"I went to resist. I'll be back": *Ötekilerin Postası* as an example of citizen journalism in Turkey

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Dilek Özhan Koçak

GIRESUN UNIVERSITY, TURKEY

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the rise of citizen journalism in Turkey. By using the example of *Ötekilerin Postası* (The Post of Others) — a Facebook page that makes citizen journalism and collective reporting — it argues that citizen journalism in the country was born because the citizens needed news that was not being reported in mainstream media. The state of Turkish mainstream media became obvious during the Gezi Park protests, where news flow to citizens did not occur especially on the first day, 31 May 2013. The approach of mainstream media opened up alternative ways for news to be disseminated, such as the use of social media for receiving news during and after the events. This chapter will discuss the central importance of citizen journalism by showing the ties between media owners and the Turkish government and the benefits that both enjoy as a result of this relationship, which prevented citizens from having freedom of information.

KEYWORDS: citizen journalism, mainstream media, alternative media, social media, citizens, information, news

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

INTRODUCTION

The transformations are experienced in the field of media in Turkey along with the construction of neoliberalism. After the1980s neoliberalism takes root in the ideological and cultural level through the settlement of the free market and its appearance in the consumption of habits and lifestyles. The ownership structure of media, its ideological function, working relationships and narrative language makes the presence of the media industry more apparent, which is more integrated with capitalism. The ownership relations and the functions of media in Turkey should be discussed in two historical and political periods. The occurrence of a free market economy and media industry, the army's interventionist role in the political field and thus mainstream media's more statist, nationalist and militarist spirit characterize the first period from the 1980s to the 2000s. Changes in power relations in the field of mass communication and the occurrence of conservative mainstream

media and broadcasting and publishing which is compatible with AKP's (Justice and Development Party) neoliberal, authoritarian, conservative hegemonic strategy, characterize the second term which is since 2002, when the AKP first came to power. When the AKP came to power in 2002, the *Uzan* Group — one of the largest in the media sector — was eradicated from the mediatic field due to the interference of its name to many irregularities. Thus, the government would have intimidated the mainstream media. The AKP, especially with its second period (2007–2011) sped up its attacks to establish its hegemony on the army, judiciary, academia and media which were the basic institutions of authoritarian laicist republicanism. Parallel to the weakness and dispersion in laicist center media and by the decisive role of the earning power of Islamic capital under the AKP government, a new "conservative media bloc" was formed. Conservative media became a new mainstream media by leaving its critical attitude to the current power apparatuses. While adding the new ones to the conservative Islamic media in the AKP era, which were inherited from the 90s, a "hegemonic media bloc" became apparent. In particular, two of these main factors of this bloc are *Sabah* (newspaper) and *ATV* (TV channel) owned by the *Çalık* Holdings, whose boss is the groom of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the AKP and prime minister of Turkey. However, *TRT*, which began to broadcast in the control of government and *Anadolu Ajansı*, (Anatolian Agency) which is a state agency, can be considered in this bloc. (Aydın, 2015, pp. 32–49).

These changes paved the way for the development and practice of citizen journalism or, in other words, the changes within the field of media made citizen journalism a necessity. This is due to that fact that in recent years Turkey has developed a management approach which is compatible with international neoliberal politics; its arguments can not only be observed in domestic political processes, but also in Middle East policies. The government, which is in conflict with the concept of liberalism, uses intolerant and harsh rhetoric for "different" and "dissident" voices, for the methods they use in producing and transferring information and for people's personal lifestyles. This attitude has had a negative impact on media and journalists. Pressures on journalists, their arrests and dismissals made the press and the profession of journalism more of a "state apparatus" which affirms the methods of power. Changes in the structure, the trend of monopolization of the press and in other mass media along with the politics of media, which was (and still is) market-driven, made the thesis of a liberal approach questionable. Turkish media are not independent from the centers of economic and political power. The media industry has now become much more integrated into capitalism. Media in Turkey not only played a role in shaping neoliberal hegemony, but also continues in this role, a role which has been affiliated to global capitalism since the 1980s.

The events of Gezi Park in Istanbul began on the night of May 31, 2013 and can be viewed as evidence of the last stage of the freedom of the press and the right of the public to receive news in Turkey. The primary aim of the social protest was against the destruction of the park adjacent to Taksim Square. In a very short per-

iod of time, however, it gained momentum among the citizenry and turned into a protest that demanded general rights and freedoms because of the repressive policies of government. However, the growing protests and the actions that occurred on the streets did not have any coverage in the Turkish conservative mainstream media; during times of more intense violence happening on the streets, CNN's Turkish channel broadcast a documentary about penguins. This became fodder for humor for a very long time. The self-censorship applied by *CNN Türk* was not the first but it became more visible during the Gezi Park events. The reason why self-censorship became visible after the 1990s is the pressures applied to journalists. The risk of layoffs of the journalists who adopted a critical attitude to the AKP's authoritarian manner is the factor of self-censorship in the media. Any kind of pressures from arresting to layoffs and its results indicate the proceeding to "monologism" in the media similar to the 1990s. In this situation people received and followed the news through alternative media channels, international news agencies and/or social media (Facebook, Twitter). The Gezi Park events damaged the credibility of the press, media and journalists in the country.

This chapter aims to analyze *Ötekilerin Postası* (The Post of Others) — a Facebook page — as an example of citizen journalism. The period of analysis includes October 21, 2012 when *Ötekilerin Postası* which was launched on Facebook on October 21, 2012 with the manifesto "We carry on the stance of Citizen Journalism, Digital Activism and Civil Disobedience as an alternative news source and we destroy censorship altogether." The research period ends in May, 2014. The chapter claims that citizen journalism has become a requirement in Turkey for receiving objective information through media. The salient questions to be addressed are: What kind of approach does citizen journalism exhibit in a changing economic and media landscape? Can citizen journalism be an alternative beside the media which was silenced through the applied pressures? The intention of this chapter is to highlight the importance of social media in the process of social mobilization and receiving information. In particular the chapter focuses on *Ötekilerin Postası* on the Facebook platform and later on a website because of the bans of Facebook and try to understand its position where neoliberal conservative mainstream media is dominant.

GEZI PARK EVENTS: BETWEEN THE MAINSTREAM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The aim of the book *Many Voices, One World* (1980) (also known as the MacBride Report) analyzes the problems of communication in modern societies with providing news and information as one of the main functions of media operations. However, an alternative paradigm posits that mass communication, whether organized as public or private, works as the management of the consciousness of dominant thought (Erdoğan, 2002, p. 326). When organized in public institutions, the management of consciousness is found in the propaganda of state ideology. However,

when found in examples of private enterprise, the propaganda of the ideology of the free market is mainly under the control of monopolies/oligopolies. In brief, in both forms of organizations, "intellectual, perceptual and cognitive" sales of the dominant system is made (Erdoğan, 2002, p. 327). The case of study of Turkish media performance during the social protests in 2013 might be used as an example of this specific approach.

The events of Gezi Park began as a peaceful sit-in protest against the decision of Istanbul's Metropolitan Municipality to cut down trees in order to make a shopping mall and museum. The residents of Istanbul wanted the right to have a say in making decisions about their city. However, this sit-in turned into a kind of "war" because of the tear gas bombs used by the police force in order to disperse the assembled crowd. Afterwards, the citizens who wanted to exercise their rights of assembly and expression all around Turkey encountered a police force. Overall, the protests turned into the movement which demanded general rights and freedom under a democratic system. It further displayed the current reality of the Turkish media, which ignored reporting on the protests against the government all across Turkey. Some media channels and newspapers, which are *Habertürk*, *NTV*, *CNN-Türk*, *Sabah*, *Takvim*, *Star*, and *Yeni Şafak* played the role of three monkeys — "Hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil," broadcast other programs and newspaper headlines were not about Gezi Park. The rights of citizens to information through the mainstream media was violated because of censorship and self-censorship. With the intensification of criticism and access to the most current information, many citizens turned into social media and other alternative media channels and personal/news blogs.

In the face of the feckless attitude of mainstream media, #direngeziparkı, #occupygezi hashtags gained in prominence. Several groups and applications were created on Facebook and they generated public support. Citizen journalism was employed to help people who were exposed to the increasingly disproportionate use of force by the police. Through the social media, violence against demonstrators was documented and information was transmitted to citizens. For the first time in the history of Turkey, broad participation in "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2007) took place. The latter was actively used for political purposes by the protesters; social media served as a tool of communication to organize mass movements on the streets. Ordinary citizens shared real-time multi-media and content. They also produced creative and humorous slogans and shared them on the city walls or in videos they made. In addition, through blogs, file-sharing websites and dictionaries (such as *Ekşi* sözlük and *İTÜ* sözlük), which could be easily updated, the disproportionate use of police force could be exhibited. In short, at the point where mainstream media failed, people managed to implement successful applications of citizen journalism.

After the events, the government accused opposition parties, civil society organizations, the intelligentsia, some media channels such as *Halk TV, Ulusal Kanal*,

Cem TV which made non-stop news during the protests and social media networks (primarily Twitter and Facebook), of producing their own rhetoric to broadcast without official permission. Almost one year later, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (currently the President of Turkey) declared Twitter a "nuisance to society" and afterwards, he declared he would destroy "Twitter Mwitter." As he vowed, he did shut down Twitter on the night of March 20, 2014. Shortly after that, he shut down YouTube as well. This sent a clear message that the ruling party could not dominate social media as it had traditional mainstream media, they would try to get rid of it instead.

As is apparent from these prohibitions, civilian communication networks are seen as promising examples of creating oppositional and dissident news which goes against current hegemonic media practices. Another promising development is the understanding of the importance of alternative media and giving it the attention that it rightly deserves. Alternative and independent media channels are essential, especially in times of emergency, for creating diverse and egalitarian language positioned against the mainstream media's current exclusionary, alienating, sexist, masculinist and militaristic news language. Independent news organizations/institutions also fill a huge gap in real time through social media in order to fulfill the public's need for information and news. At the point where the distance between editorial priorities and values and the benefits received by media owners narrow, only alternative and independent media organizations guarantee the reliability the reader/audience needs. Therefore, alternative publishing or broadcasting should be maintained until the end of the dominance of the market.

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND SILENCES IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The starting point for assessing journalism in its ethical and legal aspects is the fact that information is a fundamental right. This right is recognized in the constitutions of European democracies, international documents by the United Nations and the Council of Europe. As argued by Encabo (1997, p. 285): "the morality of a society, in other words, society's ability of looking at itself from a right moral perspective, is based on the way in which it obtains the information." The right to information is based on the right to transmit and receive information. The first dimension requires media owners, editors, journalists and as well as citizens to respect the right of free expression. The second dimension guarantees that the public receives accurate and unbiased information and honest and ethical opinions. Information is a fundamental right and if it is not accepted as a fundamental right, or is accepted as a private service, it becomes more difficult to find any other alternative. The owner of the right to information is the citizen: "public authorities themselves should delimit themselves in guaranteeing the validity of this right which can be performed through public or private media adhered to legal and administrative framework formed democratically." Democracy cannot exist with-

out information and communication. Enabling the development of democracy is possible through the participation of citizens in public events. In other words, citizens can express themselves publicly and be able to obtain accurate information: "thus, the information and communication continues through the media, expands into the area of politics and prevents politicians to supervise this area on their own, alone" (Encabo, 1997, pp. 288–290).

It is understood that free markets guarantee free expression in the field of journalism; freedom of the press means freedom of expression. According to the liberal approach, the press can serve democratic interests only if it works in a decentralized market. Accordingly, arrangements made in the market can serve — different ideas and thus, it may provide democratic requirements. In addition, what enables the press to keep the government in check is because of its position as the "fourth power" (O'Neill, 2011, p. 35). To criticize a newspaper, radio or TV for conveying events in an incomplete or fictitious fashion means criticizing the reason for the existence of media. Because media provides and guarantees all kinds of information and news for the public to then make "common sense" judgments about what is conveyed. Transmitting current events is a founding principal of journalistic practice and it results in citizens who are informed and can engage in critical analysis/thinking (O'Neill, 2011, p. 41). However, one can also observe that the idea of the free market, which "will create a democratic culture based on free thinking," and the function of media "protecting the individual against the state and inform the individual as a voter" do not work (Curran, 1997, pp. 166–172). Because the owners of media have intricate relationships with the ruling party, "center media" or "hostage media" cannot move or was, in fact, restricted. The AKP (Justice and Development Party), who took the big bourgeoisie and thereby, the media owners' groups, hostage, managed to achieve an important position by augmenting the deficiencies in the construction of neo-liberal regimes (Sönmez, 2012).

However, the events at Gezi Park revealed that Turkey's citizens had been deprived of their right to information. The ex-general manager of NTV said, "We are already doing pro-government broadcasting, even my father does not watch us. We are just trying to appear unbiased" (Acar, 2014). However, "the citizens'" request is a guarantee to obtain the right and diverse information and to have access to unbiased and honest opinions through media. At this point, the media owned by public or private enterprise" is nonsense (Encabo, 1997, p. 291).

The Gezi Park events proved that the media was not the public's media, but the media of the ruling party. Naturally, it is logically impossible for the media to broadcast in the public interest or to serve democracy. Media, which is said to be the "fourth power" is — and was — controlled by financial groups who have organic ties to the ruling party which in turn, also has ties to the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government. The silence in the mainstream media reporting became increasingly obvious during the events where the media was located in the discourse of current events and was clearly witnessed by the public.

All of this had roots from the time the AKP came into power in 2002, radical upheavals occurred in the ownership of the media industry and within and through its power relations (Aydın, 2014). From the 1980s, capital tended in the media which were owned by only a few media "bosses". Even if media did not seem to be a very profitable sector, it had an important role in the relationship between capitalists and government. Nowadays, almost all of the four largest media groups have investments in the areas of energy, mining, finance and construction. For example, all four media groups — *Doğan*, *Çalık*, *Doğuş* and *Ciner* have at least one hydroplant. The non-enforcement and then repealing of the law which prevents media owners from having investments in the field of finance enabled the *Doğuş* (the owner of leading major television channels such as *NTV, CNBC-E* and *Star TV*) to extend its operations beyond media investments. Turkey's leading newspapers, including *Hürriyet, Hurriyet Daily News, Radikal, Posta, Fanatik, Time*, leading TV channels *Kanal D* and *TV2* as well as the owner of the *Doğan* News Agency all have investments in energy, industry, trade, finance and the tourism sectors. The *Çalık* Group — the owner of *Sabah* and *ATV* — also has investments in textiles, energy, construction, finance and telecommunications. *HaberTürk*, one of the major news channels, along with *Bloomberg HT* and *Show TV* all belong to the *Ciner* which has investments in energy and mining, commerce, industry and the service sector (Sözeri, 2013). The *Doğan* Group — the owner of CNN Türk — aired the documentary on penguins during the first day of the Gezi Park protests, which became the subject of humorous jibes. In light with this, and considering the commercial purpose of the media, media would presumably have a concern in drawing the widest audience to itself; if one views this taking into consideration the correlation between the size of the audience and media's advertising revenue. The Gezi Park events first broke on CNN International and afterwards, on other international news channels. As CNN International was airing the events live, the major Turkish news channels were broadcasting the penguin documentary or the Turkish Olympics, creating "misinformation" or "disinformation."

In addition, *TRT* (The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation), which had claimed to do public service broadcasting, also did not broadcast objective news stories. Özden Cankaya (2003), who is a professor in a communication faculty and had worked in public broadcasting in Turkey, said that "*TRT* is currently serving as the government's broadcasting institution rather than being the state's and entire society's broadcasting institution." For instance, if one looks at the time period when political broadcasts took place on *TRT*, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan alone had 44 hours, the leader of the CHP (the Republican People's Party) Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu had 12 hours and the leader of the MHP (the Nationalist Movement Party) Devlet Bahçeli had 2 hours and the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) 22 minutes. However, in Law No. 6112 on the Establishment of Radio and Television Enterprises which came into force on 15 February 2011, it is emphasized that broadcasting related to political parties and democratic groups "cannot be one dimensional or

partial." Furthermore, Cankaya (2003) stated that *TRT* did not broadcast objective news during the Gezi Park events; instead it supported the government's views and policies. The reason for this had much to do with the organizational structure of *TRT*. Although the amendment in the 1982 Constitution made *TRT* an autonomous institution, this autonomy could not be implemented effectively. The board of directors of *TRT* which includes its executive board and general management are appointed by the government through suggestions made by *RTÜK* (Radio and Television Supreme Council). The managers of the organization are appointed by the government broadcasting commission just like officials of government. News is prepared not to transmit the facts, but instead, as Cankaya (2003) suggested, to support those in political power and to consolidate that power. All of this supports the argument that *TRT* serves as the government's broadcasting arm (Cankaya, 2014). However, public service broadcasting was created to mediate state and corporate power, and can do so, because it is obligated to increase neither political nor corporate power (Keane, 2002, p. 299). So the reality of the media is obvious: "It reflects the ideology of whoever gives money" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1997, pp. 110–111). Because "the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production" (Marx & Engels, 2000, p. 26). Then it is apparent that there is a contradiction between the ideal functioning of the public media as public space and the reality of monopoly ownership. In Turkey today not only does the mainstream media claim to be broadcasting in the public interest, but also *TRT*, though both in actuality pursue a pro-government policy. Citizen journalism has been born out of necessity, a requirement of a free society.

ÖTEKILERIN POSTASI — AN EXAMPLE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN TURKEY

Citizen journalism in Turkey was born from the needs of citizens who wanted to access information. Along with *Ötekilerin Postası* (The Post of Others), there was *Çapul TV* and other alternative media outlets that were born because of the need for news reporting during the events of Gezi Park. In addition to this *Dokuz 8* — a citizen agency that was born on the date of the last local election in Turkey. The creation of citizens' agency was a response for accusing the two main news agencies — *Doğan Haber* and *Anadolu* of being biased.

Ötekilerin Postası was originally founded as *Açlık Grevi Postası* (The Post of Hunger Strike) on November 12, 2012 in order to publicize a hunger strike, which was started by Kurdish political prisoners in Turkey. Mainstream media had not reported on the hunger strikes and had not given any news about them. *Açlık Grevi Postası* was created on Facebook on the 40th day of the strike, which continued for 68 days. Its purpose was to transmit news about the health status of prisoners through social media and to call for action and campaigns regarding these strikes.

One of the founders, Emrah Uçar, declared the aim of the platform "to bring real and objective news about the strikes in the prisons" (Çağlar, 2013). Emrah Uçar stated that they did not know they were creating citizen journalism as they were doing it, but only realized that later. This stance also illustrates the *naïveté* of citizen journalism. Uçar stated that through the suggestions of its followers and volunteer reporters that they turn the page into *Ötekilerin Postası* (Çağlar, 2013). Thus, it could be the voice not only of the Kurdish people, but also serve the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), animal, nature, Armenian, workers, students, believers, nonbelievers, unassigned teachers, in other words, the "others" of society of various identities. What *Ötekilerin Postası* understood about citizen journalism was that "you could be in any place and you could transmit the news to readers in that moment" (Çağlar, 2013). *Ötekilerin Postası* used its reach to create digital activists which, as explained by Uçar "we do not only transmit the news, but also set people in motion. For instance, if a banner, design or a campaign is prepared through social media to mobilize the people, it means digital activism… We don't make people conscious, our aim is to create an awareness" (Çağlar, 2013). The followers of *Ötekilerin Postası* increased to tens of thousands during the Gezi Park events, because not only those identifying as "others," but most citizens had not found their views expressed by the media. As an example, it previously was not possible to find any nationalist or Kemalist Facebook pages. They now became visible, because they also had become the "other" due to the government's policies.

The *Ötekilerin Postası* Facebook page received 1,700,000 clicks a day, and was first closed on July 5, 2013 by Facebook management because of such a slander "pornographic shares were made." Emrah Uçar, one of the founders of this page says that the attitude of Facebook was not different from the attitude of government. He mentions that the Facebook page was intentionally turned off, pornographic shares can never be found in the content of the page. At that time, there were 138,000 followers. After it was closed, it re-opened and then closed again and a "fake account" era done by others started for *Ötekilerin Postası*. (Çağlar, 2013) Although why and by whom the page was closed is unclear, it cannot be wrong to say that the intolerant attitude of government has an effect.

Not having any financial support, it can be said that *Ötekilerin Postası* was and is independent. In order to survive, because of Facebook's "biased" stance, the group decided to make their own website: http://otekilerinpostasi.org/. They further organized two nights of entertainment which gained the support of celebrities who volunteered their time. *Ötekilerin Postası* functions through the efforts of volunteer reporters and with a variable number of editors, suggesting gatekeeping instead of gatewatching (Bruns, 2003). Because the content of the news is not changed by the editors, they only intervene in order to correct the use of language. For instance, "a friend of ours was attacked" turns into "x was attacked by y." In other words, the news is shared instantly along with photos and videos in citizen journalism, instead of what occurs in professional journalism in Turkey. All of

this means that everything must pass through a filter before being published. Citizen journalism does not create any ties to the reporters. The editorial team provides continuity by using their own networks or the networks of volunteer reporters.

BETWEEN THE FIFTH POWER AND MEDIA INSTRUMENTALIZATION

Conventional media, just like other financial interest groups have neither a goal of being the "fourth power" and denouncing the misuse of laws nor a goal of correcting the defects of the functioning of democracy in order to improve the political system The media does not want to be a "fourth power" anymore (Ramonet, 2004). Furthermore, as argued by Ignacio Ramonet (2004) they do not want to act as a counter-power. Ramonet (2004) questions what we should do as a citizen and gives the answer that we should bring into being a "fifth power." "The 'fifth power' will have a function of disclosing the super-power of big media conglomerates which are the accomplices and emitters of liberal globalization." In this sense, it will not be wrong to characterize citizen journalism such as *Ötekilerin Postası* as the "fifth power" or "citizen power." The fact that Turkey has had the world's largest number of imprisoned journalists over the last two years (BBC, 2013) could be explained by a need for objective journalism that such mediums as *Ötekilerin Postası* are indispensable for Turkish democracy. Journalists who would like to fulfill the principles of their profession are faced with great pressure and coercion. For example, 143 media workers lost their jobs during the protest events. A total of 186 journalists were attacked in 2013. A total of 153 media professionals faced assault and injury during the events of Gezi Park. The reporters' photos were deleted and they were faced with insults and curses; they were unable to do their jobs because of the police attacks. At least 28 reporters, 5 of them international, were detained and 3 of these were arrested. The NTV History Magazine was shut down, *Hayat TV* was on the verge of closure, at least 12 journalists and 1 programmer resigned and 3 journalists were laid off due to censoring and the biased attitude of the media of the ruling party. *Halk TV, Ulusal TV, Cem TV* and *EM TV* were amerced by RTÜK with the allegation of encouraging violence. All these channels had reported on the Gezi Park events as news. The newspaper *Takvim* declared Ethem Sarısülük, who was killed by a police officer during the Gezi Park protests, a member of an illegal organization. The newspaper *Yeni Şafak* made arbitrary additions to Noam Chomsky's interview. The TV channels *NTV, CNN Türk, A Haber, Kanal 24* and *Skytürk* remained silent during the beginning of the events, then put forward the news of the "attack on 360 police officers." The newspapers *Bugün, Sabah, Star, HaberTürk, Türkiye, YeniŞafak* and *Zaman* carried the identical headline (seen as the measure of the control the Prime Minister exerts on the media): "We'll lay down our lives for democratic demands" (Depeli, 2014). Prime Minister Erdoğan began a war on the media, calling upon journalists not to report

on some events in Istanbul. During the Gezi Park events, he threatened the media: "I am calling on the society of capital from here […]. I am calling on the media. You lose, you" (*Siz de içinizdeki*, 2013). His anger went beyond the nation; he claimed that the BBC, CNN and Reuters created false news about Turkey: "They lost their honor as much as they burned the Turkish flag. They provoked lawlessness irresponsibly by saying, I am a journalist, I am an artist, I am a politician" (*Başbakan Erdoğan*, 2013). Through this discourse he declared almost everyone a "terrorist" if they opposed him. The opposition employed some TV channels and newspapers, especially social media very effectively. *Bianet*, *sendika.org*, *Ötekilerin Postası*, *Başka Haber* as well as other news sites all existed during the Gezi Park events. The *Daily Gezi Postası* newspaper, *Gezi Radio*, *Revolt İstanbul*, *Gezi Parkı TV*, *Video occupy* and *Çapul TV* created alternative media covering the Gezi events and broadcast live on the internet. RedHack and Anonymous organized cyber-attacks on the government's websites. Another expression was added to the consciousness of the people borrowing from the saying that "some books are more dangerous than bombs" (Depeli, 2014) In 2011, Gaziantep deputy Ali Şahin said: "A fake tweet is more dangerous than a car full of bombs" (Depeli, 2014). According to a report by the Alternative Informatics Association, almost 1,000 websites were closed every month in 2013. Finally, the editor of *Ötekilerin Postası* was prosecuted due to his posts made during the Gezi Park events. The editor tweeted under the nickname @radikalaktivist and a complaint was lodged under the assertion that he had "encourage[d] people to hatred and hostility" and "insulting the prime minister" (*Başbakan'dan Ötekilerin*, 2014). Although no insults in his posts could have been found, a complaint was lodged because he created these posts without the permission of the ruling party. The Alternative Informatics Association has stated that government made internet and digital activism a target of attack after the Gezi Park events (Depeli, 2014).

We can see that reporters continued their work under very serious and very insecure conditions. The source of insecurity is the pressure from the ruling party. During the recent events, the distinctions between information and disinformation, ethical and non-ethical journalism become blurred; the news itself became insecure and precarious. News turned into something different from what we understand to be a journalist's work and the upholding of professional principles. Because of this, a third outcome was revealed: The bond between the news, the labor of the reporter, professional ethics, a public's right to the information had all been broken in the eyes of the audience. The media audience comes away with the belief that media has a right and responsibility to the public-but it is, in fact, hampered from these pursuits (Depeli, 2014).

Pressures were not only placed on journalists. Citizens at Taksim's Gezi Park who endeavored to use their freedom of expression were characterized by the prime minister as *çapulcu,* which means looters. After the events at Gezi, people were tracked down all over Turkey. This was done in order to show that the *çapulcular*

were terrorists or illegals. Interestingly, a lot of this news appeared on mainstream media. For example, during the events, civilians who were affected by tear gas took refuge in a mosque. The mosque was being used by doctors as an emergency service area where first aid was given to injured people. After the events, mainstream media printed a photo of a beer bottle taken in the mosque. They claimed that the mosque was used as a bar during the events. Although the *İmam*, the caller of the daily prayer at the mosque, rejected this news (*Erdoğan'ın içki içildiğini*, 2013) discourse was maintained, information was distorted, and an "aberration of the news" was affected (Gitlin, 1980).

Mainstream media failed, due to the stance they took during the events in Gezi Park and afterwards, during the bribery and corruption sting on December 17, 2013. Trust in the media was severely shaken. That is how citizen journalism acquired an indispensable position, by protecting the values of truth, reality, and objectivity that the media had already lost. If citizen journalism is defined as journalism that fulfills the principles that are not fulfilled by mainstream media as well as to "cause citizens to gain the consciousness and responsibility of being a citizen and set the citizens in motion," then it means that "the definition and the source of news and the responsibility of reporters should widen" (Alankuş, 2013, p. 110). News is made "problem-centered" rather than "event-centered" and thus, "framing the news from the perspective by various citizens, news features become not only elite-centered or flowing from the elites to the citizens. News becomes more citizen-centered, operates from the bottom-up and paves the way for a dialogue between citizens" (Alankuş, 2013, p. 110). Thus, it can easily be stated that citizen journalism strengthens democracy by seeing the reader or the audience as a citizen rather than a customer. Because the relationship between democracy idealized by a liberal approach and journalism does not work, this makes citizen journalism such as that witnessed in the efforts of *Ötekilerin Postası* essential.

CONCLUSIONS

Citizen journalism, just like pirated communication in 16th century Europe, is the result of media censorship in Turkey. Censorship at that time increased the interest in books and official censorship lead to the organization and reorganization of pirated communication. These ranged from state secrets to trade and technical secrets, from religious thoughts to pornography and each had to be snuck into circulation (Briggs & Burke, 2011, p. 60). Today, citizens create points of resistance to face political pressure and create alternative media by being the reporter of their own news. What has made citizen journalism possible are the new communication technologies. Laptops, cameras, smart phones, 3G technology each offers the possibility for common people to make their own news. Every citizen who uses communication technology can become a potential reporter. Considering that Habermas dealt with the growth of popular press and the increase of literacy in terms of the vital-

izing of public space, citizen journalism has considerable potential in revitalizing the public sphere in an environment where both the press and public service media and private media are controlled by the ruling class (the world of power and money) (Keane, 2002, p. 325).

Ötekilerin Postası survived as a result of the efforts of citizens by being both an information transmitter and receiver. This seems promising not only in terms of intimidation and the repressive politics of the ruling class which include all kinds of prohibitions and lawsuits, but also in terms of a reflexive criticism of the mainstream media. When we can come to a public space designed to create an ideal forum wherein everyone is a real and a potential participant and every citizen is the producer of collective demand we can discuss whether citizen journalism is ideal or not. Today it can be said that citizens can fulfill their own basic rights of obtaining information in a media environment that is under the control of the ruling party/class. Since its founding, *Ötekilerin Postası* has developed a type of collective journalism by transmitting the news that mainstream media ignored. One cannot be sure if citizen journalism is an alternative or a candidate for the throne of traditional media in light of journalism that is practiced under the recent reforms (and that is still re-forming) along the lines that highlight the benefits of a global market. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it can be an alternative way of reviving and developing public space in the way Garnham (Keane, 2002, pp. 299–300) posited of a "rational and universalist political space independent from economy and state" in response to that of the market-driven media. Today, every citizen that has access to new communication technologies is a potential reporter, and so it would be difficult to predict if citizen journalism is doomed in the long-term due to the structural limitations and superficial problems of these technologies and a citizen's access to them. However, citizen journalism in Turkey is a necessity where neoliberal conservative mainstream media is dominant. Especially after the Gezi Park events in 2013, social media and accordingly citizen journalism for the right to information is indispensable. *Ötekilerin Postası* faced prohibitions while making news on a Facebook page. In order to ensure its continuity, it made organizations to make money to establish a website. By means of continued stubborn reporting through the agency of volunteer reporters *Ötekilerin Postası* became not only an alternative to conventional media but also fulfilled the right to information which is a fundamental right of a citizen. Citizen journalism in Turkey as an alternative and objective news medium seems to be a hope for the future in the face of neoliberal conservative mainstream media.

REFERENCES

Acar, A. (2014). *İğneli Fıçı Medya* [Media which is a Barrel with Pins]. Retrieved April 25, 2014 from http://www.diken.com.tr/ igneli-fici-medya/.

Alankuş, S. (2013). Yeni Habercilik Arayışları: Hak Odaklı Habercilik, Yurttaş Gazeteciliği, Barış Gazeteciliği [Search for New Journalism: Rights Based Journalism, Citizen Journalism, Peace

Journalism]. In: Alankuş, S. (ed.). *Gazeteciliğe Başlarken* [Getting Started with Journalism]. İstanbul: IPS Vakfı Yay.

Aydın, U. (2014). The Media in Turkey: From Neoliberal Militarism to Authoritarian Conservatism. In: Akça, İ., Bekmen, A., Alp Özden, B. (eds.). *Turkey Reframed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 122–140.

Aydın, U. (2015). Lanetli Süreklilik / Neoliberal Militarizmden Otoriter Muhafazakarlığa Türk Medyasının Otuz Yılı [Cursed Continuity / Thirty Years of Turkish Media from Neoliberal Militarism to Authoritarian Conservatism]. In: Uraz Aydın, U. (ed.). *Neoliberal Muhafazakar Medya* [Neoliberal Conservative Media]. İstanbul: Ayrıntı, pp. 31–65.

Başbakan Erdoğan İstanbul'a geldi [Prime Minister Erdoğan arrived in İstanbul] (2013). Retrieved April 22, 2014 from http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/147322-basbakan-erdogan-istanbul-a-geldi.

Başbakan'dan Ötekilerin Postası Hakkında Şikayet [Prime Minister Erdoğan complained about Ötekilerin Postası] (2014). Retrieved April 23, 2014 from http://www.sendika.org/2014/03/basbakandan-otekilerin-postasi-hakkinda-sikayet/.

BBC (2013). *Tutuklu gazeteciler listesinde Türkiye yine birinci* [Turkey Is Still the First in the List of Arrested Journalists] (December 18). Retrieved April 18, 2014 from http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/ 2013/12/13121_cpj_turkiye.shtml.

Briggs, A., Burke, P. (2011). *Medyanın Toplumsal Tarihi* [Social History of the Media]. İstanbul: Kırmızı.

Bruns, A. (2003). Gatewatching, Not Gatekeeping: Collaborative Online News. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy: Quarterly Journal of Media Research and Resources*, 107, pp. 31–44.

Çağlar, Ö. (2013). *Ötekilerin Postası: Facebook yönetiminin tavrı devletinkinden farklı değil* [Ötekilerin Postası: The Attitude of Facebook Management Is Not Different from the State's]. Retrieved April 24, 2014 from http://www.agos.com.tr /tr/yazi/5258/otekilerin-postasi-facebook-yonetiminin-tavri-devletinkinden-farkli-degil.

Cankaya, Ö. (2003). *TRT: Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi: 1927–2000* [TRT: The History of a Mass Communication Institution]. İstanbul: YKY.

Cankaya, Ö. (2014). *TRT Hükümetin Memuru Gibi Yayın Yapıyor.* [TRT Broadcasts such as an Officer of the Government]. Retrieved April 16, 2014 from http://www.bianet.org/bianet/medya/153096-prof-cankaya-trt-hukumetin-memuru-gibi-yayin-yapiyor.

Castells, M. (2007). Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1, pp. 238–266.

Communication and Society, Today and Tomorrow, Many Voices, One World (1980). Kogan Page: London/Unipub and New York/Unesco, Paris United Nations.

Curran, J. (1997). Medya ve Demokrasi: Yeniden Değer Biçme [Mass Media and Democracy: A Reappraisal]. In: İrvan, S. (eds.). *Medya, Kültür, Siyaset* [Media, Culture, Politics]. Ankara: Bilim Sanat Yayınları, pp. 139–197.

Depeli, G. (2014). *BİA Medya Gözlem Raporu Değerlendirmesi, İktidar Saldırısının Topografyası* [BIA Media Observation Report Assessment, The Topography of Ruling Attack]. Retrieved April 24, 2014, from http://www.bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurlugu/154085-iktidar-saldirisinin-topografyasi.

Encabo, M.N. (1997). Gazetecilik Etiği ve Demokrasi [The Ethics of Journalism and Democracy]. In: İrvan, S. (ed.). *Medya, Kültür, Siyaset* [Media, Culture, Politics]. Ankara: Bilim Sanat Yayınları, pp. 283–298.

Erdoğan, İ. (2002). *İletişimi Anlamak* [Understanding Communication]. Ankara: Erk Yayınları.

Erdoğan'ın 'içki içildiğini' söylediği Dolmabahçe Camisi'nden görüntüler [Images from the Dolmabahçe Mosque Which Is Claimed by Erdoğan as a Place Wherein It Is Drunk] (2013). Retrieved April 22, 2014 from http://t24.com.tr/haber/erdoganin-icki-icildigini-soyledigi-dolmabahce-camisinden-goruntuler,231645.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The Whole World Is Watching*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keane, J. (2002). Kamusal Alanın Yapısal Dönüşümleri [The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere]. In: Irvan, S. (ed.). *Medya, Kültür, Siyaset* [Media, Culture, Politics]. Alp Yayınevi, pp. 295–337.

Marx, K., Engels, F. (2000). *A Critique of the German Ideology*. Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxist.org).

Nip, J.Y.M. (2006). Exploring the Second Phase of Public Journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 7, pp. 216–218.

O'Neill, J. (2011). Piyasa'da Gazetecilik Yapmak [To Do Journalism in the Market]. In: Belsey, A., Chadwick, R. (eds.). *Medya ve Gazetecilikte Etik Sorunlar* [Ethical Issues in Journalism and Media]. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, pp. 30–38.

Ötekilerin Postasını Anlayabilmek [To be Able to Understand Ötekilerin Postası]. Retrieved April 11, 2014 from http://birgun.net/haber/otekilerin-postasini-anlayabilmek--1216.html.

Ramonet, I. (2004). *Beşinci Kuvvet* [Fifth Power]. Retrieved April 24, 2014 from http://www.yasemininceoglu.com/makaleler15.php.

Shoemaker, P., Reese, S.D. (1997). İdeolojinin Medya İçeriği Üzerindeki Etkisi [Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content]. In: Irvan, S. (eds.). *Medya, Kültür, Siyaset* [Media, Culture, Politics]. Ankara: Bilim Sanat Yayınları, pp. 99–136.

Siz de içinizdeki kirleri temizleyin [Clean you as well the dirt within you] (2013). Retrieved April 15, 2014 from http://www.milliyet.com.tr/siz-de-icinizdeki-kirleri/siyaset/detay/1810974/default.htm.

Sönmez, M. (2012). *Rehine TÜSİAD, Rehine Medya* [Hostage TÜSİAD, Hostage Media]. Retrieved October 8, 2014 from http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/348640/ Rehine_TUSiAD_Rehine_Medya_8230_1_.html and http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/ koseyazisi/348950/ Rehine_ TUSiAD_ Rehine_Medya _8230_2_html.

Sözeri, C. (2013). *Türkiye'de Medya Sahipliği ve Getirileri* [Media Ownership and Its Gains in Turkey]. Retrieved April 11, 2014 from http://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiyede-medya-sahipligi-ve-getirileri/ 244181.