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## **The June Uprising within the Dialectics of Change**

Nejla Kurul\*  
*Ankara University*

Selin Tural\*\*  
*Oberlin College*

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there has been 4 thousand 725 protests which 3 million 545 thousand people have actively joined in 80 of the 81 cities of Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The actual number is presumed to be much bigger, as the Ministry has not taken into account the people who played “pans and pots” from their homes, switched their lights on and off, honked their cars or gathered on the streets they lived on, at 9<sup>pm</sup> every day in solidarity with the June protests. The magnitude of this number can also be deduced from the amount of teargas and water cannons used. According to Amnesty International, excessive force has been exerted on the peaceful protestors since the first days of the Gezi Park protests. The government used Turkey’s 1 year supply of 130.000 teargas capsules in the first 20 days of the protests and on 13<sup>th</sup> August ordered a new supply of 400.000 capsules. This weaponry combined with police brutality led to more than 8.000 injuries as of July 10<sup>th</sup> and five deaths as of August.<sup>2</sup> (The counts raised to 8, which two of them are police officers who has been died due to non violent reasons like falling down from a bridge and heart attack. One child at 14 years old, Berkin Elvan has died after 269 days long coma. His death by attacks of riot police has caused a mass protests in countywide)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>.

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\* Ankara University Scholar. Co-Chairwoman of SYKP (Socialist Re-Formation Party). E-mail: nkurul@ankara.edu.tr

\*\* Student of Philosophy in Oberlin College. USA. E-mail: stural@oberlin.edu

\*\*\* Editor’s note.

Regarding the issue of naming and defining the June Days of the people of Turkey, this essay chooses the name “The June Uprising”. Since, in Ertugrul Kurkcu’s<sup>3</sup> words, the movement “was not marked by locality or partialness, invigorated all the urban opposition dynamics, occupied city centers and is impossible to reduce to one component or one group due to its plurality. This unprecedented event in the history of Turkey was a social uprising whose common denominator was integrity, justness and freedom.”<sup>4</sup> June Uprising was not a student rebellion, neither a revolt of the exploited working classes, nor the uprising of an oppressed identity or religion. On the other hand, contrary to some opinion, it also was not a “middle-class” or “white-collar” movement. The space occupied by the resistance encompassed all of these and can therefore be defined only with its plurality and diversity: people of many genders and sexual identities, the working class in or out of employment, students, teachers, doctors, lawyers, Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Alaouites, anti-capitalist Muslims, people with ties to a social organization and people with none... The rebels were the citizens crushed by the barbaric wheels of the neo-liberal system. The uprising was a journey from the concrete to the abstract, the joining of the particular with the universal, the meeting and solidarity between isolated and introverted groups who had their backs turned to the outer world. Even though it is difficult to name the June Uprising with its participants; the plurality, diversity and geographically wide-spread nature of the process confirms the accuracy of the term “uprising”.

Last June; the insecure, cynical, nihilist pre-uprising Human who only took the roads s/he knew, witnessed the social relations s/he had recognized but not fully brought into consciousness, on the course of a couple of days, over a few trees. S/he came face to face with the brutality of state and state’s police and the bias of the main-stream media. S/he met people who insisted on saving Gezi Park, resisted against the government-instructed police violence with courage, who wanted the people to have a say in the urban planning their cities, who wanted freedom against the police orders to confine people to their “old” ordinary lives. A Gezi “saying” goes “At first it was all a big cloud of gas, and then life began!” The people, songs, books, graffitis, poems, artworks s/he encountered at Gezi were out of the ordinary, all-inclusive and all-accepting, sharing, honorable, good and kind. In the first days of the Taksim commune, street-vendors who wanted to exchange food or water with money were not allowed behind the barriers. Food, water, smiles, inspiration, knowledge, culture and conversation were free and available to everybody. These forms of resistance helped the Uprising Human to express her piled anger, overcome her usual passivity and spring out of the routine of daily life.

The components of the Uprising; the resisting society and nature/right to city (represented by the three trees symbol PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan condescendingly used) are tied together in social, economic, cultural and political bonds. Everything regarding the June Uprising is encircled by a “whole” that includes the historical background. In nature and society everything is in the process of change at all times. To reduce the reality in motion to a moment, an image, a representation and to fixate on the past without consideration of the future is against dialectics. Changes in nature and society come into existence as a result of accumulation. A revolution is always

the result of an evolution. The June Uprising has proved to be a monumental example of the evolution in the struggle of the people of Turkey for democracy and freedom.

The struggle of contradictions is what led to the June Uprising. These contradictions are inherent, cause changes and exist in a whole with other contradictions. Societies exist with their contradictions; class contradictions being one of the primary. However, in the June Uprising, with its colorful, multi-faceted nature, class contradictions were hinted at but not fully revealed. The unemployed and the working class existed in the city squares as a class of their own but only had a limited amount of exposure and interaction to strengthen their class consciousness. The June Uprising was a platform where many contradictions in Turkey's society were expressed loud and clear with art, humor, technology and originality on the streets, squares and social networks. The demands of personal freedom, change, a democratic and free Turkey, peace amongst the people of Turkey have not yet been taken into account by the government. Thus, the contradictions remain as strong as ever to be a source of hope for the oppressed and a source of fear for the oppressors.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer<sup>5</sup> the Human, whatever it is, exists only with and through other people; cannot be defined by "indivisibility" and "uniqueness"; and can come to existence to the extent that s/he forms partnerships and shares life with others. During the June Uprising, the individual, which capitalism defines to be "indivisible" and "unique", who was atomized and scattered by the capitalist system, met other individuals who experience the same contradictions, formed necessary partnerships and sought ways to share life with them in the most crucial setting, the city. For capital accumulation cities are unearned income, whereas for anti-capitalist movements cities are the habitats for rebellions and revolutions.

Twenty & Twenty first century social uprisings prepared the first stage for the June Uprising because city-based class struggles, in David Harvey's words "the urbanization of the class struggle"<sup>6</sup> was in the collective consciousness of the pre-Uprising people. Stage two of the events that led to the uprising was the revitalization of the spirits crushed by the 12 September 1980 military coup d'état. The democracy and labor forces of Turkey had been extinguished from existence since the 1980's with the military overthrow. Out of fear and protective instincts, the parents had tried to pass their internalized self-censorship and apolitical lifestyles onto their children. However, the trauma of the 1980's was not inherited by the new generations and they interpreted the 21<sup>st</sup>. century social uprisings from all around the world in a different and braver manner. A Gezi "saying" demonstrates this with "we underwent abortion for the dead citizen inside us." The third stage was prepared by the capitalist recession and neoliberal and conservative policies of the AKP government.

The June Uprising took place at a time when capitalism's periodical recession had started to seriously display itself in Turkey. Historically capitalism enforces the oppression of capital over labor, and manifests itself in hierarchical attitudes towards ethnic, sexual, national, cultural and religious characteristics. The people of Turkey was polarized and persecuted under neoliberal AKP rule. Together with the TOKI

urban projects, the planned nuclear power plants, the third airport and third bridge in Istanbul, the unstoppable shopping malls in every corner as well as the ubiquitous religious and conservative architectural structures, the city & ecology were victimized as well as the people. In the lives where neoliberalism stepped in, there was unemployment and poverty of the seemingly employed but actually not in “real jobs”: low salary, no social security, inhumane working conditions. According to TUIK’s<sup>7</sup> (Turkish Statistical Institute) December 2012 data, Turkey’s unemployment rate is 10 %. However, this percentage becomes 12 % in non-agricultural sectors and 20 % in the young population. The statistics further indicate that Turkey’s labor force participation rate is 50 % which means that one out of every two working- age persons in Turkey is economically inactive. Labor force participation rate is 71 % in males and approximately 30 % in females. As demonstrated, Turkey’s labor force capacity is almost half the economically active population and almost one third of the female working-age population. And statistically 73 workers lose their lives in work related incidents every month.<sup>8</sup>

Another outcome of AKP’s neoliberal & conservative ideology was the policing of bodies, ethnic identities and beliefs. People of Turkey, especially the working class, were classified into hierarchically privileged (and under-privileged) groups as men, women, LGBTI individuals; Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians and other peoples; Sunni Muslims, Alaouites, non-Muslims, Nusayriis and other beliefs. These divisions allowed people to be exploited under many identities, for different reasons and on different layers (For example a Kurdish, Alaouite, working class woman)

Prior to the June Uprising, AKP’s oppressive patriarchal policies had reached a state where the government itself was a threat against female freedom. Women were forced out of the active labor force and were forced to undergo the most brutal effects of neoliberal unemployment. In addition to this, women were urged by the PM to have at least three children, abortion was politically and actively being tried to prevent, and the covering of the female body/hair was openly encouraged, even pressurized. Naturally, the Uprising Human took these as attacks on her personal freedoms.

The Uprising Human also witnessed and participated in Turkey’s 20 year old LGBT Movement in many cities and squares including Taksim, the LGBT center of Istanbul. In early June at Gezi Park, many people were chanting “We don’t want a homophobic government” in unity as combatting police brutality side by side with another but less visible oppressed group, the LGBT community, had created a sense of solidarity.

During the June Uprising, people oppressed in different, singular or multiple ways got to know and try to understand each other. Uprising Humans were from many different backgrounds: supporters of the Kurdish Struggle for democracy and freedom, defenders of the resistance against assimilation of the Alaouite culture, as well as members of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims movement resisted and demanded freedom&justice side by side.

According to KONDA<sup>9</sup> (A Public Opinion Poll Company) research conducted in Gezi Park, most people found out about the protests through social media. Half of the interviewees came there initially in “solidarity against police brutality”, 19 % to protect Gezi Park’s trees and 10% in support of the Taksim movement. The reason why the protestors stayed even after their initial reactions was 58.1 % “because their freedoms were restricted”, 37.2% “in opposition to AKP”, 30.2 % “in reaction to Erdogan’s statements and attitude” and 19.5% “in opposition to state order.” Another important property of the Uprising People was that the majority (79 %) wasn’t affiliated with any political or social organization or foundation.

In the aftermath of the June Uprising, even though a Revolution is still out of sight, the Evolution is growing strongly. The Human which is revealed by social interactions and relations, initiates action, change and transformation on herself and the world. S/He evolves towards an individually and collectively more complete and meaningful life. According to Freire<sup>10</sup>, no matter how distanced from consciousness and knowledge and absorbed in the “culture of silence” the labor classes and the oppressed groups are, they will be able to look critically on themselves and the world around them through dialogue with others. The June Uprising opened the way to this dialogue and the souls of the people of Turkey were affected irreversibly.

Another Gezi saying goes “This is only the beginning. The Struggle will continue!”

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<sup>1</sup> [www.haber.stargazete.com/.../gezi...orgutler.../haber-79087](http://www.haber.stargazete.com/.../gezi...orgutler.../haber-79087).

<sup>2</sup> According to Turkish Doctors Association. <http://www.ttb.org.tr/index.php/Haberler/rapor-4045.html>

<sup>3</sup> Member of the National Assembly of Turkey. Co-Chairman of HDP (People’s Democratic Party)

<sup>4</sup> Kürkçü Ertuğrul (2013). “Gezi’den Sonra” [After Gezi] **Radikal** 2, 6.09.2013. (<http://www.sendika.org/2013/08/geziden-sonra-ertugrul-kurkcu-radikal-2/>).

<sup>5</sup> Adorno Theodor, Max Horkheimer (2011). **Sosyolojik Açılımlar Sunular ve Tartışmalar. [Sociological Expandings, Presentations and Debates]** (Translated to Turkish by: M. Sezai Durgun-Adnan Gümüş) Ankara: BilgeSu Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Harvey David, (2013). **Asi Şehirler. Şehir Hakkında Kentsel Devrime Doğru. [Rebel Cities - From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution]** (Translated To Turkish by: Ayşe Deniz Temiz).İstanbul: Metis Publishing.

<sup>7</sup> TÜİK. [www.tuik.gov.tr](http://www.tuik.gov.tr), 17.09.2013.

<sup>8</sup> İşçi Sağlığı ve İş Güvenliği Meclisi [Worker’s Health and Job Safety Council] ([www.bianet.org](http://www.bianet.org), 17.09.2013)

<sup>9</sup> (<http://www.konda.com.tr>, 20.09.2013) - 4411 people interviewed within 6-7<sup>th</sup> June.

<sup>10</sup> Freire, Paulo (2010). **Ezilenlerin Pedagojisi.** [Pedagogy of Oppressed]. (7<sup>th</sup> publishing) İstanbul: Ayrıntı Publishing.

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