On Translocal Commons and the Global Crowd

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Opening Comments:

I am delighted to be here at Boğazici University to help celebrate 150 years of the institution's history. Thanks are due to the organizing committee – Deniz Erbaş, Yayah Madra, Ayşe Mumcu, Fikret Adaman, and Laura Fresco - who through their warm welcome have made me feel less like a visiting foreigner than as someone coming home.

On this anniversary occasion, Rector of Boğazici, Gülay Barbarosoğlu describes Boğazici University as "a bedrock of unfettered freedom." It is a historical tradition of which you all can be justly proud. But this tradition of intellectual freedom demands of *us* intellectual courage, the courage to criticize the status quo, to question everything, including ourselves! Living up to this challenge entails the courage to be the outsider, defending unpopular positions and disagreeing even with each other, on issues of crucial concern. On the broadest scale, it means the courage to risk ourselves professionally and when necessary, physically, in order to stand in solidarity with others who deserve their freedom as well. This talk is dedicated to the graduates of Boğazici whom I have had the honor to teach at Cornell University and, more recently, at the CUNY Graduate Center: Professor Ayça Çubukçu, Professor Banu Bargu, Professor Onur Ulaş Ince, Ph.D. candidate Pinar Kemerli, and graduate student, Sumru Atuk. They all repeatedly demonstrate this commitment to intellectual courage. Over the years, their courage has strengthened my own.

On Trans-local Commons and the Global Crowd

i.

The world has recently witnessed massive popular demonstrations that, in the name of democracy, have occupied public space and in the process, have had the experience of living differently within it. While demonstrators have managed to hold crucial sites in the parks and squares of urban centers, police brutality against them became integral to what almost all of the protests were about. Remarkable is the fact that these have taken place in nations that (despite varying degrees of authoritarian rule) have at least some claim to democratic form (popular elections, multiple parties, civilian executives). They are not officially totalitarian states. The list of collective actions is long, and it is global in scope: Tunis and Egypt in 2011, Malaysia's *Bersih* (Clean) movement in 2012, the anti-development demonstrations in Cambodia,[1] Moscow in 2011 against Putin's regime. In the wake of financial crises, these demonstrations spread throughout Western nations, from Greece (democracy's original homeland) to Spain, to England and the United States. More recently, Turkey, Brazil and South Korea have joined this number.[2]

These are specific, local actions, and they have been handled by national governments in very different ways with radically diverse consequences, from, ultimately, a military coup in Egypt to, as an immediate response, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's sympathetic hearing of the demonstrators' concerns. But the specifics of each case should not blind us to the fact that together they constitute a

[1]Malaysians were calling for free and fair (clean) elections. Cambodians dressed up like the Na'vi tribe from the Hollywood movie *Avatar* (2009) to protest environmental destruction for the sake of capitalist development. See: http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/01/03/southeast-asia-in-2011-a-year-of-protest/

[2] In Brazil, the call was for free fares on "public" transportation that is in fact owned by private, for-profit companies; in Turkey, the protest was against further development of the city center that would turn a public park into a shopping mall. In South Korea, it was against election irregularities, and government spying on the political opposition.

global event, initiating a new space for politics that I am calling the Trans-Local Commons. While each is embedded in a specific local logic – the Gezi Park demonstrations in Istanbul emerged out of a political constellation different from that of Occupy Wall Street in New York - the issues sparking the demonstrations are not unique to particular nations: weakening commitment to social welfare programs, uprooting established communities for urban gentrification, privatization-for-profit of public services, rising student costs and university tuitions, environmental degradation for corporate gain, corruption of public officials, and lack of governmental responsiveness to the needs of the majority of citizens.

In many cases – certainly this is true of the Occupy movements in the United States – protesters were criticized for their failure to voice positive alternatives, and lack of focus on organizing as a political group that might take its fight to the ballot box. Their refusal to play by the rules of national elections and representative legislatures should not be dismissed as mere incompetence or laziness. Rather, it manifests a growing awareness that the roots of the problem are not national in scope, nor is a remedy possible on the national level. These mass protests in urban, public space were pro-democracy, but more significantly, they were redefining what in our age of global interconnectedness the idea of democracy might mean.

The neo-liberal Global Order that was constructed after the Cold War has brought us an unregulated but integrated global capitalist system of finance, production and consumption. It has brought us a global democratization of the economic elite that is now far more evenly distributed across the world's nations and peoples than was the case during the early post-colonial decades. But it has done so at the expense of an intensified class divide (the oft-cited, growing gap between rich and poor), and a global surplus of populations, people who no longer provide the systemic necessity of a global reserve army of the unemployed. The locations of this superfluous workforce are spread like an archipelago throughout the system, which increasingly relies on computerized processes for greater productivity, eliminating human labor in

many occupations. Only the most poorly paid workers – the young women in the Bangladesh garment factories, the young men in Africa's mining industries, the immigrant labor force in US meat slaughtering plants, domestic servants throughout the cities of the world – are still absorbed by global capital with apparent ease, often under shocking conditions of exploitation. In this context, the middle class that was supposed to provide the basis of liberal democracies is threatened as well, because even when their standard of living is momentarily on the rise, their *quality* of life suffers from the very forces that cause the rise.

A central concern in all of the nations of the world is this: How are national governments to negotiate between the interests of global capital and the interest of their own citizens? Given the disparities in power between the economic elite (the infamous 1%) and the vast majority of the population, it is not easy to see how the state in its role as mediator can deliver economic security for its citizens. The reasons are structural. Volatile and prone to crises, global capitalism is a system nonetheless, one that has to grow in order to survive. And as nations compete to attract capitalist investment, the dynamics of growth take place by side-lining social costs and turning a blind eye to environmental degradation, worker safety, and the non-profitable aspects of human existence (old age, chronic illness, education for all). The universalization of this situation, that undergirds the politics of every nation in the world, changes qualitatively the conditions of possibility of democracy. Today, democracy has become a global struggle. The temporal imaginary of development theory, the belief that nations as discrete entities were moving at different speeds through necessary stages of economic modernization as the prerequisite for democratic transformation, the idea that some nations were "behind" and others "advanced," along a continuum upon which all were positioned – this temporal imaginary no longer holds. Democracy needs to be re-imagined without such a stagist temporal apparatus and, moreover, without the conceptual limitations of national borders. All of us occupy the same political time zone.

When the world's citizens are held apart by discourses of national difference, politics is staged competitively as a struggle at home against the economic welfare of national populations elsewhere, no matter how *politically* allied those nations may be. For example, German citizens see their interests as opposed to those of the citizens of Greece. US workers see themselves in opposition to workers in Mexico, as Malaysians do regarding people in Cambodia and Thailand. Not only between nations, but also within them, specific identity groups see others as the enemy that holds them back. As these perceptions play themselves out within conventional nation-state politics, they lead to ethnic, racial, and religious riots - an escalation of hatred that, in the most extreme cases, has as its consequence civil war.

These are the shared realities within which the new citizen actions have emerged. I use the word "emerge" deliberately, because of its double meaning in English. The phrase "state of emergency" has circulated recently (based on a renewed appreciation for Carl Schimitt's writings on the subject[3]) to define the situation in which a nation's sovereign power finds its very existence threatened, and suspends democracy, the constitution, the law, and citizen rights, in order to preserve itself as the sole legitimate power to *protect* democracy, the constitution, the law, and citizen rights. This paradox enables national governments, which have a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, to use that violence against their own citizens by declaring a "state of emergency." But the word in English dating to the 16th century had another meaning, the emergence of something new. (There is no direct parallel in the Turkish language; the closest I have been able to find is *kelebek kozadan*!) If we return to this meaning, we can say that the global actions exist in a state of emergency in the anticipatory sense that they are enacting something new, indeed, a new meaning of democracy, one that can no longer be realized within the boundaries of a specific

[3] See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception,* trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Carl Schmitt's German term *Ausnahme* means literally "exception," but in English the "state of emergency" has a political meaning commensurate with "state of exception."

nation-state. It is no small irony that their emergence is a counterforce to precisely that global capitalist system which, through massive movement of peoples and goods, has produced the conditions of possibility of this new situation. Citizens are increasingly aware of the global stage on which they act, and they perform their protests in communication with political actors around the world.[4]

This is crucial, because it distinguishes the new, trans-local commons from reactionary demonstrations that are also more than capable of bringing hundreds of thousands of protestors out onto the streets. These latter movements – anti-immigrant, anti-gay marriage, and against ethnic, sexual and religious minorities – look to the past to reestablish a utopian era that in fact never existed. But the new civic actions are taking place in an anticipatory mode. Participants range demographically over every age group and economic sector, but the impetus comes from the young with a (precarious) future in front of them. They are most often urban-dwellers accustomed to inhabiting multi-cultural, multi-racial spaces. And crucially, they are skilled in the newly decisive, political technologies of social media.

ii.

These actors constitute a new political animal in the human gene pool. We can call it the global crowd. What are we to make of this massive assemblage of humanity? Will it evolve as a permanent power on the political landscape? Or will it become an endangered species, hounded by surveillance mechanisms into an early extinction? Amorphous, anonymous, the global crowd is still discovering its powers. Its capacity to survive in the present political climate is as yet unknown. To speak together, producing collective voices within a trans-local commons, is to enhance its potential. The global crowd is not an object to be described by intellectuals, but a composite of

[4] The Arab Spring initiated these events, inspiring *los Indignados* in Spain, as well as the Occupy Wall Street Movements in the US and elsewhere. The British newspaper *The Guardian* published the "Map of the Occupy World"). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Occupy_movement_protest_locations

ourselves. Our speaking of, to, and with the global crowd nurtures its self-awareness with the power of critique. Its potential is our own.

The global crowd differs from what used to be called derogatorily the mob, because the sophisticated use of the new social media acts as a kind of trans-personal, decentralized brain, allowing the collective to self-organize. Like crowd-sourcing, or bit-torrents, it creates peer-to-peer configurations that defy hierarchies of wealth and internet privatization. It creates a web of relationships among people, a social fabric of trust that weighs lightly yet strongly on participants, whose potentially limitless number is their strength. The crowd's horizontal interconnectedness enabled by the new media distinguishes it from the irrational crowd forms described by Gustav Lebon as a massification of individuals who lose their capacity for self-reflection.[5] The global crowd differs as well from the old-style working class. Unions collaborate, but are not its monolithic composition. New labor movements challenge older unions that have adjusted to the corporate model of national compromise and lost their militancy. Workers are increasingly dependent on trans-local political action, because - consider the horrendous fate of thousands of women garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in the factory fire of November 2012 - their struggle needs the global solidarity of consumers in cities elsewhere, in order expose and resist the practices of global corporations that are getting away, literally, with murder.

The global crowd is also not the multitude. I am referring here to the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri who have given the global citizenry this designation.[6] We have all learned a great deal from their path-breaking work, now already more than a decade old, that analysed and affirmed the political promise of globalization, and you are fortunate to have Michael Hardt coming here as your final visitor during these anniversary celebrations. But it seems to me that the multitude

[5] Gustav Lebon, *La psychologie des foules* (1895).

[6] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

has taken a new shape with the recent actions of the global crowd. There is something too passive about "multitude" as a description of contemporary political action, and also something too differentiated, focused on a multiplicity of experiences, whereas the present global actors are working in an anticipatory way to produce a unity of practice, rather than simply a multi-cultural ensemble of identities, against the emergency forces deployed by state power. This unity, this solidarity across differences, is essential for effective action within the political time zone that is now globally shared. If the global crowd has affinities to earlier forms, it is in the tradition of Bakhtin's crowd, a carnivalesque collectivity that enacts a changed social order: people practice living together without the mediations of political representation or capitalist exchange. The global crowd is generic (*générique*) in the sense that it gives new life to the Feuerbachian notion of species-being (*Gattungswesen*) as interpreted by Marx, producing a trans-local commons in the name of a democracy to come.

What, if not ethnic or class identity, is the new basis of solidarity? Consider the following example that developed spontaneously in Cairo during the height of the 2011 Arab Spring. People who came together in Tahrir Square as a united force to oust the old regime exchanged cell-phone numbers in order to remain in contact as a political force. They gave their individual first names. But the last name for all of them was Tahrir - Leila Tahrir, Abullah Tahrir, Mohammed Tahrir, Mina Abdud Tahrir, Susanna Tahrir, etc. The all-powerful patronym that shores up property ownership, family patronage, and class/ethic/religious hierarchies, was replaced by the name of a public space that symbolizes a new citizen unity, *and* (this is new) enacts it for a global audience, that is invited and encouraged to replicate this unity in their own locales, so that the imagined community transcends national divisions. These actions anticipate a not-yet realized possibility of what the global practice of democracy might mean.

Democracy is not merely a question of winning elections, but of governing for the benefit of the people, all the people. The life of the crowd in the public commons

performs this understanding for the world to see. In its public role, the new anarchism of the occupy movements distinguishes itself decisively from the traditional anarchism of the avant-garde. The horizontal democracy of the global crowd in action is anticipatory of the democratic goal. The internet is not merely a means of propagating information, but also now, a method of organizing and a weapon of tactical improvisation within crowd action itself.[7] It is worth noting that the global crowd's discontinuous history and dispersed chain of events is well-documented and remarkably accessible in digital form. Wikipedia is particularly effective in making this recent history freely available.[8]

The global crowd appears as a body-without-organs, or more specifically, a body without the largest of human organs: the skin. There is no edge to this techno-leviathan, no boundaries to its habitat, no place where it cannot live. It cannot commit treason. It is not bound by the neo-liberal idea of contract. There are no limits to the possibilities of integumentary exchange. The global crowd roams the world, and does so as a force of image-production deeply embedded in living beings: "'images,

[7] Much has been said about the significance of social media in enabling the Arab Spring, and those demonstrations that, globally, have followed in its lead. But the transformation may not be as radical as some commentators have argued. If we consider as protopypical the crowd actions in spring 2011 in Tahrir Square, we need to keep in mind the order of events. Thérèse Tierner tells us that January the *before* the demonstrations, the Egyptian government shut down internet access for four days, believing that stopping internet and cellphone access would cut off any plans to mobilize. In response, "residents left the digital public sphere, reappropriating Cairo's streets and reconnecting the city before gathering in Tahrir Square." Citing the report of Seeta Pena Gangadharan, Tierney observes that "the media blackout served to mobilize the uprising; people went through their neighborhoods, knocking on doors and spreading the word face to face. It was a combination of street tactics *and* Internet tactics that enabled the revolution." Gangadharan's comments took place during a panel discussion, ISEA, Sabanchi University, Istanbul, 16 September 2011. "[A]pproximately 93% of all Egyptian networks were unreachable by late afternoon [of January 27, 2011]. The shutdown happened within the space of a few tens of minutes, not instantaneously, which was interpreted to reflect companies having received phone calls one at a time ordering them to shut down access, rather than an automated system taking all providers down at once. Analysis by BGPMon showed that only 26 BGP routs of the 2,903 routes registered to Egyptian networks remained active after the blackout was first noticed; thus an estimated 88% of the whole Egyptian network was disconnected" (Thérèse F. Tierney, "Disentangling Public Space: Social media and Internet Activism," *thresholds* [Revolution!] 41, *Journal of the MIT Department of Architecture* [spring 2013], p. 86).

[8] A search of Wikipedia for "global protests" by year (beginning abruptly in 2011) brings striking results.

bodies, and struggles form part of the same dynamic.'"[9] This transformation "from mass communication to masses that communicate,"[10] overturns the power relations of mass culture from inside the belly of the beast. The actions of the global crowd are "open to shared experience," a shared life beyond differences in identity.[11] Rabih Mroué speaks of "the pixelated revolution," captured and recorded by cellphone videos that are uploaded and go viral as counter-images to the official news channels that do not televise revolutions.[12] He claims that even in the case of the Syrian civil war, resistance is staged in a secular zone, where the violence of the regime is recorded by the prosthetic eye of the cellphone, and streamed to the world as an appeal to human judgment, not a performance before God.[13]

How can the world see? The question is misplaced. The issue is rather, how do demonstrators premise their political action on being seen, not by national leaders, not by the state, but by the world, a vision that circumvents state surveillance and makes public evidence no longer a vulnerability to protesters, but a weapon. President Mubarak on state television speaking paternalistically to his people appears foolish on Al-Jazeera's split screen alongside Tahrir Square protesters waving shoes and shouting him down, a mere man like any other, calling for him to resign. Here, the gaze of national power has lost its capacity to lock in the meaning of political actions by people who are no longer "his" to address.

No doubt the strength of the global crowd is its weakness as well. The spontaneity that brings success is immediate, but evanescent. Because the crowd maximizes the use of social media, it does not need a party base and as a consequence, it does not have one. We can see how tragically this vulnerability played itself out in the case of

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[9] Hito Steyerl, cited in Pablo Martínez, "When Images Shoot," *Image(s), mon amour: Fabrications* (catalogue for solo exhibition of the Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué, Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo). Intro. Ana Isabel Mariño Ortega (Madrid: CA2 in collaboration with SALT [Istanbul] 2013), p. 89.
[10] Martinez, p. 92. pp. 90-92.
[11] Martínez, pp. 90-92,
[12] Rabih Mroué, "The Pixelated Revolution," *Image(s)…Fabrications*, p. 392.
[13] Rabih Mroué, "The Pixelated Revolution," *Image(s)…Fabrications*, p. 392.

Egypt, because there is as yet no effective, democratic alternative to the politics of nation states. The Muslim Brotherhood had a long-lived and well-established party base that penetrated deep into the lives of ordinary people, so that they were placed strategically to win the first national election. But dissatisfaction with the authoritarian tone of Morsi's rule caused the crowd to reappear on the streets one year later in numbers truly extraordinary.[14] Perhaps here, at the critical moment, the crowd made a strategic error by responding affirmatively to the Egyptian military's offer of support *when they did not need to do so*. The military would not conceivably have used violence against the demonstrators, so that Morsi's threat to impose a state of emergency against the crowd was ultimately hollow. Sovereign power needs the loyalty of the army to ensure its monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, and Morsi did not have it. The few remaining years of his term in office might have allowed the common sentiment to coalesce, consolidating the opposition while increasing global support. A new majority coalition might have won the next election and continued to inspire the world, shifting the international balance of forces involved in Syria's revolution as well. Instead, a military coup quickly used violence against unarmed supporters of Morsi (more than 1,000 killed), perpetuating the old meaning of the state of emergency that Morsi had earlier tried unsuccessfully to evoke. The force of the people was pre-empted by the military, threatening to turn control back to the state-within-a-state that is anathema to democracy. Turkish critics have named this the deep state (*derin devlet*), the techniques of secrecy and surveillance of which are everywhere growing stronger and more globally interconnected.

Events in Egypt show us just how difficult it is for a new democratic force to emerge on the global stage. If in 2011 Egyptians assembling on Tahrir Square inspired the whole world with enthusiasm, in 2013, events were framed by the Egyptian military

[14] Reporting on the number of protestors on June 30, 2013, Reuters gave the figure of 14 million, among a population of 84 million Egyptians.

within narrowly national terms. President Obama, too, acted in old ways, both liberal and national, claiming publically that this was something for the "Egyptian people" to decide for themselves (while excluding political and economic elites, nationally and globally, from this identity-constraint). Such rhetoric sounds tolerant. But it cuts the global crowd into manageable pieces for state control, whereas the radical potential is that these movements will overflow national borders.

How do the Egyptian people define themselves? There is not a simple answer. Public opinion polls, looking for the decisive identity-variable, find instead a multiplicity of identifications - Muslim, Arab, Egyptian – the political significance of which is not stable, but changes with shifting contexts.[15] This slippage prevents the "us v. them" thinking that was characteristic of the Manichaeism of the Cold War era. Rather than deriving their politics from their identities, global crowds negotiate the content of these designations as the *consequence* of their actions, not its cause. In proclaiming to the world, "the state does not represent us," crowds demonstrate that it is through them, not government officials, that the meaning of words such as America, or Egypt, or Syria, or Greece is decided and communicated to the world.

iii.

My point is that for the global crowd, what is newly emerging is the idea that politics is *not* determined by identity. Not who you are is crucial, but the fact that you are willing to stand with others in public space as an embodiment of the general will – general in the generic sense of a trans-national humanity. However, the politics of global democracy is only a *possibility* within our shared political time zone, not the

[15] "In my May 2012 poll, two-thirds of respondents said they supported making sharia the basis of Egytian law. But when I probed more deeply, things became less clear: Of those who supported sharia as the basis of law, only 17 percent said they preferred applying it literally, while 83 percent said they favored applying the spirit of sharia but adapted to modern times. Little surprise that Egyptian commentator Muhammad Hassanein Heikal describes Egypt as a "civil-secular country that loves religion." See Shibley Telhami: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/egypts-identity-crisis/2013/08/16/70d1459c-0524-11e3-88d6-d5795fab4637_story.html)

rule. The definition of democracy as an ethno-national project, wherein other cultures/religions/ethnicities are considered fortunate if they are recognized as minorities within the nation, remains the dominant form. In Turkey, of course, the situation for Armenians and Kurds is no exception.

The existing global norm of nation-states is based on the problematic assumption of racialized differences, accepted as a given, but always the consequence of a process of historical naming that is anything but natural. In the case of the Americas, successive waves of forced labor were codified in taxonomies of difference by means of the pseudo-science of race. Today in the United States, the word race is intentionally avoided, but the category of white is not, and the demographic threat to the special position of self-identified whites is a central issue in domestic politics. In Latin America, an elaborate caste-based system in the colonial era presumed intermarriage, but adhered to a strict hierarchy along color lines,[16] and still today, the elite remains protective of its Portuguese or Spanish ancestry. In the British Empire, the very construction of racial difference was a legacy of colonialism.[17]

Neo-liberalism has its own fantasy of global unity, whereby the reciprocity of trade and economic interdependence is supposed to lead in Kantian fashion to global peace. To consider an example on the other side of the globe, in Malaysia (a country that I will visit shortly) racial divisions, tied to provincial territories, that were established under European imperialism continued to be accepted after independence. Since that time, integration into the global economy has encouraged new immigrants from both ends of the financial scale. Given the multiplicity of racial/ethnic/religious/linguistic divides, the unity of Malaysia as a nation has relied

[16] (1) Peninsular - a Spaniard born in Spain, (2) Criollo (fem. criolla) - a person of Spanish descent born in Mesoamerica, (3) Indio (fem. India) - a person who is a native of, or indigenous to, Mesoamerica, and (4) Negro (fem. Negra) - a person of African slave descent.

[17] See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject, Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 1996).

on all citizens' acquiring fluency in the language of business finance, described by one scholar as "certainly the most elaborated public discourse in the country."[18]

Malaysian dependency on a global economy is in many ways an extension of the British colonial project that was connected with tin and rubber production for export. And yet, within our shared political time zone, the Malaysian model, which relies on mutual economic interests and a common currency to bind cultural and linguistic differences that are class differences as well, appears anticipatory of the most contemporary political experiments – resonating with the European Economic Union, for example, or even with proposals for an economic resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.[19] The idea of economic harmony based on mutual exchange as a means of transcending economic conflict based on class, that has become a central tenet of neo-liberalism in the post-Cold War era, is supposed to have made communal and collective ways of living together obsolete, preventing what Derrida called the "spectre of Marx" from making its presence felt in political life.[20] And yet, that past persists in the social unconscious. Again, Malaysia with its violent anti-capitalist history is prototypical of a trans-local phenomenon.[21] The spectre of Marx stirs in the thickets of memory of the global crowd as well.

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[18] Thomas Williamson, "Incorporating a Malaysian Nation," *Cultural Anthropology* 17.3 (2002): 401-430. "The iconography of the RM 100 note, for example, depicts the Proton (Malaysia's 'national automobile') on its assembly line along with a close-up of its engine. Other denominations feature the telecommunications sector, Malaysia Airlines, and a Petronas oil platform" (p. 402).

[19] Post-colonial nations have a more prominent history of foreign direct investment, but the parallels provide evidence for the synchronicity that characterizes the present global era.

[20] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuff (New York: Routledge, 2004). The global crowd is a possible locus of the New International that Derrida considered necessary.

[21] See, for example, the 2006 Malaysian film, *The Last Communist* (Lelaki Komunis Terakhir), by the director Amir Muhammad, whose "semi-musical documentary" records in images the haunting in the present of Malaysia's anti-capitalist past, by tracing the life of the Communist leader Chin Peng, who is still today living in exile. The film features interviews with people in the towns in which Peng lived from birth to national independence, interspersed with songs that are fashioned after propaganda films. Banned from screening in Malaysia by the government's Home Affairs Ministry, *The Last Communist* made its world premiere at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival. It has also been shown at the Seattle International Film Festival, the London Film Festival, the Singapore International Film Festival and the Hong Kong International Film Festival, but has

To speak of all of us, globally, existing within the same political time zone means that nothing in recent history will surprise us. Neo-liberalism is the justifying discourse throughout the world. To return to our Asian example, in the 1980s the model for Malaysia became explicitly that of a corporation. "Malaysia Inc." was the name for national unity, trade unions were sidelined, and public industries underwent privatization.[22] The fact that a wealthy elite was the beneficiary did not close off the rest of the population from the dream of taking part, promulgating a "heady futurism" in the culture.[23] In 1991, Mahathir announced his plan of Vision 2020, which entailed a strong push for economic growth. The construction of Petronas Towers as the tallest building in the world became an icon of this drive.[24]

But the Asian economic boom came to a sudden end in 1997.[25] The financial crisis hit not only Malaysia, but Thailand, Philippines, Korea, Hong Kong, Japan – again, as anticipatory of a decade crisis of the global capitalist system that spread around the world (Argentina in 1998, Turkey in 2000, United States in 2008, Eurozone in 2009). In Malaysia, recovery by official channels required a bailout of key industries, as well as further dependence on global financial institutions and controls, with the biggest sacrifices made domestically by unions and social programs. To the rest of the world's citizens, whether American, European, Asian, or African, none of this is news. All of these developments are familiar from effects of global capitalism in their own

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never been publicly viewed in its home country. The film has been uploaded in its entirety on YouTube. For an insightful discussion of this film, see Fiona Lee, "Spectral History: Exploring cold War Legacies in Malay(si)an Decolonization through the Historical Documentaries of Amir Muhammad," Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of English, CUNY Graduate Center, 2013.

[22] As prime minister, Mahathir used the model of "Malaysia Incorporated" to define the country, where "'even the unskilled worker or the hawker plays a role in the economic sector and is therefore involved in the Malaysia Incorporated concept'" (cited in Williamson, p. 408).

[23] Williamson, p. 411.

[24] See Williamson, pp. 410-11.

[25] Following the 1997 crisis, tens of thousands of Malaysians assembled in dramatic public protests, fearing immigrant unrest, and the possibility that their ethnic supremacy would be undermined (Williamson, 417). An Internal Security Act reflected concern that because of the immigrant population might make trouble, a strong police state is necessary because at any time, ethnic violence might break out (Williamson, p. 417)

countries. And yet, despite extraordinary similarities in the economic situation, the sad truth is that throughout the world, appeals to racism and religious intolerance have proven effective as a means of national politics in response to this situation. In the global wake of the capitalist financial crisis, divide and rule has managed to prevent the spectre of Marx's return.

It is here that the global crowd finds a foothold as an alternative to both capitalism and Marxism. At the same time, given existing political institutions, it is not a replacement for national citizenry. Religious, linguistic, racial, and sexual differences are not obliterated in the crowd. They are celebrated. Theirs is not an abstract argument about universal human rights. Rather, citizen variety is displayed as an affirmation of the fact that the political issues that matter are not commensurate with differences in identity. Practical issues are precisely the principle of assemblage of the global crowd, as a forum in which the meanings of the nation, or religion, or ethnicity, are negotiated in full view for the world to judge. Moreover, its strategic positioning on the Internet, wherein information speedily travels beyond the geographical boundaries of the nation-state, highlights the fact that the place in which national politics plays out is not confined to a specific geographical location.

From the moment I arrived in Istanbul, I have been hearing reports of the Gezi spirit that persists after the demonstrations at Gezi Park and the police actions against them - which I witnessed through live, continuous CNN-TV coverage provided by a camera crew stationed at Taksim Square. Every description of Gezi testifies to the inspiration people felt as a consequence of this spontaneous coming together of citizens from the most diverse backgrounds, groups traditionally divided in electoral politics, but now in solidarity with a protest that was sparked by the government's plan to replace the public, green space of Gezi Park with a shopping mall, as one of a long list of urban transformation projects that have increasingly neglected the needs and desires of the people themselves. Groups from across the spectrum of political parties, social classes, and ways of life – women veiled and unveiled, gays and Lesbians, Kurds,

Socialists, Islamists, and soccer fans – came out to make a stand, respecting each other's differences while uniting against the violence of the police response. This was a fully local event, and Gezi is now firmly established as part of the collective memory of Turkish political life. But my message to you today is not to forget that Gezi is also trans-local in its implications, anticipatory of something more, something global, that needs to be recognized, honored, and nurtured, because national success will depend on this global consciousness and the trans-local solidarity that it engenders.

iv.

What is democracy in global terms? The promise and hope provided by the global crowd is precisely the possibility of unifying peoples' struggles across the boundaries of nations on a basis other than ethnic, religious, *or* class belonging, all categories of distinguishing friends from enemies based on who they are, rather than the truly political ground of where on the issues they stand. The slippages within political naming have never been more extreme. The need to translate local terms for a global audience marks a change in the political horizon.[26] With the disillusionment of the dream that capitalism would be sufficient for a political harmonization of interests, coming close on the heels of another failed dream that Marx's historical predictions would inevitably be realized, the global crowd has emerged as a space of democratic experimentation. Its history remains to be written.

We might look at it this way. Translocally, the global crowd occupies a space traditionally monopolized by interstate diplomacy. In its progressive forms, it democratizes this space. It is anarchist insofar as the people, not their governmental leaders, appeal directly to the world, and negotiate recognition of their place within it. Whereas traditional diplomacy is secret, the diplomacy of the global crowd makes

[26] We can make this point by reference to Walter Benjamin's theory of translation, whereby both languages involved in the process are transformed (see Lee, "Spectral History")

publicity its practice. Traditional diplomacy mediates cultural exchanges via state-approved forms. The diplomacy of the global crowd produces its own, shared culture: street art, political performance, as well as a shared mass culture of popular music, independent cinema, imitated fashions, viral videos, tweets, facebook postings, open source software, cellphone directories, and more. Those who participate in the global economy, at no matter what income level, have access to at least part of this media arsenal, particularly young people, and demographic trends are in their favor.

The effects of this new diplomacy are not yet tested. The capacity of the global crowd to improve traditional institutional orders is a conjecture, and a hope. Its actions, so far, have appeared to be easily overpowered by state violence, power politics, nationalist enthusiasm, and proxy wars. But the global crowd's enormous potential as a political force will not simply disappear. It is vital that the crowd's participants remain visible to each other. States and corporations must be prevented from controlling the global field of meaning. Not just freedom of expression is at stake. The new media must be kept open and publically available because publicity is the only antidote to a monopoly of the internet's revolutionary technology for the purposes of wealth accumulation and population surveillance that define the interests of global corporations and the deep (undemocratizable[27]) state. Nothing will be more critical for the meaning of democracy in the future than the struggle against state and corporate appropriation of media information that denies access to it by the global crowd.

The global crowd is a power block. It takes its place among other power blocs (including the BRICS alternative to Western hegemony, and the Chinese state's bid for superpower status, as well as national political parties, labor unions, and religious institutions.) This power bloc has no bars to entry. It performs for a worldwide public. Its political effectiveness depends on a synchronicity of actions within our shared

[27] Neither al-Qaida nor the military state can practice effectively without secrecy. The fact that they share this situation says a great deal against both these forms.

political time zone. It has the power to challenge the practices of the national security state and global capitalism alike. The very fact that it is a player in global space, not the only one, but the one most open to the world's immensely varied populations - varied religions, varied genders, varied languages, varied traditions - anticipates a changing world order, one with weak boundaries and shifting nominations. And it brings to international diplomacy something that this field has never even pretended to deploy in its most enlightened Western forms: democracy. Not the technology of global communication, but the claim to democratize global space by means of it – this marks what is new in the present situation. To speak about, to and with the global crowd is to help it to emerge. *Kelebek kozadan*!