampment map of Gezi Park depicting the groups that participated in the protests of June 2013. The information source is the manuscript map “The Gezi Republic,” which first appeared in the online Historical Atlas of Gezi Park (<https://postvirtual.wordpress.com/2013/06/27/historical-atlas-of-gezi-park/>)



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cultural production on which social media and the mobile technologies and the capabilities of the internet acted as accelerants. She says “images of the photographs [were] endlessly remixed into online art.

The word ‘chapulling’ was coined, reappropriated from one of Prime Minister Erdoan’s speeches, meaning ‘to fight for one’s rights in a peaceful or humorous manner.’ In the chapulling spirit, music also became a huge part of the protests: hundreds of songs inspired by the demonstrations were recorded, uploaded and shared online” (Temelkuran, 2014: online).

The repertory in question would not be a compilation of protest classics by Dylan, Baez, and Lennon, although Lennon’s “Imagine” was performed at one of the quieter moments during that season of unrest.³ Temelkuran reports on songs that were composed incidentally, during the protests, organically mashing up protesters’ original compositions and lyrics that directly referenced the events, and popular and folk themes and tunes. Protesters spoke unswervingly through music to power, transforming Gezi Park, Taksim Square, and the surrounding streets, where the protest spilled, into musical landscapes of inclusion. One of the protest songs is titled “Recebum,” meaning “My Recep,” or “My dear Recep,” and is based on a folk song from the then Prime Minister Erdoan’s hometown. Temelkuran notes that the Prime Minister, whose full name is Recep Tayyip Erdoan, hates being called Recep, which communicates the singers’ desire to resist the state with irreverent humor, per ‘chapulling’.

You said I will do this, I will do that
 You said I will bring down that I will sell this
 Were you blind my Recep
 Why didn’t you see us ...
 You hit us when we said stop
 You called us looters

3 | The Independent reported on the incident: “Hundreds gathered around German musician Davide Martello as he clinked away late into the evening. They were mostly silent while he played John Lennon’s “Imagine,” some Bach, and his own composition “Lightsoldiers” (Hall, 2013: The Independent online).

But a day would come, my dear Recep
You'll be taken into account, my dear Recep
By those you called looters
So you thought these people are sheep, my dear Recep
(*Translation for Free Word by Canan Marasligil*)

Free Word captured in video a group of university students in Taksim Square as they were singing the lyrics of the song below from the pieces of paper on which they had composed and transcribed it on the spot. Canan Marasligil, who also translated it, attempts to capture the energy emitted by that act of musical transgression: “It’s a funny song, but it’s also quite touching – in a weird way; in a complicated way. Anyway. Forget about it. (My god, my country is so messed up it always makes me cry when laughing, or vice versa). Forget it, I am translating.”

Are you a looter? Wow!
Are you a protestor? Wow!
The gas mask looks red
The tear gas tastes like honey
My TOMA⁴ is spraying gas on me
Never mind, we'll find a way
(Because) The people are standing up
The people are on barricades on the road to Taksim
Gas masks come in different styles
I am rallying for Taksim
Don't be lazy and you come too
We can find a way
(Because) The people are standing for their rights
The people are in the barricades
(*Translation for Free Word by Canan Marasligil*)

4 | TOMA – (type of riot police vehicle).

The song that follows was created by Kardeş Türküler, a well-known group that incorporates in its repertory musics of different cultural traditions from the broader region. They are normally known for their folk songs in the various languages of Anatolia. In this song, they open with a well-known derisive statement that the embattled Prime Minister had made in the past: “I am going to say one single thing: Saucepans and frying pans: it’s all the same.” Prime Minister Erdoğan was incensed by the “pan-bangers,” who came out on the streets of Beyoğlu to protest the riot police assaults upon unarmed protesters. To whit, the song starts with the banging of pans.

You are saying this and that
We are fed up
Your one-man decisions, your commands
We are fed up
We are so bored
What kind of a wrath this is
What is this anger?
Take it easy
When they couldn’t sell their shadows they sold the forests
They closed down, demolished the cinemas and squares
Everywhere it is shopping mall⁵
I don’t like to pass from your bridges
What happened to our city?
It is full of buildings with hormones.

Translation for Free Word by Canan Marasligil

The protesters’ lyrics point to the moral incoherence of neoliberal governance in the hands of a power-centralizing, if not authoritarian

5 | Temelkuran’s tone is important and we reproduce it here: “The PM sold a historic cinema to a businessman so he could build a shopping mall there, and he’s obsessed with shopping malls in general. He loves them. It was a plan to build a shopping mall on Taksim Square that sparked the protests there in the first place.”

leader and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). Per the song, neoliberalism's logic is "hormonal," as it is fixed on the reproduction of growth. The reference to forests concerns the illegal appropriation of large tracts of forest land in the margins of the metropolis by rogue development, including AKP connected speculators (Ashdown, 2014: online).⁶ By juxtaposing squares and cinemas – both expressing a convivial city that is accessible even to urbanites of modest means – and shopping malls, protesters reject the culture of mass consumption that came with the embracing of neoliberalism in the 1980s.

The generation of liberals that was born after the 1983 return to democracy has only a schoolbook acquaintance with Cold War-era geopolitics and militarism, and imagines that Turkey's best-possible-future is in the European Union. To them the loss of spatial-social privileges is unacceptable. For them, Taksim Square and İstiklal Caddesi (the cosmopolitan Avenue de Péra of old) have been constructed over a generation into landscapes of inclusion by the life-paths of the diverse communities that make up Istanbul into a global city. Gezi Park, as an important urban component in that spatialization of diversity and expression in Beyoğlu, is understood as exemplary of post-Republican values, that is, *cosmopolitan* and *global* values.

The loss of access to Gezi Park that symbolizes an open, liberal, cosmopolitan, and global Istanbul, is a harbinger of future political defeats for both liberal and radical communities. For the generation of marginalized Istanbul residents, such as those in Sulukule displaced from their homes by gentrification, the liberal imaginings of a global city are unattainable, if not irrelevant, to their every day

6 | The Belgrade Forest on the European Side of the agglomeration and smaller forest fragments on the Asian side, such as the Validebag Grove in Uskudar, are under constant threat of squatter settlements, waste dumping, illegal logging, and mega-projects, such as Istanbul's visioned third international airport.

existence. In their case, only radical means can offer lasting solutions, even if by radical action they reach out to *hip-hop*, or irreverent songs created on the fly once the tear gas dissipates.

There is also irony in the public reaction to the top-down redevelopment of Taksim Square and Gezi Park, and an opportunity to revisit two classic urban planning adages: The first is that the sites of urban planning misdeeds of one generation (may) become the cherished places of urbanites decades later. The second points to society's and the city's discursive construction: No matter what the original planning intent might have been, with time, and in the presence of democratic praxis, an urban landscape – a place – would reflect the will and agency of the popular collective. With regard to the first adage, Viollet-le-Duc stated it plainly in 1860: "It is remarkable with what ease people in Paris forget the old things" (Chevalier, 1994: 10). It still applies today. With regard to the second, time will tell.

This is neither an endorsement of the redevelopment plan in question, nor a prediction that history will absolve its authors. I am strongly reminded, however, of the outcry among intellectuals and the general public surrounding the redevelopment of Paris' beloved Les Halles – the central city quarter that was richly-quilted with food markets and small trades: a idealized Parisian landscape, perhaps? Surely, the Paris of people's hearts. Louis Chevalier, in his class work *The Assassination of Paris*, savaged French President, Georges Pompidou, his Minister, Andre Malraux, and the avant-gardist technocratic establishment that wanted to remake much of the historic city in accordance to the ideological frame and practices of architectural and planning modernisms. He called the outcome of the interventions, and especially the erasure of Les Halles as they had existed in classic form since the Second Empire, the gutting of Paris (Ibid: 192–93). The irony is the much-lamented Les Halles, which was demolished in 1969, took its urban morphological shape during the Second Empire, under the direction of Napoleon III and the Baron Haussmann. Considered a strategy for disciplining the unruly crowds, reigning in associational politics, and disciplining the feminine in public places, Victor Baltard's wrought iron and

glass pavilions (1851–70), regimented in a grid, represented the epitome an early police and surveillance state. One hundred years later, [t]here were protests against the demolition of Les Halles. It was absolutely barbaric that the government did not leave a single one of Victor Baltard's pavilions of glass and iron standing ... A few people chained themselves to Baltard's magnificent structures" (*Ibid*: xvi). It is conceivable that in 2017, Gezi Park long forgotten, energetic protesters may be placing themselves in harms way to defend Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's embattled project.

Music performed in public (on the street or on the sidewalk, at an unkempt urban lot or in a great square symbolic of the country's political birth); music performed in the semi-public domain of a community hall, cultural foundation or place of worship; music played in the intimate surrounds of a coffee house or a tavern, or just outside it in the quiet alley in the "wings of the city"; music that is performed, live, or is sounded out of cassettes, CDs, or the Internet and social media; is co-constructive of the lived spaces and landscapes in which it is sounded. In this book we have explored musics of social protest and inclusion that are ontologically connected to places and landscape, and constitute material evidence music, landscape, and social contestation can be usefully triangulated to reveal the contours of a cultural politics of place. The spatial-political logics of the soulful folk poem-songs of the *Âşiks*, the transgressive *Rembetika* of the Greek/Rum community, the itinerant *Zakir* singers in Istanbul's Alevi *cemevis*, the gentrification-resisting *hip-hop* artists with global reach, and the impromptu singer-composers of teargas-laced Gezi Park, suggest ways in which music, and all the related informal and unregistered everyday encounters and performances, plays an important role in the making of diverse urban lives in the course of democratic political praxis.

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Figure 1: Protester with guitar faces riot police during the 2013 Gezi Park protests



Kemal Aslan, Occupy Istanbul photography collection, 2013, with permission