

M.A. Thesis Proposal

The Working Class's Participation in the Mass Protests in Brazil and Turkey in Comparison

Introduction:

Turkey and Brazil are two of the emerging market economies, which were greatly praised by the international institutions for their fast growing and stable economies. They underwent rapid economic growth –which depended upon neoliberal policies to a great extent– in the last decade under PT (Workers' Party) government in Brazil and AKP (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey. However, summer of 2013 has witnessed simultaneous mass protests in the two countries. Considering the mass protest wave in several countries following the 2008 economic crisis, the protests in Turkey and Brazil should be evaluated disparately from those in Greece, Spain, Tunisia Egypt or in the USA due to their similar positions in today's global capitalism with their success stories. This makes the cases of Brazil and Turkey worthy of consideration as comparable cases.

As these two countries' economies have seemingly expanded, growth did not improve every segment of the society equally. Particularly, while the middle segments of the population in both countries appear to be well off from the economic growth past decade, the condition of the lowest 20% was merely slightly ameliorated in terms of income distribution. On the other hand, looking into the academic and non-academic analyses on the mass protests in the two countries, we come across with the impression that middle classes' participation was dominant. In this research, my aim is to look into the class composition of these protests and to analyze and compare the processes lying behind this phenomenon. More specifically, I aim to look into the participation of the working class in the protests in Brazil and Turkey to indicate the similarities and differences between the two by looking into the historical and institutional processes.

The succession of events:

In Brazil and Turkey, the initial protests that eventually triggered mass protests concerned with relatively minor problems. They swiftly became nation-wide comprising people from different backgrounds and giving voice to their various demands. The two protests articulated people's discontent against their governments, which has escalated throughout years with the two governments' policies. In Turkey, the protests targeted the neoliberal conservative AKP (Justice and Development Party), which has been the ruling party since 2002, while in Brazil, the protests were against PT (Workers' Party), which has been in power since 2003 and which has been maintaining the neoliberal path that has been set previously. Despite the similarities between the two mass protests, there have also been some divergences in terms of social profile of the protestors and the demands that have been uttered during the protests stemming from each country's socio-economic structures.

Turkey:

In Turkey, on May 27th, the construction equipments entered the Gezi Park in Taksim, to demolish one of the last green areas in the city center and build a shopping mall which

would be a replication of 'Taksim Military Barracks' which was demolished more than 70 years ago. Putting in a larger frame, the demolition of the park and the construction of a shopping mall was a reflection of an ongoing trend in İstanbul in the past decade: urban regeneration through dispossession, undergirding of consumerist culture through the construction of tens of shopping centers all over the city, the exponential growth of the construction sector in the city center, which most of the time aimed to serve the upper and upper-middle classes.

A relatively small number of protestors entered the park with their tents in order to stop the demolition. The police attempted to repress the protests through excessive violence. However, the police brutality, which people heard of through social media, led to an increase in the number of the protestors (KONDA Gezi Park Survey). In the following days, both the scope and the target of the protests have extended. While various other cities have started to support the protests through demonstrations in their own cities, the common ground of the protests exceeded the protection of the Gezi Park. Also, it has been argued that while the social profile of the protests mostly consisted of young middle class people in the first days, in the following days they became more heterogeneous through the participation of the working class. (Gökay and Shain 2013; Tuğal 2013, 166; Yörük 2013). Furthermore, the participation of the students was significant. 'Taksim Solidarity', which was established in order to object the Taksim Pedestrianization Project, has become prominent in the first days of the protests by calling people for action. Nevertheless, the protests largely continued as leaderless.

The pattern of participation of the working class in the protests reflects the country's current condition of the formal and informal labor force. Two of the largest trade union confederations DİSK and KESK declared general strike for one day. However, they could not attract a large number of people and could not be successful due to their powerlessness in terms of effectively influencing the economy (Yörük 2013). Alongside the apparent lack of strength of the formal proletariat, there were a significant number of people from the informal proletarian districts coming to Gezi Park to join the protests or bringing the resistance into their neighborhoods (Tuğal 2013, 166).

Lastly, the attitude of the government and the media towards the protests were very determinative during the process. While some AKP officials gave some speeches aiming to appease the protests in the first days, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan continued to refer the protestors as 'looters' and 'vandals'. This certainly incited the movement. In conjunction with this, the mainstream media, which has gradually fallen under the hegemony of the government, remained largely silent at first while reporting the news somehow biased in the following days (Aymaz 2013, 231-235).

Brazil:

In Brazil, the triggering event that led to large demonstrations was an increase in the public transport prices in the São Paulo city. However, it should be noted that it has a background in terms of the urbanization pattern behind the precipitating influence of such negligible change. São Paulo is a highly industrialized city, which is considered as an important economic hub in Brazil. During the urbanization process in the first half of the 20th century, the arrival of industrialization led to a disorganized urban space. Like many other

large cities in the world, transportation has become very problematic in São Paulo, which worsened with the augmentation in the number of private transportation (Caldeira 2000, 216; Vasconcellos 2005, 91).

Concomitantly, as Caldeira indicates São Paulo city has been urbanized in a dispersive pattern, which let the middle and upper classes live in the city center and pushed the poor to the peripheries of the city that has to use the buses in a congested city while former groups use their private cars (Caldeira 2000, 220; Caldeira 2013). On top of these, the PT government has made it financially easier to acquire private automobiles without state control, which led to an even more congested traffic (Caldeira 2013). Considering this context, it is possible to perceive the mass protests, bursting with a small increase in the bus fares, as a reaction to the reflection of social inequalities in the urban sphere.

The process of acceleration was similar to that of Turkey. The demonstrations were initially led by left wing Free Fare Movement (Movimento Passe Livre, MPL) demanding the reversal of the transport fare increases. The largest protest was held on June 6. Participation to the protests has mounted up and spread to other cities when excessive police violence was used against the protestors and when MPL announced that the protests were not only against the hike in public transportation. As a corollary to this heterogeneous profile of the protestors and their various demands, people did not recognize the leadership of MPL and expressed their own demands. The demands had a wide range including reversal of the fare increases in public transportation, elimination of corruption, inequality, and police violence and amelioration of the public services (Karadağ 2013; Saad-Filho 2013, 658-659).

While the social profile of the protests has become more heterogeneous in the following days, some scholars argued that a significant difference from Turkey was the participation of the working classes from the squatter neighborhoods. (Tuğal 2013, 162-163; Yörük 2013). On the other hand, in an interview that the leader of the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, João Pedro Stédile gave in June 25, almost 3 weeks after the first demonstration, he remarked that the working class has not participated in the protests yet. While he seems to be referring the participation of the formal working class in an organized fashion, this phenomenon requires elucidation (Stedile, 2013). Furthermore, Saad-Filho and Morais argue that as the protests have become more widespread, the proportion of the middle class became more dominant in the protests' composition (Saad-Filho and Morais 2014, 237).

Finally, the response of the government and the media was much more different from Turkey. The mainstream media has criticized the movement in the first days until it started to see the protests as an opportunity to defame the PT, which it did not support. Therefore, media had a supportive role during the protests in Brazil. On the other hand, seeing that the protests have expanded, President Dilma Rousseff, an ex-guerrilla who fought against the military government therefore familiar with how social movements escalate and demobilize, developed a more strategic attitude towards the protestors than Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Saying that they were not afraid of the streets, she embraced the movement and reversed the hike. The movement was appeased to some extent although it did not completely end after Rousseff's speech (Karadağ 2013, Saad-Filho 2013, 658).

Historical Background:

The reason I have chosen Turkey and Brazil as comparable cases among other mass protests taking place in the last few years in several countries is their certain structural characteristics and the current place they occupy in the world capitalism. On the other hand, it is crucial to indicate the divergences and convergences in their historical backgrounds, which I deem to be an important determinant regarding the main question of this research.

In 1980s, Brazil and Turkey have abandoned their protectionist ISI development strategies following the neoliberal restructuring that has been 'recommended' by the World Bank and the IMF claiming that only this way the economic damages caused by the capitalist crises of the 1970s could be overcome. In Turkey, neoliberal restructuring have launched by the military regime which took over the government in 1980 through the adoption of "January 24th decisions" (Boratav 2011, 148). It accelerated through the policies of subsequent civilian governments while in Brazil neoliberal restructuring has come along the political liberalization after the collapse of the military regime in 1985, having remained in power for 21 years (Saad-Filho 2010, 12-13). Through the prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy, gradually, political activism of the labor force was taken under control, labor market was deregulated, state enterprises were privatized and the economy was opened up to international markets (Boratav 2011; 148; Draibe 2007; 240; Saad-Filho 2010, 16).

Although they have been gradually adopting neoliberal policies in the last 30 years, past decade has been the reason of their glorification in the world economic scene. Making a comparison with advanced economies in terms of economic expansion and rapid recovery from the economic crisis of 2008, emerging market economies are praised for their success. However, despite the increase in their GDP per capita and GNI, Gini Index of the two countries demonstrate that the inequalities persist with merely slight amelioration. Notorious for its unequal distribution of wealth and income concentration (Bohn 2011, 59), Brazil has improved from 58.7 in 2003 to 54.7 in 2012, whereas Turkey has reached 40.0 in 2010 coming from 43.4 in 2003. Looking more into the World Bank data to examine the changes in which groups' conditions have reverberated in the Gini Index, we see that the overall structure of the income distribution did not change while the second and third in Brazil, and second, third and fourth 20% segments in Turkey seem to have ameliorated the most while the amelioration of the lowest 20% seems very small (World Development Indicators).

Although the macro-indicators give a glimpse about the effects of neoliberalism on the lower classes, examining the qualitative information about these regimes provide a more comprehensive account on the issue in question. Regarding the Brazilian case, Petras and Veltmeyer argue that although the PT sustained its social democratic discourse, it pursued an orthodox neoliberal agenda including enabling the business elites to render the workforce more flexible through increasing the possibility to have part time and temporary workers, to undermine unionization and to be able to dismiss workers with lesser costs. Furthermore, they argue that Lula administration's overall policy towards the labor market was to weaken the rights of the labor force to benefit the employers in order to obtain a more competitive market (Petras and Veltmeyer 2006, 13-16).

In the Turkish case, some scholars have drawn attention to the suffering labor market under the neoliberal economic regime. It has been argued that especially the organized working class has severely suffered from the neoliberal restructuring with regards to declining real incomes, diminishing job security and weakening unionization (Ünay 2013, 12). Sürhan Cam also unravels the declining conditions of the labor market behind the success story of Turkey as an emerging market economy. He underlines the increasing incidence of temporary employment, declining real wages and suppression of trade unions in order to render Turkey more competitive in world capitalism (Cam 2002).

The social security services that the governments provided for their citizens have also changed in congruence with the transition in the development strategies in the two countries. Adoption of neoliberal economic policies has brought the question of extreme poverty, which was considered so severe that elimination of poverty has become a priority in the Millennium Declaration Goals (Barrientos, Gideon and Molyneux 2008, 761). As a result, the framework of social policies has evolved to prioritize the poor, which indicates a shift in the premise of the social welfare regime from employment-based to income-based. While these policies are considered more inclusive and rights-based, another façade of this implementation comes forward: speaking for the Turkish case, it has been indicated that this novelty has come into being as a response to the shift in grassroots movements (Yörük 2012).

While employing welfare mechanisms, governments' purpose might be gaining electoral support or accomplishing political mobilization containment (Yörük 2012). Therefore, the groups that receive social welfare and social assistance benefits should be considered in order to examine whether it has been a determining factor in the social profile of the protestors by succeeding in containing the mobilization of certain social groups.

In the Brazilian case, Conditional Cash Transfer programs (CCTs), which extended its scope in 2000s parallel to the ascent of the Workers' Party government, were perhaps the most debated topic in terms of populism in the past years. The academic literature frequently focuses on president Lula's period (2002-2010) who was the predecessor of Dilma Rousseff. The articles that I refer here examine the voting behavior in order to see the impact of social assistance on people's support for the incumbent political parties.

Some scholars associate the popularity of the Workers' Party to the social assistance programs it employed. Conniff argues that President Lula gained great support from the poor through these assistance programs and this helped his reelection in 2006 (Conniff 2012, 66). Furthermore, Boito and Resende argue that in the first years of his presidency, Lula has financed the Bolsa Familia program from education and health budgets, which aimed to support the image that the social assistance was actually a favor on the part of the government rather than a duty of the state (Boito and Resende 2007, 127). However, Bohn contradicts the populist portrayals of Bolsa Familia program and she propounds that the recipients of Bolsa Familia (the most prominent CCT program) were already supporters of Lula and 'helping the poor' did not serve for clientelism as alleged by others (Bohn 2011, 74). In parallel, Zucco argues that CCTs did not engender a remarkable difference in partisanship or function as an incentive among people in terms of party identification (Zucco 2013, 820).

While the issue of the populism through CCTs is debatable, another important factor concerning the relations between the government and the subordinate classes is the question

of hegemony, which is also linked to populism. Some scholars argue that President Lula frequently referred to the historical links between the Workers' Party and the social movements in order to appeal to the masses. On the other hand, it is maintained, a new phase of corporatism has been launched with the ascension of the Workers' Party, which led to the neutralization of the workers. This refers to those members of the CUT, the largest national labor union in Brazil. The incorporation of the union members in the cabinet and administrative bodies has a noteworthy impact on the workers, as some scholars argue. Correspondingly, they sustain that the leaders who have been offered positions in the government do not stand up sharply against the anti-labor policies of the regime (Boito and Resende 2007, 123; Petras and Veltmeyer 2003, 17). In parallel with this, the discourse of the Workers' Party is an important element for the co-optation of the workers' movements. It has been argued that while decidedly maintaining the neoliberal economic policies of the previous governments, the government claims to represent the rural and urban working classes and to work for their best interest (Petras and Veltmeyer 2003, 11-12).

In Turkey, a similar expansion in targeted poverty alleviation programs has been observed in the 2000s, overlapping with AKP government. These programs were undertaken by Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakfı (Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation) which was established in 1986, but started to function more effectively under the AKP government. The rationale of this practice is parallel to Bolsa Familia in Brazil and it has encountered similar criticisms in terms of populism and pulling votes from the poor (Bozkurt 2013).

Alongside the question of populism, another issue regarding the popularity of AKP was the debate on hegemony. Concerning this subject, the curious question that has been asked was 'how come a significant percentage of AKP votes come from the poor although it pursues a neoliberal agenda which seeks the benefit of the capitalist classes.' The answer some scholars come up with is the hegemony that the AKP government constitutes to receive the support from the subordinate class, which comprises the nationalist and Islamist discourse it uses besides the social assistance programs it conducts (Bozkurt 2013; Dinçşahin 2012, 620).

Questions and Methodology

The issues that are addressed above briefly set the necessary background information for the main question of this research by indicating the socio-economic relations between the formal and informal working class and the neoliberal governments. In both cases, it is possible to see that the governments have expanded the scope of neoliberal capitalism, albeit to different extents. Not only regarding the cases of Turkey and Brazil, but also considering the literature on neoliberalism, it is possible to argue that the working class is not the best-off of the neoliberal policies although the governments attempt to ameliorate their conditions through different means. In such a context, the participation of the working class in the protests is an intriguing question, considering that the protests exceeded their initial motivations and came to have an anti-government substance.

Accordingly, several questions arise on this topic. How was the participation of working class neighborhoods and working class organizations in the protests? Which groups among the working class supported the protests while others kept their silence? What were

the reasons behind their decision on supporting or not supporting the protests? I consider these questions important in order to comprehend the relations between the neoliberal governments and the working class.

In order to find answers to these questions, I will apply parallel methodologies in Turkey and Brazil in order to see people's incentives and disincentives in terms of joining the protests as well as the determinants behind the social class composition in both protests. Firstly, I aim to look into the statistical data on the protests in order to see more concrete information on the social class composition of the protests in the two countries. To this end I will look into the SAMER survey in Turkey (SAMER 2013), which included some questions on Gezi Park protests in the questionnaire while in Brazil I will look into existing and upcoming studies. This part will also help to compare the two countries on a macro scale.

Secondly, I will conduct interviews, which will constitute the backbone of my research. To conduct my interviews, I have chosen İstanbul and São Paulo City, which were the cities where the protests have first erupted. The reason I chose these cities is the socio-economic place they occupy in terms of industrialization, segregation and commodification as well as their central roles in the protests. The interviews will be made with working class organizations in the two countries in order to understand their stances towards the protests. Additionally, I will choose two working class neighbourhoods in Brazil and Turkey one that supported and participated in the protests largely and another one, which did not join the protests. Through these interviews, I will try to comprehend the processes behind people's decisions on joining or not joining the protests, their stance towards the governments' actions and ongoing neoliberal policies, the ways in which they perceive the protests and the people who joined the protests. Concerning the interviews, I think discourse analysis will be helpful to analyze people's stances.

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