

## **ON VULNERABILITY, INTERDEPENDENCY AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY: AN INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH BUTLER**

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Judith Butler is one of the world's leading theorists whose works such as *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* have shaken our conceptions of gender, sexuality, subjectivity, and agency. Her theories on the social constructedness of biological sex and the performative nature of gender not only challenged the hegemonic conceptions of gender, but also required a radical reconsideration of the feminist theory and politics. In her recent works, like *Precarious Life*, she questioned post-9/11 politics focusing on the questions of vulnerability, precarity, and grief. Her work has exposed how the conditions of war depend on the separation of human from non-human, and grievable lives from ungrievable ones. We had the chance to meet her for an hour in Istanbul, where she came mainly for the workshop titled "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance: Feminism & Social Change" and gave a public seminar on "Freedom of Assembly or Who Are the People?" at Boğaziçi University in September 2013. During that one hour, we talked about her thoughts on the issue of vulnerability, specifically in relation to feminist politics and worldwide occupy movements. In our conversation, we discussed the implications of global experiences of public assemblies, as exemplified by Gezi Park and the Occupy movements, for the conceptions of sovereignty, political agency, and legitimacy. According to Butler, these new forms of politics not only create an "epistemic" shift and bring forth a new sense of political hope for all, but also set the ground for revisiting the notion of "the people" as a way of rethinking the unevenly distributed, and mobilized forms of, vulnerabilities. In this interview, Butler makes important and very timely comments on the ways in which novel forms of politics are manifested through spontaneous assemblies and how all these developments challenge our "accepted pessimisms" that are created under strong state sovereignty through electoral politics and police violence.

***Today, we would like to start our conversation with the primary purpose of your current trip to Istanbul: You are here for the workshop titled "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance: Feminism & Social Change." Could you please tell us a little bit about how the idea of having a workshop on vulnerability emerged? How and why did you decide to put vulnerability at the center of this meeting?***

I think vulnerability has become an issue for a number of reasons. Perhaps, for me personally, it emerged out of my work on precarity and what it means to think of certain populations as being vulnerable to unemployment, or vulnerable to disease, or vulnerable to dispossession or displacement. We speak that way quite often. We say that certain groups are more readily and forcibly exiled or that certain groups are more readily deprived of political representation. You know, I think that here is a way that we all have an idea of what we mean. During these years in

which people are talking about precarious populations or understanding precarity as something that is systematically and differentially produced by neoliberalism and by new securitarian states, we have to be able to talk about what that vulnerability to exploitation is. By this, I don't mean that vulnerability is some dimension of human nature; something we all share in common. It is not so much a humanist conceit along those lines. My sense, rather, is that none of us are merely vulnerable. Vulnerability is not a subjective disposition. You could say, for instance, "I feel vulnerable today," but that does not really describe what you are vulnerable to. I think, in fact, we are always vulnerable to something, which says something about our relationship to the world, our dependency on the world, our exposure to the world, our capacity to be constituted or reconstituted by various conditions in the world. So, I think that is important to realize that vulnerability always has an object or a condition, and in this sense it is a relation rather than a disposition.

Some feminists have focused exclusively on questions of agency, and that makes sense, given our desire to see change and to understand the conditions of social transformation. Agency is essential to activism; agency is essential to social and political transformations of all kinds. But how do we move from being vulnerable to certain kinds of deprivations or dispossessions, to acting? When we pose the question, we suppose that a sequence is at work, but that might not be the best way of understanding what is happening. In my view, we are acted upon by forces and we also act and that is not always a sequence in which first we were deprived and then we revolted. It may be that it is a sequence for some people and that is a good story, even a true story. But that narrative account seems to rely on a sequential distinction that misses the point that there is vulnerability in active resistance – it is not overcome or relegated to the past. For instance at Gezi, you were standing up to the police, you were exposed to them, you were vulnerable to them. All exposure is vulnerable, some exposures are also active and deliberate. That vulnerability and that activity coincide in a certain way. What follows from the fact that you can deliberately expose yourself? Some people do it in relationship to the pepper spray or the gas –the woman in red is a dramatic case in point



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That deliberate exposure does not get rid of your vulnerability. It is, rather, a mobilization of vulnerability. When we talk in that way about the mobilization of vulnerability or even the mobilization of bodily exposure, we assume vulnerability and activity work in common. I guess the second point I would make here is that I think vulnerability is linked to interdependency. None of us will make the world alone and we are all dependent on one another for making social change. And we are dependent as well on infrastructural conditions of all kinds, systems for production and distribution of care, food, shelter; these infrastructural conditions are profoundly social, related to the human, supporting the human, but not fully human in character. Our particular, singular agency is conditioned by them. This is an extremely important point, which links the discussion of vulnerability to dependency: we are vulnerable to forms of destitution that follow from the destruction of the infrastructural conditions of life, social goods or social institutions. So, in the same way that no one can live without the infrastructural conditions of life, nobody can act without dependency on others or on larger social institutions. Both dependency and vulnerability are conditions of action, but they also inform action, which is why I am not sure we can logically or sequentially separate them from one another.

***Do you think that having a discussion on vulnerability in a transnational context with scholars from different backgrounds would have its own difficulties? If so, what would be the challenges? Considering that vulnerability is a contextual concept, what would discussing this notion in a transnational context provide us in terms of theoretical and empirical questions and possibilities?***

I think that we were very mindful of the fact that vulnerability and resistance, which are the two terms that loosely structure our conversations, may not be the relevant terms through which people try to describe their particular political situation or the political fields in which they find themselves and act within. We put that on the table to begin with. The composition of the group is interesting. There are only two people from the United States, there is one from Palestine, two from Greece, one from Cyprus who could not come, two from France (one could not come), three Turkish feminists, one from Argentina, and one from Belgium. It is not the whole world, obviously. But it is a pretty interesting cross-section. One question we had to ask was, how the term vulnerability is misused or instrumentalized. For instance, within certain United Nations Protocols, certain populations are called vulnerable populations. It means they deserve protection. One problem with that designation is that it does not provide the language for recognizing the collective agency of those populations, or specific movements within those populations, to transform their circumstances. The designation of vulnerability can assist a more paternalistic form of power. So, some people suggested that we should not talk about vulnerability at all. The second is that “vulnerability” can be claimed by dominant groups: certain states or certain dominant populations claim, for instance, that they vulnerable to intrusion by foreigners (so the claim of vulnerability assists anti-immigration politics in Europe) Or dominant political parties claim that they are vulnerable to dissenting political parties. Or dominant religions call themselves vulnerable to attack by marginalized or stigmatized religions. Hegemonic powers can portray themselves as vulnerable, just as the State of Israel does that all the time, especially when it seeks to justify its military aggression (here it is important to distinguish between forms of anti-semitism that have to be opposed, and the instrumentalization of the charge of anti-semitism to wage violence against Palestinians). So, there are instrumental uses of the term vulnerability toward which I am sure we would all voice skepticism. It is important to acknowledge that there are sometimes uses of the term vulnerability that support a politics of containment or paternalistic scheme of power. But then the question is: do we allow those discourses to own the term? Do we have to disavow the term altogether because it has been instrumentalized by forms of power we oppose? Can we not mobilize it for another purpose, entering into a hegemonic struggle over its use? Can we still seek recourse to it? It seems to me

that many of the demonstrations that we are seeing lately, that bear a relationship to “occupy” demonstrations, are bringing attention to the politicization of basic bodily requirements. People increasingly ask: What does that mean I cannot feed my children? What does that mean I have no permanent job that I myself have become disposable labour, that my house has been taken away or that my neighbourhood has been destroyed so that some parking lot, shopping mall, or hotel structure can be built there?

These are very basic issues of shelter, of health, of longevity, of community. There is something about bodily vulnerability that is important here. Bodies are not self-generating or self-motoring; they don't just get up and walk and speak and act without being supported in lots of ways – all of us learn to walk with supports, and we continue to rely on a world of support when and if we have the capacity to walk as adults. One of my quarrels with Hannah Arendt was that in *The Human Condition*, she always assumed that an unpaid labour force that would make sure that the standing and acting men of politics could freely go into the agora, stand forth, and speak and act. I think right now what we are seeing is the politicization of that unpaid labour force that makes it possible for recognized political actors to come to the fore. But if we accept that that the inequality presupposed by such a distinction ought to be a political issue – and acknowledge that it has – then the domain of need and the tasks of infrastructure become key to our political thinking. I think this is precisely what a politics focused on accelerating precarity does. And the forms of action that call attention to that precarity are ways of mobilizing that condition within the political field.

***Although vulnerability has already been a widely discussed issue among feminists in Turkey, the biggest controversies around it came to being mainly in the context of abortion debates that happened last year. After the statements of the prime minister on abortion–his calling abortion a massacre–and his tendency to put a ban on abortion, which has been legal in Turkey since 1983, some feminists protested against this development with the campaign of “my body, my decision.” However, this slogan received many criticisms from different circles including among feminists. The criticisms focused mainly on the claim that such a motto promotes adult/pregnant women and their rights at the expense of ignoring the say of the father and/or the God in this decision and the right of the fetus to live. Considering that your theory regards autonomy as a relational concept, what would be your thoughts about this slogan? Could we, or say should we, have alternatives to it?***

My guess is that "my body, my choice" is a form of individualism that probably impresses a number of people as a Western import. It is probably understood as an attack on women's place as mothers and their definition within the family. Sometimes the abortion rights, or reproductive freedom, debate in the United States has also called into question whether the body is figured as property. The presumption is that my body is my property (and that bodies are forms of property), and that I have rights of ownership over my body. When we make such claims, are we subscribing to certain classical liberal ideals of the individual as property owner or having property rights in the self? That idea was useful for emancipating Black people from slavery once they were able to own themselves and not be owned by another. There is an interesting tradition there – but is the paradigm of property unwittingly extended into bodily relations in a way that produces other sorts of problems? My sense is that we can accept the idea that all human lives need to be intimately connected with other human lives in one way or another without saying that the family is the only way to be connected. We can also say that most women who choose to have an abortion do not have the social and economic means to sustain a child at that point in their lives and the question that they are posing is whether they can provide a livable life for their child and whether they can continue to have a livable life for themselves or for others for whom they are obligated to care. Given the fact that we are living in a world in which increasing number of people, especially women, do not have a strong sense of economic solidity or security, since women are differentially exposed to poverty, they are disproportionately subject to becoming disposable labor or having their labor unpaid. These are questions that bear upon the conditions under which a life should be brought into this world, and whether bringing that life into the world would make that women's life livable or unlivable? Quite frankly, I do not think we have to decide when life begins or even whether the body is property more generally or whether my body is my property. I think we have to reformulate the question so that we can talk about conditions of livability for everyone in the scene. One of the problems is that of course some people have abortions because they are ashamed of being pregnant outside of marriage. If they were less ashamed about being pregnant outside of marriage, if there were more institutions available to assist either in adoption or in childcare probably, there would be fewer abortions. It always makes me angry that some of the very religious institutions that shame women for pregnancy outside of marriage also forbid them from abortion.

***Since you have brought the issue of family, I would like to continue with and ask the following question. We know that the family is a complicated and difficult institution when it comes to the issue of vulnerability. The current government in Turkey is trying to overcome the vulnerabilities that neoliberalism inflicts by***

*calling all of us to the family to keep/re-establish the heterosexual nuclear family while also reifying social ties. While doing this, we see that the state is also suggesting that we should all go back to our family and/or build our own families. One of the feminist responses against these policies in Turkey runs through the campaign “Aile Dışında Hayat Var, ” which means “There Is Life Outside the Family,” this is the title of the campaign. The campaign mainly asserts the possibility of happiness and solidarity outside and beyond the family, and, at the same time criticizes the unequal, oppressive, and violent space that the family often offers. However, LGBTQI people want to reclaim the family instead of abandoning it, they demand inclusion within the structure of the family, they want to be able to establish their own families, they want to be part of the families they were born in. So, within this context, what is your view on the notion of the family as an institution that embodies different forms of vulnerabilities, both as a source to vulnerabilities and a form of solution to them, simultaneously? And, as a follow-up question to this, what kinds of support mechanisms can we ourselves establish outside the “family” as it is known?*

I don't know the Turkish situation well although I know some of the work Zeynep (Gambetti) and you (Özlem Aslan) also wrote on family matters in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> I don't think it has to be an either/or situation. I don't think you have to choose one thing and not another. We do not have to say “I am for community, I am not for family,” or, “I am for family, I am not for community.” I think there is such a thing as “porous family,” when people move in and out of the house; some families can extend to include who are not related by marriage or biological ties, and, who are nevertheless part of their household. In the US, we have this notion of household politics, which is a little different from family politics and a little different from community. It revolves around the question: Who are the people who take you to the hospital, who celebrate your happiness, who are there for you when you need someone, or, you know, who are your basic structure of support? Sometimes they can be a mix of family in a more traditional kinship sense of the nuclear family, but sometimes it is more extended family, maybe related by kinship ties, maybe not, maybe extending kinship into non-biological and non-familial ties. So, there are people who may want to have a family, for instance, gay/lesbian people who say, “I want a child, I want a

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<sup>1</sup> Zeynep Gambetti & Özlem Aslan. “The Return to ‘Family Values’: Unmasking the Alliance Between Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism in Turkey,” paper presented at the International Conference on “Sexual Nationalisms: Gender, sexuality, and the politics of belonging in the New Europe,” University of Amsterdam, January 27 & 28, 2011.

family.” If they say they want to have a child and a family and believe that the family is the basic unit of society, and that’s why, they want to go into it, their reasoning may have some consequences that they don’t like. For instance, if we think that the nuclear family exhausts the meaning of kinship, then we effectively break alliances with those who are trying to make extended kinship outside the family. I think if we want to make a family, and want that family to be part of a broader relational world, one that extends kinship and community, then the family can be part of a large movement of people who are trying to transform intimate and dependent life, right? You can then have a family but you are not defining the family as the only or the best option for organizing intimacy. I believe in the porous family, the worlded family.

***You are saying that doing politics over vulnerability also brings the risk of opening itself to the intervention of the state and its paternalistic protection. When we think of the women’s movement in the last decade, not only in Turkey but also globally, we see that the movement has made the law one of the most important arenas of feminist struggle and feminists made important investments to turn the law into a more equal and gender/women-friendly institution. We cannot ignore that there are important gains on this front, mostly on the paper and relatively in application; however, each time that we go to the law for redress for our injuries, it ends up with more space for the state to enter into our lives with the ultimate aim of governing and shaping them. In this context, what could be the tools to challenge paternalistic and state-led interventions while we continue our struggle in and through the law? If and since we cannot abandon the field of law all together, how should we relate with the law so that we can develop productive and useful strategies and tools for feminist activism and politics?***

First of all, going to the law can mean several things. If we go to the law to pass legislation that will establish equal work opportunities for women or equal pay, or various ways of securing political equality, then we are looking to make legislative changes. Or possibly, right now in Turkey, people may be involved in new constitution-making and want to establish constitutional principles of equality that could then be appealed to in subsequent legal cases. But let’s also remember that if you are suffering sexual harassment in the street and you turn to the police for help, you are also turning to the law because the police is an arm of the law, it is an instrument and extension of the law; the police are there essentially to implement the law and the law is an extension of state power, so, one is going straight to the heart of state power. There are two

different kinds of risks that follow. If you are turning to the law to accomplish legal or legislative reform, one question is “is the law end of the process or is the law an instrument in a broader political process?” Because there are certain political changes that cannot be undertaken by law, that actually require a widespread change in public opinion or fundamental changes that may or may not be regulated by law, like shifts in media control and coverage, or other kinds of bureaucratic forms of governance. Usually health policy which may be organized by modes of governmentality, in the Foucauldian sense, are not primarily legal regimes; they are regulated by other kinds of decisions or policies. So, the law can be an instrument, it can implement effects that we sometimes don’t like, so it has to be thought about strategically, but I don’t think legal reform is the end of political transformation, it is an instrument to be navigated. In the case of the police for instance, in English we say, “you turn to the law, you turn to the police” or “I am going to call the law on you,” “the law” is always a substitute for “the police.” You know, I worry about that a lot, since so many women and gay/lesbian/trans people who are harassed. You know it would be foolish to turn to the police. I know that when I was in Ankara a few years ago under the auspices of Kaos GL, I met with a number of transgender people who said that when they are attacked they cannot turn to the police to say they were attacked because they would then be attacked again; they would either be ignored by the or they will be attacked or will be harassed by the police themselves. So, when the police become the problem, you need other ways of establishing networks of safety that do not necessarily depend on “the law”; and when the law is the problem, when elections are corrupt, or when law and police are complicit in brutal methods of suppression, you need other ways of expressing popular sovereignty that does not depend on the law, that is, on the conceit that the popular will is adequately represented by elected officials or existing legal regimes.

***A major constraint of doing politics over vulnerabilities is the possibility of individuals or groups to get encapsulated within their own vulnerabilities and ignore their interrelatedness of these vulnerabilities with other forms of vulnerabilities. At the same time, there is the issue of “unequal distribution of vulnerabilities” that you often discuss. When we consider this, what do you think are the conditions of building solidarities between and among vulnerabilities? Is such a solidarity possible without establishing hierarchies among vulnerabilities? Actually, we are talking about oppositional groups or people who are aware of their vulnerabilities and doing politics about them.***

If vulnerability becomes an identity, then we miss the entire political meaning of the term, and what you are describing to me are certain kinds of identities that only know their own vulnerability and are defended against anyone else's. That's why, vulnerability has to be linked both to institutions and historical conditions but also to this idea of interdependency. *Vulnerability is neither an identity nor a subjective disposition, but a relation that is variably supported and imperiled by infrastructural conditions.* Because if you think about it, vulnerability, no matter how personal it is, is also a condition that someone else does share or could share potentially, and it says something about what common social requirements are. So, my hope is to foster a way of thinking politically about alliances or about interdependency that does not assume that vulnerability can be privatized or made personal or made into a basis of identity – I think that would lead us nowhere politically. The point of thinking about vulnerability is not to emerge into political life, claiming “we are all vulnerable”; no, it is to actually to be able to think about precarity and precarious activism and to think about what it means to be exposed not just to hunger and unemployment, but police force or surveillance systems. How do we collectively manage that exposure, work with it, and even calculate our actions in light of it? There is no way not to be exposed. We cannot suddenly be without vulnerability, without need, without social requirements. We can neither be fully defended nor fully agentic: that is a fantasy of mastery. But vulnerability should lead to a broader understanding of an interdependent sociality if it is to do the political work that I think it should do – dependent on one another, but also on infrastructural conditions that condition and link living processes, including human ones.

***We also want to talk about the notion of “acting on other people’s vulnerability,” mainly in relation to today’s feminist movement. One of the recent debates is about the statization of women’s movement through NGOs, which also includes constructing some women as vulnerable subjects and endowing educated women with the role of “saving” them while creating unequal power relations. How should we connect to other people’s vulnerabilities as feminists, as people pursuing feminist politics?***

We talked about those discourses in which vulnerability is located in a given population, and a paternalistic kind of power emerges in relationship to the category of vulnerable populations. And feminists can be paternalistic and are, very often, especially when they come in from, say, North American funding agencies and seek to rectify certain conditions in, say, North Africa, stipulating the kinds of research and activism that can be funded there, even when it is quite

removed from what feminists in the region wish to do. If one wants to know how vulnerability and resistance work together, then we need to understand how feminist organizing happens within situations of poverty or oppression, the lexicons and the strategies, the organization of the movement. Then, the question for those of us in the first world or from within elite institutions or privileged classes can ask, “how do we work with the forms of resistance that are emerging from within those regions in ways that are actually helpful?” So, I am thinking here about Turkish feminists from Istanbul and how they relate to the Kurdish women’s freedom movement. It would be obviously a mistake of Turkish feminists come in and say “this is what you need to do, we have liberation or we are closer to the West and you should have gone in this direction (laughs) and away from Syria, or whatever.” But, in fact, many of the people I have talked to who work with Kurdish women do so in collaborative ways, and, actually study and learn what their own modes of resistance are and how they understand themselves, the language through which they understand their activism and, in some cases, their militant positions. I think, there are ways to learn, to study, and to work with such movements that are not paternalistic, which is not the same as disavowing the power one has, but of figuring out the most ethical way to make use of one’s power. There are tasks many of us can do on the outside of such struggles, like garner publicity, alter press coverage, or publish statements, assist with advocacy, or help establish networks; those are not the same as coming in with a paternalistic agenda and trying to make sure everyone who is less fortunate than we are conforms to our idea of what feminism should be, and our own way of stating its goals.

***In an attempt to compare the Gezi Park protests and the “Occupy Wall Street,” the most striking aspects about the Gezi Park upheaval were its spontaneity and unexpectedness. This spontaneity and unexpectedness created different feelings amazement, liberation, and sincerity simultaneously. One thing that was discussed during the protests was that the upheaval did not only surprise the government itself but also the existing oppositional groups and organizations. This was a new kind of politics for all parties. How do you think that the spontaneity of these movements changes our conception of agency?***

Well, it is a great question. I have several things to say, which I probably could not have said on Sunday when I gave my public lecture and some wanted me to say more about Gezi. You know, I remember being in Cairo before the first, and what I would say, the only revolution. And, I remember asking several people at a dinner table whether there could be a broad scale mobilization against Mubarak, an uprising. They sat back and laughed at me, and they said

“Never!”. They said, no not here, that is not going to happen here. They laughed at me. “Pass the wine, Naive American.” (Laughs) And, of course, the “never”, the thing they thought would never happen started to happen. Now, this is a very important moment in politics. Because the “never” is based on an established worldview. We all have political hopes that we think will “never” happen. It is a sign of your political realism to say that political hopes are unrealizable, and it is the sign of ignorance or naivete to have such hope. Perhaps we defend ourselves against having hope by saying that it is impossible, since staying in the feeling of hopelessness about hope is nearly unbearable. So, you build up that worldview. That worldview sets the limits to what you can imagine, even your sense of reality. It sets the limits to what you can think and what you can expect – so it regulates the affective field. In some ways, it is the limit beyond which the future remains unthinkable. And, then, suddenly that limit starts to break apart, and that is an extremely exhilarating moment. Perhaps one discounts it at first: “that is false hope!” But at a certain point you take stock of something that is happening that you did not know could happen, which means that you prepare yourself to know something new. Maybe you had some inklings, intimations, or occasionally you had a brief moment of glimpsing the possibility, but then you did not allow yourself, because you could be considered naïve, or because you feel foolish, or because feeling hope has become unbearable. But it is a beautiful thing when that naiveté has a chance to live again, when it ends up actually corresponding to an emerging reality in some way, for whatever period of time.

I think we could all learn a lesson about forms of “accepted pessimism” and how they reproduce the temporal limits on imagination and our idea on what is politically possible in the future. We close down the idea of the different future because we do not want to long for something that is impossible. So, my guess is that breaking up that pessimism or that deep sense of limit was part of what was happening at Gezi. My guess as well is that people knew full well that in the end the state, i.e., the police would come in and destroy the park, disperse the people, injure people, kill some, privatize the park, and win. So, there is always that kind of sense of defeat that is anticipated. But what I find really interesting in Istanbul right now is that so many people with whom I have spoken say that although they knew that they would be defeated in Gezi, they still have come away with a new sense of hope. Because even if they do not know when or how, the new alliances are in process, forming, and will take public form again; maybe it will be large numbers who take to the street again or perhaps the resistance may end up taking form in the national or global media or in other institutions or in cultural and artistic forms – they have a sense that it surely will continue in some way, even if they do not know yet how or when. But here is the difference. Just because they do not yet know in what form it will take, they no longer

think it therefore will “never” take any form. That pessimistic “never” seems to have dissipated into the air in Gezi. Not knowing which form a resistance will take is not the same as believing that it can never take place. So, this is what I have noted as the epistemic shift that Gezi has produced, the suspension of a very deeply entrenched limit on what can be thought, felt, and done. I expected more pessimism after the Gezi mobilization was stopped, but in fact that is not what I have encountered here.

Part of what was unexpected obviously was that a movement that began at first, I think, in an effort to save the trees, which are trees, living processes, organic life that also belong to the history of this nation and its history of public assembly. This is where the assemblies were. These are the national signifiers of a history of public space and public assembly. This became, or it always was at the same time, a critique of privatization, which is part of the debate about the economic modernization of Turkey, which has been going on for a long time: At what cost, economic modernization? And, then, of course, it seems to me that the authoritarian character of the state also became very quickly part of the objection and that was fortified and confirmed by the police presence. So you have at least three dimensions operative in the mobilization. But then what else is happening? The LGBTQI people have a kind of visibility and place that they never had inside a broader community, and there were the leftists, the workers, and human right activists. But also, obviously, a number of Muslim groups including the Muslim anti-capitalists, which interests me a great deal – I would like to understand them better. And, finally the Kurdish mothers, and then the water rights people, and feminists against sexual harassment on the street. And I am just thinking, OK, this is pretty great. And, then, a bunch of workers, and then the soccer fans – when soccer enters the picture, so too does national identity and its masculine character. If a division gets opened up inside the national masculinist imaginary, then something about “Turkishness” is brought into question. The state cannot simply call the assembled people “marauders” if they are in some way linked with soccer!

***and the homeless people.***

And the homeless people, to whom this park rightly belongs. That was very true of the Occupy Wall Street too. The homeless became a big issue for the Occupy Wall Street encampment. The unexpected assembly seems to be very important because it is a different idea of thinking what it is to be Turkish. Who are we? Who are we now? What are we making ourselves into at this point? And, to what extent, is this a new opportunity for self constitution, as a population of some kind or another? I think that is a form of exhilaration that goes along with this idea of feeling that something is possible that you thought never would be. But the police and the police

state, the force and methods of the police, the practices of detention and imprisonment, and harassment, and even torture are present here in very specific ways. This is not to say that we are not all living under a securitarian regimes that normalize both heightened surveillance and police violence – that is surely what happened on my campus at the University of California at Berkeley, but also at Davis when the police used pepper spray. Those episodes bear similarities with police tactics here, but the threat of imprisonment operates here more pervasively among the general population. That really distinguishes it. And that will remain a very important struggle here.

***The occupation of particular spaces for a particular period of time constitutes a temporary social body that needs to take care of each other's bodily needs and also develop collective-decision making mechanisms to organize that space. In the case of the Gezi Park, for example, this was an important experience for all of us in terms of seeing how we can manage our lives together without the intervention of the state or any quasi-state apparatus. Because you know there is a fetish of state in Turkey. We do not exist without state (laughs). This produces a different knowledge about the state and the politics. How do you think this knowledge changes our conception of politics, state sovereignty, and the way we see the state?***

I think that when assemblies like this happen, like in Gezi, the invariably involve modes of self-governance that emerge in informal and spontaneous ways. And yet, even within a spontaneous form of occupation, the question emerges quickly: How does the assembly govern itself? Are there implicit rules? Where is the food? Where is the bathroom? Who will take care of these spaces and these tasks? Where is the infirmary? So, the encampment becomes a kind of experimental and provisional society. There might be norms or conventions that are established about how to behave, but there is no constitution and there is no law. So, they are provisional spaces of what we could call anarchist sociability, or perhaps cells of minor socialism. Anarchist sociability is part of popular sovereignty in my mind. It is about people engaging in acts of self-governance. Usually popular sovereignty ends up translating into a state form of one kind or another. We know the stories that early political liberalism tells us about how people decide they want a state form or a state form emerges out of their self-governing practices. Yet, it seems to me that assemblies like these allow us to see the operation of popular sovereignty and self-governance outside of the state apparatus. So, it actually reminds us that all states are dependent on popular sovereignty, and that popular sovereignty exceeds the states on which it confers

legitimacy or by which it receives protection. Even though most states I know try to control popular sovereignty or to absorb it into state sovereignty, I think it remains important to preserve an analytic distinction between popular and state sovereignty. The people are not necessarily represented by the state, as we know. And yet, knowing who “the people” are is not really possible. Even those in the square do not represent the “people” but they do open up the question of who the people are, and launch a new hegemonic struggle over the term. Obviously, many Turkish people did not like what was happening at Gezi; so, whatever we call “the people of Turkey” are obviously divided along some pretty profound ways. But what was enacted was the idea of a people gathering and self-governing outside of, and against, a state apparatus, even if for a provisional time, which is a very strong reminder that popular sovereignty is not necessarily controlled by state power.

***In the case of the Gezi Park protests, the public display of democratic will was accused of being disrespectful to the will of the people that is represented by the elected government. Thus, the Prime Minister declared that these are anti-democratic movements that go against the will of 50 percent. How do you think these movements, which express their demands through the occupation of public spaces, challenge electoral politics and its legitimacy?***

No elected government has legitimacy without the people. So that is just nonsense. But the real question for me in what you say is: What is the relationship between the state power and the public media such that the government can so effectively use the media in order to make such claims without the media immediately offering a critical commentary or delivering it in an ironic way? I think the relationship between state and media needs to be challenged and that has to happen through different means. That cannot always happen through a public assembly like this one. But public assembly like this one is always dependent on public media in order to make its claim known. So, luckily there are ways of making use of social networking and international media to contradict what most of the Turkish media say is happening. Not all, but most, right? But within the Turkish language, I don't know. And, that really has a huge effect on public opinion. So, I think whatever challenges can be made to secure greater freedom of the press here will be really important for the future of any popular democratic movement. And I have been very alarmed by the stories I have heard about that.

***As a last question, such movements do a pretty good job in countering the sense of loneliness created by neoliberalism. People seem to enjoy the daily encounters and the solidarity they experience during these movements very much, which we***

***think has also the potential to break the cynicism that neoliberal times produce. What would be your thoughts about the ways in which these encounters and collective solidarities might affect how we think about popular sovereignty and people's will and power? Because you know politics is "boring", people do not want to talk about it, something in the parliament. With these movements people did politics but they had fun as well.***

I think it brings us back to the question of sociability. I don't know, but what I heard from some people here is that, in Gezi, a provisional and experimental anarchist sociability emerged. By anarchist I do not mean chaotic – I only mean self-governing without a state apparatus, operating according to norms and conventions that were developed as they are being practiced, which is very interesting. We have to remember that an important part of politics has to be understood as grassroots or popular, or functions as a cultural and social politics; there is a sense of politics in crafting forms of interaction or solidarity that is not the same as becoming an electorate. Well, when you are creating something rather than implementing a set of dogmas, something new takes place... I do not know how it works here but most people in other places become cynical about joining political movements when they feel there are certain dogmas that have to be repeated in obligatory ways, and they are asked to repeat these dogmas as signs of belonging, but if they do not quite agree to do this, they risk exclusion. But when a politics becomes a new way of living and acting together, another sense of the political comes to the fore. Those are rare moments, perhaps what Arendt would understand as founding or inaugural moments, and especially hard to find under neoliberal conditions, but also under conditions where state is increasing its authoritarian control and public spaces are intensely surveyed or controlled. Popular resistance has its pleasures, its joys. It is not just because they are transforming the conditions of their lives together, but because they are part of a transformation that is happening in unexpected ways, in ways that let hope live again. We were talking in the seminar about public happiness. My guess is most people do not associate political action with public happiness. But maybe now they do, which means that next time, we see what comes!

Thank you very much for your time and such an opportunity.