TRACK 9: SPATIALITIES

TRANSLATING THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS INTO SPACE: AN ALTERNATIVE REVIEW THROUGH PRINT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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URBAN DEMOCRACY AND ITS SUBJECTS AND MEDIUMS

Democracy, whose precise meaning depends on whether an observer focuses on the individual or the collective, is a form of political control in its simplest expression. In representative democracies, the most prevalent form of government today, the equality between citizens before the law and the sovereignty of the people are essential. In democratic forms of government, political control and direction is either in the hands of the people or provided by representatives elected by them. The idea of the sovereignty of the people brings together concepts such as equality, justice, freedom, independence, which together define and complement democracy in ways that transcend mere representation.

Individuals in modern democracies, in addition to their normal civic responsibilities, are also candidates for leadership. Aristotle (1999), who in his Politics developed his definition of democracy from the perspective of the individual citizen, associated the conditions of being a good citizen in society with both being governed and having the political ability to govern. Another discourse that prioritizes the responsibilities of the individual in democracy comes from Popper (1947), who emphasized that individuals, i.e. citizens of the democratic state, should be blamed rather than democracy for political inadequacies in the state. Democracy not only shapes individuals and therefore society with the responsibilities it imposes, but also takes its shape from the society in which it functions. The knowledge, abilities, and good citizenship of the members of a given community shape a society and thus its democracy. Although many philosophers have emphasized the uniqueness of the social aspects of human existence, whether in terms of individuality or collectivity, Aristotle and Plato did not consider the inability to live outside of a community a human-specific behavior; on the contrary, they argued that human life shares this collective nature with animal life, and that our social nature is thus far from peculiar (Arendt, 1998). Whether unique to our species or not, however, communal existence requires existence in a concrete place. The relationship that democracy establishes with space, which is the focus of this study, emerges at this point.

The spatial counterpart to the search for social and collective rights that accompanies democracy has inspired the debates around the right to the city in contemporary societies. Lefebvre (1991), who defined space as a product of history, described the right to the city as a requirement of democracy and directly associated it with humanism. Harvey (1993) highlighted the dynamic relationship of space

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with society in his exploration of the subject, touching upon the dynamics of societal and spatial relationships and claiming that spatial form is at society's discretion. He thus emphasized different human behaviors and experiences and suggested that instead of asking what space is, we should instead investigate how it is that different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualizations of space. (Harvey, 1993). Harvey additionally associated the right to the city with living in it, arguing that those living in the city directly or indirectly contribute to the production of urban space and that this contribution is associated with the claim of a right to the city one inhabits (Harvey, 1993). In this case, in addition to human practices, the practices of non-humans who are residents of and shape the city should share in the claim to the it. The comprehensiveness of the definition of the right to the city should be examined from this perspective, and the subjects of the practices that constitute that right should be taken into consideration. Democracy and its participants, which restructure and reproduce space public space in modern societies, redefine urbanization processes with the collective and organized power it requires.

Harvey (2003) points out that the organized collective power necessary to claim the city through its alteration is quite beyond the capacity of individuals or individual rights: the realization of the right to the city demands claiming such a shaping power in an essential and radical way. Likewise, Lefebvre claims that the right to the city should involve a continual and active process of appropriation (in the sense of use rather than ownership) of city spaces (McCann, 2002). He also argues that "the right to the city [involves] the right to claim presence in the city, to wrest the use of the city from privileged new masters and democratize its spaces" (Lefebvre, 1996 in McCann, 2002). This definition specifically supports the fight against the privatization of public space and the maintenance of heterogeneity within metropolitan areas (Fainstein, 2006). The specific focus of this paper concerns this final point and attempts to engage in a discussion of the ways in which society can or cannot claim its collective rights and satisfy its needs in urban space while at the same time maintaining democracy within itself by allowing diversity and the inclusion of members with various needs and vulnerabilities.

Vulnerabilities in public space

The state of vulnerability was defined as "a matter of being under threat of harm" by Goodin (1985). This definition argues for the protection of those under threat with the assumption that harm can be prevented. From Arendt's (1998) point of view, vulnerability stems from human nature and permeates every aspect of human life. There are two important points to add to these. On the one hand, as mentioned above, those who are under threat of harm and have been deemed vulnerable by condition of inhabiting the city include not only the people but also the non-human members of society existing in public space. On the other hand, it is important to recognize the states of vulnerability that are not the result of human nature, but shaped by the environmental factors in which humans and non-humans live. In this complex web of realities, the existence of individuals and society in urban space requires them to be able to benefit from the rights offered by that space. Circumstances in which the right to the city is violated create socio-spatial conditions that put them in vulnerable situations. This is one of the states of vulnerability that does not originate from human nature, contrary to Arendt's arguments, but later emerges in the public sphere due to external factors.

Ali Madanipour opens his book, *Whose Public Space*, with the following sentence: "Public spaces mirror the complexities of urban societies" (Madanipour, 2010, p. 1). The public sphere is, in a way, made up of the existence, relations, and reflections of the things and people that constitute it. However, not all members and relationships within this sphere are equally reflected and represented socio-spatially. Arendt (1998) defined the public realm as the common world, but there are also

emotions, expressions, and even individuals and social groups that cannot find a place. Consequently, the diversity in question includes vulnerable groups and individuals that sometimes cannot find a place in the public sphere. On the inclusivity of the public realm, Arendt (1998) speaks of the great danger arising from the existence of people who are forced to live outside the common world, and the exclusion of the imperfect from the public realm, as such imperfection automatically becomes a private matter. This study brings together the concepts of *communal* and *irrelevant*, as coined by Arendt distinctively, as a pair of binary concepts, examining them through their exposure in media in which the public space is discussed. Here, vulnerability is associated with being deemed *irrelevant* in society, or the state of being unaccepted by society, while *communal* refers to the majority which is accepted by within society and has power over its counterpart.

SEEKING VULNERABILITIES IN PUBLIC SPACE: AN INVESTIGATION OF PRINT AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN TURKEY

This study explores the relationship between democracy and space and the *communal-irrelevant* binary as it pertains to vulnerability in society through the content analysis of print and social media in Turkey. Various states of vulnerability within the public sphere across Turkey were compiled based on the main vulnerability groups typology in social sciences literature (Turner, 2021), each group well represented in the literature and in the Turkish context. Accordingly, 12 vulnerable groups were examined in this study: women, LGBTQI+, children (aged below 18), elderly (aged 65 and over), the disabled, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, immigrants, refugees, the poor, the homeless, and non-humans.

In order to reveal the communal-irrelevant binaries in Turkish society, the investigation involved indepth interviews conducted with vulnerable individuals published online, and critical humorous perspectives, mainly satirical, published online and in print form. The interviews were retrieved from YouTube, which is a major social media organ that serves as a widespread reflection of contemporary critical thinking, while the satire particularly focused on caricature magazines, which have been an important print tool of a centuries-old tradition of satire in Turkish society. While YouTube broadcasts discuss the experience and perception of vulnerability at the individual level through interviews and documentaries, the caricatures analyzed address the socio-political aspects of the vulnerability phenomenon through vulnerable groups. The research consisted of 30 YouTube channels and 35 print and online caricature magazines published between 2012-2022. Out of these, the focus lay on the cases in which various challenges for the *irrelevant* vulnerable groups mentioned above arise in relation to the rest of the society, or in other words, the *communal* public sphere in urban settings.

Women

On one YouTube channel comprising a series of interviews held in Istanbul's Kadıköy district, when asked about their conditions in Turkey, women generally complained that they do not have equal rights with men in their families, social environment, and work life, or in the public sphere (DW Türkçe, 2019). In the words of one interviewee examining the vulnerability of women in Turkish society, "it is difficult to work and live in this country, where even laughing is difficult." In the work titled "I'm afraid of Istanbul – Woman," a young woman describes the anxieties, threats, and fears she experiences in the public spaces of Istanbul and poses the question, "Have you ever calculated every step of your daily life just to feel more secure?", referring to the bothersome experiences she has undergone simply because of her gender (140 Journal, 2017; also see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Cover of Uykusuz Magazine, dated 25 May 2017 *In Malatya, a special pink bus for women was established.*

Man 1: If she gets on this bus instead of the pink one, she's definitely a slut. Man 2: Why would she get on the mixed bus otherwise? She knows what she's doing...

LGBTQI+

The documentary titled "Don't look at me that way" discusses LGBTQI+ individuals' inability to be and act like themselves and live fearlessly, as well as the human rights violations they have been exposed to (Karataş, 2013). In this work, LGBTQI+ individuals state that the main problems they experience in public spaces are their exclusion and lack of fundamental rights that result from being seen as abnormal. They also complain that these issues prevent them from even voicing their concerns effectively. LGBTQI+ individuals interviewed also state that they want to be able to be open about their love wherever they are and whenever they feel like it, experience their feelings freely, and not be seen as different or inappropriate. One transgender woman describes the involuntary life she leads because of the treatment she receives in the public sphere as being "alive but walking around dead" (Figure 2).



Figure 2. A screenshot from the documentary "Don't Look at Me That Way" (Karataş, 2013)

In another documentary titled "Beyoğlu's stepson: Tarlabaşı," which was filmed in the Istanbul's Tarlabaşı quarter, deals with the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ individuals by examining their lives alongside the spatial transformation that Tarlabaşı has undergone (Tatlıcan, 2012). According to this work, while LGBTQI+ individuals were excluded from most public spaces in the 90s, it was possible for them to live and survive in Tarlabaşı. When evaluated in terms of the inclusiveness, Tarlabaşı has become a more inclusive place than most for LGBTQI+ individuals, where diversity is more easily accepted. The social and physical change that this urban space underwent in the following years has also deeply touched the lives of these individuals.

Children

According to the media review, the main issues associated with children in the public sphere mentioned are the fears that children feel and their perceived and actual lack of security, including risks of kidnapping, sexual abuse, and peer bullying. One of the examples examined in this context is a set of interviews with children living on the streets waiting at traffic lights in Kağıthane, Istanbul (CNN Türk, 2018; also see Figure 3). Berfin, who is only 6 years old and lives a life with little feeling of safety as a result of the vulnerability of being a child in urban public space, earns her life on streets by selling napkins and sundries. When asked about her life on streets, she mentions her fears of theft and kidnapping. She argues that the money she earns can be taken by force, and that she is therefore ready to run away at any moment. Another remarkable media sample examined is a documentary about street children addicted to drugs, piling on the additional vulnerability of addiction to that of being a child (Öztürk, 2020). One child who began to live on the streets after the disintegration of his family says that he can use drugs in hidden areas and therefore lives away from the public. He does not establish relations with the larger society and leads a completely isolated life.



Figure 3. A caricature by Sefer Selvi in Evrensel Newspaper, dated 20 November 2020 Woman: If you were reincarnated, what would you like to be?

Boy: A child...

Elderly

It has been observed that the vulnerability of the elderly in relation to society and public space is very similar to that of children, as they are viewed as emotional and naïve, in addition to their relative physical frailty and sluggishness. One news report related the story of a couple between the ages of 65-70 living in Antalya that was defrauded of their money by a swindler through the exploitation of their guilt and religious beliefs (Sözcü Gazetesi, 2020; Figure 4). The unconscious attitudes and vulnerabilities of these elderly individuals were perceived and used as an opportunity for deception.



Figure 4. A screenshot from the Sözcü Newspaper, dated 13 July 2020

In another example, a 65-year-old woman living in Istanbul was swindled when a woman approached her while she was out shopping, asserted that she knew her, and offered help and money. Instead of giving aid, the fraudster stole money from the elderly woman's home. Such reports are just one of countless examples of elderly individuals whose money was stolen through the exploitation of their religious feelings and the abuse of their goodwill (Show Ana Haber, 2020).

The disabled

In the documentary "The connected" filmed in Yalova, interviews examined the social and physical difficulties disabled individuals experienced in public spaces (Özyurt, 2020). One interviewee, 70-yearold Şerife Şahin, is orthopedically disabled. Despite her age and disability, she works a job that requires physical ability and meets all her needs by herself. She speaks of her love for the nature and people of the place she lives in but still feels marginalized due to her vulnerability. Her statement, "People should not look at the disabled with pity," reflects on the state of inconvenience she feels. Another interviewee, Yasin Sabri Şenyüz, a 27-year-old mentally disabled man, has never had a job due to his condition, so he helps his mother at home. He states that he is uncomfortable with the pitying glances he receives in public space and defines his condition not as being a disabled but a "special" individual. Seben Ayşe Dayı, a 30-year-old woman featured in a different documentary, was born with cerebral palsy (+90, 2019a). She is a trained journalist and an educational anthropologist. She expresses her vulnerability and exclusion in the following terms: "Actually, we want common sense and respect, for everything to become ordinary and be accepted as it is." Instead of escaping public space, she wants to be there and be seen by society. She wants to feel that she lives in the public space as well. To this end, she emphasizes the importance of public spaces in maintaining communication between the disabled and the larger society. However, concerning the inconvenience of the physical conditions of public spaces, "Roads are like a minefield!" are her words (also see Figure 5). Consequently, public spaces are not their preferred place to socialize, and they usually have to spend more time at home or in shopping malls.



Figure 5. A caricature exhibited in "Accessible Caricatures" in 2013 in cooperation with the Manisa Municipality in Turkey and the Caricaturists Association of Turkey

Ethnic and religious minorities

In a documentary on the Roma people's neighborhood and social life in Beyoğlu, Istanbul (Municipality of Beyoğlu, 2013), Bülent Altınbaş, a 40-year-old clarinet player, exemplifies social exclusion in his not having been admitted to a musical conservatory solely because he was a member of the Roma community: "Am I not a human? [There should be] no discrimination, as everyone is an equal servant of Allah." In an interview on Jewish youth living in Istanbul, lawyer Betsi Penso expressed her thoughts on the attacks on their synagogues: "We have experienced bombings here. Maybe White Turks have the same feeling right now, but we have been living this for a very long time, so it is not something new" (+90, 2020a). She sees Istanbul as her home but now considers leaving like other peers in her generation due to her experiences with antagonism and polarization (also see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Cover of Penguen Magazine, dated 21 July 2016

Turkey said "NO TO THE COUP."

Man 1: Let's stop this polarization, shall we?

Man 2: Okay, you stop it first.

Man 1: You first!

Man 2: No you!

Man 1: You!

Man 2: Hell, you stop!

Immigrants and refugees

In a series of interviews about African immigrants trying to survive in Turkey (DW Türkçe, 2020), Muhammed Sierra Lioneli describes the exclusion he experiences in public spaces and argues that he is publicly called "black" by some people, seen as vulnerable by others, and has even been exposed to threats and violence. A Nigerian man named Pascal, who wants to earn his living playing football, states that although he was very successful in the trial games of several different football clubs, he was not accepted only because he was "different" as an immigrant marginalized by and segregated from other segments of society (also see Figure 7).



Figure 7. A screenshot from the interview "African Immigrants trying to hold on to life in Istanbul" (DW Türkçe, 2020)

In a post that discusses controversial opinions about Syrians in Hatay, a city in southern Turkey with a high concentration of Syrian refugees (DW Türkçe, 2022), Syrian Mustafa Ekreme responds to the negative image of his community by local people: "Not all the fingers of a hand are the same size. Let's not assume that all Syrians are bad. Everyone is different."

The poor

In one documentary, Mehmet Suat Doğan, a sanitation worker in his 40s, describes it in an interview as a miracle that he can survive in Istanbul, adding: "Many of my friends around me are families that are broken or in distress, just like me. I can't sit down and chat with someone, because I see myself as inadequate due to my financial hardships" (BBC News Türkçe, 2019; also see Figure 8). Another YouTube video contains an interview about being a hammal (porter) in the wholesale marketplace in Istanbul's Bayrampaşa neighborhood (+90, 2020b). A 40-year-old man explains that being a porter is equivalent to being nothing and complains that he is not able to make any connections in public due to his outlook. He responds to the contempt of members of society with the words "We are human beings, we have rights, but no one extends to us these rights, they oppress us."



Figure 8. Cover of Uykusuz Magazine, dated 12 March 2015 Man 1: In the last year, we have become twenty percent poorer. Man 2: Brother, I am okay... I can't get poorer than this.

The homeless

An interview with 62-year-old Alaaddin Arslan, who lives in the streets of Tophane, Istanbul, states that he has been homeless for 35 years (+90, 2019b; Figure 9). In Arslan's words, "society is disgusted by people lying on the street, and this is one of the biggest things that hurt us in our hearts." He also emphasizes the dangers the homeless experiences in public spaces, stating that when confronted by drug addicts, they are even more vulnerable and at times even in mortal danger. He adds that the homeless cannot benefit from public health services, to which every member of society should have access. The documentary "Being Homeless: Life on the Street" about the life of a 51-year-old dweller of the streets of Alanya named Sinan reminds the greater society: "Do not despise people living outside, there are good people among them, try to support them" (Beta Video, 2020).

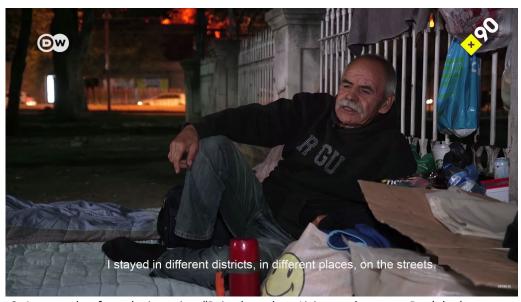


Figure 9. A screenshot from the interview "Being homeless: Living on the street. Don't look at me, come to me" (+90, 2019b)

Non-humans

Reflecting on stray dogs and cats, the most prominent animal species within the vulnerable non-humans category in Turkey, Banu Aydın, an animal rights activist and owner of a dog shelter in Istanbul, warns about stray dogs in Turkish cities: "These [animals] also deserve good families, animals that have already suffered a lot, stray dogs, abandoned animals, most of them traumatized. This one was either beaten or tortured (pointing at a dog). For example, there is a dog in the middle that I will show you. She was raped many times, it's proven. But the man paid 300 lira, got out of jail, and left" (BBC News Türkçe, 2020; Figure 10).



Figure 10. A screenshot from the interview "A day with animal rights activists" (BBC News Türkçe, 2020)

In this study, significant elements of the built and natural environments facing extinction are also analyzed as non-human. In a post concerning interviews with activists defending the Validebağ Grove in Istanbul, which is subject to a plan amendment in favor of mixed-use development (DW Türkçe,

2021), Arif Belgin, one of the volunteer advocates, calls for the grove's preservation: "A wide variety of animals, from turtles to hedgehogs, from lizards to grasshoppers, from squirrels to snakes, lives here. It has a natural ecosystem. This is a rare blessing for Istanbul. It is very important to preserve it in this way. It is extremely wrong to build facilities here." Another activist, photographer Ahmet Dayloğlu, expresses his sadness over the now lost oak trees of the grove resulting from current developments in the area: "There used to be a squirrel family in every oak tree living here, now there is only one family left."

CONCLUDING NOTES

The evidence from relevant media review shows that in Turkish society, vulnerable groups are not only viewed but also treated as *irrelevant* by the *communal* in the public sphere. As such, vulnerable individuals and groups perceive themselves as *irrelevant* through society's lens. Although their locations and types of vulnerability differ, their experiences and relationships with and in the public sphere show significant indications of social and spatial exclusion. Whether they bear an innate vulnerability or environmental factors and rights violations have made them vulnerable over time, for the members of the vulnerable groups, coming into contact with the larger society in public spaces can be strongly associated with marginalization, fear, uneasiness, insecurity, and even invisibility, in relation to exclusion. In contrast, the un-labeled remainder of society acts as a monolith that claims power over the public sphere and spaces through collectivity. Indeed, as Arendt (1998) mentioned, what makes vulnerable individuals so is not merely their smaller number, but the attitudes and behaviors of other individuals with whom they share the public space towards them. The communal-irrelevant pair is a binary of opposite and conflicting elements in this sense.

The generally assumed ways democracy manifests itself in space are that space provides the opportunity and convenience for each individual to realize themselves, both as an individual and as a member of any group co-inhabiting society, and that space has the capacity to include each without any spatial or social discrimination. However, space is only democratic to the extent that different social groups can use it equally and fairly without feeling or being assumed to be *communal* or *irrelevant*, and that these groups can relate to the space in different, free, and unique but consented ways. Vulnerable individuals wish to continually exist and realize themselves in public space because as Arendt rightfully put it, "the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves" (Arendt, 1998, p. 53). This study demonstrates that vulnerable groups are associated with the production and reproduction of urban life from both perspectives; thus, in Harvey's (1993) words and Lefebvre's (1991) descriptions, they are 'legitimate owners' of the right to the city. Because ensuring social and spatial justice to all legitimate owners of this right—human and non-human—is a requisite for urban democracy to exist, in order for the society to claim its collective rights and needs while maintaining democracy, it must realize the socio-spatial inclusion of its vulnerable members that are deemed *irrelevant*.

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