

Making sense of the protests in Turkey (and Brazil)

Urban Warfare in “Rebel Cities”*

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Many mainstream accounts of the recent Taksim-Gezi park protests have made references to the so-called Arab Spring events in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. Many asked the same question: Are the Taksim Protests Turkey’s Arab Spring? In this paper, we draw on David Harvey, distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography, to offer an alternative account to explain the events in Turkey.¹

The protests in Taksim started small: its initial aim was to stop developers from building a shopping-centre that was to be housed in a replica of a military barracks building demolished sixty years ago, resulting in the destruction of much of the Gezi Park, one of the last green spots in central Istanbul (Europe’s biggest city and the business capital of Turkey). However, the character of the protests changed when the Turkish police attacked protesters with considerable violence, and what started as an environmental protest in Istanbul quickly turned into a nation-wide political demonstration

¹ In particular his 2012 book, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso), and his 2008 *New Left Review* article, “THE RIGHT TO THE CITY”.

against the policies of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and his government. The protest rapidly gained support from a cross-section of society in Istanbul and other urban centres and became diversified. However, the protests were generally led and dominated by young middle class professionals and university students, and their demands for access, freedom and a new kind of urban living remained at the centre of the events. Issues related to the city and its quality of life dominated the protests.

It is no coincidence that the demonstrations started and concentrated in Istanbul, the largest and the most developed urban centre in Turkey. Istanbul is a unique example of contemporary urban development projects with the big urban transformation and regeneration projects. It was in the 1980s, soon after the military coup in Turkey, the city witnessed the beginning of the neoliberal transformation and the celebration of property rights, in the same way with the similar transformations happened in other metropolitan centres, like New York, London, Madrid, etc.

The metropolitan cities have now central significance in the whole system of capitalist surplus production. David Harvey describes this as “it is the metropolis that now constitutes a vast common produced by the collective labor expended on and in the city. The right to use that common must surely then be accorded to all those who have had a part in producing it. This is, of course, the basis for the claim to the right to the city on the part of the collective laborers who have made it. The struggle for the right to the city is against the powers of capital that ruthlessly feed upon and extract rents from the common life that others have produced.”²

In this sense, the Taksim-Gezi protests share a common ground with a great many diverse social movements focusing on the urban question, from India

² “The right to the city is not an exclusive individual right, but a focused collective right. It is inclusive not only of construction workers but also of all those who facilitate the reproduction of daily life: the caregivers and teachers, the sewer and subway repair men, the plumbers and electricians, the scaffold erectors and crane operators, the hospital workers and the truck, bus, and taxi drivers, the restaurant workers and the entertainers, the bank clerks and the city administrators.” (Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, pp. 78 and 137)

and Brazil to China, Spain, Argentina and the US.³ Just a few months before the Taksim-Gezi protests started, David Harvey spoke about the urban origins of the social movements and referred to Istanbul, saying that “What do we see in Istanbul? Cranes, everywhere.”⁴

Democracy and “representation”

Some of those hasty proclamations of a “Turkish Spring” concentrate on Tayyip Erdogan’s increasingly anti-democratic and authoritarian ruling style, and compare Erdogan’s rule with Mubarak’s. A certain slogan evoked some sympathy in the crowd: “Taksim will become Tahrir!” To them, the Taksim protests represent the next stage of the “Arab Spring”.⁵

Since Erdogan prides himself on being a democratically elected leader with strong grassroots support, his critics now pose questions such as how to define majority in representative democracies and whether a regime can still be considered a representative democracy when it does not follow policies to serve the interests of the majority. That is true that the 11 year long AKP rule has not led to the creation of a fair distribution of income, the benefits of huge economic success were not shared fairly and equally by all strata of the population, and as far as the *Human Development Index* is concerned Turkey

³ This is in line with David Harvey's reworking of Marxist political theory places the city first and foremost, in terms of its position as a generator of capital accumulation, as opposed to the factory/ work place. Harvey explains this situation as “the concept of work has to shift from a narrow definition attaching to industrial forms of labor to the far broader terrain of the work entailed in the production and reproduction of an increasingly urbanized daily life”. Harvey also discusses how urbanization will play a key role in social conflicts of today. (*Rebel Cities*, p.138)

⁴ “Urban Class Warfare: **Are Cities Built for the Rich?**”, *SPIEGEL ONLINE*, May 21, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/marxist-and-geographer-david-harvey-on-urban-development-and-power-a-900976.html>[accessed in August 2013].

⁵ “From Taksim and Rio to Tahrir, the smell of teargas”, 29 June 2013, <http://roarmag.org/2013/06/from-tahrir-and-rio-to-taksim-the-smell-of-teargas/>; “Turkey protests escalate, activists call for ‘revolution’”, <http://www.euronews.com/2013/06/02/turkey-protests-escalate-activists-call-for-revolution/>, 2 June 2013. (both accessed in July 2013)

is still a very unequal country.⁶ Most of the policies of the AKP favour the new bourgeoisie, the extended middle and upper middle classes rather than the vast majority of the working people. We agree with these observations. However, none of these observations are directly relevant in terms of whether the AKP regime represents the interests of majority in Turkey's representative democracy.

“Democracy” literally means “government (power) by the people. Usually the word is employed to designate the parliamentary regimes which developed in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century on the “British model.”⁷ A representative democracy is a system of government in which representatives are elected by popular vote. These representatives then poll their constituents on the various matters and represent them in the large meeting called the parliament. Representative democracy is the basis of constitutional democracy existing in many Western countries. All those countries which call themselves democratic have a representative system of democracy. It is suggested that this is the only form of democracy which is viable in the larger and more complex societies of today. Even though on principle, representatives are chosen by the people to act in their best interest, this does not mean that they necessarily act the way the people want them to in every circumstance. Theoretically power rests with the elected representatives, but this is obviously not the case since the policies implemented by governments are for most part contrary to the interests of the working people, and almost always in line with the interests of the powerful big business. This is a form of democracy but quite different from straight-up majority rule. This is what Alexis de Tocqueville called the “dictatorship of the majority.”⁸

⁶ <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TUR.html> (accessed in August 2013)

⁷ Timothy Besley and Stephen Coate, “Sources of Inefficiency in a Representative Democracy: A Dynamic Analysis”, *The American Economic Review*, 1998, pp. 139-156; Ernest Germain, *Marxism and Democracy*, Marxists' Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/1948/09/democracy.htm> (accessed in July 2013)

⁸ Morton J. Horwitz, “Tocqueville and the Tyranny of the Majority”, *The Review of Politics*, Volume 28, Issue 03, July 1966 , pp 293-307.

A system based on true democracy is participatory democracy, where members of the public are effectively members of the government by voting directly on all policies. However, this is considered unpractical and difficult to administer and as a result, most modern democracies are representative, and for most of the time the regimes exercise their hegemonic power moving between consent and coercion, which was once described by Antonio Gramsci as 'half man, half beast'- Gramsci took this term over from Machiavelli as the image of power as a centaur, a necessary combination of consent and coercion.⁹

Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan has been, by far, the most popular politician in Turkey after winning three consecutive elections by increasing his majority: 34 per cent in 2002, 47 per cent in 2007 and more than 50 per cent in 2011. His success and popularity is interlinked with Turkey's economic development: Erdogan's leadership coincided with an impressive growth spurt for Turkey which placed the country among the top ten emerging stars of the world alongside with the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Turkey's per capita income was tripled within a decade under Erdogan's leadership. Annual economic output of Turkish economy is at \$10,000 per person, it is about the same level as Brazil or Mexico and has been growing at a steady pace.¹⁰

Alongside with managing a growing economy, Erdogan's government achieved some other significant successes during this period. AKP regime has been dealing effectively with the coup leaders of Turkey's recent troubled past. A large number of generals were arrested, and one in three generals is now in prison. It was also under his leadership that significant steps were taken to calm the decades-long violent conflict with the country's significant Kurdish

⁹ Gramsci, *Historical Materialism and International Relations*, edited by Stephen Gill, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.52.

¹⁰ What has impressed many analysts over the past 10 years is the broad nature of Turkey's economic development. The industrial and services sectors have expanded alongside tourism. (J Hawksworth, "The World in 2050: Beyond the BRICs – a broader look at emerging market growth prospects", http://www.pwc.com/en_GX/gx/world-2050/pdf/world_2050_brics.pdf, accessed in August 2013)

minority.¹¹ However, these successes have fuelled Erdogan's sense of his own importance in Turkey's recent economic rise. As a result, it seems Tayyip Erdogan now believes that he is invincible. His excessive use of the state apparatus to establish his power base to such excess has led to accusations that he is indeed governing the country in the same autocratic style for which he had bitterly criticised the secular generals. After 11 years and three terms in power the result is the emergence of an increasingly authoritarian, religiously inspired and obsessively neoliberal system. It is based on a cleverly crafted hegemonic apparatus. This has been quite evident since 2011, with the start of violent repression of public protests, the jailing of journalists on suspicion of conspiring with terrorists, pressure being put upon newspaper owners to sack critical journalists; and the updating of the 1980s' military regime's anti-terrorism laws.¹²

All the above mentioned reactions and policies are characteristic of an administration that has spent too long in power and become far too confident about its capacity to maintain electoral power. Therefore, perhaps the current conflict – which has found its most powerful expression in the Taksim Gezi Park protest of tens of thousands of young people – boils down more than anything else to a style of ruling, the style of a leader who is increasingly intolerant of dissent. He gets angry too easily and reverts to his scrappy street fighter self. As his regime provides material improvement in the lives of large sections of Turkey's population, he becomes more and more arrogant and too sure of himself and his authoritarian ruling style. He is acting as if the national power is his own personal power because the millions of people, almost 53 per cent in the most recent elections, in Turkey's representational democracy had given their power to his party. These are all aspects of a regime becoming increasingly undemocratic and arrogant. But still none of these justify to put the events in Turkey in the same category with the so-called Arab Spring countries. Despite the obvious "Tahrir feel" of Taksim, one

¹¹ "Amending Turkish Constitution for Kurdish Question", 21 March 2013, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2013/03/2013336372537622.htm> (accessed in July 2013)

¹² Bulent Gokay, "Ragip Zarakolu, human rights symbol in modern Turkey", *OpenDemocracy*, 11 February 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/bulent-gokay/ragip-zarakolu-human-rights-symbol-in-modern-turkey>

must acknowledge that the significant differences are substantial. To start with, Mubarak was a dictator, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an elected prime minister. More importantly, Arab uprisings were mass events preceded by massive economic crises, while protest movement in Turkey is mainly a middle-class movement, mostly about young educated people defending lifestyle matters. Turkish protestors were, in general, better educated professionals and university students from reasonably well-off families, and they are better connected through technology. This is the new middle class of an emerging powerhouse. They are protesting about quality of life, about future opportunities, and freedom of expression.¹³

The mainstream terminology used by the Western media and experts, and shared by some Left/ Liberal accounts make the comparisons between Taksim and Tahrir Square referring to the ability of the street to topple a government. Some even claimed that “the Gezi Park resistance is a [revolutionary] turning point for the people of Turkey. After many decades they feel their power again”.¹⁴ However tempting, we believe such comparisons represent a gross over-simplification based on a range of superficial similarities many of which ignore the class analysis of the events. The political-economy background of the events in Turkey is very different from that of its war-torn Arab neighbors. Turkey’s protests are also very different from the discontent in some of its European neighbors, such as Greece and Spain where weak economies have brought the unemployed youth out onto the streets.

It is clear that the riot police in Turkey has employed a massive amount of force against these protestors, though it is not very different from Spanish, Italian, Greek, and British police tactics which we witnessed during the same weeks when hundreds of thousands of protestors walked against their crisis-ridden governments’ austerity policies. In those European countries comparable levels of police force were employed, with the same instruments --

¹³ “Turkish protestors are young, liberal and mad at PM, poll says”, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130605-turkey-protesters-istanbul-taksim-park-anger-erdogan>, 5 June 2013.

¹⁴ I. Zekeriya Alman, “Turkey: ‘Occupy Gezi’ -- Istanbul’s red-green uprising; Right to the City movement and the Turkish summer”, <http://links.org.au/node/3373>, 2 June 2013.

tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets-- to pacify the protesters and control the angry crowd. However, none of these European events were considered as a British, Greek or Spanish “Spring”!

Undoubtedly, the two events, Turkey’s and Egypt’s, started and centred in two symbolic squares- Tahrir and Taksim; just like Tahrir Square Taksim has become a strong reminder of the power of public space; a number of normally rigorously competing football fans unified in their opposition to their governments’ policies leaving aside their historical differences to defend “their city”; protesters demanded the resignation of the rulers in both cases; and the police responded harshly both in Tahrir and Taksim squares.¹⁵ But similarities end here. Still, a growing number of articles in the mainstream media focused mainly on Turkish government’s Islamism and the presence of secular groups within the demonstrations, presenting Turkey’s protests yet another example of an Oriental Muslim dictator oppressing his mostly secular subjects. “Islamists in power and secular, modern Turkey is in the streets and squares” says one such account.¹⁶ These interpretations tend to simplify complex and multi-layered events into gratifying morality tales about Western democratic secularists versus conservative Islamists.¹⁷ Such an interpretation is too ethnocentric, in the sense that those who look like us are “good guys”, those who look/ and dress less like us are “bad guys”. Such presentations have a tendency to see the Muslims only in clichés, and run the risk of creating a cultural caricature.¹⁸

¹⁵ A poll published in the *Hurriyet Daily News* revealed that 70 percent of the protesters insisted they did not “feel close” to any political party. (given in “In Istanbul’s Heart, Leader’s Obsession, Perhaps Achilles’ Heel”, *New York Times*, 7 June 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/08/world/europe/in-istanbuls-taksim-square-an-achilles-heel.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

¹⁶ “From Tahrir to Taksim”, <http://www.ericlee.info/blog/?p=763>, 12 June 2013.

¹⁷ ‘the fact that in Turkey, Egypt or Tunisia an “Islamic republic” with its own peculiarities was not born, as in Iran, is the reason for disorder and conflicts’, says Daniele Scalea in <http://www.4thmedia.org/2013/06/23/from-tahrir-to-taksim-the-carousel-of-revolt-in-the-mediterranean-periphery/> (accessed in July 2013)

¹⁸ Such Eurocentric prejudices had emerged over centuries, supported by the writings of leading Western thinkers/ writers. Immanuel Kant, for instance, divided humans into four racial categories, set apart from each other by differences in natural disposition. “Humanity”, he writes, is “at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites”. (in E.C. Eze, *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader*, Blackwell, 1997, pp.47, 55 and 63) Similarly, James Mill, great

Brazil, Turkey, (and Chile) -- Protests Follow Economic Success

It would be more appropriate to make comparisons between the demonstrations in Turkey and the protests in Brazil, which started just a couple of weeks after the protests in Taksim. One might even include the student protests in Chile in 2011 here¹⁹. Despite their significant differences, in particular in terms of the reactions from the Turkish and Brazilian authorities, both Turkish and Brazilian protesters seemed to be coming from similar class backgrounds and ages, and they were making similar demands of democracy in similarly innovative ways.²⁰

There are a number of other comparisons that might be made of Turkey and Brazil, (and Chile too): both are emerging powers with booming economies and dynamic, democratically elected governments; both countries are exerting considerable influence in the regions around them, and often being cited as models; both have been developing global ambitions. Brazil is one of the BRICS, B of the BRICS, and the largest economy in the Western hemisphere after the US. Turkey is at a critical junction of Europe and the Middle East, and is a key geopolitical player in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East. Both countries pull considerable weight in affairs far beyond their own borders.

There are, of course, some divergences too. The immediate, explicit issues which led to the protests are not exactly the same, but similarly urban: the government's plan to redevelop Gezi Park, an urban park next to Istanbul's

British philosopher and historian of the 19th century, wrote a five-volume history of India to demonstrate how deficient the Indians are in governance, science, philosophy, art, and technology. Today other Western writers repeat a similar line. Niall Ferguson, for instance, writes, "Without the spread of British rule around the world", colonised people, such as Chinese and Indians, would not have parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, incorrupt government, and individual freedoms. (Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2003)

¹⁹ Massive protests of August 2011 or the Chilean Education Conflict (as labelled in Chilean media), a series of ongoing student-led protests across Chile, demanding a new framework for education in the country. Beyond the specific demands regarding education, there is a feeling that the protests reflect a "deep discontent" among some parts of society with Chile's high level of inequality. Recently, following the start of the protest movement in Brazil, mostly peaceful demonstrations started again across the country to demand education reform.

²⁰ "Peace is over, Turkey is here?" was one placard in Sao Paulo. (Reuters, 14 June 2013)

Taksim Square in Turkish case, it was very much "a right to the city" type of a movement; an increase in public transport fares in Sao Paulo in Brazilian case- for free bus fares and under the slogan "*Copa pra quem?*" (Whose Cup?) tens of thousands of young Brazilians took to the streets, occupied and set-up neighborhood assemblies to reclaim their city from neoliberal forces. The governments are not at all alike, Turkey having a long-serving popular leader who heads a conservative Islamist party; and Brazil with a relatively new president, a former leftist guerrilla who was imprisoned and tortured in the 1970s during military dictatorship, heading a leftist popular movement. But there is a very important similarity: they are both representative democracies. Not only that, each country has a powerful military that had been involved in politics in the not too distant past. But now, both countries have managed to put their armies in the barracks, and therefore their democracies considered quite stable. Based on their world-class model of economic progress, development and reasonably stable democracies, both countries are often cited as examples of previously underdeveloped countries able to overcome their troubled political past. In this sense, there is no Turkey Spring as there is no Brazilian Spring. This is not Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. Democratically elected governments in Turkey and in Brazil are far more resilient and their leaders far more popular and secure in their power than the North African dictators swept away by the events of 2011. Despite his increasingly authoritarian policies, Turkey's Erdogan still remains immensely popular among the country's poor and deeply religious majority.

However, as can be seen in many "democratic" countries, democratically elected leaders often come to have an inflated sense of knowing better than their citizens what is best for their citizens, and they do have a tendency to favour prestigious infrastructure projects rather than what affects most peoples' daily lives. This is exactly what is at stake both in Turkey and Brazil. So, in one sense, both in Brazil and Turkey, participatory democracy was forcefully diluted among an orgy of neoliberal mega-projects, generating dubious profits for a small elite in their respective countries. All this also created an inflated self-image around these mega structures for the leaders. In Turkish case, it is the ruling AKP's collusion with powerful business

interests in the so –called re-development of Istanbul. In Brazilian case, it revolves around massive public funds for the hosting of the World Cup and the Olympics.²¹ This is common feature of capitalist system in the context of so called urban re-development and cultural investment in and around many modern metropolitan centres. This is justified by an economic argument around the importance to capitalism of land, rent and speculation more so than straightforward production. “Over the past 30-40 years, where cities try to brand themselves and sell a piece of their history. What is the image of a city? Is it attractive to tourists? Is it trendy? So a city will market itself.”²² There are many passages describing this situation in David Harvey’s *Rebel Cities*, such as:

there is always a strong social and discursive element at work in the construction of such causes for extracting monopoly rents, since there will be, at least in many people’s minds, no other place than London, Cairo, Barcelona, Milan, Istanbul, San Francisco, or wherever, in which to gain access to whatever it is that is supposedly unique to such places.²³

Or:

Much of the corruption that attaches to urban politics relates to how public investments are allocated to produce something that looks like a common but which promotes gains in private asset values for privileged property owners. The distinction between urban public goods and urban commons is both fluid and dangerously porous. How often are development projects subsidized by the state in the name of the common interest when the true beneficiaries are a few landholders, financiers, and developers?²⁴

The recent events in Turkey and Brazil are examples to how authorities respond to the crowd when their “grand” projects of neoliberal restructuring were challenged by their citizens, many of whom may have voted for the ruling

²¹ There is a background to this: since 2008, the ongoing pacification programmes in Rio’s favelas which entail a neoliberal urbanized approach to social and class warfare through the application of a range of different public policies to “troubled” neighbourhoods, such as special police units (Pacification Police Units, UPP) patrolling favelas to help broker peace being warring drug traffickers.

²² Interview with David Harvey: *Rebel Cities & Urban Resistance Part II*, 7 January 2013, <http://www.zcommunications.org/contents/190562>, accessed in August 2013.

²³ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p. 103.

²⁴ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.78.

parties. No representative democracy is fully democratic, and the fact that the way the Turkish, Brazilian and Chilean rulers' not fully representing the demands of their populations is not very unique either. Even in the UK, which is generally considered one of the best examples of the Western parliamentary democracy, just over ten years ago in February - March 2003, Tony Blair's Labour government utterly ignored huge demonstrations, largest ever in the history of his country, including the two-million strong anti-war protestors in London, and pressed on with a disastrous war policy against Iraq. The surveys of that time, March 2003, pointed out that fifty-five per cent of Britons agreed that the London marchers were right because the war was delivered on false pretences and delivered little other than bloodshed. There were also global protests against the war in Iraq: three million people protested on the streets of Rome, considered as the largest anti-war rally ever in human history, and anything between 10 and 30 million in other metropolises around the world. Still, none of this made any serious impact on the decisions of the Blair government regarding starting a disastrous war in Iraq. The Western governments' refusal to listen to the anti-war protesters was such a dramatic illustration of the limits of parliamentary democracy, but also such events shaped a strong and growing taste for direct action, one can find many examples from the anti-Vietnam War actions in the 1970s to the occupy movements of the 2008-13.²⁵

Until recently, Turkey, Chile and Brazil were the envy of much of the world. Their economic rise has been spectacular. These were among the fastest developing countries on earth. All three countries have seen a strong period of mass growth, economically and population-wise. Sustained growth brought in enough tax revenues to improve both education and health spending. The boom also allowed the governments to increase minimum wages significantly without any apparent damage to employment. As a result of governments'

²⁵ Guardian/ICM poll, in February 2003, shows that at least one person from 1.25 million households in Britain went on Saturday's anti-war march in London, confirming estimates that between one million and two million people went on the march. The poll shows it is the prime minister's personal standing rather than the Labour party which has suffered the wrath of anti-war voters. Labour's standing is down four points from 43% last month to 39% this month but the government still maintains a healthy eight-point lead over the Conservatives. (*The Guardian*, Tuesday 18 February 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/feb/18/politics.iraq>)

extension of welfare, health and educational provision, a large section of people in Turkey, and Brazil, has gained access to better public services.²⁶

If we try to make a connection between these economic success stories and the recent protest movements, first observation will be about how a strong cycle of economic enrichment over the past ten years has changed the public's expectations of its politicians. Since Turkish, Chilean and Brazilian regimes achieved sustained growth and employment, delivering on growth and employment is no longer enough to satisfy the majority of their populations. Citizens increasingly hold their leaders accountable to improve the quality of public services, and to expand the boundaries of participatory democracy, and listen to their concerns closely. One therefore can consider the protests in Chile, Turkey and Brazil as a symptom of radically shifting demands, driven mostly by these emerging power houses' economic success. These are democratic protest movements in societies experiencing rapid change where the public's demand for better services and more democracy at local as well as national levels grow at a faster pace than their governments' ability to provide.

Despite the multiplication of the slogans and emerging chaos about the aims of the protesters, it is important to note that the protest of both Turkey's and Brazil's urban youth are first and foremost a response to the ruling regimes' grandiose neoliberal projects of urban transformation, gentrifying schemes, with the aim of creating high-tech malls, skyscrapers, and expensive giant high-tec stadiums. All this is part of "the violent neoliberal attack upon the public provision of social public goods over the last thirty years or more".²⁷

It is also important to note that the educated urban youth is at the forefront of the resistance to such neoliberal assault. To many analysts, young people's role in the protest movements came as a surprise because young people had been identified as apolitical and individualistic for decades. With the recent protests movements in the summer of 2013, the urban youth proved that they cared about how current policies of their governments are affecting their life,

²⁶ http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2013/07/08/130708ta_talk_surowiecki, <http://theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=10040>, <http://www.globalenvision.org/library/3/1377> (all accessed in July 2013)

²⁷ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p. 85.

urban space, their country and their fellow citizens, and that they are willing to protest resiliently.

Youth and urban “warfare”

Within neoliberal narratives, youth are mostly defined as a consumer market, a drain on the economy, or stand for trouble. ... Young people increasingly have become subject to an oppressive disciplinary machine that teaches them to define citizenship through the exchange practices of the market and to follow orders and toe the line in the face of oppressive forms of authority. They are caught in a society in which almost every aspect of their lives is shaped by the dual forces of the market and a growing police state. The message is clear: Buy/ sell/ or be punished.²⁸

Much like the protesters in Turkey, most demonstrators in Brazil have jobs and are well educated. They are mainly from the country's growing middle classes, which government figures show has ballooned by some 40 million over the past decade amid a commodities-driven economic boom. Unlike countries such as Greece and Spain where weak economies have brought the unemployed out onto the streets, the discontent in Brazil and Turkey has been created by strong economic growth.²⁹ As standards of living have risen, so have people's expectations for better services and wider participation in decision-making. Brazilian and Turkish youth are not protesting because they want to overthrow a dictator or are angry about massive unemployment. They are upset, and rightly so, about the priorities and the manner in which these have been pursued – without sufficient consultation - by their governments.

²⁸ Henry A. Giroux, “The Violence of Organized Forgetting”, *Truthout*, 22 July 2013, <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/17647-the-violence-of-organized-forgetting> (accessed in July 2013)

²⁹ Anthony Faiola and Paula Moura, “Middle-class rage sparks protest movements in Turkey, Brazil, Bulgaria and beyond”, *The Washington Post*, 28 June 28 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-06-28/world/40250885_1_turkey-new-government-arab-spring. (accessed in August 2013)

They demand the right to participate in the planning and distribution of their country's wealth. In both countries, more and more people demand the right to be heard and to be involved, linked to the feeling that they aren't really able to get involved. They want the right to determine their own futures. They are no longer prepared to be talked down to by the government.³⁰ The protests can in one sense be read as the articulation by those involved of what a fair and just world might be.³¹ Turkish and Brazilian youth, rejecting the neoliberal notion that democracy and markets are the same, have not only addressed some of the current injustices while reclaiming their urban space, but they also started to produce new ideas with a new and very imaginative political language.

The whole process is almost a textbook case to what David Harvey describes as “the urbanization of capital”:

The reproduction of capital passes through processes of urbanization in myriad ways. But the urbanization of capital presupposes the capacity of capitalist class powers to dominate the urban process. This implies capitalist class domination not only over state apparatuses,... but also over whole populations – their lifestyles as well as their labor power, their cultural and political values as well as their mental conceptions of the world. That level of control does not come easily, if at all. The city and the urban process that produces it are therefore major sites of political, social, and class struggles.³²

In the final analysis, we believe that the protest movements in the urban areas of Turkey and Brazil represent the direct responses of youth in the search of “a different way of urban living from that which was being imposed upon them by capitalist developers and the state”.³³ In our view, the demonstrations can be connected to a wider discussion developed by David Harvey around “the right to the city” which is a right to democratic control over the process of

³⁰ James Surowiecki, “Middle Class Militants”, *The New Yorker*, 8 July 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2013/07/08/130708ta_talk_surowiecki. (accessed in August 2013)

³¹ “Turkish protesters reject neo-liberalism not Islamism”, *ahramonline*, 4 June 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/73116/World/Region/Interview-Turkish-protesters-reject-neoliberalism-.aspx>. (accessed in August 2013)

³² David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.65.

³³ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.21

urbanization. The specific aims of the protesters in Istanbul and Sao Paolo, to keep a green space as a public park and to defend affordable transportation fees for urban public, are in a general sense their attempt to reclaim their city, their urban space. Whatever the initial results, or lack of specific gains, of the recent protests, Turkish and Brazilian youth have already created “a critical mass of political energy” for a “struggle to fashion an alternative to globalisation that does not trade on monopoly rents in particular or cave in to multinational capitalism in general”, and initiated “a platform for what an alternative urbanization project might look like”.³⁴

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* “Rebel Cities” is a reference to David Harvey’s 2012 book, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012).

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³⁴ Matt Mahon, “Interview with David Harvey”, *The White Review*, May 2012, <http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-david-harvey/> (accessed in August 2013); Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, pp. 88 and 111.