

## **HRANT DINK MEMORIAL WORKSHOP**

### **New Forms of Social Protest, May 25-26, 2012**

Sabancı University  
in collaboration with  
Hrant Dink Foundation and Istanbul Policy Center

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In our Call for Papers for the Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop 2012, we had maintained that the last few years have witnessed an eruption of mass social unrest and bottom-up social action finding new ways of expression in terms of organization, strategy, and communication. We had called for papers with theoretical and practical insights that could broaden our understanding of what is happening at the intersections of these social protests and new modes of being.

In response to our call, we received many well-informed abstracts, allowing us to form well-connected panels addressing various aspects of new forms of social protest. A summary of these panels is as follows:

In the first panel, titled Politics and Memory, Fatmagül Berktaş made the opening remarks. She began her comments by referring to a symposium in which she had participated together with Hrant Dink back in 2001. In that panel, Hrant Dink said that the existing structures always reminded him of the fact that he was different. Berktaş argued that one can only develop a critical eye if s/he could keep a distance from her/his identity group. One does not have to be a member of an identity group in order to fight for the rights of that particular group. She based this argument on Jacques Rancière's work, as well as the well-known slogan of the May 1968 student movement: "We are all German Jews." She maintained that our given identities (the ones that we are born into) can be used for opening up a space for political struggle. It can serve the birth of the new. Berktaş drew attention to the human agency –à la Hannah Arendt- in making political struggle possible.

Alparslan Nas' paper titled "Rethinking Diyarbakır Prison: Musealization as Resistance Activism" focused on the museum as a space of micro-resistance. His particular reference was the Diyarbakır Prison and the debates about turning it into a museum. Nas developed a critical argument towards the idea of the museum. He referred to the museum as the "afterlife of dead objects" (à la Marcel Proust) and underlined the importance of the museums' interaction with the city in which it is located. As an example, he referred to

the significance of establishing a connection with the memoirs of key literary figures like Mehmed Uzun who was placed in Diyarbakır Prison back in 1972. He also took a critical stance towards the idea of turning the Diyarbakır Prison into an educational complex. Overall, the paper addressed the shortcomings of musealization.

Eray Çaylı, in his paper titled “Strategies and Tactics of Architectural Memorialization in ‘Witness-Sites’: the Case of the Madımak Hotel” gave a visual narration of the Sivas Massacre of June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1993 during which 37 intellectuals who were gathered at the Madımak Hotel for an Alevi cultural festival were killed as a result of arson. Turkish state authorities have transformed the hotel into a Science and Culture Center in 2011 after a long period of rejecting similar attempts at constituting a memorial site. Çaylı portrayed how this Center incited a memorialization despite the opposition of the Alevi associations who argued that the Science and Culture Center was a misrepresentation of the past. Hence, despite such misrepresentation, it had paradoxically incited a form of memorialization.

Anoush Suni in her paper titled “Renovation as Resistance: The Restoration of the Habap Fountains” portrayed the process of the restoration of the Habap Fountains that were built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Armenians in the village of Habap (officially called Ekinözü) in Elazığ. The fountains were left to ruin in the course of the past 100 years. Habap was the birthplace of Fethiye Çetin’s grandmother Heranush whom she described in her book, *My Grandmother*. She maintained how the restoration of the fountains was a form of resistance since they became the centerpiece of a protest against silencing of history. She argued that the restoration of the fountains was also a form of protest due to its gender activism. The stories of women such as Heranush who remained in Anatolia after the Armenian Genocide were all but forgotten. The restoration gave them their voice back. The project included a third level of resistance in its effort to reverse the process of destruction by rebuilding what had been purposefully destroyed.

During the discussion, the chair of the panel, Rober Koptaş, underlined the importance of not necessarily moving from a political solution to memory (as was the case, for instance, in Germany after the Second World War) but rather insisting on building memory even when a political solution is not in sight.

In the second panel of the workshop titled Occupation as Social Protest, the first paper was presented by Jermaine Ma. It was titled “What about Occupy? An Integrative Approach to Political Protest Movements”. Ma presented a test of the regime hypothesis that was suggested by Kitschelt in 1986 in view of protest movements such as Occupy, that began in September 2011 in New York City. She compared the Occupy movement with anti-World Trade Organization movements that became important in late 1990s. Ma suggested an integrative approach by integrating rational-choice approaches (such as Kitschelt’s) and behavioral-constructivist approaches.

Umut Kocagöz’s paper titled “Counter Occupation and the Commons” contained a description of the occupation of Starbucks at Bosphorus University, Istanbul that was realized by a group of students in December 2011. The occupation of Starbucks lasted for

80 days. Kocagöz described his first hand experiences. He not only adopted a critical stance towards the occupation but also considered the possibilities that it has generated.

Josef Burton in his paper titled “Youth Activism at the End of History” also presented first-hand information about the Starbucks Occupation at Bosphorus University. He made an attempt to situate the conditions that led to the occupation within the normalization of certain practices as a result of the uncritical reception of neo-liberalism in Turkey. He, for instance, argued how it began to be perceived as normal for Starbucks to be present in a university campus. He also portrayed how neo-liberal inequalities were viewed as normal (the normalcy of arguments such as “those who prefer Starbucks can go there while others can opt for the cheaper *Kantin* option”). It was this uncritical acceptance of neo-liberal practices that prompted the Starbucks Occupation. He referred to the post neo-liberal idea of youth: one who is interested in new politics by being critical of neo-liberalism.

The chair of the panel, Ayfer Bartu, pointed to the importance of the Starbucks Occupation since it had opened up the possibilities of other forms of criticism at Bosphorus University. In other words, she argued that the Starbucks Occupation had opened up a new political space.

The third panel of the workshop was titled Political Engagement in Neoliberal Times. In this panel, Simten Coşar explored the paradoxical relationship between neoliberalism and the public realm. Neoliberalism rejects the existence of a public realm where collective action can take place and rights-based decisions can be made. Yet it creates and imposes its own public. The dissolution of the public realm in Turkey was carried out through a manufacturing of consent based on emphasis on Turkishness and Islam, the rejection of all claims of social justice, and instrumentalization of Islam following the 1980 coup. The 1990’s was a transition period where identity-based civil society activism compatible with neo-liberalism was allowed to flourish. The period since 2000 has been a period where neo-liberalism has built its own public realm. The characteristics of this period have been managerialization of politics, flexible labor markets, and the use of economic crises and instability as a threat to opposition movements, the replacement of rights-based social claims with a framework based on traditional and Islamic solidarity, and constant shifts between authoritarian and consent-based politics.

In her paper titled “Feminist Claims to the Public: Articulation into Neoliberal Preferences or against the TINA Argument?” İnci Özkan-Kerestecioğlu covered the same period with an emphasis on feminist politics and its relationship to the claims for a public space. Whereas the feminism of the period prior to the 1980’s sought to increase women’s participation in the public realm, the feminism of the 1980’s challenged the public/private distinction. The 1990’s brought institutionalization and along with it the abandonment of the commitment to a new kind of politics. The period since 2002 has been a period where neoliberalism became public and civil society became more state-like. According to Özkan-Kerestecioğlu, whereas the 1980’s put gender equality on the agenda, this last period has been characterized by a discourse of virtual equality.

Gülden Özcan continued the exploration of the relationship between neoliberalism and the public sphere but shifted the focus on the different public spheres of labor and the bourgeoisie. Whilst the bourgeois public sphere in contemporary societies consists of the sphere of computers, corporations, shopping malls etc. (the sphere of reification), the public sphere of the working class consists of traditional spaces such as trade unions. Özcan gave an overview of the working class's public spheres from the early republic to the current period emphasizing the expansion of working class organizations in the period following the 1960 constitution and the repression following the 1980 coup. She observed that since the 1990's there has been an expansion of civil society supported by the European Union. However, these NGO's, some of which are funded by corporations, have taken over some of the duties of the state and are usually operated by upper-middle class people. For that reason, they cannot be considered a public sphere of the working class. She argued that in the period following the electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party in 2002, which is a victory of the new elite, the workers have not been able to create and experience an authentic working class public sphere due to the oppression of labor organizations and the growth of the industrialized public sphere that is able to manipulate the working class's interests.

In her paper titled "Broken Promises of Liberalism and The Politics of Disillusionment", Aslı Vatansever observed that liberalism has failed to deliver on its promises to the public and this has resulted in disillusionment with traditional forms of politics, including traditional left politics. Pluralistic, direct-action oriented and horizontally organized left movements are replacing labor unions and labor parties as the modes of left political activity. Under these conditions, the internet has emerged as a site of resistance, so much so that any resistance movement will be of limited benefit unless backed by cyberspace resistance. With these changes in politics and society 19<sup>th</sup> century paradigms of social theory and Marxism is less relevant.

Salpi Ghazarian's paper examined recent protest movements in Armenia. The period leading to and right after Armenia's independence was, according to Ghazarian, a period of public political involvement and high hopes in politics. Since then, there has been a growing disillusionment with the political process due to unresponsive governments and unreliable media, which acts as the government's mouthpiece. In effect, the fact that the post-independence political scene is not significantly different from the pre-independent political scene has made the public to question traditional politics. Environmental issues have been the rallying point for new social movements just as they had been in the independence movement twenty years ago. However, the current protest movements are different from the past ones. They are egalitarian and have a non-hierarchical structure. They seek a new politics based on listening to the concerns of all without restricting any point of view. They are filling in the gap left by political parties and reject traditional politics. In this new activism, Ghazarian finds both cause for concern and optimism: on the one hand the rejection of politics is a cause for concern; on the other hand the young people taking a stand for themselves is a cause for hope.

The fourth panel of the workshop was titled Art and Resistance. In this panel, Begum Özden Firat offered a critique of the preoccupation with being creative in activism. The

mobilization against the demolition of the Emek movie theatre in Istanbul has formed a basis for several creative protests such as interrupting the minister of culture's speech with toy musical instruments. Recent activism was initially seen as an alternative to dull traditional protest movements and was welcomed by the public. However, Fırat observed that the pressure to come up with new creative and entertaining forms of protest risks becoming an end in itself and reproduces the commodity culture it is supposed to be critical of. According to Fırat, we should go back to what creativity is about: creativity is a social relation embedded in everyday life rather than an individual achievement. If activists focus too much on tactics, they neglect movement building and long-term strategizing.

Sigrid Schiesser's paper titled "Street Art and Place Making in Krasnodar, Southern Russia" looked at street art as a new form of social interaction in Krasnodar, Southern Russia. Despite the current neoliberal order, Schiesser observed that the Soviet concept of "common" and Soviet urban still was influential. Street art produces and revolutionizes social spaces. Street art activities, which are deemed not to be art by the majority in the city, are completely new post-Soviet activities bringing together individual action, participation, freedom of speech and opinion.

In her paper, Tina Bastajia explored several works that combine mobile technologies, geo-located services and social interaction to produce augmented reality: Pera pARKours uses augmented reality (via the Layar mobile browser) to re/dis/locate fragments from the archive; Coffee Deposits:::Topologies of Chance is an interactive cross-media project by Tina Bastajian (US/NL) and Seda Manavoğlu (NL/TR) that "traces a multiplicity of layers and movements in Istanbul via mobile and ad-hoc Turkish coffee encounters".

The fifth panel was a film screening panel. First, 5 short films called Multimedia for Dialogue in cooperation with Hrant Dink Foundation and Galata Fotoğrafhanesi, were viewed. All these short films were shot by Armenian and Turkish artists in the border town of Gümrü. Secondly, Aris Nalçı presented his film project titled "The False Witness of Public Opposition: Media".

The sixth panel of the workshop was titled Emerging Movements, New Strategies I. Banu Bargu's paper was about the emergence of a new front in war in the form of "human shields." Focusing on two cases of resistance against the war, namely the International Solidarity Movement in Gaza which convened as a reaction to Rachel Cori's being crushed by a bulldozer, and the Mothers and Peace Initiative in Turkey organized by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) to cross the Iraqi border, Bargu suggested that both cases were significant attempts of resistance against the war, despite the fact that they did not achieve the desired number of followers. Bargu argued that although these were unrelated events, they signified the emergence of a new form of agency on the stage of politics along with a new front of morality. Thus, adoption of active shielding became a strategy of resistance, as human shields entered into a peculiar relationship with international law, defining themselves as "civilian subjects." In the discussion following Bargu's presentation, possible links between human shields and suicide bombers were

debated, with some participants strictly criticizing and opposing any perspective linking the two.

Emre Can Dağlıoğlu's paper also tackled new forms of resistance by exploring the role of Wikileaks in the Arab revolutions. Dağlıoğlu discussed the emergence of this new form of resistance in the context of information and hegemony, as conceptualized by Foucault and Arendt. Considering Wikileaks as a media organization which reveals the inner-workings of the "system", he situated the Wikileaks incidence in the realm of conspiracy theories and argued that, paradoxically, the conspiracy power of the system increased as the means of communication became more transparent. An interesting assertion included in Dağlıoğlu's presentation was that spaces of power and hegemony became operational through information. Although Wikileaks could be seen as a medium of opposition and resistance, Dağlıoğlu also pointed out the hegemonic power of Wikileaks with regard to access to information, which was pinpointed by several other scholars such as Slavoj Žižek, Bülent Somay and Özlem Dalkıran. Following Dağlıoğlu's presentation, the audience raised questions about the potential and actual impact of Wikileaks on the rulers. Wikileaks' positive impact on Turkish government through its endorsing influence in nationalist stance was widely debated.

In her paper titled "Spheres of Counterpublics: Rituals as Protest", Pınar Büyüktaş discussed the power relationships between life and death; and death and politics. Posing a question about the significance of thousands of people's convening at the funeral of Hrant Dink, Büyüktaş considered that gathering is a space for oppositional action. She pointed out the discourses in the mainstream media regarding Dink's funeral, the discourse which constructed an act of "awakening" which, then, undermined collective memory, social wounds, and what they corresponded to in life, rather than in the politics of death. Büyüktaş also emphasized the increasingly common use of the concept of risk, which imposed the necessity of being alert when confronted with death, while introducing the concept of "security" in order to avoid such imposing concept of risk. She, then, contextualized the funerals in general, and Hrant Dink's funeral in particular, through the concepts death, justice and politics surrounded by those.

Panel seven was on Global Perspectives on New Forms of Social Protest. David Graeber's presentation discussed the "creation of reality" by means of money and power. Graeber explored the generation of a pervasive reality based on power in the context of the Foucaultian idea of professional elites and their ideology. Tackling the ways in which masses are mobilized politically, he explored "populist games" led by the elites. He pinpointed the role of the "cultural elite" and cynicism of the left.

Amr Shalakany's presentation was on the use of social media in Arab Spring as a medium of resistance which brought different classes together. Shalakany discussed the so-called revolution of facebook along with new social forms of interaction. He gave a vivid account of the launching of the protests in Egypt, emphasizing the absence of a concrete idea and leadership at the beginning of the protests. He then elaborated on the reactions of the political parties to the resistance movement, which then gave rise to a

cacophony of voices, through which Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the most dominant one. Shalakany tackled the links between military, judiciary and electoral politics in the context of the Egyptian resistance movement. He also pointed out the media coverage which entailed considerable romanticization, generalizing all Egyptians. Shalakany's presentation ended with a discussion of current state of protests, and a general evaluation on the politics in Egypt. Following Shalakany's presentation, several issues were brought up by the audience including the role of and space for the "Turkish model" in the reformation of institutions and politics in Egypt; and the tyranny of rule-of-law as a paradoxical process.

The eighth panel of the workshop was on Gendered Resistances. Jennifer Petzen's paper posed a critical stance against activism, particularly focusing on the recent cases of feminist and queer activism in Berlin. Referring to prevalent racism in feminist and queer activism as homonationalism, Petzen talked about internalized racism in these movements and resulting isolation of feminists and queer of color in white-dominated progressive groups in Berlin. Despite the anti-racist claims widely made by white activists, Petzen emphasized a process of "subtle racialization of sexuality", while delegating race to a place outside Germany.

Federica Giardini provided a critical account of Mediterranean democracies with regard to their sexist characters and with a specific reference to Italy. Exploring intertwined processes of "womanization of media", objectification of women in politics based on a discourse on "participation", she questioned the citizenship rights and practices in Italy, while she pointed out the re-opening of citizenship and re-appropriation of public space. In the discussion following Giardini's and Petzen's talks, several questions regarding the links and intersections between Islamophobia, post-coloniality and homonationalism were raised and discussed widely.

The ninth panel of the workshop was titled Emerging Movements, New Strategies II. In this panel Bülent Bilmez focused on the recent social opposition movement in Dersim which emerged in the context of the construction of power plants. Bilmez asserted that this movement simultaneously used various discourses which, indeed, contradicted one another; carried out in a synthetic manner rather than eclectic. Undertaking a historical account of Dersim contextualized as an exemplar of opposition in many fronts (religious, linguistic, ethnic and political), Bilmez emphasized the prevalence of Orientalism. He, then, explored the complex character of the current opposition movement which made references to sacred, religious values and places, in addition to ecological values and principles, through a strictly anti capitalist (nearly Stalinist) discourse. Bilmez suggested that this movement entailed not only environmentalism, but also religious/sacred values, linguistic heritage, along with the Kurdish national movement.

Polina Gioltzoglou's paper was about the crack in Greek politics which started emerging in 2008 based on a revolt that erupted following the assassination of a 15-year-old boy by the police. This incidence triggered riots at an unprecedented scale in Greece. Then, it took a different stance as it evolved to entail much broader issues and resentments, and the movement began to take an anti-state apparatus position. Thus, the assassination of a

young boy operated as a cohesive force for many groups in the Greek society who, indeed, had very dissimilar demands. These groups generated a common discourse on the hegemonic character of the Greek state and its distribution of privileges to financial capital, rather than the people, as “money for the banks, bullets for the youth” became the slogan of the movement. Gioltzoglou underlined the performance of subjectivity, along with the emerging solidarity not only in Greece, but also across Europe, where protests emerged in solidarity with the Greek protest movement.

In the final paper, Assel Bitabarova described the many features of the riots that took place in December 2011 in the oil town of Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan as an example of social protest, civic consciousness, and political rallying.

Our call for papers that would provide us with theoretical and practical insights into new ways of social protest and new modes of being, resulted in the organization of a workshop which indeed enabled all participants to gain a broader and deeper understanding of many innovative forms of social protest, ranging from restoration and renovation to occupation, from art and film-making to acting as human shields, from Wikileaks to funerals. Many such novel forms of social protest in geographies ranging from Egypt to Greece, from US to Turkey, and from Armenia to Kazakhstan were covered in the workshop. As the organizers, we were very happy to witness the synergy resulting from many jointly-gained insights and also to witness how, amidst heated discussions, international conferences can be a binding force among academics, providing a basis of hope for the future.