

## Reclaiming the National Will: Resilience of Turkish Authoritarian Neoliberalism in the Face of Popular Resistance

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This article explores why and how authoritarian regimes become resilient in the face of strong resistance of counter-hegemonic forces to neoliberal social and economic projects. The discussion is illustrated in the case of Turkey. The political subjectivities produced by authoritarian neoliberalism and the AKP government's attempt to reassert its hegemony through consent production are analysed by revisiting the Gezi Park protests and the 'National Will' meetings in 2013. I argue that once the AKP's neoliberal hegemony was challenged by the Gezi protestors, the government appropriated the Turkish right's existing 'national will' narrative with a neo-Ottomanist and neoliberal makeover. To unpack this argument, the article (1) retraces the Gezi protestors' own accounts to explore how the resistance to authoritarian neoliberalism materialised; (2) examines how the AKP government attempted to reproduce its hegemony through consent generation at the 'National Will' meetings through analysing discursive strategies of the government and pro-government media.

**Keywords:** AKP, Gezi Park protests, hegemony, neoliberalism, social movements, Turkey

On 16 June 2013, a colossal meeting area in Istanbul, Kazlıçeşme, was packed despite the ravaging summer heat. On stage was the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The preceding two weeks had witnessed the biggest anti-government protests in modern Turkey's history, widely known as the Gezi Park protests. The country-wide protests erupted in May–June 2013, following a police raid on a group of environmentalists in Gezi Park, and lasted nearly five weeks. The government of the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party) had announced the Taksim Pedestrianisation Project in 2011 as a plan to reconstruct an old Ottoman barracks in Gezi Park. The reconstructed Topçu barracks would, in fact, be a shopping mall. This triggered the mass protests of Gezi Park, first in Istanbul and then in other provinces in Turkey. The protests quickly became a beacon with which to resist the AKP's neoliberal and conservative policies. It was while they were still continuing that Erdoğan addressed the crowd in Kazlıçeşme:

This is not a matter of Gezi Park, trees, or the environment. This is a matter of democracy, of *national will*, and of the nation. The real matter is Turkey. My brothers participating in these demonstrations must see this (Star 2013).

The concept of 'national will' has always been a fundamental part of Turkey's centre-right discursive repertoire. It was appropriated by the political Islamist AKP, which has neoliberalised Turkey's economy while reproducing itself as the sole representative/defender of the 'national will' against amorphous

enemies. Aiming to discredit the protestors as opponents of the national will, Erdoğan made the concept a central pillar of his speeches at the ‘Respect for the National Will’ meetings across Turkey. The concept became so significant that, following the failed coup attempt in July 2016, more ‘national will’ meetings and sit-ins were organised by the regime, and bridges and squares have even been renamed with references to ‘national will’. This concept now lies at the core of AKP’s narrative and produces its ideological hegemony by rendering authoritarian neoliberalism resilient.

In order to flesh out how Turkey’s integration into a neoliberalised global economy has shaped the resistance to and resilience of the AKP regime, this article investigates the episode of social mobilisations both against *and* for the AKP in 2013—a key moment that transfigured the country’s political landscape. The burgeoning literature on the Gezi Park protests has focused less on how the regime initiated counter-mobilisations, which, equally, attracted passionate protesters.<sup>1</sup> By articulating the Gezi protests as ‘a war of position’ between two heterogeneous social blocs with competing political projects, this article complicates the question of ‘what makes neoliberalism such a resilient mode of economic and political governance’ (Tansel 2017, p. 2) in the context of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

While acknowledging the coercive and preemptive practices of authoritarian neoliberal states that target counter-hegemonic groups directly and systematically (see Tansel, 2017), I argue that this manifest resilience is also reinforced by the production of consent in civil society in the Gramscian sense. One of the most crucial discursive tools that has been utilised by the authoritarian neoliberal regime in Turkey is ‘national will’ and the narrative revolving around this concept. I sketch out this argument by engaging with the four subjectivities produced by neoliberalism (Hardt & Negri 2012) and (neo)Gramscian theory of consent production as a tool of establishing hegemony in a complementary way. Whereas the former enables us to articulate how neoliberalism generates different subject and object positions in a society, therefore also producing a conduit of resistance, the latter helps to frame why, in spite of the resistance, (authoritarian) neoliberalism can be resilient in its local context. The analysis endorses the tension in the neo-Gramscian approach ‘between the need to talk about structures and material relations, and a desire to emphasize the subjective, intersubjective, constructed, contested, and imagined nature of the social world’ (Ayers 2008, p. 10).

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<sup>1</sup> See Yörük & Yüksel (2014); Eken (2014); Örs (2014); Seçkinelgin (2015); Damar (2016); Aytekin (2017).

The discussion starts with an account of these subjectivities as theorised by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. This is followed by a brief explanation of Gramscian focus on consent production in engendering hegemony and how these subjectivities perceive and practice politics in ‘actually existing neoliberalisms’ (Peck & Tickell, 2002). In the second section, I present a snapshot of the political and economic developments in Turkey for two reasons. First, these developments led to the creation and consolidation of an authoritarian neoliberal state form and, eventually, to the impromptu organisation of the Gezi Park protests as a counter-hegemonic mobilisation. Second, the AKP government has adopted and appropriated the concept of ‘national will’ within this historically specific political–economic context.

Against this theoretical and contextual backdrop, the third section discusses four subjectivities that constituted the resistance to authoritarian neoliberalism during the Gezi protests. It is followed by an analysis of how the then Prime Minister Erdoğan framed the protesters by invoking the narrative of ‘national will’ at the ‘Respect for National Will’ meetings. Accordingly, I emphasise that the participants in the protests perceived Gezi as a display of democratic resistance. In contrast, the AKP regime aimed at reaffirming its cultural hegemony via the national will narrative, which portrayed the protests as an attempt to terminate representative democracy.

Methodologically, I will utilise the protestors’ first-hand accounts documented in the academic literature. The AKP regime’s attempts to reinstitute its hegemony through consent production will be studied through the speeches Erdoğan made in different ‘Respect for National Will’ meetings across the country, and in excerpts from pro-government newspapers, *Star*, *Sabah*, *Akşam*, *Yeni Şafak*, and *Yeni Akit*. The AKP’s discursive strategies will be unpacked with the objective of articulating how the concept of ‘national will’ was adopted and appropriated in Turkey’s political–economic context to bolster the resilience of authoritarian neoliberalism.

### **Production of neoliberal subjectivities and competing social forces**

This article highlights the importance of neoliberalisation both as a determinant of the protests of 2013 and a key process that bolstered the resilience of AKP governance. Yet it should be prefaced that this claim does not rest on the assumptions that (1) neoliberalism, in and of itself, can explain the protests of 2013; or that (2) neoliberalism should be understood as a blueprint that is implemented in a uniform manner across different countries. On the one hand, it is difficult to ignore that there are significant unifying ideological

components which manifest in locales where neoliberal political–economic transformations are put into place (Fine & Saad-Filho 2016). Economically, these components include practices such as deunionisation, privatisation, and commodification of the natural and social worlds. Politically, increased conservatism, marginalisation of dissident forces, and deployment of various authoritarian practices are important markers. On the other hand, ‘local trajectories of socioeconomic development, state power and class politics affect the implementation of neoliberal restructuring’ (Tansel 2017, p. 8). As Judith Butler (2014, p. viii) argues, ‘the context seeps into the forms of neoliberal logic [and gives] them their rhythms, mechanisms, and dynamics’. How neoliberalism is negotiated between and among political elites and social forces is contingent, and requires a context-specific analysis. Equally important is to focus on the level of everyday life where the impact of neoliberal reforms can be tracked concretely. This is important particularly for the purposes of this article as I explore how competing social forces understood and negotiated the Gezi Park protests.

One key source that allows us to theorise the impact of neoliberalism on political actors in everyday life is the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Hardt and Negri (2012) define four subjectivities produced by the neoliberal crisis, which I will trace in the protests of 2013. The first subjectivity is ‘*the indebted*’. Neoliberal capitalism controls its subjects through debt (Lazzarato 2012). The indebted individual is one whose life is determined by the cycle of debt. Whether a farmer who has to obtain a loan to ‘modernise’ their farming and increase their competitiveness, or a university student who is expected to pay back their tuition fee loan when they secure a job; the modern subject is in debt and this shapes their life choices and freedoms.

The second subjectivity is ‘*the mediatised*’, where one is expected to share their views by using extensive communication technologies (via social networking media, online news channels, personal blogging, and photo-sharing) instead of engaging with physical proximity and encounters in reappropriated public spaces (i.e. occupations). Furthermore, the mediatised are recorded and are under scrutiny. ‘*The securitised*’ is another subjective figure of neoliberalism. These are the subjects whose bodies and everyday private lives are recorded, collected, and stored for ‘security’ purposes, because they have been reproduced as risks and threats to the neoliberal political projects.

The final one is ‘*the represented*’, whose political power is reduced to the democratic golden objective of representative politics. Representative politics is a powerful mechanism that disciplines

the indebted, mediatised, and securitised subjects, so that their mirage of participation in politics through voting, lobbying, or joining 'civil society' can be reproduced (cf. Azzellini & Sitrin 2014). As will be discussed below, the national will narrative has been an important discursive tool to produce the 'represented', which in fact, has contributed to the resilience of authoritarian neoliberalism.

As I argue below, these four subjectivities challenged the ideological and material hegemony of the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism during the Gezi protests. When challenged, the AKP launched an ideological counter-mobilisation that aimed at consent production to reinstitute its hegemony. As proponents of Gramscian approaches have long maintained, a ruling group's hegemony does not simply depend on its control over material sources and institutions, but on its ideological hegemony, or 'consent creation' (Lears 1985, p. 576). When 'ideas' or 'ideologies' become 'common sense', the hegemony of a ruling group as a representative of social forces is consolidated (Hall & O'Shea 2013). In other words, its hegemony is not questioned.

As a result, ruling classes always engage with narratives that aim to produce their ideas as 'common sense'. The war of position is thus a strategy aimed not only at controlling material sources and institutions, but also at shaping what is accepted as 'common sense'. Consolidating hegemony on socio-cultural terrain is instrumental to consolidating material and institutional power over competing social forces. In other words, in this analysis, the resilience of authoritarian neoliberalism is studied as a contingent factor that is closely linked to the ruling group's ability to establish their hegemony over 'common sense'. This move also allows us to demystify the ontology of authoritarian neoliberalism: 'no longer viewed a priori, i.e. as prior to and constitutive of the reality which we can know, it becomes instead an ongoing social product, historically concrete and contestable.' (Rupert 1993, p. 67).

### **Pre-Gezi politics: Emergence of the 'National Will' narrative**

AKP, the main political power behind the reproduction of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey, came to power against the backdrop of successive democratic crises and neoliberal economic restructuring. This enabled it to construct itself as the sole democratic, pluralist, and developmentalist party in Turkey. This projected 'common sense' was the AKP's main tenant of ideological hegemony and was challenged by the

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four subjectivities produced by authoritarian neoliberalism during the Gezi protests. Consequently, the ruling party was in need of a new narrative to re-establish its hegemony by consolidating the social forces behind it, and this triggered the re-deployment of an existing conservative narrative, namely the 'national will'.

In mainstream political science literature, Turkish politics has often been studied in terms of 'cleavages'. 'Centre vs. periphery', 'government-controlled economy vs. free market economy', 'local/traditionalist vs. universalist' paradigms, and 'Western vs. Eastern orientation' are some of the 'cleavages' that supposedly run deep in society and generate as well as shape party politics (see Kalaycıoğlu 1994; Secor 2001). However, the binary positions that dichotomise political parties (and their electoral bases) can be problematic for cross-cutting—and often inconsistent—party and electoral issues and behaviours.

For example, in 1965 the centre-right 'free-market liberal' Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP) initiated a state-controlled economy through the establishment of the State Planning Agency and by formulating five-year economic plans; in 1973 the 'Kemalist' centre-left CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, - Republican People's Party) formed a coalition with the political Islamist MSP (Milli Selamet Partisi - National Salvation Party,); and in the 1990s, the Western-centric CHP developed an anti-EU nationalist stance. The same argument can be made for electoral behaviours. In the 1990s, the centre-right Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) and the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP), which claimed to represent the 'periphery', received the support of the 'Istanbul bourgeoisie'. On the other hand, the urban 'periphery' overwhelmingly voted for the party of the 'centre' CHP during the 1970s, and then for a successor of the CHP, the Social Democratic People's Party (Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, SHP) in the early 1990s (Kalaycıoğlu 1994).

Instead of situating the discussion in these dichotomist and binary frameworks, adopting a dialectical understanding of contemporary politics in Turkey through a focus on social forces—and the party politics that emanate from the competition among these forces—offers a more dynamic analysis. Such an analysis also better reflects the historical, cultural, and economic transformations of Turkish society under neoliberalism. Political parties as ruling elites formulate narratives and engage with discursive strategies to generate 'consent' for the hegemony of social forces that they claim to represent. On the one hand, these narratives are all-encompassing, aiming to cement groups from different socio-economic backgrounds (therefore, challenging 'cleavages'). On the other hand, they always construct 'the other' against which the

identity of social forces can be identified—a binary position that reflects, but also transcends, ‘cleavages’. For the centre-right parties in Turkey, the ‘national will’ emerged as the most popular narrative to achieve these objectives.

The four-decade-long single party government of the CHP ended with the victory of the DP (Demokrat Parti – Democrat Party) in the 1950 general elections. During the late 1950s, the DP became increasingly authoritarian in the face of rising social unrest generated by economic stagnation and political oppression. The DP government justified its authoritarian practices by recourse to its parliamentary majority, and ‘believed that it solely and directly represented the national will’ (Sunar 1996, p. 2084). The unrest led to the 1960 military coup, which eventually led to the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and his two ministers. In Feroz Ahmad’s (2015, p. 56) words, this is how the centre-right’s ‘fetish’ of ‘national will’ began.

Süleyman Demirel, the leader of the DP’s successor, AP, continued to capitalise upon the national will narrative during the 1960s and 1970s while adding anti-communist, religious, and nationalist contours to the narrative in the Cold War context (Bilgiç 2016, pp. 169–171). The party was confronted, on the one hand, by the rising left; anti-Americanism; anti-communism; Kurdish separatism; the emergence of new socialist, national and Islamist political parties; urbanisation; and a high level of migration from rural to urban areas. On the other hand, it faced the continuing dominance of ‘the establishment’, a combination of the military and a ‘Westernising elite’, in politics. In response, Demirel’s ‘national will’ narrative was populist and anti-establishment. It was primarily directed against the Westernising elite, including the military and CHP (Sakallıoğlu 1996, p. 145). ‘The AP’s appeal to the national will’ was actually a way of posturing the will of the nation (the people or “common people”) against the will of “the state” and its elites, and in so doing dividing society into different camps’ (Wuthrich 2015, p. 121). I

In this way, the objective was to consolidate the hegemony of the centre-right ruling elite through articulating an anti-establishment stance as ‘common sense’, as opposed to the CHP, which was portrayed by AP as ‘the establishment’ party because of its alleged affinity to the military. However, as Sakallıoğlu (1996, pp. 146–147) rightly notes, the stance was based on a contradiction:

it articulated the popular resentment against the state into a basically state-oriented discourse (...) Although the traditional discourse of the Turkish Right was always anticommunist, anti-central planning and encouraged the development of the private sector, it never intended to lose its grip on the penetrative power of the state through populist controls and bureaucratism. Because it relied on a conservative popular base, in a sense it reproduced a socially more conservative populism than the one upheld by westernizing state elites [the military, and CHP].

This contradiction was partly addressed by the AKP's appropriated version of the national will narrative; however, its state-centric essence has been preserved. Prime Minister Demirel was overthrown by the military in 1971 and then 1980, events which reinforced the national will narrative of the centre-right at the time, and eventually of the AKP.

On 24 January 1980, amidst economic turmoil and the rising voice of the left against the pro-NATO right-wing government, Turgut Özal - who ran for parliament with the political Islamist MSP in the 1973 elections and was later appointed as undersecretary of the State Planning Organisation - declared the infamous 'January 24 decisions' (see Bozkurt-Güngen 2018 ). The statement duly reflected many of the precepts that came to define the Washington Consensus. The Turkish lira was devalued, the fluctuation of interest rates was introduced, measures were taken to encourage imports and exports to replace the shrinking domestic market, and drastic increases in the price of public goods were observed (Çavdar 1996, p. 2100). Given the fragmentary nature of the political landscape at the time, it is difficult to envision how these measures could have been implemented under a fully functioning democratic system. Similarly, the test case of neoliberalism, Chile, economic restructuring plans were accompanied by a coup, and the Turkish military overthrew the government in September 1980.

The 1980 coup changed the political landscape significantly. All political parties were shut down, their leaders were banned from politics, and new parties were formed under the close scrutiny of the junta. Among them, the pioneer of neoliberal restructuring, Özal's ANAP, won the 1983 general elections. The coup had finally engendered a non-conflictual political environment in which neoliberal policies could be implemented without serious opposition. Austerity measures, along with the launch of a privatisation programme and the opening up of the Turkish market, were implemented in an ideological context that aimed to discipline society.

As a panacea for divisive 'party politics'—i.e. aiming to remove the left from the political arena—the state launched an aggressive campaign to reshape society along the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis'. The synthesis constructed multiple 'others', particularly 'the West', as a historical enemy and contemporary provocateur of minorities, including Kurds. There was a strong emphasis on Turkishness and Islam as essential characteristics of an imagined collective identity. The 'grotesque and inflationist use of Atatürkism' (Bora & Kıvanç 1996, p. 777) by the new regime created a cult of the Turkish Republic's founder, Atatürk,

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that was supposed to represent national unity by subsuming differences and ‘taking precedence over ideological issues’ (Evin 1988, p. 212). The general interest defined by the new elite required homogeneity that subsumed ethnic, religious, and class differences, but in the same time, economically liberal. In other words, the new regime aimed to produce a Turkish and Sunni ‘market man’ citizen subjectivity.

The ‘national will’ narrative in the post-1980 era stemmed from new political and socio-economic transformations in society, which rendered the narrative more contradictory. The narrative adopted by Özal and then by Demirel’s DYP in the 1990s aimed to consolidate, but also generate, social forces that were nationalist, conservative, uncritically neoliberal and supportive of ‘free markets’. In spite of their neoliberal underpinnings, state-centrism in politics and social life was preserved. The Turkish–Islamic synthesis, the objective of which was to create a ‘democratic’ but highly conservative Turkish ‘market man’, was put into practice by the neoliberal ANAP and DYP governments (Bilgiç 2016, pp. 226–228). The export-oriented neoliberal model, underlined by the political authoritarianism of the state, required this type of citizenry; and citizens who lacked economic means to pursue their interests were constructed as ‘consumers that have the right to buy higher quality goods at cheaper prices’ (Özkazanç 1996, p. 1221). The critique of the Westernising elite was significantly watered down. For Sakallıoğlu (1996), this was the reflection of the ‘identity crisis’ of the DYP and, by extension, the centre-right.

In the post-Cold War context, ‘the other’ of the centre-right’s national will – and also its main opponents – were social forces victimised by the Atatürkist, nationalist, and secular stance of the ‘establishment’ and by the military domination in politics (such as political Islamist and Kurdish political groups); large segments of populations who experienced poverty, unemployment and rising inflation during the neoliberalisation process; and Alevites and non-Muslim minorities. In other words, the ruling centre-right elite’s attempt to generate ‘common sense’ via the revived national will narrative was, at best, ambivalent (i.e. populist but unequivocally part of the neoliberal and non-democratic state), and marked by recurring democratic crises.

AKP’s own national will narrative has embraced this centre-right legacy, but has focused more on representing the party as the legitimate voice of an electoral majority. As such, it has become a crucial discursive tool in the party’s arsenal to produce a common sense that equates AKP policies with the reflections of an assumed national-popular unity.

### **Ideological and material pillars of AKP's 'national will' narrative**

A snapshot of Turkish politics before the AKP's election victory in 2002 reveals the dominance of the military in politics; an Atatürkist and nationalist ideological hegemony both at the state level and among important segments of the civil society; the marginalisation of political Islamists and the Kurdish movement. Furthermore, the 1999 Marmara earthquake, which claimed more than 30,000 lives and destroyed assets and infrastructure in Marmara, or the 2001 economic crisis leading to steep devaluation of the Turkish Lira, revealed the inability of the state bureaucracy to address major crises (cf. Kubicek 2002; Aydın 2013). AKP's electoral triumph in 2002 was a popular reaction to these developments which also undermined the political power of other parties by pushing them below the election threshold. Among the subsequent AKP policies, two should be prioritised for the purposes of delineating the circuits of consent production through the national will narrative: the formulation of a neo-Ottomanist ideology (addressing democratic crises), and an extensive neoliberal restructuring of the economy (addressing economic crises).

Neo-Ottomanism is a project of constructing a societal identity and a model citizenry in domestic politics (Bakiner 2013, p. 698). Starting from the Özal period, and in parallel with the development of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, this line of thinking has pursued a notion of 'Ottoman pluralism', which entails the peaceful coexistence of different ethno-religious and cultural groups within a political community. Harking back to the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire which governed communities based on their religious affinities, neo-Ottomanism has been constructed by combining this notion of 'traditional' Ottoman pluralism and 'modern' liberal multiculturalism. The project effectively formulated 'a common, superior identity encompassing all Turkish citizens within a religio-ethnic affiliation,' in line with the neoliberal politics of promoting individual freedoms while undermining collective rights (Çolak 2006, pp. 587–578).

Neo-Ottomanism perfectly corresponds to the way in which neoliberalism co-opts the differences that the conventional nation-state subsumes (Hardt & Negri 2000, pp. 198–200). AKP's highly culturalist narrative which shapes its domestic and foreign policy similarly promotes cultural differences, especially ethnic and religious ones. This strategic move has enabled AKP to present itself as the liberator of the masses who had been suppressed by the nationalist Republic. In this case, the Sunni-Turkish culture—with the roots of its politicisation already laid by the Turkish-Islamic synthesis of the Özal period—occupies the highest level, thus reproducing the Ottoman experience in a neoliberal context. Different 'openings' towards Kurds, Alevis, Rums (Anatolian Greeks), Armenians, Romanis, and Jews were all conducted

against the backdrop of a cultural hierarchy where the Sunni–Turkish state is reproduced as a paternalistic protector of cultural differences. The Kurdish opening was then followed by the so-called ‘Unity and Fraternity Project, the democratic resolution process initiated in 2011 to end the conflict with the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê – Kurdistan Workers’ Party) (Çiçek 2011). Islam as a unifying element of Turkish and Kurdish populations was used instrumentally in the process (Saraçoğlu 2011).

Furthermore, the military tutelage was broken down both through democratic reforms promoted through the EU accession process or through the court cases of Ergenekon and Balyoz (see Kaygusuz 2018). The military, including the high command, was accused of planning coups against the AKP government. According to Bardakçı (2013, p. 417), thanks to these cases, ‘the unaccountability of the military became a thing of the past and military interventions have come to lose their legitimacy in the eyes of the public’. Although the cases were later disowned by the AKP cadres after their fall out with the Gülenists in 2013, Erdoğan continually referred to them during the national will meetings. The point hereby is that these ‘democratisation’ steps targeting the ‘elite’ provided AKP with a substantial ground upon which to construct its own ‘national will’ narrative.

The AKP’s economic and political projects have been mutually constitutive. In the economic realm, the AKP reinforced Özal’s neoliberalism more aggressively. With the political stability provided to the party by a parliamentary majority, the economy seemed to recover (cf. Subaşat 2014). This economic ‘miracle’, however, was neoliberalism *par excellence*. Under the supervision of the AKP government, both the service sector’s share in the economy and the share of construction increased significantly (Zalewski 2014; Sönmez 2017). While the Turkish state has been reorganised to effectively secure the circuits of capital accumulation, this reorganisation also attempted to incorporate low and middle income households. The economic status of many households has been elevated, not through improvements in wages or economic conditions, but through increased financialisation and debt (Karaçimen 2014).

As a primary site of capital absorption, the housing construction industry expanded rapidly—total house sales increased to 701,621 in 2012 from 427,105 in 2008.<sup>2</sup> The repurposed TOKİ (Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı – Housing Development Administration) became the main institution to offer affordable housing to low and middle income groups (Çavuşoğlu & Strutz 2014; Di Giovanni 2017). Privatisation was

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<sup>2</sup> Data retrieved from the Turkish Statistical Institute website, ‘House Sales Statistics’. Available online at: [http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1056](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1056) (accessed 9 March 2018).

pursued aggressively. Shopping malls were built all around Turkey to promote consumption (by 2011 there were 279 in Turkey, 109 in Istanbul alone) (Hürriyet 2011). ‘Social Aid Programmes’ became the main mechanism with which the state regulated its redistributive functions vis-à-vis the low-income groups and the working poor. Only in 2013, around 14 percent of Turkey’s GDP was allocated to social aid (from coal to food aid), amounting to 220 billion Turkish Liras (approximately US\$ 85 billion) (TÜİK 2014). Urbanisation plans, including the construction of ‘satellite cities’, gentrification through urban transformation projects, and commodification of urban and rural spaces have been important parts of the new neoliberal economy (Lovering & Türkmen 2011; Karatepe 2016).

In almost every election since 2002, the AKP increased its votes, obtaining the support of previously destitute groups as well as the country’s burgeoning neoliberal bourgeoisie. The successive electoral victories were then deployed to legitimise a politics of majoritarianism. The AKP’s ‘national will’ narrative, as discussed further, was crucial in paving the foundations of this majoritarian politics.

### **Resistance to authoritarian neoliberalism: Subjectivities at Gezi**

Despite being initiated by environmentalists, the protests quickly became a form of resistance against neo-Ottomanist conservatism that securitised certain bodies and lives, and placed them under state surveillance. Furthermore, material concerns—often articulated in the form of employment prospects—emerged as a significant determinant of the Gezi mobilisation in line with the expansion of the ‘indebted’ subjectivities. In Voulvouli’s words (2011, p. 863), the protests rapidly became ‘transenvironmental’, where environmental concerns connected with issues such as a general lack of democracy, human rights violations, and economic problems. This broad perspective then led to the construction of a pluralist collective body in the occupied spaces. While the pluralist character of the Gezi protests has been widely accepted in the literature (Göle 2013; Navora-Yashin 2013; Bilgiç 2016; Damar 2016), this diversity has been conceptualised in significantly different ways.

Özen (2015, p. 534, p. 545), for example, examines the Gezi protests from a radical democratic populist perspective. She argues that while the protests established ‘a chain of equivalence among diverse frustrated demands’, the inability to construct a common populist identity and the lack of a political party seeking the fall and replacement of the government eventually led to the failure of the protests. However,

Özen's articulation should be cautioned for its two underlying assumptions about the protests' 'objective' and their ostensible 'failure'.

First, the assumption that the objective of the Gezi protests was the government's resignation is partly accurate. As documented by field surveys and participant observations, protestors' reasons for joining the occupations were diverse and did not necessarily aim at the government's fall. For example, a protestor stated that 'when it [Gezi] became a mass movement it included many different components; the purpose is to show opposition. It does not matter whom you are fighting against' (quoted in Abbas & Yiğit, 2015, p. 66). Another protestor from the Platform for Preventing Violence against Women concurred: 'There were slogans like "Down with the Government", but the protest never transformed into a movement that pursued the government's resignation... The real objective was being the opposition' (quoted in Gül et al. 2015, p. 22). Therefore, the objective of Gezi can be understood more accurately as a collective declaration of 'we exist' (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) to contest the objectification of authoritarian neoliberal conservatism.

Second, the assumption of 'failure', which follows from the first assumption on objectives and goals, overlooks the political and social consequences of the protests. The encounters of different subjectivities at the Gezi protests challenged the identity dichotomies through which the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism had reproduced its hegemony (Damar 2016). Furthermore, a fundamental consequence of the protests was the feeling and sense of 'empowerment' of individuals and groups (Leach et al. 2016). The following discussion will explore some of these consequences through several protestors' own accounts of why they joined the protests and what they expected from collective action.

Regardless of the ostensible economic 'development' in some sectors, the AKP's construction, consumerism and debt-fuelled growth strategy did not address the unemployment problem, especially for those with university degrees. In 2013, the year of the protests, the unemployment rate was approximately 9 percent, and youth unemployment was nearly 17 percent. A total of 9.3 percent of university graduates were unemployed, whereas the unemployment rate in the non-agricultural sector, which comprised the main participants of the protests, was approximately 11 percent.<sup>3</sup> It was hardly surprising that 56 percent of Gezi Park protestors were university students or graduates (KONDA 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> Data retrieved from the Turkish Statistical Institute database and the World Bank, World Development Indicators.

When these numbers translate into real life, they amount to, in the words of a protestor, a 'life-shattering experience'. Hatice, a protestor, stated that 'it is difficult to construct your life when you are unemployed. We cannot show our professional and creative abilities, and we have no income to live in dignity' (quoted in Farro & Demirhisar 2014, p. 178). The situation was equally difficult for Ali, an archaeology graduate, who felt that his profession was not valued because, in his own words, 'the neoliberal economic expansion and the urban speculation neglect even the economic importance of culture'. Ela, an urban planner, concurred that 'even when we get to find work, for example in a municipality's planning office, we cannot put in practice our creativity, as the proposed projects go against the requirements of the financial and real estate speculations' (quoted in Farro & Demirhisar 2014, pp. 179–180).

Economic insecurities were accompanied by resistance to neoliberal urban transformation projects. One protestor stated that 'We cannot breathe in Istanbul anymore. The capital does not stop expanding; whenever it puts an eye on somewhere it just grabs it, trying to convert it into a space of exploitation' (quoted in Gül et al. 2015, p. 20). 'A strong anti-capitalist/anti-neoliberal thrust', underpinned the protests and manifested in the slogan: 'the squares are ours; we shall not give them up to the capital' (Gürcan & Peker 2014, pp. 78–79).

As conditions of (un)employment and neoliberal economic restructuring determined the lives of individuals, joining Gezi became a form of resistance that transcended the boundaries between the private and public lives of participants. This is visible in Ali's statement, whose indignation speaks to the concerns felt by 'securitised' subjectivities:

I am fighting for my dignity. I do not want to be controlled by a condition of employment that does not correspond to my aspirations. But I participate in the events because I do not want to be told by the government how I should behave in my private life, how I should behave in the street, or when I should see my friends. (Farro & Demirhisar 2014, p. 180)

Ali's words about 'private life' were underlined by the pre-Gezi policies and discourses of AKP and pro-AKP cadres.

Reflecting on the protests three years later, a protestor made the same point: 'The goal was not only to protect the park; it was also a reaction to the interventions in the private lives of people, in their rights' (DW 2016). For another, Gezi was the 'breaking point' of the people who were fed up with the assaults of the government on their daily lives; a football fan concurred: 'it was not a matter of a few trees... It was a rebellion against the abortion law and alcohol regulations' (quoted in Gül et al. 2015, pp. 18–19). As the objective of reproducing individual subjectivities and their bodies in line with the neo-Ottomanist

and neoliberal ideologies became clear, the Gezi moment enabled individuals to form heterogeneous counter-hegemonic social forces in Taksim as a space of freedom, as an attempt to defuse ‘securitised’ subjectivities. The statistical research conducted during the protests affirms this argument: 58 percent joined the protests because they thought their freedoms were under attack (KONDA 2013) and 81 percent of the protestors defined themselves as ‘freedom-seekers’ (Leach et al. 2016, p. 30).

The neo-Ottomanist/neoliberal social engineering project was divisive, operating on the principle of constructing multiple ‘others’ such as ‘Kemalists’, ‘elites’, ‘the Istanbul media’, ‘international interest lobbies’, ‘feminists’, ‘homosexuals’: namely the target groups that then Prime Minister Erdoğan often highlighted in his speeches. All these singularities that did not fit into the culturalist and hierarchical differences of the AKP regime came together in Taksim Square, occupied it, and practised horizontal politics without an institution or a leader. Identity dichotomies that had been constructed in Turkey over decades, such as Islamist vs. secular, Kemalist vs. Islamist, Turk vs. Kurd, men vs. women, were abandoned in that particular space and time.

Damar (2016) argues that this was most visible in the deconstruction of the secular/Islamist divide by producing a politics of recognition. For example, a protestor who voted for CHP—traditionally a hard-line secularist party—reflexively stated that: ‘The problem is that our folks (at CHP) still have the tendency to define Islam exclusively with the AKP... Having an exchange with the Anti-Capitalist Muslims may have an impact on changing their thoughts, and thus contribute to the strengthening of the Gezi front’ (quoted in Damar 2016, pp. 215–216). In some cases, the protests went even further than the Islamist/secularist dichotomy regarding the politics of recognition:

LGBTQ individuals who participated in the resistance could reach people and make them understand that we are not three eared, five eyed weirdos or freaks [...] A participant of a large soccer fan organization, *Çarşı*, told one of our trans-friends that he used to swear at prostitutes and transvestites before, but now he will never do that again, since he came to know them and they were able to touch each other. (quoted in Daloğlu 2013)

A protester, Gündüz, articulated this point as follows: ‘I am living a very important experience. I learnt to talk to others, I don’t fear them anymore, I don’t need to defend myself, they do not oppress me. We debate in this forum about our freedom to live as we wish to’ (quoted in Farro & Demirhisar 2014, pp. 183–184).

While challenging identity boundaries, it must be underlined that the Gezi moment was politically important for counter-hegemonic social forces in Turkey in terms of creating new spatial encounters. Many segments of the fragmented Turkish society, which had never established concrete links with each other

before, came together and formed communities in the occupied spaces. They were members of ‘a corporal assemblage that acts as a living multiplicity’ (Hardt & Dumm 2000). Many collective movements obtained further political visibility and power because of the Gezi experience (Bilgiç 2015). For example, according to an LGBTQ protestor:

The so-called “sissy boys” who carried the wounded ones out of the clash zones, the previously slanged transwomen who supplied medicine and food to the barricades, and “fags” who apparently showed the courage to sit in front of the police water cannon trucks like all those “tough guys,” all gave rise to a substantial crack in hate speech, and the homophobic and transphobic collective memory woven by it within and hopefully somewhere out of the space of the resistance. (quoted in Daloğlu 2013)

In other words, the Gezi protests created a sense of ‘empowerment’ for their subjects. According to ethnographic research conducted during the protests, protestors were asked ‘if they had experienced being supported and applauded by the passers-by, by a feeling of solidarity with other protestors, and by being encouraged to participate in protests by family or friends’. In response, 77 percent stated they had experienced at least two of them (Leach et al. 2016, p. 34). This was an important attempt at overcoming the limits of living as ‘mediatised’ and ‘represented’ subjectivities and at establishing concrete social solidarities as opposed to those defined by more ephemeral digital ones. As opposed to the representative democracy that AKP promoted through the national will narrative, social forces experienced horizontal democracy in the re-appropriated public spaces beyond the virtual world.

In the literature, the Gezi moment has been studied largely from the perspective of participants who had a strong normative commitment to this outlined radical democratic experience, beyond a traditional politics of representation (e.g. İnceoğlu 2014, pp. 23–24). Indeed, as discussed above, diverse groups among the multitude conducted non-hierarchical resistance, which was followed by public forums held in open spaces during the summer of 2013 where the participants challenged the norms of ‘represented’ subjectivities (Turan 2017). Identity boundaries were challenged; the four subjectivities of authoritarian neoliberalism felt ‘empowered’ through the practice of horizontal politics.

This does not necessarily mean that there was no common identity among the protestors; the common identity was ‘the Gezi Spirit’, which was not an identity articulated through being against the government, as argued by Özen (2016), but through being in solidarity with each other. A protestor stated in 2016: ‘There is now a group called ‘Çapulcular’ [see below]. And we are in solidarity. This is the Gezi Spirit, the spirit of solidarity...There were socialists, Kurds, nationalists, Islamists. Gezi woke people up and we started to take care of each other. This spirit is still alive today’ (DW, 2016). A banner from the protests



reads: ‘On the fourth day of the protests, we have become “the people”’ (quoted in Özen 2016: 544). In the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests, the ‘Spirit’ took the form of popular assemblies and forums as well as digital activism. Akçalı (2018) argues that in these alternative spaces, ‘the people’, namely city dwellers from different subject positions, continue to resist the AKP’s authoritarian neoliberalism and often formulate alternatives for different politics.

However, the Gezi revolt and its aftermath did not reflect the experience of all social groups in Turkey. The studies that prioritised them almost always neglected the performative politics of the pro-government social forces, which were mobilised by the AKP’s ‘national will’ narrative. In the face of strong resistance from society, the ruling party reinvigorated a historical narrative that claimed ownership of ‘the real people’ of the nation.

### **The National Will: Reasserting hegemony through consent production**

Once the protests began to spread, Prime Minister Erdoğan’s first reaction to the protests was to call them ‘çapulcular’ (thugs, drifters, vagabonds). Instead of rejecting this derogative term, the protesters accepted and reproduced the concept as their common identity. Following this, the government attempted to frame the protests as an anti-religious reaction. There were two discursive attempts, whose accuracy was later discredited. One was Erdoğan’s claim that the protesters drank alcohol in a mosque after entering it without removing their shoes; another, also endorsed by Erdoğan, was that a headscarved woman with her baby had been beaten and urinated on by scores of men who were half-naked and wore leather masks and trousers. These ‘alternative facts’, fabricated by the ruling elite as an ‘othering’ performance, aimed to appeal to the conservative segments of society that had already been disciplined through the Turkish–Islamic synthesis and neo-Ottomanism in the last three decades.

However, these ‘facts’ turned out to be baseless fabrications. Religious groups taking part in the protests immediately countered this narrative. For example, the Anti-Capitalist Muslims immediately visited the mosque Erdoğan mentioned, prayed, and rejected the accusation of alcohol-drinking in the mosque (Başka Haber 2013). The second move of the government was to organise public rallies called ‘Respect for the National Will’ (Milli İradeye Saygı Mitingleri). The following analysis will unpack the discursive strategies of Erdoğan and the pro-government media to reproduce the AKP’s ideological hegemony through the national will narrative.

A prominent discursive strategy was to identify Gezi as a new initiative to topple the government of the people by 'the elite'. Here, Erdoğan's most important reference was Adnan Menderes, the leader of the DP who was executed following the 1960 military coup. In Kazlıçeşme, Istanbul, he stated:

They carried out the May 27 coup and the late Menderes' execution against this nation. But this nation replied to them at the ballotbox. They carried out the February 28 coup against the late Erbakan, and this nation again replied at the ballotbox (...) This nation always protected democracy and the national will (...) I am asking you again: will we protect the national will again? (Star 2013)

He then went on to personally associate himself with Menderes, with a clear intent to represent Gezi as an illegitimate attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government:

They say "This Prime Minister is too tough, too conflictive, a dictator". Mr Menderes was too kind and you executed such a nice and kind person (...) Now you are plotting the same for me. (Star 2013)

This discourse was part of an organised attempt at consent creation that was launched before the meeting. The pro-government forces prepared and spread a famous slogan with banners showing Adnan Menderes, Turgut Özal, and Tayyip Erdoğan, with the following words under each photo, respectively: 'The Men of the Nation: You killed him? You poisoned him? We won't let you have him...' (Sabah 2013). These banners appeared on the billboards of Istanbul and Ankara, and were used during the 'Respect for the National Will' meetings. This was to remind the people that AKP was the legitimate successor of DP (whose leader, Adnan Menderes, was toppled and executed by the junta in 1960) and ANAP (whose leader, Turgut Özal, was claimed to have 'been poisoned', albeit this was never proven).

AKP itself fought against the establishment, mainly the military, in order to consolidate its power, and always legitimised its position by claiming to be the sole representative of the national will. This centre-right narrative was revitalised during the protests: the pro-government channels claimed that, after the military and the judiciary, 'the establishment' was using Gezi to terminate the national will. The implicit message was that the 'real' people are here to sacrifice their bodies for Erdoğan and for representative democracy. Erdoğan never clarified whom exactly he was targeting; instead, he referred to this vague entity as 'you' or indirectly 'them'. As shown by his words cited in the introductory paragraph of this article, he portrayed some protestors as the collaborators of this amorphous trans-historical enemy, 'the establishment'.

It is important to underline that Erdoğan sometimes refrained from targeting the protestors directly, while still referring to 'the real nation' that was in the meeting as opposed to the 'others' at Gezi Park. This was in line with his polarising discourse that emerged before the National Will meetings, when he claimed

that he was struggling to keep ‘his 50 percent [of the electorate] in their homes’ (Hürriyet 2013). At a meeting in Kayseri he openly divided the country into two diametrically opposed social camps: ‘those who call themselves “the people” [Gezi protestors] call these people [referring to the meeting participants] dumb-heads’ (Anadolu Ajansı 2013). ‘Dumb-heads’ (*bidon kafalı*) and ‘the man who scratches his stomach’ (*göbeğini kaşıyan adam*) were two expressions used by two anti-AKP journalists, Yılmaz Özdil and Bekir Coşkun, to derogate AKP voters as careless and unreflective people. By integrating these expressions into his speech, Erdoğan not only reproduced his anti-elite and anti-establishment stance, but also associated the Gezi protestors with the elite who looked down on ‘the real people’. In Erzurum, he stated: ‘I don’t recognise any will higher than my nation’s will. They [protestors] will first learn how to respect the national will’. Then, he suggested that people should hang Ottoman flags next to Turkish flags (Milliyet 2013).

Neo-Ottomanism was a vital element of his discursive repertoire, producing the following line of reasoning in justifying the record of the government and discounting the protests. According to Erdoğan, international forces joined by the local traditional ‘establishment’ were using the Gezi protests to halt Turkey’s rise as a new power. Additionally, positioning ‘the real nation’ against the ‘misguided’ protestors was a common strategy that both Menderes, just before the coup, and Demirel, in the 1970s, had used. However, Erdoğan’s national will narrative differed from the previous narratives in relation to the question of *who* was misleading the protestors. As opposed to its centre-right successors, the AKP’s narrative was built upon the political and economic achievements of the party. Erdoğan’s first argument was concerned with the democratic achievements of neo-Ottomanism:

Turkey is the successor of the Ottomans, who united the whole Middle East under one banner. No conspiracy would work against us (...) Turkey is not a country which they could redesign through the international media. BBC and CNN: I challenge you to show this crowd too (...) Shamelessly, they are saying that it is time to have a “Turkish Spring”. You miserable people, the Turkish Spring happened on 3 November 2002 [the date of AKP’s first national election victory]. (...) There was torture in prisons and police stations. We said we would show zero tolerance to torture. We provided a shift from the rule of the superior to the superiority of the law. Freedom of expression was limited; we removed the limitations. (Star 2013)

In Kayseri, the main opposition party CHP too came under attack.. Erdoğan claimed that ‘they [CHP] have been playing dangerous games on our Alevi brothers and sisters. CHP is part of the conspiracy organised by international dark forces’ (Haberler 2013). He continued his speech with an emphasis on the Alevi opening that the government had initiated. In the same speech, he made another discursive move to complete his line of reasoning that the protestors were undermining Turkey’s stability:

Turkey is getting stronger. “They” are anxious because the stock exchange is increasing. Our interest rates are the lowest in history. They are using the protestors like puppet masters. There have been no terror-related deaths in

months. This makes them uneasy. We are one, united as Turks and Kurds (...) God willing, the thirty year-long terror is now ending. They are made very uncomfortable by this. They are trying to hinder the resolution process by provoking these demonstrations. (Haberler 2013)

Erdoğan's discourse in both the Istanbul and Kayseri speeches had several important dimensions. First, he connected economic achievements with political achievements that the previous centre-right governments could not pursue. The Alevi opening, the Kurdish peace process, and the democratic reforms for human rights aimed to cope with the democratic crises that 'the establishment' had created. By addressing them, the AKP paved the way for a peaceful country with a growing economy in the Middle East. Second, he again articulated that 'they', i.e. a coalition of international and national forces, were uncomfortable with this progress, and were using Gezi protestors like 'puppet masters'. International media were depicted as part of this international alliance.

The regime's important consent-creating platform, the pro-government media, gave a more detailed account of who 'they' were. A columnist in *Yeni Şafak* wrote:

Upon his return from Africa, the Prime Minister said: "we will not retreat from the Interest Lobby", and all eyes turned to the business world. It is well known that local and international big capital played an important role in the May 27 [1960], September 12 [1980], and February 28 [1997] military coups. The Prime Minister's words created anxiety about whether there is another coup scheme organised by internal and external forces. That interest lobby, which played a role in the Gezi Park protests, is always after easy profit. That is why they are always after high interest rates and high exchange rates. They do not care that the country is getting poorer while they are making profits (...) Clearly big business and their media are behind these protests. (Sungu 2013)

Another pro-government columnist from the *Star* newspaper echoed these claims:

Gezi protests show us once again that those who are wearing [military] boots are not the only coup-makers. Those who are not wearing boots, the media and capital, is always lurking and waiting for their moment. (Çakır 2013)

When the AKP's hegemony was challenged, Erdoğan and the pro-government media re-employed the national will narrative on three discursive strategies. The first was the traditional centre-right discourse of an anti-establishment and anti-elite party leader, who—like his predecessors—had faced another coup attempt by the establishment. 'The other' was the elite who gathered at the Gezi protests. The second discursive strategy was to underline the AKP's political and economic achievements, and how these achievements were targeted by international forces that were provoking and using the protests. Therefore, AKP as the defender of the national will against 'them', an amorphous enemy who is always in the waiting, presented Erdoğan as the successor of Menderes. CHP, which was traditionally part of the establishment, was presented as a tool of these 'dark forces'. Third, neo-Ottomanism and anti-Westernism were intertwined. On the one hand, neo-Ottomanism was portrayed as enabling democratic reforms as the *millet* system rejected the homogenous nation-state of 'the establishment', and making Turkey a target of 'international

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forces'. The CNN and BBC were two main media outlets that Erdoğan repeatedly criticised, hence fanning the flames of anti-Western sentiment. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis, as mentioned above, was strongly shaped by the idea that the West was always seeking ways to terminate Turkey's presence and render Turkey docile. Gezi was thus portrayed as the latest attempt of the West to achieve this goal.

The authoritarian neoliberal regime's attempts to create consent continued after the National Will meetings through its media. In 2017, the *Akşam* (2017) newspaper claimed that the international financier, George Soros, was behind the Gezi protests. In 2016, the daily *Sabah* (2016) published three ministers' views on the Gezi protests. The Minister of Development suggested that Gezi was a coup attempt against the national will; the Minister of Transportation argued that the Gezi protests were an attempt to obscure Turkey's economic development; and the Minister of Economy blamed the international media. In 2017, *Yeni Akit* (2017) specifically targeted the West: 'The West learned that they could not interfere with Turkey as they wish'. In 2017, an opinion piece in *Star*, a national daily owned by pro-Erdogan Sancak family, associated Gezi with the Syrian conflict by stating that some of those who were active in Gezi had now joined up with the PKK/PYD (-Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, the Democratic Union Party of Syria) forces in Syria and were working with international forces against Turkey (Özkır 2017).

Investigating the processes of consent production has revealed how authoritarian neoliberalism becomes resilient in the face of popular opposition in a historically produced political-economic context. Economic and political populism, which has been performed within/through the existing social fault lines in Turkey, have enabled the ruling AKP elite to produce subjects whose everyday lives have been 'developed' through authoritarian neoliberalism. Notwithstanding the importance of the state in the reproduction of neoliberal economic and political relations, the ability to produce consent at the civil society level has rendered the regime resilient. Economic and political consent, crafted by the party-state of the AKP, has justified and legitimised coercive and violent practices inflicted on the four subjectivities produced by authoritarian neoliberalism in the post-Gezi period.

## Conclusions

The Gezi Park protests in May-June 2013 were an important political moment for both the protestors and the authoritarian neoliberal regime in Turkey. For the former, they constituted a significant moment of resistance to authoritarian neoliberal conservatism; for the latter, the protests represented a challenge to the

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re-establishment of the party's hegemony in the face of extensive societal discontent. This article has argued that the authoritarian neoliberal regime reproduced its hegemony through re-appropriating the historically produced centre-right 'national will' narrative. This re-appropriation enabled AKP to present itself as the protector of representative democracy against the protestors, who were represented as the tools of intervention by domestic and/or international forces. The argument made in this article was substantiated by analysing accounts of Gezi protests documented in the literature and zooming in on understanding how the protestors themselves perceived the protests. The-then Prime Minister Erdoğan's speeches in the 'National Will Meetings' and pro-government media accounts on the Gezi protests were also examined with a view to determining the discursive strategies utilised by the government for hegemonic consent creation.

The four subjectivities produced by neoliberalism, for Hardt and Negri (2012), are 'the securitised' (whose bodies and lives are put under surveillance), 'the indebted' (whose economic survival depends on debt), 'the mediated' (who participate in public solely via digital media and avoid physical encounters), and 'the represented' (who delegate their political power to elected representatives). In the case of the Gezi revolt, these four subjectivities appeared in different identities. 'Securitized' and 'indebted' subjectivities physically encountered each other and challenged being mediated and represented. Unemployed graduates, environmentalists, Kurds, secularists, Islamists, nationalists, women, LGBTQ, and football fan clubs challenged identity dichotomies in these spatial encounters. Although these dichotomies were not entirely produced by the AKP regime itself, the government attempted to use them to defeat counter-hegemonic forces. Furthermore, protestors felt 'empowered' during Gezi. Nevertheless, for some Gezi was a failure, because it failed to overthrow the government and replace it with an alternative political programme. Challenging identity boundaries and empowerment were important political consequences for the Gezi protestors, whose main objective was to say 'we exist'. Facing such resistance and after failed attempts, AKP's move was to reinvigorate the 'national will' narrative.

Three conclusions can be derived from this discussion. First, in the Turkish case authoritarian neoliberalism was able to re-establish its hegemony by reproducing itself as the 'real democracy' through the national will narrative. The government craftily manipulated a powerful pre-existing dichotomy: the 'real people' vs. the 'elite' / the 'nation' vs. amorphous enemies (including the West) and represented itself as the successor of two major centre-right parties, both of whose leaders were highly popular. By presenting himself as the new 'man of the people', Erdoğan and his party challenged every oppositional group or

practice as a new ‘intervention’ against the ‘real democracy’ which they claimed to embody.. These threatening ‘others’ during and after the Gezi protests, such as ‘interest lobbies’, ‘international forces’, ‘international media’, ‘intellectuals’, etc., were often amorphous straw men compared to the more institutional ‘others’, such as the military or the judiciary. Both types of ‘others’ were portrayed by the pro-government social forces as new threats to representative democracy. Anti-Westernism has been integrated into this discourse by presenting the West as a conspirator against the national will, which the ruling party single-handedly represented.

Second, the resilience of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey can be explained by a unique combination of ideational and material practices promoted by the AKP regime itself. AKP’s authoritarian neoliberalism is largely built on the construction of a certain national citizen subjectivity: the figure of a conservative, Turkish, Sunni, and market ‘man’ occupies a hegemonic position within national politics. This success was the direct consequence of the historical process launched by the 1980s Özal governments which promoted the ideology of a Turkish–Islamic synthesis. Neoliberal/neo-Ottoman ideology has created its own social forces by constructing multiple ‘others’, who ended up comprising the forces of resistance in the Gezi protests. The national will narrative enabled the party to present itself as the sole democratic actor defending representative democracy against potential interventions by those ‘others’. This has occurred at the same time that, as shown by Kaygusuz (2018) in this volume, the national security state as the primary institution of authoritarian governance has been recast with the objective of protecting the normative and economic interests of the pro-AKP social forces. In the aftermath of the failed coup attempt, the national will narrative has been deployed again side by side with the emboldened national security state.

Finally, the hegemony of authoritarian neoliberalism is not impervious to disruption, but is continually contested by antagonistic social forces who reject the ideational and material straitjacket imposed upon dissident social forces. The Gezi Park protests in 2013 marked the first time that dissident social forces came together beyond the aegis of traditional party politics to articulate a common voice of discontent against the economic, political and cultural components of AKP governance. In this sense, the Gezi protests and the National Will meetings were practices of opposing social forces that had different conceptions of democracy. The former was for direct democracy, because its members felt increasingly marginalised and oppressed by the elected government and its regime; the latter adhered to representative democracy, which was hindered historically in Turkey. The resilience of authoritarian neoliberalism can be traced to its ability

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to represent itself as a representative democratic regime. However, this is also its main weakness, as its version of representative democracy is built upon exclusion, marginalisation, and oppression of 'others' who resist the latter through horizontal politics, as practised in the squares, forums and digitally after the Gezi protests.



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