The politics of the digital technoscape in Turkey: Surveillance and resistance of Kurds

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The Politics of Digital Technoscape in Turkey: Surveillance and Resistance of Kurds

Abstract

How do digital technologies function for the state in its pacification strategies concerning the dissident political bodies, their subjectivities and communicative capabilities? How does resistance take place against the surveillance practices which come to the fore as a state form, as a means of social control, and as a mechanism of creating manageable and disciplined crowds? Drawing upon the ethnographic data, this article attempts to discuss these questions, by focusing on the contemporary politics surrounding the Kurdish movement in Turkey. In particular, it presents an analysis of the digitized surveillance and resistance of Kurds both of which come to function as crucial components of the contemporary power regimes in Turkey.

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Introduction

This article explores the ways in which the use of digital technologies has become a political power in Kurdish/Turkish relations in novel ways. Kurdish/Turkish relations have historically been shaped by the Kurdish insurgent nationalist movement, claiming the cultural and political rights of Kurds, including the official recognition of Kurds as a unique cultural group as well as the free exercise of their cultural identity and language in state institutions, and the pacification regimes of the state that regards this movement as a major threat to the territorial and political status quo in the region. ¹ The object and target of the contemporary form of power is the political bodies, acting and speaking for this movement, their political subjectivities and their communicative capabilities.

This new form of power, which makes use of digital technologies, functions in two paradoxical and related ways. As a state form, it captures the flow of information

¹ See Kemal Kirişçi, The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy (İstanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2004) and Hakan Özoğur, Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State (New York: NYU Press, 2004).
and colonizes physical and cognitive spaces of bodies in their daily practices and communications through preemptive, decentralized and routinized digital surveillance, and accordingly feeds off the juridical and police systems where collected data become evidences to put thousands of people on counterterrorism trials with accusations of the involvement, support or sympathy for terrorism. As a form of resistance, on the other hand, it enables the rupture of the control over information networks and provoking new language to emerge that both negotiate, and resist the all-encompassing colonization of communication. Importantly, Kurdish activists have been using these technologies, particularly the Internet, to produce effective critiques of these trials, the preemptive surveillance, and to continue generating new discourses and representations, asserting their ethnic and political identities. While neither the control nor the resistance of Kurds take place only in digital spaces through the applications of information technologies; these technologies provide a new rationale for the state control and for the Kurdish resistance in terms of creating new communicative spaces where all public spaces are shrunk due to the prevalent forms of surveillance.

Apart from an attempt to show that the Turkish state has become a truly technological surveillant state, particularly in relation to the dissident politics which is not limited to the Kurdish movement but enacted on Kurds more forcefully, this study aims to discuss the ways in which the surveilled bodies, namely Kurds, experience, manage and resist the new forms of power in practice, in their daily lives and in their political activities. In doing so, it also aims to contribute to the literature on the new forms of power that largely focuses on surveillance or resistance in western societies.

In what follows, I will first engage with some of the relevant theoretical literature on modern and postmodern forms of control as well as on resistance and draw an outline the ways in which new control regimes operationalizes its power on
surveilled bodies and the immanent potentialities of resistance can arise in the forms of resisting counterpublics. Then, I will briefly contextualize the evolving political situation within the history of Kurdish/Turkish relations, and present the analysis of my ethnographic research that I have completed in 2012 with 40 users of communication technologies in different cities of Turkey. I will suggest that the technological forms of manipulative surveillance contributes to the colonization of communicability of bodies, by amputating the ordinary language, shrinking the boundaries between public and private spaces and distorting the intimate relationship between the users and their tools of communications that allow them to have a constant contact with their acquaintances and other strangers that they like to reach. In response to this, the resistive politics aims to gain the means of communicability particularly through the use of the Internet (mostly the social media) to create new languages, new selves, new modes of speech and new places for discussions and exchange that do not only address the Kurdish users but also the non-Kurds who are unfamiliar with the Kurdish reality. Finally, in the last part, I will sketch an outline of contemporary authoritarian regime of the technological surveillant state and the resistive politics of digital young Kurds, which, I will suggest, also informs the whys and wherefores of the Gezi Movement of 2013 that has become one of the most diverse revolt of young people, including the Kurds, in the history of Turkey.

**Understanding Surveillance and Resistance in Contemporary Societies**

Recent studies on surveillance show that there is an intrinsic link between the digitization of information, the ubiquitous use of information technologies by citizens/consumers, and the unprecedented level of recording, storing, and
manipulation of information by those with an access to the data. As bodies are immersed in digital spaces through the exposure and use of credit cards, electronic IDs, cellphones, telephones, the Internet, city cameras, data-mining systems etc., they leave traces behind themselves as they move, act and communicate within the fluctuating and flexible networks. Hence these facilities and possibilities of monitoring provided by digital technologies amplify the state capabilities for control, which give rise to the concerns about the maintenance of democracy and civil rights and the rise of new forms of authoritarianism. Deleuze defines this new form of society that is administered and managed through computerized systems of surveillance as ‘society of control’, where mechanisms of command become ever more fluid and immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the bodies of citizens/consumers that are no longer individuals (corporeal bodies) but dividuals, ‘consisting of modulations of coded information’, internally divided into measurable and adjustable pieces, data. The relationship between power and individual in this new form of society (imperial society as they call it), Hardt and Negri argue, is ‘open, qualitative and affective’: the social production of subjectivities is not limited to places; power is everywhere and nowhere; generating ‘non-places’ where the social production of subjectivities refers to the ‘fluid processes of the generation and the

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corruption of subjectivity’.6 ‘The indefiniteness of the place of the social production corresponds to the indeterminacy of the form of the subjectivities produced’.7

The technological control partake in these subjectification processes, generating a simulated version of surveilled bodies, a sort of additional self,8 or a data double of pure virtuality9 whose narrative is necessarily different from the reflection of an original referent due to the technological re-presentation.10 The re-presentation and re-creation of bodies in scanscapes is used for a variety of tasks within increasingly dominant modes of risk management, including the financial, ecological, and security risks.11 Particularly with regard to (vague) definitions of terrorism, which is regarded as one of the most threatening risks of contemporary societies, law and technology function relationally for the discrimination of population. While anti-terrorism law contributes to the codifying of classifications through which only some are taken as the focus of surveillance, surveillance of those generate evidential data that might easily end up in creation of different versions of life (of crime) lived by the surveilled outside their control.12 As Ball (2005) suggests, surveillance is not only understood as information and as knowledge but also as protection from threats. In order for the state to justify the prevalent surveillance on selected bodies, it also needs to maintain the functioning of synopticism13 (the communicative machines of fear and panic) through which the viewers’ (and/or spectators’) consciousness are educated to

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7 ibid, 196. Italics in original.
12 ibid, 175.
believe in the deadly threat of terrorism in their society as well as the operations of panopticism\textsuperscript{14} (through prisons) where risky bodies of terrorism are confined and excluded from public spaces of action and communications.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, in contemporary societies the net of regimentation of masses and individual bodies is broadened and tightened through digital surveillance which does not replace but strengthens the existing forms of control such as synopticism and panopticism.\textsuperscript{16}

As a consequence of these global flows in controlling citizens/consumers and the local investments in centralized civil registry systems, digitized remote listening, advanced filtering systems, data mining systems, city cameras etc., the Turkish state has also become a technological surveillent state which makes use of all these facilities to monitor the population, particularly the dissident political subjects.\textsuperscript{17} Importantly, the current counterterrorism laws based on vague and indeterminate definition of terrorists acts, including non-violent actions and discourses, such as ‘poetry, painting, daily columns and articles’, demoralizing and criticizing the security forces -as it was recently defined by the Minister of Internal Affairs in Turkey\textsuperscript{18} - enable the pervasive and manipulative surveillance of the dissident groups which end in the confinement of thousands of people in prisons and on trials as suspects of terrorism. The role of technology in gathering suspicious documents or mysterious talks is important due to the fact that technological evidences create a perception of precision, validity and reliability of evidences in the eyes of larger public. Moreover, technologies are re-

\textsuperscript{14} Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish} (New York: Vintage, 1977)
\textsuperscript{15} Ball, “Organization, Surveillance and the Body”, 94.
\textsuperscript{16} Lyon “Surveillance Technology and Surveillance Society”, 170; Marx, “What’s new about the ‘new surveillance’”, 83.
presented as the truth production machines, as they are evidences of counterterrorism trials, and of discrediting messages about the political subjects in media coverage. The lack of autonomous and independent structure of news media and the pressures that journalists face in the contemporary mediascape as well as the juridical systems that are in crisis in terms of providing the basis for justice, all contributes to the operations of new pacification regimes that aim to ‘tame the social, political and economic forces’ in the seemingly democratic, but essentially authoritarian ways.

My analysis of this new form of power is based on an argument that possibilities of resistance are immanent to the forms of power. If there is no place outside the regimes of control, as Hardt and Negri argue, we should find ways of resistances in all non-places. The digital technoscape is a non-place where one

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19 According to the latest research of RWB (Reporters Without Borders), Turkey is ‘the world’s biggest prison for journalist’ where 72 journalist and media personnel most of whom work for pro-Kurdish news organizations are in prison (2012). Although the Turkish mediascape is diversified and extensive, it has mostly been mute or affirmative of the state operations concerning the Kurdish unarmed political bodies. Even after the killing of 34 Kurdish civilians in Uludere/Roboski in a military air strike in December 2011, the whole institutionalized mediascape of Turkey had been mute about the attacks for some 10 hours until the official explanation of the event given by the spokesperson of the government as an unfortunate technological accident in the war of terror. In a similar manner, the hunger strikes of imprisoned KCK suspects did not get coverage in the national media until the strikers have come to a deadly stage.

20 The ways Turkish juridical systems make use of technological surveillance not only in KCK cases but also other counter-terrorism trials such as Oda-TV, Ergenekon give rise to the voiced concerns in international and national arena. These concerns persisted over ‘the rights of defense, lengthy pre-trial detention and excessively long and catch-all indictments’ (EU Commission Turkey 2012 Progress Report), ‘the technological criminalization of cases where mundane data are presented through copy and paste of wire-tapping to create suspicion of a crime’ (Selçuk Kozağaçlı and Tanıl Bora, “Çağdaş Hukuçcular Derneği Başkanı Selçuk Kozağaçlı ile söyleşi: ‘Elastik ve yapışkan bir ağ.’” Birikim 273 (2012): 35. (My translation)), and finally enhanced scrutiny of the legitimacy of the trials which seemed to be against ‘the free expression of their [suspects] opinions and ideas, in particular in the context of non-violent discussion of the Kurdish issue’ as the vice-chairman of UN Human rights committee says (Stephanie Nebayah, “Turkey using anti-terrorism law to quash debate: U.N’, Reuters, accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/01/us-turkey-un-rights-idUSBRE8A0120201211101).


22 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 5.
willingly or not is subjected to the fluid regimes of control and subjectification processes. The fluidity in this regard contributes to the aforementioned ways of control as well as to the interruption of control through the creation of a spatio-temporal gap between the surveilled and surveillor and of an anonymity of the users who will to partake in meaning from within the flexible and fluctuating networks of digitized power. The disrupt of control within a limited period of time and scale has potentialities of resistance only if the meaning making process differs from the dominant ways of addressing the individuals or publics. Digital communication technologies do not have a force outside social systems through which discourses and meanings are produced and shared across different social groups within the network at high speed. The interpellation into the usership (who consents for her own surveillance) of the net is based on the promise of a recognition of an ordinary individual being an active produser of the self, language and textual representation in the virtual presence of others in ways impossible in face-to-face relations. Although there is always an original referent to all virtual bodies on these platforms, each and every user that is present on the web of virtual relations and spaces is recreated in artificiality. The artificiality that is produced in the performative uses of the net within the work/play of self-design reveals both the limitations (such as digital divide, the

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25 The Web 2.0 allows for the methods of production of communication and knowledge does not only belong to the companies, rulers etc., but also to nearly everybody who has access to the net. The term produser refers to the evaporating distinction between producer and consumer within web 2.0. Claudia K. Grinnel also suggests that Web 2.0 ‘has also shifted attention from access to information towards access to people’. With Web 2.0, there emerged millions of online resources such as blogs, wikis, and virtual communities that allow people to meet, share ideas and collaborate in new ways. See her article, ‘From Consumer to Produser: Who Keeps Shifting My Paradigm? (We Do!), *Public Culture*, 21, no. 3 (2009): 577-589.
subsisting hierarchies between races, ethnicities, gender within the virtual spaces) and potentialities (the renewal of speech and diction to present and create oneself that one finds in the virtual social relations) of self-creation. Hardt and Negri write, ‘once we see ourselves for the simians and cyborgs we are’, we then need to participate in ‘the continuous constituent project to create and re-create ourselves and our world’ in the domain of artificiality.

This sort of creation and re-creation of selves and worlds that we inhabit within digital technoscapes can be best understood with the Warner’s conceptualization of counterpublics. He writes, ‘counterpublics are publics’, too, that are produced through circulatory discourses, addressing diverse people, including the strangers, hailing them into particular positions, ‘providing a sense of active belonging that masks or compensates the real powerlessness of human agents in capitalist society’. The difference of counterpublic to public discourse, on the other hand, is that it ‘remains distinct from the authorities’ and that ‘have critical relation to power’. The counterpublic does not conflict with power because it comes to the fore as a reflection of subculture or oppositional identities formed elsewhere, but precisely as the form of recreation of languages, discourses and of subjectivities that challenge the dominant groups, ideas, policies as well as speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public. The potentialities of counterpublics are always immanent in all organizations of publics that have necessary tensions, perversities and ambiguities for them to function continuously.

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27 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 92.
29 ibid, 81.
Functioning like a container for millions of users, the Internet becomes a social laboratory, where users interact with each other through the creation of their representations and improvise their discourses. I argue that the possibilities of improvisations through the circulatory discourses within the net contributes to the formation of counterpublics for Kurds, who search for the means of communicability, and for the new ways of expressing themselves as well as recreating themselves with a novel discourse and language that degrade the power, the disciplinary institutions, and the dominant political culture. The Kurdish counterpublic is not solely instituted through the discourses in the net, it has intertextual relations with all others that have been posing critiques against the state authoritarianism, media synopticism and power relations that constitute the dominant discourses and practices, aiming to create a defeated, accepting and docile consumers/citizens out of Kurdish population.

**Kurds of Turkey**

Kurds constitute the largest nation in the world without a state, and they struggle for their cultural and political rights in countries where they reside. Kurds of Turkey have been in revolt against the political project of the Turkish Republic, which aimed to develop nationhood based on the Turkish language, and the imagined national identity that required a break with the religiosity, local traditions, and non-Turkic ethnic identities for the last century. Resistance coming out of Kurdish population against this establishment had first had the characteristics of the local-armed nationalist and religious rebellions, then gained the traits of a wider, modern, leftist, pacifist

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31 See Zoe Sofia, “Container Technologies,” *Hypatia* 15, no.2 (2000): 181-201, for understanding of how communication technologies become a container, housing the users’ memories, data and also her imaginations, desires and unaccomplished wills.

nationalist movement in the ‘60s and the ‘70s. With the rise of the armed movement of the PKK in the early ‘80s, the ethnic and cultural consciousness grew and spread amongst almost all Kurds living in Turkey. Violence and human rights violations against Kurds during the military dictatorship of 1980-3, prohibition of the use of Kurdish both in private and public spaces, and the clearance of villages in the south eastern parts of Turkey under the Emergency State Rules of the ‘90s, provoked many Kurds to become involved in activism and even join to the armed forces.

For millions of politically active Kurds, the use of media technologies became of crucial significance, signifying the possibility of deciphering human rights violations against Kurds, making and inventing themselves in the way they imagine, and producing a sense of nation without an officially recognized territory of nation. A newspaper Özgür Gündem and a satellite TV-channel, MedTV were established and had become extremely popular in Kurdish populated areas, and consequently been treated as terrorist propaganda machines by the state - journalists were killed, readers/viewers were arrested or exposed to the violence of security forces in the ‘90s. After the bloody years of the ‘90s, a relatively freer environment was established due to the capture of the PKK leader, and the policies of democratization processes adopted as a result of the country’s aspiration to become a member of EU in the early 2000s. These changes did not put an end to the war between the PKK and Turkish army, but yielded to the representations of Kurdish voters in the parliament and in municipality with a distinct political party, and to the artistic and medial presence of Kurds in creative industries and in digital media technologies to a certain extent. The

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33 Kirişçi, The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy.
34 Ibid.
35 Gambetti, “The Spatial Dynamics of the Kurdish and Zapatista Movements”, 45.
37 Ibid.
Kurdish diaspora has appropriated desktop and electronic publishing to develop a standardized Kurdish as well as an archive of extensive literature, both of which aim to produce a sense of belonging to a culture, literature and history. Likewise, Kurdish cinema and music started to be represented and performed in cultural scenes, as a means for Kurds to assert their cultural and ethnic identity more strongly than ever through creative industry.

In a relatively freer environment, the government has initiated the ‘Kurdish opening’ in 2009 which is based on a political understanding of giving ‘individual cultural rights to Kurds’ such as the homecoming of PKK militants, opening Kurdish courses and establishing a state-run Kurdish speaking television channel. However, these developments have instigated the national hysteria and produced the sense of ‘we gave enough already’ on the part of larger Turkish public, and did not give rise to the satisfaction of political Kurds, who demand a neutral definition of citizenship that would not exclude Kurdish ethnic identity and warranties allowing the free exercise of the Kurdish identity, including the use of their mother language in education and in legislation.

Particularly after 2011 while the uprisings in the Middle East were spreading to different countries, the state has changed its strategy from providing cultural rights at individual levels to a hard-line approach whose aim seems to ‘finish off the PKK’ and cut the organic links between the Kurdish masses and the PKK and the pro-Kurdish political party (BDP), through a new tactic whose components did not exclude military

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38 Romano, “Modern communication technology in ethnic nationalist hands”, 127. See also Bilgin Ayata “Kurdish Transnational Politics and Turkey’s Changing Kurdish Policy: The Journey of Kurdish Broadcasting from Europe to Turkey”, Journal of Contemporary European Studies 19 no. 4 (2011): 523-533, for an analysis of the effects of Kurdish media networks established by the Kurdish diaspora both on transnational politics and on the internal policies of state-run Kurdish speaking TV channel.
39 Yeğen, “The New Kurdish Movie”.
40 ibid
operations against the PKK militants, but focused more on judiciary and police system through which thousands of people are put on anti-terror trials as well as on the propaganda machine of media through which politicians of BDP attempted to be discredited.\textsuperscript{41} As a consequence of this new political strategy, more than twelve thousand people, including Kurdish politicians, journalists, students, doctors, mayors etc., are put on trials with accusations of aiding, abetting or being a member of the terrorist organization called KCK (the Union of Kurdish Communities which is an urban organization of the armed PKK) with evidences consisting mostly of technological data collected out of digital surveillance. This research takes up the effects of policies regarding KCK cases and this pacification regimes of the state on the part of Kurdish population within the period between 2009 and 2012. In 2013, the Turkish state has once again adopted a relatively moderate-line approach, and launched a ‘peace process’, following an agreement with the PKK leader that aims to resolve the Kurdish conflict with constitutional reforms on the condition that, as far as the public knows, the PKK guerrillas withdraw from the Turkish territory outside the national borders. However, the KCK inmates are still not released and the expected reforms have not been actualized as of the 2013 summer.

\textbf{The Data}

The data is derived from in-depth interview that I have conducted in 2012 with 40 users of communication technologies such as telephone, cellphone, or the Internet in İstanbul (17), Diyarbakır (9), Ankara (2) and Mardin (4). The sample focused on

\textsuperscript{41} One example of this is that the photos of deputies having dinner during the period of hunger strike is broadcasted in televisions as part of the coverage of the Prime Minister’s speech when he said ‘there is only one person who is on death fast in Turkish prison. But the BDP members who tell them to die are having lamb kebab’. See “No Hunger strikes says PM amid rallies”, Hurriyet Daily News (2012), accessed January 4, 2013, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/no-hunger-strikes-says-pm-amid-rallies.aspx?pageID=238&nid=33710.
middle class Turkish (5) and Kurdish users, between 18-65 years of age, including digital activists (mostly between 18-40), university students, lawyers, teachers, intelligent service officers, NGO workers and unemployed individuals. The reason for the inclusion of Turkish users into the sample is to understand the effect of technological surveillance on Kurdish subjects at a comparative level where the generalized surveillance does not seem to concern only Kurds but also others. The sample focused largely on the middle class, because particularly Kurdish users of personal digital communication technologies like computers, cell phone and social networks seem to belong in the middle class. Twenty of the sample were women.

The in-depth interviews, each of which lasted an average of one-to-two hours, were organized with the aim of learning if the interviewees fear and doubt about their surveillance, how they react to the surveillance practices and how they negotiate and/or resist these forms of control. While some of my Turkish informants in the sample seemed to be less interested in politics, all my self-defined Kurdish interviewees were politically conscious subjects due to the fact that defining oneself as a Kurd in the political landscape of Turkey is already a political statement regardless of the users’ political engagement with a political party and organization. Regardless of their political involvement, all my informants were well-informed about the current surveillance practices of the state. Most of them expressed the fear and doubt in relation to their potential/actual surveillance and the irritation due the infringement of their privacy. And yet, when the issue came down to the intensity of fear and the perceived risk of being under the constant surveillance, there seemed to appear differences between politically active informants and others, and Kurds and Turks alike.
All of my digital activist interviewees use smart phones -which have become ubiquitous gadgets among many from different social classes- that have connection to the Internet. All of them are regular users of Facebook (the most visited page in Turkey)\(^{42}\) and some of them are Twitter users. The experienced ones in virtual politics participate in forum discussions, contribute to the urban-dictionaries and open blogs as well. They are truly members of the user publics of the digital ecologies. The ones who reside in Istanbul and Ankara are more included in heterogeneous crowds of virtual friendship networks (that do not require an offline acquaintances or kinship), where all of their personal messages become public as they write in their personal pages or open/closed Facebook groups, Twitter hash-tags and blogs. The fact that telecommunication interactions through telephone talks and texting and email exchange constitutes the freer sites for the centralized technological surveillance of the state and that finding evidences and building fabricated images and conversations in social media sites are relatively more difficult due to the policies of Facebook and Twitter that require official application of the Turkish state to give the private information of the users make most of these users to prefer these social networks for their cultural and political struggle. Despite that Facebook is regarded as less trusted social network due to the experiences of users whose groups were closed by the company with an excuse of many complaints of other Facebook users, it remains to be the most popular platform where the users can reach bigger and more heterogeneous crowds.

\(^{42}\) According to Alexa.com, the most popular site is Facebook, then follows Google Türkiye, Youtube etc. Twitter has been within the top ten, but after Gezi Protests where Twitter has become one of the leading virtual platform for the mobilization of protestors, it has be attracted more users. (see www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/TR).
The Production of Control and Its Effects

The surveillant regime of Turkey is not a new phenomenon. The novelty lies in the growth of technological authoritarianism that amalgamates the force of law, police and technology to produce digital materials that can easily be manipulated to generate fake conversations, fabricated images and narratives of crimes when there is no rational basis that prove the crime. Although one cannot argue that all evidences presented in the indictments of anti-terror trials are based on the technological mutation of non-evidence of crimes, there seems to be some concrete reasons that worry the lawyers, human rights associations and civil right activists about the way technological control functions to manufacture crime. One of the lawyers of KCK case in Diyarbakır explains his experiences in these trials:

The indictments start with the hundreds of pages of KCK history, then continues with few testimonials of hidden witnesses and then hundreds of pages of transcriptions, obtained from remote listening, transcriptions of wiretapping, text messages etc. All of these are read in courts. So the private lives of all these suspects are heard by everyone…the court becomes like a gossip program…since none of these information prove any crime on rational basis, then the prosecutors claim that they are encrypted messages.

Some of the examples of the evidences written in the indictments are as following: SMS message like ‘37 B Black’ sent from a suspect to her sister, asking her to buy a bra in this size and color is interpreted by the prosecutor as an encryption of a bomb, or a telephone conversation where the Turkish professor speaking on the phone to another KCK suspect where she is invited to a meeting and responds by saying ‘inshallah’ is interpreted as the conscious admission of participating in the terrorist organizations’ meetings, or a photograph of an illiterate old Kurdish woman in a protest in Diyarbakır taken by police cameras is claimed to be an evidence of her managerial position in KCK, responsible for sending emails to protestors to invite them to the violent protest.
In the face of these sort of evidences, lawyers maintain that they feel desperate and ‘do not know how to defend them’ as one lawyer in Diyarbakır says or ‘I feel as if I was given a role to play in an absurd comedy, a sort of deadly joke’ as another lawyer in Mardin says. The progress of trials is also blocked by the denial of the request of Kurdish suspects to defend themselves in Kurdish in courts, while almost half of the wiretappings are in Kurdish and translated into Turkish as evidences of their ties to terrorism.

While the cases are in deadlock due to the denial of the suspects’ demand to give testimony in Kurdish and to the lack of hard evidences, proving the crime on rational basis, the effect of surveillance on the surveilled bodies becomes pressing, as these bodies feel the constant relentless of being watched in their daily activities and communications. A female municipal worker, who is on KCK trial without detention with the accusation of helping the KCK without being a member of it, explains this effect:

when you are taken into custody, they put all information on the table they collected throughout some time without your knowledge…it’s terrifying to see…I mean, as if I was always naked…and the way they present all these things in indictments…all pieces are sewn together to create another you… the data is yours, but the story is not… what is most terrifying is not my possible detention or imprisonment, but to see how they control everything, every minute of your life and manipulate everything in the way they want.

Just as this informant does, most of my Kurdish interviewees, regardless of them being on trials, describe the felt effect of the amalgamated force of law and technology not as the fear of confinement in prison with evidences whose collection and interpretation seem to be outside of their control, much as they express the constant relentlessness of being watched in every moment of their lives. Although the consciousness of surveillance is not limited to the political Kurds but spread to almost
anyone, the Turkish activists that I have interviewed noted that ‘we will definitely come after Kurds in the state’s list of usual suspects’ as a well-known female activist in her ‘30s told me in Istanbul, by referring to the hierarchy of risky subjects within categories of suspicion where the Kurds sit on the first row. The amalgamated force of law and technology does not seem to implant a pressing fear of imprisonment on the part of political Kurds as much as it does on the non-Kurds, perhaps because as a doctoral student has expressed to me ‘if you define yourself as a Kurd in this society and if you decide to struggle for your identity and language, you must be ready for imprisonment, death, loss of your future… it is a high-cost struggle’.

One of the ways in which the surveilled bodies attempt to manage the experience of the surveillance which might end up in the recreation of their autobiography as a story of crime through technological narration is the production of a new daily language, addressing an unknown listener as well as the known receiver of a speech particularly on the phone due to the fact that the telephone systems (mobile or wired) constitutes the ‘main artery of the surveillance systems’ as one of the former intelligent service agent has told me in an interview in Ankara. The imaginary and potential eavesdropper is always present in the talks, altering the very nature of the daily language and producing it in the forms of artificiality. A journalist working for a pro-Kurdish news agency in Diyarbakir explains how this consciousness affects his daily communications, ‘all talks are prolonged and became explanatory when it is not needed. I don’t speak on the phone as I used to any more. I give full explanations about everything that I speak about on the phone. Not because the other does not get what I’m talking about, but to minimize the risk of manipulation of what I say by the constant guests on our line’. Thus, this amalgamated force generates a collective desperation due to the felt loss of control in communications and meaning.
The ordinary daily language, which all of us dwell by, is not only instrumental and practical, but also performative in the sense that nuances of meaning are captured and determined within the context of speech and diction. Thus, the amputation of language brings forth the felt loss of possibilities of language games, jokes, humors, ironies and gossips, which make an ordinary speech and daily conversation a dwelling container for human interaction.43 A primary school teacher in Diyarbakır tells me that he ‘cannot even make gossips. Because you know, all conversations are being read in courts. I mean the problem is not only that you have no privacy, no secrets any more, but also your relationships can be troubled’ due to the potentials that private might become public and the coherent conversation might become incoherent or might take up other meanings in unpredictable ways through the technological re-presentation. The boundaries between private and public that protect the invasion of one from another evaporate.

In addition to the extra carefulness that they adopt in their daily speeches on the phone or in particular places where they are sure of its surveillance, most of my informants routinely clear the digital files they keep in their computers, the mail inboxes, the CDs and flash-disks not to leave any material for the manipulative surveillance regimes to fabricate what is not theirs. This, however, changes the very nature of the relationship between the users and their machines that provides the basis for the control of communicability of users both by themselves and by the state.

A female informant in her ‘30s, says ‘my computer, my cellphone used to feel like the extensions of my body, now I feel like, there is someone else between my things and myself. I don’t want to keep anything in my computer or my cell phone’. I

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have elsewhere explored the ways in which people of Turkey grew attachment with their digital technologies such as cellphone not only due to the machines’ instrumental and display value, but also due to the seemingly liberating effect they produce as the users find uses of these technologies in doing whatever they normally cannot do in the existing social structures, and in their daily lives. On the one hand, this ‘doing’ with digital technologies contributed to having a private world outside the monitoring of familial authorities, and creating a world of self where desired self-design is produced by using the technological means such as save, delete, edit for the general user publics44. It also yielded to the political mobilization of crowd to take the streets for a political protest through de-centralized text messages, to the dutiful and playful exercise of unfamiliar mother Kurdish language through texting among peers, transforming the Turkish-speaking public spaces into Kurdish-speaking soundscapes with the ringtones of cellphones etc., for the counterpublic users of Kurds,45 on the other.

Thus the affect of this new form of control on the surveilled bodies who are conscious of their surveillance contributes to the realm of incommunicability in various ways. The amputation of daily language, the shrink of all public spaces of communication and the distortion of the relationship between the human and the machines that is both in the service of neo-liberal and authoritarian technological power, and of the resistive potentialities, by allowing the generation of critical discourses, language and counterpublics are the main operations of this new form of power. However, when the means of protecting oneself from this sort of force and of expressing oneself in any known language inside and outside the institutions, non-

places seem to be lost, the motivation to use all non-places for resistance might become more forceful. While the inmates started a hunger strike, which lasted approximately 70 days with a demand for Kurdish language rights in courts as well as in education, and end to the denial of PKK leader's right to communicate with lawyers, the younger digital political bodies outside prisons continue their struggle, particularly with a strive to gain the means of communicability in digital spaces as well as in streets.

**The production of the political in digital counterpublics**

The recognition of limitations and inequalities that subsist in the virtual world and the potentialities that are immanent to the artificiality (the virtual self-design) of this non-place contributes to the ‘produsership’ of activists. Particularly after the Arab Spring where the activists made use of digital communication technologies to organize collective action and prepare the ground for taking action against the authoritarian state power, especially in Egypt through the forums, blogs and social media, Kurdish activist seem to be more motivated to believe in the power of the net to alter the political culture in effective ways. Since the most pressing effect of the contemporary regimes of control is upon the political individuals’ communicative capabilities, the Internet becomes a means of creating a resistive possibility in the hands of Kurdish users, including the Kurdish politicians, for the production of new and alternative communication platforms where political users ideally do not only voice their critiques, concerns, demands, but also produce their own counterpublics, textual representations and discourses to change the political and social landscape in which they live. A male activist in Diyarbakır recounts how he decided and started to use the digital technologies for his political struggle:
90 per cent of Kurds write [on the net] with other persona, using other proxies etc., we know that we are not free on the virtual either, we know that we are considered as threats, this is something transferred from the real world. It is like the political consciousness to desire not to decipher one’s identity, it is the outcome of political reality, not fear. I have always been a regular user... I created characters for myself. So I thought if I can create a character that becomes very popular on the net, I can do many other things over there. This is how I do it, how I started using it for my own purposes’.

Particularly against the existing forms of information monopoly and media synopticism, Kurds appropriate the virtual space to make their own news and share it with the larger public, preferably containing ones unfamiliar to the Kurdish reality.

*The News Network*

Apart from professional online news agencies such as ANF and DİHA, and web TV such as Nurce, IMC TV etc., amateur news agencies, blogs and social media are adopted by the political agents to create an alternative news space that would ideally have an effect on people’s agenda and their decision making, while the news is central to the making of political culture in Turkey. For instance, the Uludere/Roboski case which did not get coverage in mass media for some ten hours after the massacre due to the governmental pressure on mediascape was first announced in these pro-Kurdish news agencies, then spread to the social media (twitter and Facebook), and thousands of people were called for demonstrations against the massacre via decentralized messages on the net. Most of my informants have spoken about the resistive power of the net in terms of mobilizing collective action with a reference to the protests against Uludere that was largely organized through social media messages. One of my male university students commented on this in Istanbul, by saying ‘we have seen how crucial these sites are for us in Roboski example. People may react to what is being done to us, only if they are informed about the truth. Roboski is not the first massacre
of civil Kurds, but it is the first one that many people became aware of, thanks to the
Internet’.

The net in the hands of Kurds is also appropriated for building communities
and for mobilization of people to participate in collective action whose targets exceed
the organization of flash or political mobs. For instance, while the hunger strike of
imprisoned Kurds did not find any coverage in media and support from larger public in
Turkish political landscape, some Kurdish netizens opened an account in Facebook
(*Açlık Postası* -Hunger Post- which then turned into *Ötekerler Postası* -Others’ Post-,
a social network group active both in Facebook and Twitter) with an aim to make news,
increase the awareness about the strike and support the strikers. The founder of
*Ötekerler Postası* explains how they decided to create their Facebook group:

‘What the government has been doing is to silence all
others. The mainstream media were contributing to this
aim. We asked ourselves, why don’t we create our own
news network. Then, we began doing citizen journalism
[on social networks]. We wanted to make objective news
about the medical conditions of inmates that were on
hunger strikes to inform their families and the larger
public. We knew that there would be pressure from the
state, but we have nevertheless continued’.

*Açlık Postası* has become, unexpectedly, as the founder of the network says,
one of the most alternative news social network groups in a very short time. Through
the virtual community of followers and contributers, they organized a campaign by
calling everyone to withdraw money from their bank account and write that ‘do not
remain silent to the strikes’ and put the money into ATM machines to make others
engage with the discourses written on the banknotes. Along with this campaign,
political netizens continued publishing photos of the strikers with provocative
messages, with a claim to decipher the existence of mass hunger strike and opening
discussion sites about the strike to mobilize people to become supporters of the struggle
of the strikers. In the end, when the strike has become an undeniable issue to be discussed in the political landscape; the government took an action to communicate with the leader of PKK to make him stop the strike. The strike ended; the talks between the state and the PKK leader have eventually restarted in January 2013. The group, then, changed the name into Ötekilerin Postası and continues to be followed by thousands of users, who do not only include Kurds but all others who have lost their trust in the mainstream media if they ever had. Neither the Uludere case nor the campaigns supporting hunger strike are mere outcomes of the particular use of the net. However, these examples show how the virtual and the actual circulate and affect each other in the insurgent politics of Kurds and also others when their voices, representations and their language and discursive practices are attempted to be silenced through the digital surveillance, media synopticism and juridical operations.

Resistance as the form of new discourse: ‘modern Kurdi perspective’

Along with the struggle to create an alternative news platform that would ideally resist the synoptic control of power, the Kurdish users, particularly the younger ones aim to present and develop a ‘modern Kurdi perspective’, as some of my informants have put it, by way of Internet. The ‘modern Kurdi perspective’ refers to a search for a new political subjectivity, new discourse and a new language that differs from the traditional Kurdish discourse, while not breaking the continuity with the historical claims of cultural and political rights. The collective called Kurd 2.0 who controls different personas on social media (Özgür Amed in Facebook, Özgür Gündem, 

46 During Gezi protests, the network has continued to be one of the popular networks for the protesters who are in the streets and in social media, actualizing the biggest national revolt of the Turkish history. However, the Facebook page has been closed for a short period of time and then recreated as once again a popular Facebook group with the help of the contributors and followers.
bijwenist-Kurd 2.2\textsuperscript{47} in Facebook and Twitter etc), urban-dictionaries (like Tolaz), amateur news agencies (such as Amed Ajans) and blogs/sites/e-journals (Kurd 2.0) can be given as an example of this sort of political intervention that makes use of the net for modern Kurdi perspective. The founder of this Kurd 2.0 collective explains their understanding of ‘new language’ and ‘new discourse’:

The typical Kurdish discourse was based on the language of victim. We, Kurds, had tried to show that we were existent in the first place, then we tried to show that we’re dying. But there is no need for this. They already know what they did to us. It is as clear as crystal. What we need is real resistance. We need a new language to express ourselves. I perceive humor, irony and sarcasm as the most resisting tools to throw the fireball back to the ones who threw at us. This is what Kurd 2.0 is about, as far as I am concerned.

In the above narrative of the famous Kurdish digital activist, the Internet 2.0 provides a new rationale for the social imaginary of a new political subjectivity with a new discourse, and a language where potentially all Kurdish users can become the producers of discourses that would represent themselves in a way that challenges the typical representations of Kurds as a victimized group, as a political identity whose language is diseased by Turkish. This activist, who lives in Diyarbakır in his 30’s, defines Turkish as ‘a virus’ not only as a language that the state obliges all citizens to speak, write and receive schooling in, but also as a discourse which also affected the ways in which Kurds speak about themselves, represent their political subjectivity and their claims in public/private spaces either in Kurdish or Turkish. The search for a new language and new perspective, which suggests a new political subjectivity that is framed as Kurd 2.0 is a struggle to transgress the dominance of Turkish as a discourse (not merely as a language of everyday life and institutional practice), which locks up

\textsuperscript{47} They keep upgrading the name Kurd 2.0 as the state or companies such as Facebook closes their blogs, sites or groups. Thus each upgrade refers to a new establishment of the same group that comes after the censorship of the previous one.
Kurdish language and discourse as a non-language, a discourse of backwardness, feudality, terrorism, armed rebellions, and of the periphery who has to sacrifice their lives for the struggle of their cultural and ethnic identity. The mode of interaction and addresses, and the form of language of the virtual exchange and discussions that allows for humor, laughter, abusive messages that become easily viral and effective in particular brevity required in Facebook and Twitter contributes to the conceptualization of Kurd 2.0 which proposes not only a new language, a new subjectivity and also a joy for the political action.

A writer of Tolaz (a Kurdi humorous news network) that is connected to the counterpublic of Kurd 2.0 says:

‘I was raised in a politically conscious family. But I was also assimilated, cannot really read and speak in Kurdish. Living in Istanbul, I was feeling isolated from political discussions. The Internet has become a place for me to meet other Kurds. I was writing for the forums, dictionaries like Zıtferheng. Then I came across the Kurd 2.0…The meaning of 2.0 is a lot for us. It is a new perspective, something like more integrated into the contemporary times. We speak about films, arts and also politics. We believe that the language of politics needs to be lightened. We need to entertain ourselves as well. The politics should be joyful. The serious guys who are old and respected (kelli fellî) are like boring. I respect them but I cannot really listen to them for so long…The use of humor mobilizes our target group as well. We criticize everything, KCK cases, TC, including the Kurdish politics but in our humorous ways which is more critical and effective in our opinion’.

The collective Kurd 2.0 in this regard opens like a counterpublic that reaches both Kurdish users and non-Kurdish ones, particularly in social networks like Facebook and Twitter addressing all with a critique posed not only against the dominant Turkish political culture that associates Kurdishness with threats to the unity of the country but also against the dogmatic historical Kurdish politics that always asks the young agents to 'sacrifice their life, love, and their future' as one of my young female informant has expressed. The desire to elaborate strategies of self-hood that initiate new signs of
identity, and innovate sites of collaboration, negotiation, and contestation, in the act of producing the textual representations is common among all these active users of the net, regardless of their link to the collective Kurd 2.0. The ‘light’ and sarcastic language and the joyful mode of address is not less political in their eyes but the most effective one. A PhD student, whom I interviewed with a reference of the Kurd 2.0 founder, suggests that 'writing in *EkşiSözlük*' (a popular urban dictionary site) where he encountered with the 'white-democrat Turk' has made him 'search for new means of argumentation to challenge their memorized discourses about Kurdish movement'. In doing so, he explains, 'I also began to acknowledge that the way we make our language and we define ourselves have to change'. The encounter with others, Kurds and non-Kurds alike in the flow of messages within the social laboratory of the net, motivate and provoke them to shatter the dichotomous thinking that many people think through in Turkey such as Turk/Kurd, terrorist/pacifist, modern Turks/traditional Kurds as well as through the fixed political identities with a distinct language, discourse and terminology that always need to be explanatory, serious and exclusive of what remain outside of it.

For instance, a female university student of a law school in İstanbul, says that she puts the images of female guerrillas on her Facebook wall where she entertains communicating with her Turkish Facebook friends to ‘shock’ and show them the 'absurdities of seeing the ones on the mountains as monsters'. While most of the female young activists appreciate the Kurdish movement for its struggle to liberate the Kurdish women from the traditional patriarchal norms, they also criticize the authoritarianism of the movement and of the dominant culture of Kurds whose effect is more pressing on the unprivileged gender positions. A university student of a medical school in Istanbul says, ‘I am Zaza. A Woman. A believer. And I will not deny that I used to have
sympathy for the *cemaat* [The Fethullah Movement] and for the party [PKK] at different times of my life...But however I define myself, I am told what I have to do. I am really fed up with this. I just want to be a human being who has a conscience’. She says her Facebook wall and her posts in various different digital communities do always intend to ‘surprise’ the ones who cling on the fixed identities, excluding what remains outside of them. At times as such, the self-creation of users in the social laboratory of virtual communities becomes an expression of the multitude or of the multiplicity that resists the commands of homogenization and standardization of power regimes.

In a similar vein, a transsexual woman, living in Diyarbakır, who created a Kurdish LGBT network (*Hebun*) on the Facebook and built a community out of silenced Kurdish LBGTs living in different areas in Turkey, says ‘we are struggling for our ethnic identities and also our sexual identities...we’re struggling against the Turkish nationalists who deny the rights of Kurds and also macho Kurds who deny the rights of LBGTs and also bourgeois Turkish LBGTs who always speak with terms, concepts that ordinary people don’t understand’. Or from totally different perspective, a nationalist conservative activist (*IBH*) who has become popular in offline Kurdish political landscape after his presence that has attracted thousands of followers in Facebook and who also involves in polemical discussions with Kurd 2.0 says, ‘we need a theoretical, intellectual basis for our movement that has to be founded upon our history. My followers and I are having intellectual discussions about ourselves and our identity. We should be able to define ourselves with our self-determination as a nation, but this should not be exclusive of our religious identities, nor of our history and tradition’.
The counterpublics that are formed by these digital Kurds who do not aim to reach only Kurdish political agents but also others and recreate themselves and languages in new forms through the exchange and discussions are attempts to challenge the dominant culture and power - be it the state power, the official discourse of the Turkish authorities that are internalized by Turkish nationalists, the PKK doctrines, the patriarchal language that constitutes women, trans-identities in unprivileged positions. As one of the male users that I interviewed in Diyarbakır says, ‘all of us are searching for Kurdi perspective, Kurdi discourse, Kurdi language for everything we say…this is like we’re integrated into the contemporary era, but we are not assimilated. We criticize even some notions, approaches of the movement but not with the language of T.C, or with the state’. In this regard, they attempt to generate a modern Kurdi perspective as a discursive event which is always already related to the political and ethnical struggle that has been carried out through armed struggle and representations of Kurds in the parliament, but also radically different from those in the way it takes up the task of producing an ever new language and discourse, housing the laughter, joy, fluidity in terms of being inclusive all oppositional subject positions and critical to any forms of authority, and articulating design, and aesthetics in digital mediascape and creative/cultural industries. In other words, they strive to produce the new means of ‘the political’ as the state power adopts new pacification regimes to tame their communicative and cognitive capacities.

While the digital activism is not regarded as a form of political action that would bring ‘revolution’ by itself to the territory of the region by my informants, all of them consider the discursive potentialities of the net ‘one of the essential sites of contemporary political movements that aim to mobilize young people’ as Radikal Öğretmen (his Facebook persona) puts it, or ‘something that shows that technologies
are not only in the service of the state, but also the people’s as a cafe co-owner in Diyarbakır in his late 20s states.

**Conclusion in the light of Gezi Protests**

In this research, I have attempted to explore the form of state control and resistance of Kurds that make use of digital information technologies in the last couple of years in Turkey where not only the Kurdish political subjects but also other dissident agents of Turkey have been feeling the pressing pressure on the freedom of information and speech. The amalgamated force of law and technology on Kurdish bodies, which is also strengthened by the mass medial representations of Kurds, has amputated the possibilities of ordinary language, representation and discourses for Kurdish bodies. Particularly post-structuralist theories inform us that it is language that initiates subjectivity. Through the destructive attempts on the possibilities of language, historically on the mother language, currently on the means of speech and diction in any language that Kurds and their surveillors know, the political bodies, their subjectivities and communicative capabilities are attempted to be colonized.

I consider the digital activism of Kurds, as an attempt to regain the agency in meaning production, retrieval of the political body and the construction of a language to invent the means of speech and discourse that would ideally represent themselves at their self-presence. As most of my informants have underlined repetitiously, the activism on the net is the one that is relevant until someone takes off the plug and yet till that moment, it functions as a space for possibilities of communications that might have an impact on the real life. The Kurds for whom the public and private spaces of speech and diction are shrunk due to the prevalent surveillance, create a counterpublic where they reach out the others and recreate themselves in the exchange and
discussions with others out of the virtual space of the net. The political Kurds, particularly young ones, appropriate these technologies, specifically the Internet to transform the political language and traditionally instituted political subjectivities as well as the larger dominant political culture that institute them as unprivileged citizens of Turkey that are attempted to be pacified in changing regimes of power. As cyborgs, simians, or produsers living, communicating and producing within digital ecology, they know how to go around the filter systems, to meet and reach others in ways that affect the non-Kurds in digital mediascape. They are political. Their digital daily struggle is a cultural and political struggle that cannot be dissociated from the historical insurgent politics of Kurds, claiming the language and education rights. Yet, the way they produce the political is radically different from their elders or from the ones’ who are involved in older forms of political struggle. They take politics seriously, but the language they use, seem to enjoy the possibilities of humor, laughter and sarcasm. They value the political struggle as an essential part of their subjectivity, however they do not want to accept the call to sacrifice their lives, youth and love for the political struggle. They are the counterpublic of the new pacification regimes that make use of fluid system to control the economic, social and political forces.

I suggest that the research that I present here informs in great deal the whys and wherefores of the Gezi Revolt of 2013’s Turkey. As I understand the nationwide protests, it is a historic one of young people, belonging to different social classes, holding different socio-cultural and political stands that have the collective will to end state authoritarianism. The authoritarianism that I attempted to sketch the outline here with a focus on how it is enacted on the Kurdish movement through adopting the whole means of technological surveillance and imperial power regimes of the global networks. The digital activism of young Kurds, on the other hand, informs us about the
ways in which millions of middle class urbanite young people who are often criticized as an apolitical digital generation by their elders appropriate the social media and the streets to produce new means of ‘the political’. Just as the digital counterpublics of Kurds do, the Gezi protesters use the digital mediascape to change the political landscape of Turkey where their voices matter and where they also hear, see and speak with each other beyond the usual encounters trapped within the social boundaries of identities. The Gezi protesters adopt the digital mediascape in which they inhabit on daily basis to create their own political language and subjectivity, generating the joy of political action, the humorous power of political discourse, asserting their agency to make their own decisions about their lives, environment and discourses in similar ways that young Kurdish political activists have been doing for a while. The Gezi Protest has been a momentous one precisely in moments where the protesters who now grow consciousness that there were groups who have been victimized in the past and in the present in the way they are being victimized now by the authoritarian regime of the state, including media synopticism, and police brutality. In one of those moments, a twitter user writes to Bijwenist-Kurd 2.0 that ‘I am so ashamed of my own fascist attitude towards you. I now understand what you have been through with this corrupted media, another one writes ‘I apologize to you my friends, we have been following the Kurdish problem from this media. It’s been our stupidity. A big apology’. In instances as such ‘the modern Kurdi perspective’ that produce and is produced by the counterpublics of Kurds reaches the climax where the left of the story will be based on a question of how far the counterpublic can be extended in the way it transforms the identities of members, their languages and the political consciousness of the sheer possibility of resistance.

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