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### Author

Gurel, Perin

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# Bilingual Humor, Authentic Aunties, and the Transnational Vernacular at Gezi Park

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PERIN GUREL

On June 2, 2013, in the midst of intense antigovernment protests over an urban development project that would have destroyed Istanbul's Gezi Park, a Twitter user posted a photograph of a rotund, middle-aged woman sporting both a headscarf and a plastic Guy Fawkes mask, popularized by the Hollywood movie *V for Vendetta* (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Her hair covered with a purple-and-white headscarf with abstract geometric designs, her thick black sweater revealing a clashing florid black-and-white blouse, carrying a little black purse, the woman was “anonymous” in more ways than one. The mask on her face occluded her facial features, connecting her to the anarchist transnational hacktivist network Anonymous, whose members and supporters have become notorious for their use of Guy Fawkes masks. The rest of the image, from her headscarf to her squat physique and her little hand clutching the handle of her purse, marked her as the embodiment of the generic Turkish auntie or *teyze*. The incongruity between these two types of anonymity—one rebellious, masculine, and Hollywood-born, and the other domestic, feminine, and perceived to be deeply local—was emphasized in the bilingual label that attended the image: “V for Teyzetta [Auntie-etta].”<sup>2</sup>

Only one example of the bilingual (specifically Turkish-English or “Turkish”) and image- and text-based vernacular humor that flourished in the wake of the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, “V for Teyzetta” became social media gold immediately upon her appearance. The image was retweeted over a thousand times and traversed Turkish networks across Twitter and Facebook in multiple versions during early June. In some variations, the “auntie” was made to say “*Sis Atma Yivrum*”—a transliteration of heavily accented colloquial (and incorrect) Turkish for “My child, do not throw fog,” i.e., pepper gas—creating yet another linguistic fissure, between English, Turkish, proper Turkish, and charmingly “uneducated” Turkish to go along with the visual

fissures mentioned above. How do we make sense of all this play with the familiar and the foreign in visual and textual humor in the service of a people's movement? Why claim both traditional aunties and American pop culture in challenging a democratically elected, Islamic-leaning, neoconservative government, the incumbency of which has been marked by a privatization and urban development frenzy?



Figure 1.  
“V for Teyzetta,” shared on Twitter  
by @sarpapak81 on June 2, 2013.

While perhaps the most popular photograph of its type, “V for Teyzetta” was not alone. Such gendered images of homey authenticity were widely disseminated in Turkish social media in the early days of the events, in response to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s claim that the antigovernment protests that shook Turkey in May and June 2013 had been coordinated by “outside forces.” *The Economist*, among others, ridiculed this as a tone-deaf description for a popular movement involving “millions of housewives” on their balconies and at their front doors, “clanging their pans.”<sup>3</sup> As proof, protestors shared smartphone photos of headscarf-wearing, protesting “aunties,” sarcastically labeling them “foreign agitators” and “members of marginal organizations” on social media. Humorous images of guileless, lower-middle-class housewives thus became an important weapon in response to government attempts to label the protestors as disgruntled, “westoxicated,” secularist elitists who could not handle the truly democratic rule of the previously disempowered “black Turks” from the provinces.<sup>4</sup>

However, the emphasis on authenticity was belied by the defensiveness inherent in the constant attention to the presence of “aunties” at the protests, as well as the prominence of the English language and American cultural exports in protest humor.

Because auntie humor was entirely dependent on the stereotype of the auntie as semiliterate and hopelessly provincial, her “authenticity” was often produced through juxtapositions to Hollywood icons (such as V) and using English or Turkish as a foil to her “incorrect” Turkish. Moreover, Turkish dominated much of the jocular output of the Gezi protestors, with or without the auntie. Most centrally, when Erdoğan, whose incompetence in English is well known to educated Turks, called the protestors *çapulcu* (marauders or looters), the protestors invented the Turkish verb “chapulling” to describe resistance against Erdoğan’s rule. The verb was most commonly used in the bilingual neologism “everyday I’m chapulling” (see Figure 2), inspired by the hip-hop phrase “everyday I’m hustlin’.”<sup>5</sup> Although “everyday I’m hustlin’” appears to be nonstandard English due its use of continuous present tense instead of the simple present tense and awkward syntax (a more “proper” rendering would be “I hustle [for money] everyday”), its grammar and syntax mimic standard Turkish. The text’s hybridity, therefore, transcends lexical merging and operates at multiple levels, in line with the complex dynamics of transculturation, that is, cultural exchange and transformation across power differentials.<sup>6</sup> “Chapulling” also has multiple existences and variations, existing in various spellings and syntactical combinations, fitting the definition of folklore.<sup>7</sup> This variation, however, was limited: interestingly, the use of the alveolar nasal *-in’* instead of *-ing* did not resonate for the protestors. A Google search revealed no versions of this text using the truncated suffix, perhaps because accents fall on the final syllable in standard Turkish or because such a transliteration would have overstrained the already extensive bilingual and bicultural faculties required to decode this short text.

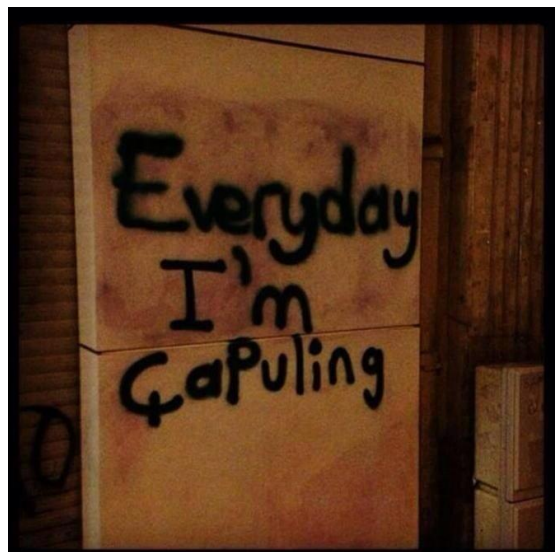


Figure 2.  
“Turkish” protest graffiti  
spotted in June 2013.  
Photo credit: Erginbilgin (*Wikipedia*).

The formal complexity of these two small examples of bilingual and multicultural folklore from a single country point to a wealth of vernacular data that has gone underutilized in transnational American Studies. The emphasis on folklore and linguistic hybridity that has enriched critical studies of the US–Mexico borderlands since the mid-twentieth century has not yet been replicated in American Studies of the United States and the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> Linguistically and/or culturally hybrid vernacular communication, however, provides transnational American Studies with an important and much neglected archive for studying the connections between culture, social structures, and power. Focusing on Facebook and Twitter posts by Turkish protestors and their supporters, this article analyzes the complex linguistic and visual humor that developed around Gezi Park in the first months of the protests and relates it to the identity politics mobilized during the resistance. I build on my past ethnographic and historiographic research on Turkish protest politics and bilingual folklore (conducted between 2006 and 2012) and bolster media-based analysis with information gleaned from casual conversations during visits to Istanbul and Bodrum, Turkey, in July 2013. This essay argues that, rather than simply marking unconscious “Americanization” or a strategic appeal for foreign support, American cultural exports, the English language, and bilingual humor were also utilized as nodes on a scale of “civilization” through which the protestors defined themselves and their opposition. Sympathetic images of semiliterate, caring aunties did important work to ground this vision of civilization in homey Turkishness, even as other women in headscarves, supporters of Erdoğan, were mocked for their nonstandard Turkish and misplaced love. Thus, not just flows but also rifts across national, class, gender, and age boundaries determined the politics of the transnational vernacular at Gezi.

This essay uses the term “vernacular” broadly to imply a mode or style of communication that self-consciously differentiates itself from the official and the institutional, often through the use of humor and nonstandard forms of speech.<sup>9</sup> As “a diffuse set of communication practices,” the vernacular can be differentiated from its institutional foil due to its informality and communal tone (243). The study of vernacular texts in their transculturation with linguistic and cultural exports from the United States tell us much about how “America,” and not just the American government, operates in an area, providing insight into “multiple meanings [and uses] of America and American culture in all their complexity.”<sup>10</sup> Although supporters of the ruling AKP government sought to evoke memories of foreign-sponsored coups (including of the near-simultaneous revolution/coup in Egypt) in their accusations of “outside influence,” America’s influence on the events at Gezi Park was as complex as transculturation itself. Despite sympathetic statements made in favor of free speech and against police brutality from official sources, and the Senate hearings prompted by the events, any search for US government influence on the emergence of the Gezi resistance is likely to fail.<sup>11</sup> There is no evidence of “state-friended” social media organizations acting with orders from the US government, unlike the “genetically-modified grassroots organizations” Jack Bratich has identified in the case of the so-

called “Green revolution” in Iran.<sup>12</sup> Yet the impact of American culture and English, the constant symbolic connections made between social media and “the West,” and between humor and “civilization,” as well as the presence of the United States as a reference point for both the government and the opposition, remain undeniable and require close analysis.

The figure of the linguistically incompetent auntie and bilingual humor cut across multiple historical developments in which the United States is implicated, such as the uneven rise of English-language competency and social media use in the country, the former on the heels of Turkey’s Cold War alliance with the United States, the latter a development of US-led economic globalization in the twenty-first century. Similarly, the influx of American cultural products into the country can be traced to the neoliberal restructuring of the Turkish economy under Prime Minister Turgut Özal—a staunch Reagan ally—in the 1980s. Since 2002, the Erdoğan government has further contributed to these developments through its pro-privatization policies, which include an increased push for foreign investment and reduced regulations.

As many scholars have pointed out, the rise of social media has not marked the “flatness” of the world and the elimination of real-life boundaries, such as nationality, gender, race, class, and religion. Instead social media operate through these barriers, accentuating divides more often than rectifying them.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the politics of vernacular humor and foreign language use intersect with preestablished social categories, including gender, class, and age. Although it has become the default liberal mode to celebrate protest humor both in the United States and abroad as a liberating counterhegemonic intervention, close reading of specific texts and contexts of humor reveals operations and underpinnings that foreclose simplistic glorification. “Sense of humor” must not be taken for granted as a self-evidently progressive attribute; its manifestations and celebrations do important political work.<sup>14</sup> The Gezi protests and the intersection of bilingual humor and social media in this instance must, therefore, be read through preexisting stratifications, not just among states but also within them, with fault lines drawn along class, gender, region, and religiosity. In the Turkish case, this means operating with the recognition that 60 percent of Turkish households still lack internet access and English-language fluency remains the purview of the elite, marking a digital divide that is particularly acute for the old, the female, the disabled, and the rural—categories that, in partial combination, make up the stereotypical, comical Turkish “auntie.”<sup>15</sup> The digital and linguistic divides that structure such humor trouble the very definition of a “people’s” protest, despite connotations of populism stemming from the use of social media and the transnational vernacular.

## Disproportionate Force vs. Disproportionate Intelligence? Violence, Humor, and the Humanity Game

Figure 3.  
English-language protest graffiti spotted in Saskinbakkal, Istanbul—a posh commercial district on the Asian side of Istanbul (July 2013). A transnational and multicultural reworking of the Vietnam-Era slogan, “Make Love, Not War,” this text constructs a civilizational binary that is further reinforced through the use of English.  
Photo credit: James Searl.



On May 27, 2013, around 11:00 p.m., construction machines began uprooting trees at Gezi Park in Istanbul’s booming Taksim district. Somewhat neglected and with a well-earned reputation for drug use and public cruising, Gezi Park with its towering sycamore trees was, nevertheless, one of the few remaining green (and nonprivatized) areas left in a rapidly developing metropolis home to almost fourteen million people.<sup>16</sup> By the morning of May 28, young activists belonging to the Taksim Platform, a diverse group of NGOs, initiatives, and civil stakeholders who had united to fight top-down projects to “gentrify” the area, occupied the park. In the early afternoon, the police began using what the media soon labeled “disproportionate force” (*orantısız güç*) to squash the resistance, attacking the unarmed demonstrators with pepper gas. This intervention led to one of the most memorable and widely shared photographs from Gezi taken by a Reuters reporter: a young woman (later revealed to be a scholar specializing in urban planning) in a red summer dress doused with tear gas, her brown hair waving like a flag in the air due to the force of the spray, her feet grounded in passive resistance.<sup>17</sup> The officer attacking her is in full riot gear, knees bent with an intensity reminiscent of war (see Figure 4). Sporting a bright, seasonable dress that revealed just enough of her body for middle-class respectability, ballet flats, uncovered hair, and an eco-conscious sack, the woman in red came to symbolize the generic female protestor. In implicit opposition to the auntie, she would not be an object of humor but solidarity and pride.





Figure 4. “Woman in Red,” May 28, 2013. Photo credit: Reuters/Osman Orsal.

Following a series of defiant speeches by Erdoğan and a brutal dawn raid on May 30, the streets of Istanbul (and increasingly other Turkish cities) filled with protestors of various backgrounds; the police fought back brutally with the use of water cannons, tear gas, and pepper spray, leading to more than one hundred injuries on May 31 alone. On July 15, Turkish Doctors Association announced that 4,177 individuals had been wounded to that date in Istanbul alone; almost eight hundred were due to gas canisters being used illegally as weapons.<sup>18</sup> Eight people were dead, and these would not remain the only losses.<sup>19</sup> The excessive and sometimes clearly illegal use of force by the police and the lack of proper legal oversight have been documented and condemned by multiple internal and external organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.<sup>20</sup> The intensity of the government’s reaction, both foretold and symbolized by the bent knees and the forward-leaning posture of the officer in the “woman in red” photo, stemmed in part from the casting of the protestors as foreign forces. Not only did Erdoğan read the events as a “civil coup” overseen by outside interests, including the famous Hungarian American speculator George Soros and an ambiguous “interest rate lobby,” there are



no doubts that some police chiefs considered their response to the protests as part of an epic resistance against foreign invasion, similar to Gallipoli.<sup>21</sup>

The people at Gezi were, of course, overwhelmingly not foreigners but Turkish citizens. This was hardly Turkey's first large-scale anti-AKP protest, but Gezi was unique in momentarily uniting "a host of unlikely bed-mates, from residents of Istanbul's plushest districts to the most radical of communist ideologues," as Alan Scott has put it.<sup>22</sup> From fascist-leaning Kemalists hungering for a coup to leftist, anarchist-leaning LGBT groups, including those who had been warring over different tactics and ideologies when I did my fieldwork in Istanbul in 2008 and again in 2012, from first-time protestors concerned about restrictions on their personal rights to protest-hardened members of the Turkish Worker's Party, over half a million individuals filled the streets of Istanbul, Ankara, and seventy-six other provinces to voice their dissatisfaction with AKP's rule in the summer of 2013. Although the Kurdish movement (then in the midst of peace talks with Erdoğan) appeared initially hesitant to join forces *en masse* with Gezi protestors, Gezi also created a moment of mutual bonding and understanding as the privileged youth of the Istanbul elite experienced a fraction of the state brutality that had long been the lot of southeast Turkey.<sup>23</sup> The communicative output of the protestors was, therefore, marked by the heteroglossia that characterizes the vernacular in general, with hammer-and-sickle graffiti sharing space with vulgar insults written in nearly illegible handwriting, with bilingual jokes flanked by slick Western-style spray-painted stencil images of, for example, "the woman in red."<sup>24</sup>

Social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook became very active in the early days of the protests, partially in response to conventional media's self-imposed censorship and, later, perceived biased reporting.<sup>25</sup> Around May 31, protestors settled on the hashtags #direngezi (resist gezi), #OccupyGezi, and #DirenGeziParki (Resist Gezi Park), using Twitter as a clearinghouse for all Gezi-related communication. A study of over four thousand protestors between June 6 and 7, 2013, found that almost 70 percent of those visiting the park had heard about the events from social media.<sup>26</sup> Similar to Paolo Gerbaudo's findings in his study of hybrid activism in Egypt, Spain, and the United States, the information Gezi sympathizers received did not emerge out of a democratic ether but through what Gerbaudo has called "choreographic" or "soft" leadership.<sup>27</sup> In the case of Turkey, communal authority coalesced around specific Twitter accounts, Facebook groups, and even conventional media sites, such as Halk TV, which showed the protests live online. It is no surprise that the role of soft leadership often fell to organizations and individuals with preestablished cultural capital and well-known stakes in Taksim. Moreover, these groups undertook repeated practices of "centring," from official press releases to smaller but widely disseminated messages intended to police the behavior and self-presentation of the protestors, such as Facebook messages castigating those who throw stones or damage private property and tweets that put social pressure on political party members to ditch their flags and come simply as representatives of "the people."<sup>28</sup>

In social media, protestors shared critical information regarding police raids and the availability of legal and medical help, but they also created visual and/or textual frames advancing a specific representation of their identities and goals, in response to Erdoğan's insults and insinuations. A collective counter-framing of the event took place and was repeatedly sharpened and negotiated in shared image- and text-based posts, as well as in interviews given to Turkish and foreign media, which were then shared on social media via links to YouTube. Some of these frames were formed in direct, articulated opposition to Erdoğan's representation of the events and the protestors. Many individuals, for example, ironically incorporated his insults, *çapulcu* (marauder) and *ayyaş* (drunkard), into their screen names on Facebook and Twitter. Other frames functioned much more implicitly, building on classed and gendered connotations around "civilization" and "authenticity."

A cartoon published on June 9 in the popular mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet* showed three slim young women with stylish hair, jeans, and cut-off shorts sitting cross-legged on the grass at Gezi Park. With their casual elegance, these cartoon women, like the woman in red, were the opposite of the auntie. The talk bubble above one stated, "Honestly, never mind all that. . . . It is even a victory that the foreign press could no longer just publish images of mustached men." Indeed the protestors were aware of how they were represented nationally as well as internationally. Certainly jarring images from the people's protest functioned to galvanize support at the most basic level. Many highly educated Turks I spoke with, however, noted that such images also provided an opportunity to fight the popular European and American vision of Turkey as "a backward-looking land of *doner* kebabs, bazaars, and guest workers."<sup>29</sup> Yet Erdoğan's accusations of "foreignness" and eliteness required visual countering as well. Supportive Turkish social media in the early days of the protests, therefore, was marked by the development of a double-throated representational strategy. Images that showed protestors as educated, socially conscious citizens symbolically aligned with "the West," modernity, and civilization (e.g., photos of volunteering medical student corps, images of youth cleansing the eyes of stray dogs, even the woman in red and other unveiled young women in the famous photo) were combined with images of wholesome, plump aunties and mothers symbolically aligned with "the East," home, and authenticity.

In this complex communications environment, protest humor became an important part of the self-framing of the protestors in addition to functioning as a political weapon. On May 30, the Twitter user @elifzelaliyik posted a photograph of young students at Gezi Park raising their books to the police officers' eye level over the riot shields during a sit-in, in an effort to make them read (see Figure 5). She quipped, "the students are applying #disproportionateintelligence to the police."<sup>30</sup> "Disproportionate intelligence" thus became a key term for the self-representation of the protestors and their supporters. Building on a comparison with the Turkish police's notoriously brutal use of force against political protestors, the phrase itself is not new: it appears to have its roots in a short tagline by the online satirical newspaper *Zaytung*

(the Turkish equivalent of *The Onion*), regarding antigovernment protests at Middle East Technical University, posted on December 29, 2012.<sup>31</sup> While shared multiple times on Facebook and Twitter at the time, this gag apparently didn't get its own hashtag until late May 2013 in relation to the Gezi events. By early June 2013, there were multiple Facebook groups and multiple entries on the popular wiki *Ekşi Sözlük* (Sour Dictionary) celebrating the use of “disproportionate intelligence” as opposed to the police's use of “disproportionate force.”<sup>32</sup> Like the graffiti opening this section, “Police Fucks, We Make Love,” the idea of disproportionate intelligence, in juxtaposition to brute force, aligned the protestors with cultural capital and cast the police as unrefined, animalistic, uneducated cavemen. This quip soon found its way to conventional media critical of the government, such as the left-leaning Kemalist newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, which picked up the phrase “disproportionate intelligence” around June 7 and used it nineteen times in approximately two months.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 5. Image of “disproportionate intelligence” at Gezi Park, shared on Twitter by @elifzelaliyik on May 30, 2013.

I provide this preliminary chronology to point out a few critical facts about the culture of Gezi. First, despite celebrations and condemnations of social media as

providing a radical break with the past, old and new media, oral and print communication operated in tandem to provide frames; such “hybrid transmission” has, in fact, come to define folklore in the digital age<sup>34</sup> and has deep structural roots in old media’s active response to new media worldwide.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, political humor is not in itself a new development for Turkey, and vernacular bilingual humor certainly did not appear *ex nihilo* in the globalizing digital age.<sup>36</sup> Despite racist stereotypes about Muslims lacking a sense of humor<sup>37</sup> and the general liberal misperception that state limits on freedom of expression stifle popular humor production (in fact, folklore research suggests that vernacular humor flourishes under political repression<sup>38</sup>), the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey have had a long tradition of humor-focused media. Cheap weeklies containing cartoons that easily move from the sexual to the scatological to the political have been popular since at least the late nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Bilingual humor has also been a part of Turkish humor since at least the late Ottoman Empire, although hybridization with Arabic, Persian, and French dominated such humor until after World War II. Humor based on linguistic misunderstandings between different classes and ethnic groups appear in shadow puppetry and joke cycles even earlier.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the humor that emerged around the Gezi resistance was not unique by either quantitative or qualitative measurements. There are clear precedents to the visual aspects of this humor, as well as their bilingual turns of phrase. What I found distinctive about it was its incessant celebration by the conventional press and in new media.

Popular middle-class and upper-middle-class newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Milliyet* quickly picked up on the “disproportionate intelligence” discourse. Liberal-leaning *Milliyet* devoted an entire Sunday section to Gezi-related humor, interviewing sociologists, as early as June 18, 2013.<sup>41</sup> Even *Today’s Zaman*, the English-language daily aligned with the Islamicist Gülen movement, which had been generally sympathetic to the AKP government before the 2014 fallout between Gülen and Erdoğan, informed its readers that the protests had led to a “boom” in humor on July 28, 2013.<sup>42</sup> By the end of July 2013, there were three widely available books on the events at Gezi: the first was purely a catalogue of Gezi-related humor, the second purely a collection of apparently original Gezi-related humor, and the third, a book combining analysis and a chronology, noted the role of humor multiple times in both of its sections.<sup>43</sup> All were sympathetic to the protestors—a point they made, in part, by celebrating their humor in addition to decrying the government’s response.

On the surface, the humor of Gezi was celebrated for different reasons, with explanations ranging from the tactical to the socio-psychological. Writing for *Al Jazeera*, Zeynep Zileli Rabanea suggested the widespread use of humor consisted of a tactic built on the protestors’ conscious recognition of how “virality” works online.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, an op-ed piece in the left-leaning *Radikal* suggested humor had become necessary to deal with the government’s conspiracy theories, underlining an important discursive distinction between what its author called “Cold War–style” politics of conspiracy and the new democratic ethos of the protestors.<sup>45</sup> For the sociologists

recruited by *Milliyet*, on the other hand, Gezi-related humor was more subconscious and psychologically motivated: the symptoms of a general environment of authoritarianism and the pressures of political oppression being released like a valve on social media. Perhaps the most common explanation, advanced by multiple online and print articles, was generational, with analysts suggesting humor was a trademark of Generation Y, digital natives weaned on *Zaytung* and *Ekşi Sözlük*.

No matter the explanation, the emphasis on the very presence of humor did important cultural work for the protestors and their supporters. Celebrating “our” intelligence and humor in response to “their” brutality functioned as a part of what Jessica Winegar has called “the humanity game” and proved the protestors to be individuals with whom the whole civilized world, particularly the West, can identify.<sup>46</sup> Along with music and art performances and the free classes that soon filled the occupied park, humor and its celebration allowed for an image of protestors to emerge in opposition to the brutal government and the police. Erdoğan was referring to this construction when he gave a widely mocked speech to his party, in which he referred to the self- and other- construction of the protestors: “According to them, we do not understand anything about art, architecture, literature, and aesthetics. . . . According to them we are blacks/negroes.”<sup>47</sup> The implicit and explicit recruitment of humor (against violence) to the humanity game was so predominant that the famous *Hürriyet* columnist Ahmet Hakan insisted that all clashes would be over if only government officials could “laugh just once.”<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Elif Çakır writing for the pro-AKP *Star* railed against the binary opposition made between humor and violence in her piece interviewing a young headscarf-wearing mother who claimed to have been harassed by a group of protestors: “çok esprili çocuklarmış!” (they are said to be kids with a sense of humor!).<sup>49</sup>

With the exception of feminist and queer criticisms of sexist, homophobic, and transphobic humor, shared in social networks and published by left-leaning media such as *Radikal* (in Turkish) and *Jadaliyya* (in English), the media did not differentiate between different types of humor, or really provide much textual analysis.<sup>50</sup> Books of humor published bilingual humor alongside other types of visual and textual humor, which in itself is telling about how conventional “Turkish” humor has become in Turkey since the late 1960s and 1970s, when it first made its appearance in urban high schools and universities.<sup>51</sup> The slim, glossy volume *Çapulcunun Gezi Rehberi* alone contains around twenty-three found examples of humor that mix Turkish and English (no other languages are mixed in this way). In such collections, humor is almost always taken as a positive thing, a peaceful “weapon” against unjustified violence, something to celebrate as a sign of the “intelligence” and “creativity” of the Turkish people.<sup>52</sup>

Successful humor definitely takes a certain amount of “creativity” marked by the ability to consider novel juxtapositions of preexisting cultural scripts. Applying structural semiotics to joke construction, Victor Raskin has noted both the importance of the lexicon and the context to the intelligibility of a joke (and more broadly, any utterance), emphasizing jokes’ “culture and subculture dependency.”<sup>53</sup> Humor based

on incongruity in this case lies on the novel combination of two or more “scripts.” Bilingual humor does this by combining the scripts of two languages. Consider a simple graffito from Gezi: “Just in Biber.” This phrase builds on a bilingual pun for the Turkish word for pepper, *biber* (as in pepper gas, *biber gazı*) and the famous teen idol Justin Bieber. In addition, it utilizes a basic English pun: Justin becomes “just in.” The humor lies in the doubly layered pun, as well as the juxtaposition of the vision of a glitzy young singer with that of protestors choking on excessive pepper gas. This joke could be found in variations and different spellings of “biber” and “Bieber,” including the graffito “Tayyip Bieber,” attaching Prime Minister Erdoğan’s first name to both pepper (as in pepper gas) and Justin Bieber, thus condemning his heavy-handed reaction to the protests and emasculating him by association with a child-like pop singer. The Bieber pun, when read alongside the graffito “Amerikalı Tayyip” (American Tayyip) and conspiracy theory paperbacks arguing that the United States supports Erdoğan’s Islamization of Turkey to weaken the country, also casts Erdoğan as a Western lackey.<sup>54</sup>

Consider two other bilingual puns reproduced widely on social media and Gezi-related humor collections: “OtTOMAn Empire” combines the insinuation that Erdoğan is an Islamically oriented dictator with the common Turkish acronym for water cannon tanks, TOMA (Public Events Intervention Vehicle). The graffito, “You are scared, Arınç you?” builds on the near-homophony of the English contraction “aren’t” with the last name of Turkey’s Deputy PM Bülent Arınç. The sheer amount of linguistic and sociocultural information these short texts require before the reward of laughter mark a specific speech community that is at once deeply local and worldly. Indeed these items would be unintelligible to those who are not familiar with Turkish and English, as well as with American and Turkish popular culture. What Melani McAlister writes about “culture” in general is clearly true about humor specifically: it “packs associations and arguments into dense ecosystems of meaning; it requires us to know a thousand things about politics, social life, and correct feeling in order to ‘get it’; and then in a remarkable sleight of hand, it makes the reactions it evokes seem spontaneous and obvious.”<sup>55</sup>

It has become common to assume most instances of political humor subvert preestablished hierarchies.<sup>56</sup> Bilingual humor, in particular, seems ripe for a Bakhtinian analysis, potentially combining the linguistic chaos of polyphony and heteroglossia with the political inversions of the carnival.<sup>57</sup> Such vernacular texts do challenge conventions that equate *langue* and *parole*, in addition to defying the notion of single authorship through their persistent intertextuality. They also block access to those who are monolingual native speakers of English; thus they certainly function as a dare to the American Empire that has led to the saturation of the cultural landscape with English long before many of these protestors were born. While the protestors made good use of “Justin Bieber,” they certainly had no say in the US-based entertainment industry that propelled this Canadian star to global prominence. The same is true for the global rise of English in a bloody history intersecting with colonialism, imperialism,



and neoliberalism. Thus we can interpret such texts as a way of “speaking back” to a powerful Empire, as Mary Louise Pratt proposed: “While subjected peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.”<sup>58</sup>

Yet, despite their linguistic complexities, a formal reading should reveal that none of the texts cited above are actually dialogic. Insofar as humorous communication functions as a closing punchline, not an opening smile, it lacks what Bakhtin has called an “orientation towards an answer.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, despite their incorporation of a foreign language, one that is widely associated with the “cool” youth culture of rebellion, and their presence in public space, such texts remain deeply monologic and centripetal. Even the final example, “You are scared, Arinc you?” employs only a rhetorical question—it is a label contorting a proper name into a threat, not an invitation to discourse through difference. In addition, bilingual graffiti’s very inaccessibility to monolingual Turks points towards other power differentials that complicate the simple binary between the Western center and the Eastern periphery—signaling the presence of other, fractal “civilizational” power differentials that are reinforced, as opposed to inverted.

Although such clever texts were consistently opposed to “excessive force” in popular media, humor (and human communication in general) is rarely that divorced from violence, embodied or epistemological. After all, there is a reason why Aristotle once argued that “a joke is a kind of abuse” and why Hobbes insisted that “the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly.”<sup>60</sup> Certainly our contemporary understanding of humor and laughter rebels against such “nasty and brutish” explanations. In analyzing bilingual graffiti from Gezi in the above paragraphs, I have casually employed what has come to be known as the “incongruity theory” of humor, popularized during the European “Enlightenment” by the likes of Kant and Hutcheson, who have explained humor through the key elements of surprise and the juxtaposition of subjects that appear dissimilar at first: “join[ing] together some whimsical image of the opposite ideas.”<sup>61</sup> Victor Raskin, my main theoretical source, is certainly an heir to this way of thinking about humor<sup>62</sup>—so “common sense” to our modern minds that we would rarely bat an eye if the analysis had ended there. Yet the scholarly replacement of the so-called “superiority theory” with the rise of “incongruity” as explanation did not happen in a cultural vacuum. Instead it corresponded with the rise of “sense of humor” as a key bourgeois value in bureaucratic modernity.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, incongruity and superiority are not necessarily mutually exclusive concepts. Due to the variation in what might serve as “opposite ideas” in each cultural milieu, the blueprint of surprising juxtaposition is likely to get fleshed out in the real world through binary oppositions involving race, class, gender, sexuality, and age. At the intersection of superiority and incongruity theories, therefore, we find history at play.

## Authentic Aunties and Linguistic Others, or Hülloooooğğğğ

In many jocular texts involving aunties and English, such as “V for Teyzetta,” the humor stems from the incongruence of the cosmopolitan protestor and the folksy auntie. The following handmade poster, shared on the popular US-based site BuzzFeed, for example, juxtaposes a Hollywood-based reference with an “authentic” Turkish auntie (in the lower right-hand corner) in the pursuit of humor (see Figure 6).<sup>64</sup> The figure of Gandalf the wizard is quoted in a roughly translated line from the movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002): “Look to my coming on the first light of the fifth day, at dawn look to the east.” The commentary below states, “What do you know? Maybe he’ll come, fuck it.” The wizard’s epic register, which sounds both like a translated Hollywood movie and a Kemalist dictum, is then contrasted to the generic auntie in the lower corner giving advice in fighting the effects of pepper gas in incorrectly spelled Turkish: “Also, milk takes the poison away.” The wizard and the auntie do important work here, connecting the poster to world youth culture, English, mythical bravery, as well as to home-cooked meals, auntie-accented Turkish, and tender loving care. Like the double-pronged representational strategy of disseminated protest photos, the poster marks its creator as both cosmopolitan and geek-cool and authentically connected to a “Turkish” home and hearth. Its humor, however, is entirely dependent on the contrast between two imaginary old characters, one “Western” and male, the other “Eastern” and female.



Figure 6. An example of humor and incongruity. Handmade poster shared on BuzzFeed.

As Hikmet Kocamaner has written in an exceptionally astute piece on the gendering of the protests, Gezi protestors sought to mobilize images of aunties and mothers, in part, to counter AKP’s usurpation of the rhetoric of the family, which cast them as unruly children who must be taken home by their mothers: “the protestors

and their parents did not remain passive addressees of this political discourse, but rather actively engaged with the political actors by contesting their demands and subverting the traditional roles attributed to the family by these politicians.”<sup>65</sup> AKP’s rhetoric led to widely publicized participation in protests by self-proclaimed mothers, as well as to an abundance of mother- and auntie-related humor: stenciled images of aunties in revolutionary posture, including a widely shared image called “Diren Bayan” (resist lady), improvised from the logo of a popular yarn brand, “Ören Bayan” (knitting lady), gained traction (see Figure 7). Unlike the original, brown Turkish logo, this version is Starbucks-green and features the lady banging on a pot in protest instead of knitting. On Facebook and Twitter, protestors shared photos of “real Turkish mothers” in domestic environments preparing antigas solutions from household ingredients like milk and lemon. A tweet complaining that the mothers who had come to support the protestors at Gezi Park were using “excessive pressure” in pushing their homemade food on the young protestors circulated widely online and was picked up both by newspapers and the humor collection *Çapulcunun Gezi Rehberi*. Yet the construction of humor in such images depended on the very stereotypes of mothers evoked by AKP and its supporters: a preoccupation with food and kitchens, presumed lack of worldliness, and political naiveté.<sup>66</sup>

Figure 7.  
One of many variations of  
the “Resist Lady” meme,  
produced by bocurd,  
shared on DeviantArt,  
<http://bocurd.deviantart.com/art/Diren-Bayan-Resist-Lady-green-376578992>.  
The official “Knitting Lady” logo  
is available online at  
<http://www.orenbayan.com/>  
for comparison.



Indeed auntie humor and bilingual jokes at Gezi often depended on the very binary (traditional vs. modern) they challenged due to the demands of incongruity. “V for Teyzetta” is humorous, not because of its rather uninspired bilingual pun, but because of the visual incongruity of a headscarf-wearing “auntie” in a Guy Fawkes mask. In the versions in which the auntie says, “*Sis atma yavrım*” (My child, do not throw fog), the meme pushes the authenticity and the innocence angles even further through the use of transliterated incorrect Turkish. This is precisely the danger zone

for such bilingual and auntie humor (and indeed all types of progressive political humor): their dependence on preestablished scripts, thus, their conservatism even in the midst of the most radical of reimaginings. To quote Mary Douglas, “[a joke] represents a temporary suspension of the social structure, or rather it makes a little disturbance in which the particular structuring of society becomes less relevant than another. But the strength of its attack is entirely restricted by the consensus on which it depends for recognition.”<sup>67</sup>

The scripts and the stereotypes about aunts and their cultural and linguistic incongruity matter, even when the joke does not appear to be immediately sexist, classist, or offensive. These overlaps between script-dependent incongruity and superiority, however, become especially prominent in gendered humor. As explored further below, the underbelly of “incongruity” humor at Gezi was marked by the appearance of a more directly mocking humor directed at Erdoğan’s supporters, including women with headscarves and heavy Anatolian accents, who began to hold their own counter-protests under AKP’s urging. The politics of humorous representation, therefore, came to be strained not just by the “context collapse” inherent to online sharing and public graffiti and the heterogeneity of the protestors, but also by the persistence of the very class and gender boundaries on which bilingual and auntie humor tacitly built.<sup>68</sup>

English does not simply function as an additional script through which humor can be built in combination with Turkish. *Çapulcunun Gezi Rehberi* contains examples of vernacular texts that are not bilingual at all, simply in English, and barely humorous. Perhaps we can say the graffito “Tayyip, Winter Is Coming” is funny because it juxtaposes contemporary national politics with the HBO historical fantasy hit *Game of Thrones*. BuzzFeed, which reproduced it, commented casually in English that this item is “self-explanatory.” What about the graffito reproduced above, “Police Fucks, We Make Love,” or many other English-language variations on the same theme: “Too many cops, too little justice”; “Gezi wins Police Lost”; “No police no event”? Are these funny? Why are they even in English and why have they made the collection? Native English speakers participating in the events might have written some of these, but the basic grammar mistakes suggest this cannot be true for all. The text “No Tayyip, No Cry,” for example, is based on a common Turkish misunderstanding of the popular reggae song “No Woman, No Cry,” suggesting if there were no Tayyips/women, no one would cry, as opposed to Bob Marley’s intended “Woman, no, please don’t cry.” It also structurally parallels the Turkish graffito “No Başbakan (PM), No Dirdir (Nagging), Yes Direnis (Resistance), Yes Girgir (Fun),” as well as the incorrect English “No police no event.” Perhaps we can locate in these hastily scripted English texts peppering Turkish streets a wish to reach foreign media. Yet many of them will be inaccessible to those who speak only English and are unfamiliar with Turkish syntax and vernacular culture. It is possible that they have multiple addressees and function exoterically as well as esoterically: the foreign press, English-speaking protestors, and

non-English-speaking others, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a notoriously monolingual figure.

Erdoğan's incompetence in English has drawn mocking laughter at least as early as his 2009 World Economic Forum appearance in Davos, during which he yelled "One Minute!" in a heavy Turkish accent before criticizing Israel's actions in Gaza, chastising President Shimon Peres.<sup>69</sup> This video was quickly disseminated worldwide and Erdoğan became a folk hero for many people sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. While the Western and non-Turkish Middle Eastern media mainly focused on what this outburst might mean for Turkish–Israeli relations, many Turks became obsessed with Erdoğan's opening phrase: "Van Minut," as it was transcribed with reference to Erdoğan's thick accent. "Van Minut" quickly became a vernacular meme and a self-contained joke inserted into apparently apolitical situations: "*Tuzu verebilir misin?*" (Can you pass the salt?) "*Van Minut yaa, van minut!*" (Just a minute, just a minute!) Laughter about Erdoğan's monolingualism, however, always carried political undertones, with symbolic connotations of over-Easternness and dictatorial unwillingness to listen to others. These connotations become even more pronounced when we consider that a columnist for *Today's Zaman* explained the Gezi events as "Istanbul's 'One Minute!' to Erdoğan"<sup>70</sup> and that the book *Gezi Direnişi* chronicled Erdoğan's mistranslation of the Mediterranean as "the White Sea" in a speech, even though the speech itself did not address Gezi events.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, opponents have argued that his blaming of the events on outside forces, specifically his accusation of a nearly unintelligible "interest rate lobby" (*faiz lobisi*), might have been based on a wrong translation of "interest group lobby" (47). The depiction of Erdoğan as a monolingual barbarian overlapped with disdainful mockery for his supporters, who were cast as incoherent "mustached men" and headscarf-wearing illiterates damaging Turkey's image in the West.

In *Gezi Direnişi*, the famous journalist Emre Kongar praises the protestors for "not Othering" anyone (44). His unqualified celebration, however, contrasts with a mock dialogue reproduced in the socialist-leaning humor magazine *Penguen*. In it, established cartoonist Met Üst prints an imaginary dialogue with a *çapulcu*, which gets strained in its dialogic imagination, like the humorous graffiti cited above, when Üst suggests *çapulcus* get politically organized and try to get elected to office:

[Unnamed *çapulcu*]: What now?

Met Üst: There is no need for you to go on the streets, the mountains, fields anymore, *çapulcu*. Look: if you control the various institutions of the country, then you control the government. . . . that simple. . . . but you do not want to be a soldier, a police officer, a governor, a politician. . . . You produce songs, folk music, poems, novels, TV series, films, etc, you produce so much for life, you rule life itself,

but those who do not produce anything for life [i.e. AKP] rule your life.

[Unnamed *çapulcu*]: You are right, brother, how can that be!

Met Üst: See, the election coffer!

[Unnamed *çapulcu*]: *Hüüülooooooğğğğğğ!*

Met Üst: Stop saying *hülooğğ* and *hülooğğ-ing* people.<sup>72</sup>

The nonsensical phrase *hülooğğ* originates from a boisterous exclamation made by Erdoğan supporters at a pro-AKP rally in a clip that circulated and was widely mocked by Gezi supporters. In this video, a group of Erdoğan supporters, led by a headscarf-wearing woman, cite their loyalty to AKP and ululate enthusiastically in a way that came to be transcribed as *hülooğğ*. Met Üst converts *hülooğğ* into a verb and uses *hülooğğ-ing* as the local equivalent of Othering in a linguistic sleight of hand for good reason. It is hard not to think of the superiority theory of humor when exploring the afterlife of *hülooğğ* on YouTube. A widely shared mash-up video, for example, follows the exclaiming group with the clip of a bellowing sheep, equating them with mindless farm animals.<sup>73</sup> Another video labeled bilingually “*Ak Partili Seçmen (AKP voters) – Pokemon Edition*” has photoshopped the woman’s head onto a Pokemon creature.<sup>74</sup> Other users have remixed the sound “*hülooğğ*” with another notorious video of a *hijabi* Erdoğan supporter, who utters a sentence that sounds like “I am a mere hair in Erdoğan’s ass” in heavy Eastern-accented Turkish.<sup>75</sup> These aunties, with their transcribed “wrong” Turkish and lack of sophistication, are, in many ways, the shadow-side of the protesting aunties mobilized by the Gezi protestors. They emerge from the same sociocultural formation and socioeconomic reality: a Turkey in which education, language competency, internet access, and perceived rights to political agency are divided along lines of class, ethnicity, age, and gender.

For the Gezi protestors, the use of social media was a part of their claim to be “the people,” organizing without organizations. They employed the counter-hegemonic symbolism of the online vernacular to its full extent.<sup>76</sup> Erdoğan and his team, on the other hand, emphasized the foreignness of Twitter in claims such as “even if they have millions of tweets, our single *Basmala* (ritual pronunciation of God’s name in Arabic) will undo their game.”<sup>77</sup> Yet the political use of both bilingual humor and social media was much more complicated than implied by these rhetorical strategies. Certainly the protestors’ heavy use of English and the internet did not mean they were pro-America: not only has Erdoğan consistently been accused of being a secret American lackey by secular nationalists, who make up a considerable portion of Gezi supporters, but social media during the protests contained many posts expressing the fear that “the West,” specifically the United States, might hijack the people’s movement.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, it did not take long for AKP to claim bilingual humor as a political tool. In January 2014, even as he was blaming America for yet another scandal



rocking his government, Erdoğan appeared at a rally in İzmir as a gigantic hologram, in order to support the municipal election bid of Binali Yıldırım, whose slogan is a bilingual pun in the spirit of Gezi: *Çok Kolay* (Very Easy) *by Binali Yıldırım* (see Figure 8). Both Hollywood-inspired marketing slogan and media production trope, the small-font, small-case, italicized “by” in Binali Yıldırım’s slogan codes for his initials, projecting the self onto a ubiquitous American signifier, paralleling Erdoğan’s projection of power and presence through the use of a Star Wars–like hologram.<sup>79</sup> The dangers of appearing westoxicated, on the other hand, have been mitigated via the image of a male folk dancer to the left of the banner, operating like the auntie in Gezi banners, to ground Yıldırım in Turkish authenticity. The use of bilingual humor and Hollywood tropes by an AKP campaign challenges easy binary oppositions between the educated, cosmopolitan protestors and the backwards, village-bound AKP officials and supporters, as well as the possibility of a clean separation between the institutional and the vernacular.



Figure 8. *Çok Kolay by Binali Yıldırım*—an AKP banner containing a bilingual pun at a rally in which Erdoğan appeared as a giant hologram (January 26, 2014).

Source: “Çok kolay BY Binali Yıldırım,” *Hürriyet*, January 25, 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/25650746.asp>.

The transnational vernacular at Gezi shows that the US–Turkey binary is not the only one that operates on the ground and that speaking back to Empire might sometimes involve speaking down to other Others. A critical transnational American Studies can launch a true challenge to two of the most popular ways of perceiving the connection between culture and politics in US–Middle Eastern relations—the Clash of Civilizations thesis and the liberal globalization rhetoric—by underlining transculturation, as well as power differentials between *and within* nation-states. Transnational American Studies, however, cannot simply mean tracing flows and

transformations somewhat related to the United States using a predetermined language. We must be bold about taking seriously local knowledges and folk terminologies (however transculturated and hybridized) to transform knowledge production from within the linguistic and cultural margins, in order to thoroughly “provincialize” American Studies.<sup>80</sup> Beyond looking at published texts by intellectuals, even beyond analyzing products of mass culture, we must prioritize the study of the vernacular. Contemporary folklore provides an exceptional archive for studying the connections between culture and politics. Analyzing local hybrids can also help us rethink the very theories we have been trained to “apply” to data, including those about humor and power.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sarp Apak (@sarpapak81), “@TheRedHack :) pic.twitter.com/IXrqWv2DmO,” Twitter post, June 2, 2013, 8:10 a.m., <https://twitter.com/sarpapak81/status/341164809074651136/photo/1>.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the trope of the auntie is shared by multiple ethnic cultures but functions as a marker of deep provinciality for all of them.

<sup>3</sup> “The New Young Turks,” *The Economist*, June 8, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21579005-protests-against-recep-tayyip-erdogan-and-his-ham-fisted-response-have-shaken-his-rule-and>.

<sup>4</sup> See “White Turks and Black Turks,” *Wikipedia*, last modified September 3, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_Turks\\_and\\_Black\\_Turks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Turks_and_Black_Turks). For an analysis of the trope of “westoxication” in modern Turkey, see Perin Gurel, “Wild Westernization: Gender, Sexuality, and the United States in Turkey” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2010), especially the introduction and chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> “Chapulling,” *Wikipedia*, last modified July 16, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Chapulling&oldid=561939757>.

<sup>6</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See Alan Dundes, *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of Folklore* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), vii–viii.

<sup>8</sup> Consider the route from Américo Paredes to Gloria Anzaldúa to, for example, Alicia Schmidt Camacho here. See Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Glenn Howard, “The Vernacular Mode: Locating the Non-institutional in the Practice of Citizenship,” in *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of*

*Public Life*, ed. Daniel C. Brouwer and Robert Asen (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 240–61.

<sup>10</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 20.

<sup>11</sup> “US Senate Committee Discusses Turkey’s Democracy after Gezi,” *Today’s Zaman*, July 31, 2013, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-322432-us-senate-committee-discusses-turkeys-democracy-after-gezi.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Z. Bratich, “The Fog Machine,” *CounterPunch*, June 22, 2009, available online at UNZ.org, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/CounterpunchWeb-2009jun-00209>.

<sup>13</sup> The reference to “flatness” is regarding Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). Cf. Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Mark Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); and Jessie Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> See Daniel Wickberg, *The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Rabia Karakaya Polat, “Digital Exclusion in Turkey: A Policy Perspective,” *Government Information Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2012): 589–96.

<sup>16</sup> Tasbeeh Herwees, “The Gezi Park Protests and the Emerging Mid-East Environmental Movement,” *GOOD*, June 6, 2013, <http://magazine.good.is/articles/the-gezi-park-protests-and-the-emerging-mid-east-environmental-movement>.

<sup>17</sup> Emre Kongar and Aykut Küçükkaya, *Gezi direnişi: Türkiye’yi sarsan otuz gün* [The Gezi resistance: The thirty days that rocked Turkey] (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet, 2013), 99. See also Katie J. M. Baker, “Brutally Tear-Gassed ‘Woman in Red’ Is Symbol of Turkey’s Occupy Gezi,” *Jezebel*, June 4, 2013, <http://jezebel.com/brutally-tear-gassed-woman-in-red-is-symbol-of-turkey-511187628>.

<sup>18</sup> “Göstericilerin Sağlık Durumları / The Health Status Of The Demonstrators – 15 June 2013,” Türk Tabipleri Birliği [Turkish Medical Association], accessed June 18, 2013, <http://www.ttb.org.tr/index.php/Haberler/veriler-3842.html>.

<sup>19</sup> “Turkish Protester Ahmet Atakan’s Death Sparks Clashes,” *BBC News*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24037842>.

<sup>20</sup> See “Turkey: End Incorrect, Unlawful Use of Teargas,” Human Rights Watch, July 17, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/16/turkey-end-incorrect-unlawful-use-teargas>; and “Turkey: End the Incommunicado Detention of Istanbul Protesters,” Amnesty International, June 16, 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/turkey-end-incommunicado-detention-istanbul-protesters-2013-06-16>.

<sup>21</sup> “Çevik kuvvete skandal mesaj: ‘Çanakkale’den sonra 2. destanı sizler yazıyorsunuz,’ *sol Haber Portalı*, June 14, 2013, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/cevik-kuvvete-skandal-mesaj-canakkaleden-sonra-2-destani-sizler-yaziyorsunuz-haber>.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Scott, “Days of Rage - in Turkey,” *Turkey File*, June 3, 2013, <http://turkeyfile.blogspot.com/2013/06/days-of-rage-in-turkey.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Ruşen Çakır, “Where Do Kurds Stand on Gezi Resistance?” *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 27, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/where-do-kurds-stand-on-gezi-resistance-.aspx?pageID=449&nID=49533&NewsCatID=396>.

<sup>24</sup> See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 67.

<sup>25</sup> See Joshua Tucker, Pablo Barberá, and Megan Metzger, “A Breakout Role for Twitter? Extensive Use of Social Media in the Absence of Traditional Media by Turks in Turkish in Taksim Square Protests,” *The Monkey Cage*, June 1, 2013, <http://themonkeycage.org/2013/06/01/a-breakout-role-for-twitter-extensive-use-of-social-media-in-the-absence-of-traditional-media-by-turks-in-turkish-in-taksim-square-protests/>.

<sup>26</sup> Reproduced in Kongar and Küçükkaya, *Gezi direnişi*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto, 2012), 43.

<sup>28</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 69. As James Scott has observed, such collective management of the vernacular can be even more effective than management by the institutions of power. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 183–201.

<sup>29</sup> John Feffer and Tom Engelhardt, “Pax Ottomanica?” *Antiwar.com*, June 14, 2010, <http://original.antiwar.com/engelhardt/2010/06/13/pax-ottomanica/>.

<sup>30</sup> Jinmir (@elifzelaliyik), “Ögrenciler tarafından polise #orantisiz zeka uygulanıyor :)#geziparkı #geziparkıicintaksime #direngeziparkı !!!!,” Twitter post, May 30, 2013, 9:47 a.m., <https://twitter.com/elifzelaliyik/status/340102261592182784/photo/1>.

<sup>31</sup> “İçişleri Bakanlığı: ‘ODTÜ, hükümete karşı orantısız zeka kullanıyor . . . ,” *Zaytung*, accessed August 21, 2013, <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=200093>.

<sup>32</sup> “Orantısız zeka,” *Ekşi Sözlük*, accessed August 21, 2013, <https://eksisozluk.com/orantisiz-zeka--3861313>.

<sup>33</sup> Cumhuriyet Arşivi [Archive], accessed August 24, 2013, <http://www.cumhuriyetarsivi.com/monitor/index.xhtml>.

<sup>34</sup> Trevor J. Blank, “Introduction: Pattern in the Virtual Folk Culture of Computer-Mediated Communication,” in *Folk Culture in the Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*, ed. Trevor J. Blank (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012), 12.

- <sup>35</sup> See Dwayne Winseck, “The State of Media Ownership and Media Markets: Competition or Concentration and Why Should We Care?” *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 1 (2008): 34–47.
- <sup>36</sup> See Aslı Tunç, “GIRGIR as a Sociological Phenomenon in Turkey: The Transformation of a Humor Magazine,” *Humor* 14, no. 3 (2001): 243–54.
- <sup>37</sup> Moira Smith, “Humor, Unlaughter, and Boundary Maintenance,” *Journal of American Folklore* 122, no. 484 (2009): 148.
- <sup>38</sup> See C. Banc and Alan Dundes, *First Prize, Fifteen Years! An Annotated Collection of Romanian Political Jokes* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986).
- <sup>39</sup> See Tunç, “GIRGIR as a Sociological Phenomenon”; and Ayşe Öncü, “Istanbulites and Others: The Cultural Cosmology of Being Middle Class in the Era of Globalism,” in *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 95–119.
- <sup>40</sup> See Gurel, “Wild Westernization,” especially chapter 3.
- <sup>41</sup> “Direnince çok eğlenceli oluyorsun Türkiye!” *Milliyet*, June 9, 2013, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/direnince-cok-eglenceli-oluyorsun/pazar/haberdetay/09.06.2013/1720366/default.htm>.
- <sup>42</sup> “Upside of Gezi Park Process: A Boom in Humor, Satire,” *Today’s Zaman*, July 28, 2013, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-321975-upside-of-gezi-park-process-a-boom-in-humor-satire.html>.
- <sup>43</sup> These books are, respectively, Eylem Aydın, ed., *Çapulcunun Gezi Rehberi: Gezi Parkı Direnişi’nden Aforizmalar* [The Chapuller’s Gezi Guide: Aphorisms from the Gezi Park Resistance] (Istanbul: Hemen Kitap, 2013); Erol Hizarci, *Bir Çapulcunun Hatıra Defteri: Orantısız Zekadan Marjinal Geyikler* [The Memoirs of a Chapuller: Marginal Chatter from Disproportionate Intelligence] (Istanbul: Destek, 2013); and Kongar and Küçükaya, *Gezi direnişi*.
- <sup>44</sup> Zeynep Zileli Rabanea, “Why Turks Are Good at Protesting,” *Al Jazeera*, June 13, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/06/201361113388747184.html>.
- <sup>45</sup> Cüneyt Özdemir, “Beraber ıslandık biz bu TOMA’larda!” *Radikal*, July 2, 2013, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cuneyt\\_ozdemir/beraber\\_ıslandik\\_biz\\_bu\\_tomalarda-1139986](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cuneyt_ozdemir/beraber_ıslandik_biz_bu_tomalarda-1139986).
- <sup>46</sup> Jessica Winegar, “The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 651.
- <sup>47</sup> “Başbakan Erdoğan: İllegal paçavralar astılar,” *Radikal*, June 11, 2013, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/basbakan\\_erdogan\\_bu\\_cevre\\_hassasiyeti\\_degil-1137142](http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/basbakan_erdogan_bu_cevre_hassasiyeti_degil-1137142).

<sup>48</sup> Ahmet Hakan, “Neden bitmiyor?” *Hürriyet*, June 21, 2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/23553306.asp>.

<sup>49</sup> “Başbakan Erdoğan'ın ‘Yerlerde sürüklediler’ dediği anne Star'a konuştu,” *Yirmidört Haber*, June 13, 2013, <http://haber.stargazete.com/guncel/basbakan-erdoganin-yerlerde-suruklediler-dedigi-anne-stara-konustu/haber-762093>.

<sup>50</sup> See Zeynep Kurtulus Korkman and Salih Can Aciksoz, “Erdoğan’s Masculinity and the Language of the Gezi Resistance,” *Jadaliyya*, June 22, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12367/erdogan's-masculinity-and-the-language-of-the-gezi>.

<sup>51</sup> See Gurel, “Wild Westernization,” chapter 3.

<sup>52</sup> “Dirence çok eğlenceli oluyorsun Türkiye!”

<sup>53</sup> Victor Raskin, “Semantic Mechanisms of Humor,” *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1979): 331.

<sup>54</sup> See Perin Gurel, “Transnational Conspiracy Theories and Vernacular Visual Cultures: Political Islam in Turkey and America,” *Critical Commons*, accessed September 12, 2013, [http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/MCIMR/clips/transnational-conspiracy-theories-and-vernacular/embed\\_view](http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/MCIMR/clips/transnational-conspiracy-theories-and-vernacular/embed_view).

<sup>55</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 269.

<sup>56</sup> Ayşe Öncü, for example, cites Bakhtin in her essay on cartoons about rural immigrants in Istanbul. Yet the cartoons reproduced and analyzed in the rest of the essay reinforce the Othering of Eastern Turks and Kurds through the use of stereotypes such as *haciaga* and *maganda* as opposed to inverting “symbolic hierarchies . . . through play” (Öncü, “Istanbulites and Others,” 96).

<sup>57</sup> The idea of the Bakhtinian carnival has already been applied to the Gezi events by Ömer Şener in a short piece that does not engage bilingual humor: “The Gezi Protests, Polyphony and ‘Carnavalesque Chaos,’” in *Reflections on Taksim – Gezi Park Protests in Turkey*, ed. Bülent Gökay and Ilia Xypolia (Keele, UK: Keele European Research Centre, 2013), 40–42. Writing in *Cultural Anthropology*, Seçil Dağtas, who also does not differentiate between bilingual and other types of humor, is similarly celebratory: Seçil Dağtas, “The Politics of Humor and Humor as Politics during Turkey’s Gezi Park Protests,” *Cultural Anthropology*, October 31, 2013, <http://culanth.org/fieldsights/397-the-politics-of-humor-and-humor-as-politics-during-turkey-s-gezi-park-protests>.

<sup>58</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 180.

<sup>60</sup> “Aristotle (348–322 B.C.), excerpt from *Poetics*,” in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, ed. John Morreall (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 15; and



“Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), excerpt from *Human Nature*,” in Morreall, *Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *Reflections upon Laughter, and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1750), 24.

<sup>62</sup> See Raskin, “Semantic Mechanisms of Humor.”

<sup>63</sup> See Wickberg, *Senses of Humor*.

<sup>64</sup> Lemoustache, “25 Examples of the Best Street Humour from Istanbul, Gezi Park (#occupygezi) Protests,” *BuzzFeed*, June 6, 2013, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lemoustache/25-examples-of-the-best-street-humour-from-istanbu-b7x9>.

<sup>65</sup> Hikmet Kocamaner, “Delinquent Kids, Revolutionary Mothers, Uncle Governor, and Erdogan the Patriarch (Part One),” *Jadaliyya*, August 5, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13393/delinquent-kids-revolutionary-mothers-uncle-govern>.

<sup>66</sup> Dağtas briefly hints at this dynamic with her reference to Homi Bhabha’s description of parody and mimicry as a force that “reinforces the validity of what it mocks” (Dağtas, “Politics of Humor”).

<sup>67</sup> Mary Douglas, “Jokes,” in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 305.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Wesch, “An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube,” *YouTube*, 55:33, July 26, 2008, [http://youtu.be/TPAO-IZ4\\_hU](http://youtu.be/TPAO-IZ4_hU).

<sup>69</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “Leaders of Turkey and Israel Clash at Davos Panel,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/30/world/europe/30clash.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Yavuz Baydar, “İstanbul’s ‘one minute!’ to Erdoğan,” *Today’s Zaman*, June 2, 2013, [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/yavuz-baydar/istanbuls-one-minute-to-erdogan\\_317209.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/yavuz-baydar/istanbuls-one-minute-to-erdogan_317209.html).

<sup>71</sup> Kongar and Küçükkaya, *Gezi direnişi*, 179.

<sup>72</sup> Met Üst, “Sokak Muhabbetleri,” *Penguen*, July 25, 2013, 6, my translation.

<sup>73</sup> *Ak partiliyiz Ak partili Hüloğğ*, June 17, 2013, <http://youtu.be/LL3MRwLjog>.

<sup>74</sup> *Ak Partili Seçmen - Pokemon Edition*, June 16, 2013, <http://youtu.be/s5ef1UVOOxA>.

<sup>75</sup> *Erdoğanın Götünün Kılı Ft Hüloğğğ*, 2013, <http://youtu.be/BPmncUutwiQ>.

<sup>76</sup> See Robert Glenn Howard, “The Vernacular Web of Participatory Media,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 5 (2008): 490–513.

<sup>77</sup> “Erdoğan: Onlar milyonlarca tweet atsinlar, bizim tek bir besmelemiz oyunları bozar,” *T24*, June 22, 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/erdogan-onlar-milyonlarca-tweet-atsin-bizim-bir-besmelemiz-yeter,232546>. This association with foreign-inspired anarchy would lead Erdoğan’s government to ban Twitter in March 2014.

<sup>78</sup> See the discussion on *Ekşi Sözlük* titled “Gezi Parkı eylemlerinin Amerikan oyunu olması” [The Concept That the Gezi Park Protests Are an American Ploy], *Ekşi Sözlük*, June 3, 2013, <https://eksisozluk.com/gezi-parki-eylemlerinin-amerikan-oyunu-olmasi-3860009>.

<sup>79</sup> Matt Ford, “Giant Hologram of Turkish Prime Minister Delivers Speech,” *The Atlantic*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/01/giant-hologram-of-turkish-prime-minister-delivers-speech/283374/>.

<sup>80</sup> See Seth Fein’s useful modification of Dipesh Chakrabarty for transnational American Studies: Seth Fein, “New Empire into Old: Making Mexican Newsreels the Cold War Way,” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 5 (2004): 703–48. See also Perin Gurel, “Folklore Matters: The Folklore Scholarship of Alan Dundes and the New American Studies,” *Columbia Journal of American Studies* 7 (2005): 120–35.

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