**Protest music, populism, politics and authenticity: the limits and potential of popular music's articulation of subversive politics**

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**Abstract**

Political discourses are found not only in speeches and newspapers, but also in

cultural artefacts such as architecture, art and music. Turkey's June 2013 protests saw an explosion of music videos distributed on the internet. This paper uses these videos as a case study to examine the limits and potential of popular music's articulation of popular and populist politics. Though both terms encompass what is "widely favoured", populism includes discourses which construct "the people" pitted against "an elite". Past research has shown how popular music can articulate subversive politics, though these do not detail what that subversion means and how it is articulated. This paper uses specific examples to demonstrate how musical sounds, lyrics and images articulate populist and popular politics. From a corpus of over 100 videos, a typical example is analysed employing social semiotics. It is found that popular music has the potential to contribute to the public sphere, though its limits are also exposed.

**Keywords**

Popular politics, populist politics, popular music, protest, Turkey and authenticity

1. **Introduction**

Media such as the press, broadcast news and internet news websites are only some of the outlets where political ideology is circulated. It can also be found in cultural artefacts such as war monuments (Abousnnouga and Machin 2010), video games (Machin and van Leeuwen 2005) and television reality programmes (Eriksson 2015). In 1920s Europe, “art and architecture, as well as music, were used as central parts of communicating fascist ideology” (Machin and Richardson 2012, 331). Using more recent case studies, scholars have investigated the relations between politics, particularly protest politics, and popular music producing an array of findings. These include Street’s (1986) examination of rock and politics, Railton and Watson’s (2011) examination of sexual and racial politics in promotional music videos (videos) and Lynskey’s (2010) account of protest in music. Much research in this area has been accused of prioritising the importance of lyrics and/ or visuals, prompting Frith’s (1993) call for a closer analysis of musical sounds. This paper aims to address this concern by examining how musical sounds, lyrics and visuals communicate political ideas in protest videos in Turkey.

Oppositional voices in mainstream media are not a universal reality. Turkey is one such place where its press has been deemed “not free” (Freedom House, 2014). During Turkey’s 2013 protests, mainstream media, for the most part controlled by the government, initially avoided covering the protests and subsequently undercovered them. At the same time, over 100 protest-supporting videos were uploaded onto the internet appearing oppositional as part of a protest against the ruling party. Analysed here is one of these protest videos which articulates a set of popular anti-government discourses that represent a knowing people pitted against vain, non listening and forceful leaders, though what is known by the people and what leaders do is never specified. This paper shows the detail of how this works in lyrics, images and sounds. This is preceded by a review of literature in the areas of politics and pop and a contextualisation of the protests themselves in order to “*contextualise* semiotic systems, to put them in their historical and social setting” (van Leeuwen 1999, 8). In this way, this study questions the role and limits such popular representations can have in disseminating subversive discourses in the public political domain.

1. **Politics, pop in Turkey and Gezi Park**

The relationship between pop and politics is an area of considerable debate which has produced no real consensus (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002, 7). Sociologists such as Frith (1988 and 1981) and Street (1986) highlight how production, political, social and consumption contexts constrain potential meanings in pop. Though constrained, the music industry does not necessarily control music “unless the stock market is offended” (Street 1986, 107), resulting in politics being a part of some pop. The politics it articulates is not necessarily conventional, but the everyday (Street 1986, 3). Frith (1988, 472) concurs, noting an incompatibility between pop and conventional politics, political movements being more successful with pop than political parties. He also notes that pop can articulate some politics better than others such as nationalist struggles (some black music), the politics of leisure (youth cults and gay disco) and a combination of the two (some feminist music). Street (1986, 47) claims ambiguity is a trade mark of pop’s politics. Comparing flower power to Black civil rights and Billy Bragg to the Redskins, he illustrates how it is “uncertainty and ambiguity” in performance and lyrics which prove to be more potent (Street 1986, 67). Other academics note that much of pop’s political power lies with listeners, meanings being ambiguous and open to individual interpretation. Hebdige (1979) demonstrates how music is used by some as part of a self-imposed exile from mainstream culture. Grossberg (1987) argues that pop’s politics are played out in the activities associated with different tastes of music. Similarly, Huq (2002) argues that rave music is less about conventional politics and more about the politics of pleasure.

It is not only political ideas which are communicated through images, sounds and lyrics, but also ideas about music producers themselves (Machin, 2010, 9). These ideas are to do with authenticity which emerges as an important theme, closely intertwined with politics and genre. Though the idea of authenticity generates considerable debate, recent studies have found it useful to view it as the quality of “sincerity” or “playing from the heart” that listeners ascribe to performers (Moore 2002, 210). How this is assigned is socially, historically and genre dependent. Notions of authenticity have their roots in the Romantic tradition where artistic creativity was seen as coming from the soul, as opposed to something which emerged from society (Machin 2010). These beliefs contribute to the dichotomy of authentic verses “establishment”, allowing some pop to link authenticity with anti-establishment discourses. Rock’s authenticity, for example, is determined by live performance and being anti-establishment while indie rock values authenticity, purity and non-corporate ideals (Machin 2010; Hibbett 2005; Frith 1981). So, rock musicians can represent themselves as authentic by articulating anti-establishment political discourses. Musicians, record companies and their managers use semiotic resources such as music, looks and styles to articulate these discourses as part of a group’s “discursive package”.

Another contentious theoretical terrain is defining popular and populist politics, both seen in protest music. Williams (1976, 236) defines popular as “belonging to the people”, “widely favoured” and “well-liked”. Dictionary definitions concur. However, there is little agreement as to what is popular politics, it at times being confused and used synonymously with populism (Carpentier 2007). Though both involve the idea of being well-liked, populism involves “representing popular interests and values” (Williams 1976, 238) with many definitions 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 not a prefixed natural category, but a signifier that acquires meaning through a diversity of discourses. Its meaning changes and is 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). 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.

Authenticity and populism are both articulated in videos which support Istanbul’s Gezi Park protests that started on 28 May 2013. A demonstration by a few city planners and environmentalists to save a public green space quickly grew into approximately 3.5 million people protesting in over 80 cities. Protests attracted diverse groups who were against aspects of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) such as perceived infringements on democracy, freedom, repressive police tactics and government policies (Işik 2013, 25-27). Police with the clear backing of the government responded with live ammunition, tear gas, water cannons, plastic bullets and beatings which resulted in over 3000 arrests, 8000 injuries and six deaths. Amnesty (2013) believes “police officers were instructed and encouraged to use force unsparingly” and “Turkish authorities committed human rights violations on a massive scale” using the tactics of “force, threats, insults and prosecution”. Since the protests, Amnesty (2013) notes how there has been a systematic failure to bring police and authorities to justice with a corresponding prosecution and harassment of protesters and sympathisers. In the meantime, the park’s fate has been left to the courts.

The protests can be seen as a manifestation of a split 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). AKP has been in power since 2002. It is an economically liberal and socially conservative political party with an emphasis on its Islamic roots and future (Yeşiltaş 2009). With success in some sectors of Turkey’s economy there has been record unemployment and poverty in others (Sümer and Yaşlı 2010, 17). Part of its economic agenda has been the privatisation of most public/ state institutions including the areas of communication, transportation, industry and energy (Uzgel 2010, 24). AKP planned to transform Gezi Park from a public green space into a private shopping mall, the contract awarded to private interests closely associated with the government. Government actions, including these, have alienated many who find it increasingly difficult to express their views.

Relations between media and politics in Turkey are very close, characteristic of Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) Mediterranean Model. It has a politically oriented press, high political parallelism in journalism, the state plays a significant role as owner, regulator and funder of media as it oversees a high degree of ideological diversity and conflict in society. Though Turkish media conglomerates achieve low investment returns on their media interests, they “use the media to manipulate other economic or political interests” resulting in a “notorious interlocking of interests between the media, politicians and the businesses” (Özguneş and Georgios 2000, 414). This relationship has taken on greater significance with AKP gaining more control over media than any of its predecessors (Jenkins 2012). The AKP government has put pressure on existing media to become less critical whilst acquiring media outlets and initiating its own communication channels, resulting in AKP discourses dominating mainstream media output (Sümer and Yaşlı 2010, 17).

Turkish pop operates within this tightly controlled mediascape, its production being a multi-million pound industry involving both major global record companies and independents. Governmental music policies over the past decade have influenced music production. AKP has tried to eliminate modern musical institutions which has had a detrimental effect on modernist composers such as Kamran İnce and Aydın Esen. In the meanwhile, musicians and genres positioned against modernism such as Arabesk music performers Orhan Gencebay and Nihat Doğan openly support AKP policies with AKP giving their support for such performers (Way and Gedik 2013).

Distribution and performance of music is also tightly controlled by the government. For a recording to be released, it must get a “bandrol”. This is a sticker issued by the Ministry of Culture which indicates the product’s manufacturer has paid the required tax. However, bandrol is used by the government to censor music. CDs can be refused a bandrol for “language [being] objectionable to the government for its political content, such as song lyrics perceived to advocate violence, [or] political views the government would rather not see expressed” (Solomon 2005, 6). Live performances are also under the eye of the government. Sometimes authorities choose to not grant permission for concerts. When it is granted, concerts may be cancelled at the last minute despite being organised and paid for by bands and their supporters. These actions are usually accompanied by band members being arrested for spreading “propaganda”.

Government control also involves broadcasting. There are over 1,100 radio and 200 television stations in Turkey. Despite these large numbers, Turkey’s media are dominated by state-run TRT and five private media conglomerates, some accused of “broadcast[ing], rank[ing] and promote[ing] music-clips and in this way to a certain extent manipulate[ing] the music market in Turkey” (Barış 2010). Furthermore, corporate holdings are not necesssarily independent of government control, as indicated above, where AKP has unprecedented say over what is allowed on-air. Turkey’s pop industry is an integral part of this mediascape, magnifying the importance of videos on the internet as an alternative for oppositional musical voices.

1. **Approach to analysis**

The video chosen for a close reading, Marsis’s “Oy Oy Recebum”, undergoes a multi-modal analysis examining lyrics, visuals and music. This approach has the advantage of revealing the way each mode works to articulate discourses “on a particular occasion, in a particular text” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 29). It also addresses concerns that much video analysis ignores musical sounds, them “usually relegated to the status of sound track” (Goodwin 1993, 4). Multi-modal analysis finds its origins in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday’s (1985) functional grammar which assume linguistic and visual choices reveal broader discourses articulated in texts (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). These discourses can be thought of as models of the world and project certain social values and ideas which contribute to the (re)production of social life. The aim of 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).

Here, videos are analysed as a multi-modal site of communication where lyrics, visuals and music are viewed as semiotic resources. For lyrics and images, this paper employs a social semiotic approach developed and used by a number of scholars (Machin 2010, 2007; van Leeuwen 2005, 1996, 1995; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). At a basic level, the “discourse schema” of lyrics and visuals are examined to reveal “the social values that underlie the song” (Machin 2010, 78). Here, details are stripped to identify the generic role played by characters which “tells us about the cultural values about identities and behaviours that lie deeper in a song” (ibid., 81). At another level, recontextualisations of social action are examined following the influential work of van Leeuwen (1995). How social actions are recontextualised “encode different interpretations of, and different attitudes to, the social actions represented”, a significant factor in articulating discourses (van Leeuwen 1995, 81). Specifically, actions are analysed in terms of transactivity, de-activations through objectivation and descriptivization, de-agentialisation, overdetermination, generalization and abstraction.

The musical sounds are analysed using a semiotic approach developed by van Leeuwen (1999) and Tagg (1990, 1984, 1983) and furthered by Machin (2010). Van Leeuwen (1999) identifies six major domains of sound which contribute to meanings. These domains do not dictate what listeners hear but identify experiential meaning potential of the sounds listeners experience (van Leeuwen 1999, 94). Musicians manipulate such domains as perspective connoting social distance, music’s adherence (or not) to regularity, how sounds interact with each other, melody, voice quality, timbre and the modality of sounds. These domains are considered, where relevant, to reveal the role musical sounds make in articulating discourses of protest alongside authenticity.

1. **Data**

The sample of videos was selected based on three criteria. Videos had to be available to a wide Turkish audience. Due to the sensitive nature of protest, most Gezi Park videos were “unofficial” and distributed via the internet. Only videos released during the protests were selected and of these, only those which were obviously about the protests. The researcher collected over 100 videos from June 2013 when protest participation peaked. The researcher performed a daily scan of the internet, helped by protesters’ recommendations. The 100 videos inform the analysis and are referred to throughout with a typical example closely analysed.

Marsis’s “Oy Oy Recebum” is analysed in detail. Formed in Istanbul in 2005, Marsis has released two albums in 2009 and 2012 on independent labels. It has produced two official videos alongside a large number of unofficial videos which appear on Youtube. A typical rock line up of vocalist, electric guitar, bass and drums alongside a Karadeniz (Turkey’s Black Sea region) fiddle gives it a distinct sound. It claims to have a “significant political attitude”, naming nuclear power plants and Black Sea languages and cultures amongst its concerns. The chosen video (found on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je9ooFC0FeM>) was the first of four associated with the song, first released on Youtube on 6 June 2013. It boasted over 186,000 viewings at the time of writing. Although this video is “unofficial”, it appears on Marsis’s facebook page, suggesting the band’s involvement or at least its approval. The title, chorus and melody are a remake of the song “Oy Oy Eminem” made popular by Mustafa Topaloğlu. The original is a love song about a woman named “Emine”, ironically the name of the wife of the Turkish Prime Minister of the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Turkey’s mainstream media did not play the song, it relying solely on internet distribution.

1. **Textual Analysis**

Lyrics, visuals and musical sounds are analysed to reveal what discourses are being communicated in Marsis’s “Oy Oy Recebum”. Such a detailed reading sees a simplification of politics and events through the use of pronouns, collectivisation, transivity and an absence of specifics. As such protest becomes generic and immobilised. Here, each mode is analysed in turn to reveal its unique role.

5.1 Lyrics

Marsis’s lyrics are in the style of an open letter to Prime Minister Erdoğan, using vague and ironic references. At a first level of analysis, we can identify the discourse schema, which is the basic structure of the song. By stripping “away the details of [the] narrative in order to reveal its core structure”, we can uncover the cultural values in lyrics (Machin 20010, 80). This song’s discourse schema may be read as “There is a cruel despot. He is vain and does not listen. The people will be heard and noticed.” At this level we see lyrics suggest a pair of simple binary opposites. Wright (1975) notes that such basic structures point to wider issues and anxieties present in society at particular times. Concerns and a lack of comprehension about social changes can be shaped into simple oppositions, where individuals or groups represent each side. Here, there is an elite which is represented negatively opposing the people, a cornerstone of populism.

To draw out the details of how this schema is realised we can look at the way that social actors are represented in the lyrics. Participants are named in ways which pit a united people against Turkish politicians. The use of pronouns plays a role. Protesters and the band are named as "us" and “we”, defining a group different from Erdoğan's "you". Lines such as “Check us out” and “Count how many of us” presuppose the “us” group is numerous and powerful, large enough to boast about. The line "You kept calling us 'çapulcu'” makes clear that “we/ us” are “çapulcu” [street person], a name Erdoğan gave to protesters. The name “Çapulcu” later became a badge of honour to those who protested or sympathised with them. Other namings such as “the voice of Gezi” suggest unity, the protesters being united as “a voice”. Though represented as one, this naming ignores the diversity of protesters including Radical Muslims, Gay rights activitists, environmentalists, students and professionals. But this is part of a strategy of collectivisation, connoting protesters as a united people. There is word slippage between protesters and “the public” in “Did you think the public are sheep?” connoting they are one and the same, suggesting a united people opposed to the government, a key concept in populism.

In populism, the elite are represented against the interests of the people. Namings of the government suggest this. Lyrics represent the government as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, him serving as its metonymy. He is mostly named “you”, distinct from “us”. He is also named informally as “my Recep” connoting a lack of power (van Leeuwen 1996). In the context of a love song, such as “my Emine” (which this song parodies), “my” connotes closeness and possessiveness. However, here in the context of many negative activations, “my Recep” connotes irony, be-littling and wrong-doing as when a parent says “oh my Recep, what have you done?”, articulating opposition.

Representations of transivity play an important part in the simplification of these issues. Here we find the people ‘know’ but what they know is never explained. Erdoğan doesn't listen and he is a doer of abstraction. These representations draw upon populist discourses and are typical of counter cultural pop lyrics. For example, Bob Marley sings ‘Get up, stand up’ rallying the people, asking questions and suggesting knowing but never specifically say about what.  Turkish acts such as Bariş Akarsu, Mor ve Ötesi, Grup Kızılırmak and Duman also follow this trend (Way 2014; Way 2013; Way 2012).

Amongst the negativity surrounding the government suggested in the lyrics, it not listening is dominant, this being a popular notion amongst oppositional voices (Traynor and Letsch 2013). A variety of strategies are used in representing action which connote this. Consider the line “Were your eyes blind”. Here, the action of Erdoğan not listening is recontextualised into him being blind. This is typical of descriptivations where actions are de-activated into permanent qualities of social actors (van Leeuwen 1995, 95). This is common throughout the sample, other songs naming Erdoğan “the blind Sultan”. As such, a dynamic process becomes the permanent negative quality of an arrogant non listening government.

The line “Come hear the voice of Gezi” also articulates a discourse of non-listening through objectivation where a process becomes a nominalisation. This de-emphasises actions whilst adding “purposes and/or legitimations” (van Leeuwen 1995, 94). In this line, protesting is de-emphasised, becoming the nominalisation “the voice” while “come” and “hear” are prioritised as a command at the beginning of the line. This construction serves the purpose of emphasising Erdoğan is not listening because he has to be commanded to do so. It also serves to represent the people as “the voice”. Though represented as a voice, what the people have to say is left out, just like the lines “come check us out”, and “look how many we are”.

Even questions such as “Why didn’t you see us?” are used to connote non-listening. The action of “didn’t you see” can stand to mean a number of things such as "you do not listen/ see/ take notice/ understand us or take our grievances seriously ". It’s an example of an overdetermination where one social action is used to represent more than one action. Written as such, detail is lacking which may suit Marsis’s purposes of connoting a non-listening politica. This draws upon the populist discourse of a vain, out of touch, non-listening elite which is pitted against the interests of the people. Here the people are represented as knowing they should be listened to, though we do not get to hear what they have to say. That is, not listening is overdetermined and replaces a clear articulation of the view of the people.

Representations of action also suggest a despotic elite. Lines such as “You kept hitting even when we said ‘stop’”, connote Erdoğan is a despot. The first half of this line is a material process activation with material effect connoting negative power (van Leeuwen 1995, 90). However, agency, actions, passivations and circumstances are all unclear. Though violence against protesters was condoned by Erdoğan and his government, it is well documented that police kicked, beat, shot tear gas and pepper sprayed protesters, not Erdoğan (Amnesty 2013). The action “hitting” is abstract, a generalisation which dilutes specifics. However, it has the effect of de-legitimating Erdoğan, a common trait in generalisations (van Leeuwen 1995, 99). Furthermore, the second half of the line emphasises a despotic leader pitted against the people, one who hits out even when “we” the people say stop.

Transivity connotes Erdoğan is despotic and non-listening, but also weak by lacking vision. Consider the following reported speech:

You said: I do it that way

You said: I do it this way

You said: I level this to the ground this way

You said: I sell this that way

The actions of “do”, “level” and “sell” give no details of what Erdoğan is doing. No circumstances are provided and no details of the micro-actions which make up the selling, levelling and doing are revealed. The pronouns “it”, “this” and “that” obscure actions even more. In the first two lines, it is unclear what Erdoğan does and how he does it. These lines may refer to his perceived authoritarianism which includes him making bold statements about what he will do. This is a common attribute given to Erdoğan. These lines also connote weakness. By Erdoğan doing it “this” and then “that” way, a political flip flop is connoted, signalling a lack of vision and/or political strength. The following two lines again offer few details, though again they draw upon popular discourses. It is likely these lines refer to the popular criticism that Erdoğan not only planned to “level” Gezi park and “sell” it off to private firms, but Turkey’s AKP government is responsible for similar actions of “levelling” and “selling” other national assets to private investors with AKP links. In all four lines above, representations of actions abstractly articulate popular criticisms of the government, drawing upon populist discourses of a despotic, weak and non-listening elite opposed to the people’s interests.

 Representations of actions also connote the people are united against the government, they know, they must be heard and they are authentic. These again draw upon populism. Discourses of protester sympathy, strength and knowledge are a part of this. Consider:

You kept calling us “çapulcu”

One day you will be held to account

In the first line, protesters are passivated by Erdoğan’s non-material action of name calling, articulating sympathy for protesters and negativity towards the government (van Leeuwen 1996). The tone changes in the second line, it being a warning. To be in a position to utter a warning suggests power. However, no details about agency or actions are offered. This is characteristic of a naturalised de-agentialisation where an action is “represented as a natural process by means of abstract material processes” (van Leeuwen 1995, 76). Here, retribution is represented as a natural process with Erdoğan being “held to account” for his negative actions. Agency is witheld and the action is abstract. This again points to the people with power, knowing retribution is on the way, but no details of actions or knowledge are forthcoming. This is sympomatic of other lines such as “Did you think the public were sheep”. Here again, the people are knowledgeable, “we” are not sheep. But what “we” know, what “we” say and how “we” act are all abstract. All the same, within the context of the lyrics, one presupposes that it is protesters and/ or their sympathisers who will act against Erdoğan. This serves the purpose of articulating a discourse of protesters’ power without giving away details. It also represents them knowing that there will be revenge for Erdoğan’s deeds.

As noted above, Marsis represents itself as part of the protests through pronouns. Imperatives define this role as the band being knowledgeable protest leaders. In the lyrics, Marsis commands Erdoğan to “Come hear the voice of Gezi”, “Check us out” and “Count how many of us”. These lines connote Marsis’s power. To command someone to do something suggests the one who commands has power. Here Marsis commands Erdoğan to “hear”, “check” and “count”. Furthermore, Marsis knows that their voices of protest ought to be heard through the authority of such imperatives. But it is not just Erdoğan who Marsis commands. Its power and authenticity is further articulated in the lines “Jump Jump, Who doesn’t jump is...” repeated throughout the last 50 seconds of the song. The chant “Jump Jump, Who doesn’t jump is Tayyip” was part of Turkish protests where protesters would chant, jump and sing together. By commanding protesters to participate in an act of defiance, Marsis represents itself as being a powerful voice of protest, commanding and leading protesters. This, in turn, suggests the band is anti-establishment, a key component of rock authenticity. By altering a chant used in the protests, Marsis is legitimated as being part of “those in the know”, those who participated in the protests.

Lyrical representations of social actions draw upon populist discourses which connote politicians are vain, not listening, weak, despotic and are pitted against the people. Representations of protesters’ actions articulate strength, size and sympathy. All the while, Marsis is represented as a powerful and authentic part of the protest which knows the united voices of Gezi protests must be heard. Visuals also articulate discourses of populism through other means.

5.2 Visuals

Videos across the sample use very similar visual representations of the Gezi Park protests. This is because most visuals from these cut-and-paste videos were sourced from a small pool of images taken from the limited mainstream news coverage and images posted on the internet. In the Marsis video, the visuals are mainly concerned with protesting, police and their actions. The visual discourse schema may be read as “It is a brutal society. The leaders are vain, pompous and removed. The people rise up.” The schema draws upon populist discourses of the elite (visually represented by police and politicians) against the people (represented as protesters). How social actions are represented in the visuals reveal how this is done in detail.

Police violence dominates the visuals, represented in ways which emphasise police brutality. The most common strategy represents police actions as material and transactive connoting great power (van Leeuwen 1995, 90). Police spray pepper, tear gas and water cannons at unarmed protesters. Groups of police hold, beat, hit and kick individual protesters and dismantle camps. These are powerfully negative, articulating police abuse of power, a popular discourse at the time. Image one exemplifies this type of representation. It originates from Reuters photographer Alexandra Hudson, appearing in newspapers across Europe and many of the sample’s videos. The image became a “leitmotif for female protesters” during the protests (Hudson 2013).



**Image 1:** Leitmotif

The image’s leitmotif status may be due to the photograph employing a number of strategies which articulate popular discourses including police violence and protester sympathy. Positioning of participants within the image emphasises difference between these groups. The foreground features a masked policeman on the left activated with agency spraying pepper at an unarmed woman on the right. In the background, again on the left, a wall of masked and helmetted policemen look right symbolically dividing authority from protester in a type of “separation” within the composition (van Leeuwen 2005, 13). Throughout the sample, most photographs see protesters separate from police, dividing the elite from the people. Separation is even more pronounced between AKP politicians and protesters who never share the same shots emphasising difference (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996).

Viewer position in relation to social actors, activations and type of shots connote where sympathies lie. There is no symbolic interaction with the police, their gazes are elsewhere and faces concealed with helmets and masks (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 127-128). They are shot in a group, accentuated by identical uniforms and shields, further increasing anonimity and symbolic distance between viewer and police (Machin and van Leeuwen 2005). As mentioned above, one policeman is activated negatively spraying an unarmed woman. She is photographed individually, looking down and towards the camera. Viewers see her discomfort expressed in facial expressions whilst closeness is symbolised through her proximity to the camera, connoting sympathy (Machin 2007, 118-119). Her dress and handbag signify her ordinariness, “respectability” being one of the people, accentuating sympathy unlike shots of masked youths hurling petrol bombs. It is images like this which make clear the elite are against the people.

There are other ways representations of police action connote negativity. Police march, stand, hide behind shields, drive watercannons and shoot tear gas. These represent police actions negatively but non transactively, again connoting the police are part of an elite against the people’s interest. Some images change police action into objectivations, such as tear gas filled air, smokey horizons, projectiles in the park and spent tear gas cartridges on the road. These work to articulate discourses which legitimise anger at police oppression and sympathy for protesters without actually empowering police in transactive activations.

Visuals also connote negativity towards politicians, them being vain, pompous and removed from the people. Images include “in situ” shots and posed ones. Non-posed shots see Prime Minister Erdoğan fall off a horse and eating with his hands. Neither image connotes power or positivity. Posed images include Ankara’s AKP Mayor Melih Gökçek posing with Mickey Mouse dolls in an opulent office. The AKP government Minister for European Union Egemen Boğış is photographed from above as he looks up with his hands clasped in prayer, connoting weakness (Machin 2007). Unlike police representations, these actions are non transactive connoting less power (van Leeuwen 1996). In fact, AKP politicians look ridiculous and far removed from the people, mixed into a montage of chaos, protesters and police violence.

Other visuals, such as image two, connote politicians as despotic, removed from the people and non-listening, key to populism. Here Erdoğan is activated verbally. He is speaking and not listening. His formal dress, microphones and background indicate he is at a press conference. Formal dress and setting connote his distance from the people, who protest in Gezi park and on the streets. He leans forward aggressively. His eyes, mouth and face suggest anger. Erdoğan looks off to the left, not engaging the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 124). The background is a blurred Turkish flag and black. The blurring and darkness suggest far less certainty than a clear image of a flag. The result is a negative representation of a non-listening, aggressive politician, not a sympathetic ear.



**Image 2:** Erdoğan

Images complement lyrics in the song’s final 50 seconds to articulate division and opposition between the elite and the people. Pitting the elite (politicians and police) against an all inclusive protesting public is key to populism. Here, a series of three visuals correspond to the lyrics “jump, jump, who doesn’t jump is….”. Cut to the rhythm of the first two words are visuals of those who Marsis commands to jump and who they consider are legitimate protesters. Included are football supporters, home owners, conservatively and Western dressed young and old Turks and foreigners. These images connote the all-inclusiveness of protesters, them being the people. Cut to correspond to the line “who doesn’t jump is…” are police, the media and governing AKP politicians. This sequence not only works multi-modally to make clear who are outside Marsis's group of protesters, but also articulates the all-inclusiveness of protesters.

Representations of protesters’ actions articulate positive discourses, though with limited power. Most actions are non-transactive such as protesters walk, chant, wave arms, run, march, wave flags, clap and hold hands. Protesters also throw stones and smoking tear gas cannisters, build barricades, run and mill around the street. Police representations included their negative effects such as victimisation and smoke filled skies. However, here protesters’ actions do not include negative consequences such as injured policemen and property. They are empowered as legitimate protesters without negativity. The limited number of actions which are transactive, represent protesters as non-violent. They read and offer food to police and bang metal objects together (a sonic symbol of Turkish protest). Together, these activations draw upon positive popular and populist discourses of the people, as opposed to the elite.

Representations of the scale and unity of protests articulate a discourse of protesters are the people. This is articulated through visuals throughout the sample and in this video. Ariel shots, crowded streets, bridges, parks and tunnels all signify a large number of protesters. Unity, along with scale and inclusiveness add legitimacy to protesters’ demands and actions. In image three, protester unity is articulated. This is a group shot where individuals are less important than the team (Machin 2007, 118-119). Protesters are in a line facing the camera, though not looking at the camera. Their faces are discernible, granting a limited point of identification. They are activated lifting, passing, grabbing bags positively affecting the park by collecting and disposing of rubbish. Like a production line, they work together to move the bags away from the camera and out of the park. It is representations such as this which articulate discourses of protester unity, despite actual political unity being far less obvious.



**Image 3:** Unity

Gezi protests were the largest Turkey had seen for years and being seen as a legitimate protester was important for protesters and bands alike. It was a badge of honour to have gone to and be seen at the protests. Some images here represent protesters as legitimate. Echoing hippy culture and peace demonstrations of the sixties, protesters play guitars, flick and paint peace signs, spray graffitti, clap together and hold hands. These are symbolic signs of resistance, recycled from popular culture. They do little to address the issues of Gezi, but represent protest as cool, legitimate and peaceful amongst the chaos. Image four articulates this clearly. Here a protester is in close up playing an accordian. He wears a Guy Fawkes mask, made popular in Turkey by 2005’s “V for Vendetta” film where a masked hero takes on a corrupt dictatorial government. This mask was popular amongst protesters and is used here as a semiotic resource to articulate subversion. His pose connotes coolness as he leans away from the camera, moving to the music, playing his accordian as a fire burns in the background. This represents a party, being anti-establishment and a legitimate part of the protests.



**Image 4:** Party

Like lyrics, visual representations of social action articulate discourses of populism. Turkey’s elite, represented by police and politicians are represented negatively. Police are violent whilst politicians are despotic, ridiculous, removed from the people and talk but do not listen. They are pitted against protesters who are victims of police actions, yet united, positive and anti-establishment.

5.3 Music

Turkey’s folk tradition is diverse with regional influences affecting instrumentation, melodies and lyrics. A fast-tempo fiddle is a distinguishable characteristic of Karadeniz (Black Sea) folk music from the North of Turkey. In this protest video, these sounds along with western rock and ska are used by Marsis to articulate populist discourses.

One such discourse is a dangerous elite. Danger is connoted in melody, tempo and instrumental choices in the opening guitar riff which is repeated throughout the song. The melody (see graph one), is characterised by both low pitch and a very narrow pitch range. The low pitch suggests power in a way a higher pitch does not (van Leeuwen 2005). The pitch range is restricted to the song’s key note, its second and third. Though the first and third connote stability, the second suggests “something in between, the promise of something else”, articulating the uncertainty of protest. The narrow pitch range also has the experiential meaning potential of constraining strong feelings. This constraining heightens uncertainty, caution and danger. The melody connotes danger, being strikingly reminiscent of the two-note leitmotif used in the Jaws films which also alternates between the key note and its second minor. In these films, the leitmotif is used to represent danger, evil and menace and has been used extensively ever since with similar connotations (Wingstead, Brandstrüm, Berg 2010, 199). As danger becomes more eminent, the tempo of the leitmotif increases. In Marsis’s song, this riff is played fast, suggesting eminent danger like the film.

During this riff, a distorted guitar is upfront in the hierarchy of sound. This is unlike the rest of the song where the traditional Karadeniz fiddle is foregrounded. Distorted guitar sounds are associated with heavy metal, a genre with its own connotations of danger and menace. Together, melody, tempo and instrumentation connote danger and menace while visuals and lyrics make clear its source is the government and police.

**Graph 1:** Guitar riff.

Chaos is also connoted in musical sounds further articulating a dangerous elite, but also the fun and power of a protesting people. This is notable in melodic, tempo and instrument choices made in the instrumental bridges played between verses and choruses. Graph two represents the first half of the bridge, the second following a similar pattern. Notes are no longer constrained as seen in the opening guitar sequence. Now the music has a wider pitch range to connote the venting of strong feelings of excitement and chaos. The melody is dominated by the third and ends on the sixth, both notes with the meaning potential of happiness, whilst the penultimate note is the seventh with connotations of thoughtfulness and longing (Machin 2010, 218). These note choices suggest the excitement of protesting alongside its dangers and associated sadness. Excitement is also connoted with an ascending pitch movement which “can energise, rally listeners together for the sake of some joint activity or cause” (van Leeuwen 1999, 103). The joint activity here is protesting against the AKP government. However, the second half of the bridge ends back down on the third, bringing the chaos to a more “grounded” footing, again reminding listeners of inherent dangers.

This sequence is played at breakneck speed with a fiddle in the foreground. Choosing to foreground the high-pitched fiddle symbolises urgency, fun and chaos unlike the low pitched distorted guitar heard in the opening (Tagg 1990, 112). Tempo also plays a role. Van Leeuwen (1999, 110) notes how fast note changes or “disjunctive sound production” can come to stand for a “lively and energetic approach, or a bold or forceful attack”. In the context of images of police violence and protester actions, the melody suggests energetic, yet dangerous fun.

**Graph 2:** Instrumental bridge

Musical elements alongside lyrics also connote a despotic non-listening government. After each of the bridges described above, the guitar and fiddle hold on a C minor whilst vocals begin. The minor chord connotes sadness. Held for a bar at a time, instrumentation becomes very minimalistic while vocals are foregrounded in the hierarchy of sound. This almost antiphony of instrumentation signifies the importance given to the vocals, allowing anti-government and pro-protester lyrics to dominate listeners' attention.

Tempo changes also draw attention to anti-government lyrics. Tagg (1984, 32) notes how timing variations can be used to symbolise subversion to aspects of modern digital society. Here, a pregnant pause after each verse before the vocalist sings "Oy oy my Recep" again draws the listener into the vocals which identify Erdoğan as responsible for the negativity, danger and chaos represented in the song. Furthermore, durational variation of the vocals during this section emphasises emotional negativity. “Oy oy my Recep” is sung slowly, far moreso than the rest of the vocals. Words are elongated, symbolising emotional attachment (van Leeuwen 1999, 173). Emotions are further connoted by the vocalist's voice breaking whilst the melody drops from Aflat to F. Van Leeuwen (1999,103) notes how a drop at the end of a musical sequence may make listeners turn inwards and focus on their thoughts and feelings. Here, Marsis uses these strategies to signal thoughtful and negative emotional attachment to Erdoğan and his actions.

Bands throughout the sample employ various strategies to represent themselves as authentic anti-establishment musicians. Ozbi Asi included visuals of himself at the protests whilst Duman performed and Tarkan made a public appearance. Here, Marsis uses instrumentation and music genre to connote authenticity. Rock’s authenticity is determined by being anti-establishment (Machin 2010; Hibbett 2005; Frith 1981). Marsis uses rock sounds of electric guitars, guitar riffs and drums to authenticate themselves as rockers. Though these sounds are heard in their other songs, here they are dominant. Furthermore, by producing this video and having it as part of their website, Marsis shows themselves as an anti-establishment rock group, a group with political ideals.

But part of rock’s anti-establishment discourse includes protest as a party. This discourse is a common theme throughout rock history including The Clash’s “White Riot”, Placebo’s “Rob the bank”, Public Enemy’s “Party for your right to fight” and the Beastie Boys “(You gotta) fight for your right to party”. Musically, this is connoted in the song’s last 50 seconds. Here the Black Sea folk sounds and distorted rock guitar are replaced with a ska-inspired melody and dance rhythm. Gone are the connoted dangers of protesting. Instead, ska-style dance party music accompanies vocals which instruct listeners to “jump”. Throughout this part of the song, the tempo increases connoting fun and energy (Tagg 1984, 22) like “the chicken dance” at weddings. Though the chant sequence starts on a Cminor, suggesting sadness, it changes to and finishes on a Gmajor, with more positive connotations.

Vocal choices also articulate protester unity. Throughout the song, the vocalist is upfront in the mix. However, in the ska section the lead singer’s voice shares the foreground with a chorus of vocals, a common trait across the whole sample. By having all voices singing the same words and the same notes with no one voice foregrounded, this comes “to mean solidarity, consensus, a positive sense of joint experience and belonging to a group” (van Leeuwen 1999, 79). Here it is the unity of protesters which is connoted, accentuated by lyrics and images. The simple repetitive lyrics of “jump, jump, who doesn’t jump is…” is condusive to a fun sing along. Vocal style further connotes a party by the ocassional “whoopa” and “yip”, adding to the party atmosphere. These musical choices alongside visuals which show protesters engaged in fun activities like drawing peace signs and holding hands articulate a discourse of the fun of a united protest.

Though meaning potential of musical sounds are vague for the most part, visuals and lyrics in Marsis’s video contextualise these. They articulate danger and chaos associated with a despotic elite pitted against the people and Marsis who are united, having fun and authentic. Together, these draw upon discourses of populism.

1. **Conclusion**

The language of subversive politics in Turkey must be spoken carefully. The large number of jailed journalists, students, musicians, military and political activists attest to this. Despite heavy-handed government actions in June 2013, dissent spilled into Turkish streets and filled cyberspace including protest music videos distributed on the internet. This study details how recontextualisations of social actions in one such video articulate popular and populist politics seen throughout the sample. Populist politics are articulated by constructing “the people” made up of protesters, the band and sympathisers who are positive, authentic, powerful, united in knowing and having fun. Though activated, this is usually without agency. In the sample, they “imagine” (Erdi Uçar), “dream” (Grup Yorum), “scream” (Bülent Şimşek), “talk wisely” (CehlanErtem) and “say” (Marsis). These representations authenticate protesters and musicians as being anti-establishment. In the sample, groups authenticate themselves, not only by lyrically uniting themselves with protesters, but visually by representing themselves as protesters (Dev, Osbi) and musically by harnessing subversive style potential (Osbi and underground rap, Marsis and indie rock). Protesters and music groups are pitted against the authorities made up of the police and politicians. Police are represented as violent, articulating the popular notion that police abuse their powers. Politicians’ actions connote they are despotic, out of touch and do not listen, again popular discourses concerning Erdoğan’s government. But what does this tell us about the strengths and limits of popular music and popular/ populist politics?

This close reading of Marsis’s video reveals that authenticity is a dominant discourse. It also reveals that critical discourses based on popular politics and populist notions of the people pitted against authorities are articulated. Symbolic actions taken from popular culture are recycled such as the painting of peace signs and the wearing of Guy Fawkes masks. Protest is celebrated and anti-establishment authenticity accentuated. In almost all these videos, Marsis included, there is no real articulation of the politics behind the protests. Though protesters want to be heard, what they are saying is absent. Articulations of political concerns and the offering of political alternatives are missing. Typical of the whole sample, Marsis’s video does not articulate the shortcomings of the AKP government’s neo-Liberal economic policies and their repercussions, such as public green spaces being sold off to private corporations for huge profits. There is no references to the many AKP policies which have seen a rise in social and religious conservatism, a common complaint amongst those protesting. Environmental concerns are absent, despite this being the original reason for the protests. In fact, these videos add little to political discussions surrounding the issues Gezi protests raised. Though they offer the chance for fans to “be anti-establishment”, it ought to be recognised that this has only so much political potential, maybe less potential than other modes of communication which in Turkey, at least for the moment do not exist. All the same, while the mainstream media ignored or backgrounded Gezi, these videos were one of the few spaces where political issues rooted in populism became popularised and may have contributed in a limited capacity to public dialogue or even the scale of the protests.

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