**Youtube as a site of debate through populist politics: the case of a Turkish protest pop video**

**Abstract**

During and immediately after the 2013 anti government protests in Turkey, while there was almost complete state control over mainstream media, anti government pop videos posted on Youtube became a symbolic rallying point for protest movements and attracted vast amounts of posted comments. These were widely shared and became sung in public places and during clashes with the police. These videos and the comments posted below them can be examined in the light of scholarly debates about the role of social media in public debate and protest movements. For Critical Discourse Analysis this provides the challenge to analyse the discourses realised in both the video and in the comments themselves. In popular music studies it has been suggested that pop songs have been unsuccessful at communicating more than populist political sentiments. From a discursive point of view, the paper shows that this is indeed the case for one Turkish iconic protest video. It also finds that comments do not deal with the actual events represented in the video but seek to frame these in terms of wider forms of allegiances to, and betrayal of, a true Turkish people and in the light of homogenised and reduced forms of history.

Keywords: popular music videos, on-line comments, multimodal analysis, Turkey, Gezi Park

**Introduction**

During and immediately after the 2013 anti government protests in Turkey, while there was almost complete state control over mainstream media, pop videos posted on Youtube became a symbolic rallying point for the protests, attracting vast amounts of posted comments. These were widely shared and became sung by those against the government in public places and during clashes with the police. Despite government efforts to control the internet, these videos appeared as opositional whilst the mainstream media, for the most part controlled by the government, either ignored or glossed over the protests. On the Youtube pages where they were posted they became hubs for discussion and airing of opinions about both the music itself and the political situation. While scholars have begun to investigate the potential of social media to facilitate civic debate (de Zuniga 2012) and also to play a role in protest movements (Li 2012), there is little discursive work in multimedia on social media sites, on how posted images and film clips, themselves carrying discourses become focal points for discussions, comments and online interactions (Geogakopoulou 2014). There has also been much less work around the way that discourses are realised multimodally through entertainments media, where CDA has tended to deal more with ideologies in official speeches and news media (Machin and van Leeuwen 2007). In this particular case I am interested in the discourses communicated by an iconic popular protest song, through its lyrics, the images it carries and its sounds, and how these then related to posted comments.

In CDA it has been argued that political discourses should be investigated not only in political speeches and news media but in entertainment media (Machin and Richardson 2012) where they are also disseminated and legitimised. And in the field of popular music studies there has been much debate as to the way that popular music has been able to play a useful role in the communication of coherent political ideas (Lynskey 2010).

In this paper, I first carry out a multimodal analysis of the music video, asking what kinds of political discourses are communicated. In the field of popular music studies, there has been much debate as to the way that popular music has been able to play a useful role in the communication of coherent political ideas (Lynskey 2010), but there has been a call for critical discourse analysis to pay more attention to such processes where it has been shown that music has been deployed for its specific ideological purposes (Machin and Richardson 2012). I then go on to analyse the political discourses found in the posted comments, which in this case clearly come from both protesters, those in favour of the song, and goverment supporters, those against the song. I begin by giving a brief account of the situation which the video represents and about which the comments are posted.

 Among its paradigmatic and practical issues, Cultural Discourse Studies investigates divergent and competing human discourses from less known, marginalised and disadvantaged communities in order to reverse ethnocentrism favouring the West in the academic study of discourse and communications (Shi-xu forthcoming: 2). This paper presents a case where a divergence of discourses (both marginal and dominant within Turkey) interact and compete in a non-Western context. Though the case study is restricted to Turkey, it is hoped it sheds light on the role of music videos and related internet comments more universally.

**The Turkish situation.**

On the 28th of May 2013 a protest began in Istanbul's Gezi park to save a public green space marked for development into a shopping mall. What started with a few city planners and environmentalists quickly grew to involve millions of people demonstrating against the government in cities across Turkey. Gezi park had become symbolic for many people who were critical of the Justice and Development Party (AKP- the government at the time), and particularly Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (the prime minister at the time), regarding perceived infringements on democracy, freedom, repressive police tactics and a range of intolerant government policies (Işik 2013: 25-27). The authorties responded to the protests by deploying the police who used live ammunition, tear gas, water cannons, plastic bullets and beatings which resulted in over 3000 arrests, 8000 injuries and six deaths (Amnesty 2013).

These large scale protests can be seen in one sense as a manifestation of divisions in Turkish politics and society between secularists, whose ideas are rooted in those of the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and Turkey’s ruling AKP (de Bellaigue 2013) who came into power in 2002. AKP is an economically neo liberal and socially conservative political party with a strong emphasis on a particular sense of Islam (Yeşiltaş 2009). While there have been claims to success in some sectors of Turkey’s economy there has also been record unemployment and poverty (Sümer and Yaşlı 2010: 17). AKP has sought to systematically privatise public/state institutions across communication, transportation, industry and energy (Uzgel 2010: 24). Gezi park, with the plan to allow private commercal appropriation of a public space, should be seen in this context.

During the protests and in the following period, those involved have continued to be harrassed by the government (Amnesty 2013) whilst the mainstream media initially ignored the protests and then undercovered events. There is a history of close relations between media and politics in Turkey (Özguneş and Georgios 2000: 414) and it has been argued that AKP have taken even more tight control than their predecessors (Jenkins 2012). The AKP government has put pressure on existing media to become less critical whilst acquiring more of its own (Sümer and Yaşlı 2010: 17).

The popular music industry operates within this tightly controlled mediascape. AKP has had clear policies oriented to eliminate nationally based commercial popular music, in terms of its production, dissemination and live performance, where members of bands have been arrested for spreading 'propaganda' (Solomon 2005: 6). AKP has supported what are presented as more traditional forms of music, especially where the artists openly support the government (Way and Gedik 2013).

It is into this context that we must place the Youtube clip and the posted comments that will be analysed in this paper. Such songs, since they appear against specific government policy, are appealing as symbols of the wider protest. And such comments forums, while they can be deleted cannot all be monitored and can be unregulated spaces where citizens are able freely debate the situation.

**Social media**

On the one hand, the internet is seen by some commentators as a place which has opened the public sphere, making it more democratic. Von Hippel (2005) believes networked media challenge centralised control of media production and distribution by traditional organisations, whilst Jenkins (2006) claims these have reconfigured communicative power relations. Vatikiotis (2014) points to cases where networked media can be seen as democratic. He cites Internet users as citizen-reporters, who contribute “to the setting of the agenda and performing a watchdog role… enhancing political participation” (Vatikiotis 2014: 297). And some scholars have presented highly optimistic views of social media being instrumental in successful protest movements (Howard & Hussain 2011).

On the other hand, numerous approaches have acknowledged the dubious democratic affordances of social media practice. Vatikiotis (2014: 298) outlines the various reasons for skepticism regarding democracy and social media. At a fundamental level, these include the lack of access to technology and inequalities of technological literacy (Hargittai 2008); the degradation of economy, culture and values due to the demarcation between professionals and amateurs (Keen 2007); the limited analytical and critical value of alternative forms of journalism (Scott 2007); lazy on-line forms of activism (‘slacktivism’) that have no political impact (Morozov 2009); and weak social ties of movements initiated by social media (Andrejevic 2013). Other scholars have pointed to the way that many online forums tend to be characterised by hard language and insults (Coffey and Woolworth 2004). Dean (2010) points to the way that forums tend to find people more oriented not to attending to new and fresh points of view but to falling back on what is known and comfortable. Lindgren (2010) suggests that Youtube comments tend to not focus on analysis of situtations represented in video clips but rather to frame them in terms of pre existing personal and social interests or prejudices. Following the work of Lindgren (2010) and Georgakopoulou (2014) I want to first analyse how a particular video represents a set of events and then consider the nature of the comments. First I consider some important comments made by scholars about the political potential of popular music.

**Pop music, resistance and popular politics.**

There is considerable debate about the relationship between popular music and politics (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002: 7). Some scholars have been highly optimistic as regards the ability of music to represent and promote socio politial interests or particular cultural values (Shoup 1997; Lorraine 2006; Korczynski 2014). However, other scholars have rather pointed to its limitations. Frith (1988 and 1981) and Street (1986) highlight how production and promotion, by large corporations, along with social and consumption contexts constrain potential meanings in pop. Of course we might expect the new media environment to have greatly shifted these possibilities. However scholars such as Street (1986) and Frith (1988: 472) point to an incompatibility between pop and conventional politics. Political pop songs tend to be highly populist rather than about specific issues (Street 1986), where pop musicians allow a sense of being anti-mainstream and anti-authority, where this is connoted rather than specified and where fans will also hold down mainstream jobs and have broader investments in this so called 'mainstream' society. Even with artists known for their 'politics' Street (1986) points out lyrics are in fact highly ambiguous and the way they are performed, and marketed, plays a big role in how they are received. Also, Grossberg (1987) argues much of meanings are put there by listeners themselves.

The idea that popular music is more about popular politics is important for the analysis in this paper and a number of scholars have looked to unpacked the nature of such discourse. Populist politics involves “representing popular interests and values” (Williams 1976: 238) including a universal “appeal to the people and anti-elitism” (Laclau 2005: 7). In fact,“the people” pitted against “an elite” other are essential to the concept of popularism (De Cleen and Carpentier 2010; Laclau 2005; Storey 2003). According to Laclau (2005: 74) and De Cleen and Carpentier (2010), ‘the people’ is an important notion where meaning is shifting and fought for by different groups (Laclau 2005: 74). For example, De Cleen and Carpentier (2010) identify how the people are constructed differently by Belgian extreme right wing political groups and those opposed to them. This discursive construction is in conjunction with “the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating the ‘people’ from power” (Laclau 2005: 224). Populism “pretends to speak for the underdog whose political identity is constructed by opposing it to an elite” (De Cleen and Carpentier 2010: 180). One problem with such popular discourses is that they inhibit actual civic debate of issues (McGuigan: 1992). I draw on these ideas in the subsequent analysis of the Youtube music video and the comments that are posted.

It is how these discursive constructs of the people and the elite and their actions are represented during the time of Turkey’s protests that are of interest in this paper. Discourse analysis can supply the necessary methodology to uncover the fine details in texts, the micro details which articulate broader discourses. In this case, disourses which articulate politics condusive to political debate around issues Gezi Park protests raised.

**Methodology**

This paper follows the broader aims of Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak 2001). It looks to reveal the discourses in the Youtube pop video and those found in the comments. Here discourses are thought of models of the world and project certain social values and ideas which contribute to the (re)production of social life. The aim of the analysis is to reveal what kinds of social relations of power, inequalities and interests are perpetuated, generated or legitimated in texts both explicitly and implicitly (van Dijk 1993). Discourses can be thought of as a kind of 'script' (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999) that involves identities, ideas, values, attitides, settings, and the likes. These scripts have a dialectical relationship with actual social practices, both helping define them and being defined by them. In a given setting texts will be shaped by the interests of their authors to try to shift and recontextualize social practices in their own interests (ibid). The task of CDA is to identify and reveal the details in texts through which this is accomplished. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) suggest that we can look for the way that social practices are recontextualised through parts of them being absent from an account, for example, such as certain participants or actions. Other participants or actions may be substituted for these. The causal sequence of a particular event can be changed. These are highly useful in this analysis where the aim is to reveal how the Youtube video and then the comments made by voices representing different ideologies recontextualise specific events in Gezi park.

 Since the Youtube video realises discourses not only through language, but also through video and sound the analysis draws on a number of tools from Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin 2013). Here too it has been argued that the task is to draw out the details of how broader discourses or the 'scripts', the 'doings' of discourse are communicated and how the different modes play slightly different roles (Machin and Mayr 2012). Here I look at the lyrics, video and music as a multimodal ensemble (Norris 2004). I look at the way that social actors and transitivity are represented in the video (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2005: Machin and Mayr 2013) and how music too can be shown to communicate ideas, attitudes and identities, through cultural references and through specific meaning potentials (van Leeuwen 1999; Machin 2010; Machin and Richardson 2012).

**Analyis of the Youtube video**

The video analysed below is one example of a raft of similar anti government songs that appeared on Youtube at the time of and after the protests. The track is called *The Spring of War* by a band called The Ringo Jets, who have formerly released one CD. This video recieved 143,300 views. The song is a blues type tune, with lyrics that comprise three repeated lines. The video, like others released at the time, uses the limited amount of footage of the protests also made available online.

 In the first place we can ask how are participants represented. In the lyrics we find no individual social actor’s names only the use of the collective pronouns 'they' and 'us'. This lack of specific social actors has been noted as one characteristic of popular music lyrics. In CDA it has been shown that pronouns are one of the best grammatical categories for the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power (Van Dijk 1998: 203). And importantly such pronouns can rapidly shift to include and exclude (Fairclough 2003). This video is not about a simple people against the government and its forces. The video in contast does show participants who are collectivised. We see protesters and the police, though the police are foregrounded and given salience (van Leeuwen 2005) as seen in image one. But they are never individualised. We see a single generic (van Leeuwen 1996) protester being beaten behind the police, but it is the brutality of the police that is prioritized here rather than the suffering of their victim. We also find the police named in captions as seen in image three. Protesters are not individualised but seen in large groups moving in the same direction, but within the group we see a range of ages, genders and even children. It has been observed (Bouvier 2014) that in news footage of people's uprisings in Arab countries children were represented as a strategy to suggest this really is the people, including families, where children represent an innocent truth.

 We do get individualization where the Prime Minister is shown in a still to the right of the screen, as seen in image two. We also find members of the government represented through honorifics, but not named, in captions, 'minister of state' and 'prime minster; as is seen in images one and two. This signals that these are officials who are at fault, part of a discourse about a wider criticism of the elite.

 Machin and Mayr (2012) point to the way that poses are one important way that participants can be represented. In image two we see the prime minister looking upwards with arms uplifted in a pose of prayer. This both reminds viewers of the government’s anti secular stance and also connotes self grandeur. We also find the caption “I gave the order” and “Our police wrote an epic legend”, pointing to his arrogance in the face of the violence seen in the video, while lyrics keep reminding that this is about 'them' and 'us'.

 The most individualised participants are the band members, who comment on the events as they sing in the fashion of a news reader, reporter and weather man. They are shown in close shot and allowed to engage directly in a 'demand relationship' with the viewer creating a sense of social intimacy (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). All are in relative closeup and directly address the viewer creating a point of identification with the viewer.



Image one



Image two

The authorites, or 'they' are represented with material verb processes in the lyrics, pointing to their force:

Well they are isolating, manipulating, toxicating and its suffocating us.

These four material process activations with material effect connote negative power (van Leeuwen 1995: 90). However, there are abstractions as in 'isolating' and the metaphors 'toxicating' and 'suffocating'. These are common devices in generalisations (van Leeuwen 1995: 99) and here play their role in a populist discourse where leaders are represented as extreme despots.

Setting, context and causalities also become abstacted. For example,

And it is complicated, tolerated, formulated and it humiliated us.

The pronoun “it” obscures agency. Here “it” represents “the present situation in Turkey caused by the government”. But what is “complicated, tolerated, formulated” and what “humiliates” is not articulated. This list is a criticism of the government. But it is not specified what exactly the government has done nor if it is responsible for all of these things. It is formulated not simply as a government with an ideology or set of policies which it opposes but as a despotic govern which acts against the people, who tolerate the situation. And these populist discourses, such as unemployment which is common across much of Europe at the time of writing, are rooted in broader shifts in the global economy, and here become fused together.

 In the chorus of the lyrics we find personalised communcation as 'you' is addressed.

You can smell in the air, the spring of war is here

And we find a passive clause where “the spring of war is here”. No agent is indicated as to starting the war. But there is a sense that this is just a beginning.

 As regards transitivity in the video we find much police brutality and scenes where large numbers of protesters are seen moving purposefully in the streets as seen in image three. They are activated as they are shown energetically walking, shouting and waving their arms. We also see scenes where protesters throw objects and push back at the police. There is a sense, visually, that while the police and authorities are ruthless and cruel, the people are fighting back.



Image three

The music itself also plays a role in communicating discourses about the events. The actual genre of music is blues which is associated with melancholic sentiments and also with authenticity (Frith: 1996). The piece itself emphasises low pictched notes which suggest sadness and gravity (van Leeuwen 1999). Higher notes tend to be associated with optimism and higher levels of energy (Machin 2010). The sounds are also rough with distorted guitar sounds which suggest dirt and grittiness, rather than smooth and rounded. Such sounds are associated with certain kinds of truthfulness through a lack of polish or restraint. Sadness and inward contemplation are communicated by the vocal melody which has repeated descending lines. Each time the ending note is lower than the starting note. The rhythm of the song drags and feels somewhat laboured. There is no bounce nor lightness nor sense of joyful energy.

To summarize the multimodal ensemble works in the following way. The lyrics describe an 'us' who have tolerated and are put up on by a unnamed 'they' who are ruthless, although what 'they' have done is not specified and is represented only through abstractions while we are told this is the spring of a war. Titles on the screen using the genre of news use the honorifics 'minister', 'prime minister' to attribute acknowledged guilt by these people. Visually we see police brutality and protesters crowding the street often moving together and fighting back. There is no sense of difference at any level in this represention of protesters, in this 'us', as regards issues of poverty and unequal access to resources and opportunity that cut across Turkish society irrespective of religious/secular afiliations. We see the prime minister gesticulating and the members of the band communicating with us personally and sincerely. The music adds ideas of sadness and graveness. Overall there is a sense of a brutal regime and people who will tolerate it no longer. It is a situation that must be changed. But no specifics are given in any of the modes. As scholars in popular music studies might suggest (Street 1988; Grossberg 1987) this is highly ambiguous as a political message and draws heavily on a range of connotations and relies on the audience to piece it together. What I want to do now is look at the way that the comments posted on Youtube below the video draw, explain, or frame it.

**Analysis of the Youtube comments**

The video had received over 200 comments at the time of writing. These are originally in Turkish. Though best avoided, translations are commonly used in CDA (Flowerdew and Leong 2007; van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; Wodak 1991). To overcome any bias, I had comments translated by three individual translators, including myself. Any discrepencies between translations were discussed and if we could not agree on a phrase or sentence, it was not used in the analysis. Comments comprise four loose categories. Some support the band saying simply 'well done', or repeat words or lines from the song. Another category repeats slogans and key phrases associated with the protest movement such as 'freedom' and 'the spirit of Gezi'. The third category is where people simply abuse and insult each other. In fact it is this category that are most in the form of a dialogue with interactions between posters. Other comments link to themes but not in a sense of an obvious interchange. Of course these form an important part of the stream of comments and I will address these later in the analysis. But the last category, which is of main interest for the analysis here, is more fully developed comments about the protest and the situation itself as this allows us to access the kinds of discourses that they use. Posters who write these fall into two groups: those who are against the government and those who support it. In the analysis that follows I first analyse the two sets of comments in turn, to establish the kinds of discourses that are found over the 200 comments. Then I analyse a sequence which takes the form of a more developed interchange, to look at the way that these discourses interact.

**Anti-government comments**

What we find in these anti government comments is not unlike the discourses found in the video itself. In the first place we have a sense of the knowing people. For example:

I open my eyes, I don’t jump into the games which are played on us, I read, I don’t follow something blindly. I wish our people would lose the blinders and see what is going on.

Although in this case not enough of the people 'know' only the protesters. What is to be known is not stated but expressed metaphorically through the removal of 'blinders'. And what is already known once eyes are opened is not expressed in concrete terms but as a game being played on the people. Like the video we also find the sense of an 'us' a single 'people' who are the victims of the game. Pronouns act as an important way of framing the wider events. But in this case there is no agent acting against the people. But that it is a game being played on the people points to something deliberate and malicious.

In a comment further down the same stream of comments we find the 'blinders' metaphor taken up.

All of this happens because the blinders started to fall. Be careful they only started to fall now. Think about what would happen when they fall completely.

Such a way of talking about gaining vision, clarity, the people no longer being blinded, that the government seeks to blind the people is typical of the way 'what is wrong' is formulated without specific details. A truth is being revealed but its actual nature is not stated.

 Many anti government comments also represent government supporters as being non-thinking. But this can also sometimes suggest that they may indeed be part of ' the people' and are victims. For example:

What happens if you win elections, you keep sinking. Win the election, it is nothing. What does it mean if crowded, useless herds win? It is good to see you struggle. Now fuck off.

Throughout these comments there is a lack of specificity as regards to who may characterise the different sides of the matter. There is a shifting sense of people and of us and them in the fashion described by Farclough (2003), where sometimes government supporters are blinded at other times part of 'crowded, useless herds' and other parts of the self interested elite. We see this in the following comment:

You are the one negotiating with PKK, it is your prime minister who is dancing because he made Kurdistan, you have the shoeboxes, you are the thieves, you are the ones who slander people … you are the one who is continuing to cut trees which was illegal from the beginning although the court gave a stop order… So are we – the ones that are objecting to these- the traitors? Fuck off you are the traitors.

This comment is in response to a pro AKP comment. “You” here refers to the AKP government and its supporters. Here “you” are the elite represented as powerful, activated in a range of verb processes. These all vaguely point to events reported in the press. For example, “you have the shoeboxes” references a corruption case involving millions of dollars found at the manager of the Halk Bank, run by the government. But in no place are issues such as Kurdistan discussed, nor the processes of privatision of which Gezi was a part, nor the huge numbers of unemployed youth, as is characterstic of many contemporary societies across Europe. Important in this comment also is the sense of the 'we' who stand apart from 'you' and the set of injustices. In populist politics 'the people' can easily stand removed from responsibility from any kind of issues, even if at one time such actions were themselves popular and called for by 'the people'.

 What is clear across these comments is that in the first place, rather than analysing or commenting on the actual events or even on how they are represented in the pop video, they frame the events around a set of personal interests flexibly including diverse events through a shifting use of pronouns. This involves, in the fashion described by Georgakopoulou (2014: 532) as to how the Greek crisis was discussed on social media, an exchange of popularised and slightly xenophobic versions of history, what he describes as a pocess of 'homogenization and reduction'.

 An important part of these anti government comments is that nationalistic discourses are used to frame the events. For example, in the comment above the government's negotiations with Kurdish leaders are represented as “dancing as he made Kurdistan”. In fact, this is part of a discourse which points to the Prime Minister being a traitor. This in itself is a complex issue, sometimes interwoven with more far right and xenophobic views. But here it becomes thrown together as part of a list serving to de-legitimise. The idea of the 'traitor' is also recurrent as a naming strategy. Clearly politicians serve their own ideologies even if we dislike them. Yet the idea of using the concept of traitor, part of the nationalist discourse, is an act of claiming what are the deeper interests of a coherent and monolithic citizenship and people, rather than constructing these as ideological differences that cut across society at this present time, ones that we need to discuss and understand.

 Nationalist discourses can also be found in comments which show their support for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. For example:

But your prime minister himself can’t say I am Turk. He can’t even call Atatürk “Atatürk”.

In this case patriotism and national identity is called into question. This is partly in reference to Erdoğan and AKP prioritising Islam as an identity marker over being Turkish. In this sense the argument shifts away from the neo-liberal drive to privatisation that Gezi first symbolised to issues related to Atatürk, the founder of the modern secular Turkish Republic. Until very recently, it was unthinkable for any public figure to do anything but praise Atatürk. Comments do not make it clear whether or how such identity formulations align with those who are blinded or not.

 Clear links are made between those who the protesters are against and religion. For example:

Youtube shows what the religious gang in the government does to its people, the shoeboxes, the way it benefits some individuals and itself.

It was, of course, not clear that such a religious/secular divide characterised those who protested and those who did not. Conservative Islamic groups such as The Radical Muslims and individual women who wore clothes associated with Islam were amongst protesters in Gezi. In this maneouvre, religion is connected to the elite, a 'gang' who are self interested and pitted against the knowing people. Choosing to name the government as a gang points not to a democratic body but to a group who use violence and bullying to achieve their aims. This discourse about the prime minister's rule is common in popular expressions. This is important in the current Turkish political landscape where opposition political parties are based firmly in Kemalism and secularism and where the years of AKP have seen a shift to increasing state control of things like alcohol consumption and women's dress. But these things are not discussed or raised specifically.

 In sum these comments represent the government as bullying, a religious gang, self serving, an elite who act against the interests of and who bully a people with common interests. This elite is also challenged on the grounds of national identity. There is a sense of people being blinded which prevents a more dramatic kind of event. But overall a range of complex issues are hinted at but never fully articulated. Given what Gezi was about in the first place as regards privatization of public property, what this meant for Turkey, the anti government comments are about something slightly different.

**Pro government comments**

What we find in the pro government comments are a similar lack of specific details about policies - the same homogenisation and reduction. There is a similar kind of attempt to frame the events in terms of wider interests using pronouns. Here posters try to define just who are 'the people' and who are the distant, self serving elite. As with the anti government comments these are not actually about Gezi at all, nor privatisation, nor specific policies and which sections of the population benefit or not and in which ways. It is more about legitmacy of identity.

In the following comment see how 'the people' are to be thought of as government supporters and the government:

You are “çapulcu” (translation: street person) and …. God know you didn’t even leave your village you wannabe. Wannabe wannabe again wannabe. Ahh ahh you empty-headed çapulcu.

Çapulcu is the name protesters were given by Prime Minister Erdoğan. It is an insult, but it was a strategic way to represent the millions of students, professionals, multi religious and secular groups who were protesting for various reasons. They are collectivized as a 'you'. These people are 'empty-headed' and do not understand things represented by reference to them being from a village. In other comments, çapulcu’s lack of education is connoted in they “haven’t read a decent book in all their life and didn’t improve themselves.” The value of the protests and protester’s actions are questioned by being called a wannabe, repeatedly with a sense that there were people looking for their moment of fame.

As with the anti government discourse the idea of a self serving elite is also important though here it is represented by governments that preceded AKP. Pro government comments often use a sense of past versus future. In some instances the corruption is connected to a wider elite that exists internationally, although the links are never clearly specified. For example:

Did you start to pay taxes after Erdoğan became prime minister? You paid taxes before Erdoğan so where did this tax money go? Why are you always biased? But of course US and Israel was ruling the country before so you didn’t raise your voice. We, including our prime minister’s voice, were heard like ships… Most importantly he paid the debt to IMF. Why the previous governments couldn’t do that? Because they were busy eating and none of them cared about the country.

The elite here includes former governments who are represented as corrupt and uncaring, activated in “busy eating” and not caring connoting a despotic rule. But this elite also includes the US and Isreal “ruling the country”. This is a popular largely anti American discourse criticising both former governments and AKP. Presented in this way it serves to gloss over the complexites of what in some ways have been a mutually beneficial web of relationships, although not without problems. But here it is used to connote that those against the government are somehow in favour of relations with US and Isreal, here represented as them 'ruling' Turkey.

Importantly many of the pro government comments name the prime minister in ways which connote inclusiveness and respect. While in anti government comments he is named through abusive terms or as 'your prime minister' here he is named not only formally as Erdoğan and Prime Minister, but “our prime minister”. The sentence “We, including our prime minister’s voice, were heard…” makes clear the Prime Minister is a part of the people, activated positively in unison, opposing corruption and collusion with the US and Isreal. What exactly the people are doing is unclear, but a discourse of populism where the people are pitted against the elite is comunicated.

Unsuprisingly the pro government comments represent AKP positively working for the people, but again never in specific terms. These comments usually are contrasted with negative ones of previous governments. For example:

This country will grow, develop and other countries will shrink. Look at today’s Gezi park, not yesterday’s. It is better and good people will always win. As long as AK Party exists my country will be better.

Here, “this country” is conditionally attributed with future growth and development. Gezi park is “better”. Though not directly attributed with these positive attributes, the last line of the comment does just that, by claiming AKP’s existence ensures “my country will be better”. Overall it is in the co-text of “my country”, “grow”, “develop”,“better”, “good people” and “win”, connoting more positivity.

 The AKP government is also represented as leaders of the people, performing positive actions for the people and the country. Again, no details are given, just abstract positive attributes. These positive attributes are contrasted with other countries which “will shrink” and yesterday’s Gezi park, yet another vague reference to the times before AKP’s governance.

 So in sum what we find is government actions and policies related to Gezi are absent. Police actions are also absent. Instead, posters concern themselves with constructing the people as AKP and its supporters. AKP works for the good of the country whilst its supporters are clever. The elite pitted against them are former governments, protesters and even the US and Isreal.

 What characterises the discourses of both sides are that the events and the video are not commented upon in detail but rather there is an attempt to frame them by setting them into the interests of a shifting notion of a legitimate Turkish people at the mercy of self interested elites. To accomplish this, popular history and reduced versions of events without connection are thrown together. The pressing socio-political issues in Turkish society, even issues like police brutality, or unemployment, are not discussed. What becomes clear is that like the pop video this is populist politics where there is an easy and trustworthy mass public consensus and there are ignorant, self interested elites.

**Exchange of views**

In this final section, having looked at the political discourses used by the pro and anti government Youtube posters, I want to look at the way that these interact on the forum. As stated earlier, many of the comments appear to have little relationship to previous posts, but air an opinion. Arguably it is this tone of a lack of specific details and challenges to the collective other 'you', that leads to more comments of this type. As Coffey and Woolworth (2004) point out such forums tend not to be characterised by attempts at deeper understanding of social relations. But in several occasions there were some clear interactions. Here I examine one of these involving three posters. These provide an excellent opportunity to understand how these discourses interact.

 The example starts after poster two claimed that the prime minister is great. Here is how the populist discourses held by each unfold when they meet:

Poster one: Alright, you are used to being hoodwinked. They are stealing but show you that they are not. When you see reality, you will be shocked.

Poster two: Actually the ones that came before are the ones that robbed the country. You can’t see the service that the government gives, I guess. Investments that are worth billions are made for the country. Go and look at how much money the third bridge which is being built now costs. Talking is not service. They didn’t even drive a nail.

Poster three: Oh leave them alone, they love waiting in the sugar queues.

Poster one: Is there only Istanbul? The whole of Turkey. I don’t live in Istanbul and I don’t care about a third bridge. What has the government done as a service to this country? They used the earthquake money to make benefits available to their friends. They made 3 metres of road. It was ten times more than what it was worth. That money was my taxes. They didn’t even deny all these accusations . There isn’t a parallel state, is there any proof ? What shall I do with this service if the people are not happy?

 Poster one is anti governnent while poster two and three are pro government. Poster one begins by constructing an elite who are distinct from 'the people', some of whom are “hoodwinked” and some who know. The government is represented through the pronoun “they” who are activated by “stealing”. Poster two is accused of being ignorant.

 Poster two replies by explaining that it was the former regime who are responsible for present problems. Rather general evidence is given for what the present government is offering in “investments worth billions” and the building of a bridge, which in itself has come under much criticism from environmentalists and for being a poor use of money. Notably this comment begins cordially with “you cant see that...”

 Poster three throws in a snark comment drawing on the discourse of the protesters being uneducated peasants.

Poster one replies “I don’t live in Istanbul and I don’t care about a third bridge” and asks “What shall I do with this service?” Though this lays out an argument for why he dislikes AKP, this poster personalises his complaints and gives very few details of the actual problems with AKP. Poster one’s comments also include vague references to AKP’s clamp down on opposition after the banking scandal in “there isn’t a parallel state”. AKP’s response to the banking scandal was to claim there was a parallel state within Turkey’s judiciary, police and politics headed by Fethullah Gülen which is out to usurp AKP’s power. This poster’s flat denial of the parallel state is backed up with no counter claims or proof. This same lack of detail and context is seen in “You didn’t even deny all these accusations”. These serve the purpose of connoting a self-serving arrogant elite.

What is of note in this interaction is that we do find hints and fragments of actual issues which become fuzzy, fused with personalized perspectives and framed in terms of established alignments and prejudices. What we might argue is that here we get a clearer sense of how many people do in fact manage the knowledge they come across about events and persons in civic society and in politics. Stuart Hall (1983) writing on the way that the 1980s British working classes voted for a government that appeared completely against their interest, pointed to the way that this government, headed by Margaret Thatcher, understood the processes and the ways that understandings of events were largely reduced and fused with the personal. Fiske (1989) suggested that tabloid newspapers also operate at this level. And perhaps much public debate, that we see here, is more like a poorly informed shouting match than a debate, unlike a Habermasian coffee shop.

**Conclusion**

This paper’s aim was to look at the kinds of political discourses found on Youtube in a video and its comments which represented a specific event in Turkey, a place with tight government control over mainstream media. This analysis supports other studies which characterise such forums not as sites of engagement and debate but where comments seek to frame events into pre-existing alignments using a populist form of politics. Overall the exchange of ideas is closer to the accounts scholars give of political populism, where the complicities of policy, economics, social and civic matters are homogenised, reduced and used to position who is a good national citizen and who is not.

 The pop video analysis supports the views of those who point to the limitations of popular music to communicate more specific political ideas. This is not to say that this can play no positive role. It allows the public sharing of a discourse which connotes protest and challenge to the government. Such Youtube videos do indeed allow a greater variety of viewpoints to be accessed when the mainstream media is so restricted, exposing nearly 150,000 people to this view on the Gezi park protests. But we can be mindful of the way that while there may be pleasure and some sense of unity in deriding those in power, this can distract from ongoing concrete issues that may sit behind the individuals being attacked on this occasion. Turkey is influenced by the trajectory of global capitalism, the shift to neo-liberalism and power of international banks. In Europe even more left wing governments have found these forces impossible to stop. The populist criticism does little more than make simplistic social divisions around issues of religion and polital alignment across which great divides in poverty, access to education, health care and broader opportunuties run. In CDA it is said that discourse has a dialectical relationship with social practice. In this sense rather than challenging a power elite such protest discourses are in danger of perpetuating and reproducing different kinds of inequalities. Both sides of the argument, rather than picking apart the issues that face them, seek precisely to gloss over these to create a sense of a homogenous 'people’; either for or against the government.

 Of course Youtube is not all social media. And I would suggest that critical discourse studies need to do more work around different kinds of sites, how discourses run across them, and how they are engaged with or framed by users and how this is done multimodally. A larger study would be abe to follow representations of the Gezi protests across different kinds of social media. Presently we simply do not know enough about what people do on different sites. Do some of the more or less xenophobic posters studied in this case behave differently on other forums? Do these desolve into ghettos? And it would of course be useful to situate such a cyberethnography in the everyday lives of these indivduals. Concurring with the introduction to this collection, it is suggested that what we find online is a complex thing which we are yet to fully understand.

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