

**Alternative Media and Alternative Journalism:
Theoretical Approaches
-AND-
Alternative Media:
The Life Support of Journalism in Turkey**

**by
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M.A., Galatasaray University, 2005

Extended Essays Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2017

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Abstract

Essay 1: “Alternative Media and Alternative Journalism: Theoretical Approaches” sets the theoretical framework of two interrelated essays that seek to understand the democratic significance of alternative journalism in Turkey. The essay first examines the process- and content-oriented approaches outlining how they define alternative media and conceptualize alternative media’s democratizing potentials. Next, the essay presents some of the characteristics of alternative journalism such as native reporting and inverting the hierarchy of access as well as discussions around journalistic objectivity and funding in relation to the process- and content-oriented approaches. The essay argues that while different theorizations enable us to understand the democratic significance of alternative media and alternative journalism, in practice, they should not be used as a definitive criterion due to the dynamic and context -bound nature of alternative media. Communities and social movements may prioritize or combine these approaches depending on their needs and goals.

Keywords: Alternative media; alternative journalism; participatory media; critical-content

Essay 2: “Alternative Media: The Life Support of Journalism in Turkey” applies the theories explored in the first essay to the Turkish context, focusing particularly on the period under the rule of the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (The Justice and Development Party- AKP) which came to power in 2002. The essay argues that in the absence of a functioning mainstream media in Turkey, alternative media and alternative journalism take on the watchdog and information roles which are attributed to mainstream media in liberal theories. Furthermore, they act as a rhizome for different dissident groups and change the epistemology of traditional journalism by broadening the definition of news, adopting news values that are more relevant for their audiences and changing the sourcing routines. Finally, they offer a suitable venue of collaboration between scholars and activists in order to develop a more dynamic and responsible form of journalism.

Keywords: Alternative media in Turkey; press censorship, Turkish democracy

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my senior supervisor Bob Hackett for his continual support and encouragement throughout my years at SFU. He has been the kind of supervisor every graduate student would dream of. I also thank Shane Gunster for his insights in this work as well as smoothing many difficult processes along the way. I am very grateful to all the staff in the School of Communication for creating a safe and friendly work environment.

The long process of my education, not least represented by the following essays would not be possible without my parents. I am forever grateful for their love and generosity. Finally, I thank my husband Serbulent Turan and my daughter Daphne Yagmur Turan for being in my life and making everything more meaningful.

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1:

**Alternative Media and Alternative Journalism:
Theoretical Approaches**

1.1. Introduction

These two complementary essays are designed to understand how alternative ways of doing journalism-- or alternative journalism as I will call it here-- contribute to media and societal democratization in Turkey. The first essay provides the theoretical framework by examining how democratizing potentials of alternative media are described in different theorizations and which practices within alternative journalism reflect the principles outlined in the literature. The second essay applies these theories to nine Turkish alternative media outlets that are involved in journalism.

Although social movements literature constitutes a more popular body of work when dealing with the relationship between media and social change, due to my focus on alternative journalism, in this first essay, I preferred to use alternative media literature. Accordingly, following media scholar Marisol Sandoval's work (2009) the essay groups theories of alternative media under process-and content-oriented approaches which respectively explain democratizing potentials of alternative media as empowerment through participation and emancipation through critical-content and counter-hegemonic public sphere. In line with the process-oriented approaches, the essay examines *native journalism* and *inverting the hierarchy of access* as alternative journalistic practices. Journalistic *objectivity* --one of the pillars of professional journalism-- and issues regarding *funding* which is often considered as the most important factor influencing editorial independence and thus the production of critical-content, are discussed in relation to the content-oriented approaches.

Before delving into theoretical discussions about the definition and characteristics of alternative media and journalism, in the rest of the conclusion section, I aim to establish the growing relevance of alternative media and journalism as a research field.

Only fourteen years ago, leading media scholars Nick Couldry and James Curran described alternative media as being the "forgotten land" of media studies (Couldry & Curran, 2003: 6). They were pointing to the scarcity of academic studies that focus on alternative media as opposed to the vast amount of literature focusing on mainstream media. And when studied, alternative media were mostly undermined as constituting "alternative ghettos" for marginalized groups or dismissed as "exemplifying radical failure': Failure to attract advertisers, failure to act in a businesslike manner and failure to

reach significant audiences” (Harcup, 2003:356). Journalism practiced by alternative media, or as I will call it in this essay, alternative journalism, has also shared the same fate. The first book length study of alternative journalism was only published in 2008 by Chris Atton and James F.Hamilton. This is why John Hartley observed in 2009 that despite its potential to provide “a rich vein of journalism”, the journalism of alternative media “is simply invisible in journalism studies” (2009: 314).

However, in the last decade, this relative lack of interest has been replaced by a reinvigorated focus on alternative media/journalism and a rapidly expanding academic literature. It can be argued that this newly gained attention results from a combination of factors such as the widespread usage of the internet and the different models of journalism it has enabled, the so- called “crisis” in conventional journalism alongside the democratic deficit in news media and finally the use of alternative media by activists and citizens to create social and political change in different parts of the world.

The origins of alternative media/journalism can be traced back to the 18th century underground press in France and England (Bekken, 2008; Atton & Hamilton, 2008). Therefore, adopting a technological determinist approach in understanding and explaining alternative media/journalism would not only be limiting but also misleading. However, the role played by the computer technology and the internet in the revival of alternative media/journalism is an undeniable one. Today, the internet constitutes “the most prolific medium for alternative journalism” (Bekken, 2008). Since the emergence of *Independent Media Centers* in 1999 as a part of the anti-globalization movement, the internet has enabled various models and platforms of journalism. Among those, news blogs¹ or open publishing news sites - which are produced in collaboration with or solely by citizen journalists (eg. OhMyNews, Wikinews) have attracted a great deal of attention from scholars as well as journalists. By adopting different techniques and principles in the production and distribution of news, these new practices offered alternatives to the existing ways of doing journalism and. Not every one of these practices constitute good examples of alternative media/journalism- at least not in the in the way that this article defines alternative media/journalism-, which will be explained later. And these new

¹ For further reading on news blogs please see: Blood, 2003; Andrews, 2003; Matheson, 2004; Singer, 2005; Robinson, 2006; Lowrey, 2006; Reese et al., 2007; Domingo & Heinonen, 2008.

formats should not be approached by what Scott Uzelman calls “determinism of technique” (2011) which is quite prevalent in the field of alternative media studies particularly when it comes to the study of new media. Uzelman refers to the idea that “particular techniques are assumed to have effects (generally positive) independent of the social relations in which they are embedded or the purposes to which they are directed” (2011:29). Thus, while they play a crucial role in the revival of discussions and research on alternative media, the novelty of these formats alone does not guarantee them the status of alternative media/journalism.

The gradual increase in scholarly attention to alternative media can also be explained by the well documented crisis of contemporary journalism in the Western world and the so called democratic deficit of mainstream media. Democratic deficit “is a concept defined (or ignored) through the prism of political and normative perspectives” (Hackett and Carroll, 2006:11)².

Scholars who mainly adopt a critical political economy approach, trace back the roots of this deficit to the extensive deregulations (or market-oriented reregulation) and privatizations carried out in the 1980s which weakened public service broadcasting and opened the way for the concentration of ownership and corporatization of news media (McChesney, 2007; Hackett, 2005; Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Bennett, 2005). As a result, with news media’s increasing subjection to market forces, the standards of quality journalism have declined. Due to budget cuts in the newsroom, practices such as investigative reporting came to be considered costly and mostly replaced by cheaper content in the form of infotainment, PR materials and heavy reliance on News Wires.

² Some liberal scholars do not evaluate the trends in the media such as corporatization, and infotainment with pessimism. In his analysis, Brian McNair points out the positive impacts of market forces on the coverage of politics saying, “simple economics determines the prioritization of politics to be an efficient allocation of editorial resource” (2000:202). Additionally, he objects to “the narrative of decline” in journalism and emphasizes the effects of technology, especially that of the internet in creating a more diverse and accessible public sphere (McNair, 2000). Similarly, Pippa Norris finds the claims about media’s democratic deficit (especially those focusing on civic disengagement) unsubstantiated (2000) and argues that despite its shortcomings, the dominant commercial media system serves the needs of the citizens. According to her, “voters do not need broad civics knowledge, but just sufficient context-specific information to enable them to assess the consequences of their political choices” (as cited in Hackett, 2005:91). Similarly, it is argued that tabloid journalism constitutes “sites of popular opposition to the dominant order” (Connell, 1992 in Hackett, 2005:91). These positive interpretations mainly translate into propositions of “moderating our expectations of journalism” (Hackett, 2005:91) rather than reforming the existing media structures and journalistic practices.

These developments are blamed by critical scholars for the declining “connection between media and local communities” (Hackett & Carroll, 2006:7). It has also been argued that the profit oriented, selective coverage of issues further undermined certain groups’ representation in the media such as social movements, immigrants or ethnic minorities. According to these critiques, dominant news media in Western democracies increasingly fail to constitute a democratic public sphere and hinder “‘civic engagement’, meaning citizens learning about public affairs, trust in government, and political activism” (Norris, 2000: 4). Moreover, the shared economic interests between the owners of media corporations and governments undermine media’s watchdog function. All these factors, accompanied by the financial struggles of the news media, deepened the crisis in conventional journalism in Western democracies³.

According to Blumler, this is “a crisis with two legs: One is a crisis of viability, principally, though not exclusively financial, threatening the existence and resources of the mainstream journalistic organizations. The other, is a crisis of civic adequacy, impoverishing the contributions of journalism to citizenship and democracy” (2010:439). Vis-à-vis this crisis, professional reform movements like the public journalism movement in the US, and peace journalism have been put forward⁴. Additionally, “media activists

³ For more information about the crisis in journalism in the Canadian context, see Gasher, Brin, Crowther, King, Salamon, and Thibault (2016).

⁴ Public journalism and peace journalism constitute the most prominent practice oriented reform projects. The public or civic journalism movement developed in the 1980s as a response to the increasing “disconnection” between the journalists and communities (Carpentier, in Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007:153; Gans, 2003:36). The practitioners of the public journalism movement aim to change “the purpose as well as the practice of journalism in order to reinvigorate civic life and to encourage people to participate in public affairs” (Haas & Steiner, 2006:125). For more information on peace journalism and its critiques see (Gans, 2003; Davis 2000; Woodstock, 2002; Glasser, 2000). Although proponents of peace journalism such as Lynch & McGoldrick, state the need for a structural reform in media (as cited in Hackett, 2006) the basic promise of peace journalism lies in the contestation of the norm of objectivity (and neutrality) in journalism (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Moreover, it challenges the traditional news values which “focus on conflict” (O’Neill & Harcup, 2009:170). Galtung & Vincent especially emphasize the focus on “negativism, personalization and proximity to elite countries and elite sources” in conflict coverage (as cited in Hanitzsch, 2004: 484). Galtung identifies this type of reporting as war journalism which is the opposite of peace journalism. The latter focuses on the resolution instead of the conflict, gives a voice to every side without adopting an Us versus them framework and the journalist, “who unreservedly uphold transparency, balanced and sensitized thoroughness in covering disputes, do have the potential to change the course and intensity of the events” (Peleg, 2007). It has been argued that by doing so peace journalism can “lead to better reporting and interpreting, away from the ratings culture, towards human and social awareness, and contribute to the public sphere” (Shinar, 2007) besides promoting peaceful solutions to the conflicts. According to some, peace journalism can also serve as a mechanism of self-reflection for traditional journalism that “might play a constructive role in re-examining and re-articulating the foundational assumptions of contemporary journalism- and contemporary society” (Ross, 2007). The critiques of peace

have sought to influence media content and practices, advocated for reform of government regulation of media and encouraged new relationships between audiences and media (e.g. critical media education).” (Uzelman, 2011: 22). Their aim was to reform existing media to be “more representative, accessible, accountable, and/or participatory” (Zhao & Hackett 2005: 2; Hackett & Carroll 2006). Parallel to these goals, building more alternative media and enabling alternative journalistic practices are goals suggested by activists and scholars alike.

Alternative media are often thought to be the antidote to the failure of mainstream media and conventional journalism. Scholars argue that alternative media can “address the deep-seated problems in the mainstream media” (Gibbs, 2003:587). Moreover, because they originate from dissatisfaction with mainstream journalism and its ‘epistemology’ of news (Hackett, 2010:187; Atton & Hamilton, 2008:1), they offer a critique in action (Atton, 2009:284). Many characteristics of alternative media/journalism that will be analyzed further in this essay such as horizontal organizational structures, participatory nature and their counter hegemonic content provide us with models and important information in our quest to “re-imagine” the media and journalism. Furthermore, the same characteristics of alternative media/journalism are thought to play a significant role in the democratization of media which comprises three specific purposes; (1) expanding the range of voices represented by media thus building a more egalitarian and participatory public sphere; (2) promoting and exporting the practices of sustainable democracy to other media as well as outside, and (3) offsetting other political and economic inequalities present in the system (Hackett & Carroll, 2004:15). In line with the role of alternative media/journalism as agents of media democratization, Haas also suggests the possibility of alternative media/journalism to be role models for mainstream media organizations who share similar democratic goals (2004, p.118)⁵.

The last factor that has contributed to the rise of scholarly attention in alternative media/ journalism and the revival of the existing literature, can be found in the social and

journalism state that it “overestimates the influence that the journalists and the media have on political decisions” and conceptualizes the audience as “passive mass that needs to be enlightened” (Hanitzsch, 2007).

⁵ This is particularly the case, for those organizations who practice civic or public journalism and Haas also advocates for a more politicized approach in public journalism which can be achieved by ‘emulating’ alternative journalism (2004:118).

political uprisings that marked the last decade such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street Movement, Gezi Park protests and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement amongst others. These events and the way in which alternative media/journalism have been used for political change have emphasized once more the role they play as agents of societal democratization. In all these cases, alternative media/journalism developed ways to "bypass the professionalized and institutionalized large- scale media" (Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 133).

As mentioned above, historically, the relationship between media and social change has been studied within the framework of social movements. According to Atton & Hamilton "the foregrounding of social movements of the popular mobilization for political and social change is at the heart of theorizing about alternative media" (2008:119). Downing et al. (2001) goes further to say that the value of alternative media stems from their potential for social and political change. Consequently, the use of alternative media/journalism by social movements corresponds to the idea of "democratization through the media" or described as "the use of media whether by governments or civil society actors to promote democratic goals and processes elsewhere in society" (Hackett & Carroll, 2006:84). Thus, the democratic significance of alternative media/journalism is explained by their "ability to affect large scale social and political reform" (Haas, 2004, p.116). Alternative media achieve this through two roles: First, they serve as a "rhizome" for diverse groups who seek a change in the dominant media systems and allow for "trans-hegemonic collaborations and partnerships" among them (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008:.31) As such, they are used by the activists to "build solidarity and support around their agendas" (Rodriguez, 2008) Second, they by produce counter hegemonic content, and provide "a critique of the dominant ideologies" (Atton, 2002:491).

However, alternative media/journalism's role in creating large scale political and social change is contested within the scholarship. Drawing on Freire's critical pedagogy (1970) and Mouffe's (1972) radical democracy perspective, Rodriguez (2001) thinks that the democratic significance of alternative media (we can extend that to alternative journalism as well) lies in everyday politics (Haas, 2004:116), more specifically, in the way these media empower citizens through participation (2001:20). Similarly, Harcup (2011) emphasizes the notion of "active citizenship" enacted through alternative media/journalism, as one of the core elements in the discussion and analysis of the

relationship between journalism and democracy (28). Both Rodriguez's and Harcup's views will be analyzed in more detail later in this essay. After outlining the factors that have contributed to the newly gained attention on alternative media/journalism and situating these within the broader discussions in the field, the essay continues with the definition of alternative media/journalism and their characteristics, as well as a discussion about their potentials and limitations in media and societal democratization.

1.2. Contextualizing Alternative Media/Journalism

As Clemencia Rodriguez notes, the academic literature on alternative media generally contains two types of work: the first type, "descriptive studies", that deal with the "origin and characteristics of alternative media including issues such as their funding and programmes" (2001, p.11). The second type aims to conceptualize alternative media in relation to their importance "as processes of communication and democracy" (2001, p.11). In my attempt to contextualize alternative media, I will use a combination of these two approaches. I will review the functional definitions and theorizations of alternative media/journalism and outline characteristics of alternative media/journalism that contribute to the realization of those functions.

1.3. Process and Content Oriented Alternative Media Theorizations

The concept of alternative media encompasses a wide array of practices from underground press, labour and social movements' media to fanzines, weblogs and even street theatre (Bekken, 2008). This heterogeneity poses a challenge for developing "an all-encompassing", single and "fixed" definition for alternative media (Haas, 2004:115; Harcup, 2005:361). Yet, there are diverse attempts of theorizing and defining alternative media. Theories of alternative media can broadly be grouped as *process-* and *content-* oriented approaches (Fuchs, 2010: 177). While the theories in the former category are "mostly oriented on self-organized small-scale community media that enable citizen participation" (ibid) the latter emphasize the importance of critical content as a distinguishing characteristic of alternative media.

1.3.1. Process-oriented approaches to alternative media

What Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) describe as *community-oriented participatory media* in their fourfold schema of theories of alternative media can be a good example for process oriented approaches. In this type of media, community members not only directly participate in content production, but also take part in organizational structures of the media. Participation is indeed, often emphasized as one of the core characteristics of alternative media/journalism. It is promoted both on the decision making and ownership level and in content production. Schudson (1987) suggests that “the way in which a medium is organized and what kind of social relations it assists may be more crucial than the kinds of content produced” (cited in Hamilton, 2000:358).

Alternative media, especially those operating within social movements, are usually run “co-operatively” by media workers (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:86). Due to their financial and organizational structures, alternative media are conceptualized as ‘self-managed’ (Downing, 2001) ‘collectivist-democratic’ (Hocheimer, 1993) and ‘non-hierarchical’ (Atton, 2002) organizations (as cited in Haas, 2004:116). According to Fuchs, emphasis on self management and process can partly be explained by alternative media studies’ “strong connection to Anarchist perspectives” (2010:174). Audiences’ participation in content creation is also encouraged by alternative media. In doing so, alternative media practitioners pursue the ideal of moving beyond the sender-receiver model. The audiences and producers of alternative media oftentimes share a community bond. Additionally, in certain cases by appropriating a certain medium (TV, Video or Radio), community members can produce and circulate their own content and thus act as both producers and consumers.

For process-oriented approaches, the main democratizing effects of alternative media also emerge from the act of participation. For instance, Dommunt and Coyer state that “The political nature of alternative media is often present irrespective of content, located in the mere act of producing” (2007: 2). These approaches advance the idea of “emancipation through participation” (Sandoval, 2009:4). She explains, “for them the emancipatory potentials of media arise from the practices of media producers, that is, from the processes of how media are produced collectively” (2009:4) and traces the origins of this goal to eliminate the sender/receiver divide back to the works of Bertolt

Brecht and Walter Benjamin who respectively defended enabling radio listeners and newspaper readers to become content producers (ibid, 4). More recent examples of the process- oriented approaches in alternative media scholarship can be found in the work of Nick Couldry and Clemencia Rodriguez among others (5). Couldry points out media concentration which results in the exclusion of many groups from media production and consequently in “a concentration of symbolic power” (Sandoval, 2009:5).

Therefore for Couldry the most important task for alternative media is to challenge the highly concentrated media system and the resulting power of capitalist mass media by challenging the “the entrenched division of labour (producers of stories vs. consumer of stories)” (Couldry, 2003: 45, as cited in Sandoval, 2009:5).

Couldry & Curran (2003) incorporate this goal in their definition and describe alternative media as “media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations” (7).

Clemencia Rodriguez’s *Citizens’ Media* is another example of the prominent process- oriented theorizations of alternative media. “Citizens’ media is a concept that accounts for the processes of empowerment, concientization and fragmentation of power that result when men, women and children gain access to and reclaim their own media” (Rodriguez, 2003: 190). Drawing on Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy (1970) and Chantal Mouffe’s (1972-1992) radical democracy, Rodriguez argues that the significance of alternative media lies in everyday politics (2001). She contends that the citizens’ media contribute to communities and democracy through “opening social spaces for dialogue and participation, breaking individuals’ isolation, encouraging creativity and imagination [...]” (63). By “using their own symbols, signs and language,” people “challenge social codes, validate identities and empower themselves and their communities” (Rodriguez as cited in Atton & Hamilton, 2008:122). In summary, “for Rodriguez the main task of alternative media is to assist people in living a self-determined life” (Sandoval, 2009:5). By participating in media production in their own terms, people become active citizens. In her remarks, Rodriguez challenges the political economy dominated perspectives of alternative media. Uzelman explains:

She challenges a widely-held perspective in critical political economy that alternative media should be judged only in hegemonic terms. That is, they should not be evaluated only by their capacity to create mass, unified movements and their utility in challenging the dominance of the mainstream

media. Instead, she argues that the impact of citizens' media should be evaluated in terms of their ability to challenge and transform 'social codes, legitimised identities, and institutionalised social relations' (2001:20). Consequently, citizens' media have important 'micropolitical' effects in empowering 'ordinary people' and their understanding of themselves and their relations to one another (2011:27).

The notion of active citizenship is also examined within the context of process-oriented approaches and deemed to be an important aspect of alternative media/journalism's democratizing effects. Researching the relationship between alternative journalism and concepts like democracy and citizenship, Tony Harcup finds that alternative media "can play a role in reflecting, nurturing and demonstrating what can be called as active citizenship" (2011:15). Drawing on Chantal Mouffe (1992) and Ruth Lister's (2003) work, Harcup identifies participation and agency as the main components of active citizenship (2011:17). Accordingly,

[...] for Lister, active citizenship is a process —an activity—rather than an outcome or a status, and it is through 'struggle' that 'citizenship emerges as a dynamic concept in which process and outcome stand in a dialectical relationship to each other...Citizenship as participation represents an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined' (Lister, 2003:6 and 37 as cited in Harcup, 2011:17).

Alternative media provide people the necessary platforms where they can express themselves, voice their concerns and thus enact their citizenship. Contrary to mainstream media, it is assumed that the public sphere/s provided by the alternative media "can become more inclusive and less male, less bourgeois and less dominated by the market." (Harcup, 2011:17).

1.3.2. Limitations of process-oriented approaches

Process-oriented theorizations of alternative media have been criticized on multiple grounds. Uzelman cautions against two assumptions in the literature that 1) "participatory forms of production and organization are necessarily articulated to democratic power effects;" 2) "wider access to marginalized or excluded content, or innovative styles and formats, will activate alternative media audiences for political struggle" (2011: 22).

Advocating for "a realistic Marxist theory of alternative media," Fuchs states that process-oriented perspectives' main object of interest, "self organized small-scale

community media that enable citizen participation,” is problematic (2010: 174,177). These type of media “are not suited to supporting and advancing large-scale political change” (Fuchs, 2010:177). They are limited in many ways:

[...] [s]uch media will remain insignificant and be unable to have a transformative political potential because they are unable to reach a mass public and therefore are unable to be embedded in a large counter-public sphere. Such media tend to produce fragmented unconnected publics that are only accessed by isolated subgroups and undermine the possibility for a large sphere of political communication that is accessed by all exploited, oppressed, and excluded groups and individuals (Fuchs,2010:177).

As it can be seen from the quote above, the invisibility and *balkanization*⁶ of small scale alternative media which is the epitome of democratic media in process oriented perspectives- constitute a significant concern for alternative media scholars.

Although his work is usually considered as a part of process oriented perspectives (Sendoval,2009:5-6; Fuchs, 2010), Chris Atton also warns against evaluating “participation as good in-itself” (Atton, 2008:217 as cited in Sandoval,2009: 5-6). For Atton, “practicing prefigurative politics by anticipating the idea of a society beyond capitalism is what makes alternative media emancipatory” (Sendoval, 2009:6). His emphasis on the critique of capitalism in alternative media projects can also be seen in his later work. In their leading study of alternative journalism, Atton and Hamilton point that a “general political-economic dilemma for any critical project is that it needs resources with which to work, but those crucial resources are present only in the very society that it seeks to change or dissolve” (2008: 26). Nonetheless, with their alternative democratic structures, alternative media challenge “the political economy of mass communications” (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:123). From a Marxist perspective defended by Atton and Hamilton, there is more to the idea of empowerment through participation. They argue that alternative media “may be considered as offering radical, anti-capitalist relations of production” besides being “projects of ideological disturbance and rupture” (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:120).

⁶ Also referred to as ghettoization of alternative media (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:136-137). This happens when alternative media fail to break through and address only their members, they risk marginalization and quickly disconnection from the larger public sphere (or other alternative public spheres). This can be especially dangerous for the social movements’ (media) that are in vital need to air their causes to larger publics, access larger audiences and recruit new members (White, 1995).

Another limitation of process-oriented theorizations, particularly when thinking about alternative media's relationship with democracy, stems from the fact that horizontal and participatory structures do not necessarily bring emancipation. As Sandoval cautions "Participatory organization principles can also be used for advancing repressive media content" (2009:7). Many non-progressive media (right wing, fundamentalist Islamist and other) operating on the internet demonstrate the significance of this remark.

Similarly, the same participatory structures which enable inclusiveness do not necessarily guarantee internal democracy for alternative media organizations. In other words, one type of inclusiveness does not amount to all-around equality. In their study of IndyMedia Centers, Brooten and Hall observe a strong gender hierarchy in intra-organizational debates (2009: 203-219). Gender related concerns seem to present problems in member recruitments as well (Skinner et al, 2009), demonstrating the vulnerability of alternative media organizations to their own power cliques.

Process-oriented approaches also often emphasize the emancipatory role played by the internet. By demolishing media professionals' monopoly in media production and reducing production costs, the internet provides access for marginalized groups and views. Yet this celebratory approach has also been criticized by scholars such as Pajnik and Downing who point to the "cacophony of multiple monologues" rather than "exchange of ideas between equals" (2008:7).

1.3.3. How do process-oriented perspectives translate into alternative journalism?

Journalism practiced by alternative media is typically "understood as entirely separate and different from journalism practiced within mainstream media" (Harcup, 2005:361). However, despite their crucial differences, dichotomizing these two forms of journalism can be misleading. Studies show the possibilities of "crossover of both practice and personnel between journalism conducted in alternative and mainstream media" (Harcup, 2005:361). There can be "hybrid" practices where alternative journalists "draw from existing forms (such as tabloid journalism) and methods (such as investigative journalism) (Atton 2003, as cited in Harcup, 2005: 368-369). In their study of the alternative news network Indymedia, Platon and Deuze also find "certain

similarities” between journalism of alternative and mainstream media such as “the use of brand name and identity as a kind of authoritative voice in news broadcasting” (2003:350). For the purposes of this essay, however, I will emphasize distinguishing characteristics of alternative journalism as *deprofessionalization*, *rejection of objectivity* and *sourcing routines*.

As mentioned above, eliminating the producer/consumer divide is essential in process oriented perspectives. The principle of *deprofessionalization* in alternative journalism has a parallel goal. Alternative journalists seek to challenge the top-down nature of news. According to Atton and Hamilton, practitioners of alternative media are mostly “amateurs who typically have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists: they write and report from their position as citizens, as members of communities, as activists or as fans” (2008:1-2). Yet, it should be noted that this account cannot be generalized for all alternative media organizations since some of them prefer employing mainly professional journalists or a combination of activists and professionals.

Native Reporting

In terms of amateur reporting, a particular practice in social movements media, *native reporting*, is worth mentioning (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:127). The term refers to the colonization of certain groups by professional journalists (in the dominant media) who report on the matters of concern to these groups and yet exclude them from participating in media. It is argued that the “inherent power relations between the observer and the observed” are “grounded by the routinized narrative practices of journalism” (Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 128). Native reporters, who are often activists or community members (mostly non-professionals) counter this colonization by being the subjects of the news, identifying their own problems and expressing themselves through their own voice. As such, through their news-making, communities, civic organizations or groups seek to act as “news sources” and “news subjects”.

Again, alongside with the process-oriented perspectives, Forde et al. suggest that “we should consider alternative journalism as a *process* of cultural empowerment [where] content production is not *necessarily* the prime purpose [and] what maybe as (or more) important are the ways in which community media outlets facilitate the process of community organization” (2003: 317 as cited in Atton & Hamilton, 2008:129). This approach meshes with Rodriguez’s argument that although much of the alternative

media have short lifecycles, their achievements “can be best understood as those of empowered citizens who continue acting on their new-found abilities in a different realm” (Rodriguez, 2001:159).

Inverting the Hierarchy of Access

Turning audiences into the news subjects rather than news objects is a goal also reflected in alternative journalists’ sourcing routines. Alternative journalists seek to “invert ‘the hierarchy of access’ to the news (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976: 245 as cited in Atton &Hamilton, 2008: 86) by explicitly foregrounding the viewpoints of ‘ordinary people’ (activists, protesters, local residents): citizens whose visibility in the mainstream media tends to be obscured by the elite groups or individuals” (Atton &Hamilton, 2008:86).

As such they represent the “the interests, views and needs of the under-represented groups in society” (Atton &Hamilton, 2008: 1-2).

1.4. Content-oriented approaches to alternative media

The second group of approaches to alternative media are *content-oriented* approaches. In Bailey et al.’s typology (2008), the second conception of alternative media titled *Challenges to hegemonic media and their representations* corresponds to this perspective: According to content oriented approaches, alternative media’s distinctive feature is their political goal which is wider social emancipation. In other words, alternative media’s democratic significance is related to their “ability to affect large-scale social and political reform” (Haas, 2004:116). In contrast with the process oriented approaches, here, participatory production or decision-making processes are not of primary importance⁷. Instead, alternative media’s defining characteristics and their democratizing potentials lie in generating *critical content* and, a *counter hegemonic public sphere*.

Critical (oppositional/counter-hegemonic) content: Content-oriented approaches focus on the analysis of media content which is seen as a media structure due to its

⁷ In fact, Downing cautions against the potential dangers of both the “tyranny of structurelessness” and “Leninist model of hierarchal organization and party line-ism” that can occur within the social movements’ media (Hackett & Carroll, 2006:59).

“durable” nature (Sandoval, 2009:8). This view can be found in many prominent alternative media scholars’ works. For instance, Downing contends that the “central characteristic of radical media is their alternative political vision” (Fuchs, 2010: 178):

By radical media, I refer to media, generally small scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives (Downing, 2001: v as cited in Fuchs, 2010:178).

Similarly, Haas states that alternative media could be defined as media devoted to providing representations of issues and events which oppose those offered in the mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform (Haas, 2004:115). Other scholars such as Sandoval (2009) and Fuchs (2010) underline the *critical* nature of alternative media content based on a Marxist understanding of the term. Drawing on Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse’s work, Sandoval explains what the term critical entails:

In summary, Marxist critique departs from the critique of capitalist relations and societal contradictions. The objects of critique are all kinds of domination. The critique consists in the negation of repressive societal conditions, and aims at a society without domination and oppression in which all human beings can live a self-determined life. Critical media content can therefore be understood as content that criticizes all forms of oppression and domination, and keeps up the vision of a reasonable and self-determined society that can be achieved through social struggles (2009: 12-13).

Hackett and Carroll (2006:58) offer a more detailed description of alternative media’s political orientation and content as ideally being “progressive, explicitly opposed to particular axes of domination (corporate capitalism, heterosexism, racism, state authoritarianism)”.

Counter Public Sphere: Alternative media scholars use this term to point out the shortcomings of Habermas’ public sphere and mainstream media’s role in it. Dahlgren describes the public sphere as “the realm of social life where the exchange of information and the views on questions of common concern can take place so that the public opinion can be formed” (as cited in Zhao & Hackett, 2005:11). As such, media “link the discussants to each other” (Stromback, 2005:341). In this public sphere the economic, social and other structural inequalities are bracketed so that the opinions/discourses can be evaluated for their own sake. Thus, the public sphere is “ideally characterized by discussion free of domination, equality of participation and

rationality in the sense of an appeal to general principles rather than sheer self interest” (Zhao & Hackett, 2005: 11). The essential role the media should play in creating and maintaining a healthy public sphere in democracies is particularly emphasized in the deliberative model of democracy⁸. In his earlier work, Habermas points to a transformation of the public sphere with the rise of corporate capitalism. He suggests that corporations and political actors have dominated the public sphere to gain the publics’ support “by means of a display of staged or managed publicity” and as a result, the public sphere has been re-feudalized. (Habermas, 1989: 232 as cited in Greenberg et al, 2011:68). Since the 1980s the effects of this transformation on media and journalism became more visible and have been documented extensively by critical scholars.

Habermas’s theory of the public sphere has also been criticized on the basis that, since its emergence, it has been an exclusionary space for various groups in the society particularly for women, the poor and working class. Fuchs (2014:64) groups these critiques under *postmodern critiques of the public sphere* whose main supporters are Benhabib (1992), Fraser (1992), Mouffe, 1999 among others. The postmodern critique of the public sphere suggests that “an egalitarian society should be based on a plurality of public arenas in order to be democratic and multicultural” and accordingly, they propose that struggles against oppression take place in multiple subaltern counter publics rather than in one unified sphere” (Fuchs, 2014:64). Some alternative media scholars such as Fuchs (2010, 2014) and Sandoval (2009) caution against the limitations of having a fragmented public sphere (which manifests itself in the idea of multiple subaltern public spheres) in creating a large scale social change. Fuchs explains what kind of counter public sphere is needed and the role critical media should play in its creation:

The danger of pluralistic publics without unity is that in struggles they will focus on mere reformist identity politics without challenging the whole, which negatively affects the lives of all subordinated groups, and that it ignores that in an egalitarian society common communication media are needed to guarantee cohesion and the solidarity that is needed for a strong democracy. Postmodernists and post-Marxists are so occupied with stressing difference that they do not realize that difference can become repressive if it turns into a plurality without unity. Certainly, the counter-public sphere and an egalitarian public sphere should be based on unity in diversity, but the central aspect is that there needs to be unity in diversity

⁸ For more information on different models of democracy and the kind of media they ascribe to media, please see Stromback, 2005 and Marx Ferree, 2002.

in order to struggle for participatory democracy and to maintain this condition once it is achieved (Fuchs, 2010:186).

In his conceptualization of alternative media as critical media, Fuchs consider alternative media as “the communicative dimension of the counter-public sphere” (2010: 173). His definition of counter public sphere is based on a more comprehensive understanding of Negt and Kluge’s notion of the proletarian (counter)public sphere (1972 as cited in Fuchs, 2010:176). Negt and Kluge’s proletarian public sphere is in opposition and an alternative to the bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas, and it is to “contribute intellectual means to class struggle” (Fuchs, 2010: 176). As such, the proletarian public sphere is an independent communicative sphere for the proletariat where they can defend the interests of the working class. Fuchs proposes to extend the notion of the proletariat in a way to include “the unemployed, houseworkers, migrant workers, developing countries, retirees, students, precarious workers, precarious self-employment, and knowledge workers” as they are also a part of the “exploited class” (2010: 185) in the new political and economic world order. As one of the theorists who see the creation of a counter public sphere as one of the main democratizing functions of alternative media, Fuchs suggests that “a few widely accessible and widely consumed broad critical media” are preferable to many small-scale special interest media that support the fragmentation of struggles” (2010: 186).

When alternative media’s main democratizing function is described as producing critical content and counter-hegemonic public spheres, certain expectations arise regarding the form of journalism they produce. In the next section I examine two prominent aspects of alternative journalism in relation to content- oriented conceptualization of alternative media-objectivity, and funding.

1.4.1. How do content-oriented approaches translate into alternative journalism?

In liberal theories of media, journalism has a watchdog role over the political elites (Curran, 2002:212)⁹, and as a part this role, media is expected to fulfil an informative function (Carpentier, 2007:159). Thus, besides alerting citizens to the abuses

⁹ Although contemporary interpretations of the watchdog role expand the control function to the economic elites (McNair, 2009:239), they are not viewed as “of highest priority” (Baker, 2002:133).

of political authority, media act as a channel between the government and the governed, by relating citizens' concerns to the government via *vox-populi* interviews and opinion polls and informing the electorate on the issues of public concern. Alternative media scholars point out the advocacy function of alternative media as opposed to the information role of mainstream media. Atton (2002) suggests alternative media "promote mobilized citizenry" rather than "informed citizenry" (as cited in Haas, 2004:116). Thus, critical content is crucial for mobilization and social change. Both the production of critical/oppositional content and the advocacy function put practitioners of alternative media in a specific relationship with traditional journalistic objectivity. Some studies in alternative media/journalism show a strong opposition to objectivity from alternative media practitioners; however, in Hackett and Gurleyen (2015), we contend that there is a more nuanced approach to objectivity in alternative journalism. In the next section, I will briefly touch on the issue of objectivity in alternative journalism (a more detailed discussion can be found in Hackett & Gurleyen, 2015). Then, I will examine models of funding of alternative media as it is perceived as one of the main areas of influence on content.

Objectivity

Journalistic objectivity has been a very contested principle in media studies. The possibility of its realization, the role it plays in masking social inequality, different factors preventing its application or the reliability of the new forms which reject objectivity have widely been discussed. In their 1998 study, Hackett and Zhao suggest that what they call the *regime of objectivity* can be understood as a "multifaceted paradigm" comprising five aspects.

First, it is "a normative ideal" that journalists should seek to apply in their work. Values and principles such as separating facts and opinion, neutrality, detachment and avoiding personal/political biases can be grouped under this aspect. This first aspect also meshes with Hammond & Calcutt's description of journalistic objectivity which is comprised of three interconnected concepts: *truthfulness* which consists of "reporting actually accurate information", "*neutrality* in the sense of fairness and balance", "*detachment*: a dispassionate approach that separates fact from comment" (2011:98).

The second aspect consists of "an epistemological stance" which implies that through observation and accurate recording of the factual data, news can in fact,

represent the world as it is. The once popular metaphor in liberal media theories - media holding a mirror to society - can also be understood within these terms.

The third aspect is described as “a set of news gathering and presentational practices”. The practices employed by journalists in their everyday work routines to separate facts and opinions and remain unbiased in their reports such as fact checking, the use of quotation marks, consulting all sides of the story, and prioritizing credible sources can be understood within this category. In her famous critique of journalistic objectivity, Tuchman contends that these are in fact “strategic rituals” mostly designed to “protect the journalists (and, by extension, the news organization) against charges of bias” (Calcutt & Hammond, 2011:99).

The fourth aspect refers to the embeddedness of objectivity in “an institutional framework”. Despite mostly being part of big corporations, news organizations still have editorial independence and provide, with their specialized departments, the main organizational space where professional journalists (who are assumed to possess particular knowledge, skills and ethics either through education and/or training on the job) employ objectivity. Moreover, in their work, news organizations are considered to be independent from the government and hold legal guarantees of press freedom (Hackett & Gurleyen, 2015: 55).

The fifth aspect describes objectivity as being “an active ingredient in public discourse” (Gurleyen & Hackett, 2016:30). Here, Hackett and Zhao (1998) refer to the use of objectivity as a performance criterion for those who are involved in journalism. In such an assessment, some organizations are deemed to be biased or spreading propaganda while others would claim to be “fair” or “balanced” as being a more achievable ideal than objectivity (Gurleyen & Hackett, 2016:30).

Once considered as the pillar of North American journalism, the regime of objectivity was subjected to widespread academic critique between the 1960s and 1980s (Gurleyen & Hackett, 2016:30):

[...] critics argue that it led journalism to over-rely on official sources, to collude with and/or amplify the dominant ideology to the benefit of elites, to distort public issues by reducing them to two-sided, zero-sum contests, to adopt practices that undermine democratic public life (such as a stance of cynical negativism divorced from coherent analytical perspectives), to

frame politics as a game of insiders motivated only by electoral success, and to prioritize facts and events over processes, conditions, explanations or context.

Vis-à-vis some of these critiques, professional reform movements such as public journalism and peace journalism have emerged in the 1990s. Yet, it is the realm of alternative media where we can see the most drastic differences in the application of journalistic objectivity. There is no monolithic approach to objectivity in alternative media - in the sense that we can observe both continuation of the norm and its complete refusal by alternative media practitioners. Arguably, it would be fair to say that alternative media still offer a fertile area of research where one can find many different definitions and variations of objectivity. These variations can help us to redefine objectivity in a way that better serves the needs of citizens. One way of doing this would be to identify the differences as well as the similarities in the application of objectivity.

Indymedia (which can be considered as both process-and-content-oriented alternative media due to its participatory organizational character and content favoring the anti-globalization movement), openly states its stance vis-à-vis journalistic objectivity:

Austin Indymedia is a grassroots media collective committed to providing an outlet for the circulation of voices and messages that are systematically marginalized by mainstream media. Austin Indymedia refuses to hide behind a false sense of objectivity and promotes media-making as a tool for social, economic, and environmental justice. [...] (“Austin IMC’s Mission Statement”)

In their statement, the Austin Indymedia collective choose to be transparent about their biases. As such, “Indymedia journalists are participant [sic], rather than detached, observers of the movement scene and the direct actions. Their perspectivism [sic] is based on their social position and experience of the world, as well as their political commitments.” (Hanke, 2005:59).

In Atton and Hamilton’s (2008) study, a strong and homogenous approach can be seen in regard to the rejection of objectivity by alternative media practitioners. Their main contention is that alternative journalism seeks to develop an alternative epistemology of news (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:1). Thus, the application of journalistic objectivity would greatly differ in alternative media. In line with this, Atton & Hamilton report that “[J]ournalists in alternative media, however, seek to challenge objectivity and

impartiality from both an ethical and practical standpoint in their own journalistic practices" (2008: 85).

Accordingly, alternative media demonstrate a "partisan character", where "they exhibit clear biases, yet they proclaim their selectivity and their bias, and generally have little interest in balanced reporting.'" (2008:86). This attitude of alternative media practitioners has several rationales. First, alternative journalists disbelieve in the possibility of separating "facts from values" (p.85). They also question whether it is "morally and politically preferable to do so" (p.85). They share similar ideas about balance and neutrality: Alternative journalists contend that since mainstream media present only dominant viewpoints, alternative media try to counterbalance these dominant ideas with less represented ones. In doing so, they do not necessarily feel the need to repeat the dominant viewpoints for the sake of balanced reporting (p.85). As a way of doing this, alternative journalists give a "voice to ordinary people" (activists, protesters, local residents) — citizens whose visibility in the mainstream media tends to be obscured by the elite groups and individuals," and use "official or semi -official sources in the public domain that have been ignored by mainstream journalism" (p.86).

According to Atton and Hamilton, the type of journalism practiced in alternative media can be described as "social responsibility journalism" which is different from public journalism in the US in the sense that it does not operate within mainstream media structures and by doing so frees itself from the constraints imposed by them (2008:87).

In her study of alternative community media, Forde observes that, contrary to mainstream journalists, alternative journalists adopt news values of "localism" and "activism" (Forde, 2011:93):

[...] alternative media journalists are distinguished by their belonging to the campaign or movement for which they write or broadcast. Further, their overriding commitment is to their public sphere, whether they perceive that sphere to be the Aboriginal community, an ethnic community, the socialist political movement, the environmental lobby, the anti-war campaign and so on (Forde, 2011:93).

Forde's observations overlap with the findings of Harcup's study where some practitioners of alternative media state that they view their reporting as mainly "a political activity" (Harcup, 2005:362). However, her extensive research also demonstrates

nuanced approaches to objectivity in alternative media both over time¹⁰ and in regards to different aspects of objectivity. Forde observes that in her earlier interviews (in 1999), “the majority of alternative press journalists interviewed said objectivity was 'very important' to the work they did. [...]” (2011: 118). However, she emphasizes the way in which alternative media journalists define objectivity. While they clearly reject values like detachment and neutrality, they still seek to adhere to standards like balance and fact checking. Her more recent work reflects the same results:

[...] in 2010 we can still discern a similar approach to the underpinnings of alternative journalism. The interviewees were most likely to consider objectivity in terms of truthfulness, fairness and balance, with only a couple of journalists indicating that objectivity was a notion that they refused to engage with. Others saw that, in the broader media landscape, they were 'balancing things out' because they were acting as a counter-balance to mainstream representations of important and political issues, but generally, objectivity was still a term that the alternative journalists I spoke to, related with. (Forde,2011:119).

Forde concludes that in her research which extended over a period of ten years, there was no monolithic approach in rejection of objectivity among radical publications or an absolute acceptance of it “among more traditionally trained journalists working in alternative outlets.” (2011:123).

As the literature shows, while certain aspects of objectivity such as detachment and neutrality are highly contested in content- oriented approaches, other aspects like fact checking or fairness are still valued. Next, I will examine funding as another major influence on the critical media content.

Funding

Arguably, alternative journalism’s most notable strengths and weaknesses stem from its financial structures. Alternative media seek to challenge “the political economy of mass communications” (Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 123). They are thought to offer “radical, anti-capitalist relations of production” (ibid, p.120).

¹⁰ Another study conducted in 1988 by Eliasoph also concludes that journalists from KPFA-FM, an alternative radio station, seek to achieve balance in their coverage and employ journalism school educated journalists for a more professional approach (Meyers, 2008:378).

Accordingly, most alternative media organizations reject advertising revenue due to concerns of independence (Bailey et al, 2008:19, 32; Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 86). Some also reject state or municipal grants for the same reason and rely on “subscriptions, donations, trust funds or foundations” (Hackett & Carroll, 2006:58). This financial independence enables the production of critical/counterhegemonic content. However, it also poses questions of sustainability as well as the exploitation of volunteers.

Case studies demonstrate that virtually all types and forms of alternative media (ranging from ‘online news collectives’, Indymedia Centers to rural radio projects in Africa and Latin America) face challenges in terms of sustainability. This challenge mainly involves finding the essential funding and the recruitment of qualified personnel who can work on a voluntary basis or for little money (Meadows, Forde, Ewart & Foxwell & 2009; Skinner, Uzelman, Langlois & Dubois, 2009)¹¹. Funders’ influence on the projects presents another cause for concern for alternative media projects. In her examination of The Africa Women Filmmakers Trust (AWFT), Matewa (2009) points out that the “donors usually do not fund the projects that challenge existing power relations” (p.128). Kleinenberg (2005) makes a similar observation regarding media literacy projects developed in youth centers in the US. He concludes that depending on the funder, the projects either transform into “media appreciation projects” (in case of the corporate funders) or ideological tools of governments (p.187).

For alternative media organizations that seek to create large-scale social change, financial difficulties pose even a greater challenge because their work necessitates sustained and persistent practice.

In face of these challenges, several propositions have been put forward. On a more theoretical level Sandoval suggests “a model of alternative media that pursues radical criticism at the level of content but are not necessarily alternative at the level of economic product form and production processes” (2009:12). She calls this a “dialectical” approach to alternative media which is based on “the assumption of a dialectical relationship between media actors and media structures” (2009:9).

¹¹ The authors report that in Australia “within community radio stations only 30% operate on an entirely volunteer basis while 35% of stations employ three people or fewer” (Meadows et al, 2009:171).

Accordingly, “media structures enable and constrain the action of media actors, who again through their actions shape the media structures” (ibid:9). In her analysis media actors are composed of “producers and consumers of media products” (ibid:9). Media structures on the other hand “are institutions, technologies, media content, or the economic form of media products” (ibid:9).

The defining characteristics of alternative media are determined in relation to alternative media structures’ and actors’ differences from their capitalist counterparts (2009,10). For instance, critical scholars explain the “repressive” properties of capitalist media through their “commercial” and “ideological” character (p. 10). This means that, “if alternative media want to negate the repressive capitalist media system they should be non-commercial instead of commercial and provide critical content instead of ideologies” (Sandoval, 2009:10). Similarly, on the “actors” level, alternative media “open up access to media production to a broad public and try to abolish the distinction between media producers and media consumers” (ibid:10). Thus in their ideal form, alternative media are “non-commercial, provide critical content and are produced in a participatory way” (Sandoval, 2009:10).

However, Sandoval states that the small-scale nature and thus limited reach of ideal type of alternative media influence their effectiveness and “[u]nder capitalism the ideal model of alternative media is likely to fail” (ibid, 11). Instead, “in order to be successful in advancing progressive political aims, alternative media may depend on employing some elements of capitalist techniques of media production” (ibid, 11). For Sandoval, commercial and non-participatory media can still be alternative if they “produce and distribute critical media content” yet a medium cease being alternative “[a]s soon as ideological content in standardized form is produced and distributed” (2009:11).

Alternative media in Sandoval’s dialectical model would have a better chance against the risk of fragmentation or disappearance altogether. According to Sandoval, examples like Canadian alternative journal *Adbusters* or bimonthly *Mother Jones* which have relatively higher reach (of 120,000 and 250,000 respectively) use a mix of donations, sales and advertising (in *Mother Jones*’s case) and can still maintain their production of critical content (Sandoval, 2009:12). Sandoval also points out several academic case studies such as the study of “commercial Muslim minority magazine *Q*

News' (Bailey et al., 2008:94) and Benson's content analysis of four Californian alternative Newsweeklies (*LA Weekly*, *New Times LA*, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *SF Weekly*) which conclude that despite using advertising these publications could still produce content critical of capitalism and encourage political activism (Sandoval, 2009:12).

In their more recent work, Fuchs & Sandoval propose the following measures as a way to resource alternative media:

We suggest taxing large media (and other) corporations and channelling this income into non-commercial media. This requires combining the increase of corporate taxation with elements of participatory budgeting that allow every citizen to donate a certain amount per year to a non-commercial media project. Elements of state action and civil society action could be combined: the power of the state would guarantee taxation of large companies; the distribution of this income to media projects would, however, be decentralized and put in the hands of citizens. This measure is far from ideal and has its own limits, but it may be a step forward in order to strengthen alternative media (2015: 173).

In addition to these measures we can also add more recent online crowdfunding experiments to support independent and freelance journalism projects, which carry the potential to be examples of process and/or content oriented alternative media. Hunter suggests these media produce "point of view" or "advocacy journalism" while keeping their autonomy through a negotiation process with their investors¹²(Hunter, 2015).

1.5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this essay, I have reviewed process and content-oriented approaches to alternative media and their assumptions regarding the kind of journalism they deem necessary for empowerment and emancipation of communities and citizens. On a theoretical basis, adopting either one of these approaches to determine the defining characteristics of alternative media results in the exclusion of certain types and forms of media outlets from the domain of the alternative. Yet, on a more practical level, the

¹² They can seek active or passive investors. "While passive investors do not get involved in the production of the product or direction a project takes, active investors do play a role" (Hunter, 2015: 274).

characteristics that they underline - like participation and critical content - contribute to media and societal democratization in complementary ways.

It can be argued that process-oriented approaches to alternative media have particularly been useful in understanding and conceptualizing new media platforms (alternative or not) and new ways of doing journalism such as blogs, and citizen journalism projects like OhmyNews and Wikinews since, arguably, the democratizing potentials of these forms mainly lie in the way they eliminate the consumer-producer divide. Similarly, I believe process-oriented approaches also offer a better framework to examine the ways in which a particular group or community use a medium (like radio, video or newspaper) to empower themselves by choosing both the content and style of their communication, and creating a space and platform to communicate with the outside world and within themselves. In a way, process-oriented approaches to alternative media parallel the ideal of participatory democracy which seeks to address “unequal access to democratic processes and forums for discussion” (Harcup, 2011:17). Harcup argues that “It is by encouraging and *reflecting* a culture of participation that alternative media projects can be seen as supportive of active citizenship; and it is by *being* participatory forms of media that such projects themselves constitute a form of active citizenship” (2011:18). Thus, participation is seen as a “transformative process” for process-oriented approaches like Clemencia Rodriguez’s concept of citizen’s media. Once more, Harcup summarizes: “[P]articipation and ‘empowerment’ offered by such citizens’ media constitute citizenship in action” (2011:19). Just as the participatory democracy model suggests, people transform into engaged citizens through public participation (Marx Ferree, 2002:297).

I see the concept of active citizenship described by Harcup as an important constituent of the large-scale social change emphasized by content-oriented approaches that stress the coverage of critical content as the minimum requirement for the definition of alternative media. According to Sandoval:

[...] reaching a broad audience would be necessary if alternative media want to contrast the ideologies produced by capitalist mass media with critical reporting. Only in doing so they have a chance to contribute to critical awareness raising regarding the dominative and oppressive character of capitalism. Critical awareness is a necessary precondition for critical actions and the resistance against capitalism (2009:10).

Critical citizenship does not entail a direct opposition to or resistance against capitalism in itself. However, compared to critical content alone, its potential to achieve the type of critical action mentioned above is arguably much greater.

Just like process-oriented approaches reflect the principles of participatory democracy, content oriented approaches, represented in this essay mainly by Fuchs' (2010) and Sandoval' (2009) views, reflect the principles of radical democracy since radical democrats favor "more equitable distribution of cultural, social and economic sources" (Hackett & Zhao, 2005: 12). In this sense, in the way that participatory democracy and radical democracy complement each other, democratizing potentials of content-oriented and process-oriented media also complement each other. Social movements, communities and other groups in the society would strategically decide about which type of alternative media (one that prioritizes critical content or participation) would best serve their needs.

Further to this, I believe that the definition of alternative media should always be a dynamic one since what constitutes alternative in a given period or geography is context dependent. Indeed, as their needs and priorities change, social movements, communities or other groups may alter their use of alternative media for empowerment or emancipation. For instance, in the initial phases of a movement, process-oriented alternative media may be more useful in creating a common identity thanks to their small scale and participatory characteristics. In a later phase, the same movement may need more resources mobilized towards creating counter hegemonic content and reaching larger audiences, thereby shifting to a content oriented approach.

Moreover, Salazar (2009) notes that a radio collective operated by Mapuche activists in Chile has not only succeeded in constituting their 'subaltern public spheres' where they can discuss their conditions of oppression under the repressive government, but also managed to get their news aired on national and international television. By doing this they managed to bring major issues of concern to their community – like "the militarization of the indigenous lands" (2009:42) – to the attention of the larger public and international justice movements. This success assured not only greater attention to and visibility of their cause but also managed to put them in contact with other actors with whom they can potentially act in solidarity.

Additionally, we should not forget that besides content and process-oriented approaches to alternative media, other efforts of categorization —such as Bailey et al.'s typology (2008) mentioned above — may offer a larger framework to conceptualize the diversity of examples. It is important to note that while focusing on the contrasts between alternative and mainstream media facilitates theorization of alternative media, it is relevant not to be stuck in binary oppositions in our conceptualization of alternative media. Alternative and mainstream media not only share common characteristics and a mobility of actors, but also offer possibilities of emulation for the best practices.

Scholars like Bruck and Raboy (1990), and Streitmatter (2001:283) have put forward the idea that “mainstream media should emulate alternative media practices” (Haas, 2004: 118). In this sense, Haas suggests that mainstream news organizations that already adopt journalism reform projects such as “civic” or “public journalism” can “further their democratic goals by emulating alternative media practices” (ibid:118). The public journalism movement and alternative journalism’s “overarching goals” such as increasing citizen participation, covering “issues of concern to the citizens” and “reporting on those issues from the perspective of citizens rather than politicians, experts and other elite actors” can further enable such a collaboration (Haas, 2004, :118). Yet as Haas himself acknowledges, this collaboration may pose some challenges for the public journalism movement that avoids open political advocacy and ties with politically organized groups such as political parties or trade unions (2004; 118-119).

Nevertheless, alternative media offer ample opportunities for journalism studies to examine different ways of producing and presenting news and engaging with the audience. These qualities, together, are essential for reinvigorating journalism and making full use of the democratizing potentials made available by media.

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2:

**Alternative Media:
The Life Support of Journalism in Turkey**

2.1. Introduction

In the first essay, I reviewed the literature on alternative media/journalism by looking into process- and content- oriented approaches and what they have to say about the democratization potentials of alternative media. I also analyzed how these approaches translate into alternative journalism. In this second essay, I will examine alternative media/journalism in Turkey in order to see to what extent these theories apply to the Turkish context and in which ways Turkish alternative media/journalism demonstrate particularities. Besides the relevant academic literature on Turkey's socio-political characteristics and its history of alternative media/journalism, this second essay will also include the findings of face to face interviews I have conducted with alternative media practitioners in Turkey in 2011 and 2013.

Any media system - alternative or mainstream - is shaped by the socio-political characteristics of the country in which they are situated. Therefore, an adequate understanding or analysis of the media/journalism produced in a certain country also requires an analysis of the political and economic structures within which the media production takes place. Therefore, instead of adopting a media-centric view and focusing on solely on alternative media in Turkey, in this second essay, I aim to have a more holistic approach and reflect socio-political characteristics of Turkey as extensively as possible within the scope of this essay. Accordingly, the first section of this essay will outline 'the troubled democracy' of Turkey with a focus on the last decade marked by significant political and economical changes under the rule of the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP-Justice and Development Party).

After providing the necessary contextualizing information about Turkey, in the second section, I will examine the characteristics of Turkish news media and journalism, focusing on structural (concentrated ownership, weakness of press unions etc) as well as political and judicial restrictions (repressive laws, government censorship) which influence news media in Turkey. This section aims to contribute to the understanding of what alternative media and journalism in Turkey represent and who they contradict. The third section will examine this oppositional media tradition in Turkey and its relationship with social movements. The fourth section will focus on nine alternative media organizations that I have used in my interviews and their activities. These media organizations are chosen to represent diverse axes of domination in the country as well

as representing a diversity of media. The sample includes a pro-Kurdish citizen -media outlet (*Otekilerin Postasi*) that operates through Facebook, a citizen- media outlet (*140-Journos*) that operates through Tweeter, a feminist online news site (*Ucan Haber*), an alternative radio station (*Acik Radyo*), an environmentalist movement news paper (*Yesil Gazete*), an LGBT movement news site (*KaosGL*), a socialist print magazine (*AltUst*), a labor movement news site (*Sendika.org*) and an alternative news network (*Bianet*), Stylistically this section differs from the rest of the essay since it offers a systematic description of these media organizations' activities of the media organizations. The fifth and the last section will be based on the self-description and self-assessment of the actual practitioners of alternative media. Although in the first essay I emphasize the importance of critical-content in alternative media, the limited scope of the essay prevents a meaningful comparative content analysis. Instead, I am focusing on the statements of the practitioners in order to see how they define their work in relation to mainstream media in Turkey and where they think their democratizing potentials lie.

Through the findings based on semi- structured personal interviews, I will outline their news values, their goals, their self-evaluation regarding their success in relation to their aims and the obstacles or limitations they face. I should note here that because the findings are based on semi-structured interviews, the practitioners have not elaborated on each topic equally; therefore some sections such as the news values are quite brief in comparison to the others. Similarly, some quotes can be categorized under more than one subheading (i.e. definition of news and news values).

The concluding section discusses the findings of my research in relation to the theories of alternative media and journalism set out in the first essay.

2.2. Turkey and its Troubled Democracy

The theorization and classification of Turkey as a country is quite challenging. Chris Christensen states that in academic research, Turkey “has found itself caught in an intellectual and theoretical ‘no-man’s land’ located somewhere between south-eastern Europe and the Middle East” (2007, p.180). Besides geographical proximity¹³,

¹³ Turkey's geopolitical position is one of the most important features of the country and it is arguably the main one that attracts political as well as scholarly attention. Turkey has borders with Bulgaria and Greece on the west; Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran on the east and

Turkey also holds certain common traits with these regions such as the issue of democratic transition (common with south-eastern Europe) and political turmoil (common with the Middle East). Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the country struggles to complete its transition to democracy. Although the transition to multiparty democracy was completed in 1945, Turkish democracy has been interrupted by military coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980 (Zurcher, 2004:5) and the basic principles of democracy such as the rule of law and establishment of human rights still remain to be realized.

Turkey's democracy has been particularly scrutinized in international politics since the 1990s when Turkey's candidacy process in to the European Union gained momentum. With its predominantly Muslim population, Turkey is the "only state with a foothold in the Middle East which is also knocking on the door of Europe." (Hale, 1994, p.viii). As journalist Andrew Finkel states, Turkey is "sometimes pushed to the front of the room as an example of how a contemporary Muslim-majority society can be democratic" (Finkel, 2012:107).

In reality, the tension between populist Islamism and secularism has been at the forefront of Turkish politics since the foundation of the secular Republic of Turkey in 1923. The founding elite of the Republic who were led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, were coming from a military background. The founding political party, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP-Republican People's Party) ruled the country between 1923-1945. During this time, the country went through a mostly "top down" modernization project that included measures such as the abolition of the Caliphate, adoption of the Roman alphabet instead of the Arabic alphabet and transition from Islamic education in schools to a modern education system as well as the closure of Sufi brotherhoods (Taspinar, 2012).

Syria and Iraq on the south. The country is situated at the intersection of European and Asian continents. As such, Turkey has been in close proximity with conflict zones as well as going through internal conflicts which shaped its domestic and foreign politics. During the Cold War, it has played a strategic role as a part of the containment strategy of the US (green belt) against the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, Turkey's historical, religious and ethnic ties with some of the ex-soviet countries such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan put the country once again at the center of attention. Similarly, Turkey has once played an important role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as well as often being shown as a model for the Muslim countries in the Middle East as the only secular country with a Muslim majority population. Indeed, the discussions on Turkey's ability to be a role model in the Middle East resurfaced during the Arab Spring that started in December 2010.

The protection of these reforms were mostly left to the Turkish military. Since the very early years of the republic, the Turkish military has seen itself - and has been seen by many - as the guardian of the foundational principles of the Republic, in particular the principles of a unitary nation and secularism. As a result, the army has not hesitated to intervene directly into politics when these principles were deemed to be in danger. For instance, during the 1960 military intervention, The Demokrat Parti (DP-Democrat Party) government and the PM were charged with various crimes ranging from corruption to the silencing of the opposition party CHP. Following a joint civilian-military tribunal, the then Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and several members of the government were sentenced to the death penalty. Despite its grave consequences for the DP politicians, the 1960 coup is often seen as the most liberal of the three military interventions mainly because of the growing social pressure and censorship of the DP government and the relatively new libertarian constitution proclaimed after the coup. As such, the 1960 coup received a positive reaction from many intellectuals as well as university students (Zurcher, 2004:241). Nevertheless, the democratizing effects of the 1961 constitution were at best paradoxical. From one side, it has “legalized the interference of the army in political matters” (Zurcher, 2004:5) and by doing this it has “institutionalized the tutelage of the military and the judiciary over elected governments” but at the same time the same constitution “widened the scope of freedom of expression and association” (Kurban & Sozeri, 2012:21). The new constitution “allowed the emergence of movements and parties which veered much farther from the political center” such as the foundation of the Turk Isci Partisi (TKP-Turkish Workers’ Party (Zurcher, 2004:5).

The 1960 coup was also significant for the political history of Turkey in the sense that the DP government at the time and the current government led by the AKP which has been in power since 2002, have many similarities. In fact, the AKP often claims “the legacy of the Democrat Party” (Taskin, 2008:53). Beside their “conservative populism” (ibid:53) as a shared trait, the two parties’ relationship with religion have great resemblance. Like the AKP, the DP had also appealed to “religious sentiments” particularly during election campaigns, and expressed their dedication towards building more mosques and religious schools (Zurcher, 2004:232). A further resemblance can be found in the DP’s problematic approach to the notion of democracy and that of the AKP. As a majority government, the DP held the conviction that the support of the majority

“gave it absolute power and legitimacy to do whatever it deemed necessary” (Zurcher, 2004:222).

The tension between the military and pro-Islamist parties have been felt between 1970-2001. During this time period, four pro-Islamist political parties have been closed either through the rulings of the constitutional court or military intervention¹⁴ (Taspinar, 2012). Similar to the 1960 coup, the military intervention of 1980 also had a big, and arguably ongoing effect, on Turkish democracy and economy. The 1971 and 1980 coups were legitimized by the military on security grounds. The generals who carried out these coups blamed the liberal 1961 constitution for politicizing the society and causing a state of terror and chaos due to the confrontations between the right and left -wing groups (Ahmad, 1985:213).

The 1980 coup was then followed by the military junta of Kenan Evren, and the 1982 constitution (that was modified in 2010) banned any kind of political involvement for ordinary citizens. According to Ahmad, the slogan of the coup should have been “leave politics to the politicians” (1985:214). Indeed, the coup of 1980 specifically targeted the Turkish left with the result that the “growing leftist movement of the 1970s was eroded” (Bek, 2010:175). As such, all collective activities including “unionization and freedom of assembly” (Adakli, 2009:286) were banned. “Human rights violations reached their peak” (Bek, 2010:176) and the political atmosphere of the time has been described as the “breakdown of all forms of democracy” (Gulalp, 1985:329 as cited in Bek, 2010:176). It is important to note here that just as the 1961 Constitution institutionalized military tutelage, the 1982 constitution established neo-liberalism by replacing the “‘social state’ with a new ‘regulatory state’” and in doing so it obliged the following civilian governments to “abide by neoliberal measures” (Cosar & Yegenoglu, 2009). And that is exactly what happened during the rule of Turgut Ozal’s Anavatan Partisi (ANAP- Motherland Party) which came into power in the general elections with the end of the military regime in 1983.

During its two consecutive terms (1983-1989), in accordance with its new, neoliberal agenda, the ANAP government applied strict control over wage labor,

¹⁴ These parties are The Milli Nizam Partisi (MNP- The National Order Party), the Milli Selamat Partisi (MSP-The National Salvation Party), the Refah Partisi (RP-The Welfare Party), the Fazilet Partisi (FP-The Virtue Party).

decreased wages and gradually reduced public social expenditures (Cosar & Yegenoglu, 2009). It was during Ozal's presidency¹⁵ that the state monopoly over broadcasting was abolished in a de facto manner (which will be further examined later in this essay). The ANAP rule was a period of radical social and economic change, which is why it has been referred to as the birth of the *Second Republic* by some intellectuals like Ahmet Altan. Altan, who is a well-known columnist and economist, claims that the first republic (founded in 1923) was not democratic or pluralist and the power in the first republic belonged to the "bureaucracy and the military" (Altan, 2013). He further criticized the statist approach of the first republic for becoming "a system of robbery" and providing support for the military (ibid, 2013). According to Altan, although in many ways it has been better than the previous one, the Second Republic also fell short in terms of democracy.

Indeed, during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s neoliberalism was applied to all spheres of life (Cosar & Yegenoglu, 2009) and as Yesilyurt (2015) points out "The many economic crises (1994, 1999, 2001, and 2008–2009) did not bring a reversal of neoliberalism; instead, it was further fostered by the very crises it had created." It was the current ruling party of Turkey, which has been in power since 2002, who brought a religious dimension to neoliberalism, however.

2.2.1. Neoliberalism meets Islam

The AKP was founded by the "reformist wing" of the Refah Partisi (RP-Islamist Conservative Welfare Party) which was closed by the Constitutional court at the end of a "post-modern coup"¹⁶ in 1997 (Elmas & Kurban, 2011:23). Identifying itself as a liberal democrat party instead of an Islamist party, the AKP gained the support of the liberal democrats against the issue of military tutelage. Indeed, thinkers similar to Altan (who was mentioned above) supported the AKP in its first period between 2002-2007.¹⁷ At the

¹⁵ After his time as the prime Minister of Turkey, Ozal also served as the President of Turkey between 1989-1993.

¹⁶ This coup was not a direct intervention as were the previous three. It happened because of the National Security Council's pressure on the government to resign. The military was taking this measure against the "rising threat the secularist regime".

¹⁷ These intellectuals have also received great deal of criticism, especially from the left, for supporting the AKP. Journalist Ariane Bonzon's widely discussed article "Did the Turkish Liberal

time, it was seen as a potential driving force for democratization since it seemed to be committed to pass the necessary democratization reforms as a part of the European Union adaption process. Many intellectuals and analysts held the belief that Turkey's EU membership would "contribute to the first necessity – changing the state-centered legal structure and limiting the state power in politics" (Bek, 2010, p.187).¹⁸

In its first term, the AKP government implemented some social reforms within the framework of Turkey's EU Harmonization process, and others in to the "democratization of civil-military" relations. (Yildiz, 2014:389)¹⁹. However, starting from its second term in 2007, the AKP not only turned its back on the EU membership plans, but also started to target all forms of opposition in the country to its rule. For example, in May 2011 the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that "the military has stopped making statements on political issues" (Yildiz, 2014:391). This can be considered as the end of military tutelage in Turkey where it was replaced with "civilian authoritarianism" of the AKP (Kayabal, 2012). However, the military was not the only group to come under fire from the AKP, as it will be explained in the next sections.

2.2.2. The Kurds

A particular group who has been targeted by the AKP in the recent years has been Kurdish journalists/media and politicians. Of course, Turkey's relationship with its

intellectuals act as the Islamists' useful idiots?" provides a good compilation of these criticisms. <http://arianebonzon.fr/did-the-liberal-intellecutuals-act-as-the-islamists-useful-idiots/>

¹⁸ It should be noted that this is not the only sentiment towards Turkey's accession to the EU. "The 1963 Ankara Agreement "recognizes Turkey as a European Nation and allows for eventual membership" (Finkel,2012:98). Accession to the EU was a major political issue during 1990s and gained momentum in 2000s, however, as of 2015, no significant development has been achieved and this has caused major disappointment for many Turks who see "the EU process as humiliating gauntlet that Turkey is being made to run" (Finkel,2012:97). Ultra- nationalist groups also see the EU as a threat to the territorial integrity of Turkey since the accession would guarantee greater rights for the minorities. While outlining different attitudes towards the EU, Adakli says that the big media groups have supported the accession at all costs since membership was seen as bringing more wealth (2009: 305). The military on the other hand "backed the membership" by keeping away from having a clear position on the topic (2009:305).

¹⁹ "In this reform process, the MGK's [The National Security Council's] function was reduced to that of an advisory body; the DGMs [The State Security Courts], which had included both military and civilian members, were totally abolished; the provision allowing for the selection of one member of the YOK [Higher Education Council] by the General Staff was removed from the Law on Higher Education; and the provision allowing for the nomination of one member of the RTUK [The Supreme Board for Radio and Televisopn] by the MGK's Secretariat General was repealed from the Law on the Establishment of and Broadcasting by Radio and Television Corporations." (Yildiz, 2014:389).

ethnic and religious minorities has always been problematic. The founders of the Turkish Republic aimed to build a nation state which would be united under the Turkish identity. Accordingly, Turkey's official stance towards the Kurds has long been based on denial of the Kurdish identity, and pro-assimilation and repression of the Kurds who make up 20 per cent of the population (Yegen, 2015:3). Since 1984, the Turkish military has been fighting with the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) at the southeast border of Turkey and it is estimated that 37,000 people have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands have been displaced due to this conflict (Yavuz, 2009). Meanwhile six Kurdish political parties have been closed (Factbox: Turkey's history of banning Parties, 2010) and for twenty-five years (1987-2002), southeast Turkey stayed under a state of emergency (OHAL) in order to prevent PKK activities (Aydin & Emrence, 2016: 5).

According to Aydin and Emrence (2016), the AKP's Kurdish policy has mostly been "instrumentalist" and has been determined by the party's "electoral expectations and goal of establishing a powerful presidency" (2016, 12). They distinguish three distinct periods during which the Kurdish policy changed drastically under the AKP government (2016:7). The first period (2002-2007) was marked by membership talks with the EU, where, with the aim to expanding its electoral base, the AKP actually increased its economic investments to the east and southeast by offering "several incentives" to the Kurds (ibid,7).

In the second period (2008-2014), the AKP aimed to keep the PKK under control by starting peace talks with the jailed leader of the PKK (Abdullah Ocalan). In 2013, the AKP government came up with a series of reforms promising Kurds new rights such as the right to education in Kurdish in private schools as well as establishment of an anti-discrimination commission against hate crimes and the decrease of the electoral threshold to 5% of the national vote²⁰ ("Turkey's Erdogan announces Kurdish reforms"). Also in the second period, the AKP promoted Islamic solidarity in Kurdish regions through the work of NGOs and government activities (Aydin & Emrence, 2016:7). One of the major gains of this period was the PKK's cease fire that lasted until July 2015 (Bora,

²⁰ Kurdish people's - and other small parties'- representation in the parliament is restricted by the 10% electoral threshold. In Turkey, political parties need to win at least 10% of the national vote- which is the highest threshold in the world (Louter & Lyons, 2015) to enter the parliament. The local seats won by those parties who remain under the threshold would be redistributed to the bigger parties as it was the case for the AKP who received 102 bonus seats this way in the 2002 elections(ibid).

2016). According to Aydin and Emrence, with its Kurdish policy during this period, the AKP also prevented “the formation of an opposition front at critical moments” such as “the Gezi Protests, the constitutional referendum in 2010 and the presidential election in 2014, when the Kurdish activists refused to align with opposition groups and parties” (2016:7).

The results of the June 2015 elections caused a major shift in the AKP’s Kurdish policy during the third period (2015-2016), however. The Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP-Peoples’ Democratic Party) won 80 seats in the parliament (TBMM) and as a result, it not only prevented the AKP from forming a majority government, but it also became the first Kurdish political party who “entered the TBMM on its own for the first time” (Aydin & Emrence, 2016:11). Following this victory, the government quickly sent police forces and gendarmerie to the region to establish control over civilians. “Long curfews and special security zones became widespread across the region. According to human rights groups, 321 civilians died during curfews imposed on urban areas” (ibid, 11). These measures were also partly aimed at “suppressing the voter turnout” in the November 2015 elections (ibid, 11). As a result, an estimated three thousand people were detained, among whom were mayors and officials of the HDP (28 Mayors have been replaced by the government with appointed trustees) (ibid, 11). The curfews and arrests have continued through 2016. Currently, the co-chairs of the HDP Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ are in prison.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt on July 15, pressure on the Kurdish movement further intensified since emergency laws that were put in effect across the country allowed authorities to ban protests and prohibit political mobilization against the government (Aydin & Emrence, 2016:1).

After the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency following the failed military coup in July 2016, the AKP government has extended the “fight against *terrorism*” (a term with a broad legal definition and used by the government to silence opposition) to intellectuals and academics. In 2017, the number of academics that have been expelled from their positions by special decrees that have the force of law (KHK) has reached 4,439 (Ozturk,2017).

Crushing political dissent has been at the forefront of the AKP government’s agenda since its second (2007-2012) and third terms (2012-2017). Although the AKP is a “fusion” of neoliberalism and social conservatism (rooted in Islamism), according

Cosar and Ozcan, the “AKP’s conservatism is about removing all kinds of dissent in the way of neoliberal economy-politics” (2011). The authors argue that when implementing its neoliberal policies, the AKP chose to “appeal to the masses with a claim to be the representative of the nation [to occupy some of the space of Kemalism], and marginalized the discourse of opposition groups. Exemplary in this respect are the labour movement and the feminists.” (ibid).

2.2.3. The Labour Movement

Indeed, the party frequently targets the labour movement and women. The 2010 TEKEL (former state Monopoly of Tobacco and Alcoholic Beverages) worker’s mass protests²¹ and 2011 HES (Hydro Electric Power Plants) demonstrations in Artvin are just a few examples of “the policing of the political dissent’ (Cosar & Ozcan, 2011). In the former case, 12,000 TEKEL workers took the streets protesting the closure of 12 factories and privatization (Tait, 2010). Against the widespread public support, the workers, the government has resorted to police violence and the protesters have been accused of standing against the development of the country by the then Prime Minister Erdogan (“TEKEL Iscilerine Ankara’da Sert Polis Mudahalesi”²²).

The neoliberal policies which have been implemented since the 1980s and furthered by the AKP government significantly decreased workers’ job security and safety. The Soma mining accident of 2014 which resulted in the death of 301 mine workers has been the emblematic incident for issues around job safety in Turkey (Yesilyurt 2015). The Workers Health and Safety Group indicate that 14,455 workers have lost their lives at work between 2002-2014 (ibid). These numbers put Turkey in first place in Europe and third globally in workplace accidents (ibid). Yesilyurt explains this outcome as a result of “three decades of privatization, subcontracting, outsourcing, poor occupational safety and health regulations, and insufficient, pre-arranged, pro-corporate inspections by authorities” (2015).

Destruction of the environment and livelihood of the villagers has been another source of contention for the AKP’s economic policies. The HES projects that aim to build

²¹ A comparative analysis of the coverage of the TEKEL protests in the mainstream and alternative media can be found in (Dogu,2015).

²² All the information from this source is translated by the author.

hydro electric plants on the rivers in the Black Sea region of Turkey have been protested by environmentalists and the villagers who need the water for their main source of income—agriculture (Cosar & Ozcan, 2011). During protests in Artvin, a high school teacher Metin Lokumcu lost his life “due to a heart attack caused by a gas bomb thrown by the police over the protesters.” (ibid). In the Aegean region of Turkey, the destruction of 6,000 olive trees in order to provide land for the Kolin Group’s (a big conglomerate with close ties to the government) power plant project, also resulted in protests (Daloglu, 2014).

2.2.4. Women

In terms of feminism, both the current President of Turkey, Erdogan, and leading party members often resort to marginalizing discourses (Cosar & Ozcan, 2011). In 2004, as a reaction to the mass protests by women’s groups and activists against the AKP’s proposal to criminalize adultery, Erdogan famously referred to feminist activists as “a bunch of marginal women....who do not comply with Turkish morality”(Yegenoglu & Cosar, 2012:197). Similarly, he declared in a speech that women are not and cannot be equal to men (“Recep Tayyip Erdogan: ‘Women not equal to men’”). In 2016, Turkey was in the 130th place among 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/rankings/>). The data shows that between 2003 and 2010, the number of murdered women in Turkey has risen by 1,400% (Tremblay, 2014). These numbers are indicative of the AKP’s approach to women’s rights in Turkey (Tremblay, 2015), which, according to activists have been in decline during the rule of the party (“Is Life Getting worse for women in Erdogan’s Turkey?”). According to Yegenoglu and Cosar the AKP’s rule can be characterised as “neo-liberal conservative patriarchy”²³ (2012: 186). They explain what the term entails as follows:

However, this conservatism in terms of women’s issues shall not be identified with the pro-Islamist origins of the party. Rather, it should be considered as a neoliberal version of the patriarchal structure that permeates almost all political tendencies in Turkey. In this version, national

²³ The authors distinguish three types of patriarchy in Turkey’s history; republican, liberal and neo-liberal conservative. For details please see Yegenoglu & Cosar (2012).

and religious political priorities are synthesized in a neoliberal frame. (Ibid, 2012:180).

Certainly, the most famous case —and the most significant case for this essay—of political dissent against AKP’s neo-liberal policies and conservatism was the Gezi Protests of 2013 which will be examined in the following section.

2.3. Turkish Media: A Neo-Liberal Media Autocracy²⁴

According to Akser and Baybars-Hawks (2012), “media autocracy” in Turkey “operates on political, judicial, economic and discursive levels in post-2007 Turkish media.” (302). The authors identify “five different systemic kinds of neoliberal government pressure” to keep the media’s voice down: “conglomerate pressure, judicial suppression, online banishment, surveillance defamation and accreditation discrimination” (ibid, 302). Together, these pressures lead to a “historically conservative, redistributive, panoptic and discriminatory media autocracy” (ibid, 302). While I do agree with their analysis, in this essay, I chose to examine Turkish media’s characteristics through structural restrictions related to neoliberal policies and political pressure of the AKP government as well as legal restrictions on the journalists. Although here I touch on some of the points raised by Akser and Baybars-Hawks (2012), I do not intend to cover all aspects of their analysis.

2.3.1. Structural Restrictions on the Media

Starting from the 1980s, the media have gone through a neo-liberal restructuring similar to other domains of life in Turkey. The first waves of changes happened in the press sector. Although Turkey’s first truly commercial press emerged in 1948 with the foundation of the *Milliyet* and *Hurriyet* newspapers (Kaya & Cakmur, 2010:524), they were owned by small families with journalistic backgrounds (Adakli, 2009:286). In the 1980s, these newspapers started to become a part of bigger holdings (Adakli, 2009:286). With the abolition of 60 years of the state monopoly in broadcasting²⁵ in

²⁴ This description is first used by Akser & Baybars-Hawks in the title of their 2012 article: “Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy”.

²⁵ Until 1989, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) had been the sole broadcaster in Turkey. The state monopoly over broadcasting had been abolished first in practice by private radio and TV channels which operated illegally through foreign satellites. Later in 1994, with a change in

1994, the same firms extended their operations to radio and TV broadcasting (Catalbas, 2000:127).

By the end of the 1990s, the broadcasting market was already highly concentrated with cross-media ownership and commercialization of the broadcasting soon turned into conglomeration (Kaya & Cakmur, 2010). This transformation had a two-fold impact on the news media: media content had increasingly been “sensationalized” to make it more profitable (Bek, 2010:164), and the press unions in the country were weakened to the point of extinction²⁶ to break the horizontal solidarity among journalists, leaving them more susceptible to corporate and government pressure (Christensen, 2007:190). Journalists, deprived of their union rights, became an easy target for the elites that they are supposed to watch on behalf of the public. During the 2001 financial crises in Turkey which hit the banking sector and by extension some media organisations that had investments in the banking sector, 3000 to 5000 journalists and media workers were laid-off (Christensen, 2007:193). Media owners used the crisis to “rid themselves of unwanted or ‘troublesome’ staff under the guise of economic necessity” (ibid, :193).

As in many parts of the world, in Turkey, media holdings have "organic relationships" with the political elite (Elmas & Kurban. 2011:23) and they are "vulnerable to political pressures as their owners' economic interests encourage them to develop clientelist relations with the government and other political actors." (Somer, 2010:560).

the Turkish Constitution, the abolition of the state monopoly over broadcasting gained a legal status and the broadcasting Law No.3984 was passed.

²⁶ Currently there are two major Journalist Unions in Turkey: Union of Journalists in Turkey (*Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası-TGS*) founded in 1952 and Media Workers Union (*MEDYA-IS*) founded in 2012. Medya-Is is known for its closeness to the current AKP government and it has mainly been TGS that has aimed to protect the rights of its members and “negotiated collective bargaining agreements with the Turkish Newspaper Owners Trade Union on behalf of members” (Christensen, 2007:190). TGS has been the target of the big media groups starting from the 1990s. Members have been discouraged or openly threatened by the media owners to leave the union to be able to keep their jobs (Christensen, 2007:190). Among other “anti-union strategies” used by the media corporations, was the breaking down of the large companies into smaller companies which would legally not meet the conditions to have a union (ibid:191-192).

Today, “[m]ost media companies in Turkey operate under large business groups and these groups operate in various other business sectors, ranging from construction to energy and transportation, where they sign contracts with the government and enter public tenders” (<http://turkey.mom-rsf.org/en/owners/companies/>).

The current neo-liberal Islamist AKP government, uses public tenders and government contracts as a means of reward and punishment for the media organizations. Favorable media organizations are given big procurements such as the Housing Development Administration (TOKI) and Defense Industry, which are directly under the control of the Prime Minister’s office (Corke et al.,2014:12). In 2012 alone “the government issued \$46.2 billion worth of contracts, with key holding companies with media outlets eagerly bidding.” (Ibid:12). In 2009, when the media outlets of Dogan Media Group were critically covering the AKP government and reporting extensively on the Deniz Feneri corruption scandal,²⁷ the group was not only fined approximately 525 million dollars for “alleged tax irregularities”, but also “all of the companies in the Dogan Group were banned from bidding for state tenders for a period of one year.” (Kaya & Cakmur, 2010:522). The AKP government also uses state institutions such as the TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund) to seize unfavorable media holdings and to subsequently sell them to government friendly, Islamist groups²⁸ (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012:306).

As a result, despite the large numbers of media outlets in the country,²⁹ the diversity of opinion as well as the freedom of press are very restricted. It can be argued that contrary to the assumptions of the liberal press theory which perceives private or commercial media as a necessary step for press freedom - in Turkey, the process of privatization did not lead to a more independent media environment.

²⁷ “Turkish-German charity for the illegal transfer of funds to various Islamists in Turkey and reported its alleged connections with names close to the AKP” (Kaya & Cakmur, 2010:522).

²⁸ Ciner and Uzan groups went through this process between 2002-2008. (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012:306).

²⁹ According to the data provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute, there are “2,731 daily newspapers, 734 radio stations, 83 radio-TVs and 108 TV channels are active in Turkey. Internet access rate of households is 76.3 per cent. Mobile phone and/or smart phone owners make up 96.9 per cent of the population. 69.5 per cent get news from the Internet; while 82.4 per cent of Internet users follow news on social media (Media Ownership Monitor, Turkey <http://turkey.mom-rsf.org/en/media/>).

The exclusion of certain groups from the broadcasting sector further aggravates the lack of structural diversity in the sector and thus reduces the diversity of opinion. During the 1990s, the concerns about separatist and anti secularist outlets by the National Security Council and its pressure on the then coalition government resulted in the exclusion of non-profits from the sector in the new broadcasting law. Article 29 of the Law No.3984 which came into effect in 1994 banned “[...] *inter alia*, political parties, associations, unions, professional associations, foundations, cooperatives and local governments from owning media or partnering with media enterprises.” (Kurban & Sozeri, 2012:44). The AKP government kept these restrictions in place in the new broadcasting Law No:6112 that came into effect in 2011 (Sozeri & Guney, 2011:21).

Small broadcasters in the country are additionally disadvantaged since as of 2002 no new licences can be granted to new terrestrial television channels (Sozeri & Guney, 2011:23). Thus, “[...] the only way for investors wanting to enter this domain is to buy an already existing licensed company” (ibid,23). Hence the fierce competition in the field and the frequency of the acquisition of small firms by larger ones.

Each new broadcasting regulation strengthens the position of big media companies in the sector. The latest broadcasting law No. 6112, increased “the ratio of foreign shareholding in a radio and television enterprise” from 25% to 50% (ibid: 22) to open the sector to foreign capital. Furthermore, an amendment to the Law no.3984 was passed in 2002, and “the annual ratings of media organizations were taken as a criterion in preventing concentration in the media sector” (Sozeri & Guney, 2011:21). It is argued that the 20% upper limit set by the law is “a very difficult to reach upper threshold” since “the highest rated station in Turkey only achieves a rating of 16%” (ibid,21). Consequently, media scholars contend that “the limitation is not realistic and does not function as a barrier against concentration” (ibid,21). Indeed, as of 2017, “[t]he top eight owners of media in Turkey share almost 40 per cent of the cross-media audience in the country (<http://turkey.mom-rsf.org/en/owners/companies/>).

2.3.2. Repressive Laws and Government Pressure

Historically, the relationship between political power and the press in Turkey has been very close due to the late emergence of newspapers in the Ottoman Empire (Kaya

& Çakmur, 2010: 552)³⁰ and low levels of professionalization³¹. The country also shows a strong press-party parallelism³². Contrary to their North American counterparts, journalists in Turkey perceive themselves as “public intellectuals” and they “are often in pursuit of self-anointed goals such as democratization, justice or modernization” (Somer, 2010: 559)³³.

Although it has been argued that “formal political parallelism has eroded in Turkey in favor of a more economic parallelism” (Uce & De Swert,2010:71), the media in Turkey are polarized more than ever as pro- and anti -AKP. The AKP government for its part, does not hesitate to use repressive laws and censorship against its perceived enemies.

As Tunc notes, the use of repressive laws by the governments is one of the “acute problems” in Turkey against investigative reporting (2013). In this respect, governments resort to anti-terrorism and criminal defamation laws to “punish dissent” (Corke et al., 2014:4). The AKP government has systematically been using repressive legislation against dissident journalists since 2007. In 2008, the first wave of arrests

³⁰ “While in most parts of Europe regular newspapers had begun to appear in the early seventeenth century, in the Ottoman Empire even printing in Turkish (and/or Arabic) was forbidden until the end of the eighteenth century. In such a context, the advent of a commercial press would inevitably clash with the existing institutional setting characterized by a pre-capitalist, undeveloped economy, patrimonial structure of political controls. This has marked the singularity of the history of the Turkish press. The Turkish press was rooted exclusively in the world of politics and literature contrary to its Western counterparts. Indeed, the relationship between politics and media in Turkey has always been and continues to be very close” (Kaya & Cakmur, 2010:522)

³¹ It has been argued that professionalization in journalism is mainly based on “formal-college based education” which potentially “act[s] as a shield against commercial pressures and political instrumentalization” (Joseph, 2009:48). In *Comparing Media Systems* (2004) Hallin and Mancini use “autonomy, distinct professional norms and public service orientation” as criterion to “measure” journalistic professionalism. (Ibid:48).

³² The term refers to “the degree to which the structure of the media system parallel[s] the political party system” (Carkoglu & Yavuz, 2010:615). The press-party parallelism (PPP) is seen as an “essential indicator of pluralism in a media system” (ibid:615). Political parallelism can be detected in four interrelated areas: “in media contents; in the ownership of the news media; in the affiliations of journalists, owners, and managers; and in readership patterns” (Van Kempen, 2007:307).

³³ Based on the interviews conducted with Turkish journalists by Murat Somer. Somer also argues “The lack of mass newspapers in the formative periods of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries might have given rise to a journalistic culture less interested in informing the public and more interested in interpreting and shaping politics closely tied to the political field, [...]” (2010:559).

were made in relation to the Ergenekon and Balyoz operations against alleged coup plans prepared by military personnel as well as some ultra-nationalist intellectuals and journalists. (Akser & Baybars - Hawks, 2012:312). Between 2009 and 2010, the government also started to use the Information Technologies and Communication Authority (BTK) for “internet blackouts and bans” to prevent NGOs and the opposition in the country to spread anti-AKP messages through YouTube Videos and to “block any website they found disturbing” (ibid,308-309). Kurdish and left-wing media were targeted next.

The data provided by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on the imprisoned journalists in Turkey in 2013, showed that Kurdish journalists³⁴ constituted the majority of journalists in jail and one-quarter of the imprisoned journalists were working for “media outlets associated with banned leftist movements” (Corke et al, 2014:14). During the state of emergency declared after the failed coup attempt in 2016³⁵, 2,708 journalists were dismissed, 179 media outlets were shut down and the number of journalists in jail increased from 31 in 2016 to 131 in 2017 (Vonberg et al, 2017). In fact, according to Reporters Without Borders’ 2017 World Press Freedom Index, Turkey ranks 155th among 180 countries in terms of freedom of press (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>) and since 2016, it has first place in the world in terms of number of jailed journalists (Beiser, 2016). Additionally, since Erdogan’s presidency in 2014, 2000 cases of insult to the president have been opened and “prominent journalists” have stood trial (Shaheen, 2016).

Besides arrests, trials and threats, Turkish journalists also face reporting bans³⁶ and injunctions and commonly apply self-censorship.³⁷ Detentions and closures have

³⁴ CPJ also notes that the Kurdish journalists “[were] used as “bargaining chips for negotiations with PKK” (Corket et al,2014:14).

³⁵ 110,000 people from different walks of life have been detained and nearly 50,000 of them were arrested (Vonberg et al, 2017).

³⁶ For instance, on May 2013, a bomb attack in Reyhanli (a city near the Syrian boarder) killed 46 civilians. Immediately after the bombings, the RTUK (broadcasting regulator) imposed a media ban on the coverage of the issue. (Ellis, 2013).

³⁷ According to a survey conducted on 67 journalists in various media organizations in Turkey, “91.4 per-cent of the journalists indicated that they have been applying self-censorship while 81.5 per cent pointed out that self-censorship was widely common in the profession” (Tunc, 2013:160).

been a common practice for anti-AKP media and investigative journalists.³⁸ Pro-government media on the other hand, including the public broadcaster TRT which acts as a government channel, are used to disseminate official discourses and views to the extent that they occasionally use the same headlines.³⁹

This dysfunctionality of news media in Turkey became most apparent during the Gezi Park protests which started on May 27, 2013. A small number of environmental activists occupied Gezi Park in Istanbul in order to stop the destruction of the trees in the park due to the government's plans to build a shopping mall (along with a hotel and restaurants in the area). (Corke et al, 2014:8). Using social media, activists gained support from hundreds of others and after two days of protests, they were brutally attacked by the police with tear gas and water cannons (ibid). The protests turned into an uprising against the AKP's political conservatism and neo-liberal policies.⁴⁰ A diverse group of protesters "including environmentalists, soccer fans, Kurds, secular nationalists, and even some leftist Islamists" (Oz, 2016: 178) occupied Taksim Square. "Over the next two weeks, protests spread to 80 of the country's 81 provinces, with more than 3.5 million people participating, according to the government's own estimates." (Corke et al, 2014:8).

The first days of the Gezi Park protests "showed the reflexive compliance and conflict aversion of the conglomerate-dominated media." (Corke et al, 2014:8):

Many of Turkey's media outlets were caught off guard by these events and slow to adapt their coverage, drawing popular ire. Most notoriously, on

³⁸ Can Dundar and Erdem Gul from the oppositional Cumhuriyet Newspaper were charged with "revealing state secrets" for their news report that linked Erdogan with efforts to send arms to Syria. "Turkish journalists face multiple life sentences over Syria Report". Dundar remains in exile since 2016 however as of 2017, 17 employees of Cumhuriyet are on trial on terrorism related charges "Trial of 17 Cumhuriyet Newspaper employees begins in Turkey"

³⁹ In November 9, 2013 seven newspapers used a quote from the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in their headlines on the controversy regarding the closing down of the co-ed student housing (Corke et al, 2014:13). Similarly, in June 2013, during Gezi Park protests, seven newspapers used the same quote from Erdogan "I would give my life for the demands of democracy". (ibid, p.13). More recently, on 5 March, 2015, 12 columnists from 4 pro-AKP newspapers used again President Erdogan's quote in their headlines to support his claims about an alleged attack during the Gezi Park protests to a woman with a head scarf ("13 Kose Yazarinin Yazisi Ayni Baslikla Cikti")

⁴⁰ A more detailed analysis of the Gezi Park protests can be found in Gurcan & Peker's book (2015) *Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey's Gezi Park: From private discontent to collective class action*.

June 1, as mass protests filled Istanbul and CNN International showed round-the-clock coverage, the Doğan-owned CNNTürk was broadcasting a nature documentary about penguins. The penguin became an ironic symbol of media cowardice in the protests. Some papers and television stations, including CNNTürk, soon caught up with the news, while other pro-government stations like NTV continued to push the government's conspiratorial talking points (protesters even gathered in front of NTV's offices). (Corke et al, 2014:8).

While the protesters extensively used social media and alternative media to bypass mainstream media, those in the mainstream outlets who attempted to cover the protests against the official AKP line were punished afterwards.⁴¹ Due to all these restrictions on the mainstream media in Turkey, alternative outlets have become an important source for information and self-expression for the public.

2.4. Alternative Media in Turkey

In this and the following sections, I adopt the dialectical approach to alternative media developed by Sandoval (2009) and Fuchs (2010). A dialectical approach “tries to overcome the dualism between subjective and objective approaches” (Sandoval, 2009:9). It asserts a reciprocal relationship between the structures and actors of alternative media (Taylan, 2012:54). Consequently, the approach suggests that the structures of the media can limit or enable the actions of the media actors and these actions in turn can shape media structures (ibid:54). According to Sandoval, who defines alternative media in terms of its difference from the capitalist media, “ideal typical alternative” media are “non-commercial, provide critical content and are produced in a participatory way” (2009:10). Yet, she also acknowledges the limitations for alternative media outlets to provide all three dimensions at the same time. Therefore, Sandoval accepts critical content as the minimum requirement for alternative media (2009:11). This definition allows me to include oppositional media in the analysis of alternative media history in Turkey. Although most of the organizations that will be mentioned in the following section do not have participatory structures or non-commercial ones, they offer

⁴¹ According to the data provided by the Turkish Journalists' Union, “59 journalists had been fired or forced out” after the Gezi Park protests. “NTV Tarih, a history magazine owned by NTV, was shut down entirely and its staff let go after the magazine's editors prepared a special “Gezi edition.” The Gezi firings continued through the fall. In November, the public broadcaster TRT fired two employees who used social media to voice their support for the protests.” (Corke et al., 2014:8).

oppositional, counter-hegemonic content for their period. They are also a critical part of social movements which are essential in any historical account of alternative media. Thus, in the following section I use the terms ‘oppositional’ and ‘alternative’ media almost interchangeably although I am aware that they are not necessarily the same thing. Oppositional media here offer the critical content Sandoval and Fuchs emphasize (2009; 2010) and they criticize the dominant socio-political system in the time period by offering an alternative to the existing structures of domination.

2.4.1. Brief History

The scholarly and public attention devoted to the study and practice of alternative media and journalism in Turkey differ greatly before and after the Gezi protests of 2013. In their analysis of alternative media in Turkey, Coban and Ataman⁴² (2015: 39) describe the Gezi Protests as a historical turning point where the power of traditional and new (online) alternative media was united and reached almost the entire country. Demonstrators’ and activists’ use of social media to organize the protests as well as the use of more traditional alternative media such as bulletins and magazines in the occupied areas within Gezi Park, paved a way to a newly gained scholarly and public attention.

Coban and Ataman (2015:39) distinguish three distinct critical moments regarding the history of alternative media in Turkey. The first moment was the 1908 revolution. It was during this time that media’s role in societal transformation was realized for the first time and consequently the first book about Turkey’s press history was written (ibid:39). The second moment was between 1974-1980 when “the revolutionary struggles” were on the rise and alternative news papers and magazines were able to reach hundreds of thousands (ibid:39).

The third and -the most recent moment-, starting with the Gezi Protests, engendered a significant increase in the academic literature. According to the authors, these three periods shared one main characteristic: it was seen clearly that alternative media play a vital role in creating a public sphere and informing people as well as organizing and mobilizing them in a way that would shake the very foundations of the

⁴² All the information taken from this source is translated by the author.

dominant societal system (Coban & Ataman, 2015:38). In this essay, I will not follow Coban and Ataman's (2015:38) periodization, but will provide a very brief history of oppositional and alternative media starting from 20th century to this day.

An examination of the social opposition in Turkey would reveal that the country indeed holds a long tradition of oppositional and alternative media despite the lack of interest in academic studies towards the actual practices (Koker & Doganay, 2007:19) and social movements have always been at the forefront of alternative media production. Accordingly, some of the most important examples of alternative (oppositional) media were produced by the socialist and feminist movements of early 20th century, particularly after the 1908 Revolution. During the Second Constitutional Era in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1913), socialist groups with different ethnic backgrounds (Jewish, Bulgarian, Armenian, Greek) and trade union- based organizations gathered around oppositional publications against the political power's despotism⁴³ (Kara, 2008⁴⁴: 72; Taylan⁴⁵, 2012:186; Coban & Ataman, 2015: 14-17). During the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), with the influence of the newly built Ankara government, publications against the Sultan saw an increase (Taylan,2012: 187).

Feminist publications of 1908 like *Demet*, *Mehasin* and *Kadin* also played an important role in spreading alternative views of the society. The magazine *Kadinlar Dunyasi* (Women's World) published between 1913-1921 is considered as the pioneer of the feminism movement in Turkey (Yosmaoglu, 1996 as cited in Coban & Ataman, 2015:19).

⁴³ Some of the important socialist newspapers of the era were the *Gave* in Izmir, the *Amele* (worker) in Thessaloniki and the *Istirak* in Istanbul and the Kurdish *Peyman* (Taylan:2012:187). As a city hosting a major population of workers, Thessaloniki has particularly been at the forefront of socialism⁴³. The Thessaloniki Socialist Workers' Federation (SSIF) created its own media between 1909-1912 and the SSFI published newspapers in 4 different languages in order to act as a melting pot for workers from different backgrounds (Coban & Ataman, 2015:17-18). The so -called *Cemiyetler Kanunu* (Unions Law) of 1910 resulted in the closure of many socialist organizations, yet they had a revival between 1918-1919 with the influence of the October 1917 Revolution and the return of many exiled opponents with the dissolution of the Ittihat ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress) government (Kara, 2008:74). One of the most famous of them was the Turkiye Komunist Partisi (TKP-Turkish Communist Party) which started publishing the party's famous magazine *Aydinlik* (Taylan, 2012: 187). The magazine had supported Mustafa Kemal and the Kemalist ideology during the independence war and the first years of the republic for being progressive and anti-imperialist (Kara, 2008: 80-81).

⁴⁴ All the information taken from this source is translated by the author.

⁴⁵ All the information taken from this source is translated by the author.

The new nation state founded by the “the leadership of Kemalist bourgeoisie” adopted a “top-down and monist” approach to politics and “failed at creating the privilege- and class- free, united masses it desired. Consequently, the ‘others’ of the republic who could not be part of the mainstream politics such as the labour movement, Kurdish people and women have continued their struggles against the privileges” (Coban & Ataman, 2015: 20). During the first years of the republic, oppositional organizations and publications were closed with a special law passed in 1925 (*Takrir-i Sukun Yasası*) (Taylan, 2012: 188). The new Ankara government, dealing with rebellions and the counter propaganda of the residual pro-Istanbul government press, saw the oppositional movements as a threat to the new regime and many oppositional journalists including socialist journalists, were exiled after trials at the special courts (Istiklal Mahkemeleri) (Ibid, 188). It can be argued that from 1930 to the beginning of the World War II, oppositional press had a gradual return.⁴⁶

During and after World War II, the government used a series of laws⁴⁷ to “silence the oppositional press” (Taylan, 2012:189). Three newspapers *Vatan*, *Tan* and *Tasvir-i Efkâr* are often praised by scholars for their ability to have pursued an “idealist journalism” and “contributing to the development of the societal opposition” (Taylan, 2012:189); however, *Tasvir-i Efkâr* and *Vatan* were closed by court orders (respectively in 1925 and 1944). The *Tan* newspaper, known for voicing the democratic demands of the time and its leftist anti- fascist editorial line, were destroyed as a result of an anti-communist provocation by the government and an attack carried out by a right- wing group in 1945 (Coban & Ataman, 2015:23; Taylan, 2012:190).

⁴⁶ Several newspapers known for their opposition to the government were published in this period in big cities like Istanbul and Izmir (i.e. *Yarın*, *Son Posta*, *Hizmet*, *Halkın Sesi*, *Yeni Asır*) (Topuz, 2003: 155-156). All the information from this source is translated by the author. The TKP (Turkish Communist Party) became an important source of government critique during late 1920s and early 1930s. Its publications such as *Kivilcim* and *Bolşevik* started to criticize Kemalism for being in close relationship with the imperialist countries and thus joining “the side against the revolution” (Kara, 2008:84).

⁴⁷ Including the 1931 press law that declared communism and anarchism as well as the propaganda in favor of the re-establishment of the sultanate and caliphate illegal. Article 50 of the same law authorized the closure of newspapers and magazines that negatively impact country’s general politics by cabinet decision. When these were not enough, martial law has been used (Topuz, 1996 as cited in Taylan, 2012:189).

The absence of these political newspapers was, in some ways, filled with political satire and magazines. The *Markopasa* (1946-1947) with a circulation reaching 60,000 was one of the publications which shouldered the delicate job of criticizing the government through humour (Taylan, 2012:190)⁴⁸. As such, it not only struggled to find a printing house, but also had to endure the jailing of its writers, raids into its office by groups close to the government and by the police and ultimately closure with a court decision (Tellan, 2012⁴⁹: 457).

Similar intimidation tactics towards oppositional publications continued during the DP (Democrat Party) rule (1946-1961) through new press laws as well as lawsuits against journalists (Taylan, 2012:191). However, a revival of oppositional media can be seen after the 1960 coup d'Etat and particularly with the relative atmosphere of freedom of the 1961 Constitution following the coup. According to Ersan (2013:18), in this period 'the process of social activism' started where almost all social groups, particularly the working class and the youth, mobilized in an unprecedented way for their demands and organized in the form of trade unions, associations, cooperatives" (as cited in Coban & Ataman, 2015: 23). During this process described by Ersan, alternative media played "a vital function in the formation and conduct of social movements" and became a significant power "in terms of political organization and transformation" (Coban & Ataman, 2015: 23). Some of the most important leftist publications of the period were *Emek*, *Sosyal Adalet*, *Donusum*, *Yon*, *Devrim*, *Ant* and *Turk Solu* ⁵⁰(ibid, 23).

⁴⁸ In fact, political satire is an established genre in Turkish oppositional culture, the first examples of which go as far back as 1852 (Tellan, 2015:455). However, according to Tellan (2015), political satire magazines that were published before the 1950s such as the *Akbaba* usually supported the political power and their satire was based on everyday humour (Tellan, 2015:457).

⁴⁹ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

⁵⁰ *Yon* (1961-1967) and *Devrim* (1969-1971) were particularly influential publications. The radical *Yon* magazine was considered "a taboo crashing" publication since it carried to its pages issues and topics that were not discussed openly in previous publications such as setting the establishment of a socialist system as an official goal, covering for the first time the 'Kurdish problem' which has previously been treated under the ambiguous title of 'the 'Eastern problem', as well as publishing the poems of Nazim Hikmet whose work was banned in Turkey (Kara, 2008:90). The *Devrim* magazine - which is published by mostly the same team of writers - is considered to embrace *Kemalism* in its political argumentation more than socialism (Atilgan, 2002 as cited in Kara, 2008:93). These magazines were described as "projects of discourse that combine anti-imperialism, sovereignty⁵⁰ (*independence*), and nationalism while connecting them to socialism" (Atilgan, 2007:682 as cited in Taylan, 2012:192).

The 1970s can be seen as a historical period where “the alternative media played a lead role” (Coban & Ataman, 2015:25). The leftist movements and associations of the time used a variety of media including posters, banners, booklets and so on to disseminate counter hegemonic messages. Yet, it should also be noted that when analyzed within the framework of today’s alternative media scholarship (that I have reviewed in the first essay), some of the above mentioned publications such as *Yon* and *Devrim* were not perfect examples of alternative media due to their hierarchal production structures or their reliance on advertisement revenue (Kara, 2008: 92). Moreover, these oppositional publications did not position themselves as alternative media (Taylan, 2012:192).

The 1980s were a period of change for both mainstream and alternative press in Turkey. On one hand, the press was increasingly becoming an investment area for both national and international investors due to the neoliberal policies and deregulations carried out by the ANAP governments (Taylan, 2012:195). On the other side, a proliferation of alternative publications could be observed. The 1980 coup and the depoliticization efforts of society in the aftermath of the coup suppressed the left-wing opposition which was based on the idea of class struggle in the 1970s. This was replaced by a new opposition based on identity politics and political satire.

In the 1980s, feminist publications played a significant role.⁵¹ It is argued that feminist publications produced by feminist groups belonging to different political views, demonstrated “an understanding of alternative media” and contained “a critical approach to the mainstream media” (Taylan, 2012: 196). They also carried the previously undiscussed issues such as “abortion, sexual assault in marriages, rape, harassment, virtue, virginity, flirtation, women’s sexuality, domestic violence, unequal division of labor in the family, hierarchy within the family and so on” (Caha, 2003:268 as cited in Taylan, 2012: 196) to the public sphere and opened them to discussion (Taylan, 2012:196).

In the 1990s and 2000s, the LGBT movement created its own alternative media such as the *Kaos GL* magazine (1994) and *100’de 100 Gey ve Lezbiyen* (%100 Gay and

⁵¹ The *Feminist* (1987) and *Kaktus* (1988) magazines were some of the examples of these publications which were later followed by others like *Pazartesi* (1995) magazine, *Ucan Supurge* communications network (1996) and *Roza*, *Jujin*, *Jiyan* magazines published by Kurdish feminists (Coban & Ataman, 2015:29) in the 1990s and *Amargi*, *Feminist Dergi*, *Ucan Supurge* News Site in 2000s (Taylan, 2012: 196).

Lesbian) bulletin of Lambda Organization (1996) (Taylan, 2012: 197; <http://www.lambdaistanbul.org/s/hakkinda/ozetle-lambdaistanbul-ne-yapti/>)⁵². In 2010, the first Kurdish-Turkish LGBT publication *Hevjin* was launched in Diyarbakir (Miller, 2010).

During the 1980s and onwards, political satire magazines such as *Limon* (1985), *Avni* (1989), *Pismis Kelle* (1990) and *Leman*, (1991), also played an important role in criticizing the dominant ideology (Yuksel⁵³, 2015: 475-476). After the corporatisation of the media in the 1990s, some of the political satire magazines like *Deli* and *Leman* had to leave their parent companies due to disagreements with their new bosses in the media sector⁵⁴ and they tried to survive as self financed media outlets (Yuksel, 2015⁵⁵:476). Political satire magazines were not the only ones seeking independence in the 1990s.

The alternative news and culture magazine *Express* was launched in 1994 by a group of journalists who had worked together in other news magazines and had recently been fired from a magazine called *Ekonomik Panorama* due to their critical coverage of the Uzan Group (one of Turkey's biggest capital groups) (Bedir & Keten, 2015:72). The journalists published the *Express* with their severance payments (ibid). In their very first issue, the magazine described itself as "an independent publication, in every aspect."

[The *Express* magazine] doesn't have any connections with any capital type or group, any funding mechanisms or a relationship with any political party, organization or formation. It is hundred percent independent and hundred percent engaged. [...] engaged to an ideal of a world without war, exploitation, masters and domination. This engagement is the reason why *Express* exists." (Express, 2010 as cited in Bedir & Keten, 2015).

⁵² Before creating its own publications, in the 1980s, the LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) movement also started to voice issues regarding LGBT people's "rights and problems" in some collaborative alternative media projects such as the "*Yesil Baris (Green Peace) Magazine*" published by Radikal Demokrat Yesil Parti (Radical Democratic Green Party) (Taylan, 2012: 197).

⁵³ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

⁵⁴ The political satire magazines were either closed by the parent corporation because they were found unprofitable or the staff chose to leave the because of policies like the cancellation of workers' social security plans (Yuksel, 2015:476).

⁵⁵ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

In the 1990s and 2000s, some media organizations created by minorities also played an important oppositional role. According to Taylan, minority media is one of the constituents of “radical/oppositional media” in Turkey (2012:199). Elmas & Kurban note the existence of “a few but, quite well -established, minority newspapers run by Non-Muslim and Kurdish communities in Turkey”⁵⁶ (2011:34).

Among these publications, the *Agos* newspaper holds a special place because it constitutes “the only example of a minority paper that reaches broader segments of society” (Elmas & Kurban, 2011:34). Launched by Armenian journalist and intellectual Hrant Dink in 1996, the newspaper aims to “[break] the barriers between the Armenian and Turkish Communities” (ibid). In line with this goal, the newspaper was published in Turkish and Armenian. It has been argued that the “Armenian community that was previously immersed in silence, has met with the radical politics again through this newspaper”, but unfortunately Dink’s efforts costed him his life (Coban & Ataman, 2015:22). Dink’s assassination in 2007 caused a significant reaction among the public, and 200,000 people marched in his funeral (Candar,2017).

Following the assassination of Editor-in-Chief Hrant Dink in 2007, the paper increased its efforts to reach out to the broader public by increasing the number of its pages in Turkish, employing new columnists from outside the Armenian community and adding new sections. The paper is popular among dissident political groups as well as those who want to support the paper as a form of protest against Dink’s murder. It has Armenian, Greek-Orthodox, Turkish, Kurdish, Sunni and Alevi staff members and columnists. *Agos* began with a circulation of 2,000. By the time of Hrant Dink’s death it had grown to approximately 6,000 (Elmas & Kurban, 2011:34).

According to Coban and Ataman “weakened by massacres, threats, and forced migration, minorities in Turkey withdrew into themselves and avoided getting involved in activities that might be considered harmful by the State” (2015:22). The authors also explain --in part-- minority media’s relative underdevelopment as a result of “minorities’ avoidance of pursuing politics openly with a rights-based perspective for struggle and to

⁵⁶ Among them the daily *Iho* (1977) and weekly *Apoyevmatini* (1925) address the Greek Orthodox community (ibid, 34). The weekly *Salom* (1947) addresses the Jewish community which has started its publications in Ladino but had to switch to Turkish (maintaining one page published in Ladino) in the 1980s due to young generations’ unfamiliarity with the language (ibid,34). The Armenian community has the *Jamanak* (1908), *Marmara* (1940) and *Agos* newspapers and a news bulletin called *Lraper*, published by the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul (Elmas & Kurban, 2011:34).

become a part of social movements” (ibid, 22). Yanardagoglu’s observation about the *Salom* newspaper confirms this attitude:

The newspaper is seen as both reflector and leader of public opinion in the community but it refrains from challenging the status quo and aims to combat prejudices against Jews (2013:91).

Publications by Kurdish groups on the other hand, had and still have, a more explicit political stance. And arguably they face the strongest political pressure among minorities. Between 1983 and 1991, the Kurdish language was banned. In 1983, Law No.2932 banned the use of Kurdish, stating that “publishing in the Kurdish language, naming places and children in any language other than Turkish” was illegal and “declared Turkish, as the mother tongue of all Turkish citizens” (Yanardagoglu,2013:89). The first Kurdish weekly, *Welat*, was launched in 1992 in Istanbul, a year after the ban was lifted (Elmas & Kurban, 2011: 35). However, it was closed by a court order and the publication continued under the name *Azadiya Welat* starting from 1996 (Elmas & Kurban, 2011:35).⁵⁷

Pro-Kurdish, leftist *Ozgur Gundem*, which was launched in 1992 played an important role in terms of social opposition in Turkey (Taylan, 2012:200). *Ozgur Gundem* was banned between 1994-2011 and it was temporarily closed in 2016 by a court order accusing the newspaper of conducting propaganda for the PKK, and its editor in chief was arrested (“Turkey: Pen protests closure of Ozgur Gundem and targeting of journalists”).

As opposed to previous decades, minorities could also have a presence in the broadcasting sector during the 1990s. Minority channels particularly boomed before the passage of the broadcasting law (1989-1994) and they operated illegally or as pirate stations. Turkey’s two largest minority groups; the Kurds and the Alevis⁵⁸ particularly used this opportunity to build their own media. In the first part of the 1990s, Alevi radios such as Baris Radyo, Yon Radyo, Ekin, Anadolu’nun Sesi and Yasam Radyo were

⁵⁷ In the 2000s, the newspaper went through two important changes. Its headquarters were moved to Diyarbakir from Istanbul in 2003 and it turned into a daily newspaper in 2006 (ibid, 35). “The paper is distributed across the country and has a circulation between 4,000 and 10,000.” (Elmas & Kurban, 2011:35).

⁵⁸ Alevis are Turkey’s “largest religious minority”; they “fuse Shiite Islam with Sufism and Shamanism. Rather controversially they are also followers of Ali-the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad” (“Turkey’s Alevi”).

created and gained a large listener base (Coban & Ataman, 2015:33). Kurdish local radio and television stations built in the southeastern part of Turkey in their turn, were responding to the region's needs dealing for the first time with "issues such as corruption in local administration, poverty, the rights of the Kurdish people" and aired "programmes that reflected the multi-ethnic multilingual characteristics and culture of the region" (Algan, 2005:76 as cited in Koker & Doganay, 2007:21).

In the 1990s, local radio stations "became a medium for alternative voices" (Koker & Doganay, 2007: 20). As the broadcasting law of 1994 banned non-profit stations, radio stations such as the *Ozgur Radyo* (Free Radio) and the *Acik Radyo* (Open Radio-94.9 FM) were launched in 1995 with a commercial status even though they were not profit oriented and their programming contained (and still contains) oppositional content; it will be analyzed in detail in the next section. *Ozgur Radyo* (Free Radio-95.1 FM) declared itself to be "the voice of the workers, laborers, the youth, working women, oppressed peoples [...]" (Ozbakir, 2008::82 as cited in Coban & Ataman, 2015: 33) but was closed in 2016 during the state of emergency declared after the failed coup attempt ("Media Ownership Monitor Turkey"). Currently, the station continues its broadcasts via the internet under the name *Yeniden Ozgur Radyo* (Ozgur Radyo Once More) (<http://www.ozgurradyo3.com/bizedair/>).

In fact, in the 2000s, the internet became an important site for alternative media. During the 2001 economic crisis and the massive journalist lay-offs that followed, many unemployed journalists created blogs or websites. Accompanied by academics, these journalists were engaged in media criticism through newly built websites like *Dördüncü Kuvvet Medya*, *Kuva-yı Medya*, *Jurnal Net*, *Medyatava*, *Antimedya* (Taylan,2012:204). Although these websites could not be considered alternative media entirely in regards to the definition provided here, they were important in terms of providing a sphere for critical discussions (ibid, 204).

Social movements also extended their media presence to the internet in the 2000s. Kaos GL and the labour movement (senndika.org) launched their own websites along with the Bianet (Independent News Network) (These will be analyzed in more detail in the next section).

As mentioned earlier, the Gezi Park protests of 2013 were a turning point in the history of alternative media in Turkey (Coban & Ataman, 2015: 38). Since the mainstream news channels failed to cover the protests or reflected the official outlook and discourses, the country witnessed an unprecedented emergence and activity of alternative media outlets.

Around that time, the *Otekilerin Postasi* (The Post of Others) and *140 Journos* (which will be analyzed in more detail in the next section) increasing their followers significantly. In addition to them, new alternative media outlets such as the *Capul (Loot)TV* were built. The *Capul TV* is an online TV channel, launched by a group of activists who had previously worked for the labour website *sendika.org* (Yilmaz & Ataman, 2015⁵⁹:148). The channel embraced the word *Capulcu* (Looter), a term used by the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to describe the protesters and used a penguin in its logo making reference to the penguin documentaries aired by the mainstream media during the first day of the protests (Ibid, 2015:149). The channel uses a horizontal organizational structure and its work is volunteer based (Yilmaz & Ataman, 2015: 153). The language used by the channel is described as being rooted in rights journalism and a language that is based on peace--one that avoids hate speech and rejects discrimination (ibid, 173).

During the protests and the Taksim Commune, citizen journalism projects were carried out by the protesters through various platforms on the internet. Some of these projects were: The Gezi Radyo (Gezi Radio), Gezi Parki TV (Gezi Park TV), *videoccupy.org* *RevoltIstanbul* (Ergec & Cam, 2015:225⁶⁰). The *Hemzemin Forum Postasi* which has published 12 issues between June 20th and December 20th 2013 , aimed to establish a line of communication among different forums that were taking place in various cities and to coordinate their efforts (Ergec & Cam, 2015: 227). The *Gezi Postasi* (The Gezi Post) which published 14 issues between June 8th and July 29th 2013, was the daily newspaper of the resistance movement during the commune and could be reached through <http://Twitter.com/gezipostasi> and

⁵⁹ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

⁶⁰ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

<http://gazetegezipostasi.blogspot.com.tr/> as well as being distributed as a hard copy (ibid:226).

As it can be seen in the examples provided in this section, different types of oppositional media (leftist/socialist media, minorities' media, feminist, LGBT and political satire media) in Turkey, "continue to challenge mainstream media structures which are the carriers of the dominant discourses of established power and to contribute to freedom of speech" (Taylan, 2012:206). Yet, the impact of these efforts depends, to a great extent, on the sustainability and reach of the alternative media outlets.

The next section introduces nine recent examples of alternative media organizations, outlining their main characteristics such as their area of work, strategic orientation and relationship with social movements as well as their organizational and financial structures.

2.5. Examples of More Recent Alternative Media Organizations:

2.5.1. Bianet:

BIA Bagimsiz Iletisim Agi (Independent Communications Network) can be considered as one of the first and most influential organizations in Turkey.

What it does: The BIA project was founded as a response to several civil society and trade organizations⁶¹ who struggle to make their voices heard in the mainstream media and consequently their search, alongside with journalists and academics, for an alternative way of communication (Taylan, 2012: 208). Bianet operates through its website <http://BIAnet.org> and brings together over 130 local newspapers, radio and TV stations in a news pool. During its first stage (2000-2003) Bia "provided basic vocational training for local media journalists, produced radio programs for the program pool, and gave legal counsel and support to journalists and local media owners across the country whose rights to free expression and access to information were seriously restricted" (Alankus, 2011:76). In its second stage (2003-2006) Bia's activities were focused on

⁶¹ These were —Interpress Service Communication Foundation, the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, and the Turkish Physicians Association (Alankus, 2011:76)

monitoring projects where the network has provided regular dossiers about media freedom and human rights violations (ibid, 76).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: Bia's particular approach to journalism is defined as "human/women's/children's rights-focused reporting" (Alankus, 2011:76). Bia's other activities involve "training programs, open access book publications, local media news pool, and legal advising on media issues" (Alankus,2011:77).

This refers not only to following up rights violations and reframing the news in its entirety from women's and children's rights perspectives but also to redefining conventional news reporting practices. (Alankus, 2011:76)

Taylan, who conducted an ethnographic study on Bia, observes that journalists of Bianet see an organic relationship with social movements, human rights associations and other minority groups (Taylan, 2015:312⁶²). They also "position Bianet as a media outlet that works as a non- governmental organization" (ibid, 312) and Taylan finds this characterisation accurate mainly due to Bianet's involvement in regular journalism training (Taylan, 2015:313).

Bianet has been evolving in relation to the non-governmental organizations since its foundation. At this point, from one hand, people from different movements and struggles such as feminists, LGBTQ people, youth/student organizations, trade associations and unions, defenders of human rights, artists and academics voice their views and problems and on the other hand they strengthen their possibilities of communication and interaction with each other within the framework of multiple alternative public spheres created by Bianet (Taylan,2015:312).

It should also be noted that as Bianet is in close relationship with communication academics and journalists, it dedicates extensive work to alternative ways of doing journalism.⁶³

⁶² All the information from this source is translated by the author.

⁶³ For instance, in 2006 Bianet organized "Another Communication is Possible Conference" in Istanbul (and the content of the presentations in the conference were turned into a publication which can be found on Bianet's website). Similarly, academics involved in the *Bianet* such as Sevda Alankus, has published handbooks about alternative approaches to journalism such as Peace Journalism for the network's online library (<https://bianet.org/bianet/sayfa/bia-kitapligi>)

Organizational and Financial Structures: Bia's organizational structures are described as non-hierarchical (Alankus, 2011:76) and it operates through an advisory board that consists of different groups such as local media representatives, activists, academics and journalists (ibid, 77). As its core team, Bia employs "five editors, one reporter, one webmaster, and several freelancers" and "editors' responsibilities are regularly rotated" (ibid,77). Bia is a non-profit organization; however, it receives funding from local and international sources such as the European Union, Swiss International Development Agency (SIDA), KAGIDER (Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey) and others for its various projects (<https://bianet.org/bianet/sayfa/ips-iletisim-vakfi>).

2.5.2. Acik Radyo (Open Radio) 94.9

Acik Radyo started broadcasting on November 13, 1995. It broadcasts to the "metropolitan Istanbul area and its environs" (What is Acik Radyo?,). Since 2000, the station has also been broadcasting online. The slogan of the radio station "Open radio is open to all the sounds, colors, and vibrations of the universe" (What is Acik Radyo?). Nielsen's 2000 report indicates that the radio has around 45,000 everyday and 120,000 weekly listeners.

What it does: Some of the main topics covered in Acik Radyo's programmes are environmental issues, human rights, "globalisation and inequality, freedom of the press and world music" (Bonini, 2017). In its 22 years of broadcasting, the radio aired 1200 programmes by 1100 programmers (What is Acik Radyo?) most of whom "belong to the local art, cultural and political scenes" (Bonini, 2017). Besides hosting local activists, artists and thinkers, Acik Radyo is also known for hosting as guests some of the world's most prominent names such as Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Amy Goodman, Robert Fisk, Arundhati Roy, David Barsamian, David Harvey, Johan Galtung and Hose Bove among others (What is Acik Radyo?).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: Although it is not a social movement's media, its founder Madra explains that the radio has a close relationship with the environmental movement and particularly with Kuresel Bak (Gobal Peace and Justice Coalition) - an anti- capitalist anti-war movement (Personal interview, August 10, 2011). In terms of its ideological stance and its financial structures, the station emphasizes its independence:

Açık Radyo is not dependent on any interest group or any capital group. It is also completely independent from the state, and from any kind of “ideology” except the principles of pluralist democracy, the rule of law, and the protection and promotion of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. Thus, it is an independent body. It can be considered as one of the rare independent institutions in the Turkish media scene, which is under increasing pressure from the concentration of ownership of financial and power centers. (What is Acik radio?)

Organizational and Financial Structures: *Acik Radyo* has 4 editors and the rest of the producers and presenters (around 200) are volunteers (Bonini, 2017). Although it is registered as a commercial radio (this is the only form of radio station allowed by the Radio and Broadcasting Law in Turkey), “it functions as a non-profit organization” (What is Acik Radyo?). Founded by the former political science professor Omer Madra (Bonini, 2017), the radio is a collective with 92 partners with “almost equal shares” (What is Acik Radyo?). It can be defined as a listener supported station and its programming is based on volunteer work (Bonini, 2017). Yet, on a side note it should be added that as confirmed by the founder Omer Madra, the *Acik Site* (Open Site) --which is independent from the *Acik Radyo* although their contributors are mostly the same people--received \$150,000 support from Acik Toplum Enstitusu (Open Society Foundation) in 2000 (Birsen, 2011)⁶⁴.

2.5.3. Sendika Org (Trade union.org)

Founded in 2001, the news website uses the slogan “We are the producers, we will be the rulers!” (<http://sendika54.org/>). Sendika.org faced multiple censorship efforts and closures. As of July, 2017, The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) has banned access to the site 52 times (“BTK’dan sendika.org’a 52.kez İletisim engeli: ‘Rekorlari kira kira Geliyoruz’⁶⁵). Its editor in chief Ali Demirhan was taken into police custody between April 20-25, 2017.

What it does: Sendika.org “combines class and trade union struggles with social movements’ perspective” (Coban & Ataman, 2015:36). The news site periodically publishes translations of socialist literature. Along with news reports, social analysis, special dossiers and translations, Sendika.org also involves in the organization of

⁶⁴ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

⁶⁵ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

“International Labor Film Festival” in Turkey (<http://sendika54.org/hakkimizda/>).

Occasionally, the news site covers the symposiums or workers’ demonstrations through online live broadcasts. It also provides services such as the publication of handbooks that contain practical information for workers’ everyday lives and online legal consultations (ibid). Sendika.org serves as a platform in the organization of strikes, resistance and solidarity events (<http://sendika54.org/hakkimizda/>). During the Gezi Protests, some of the volunteers and journalists of sendika.org launched an online TV channel called *Capul TV* in 2013 (Yilmaz & Ataman, 2015:149).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: In its About Us section, Sendika.org provides detailed information about the labour movement in recent times and adopts the legacy of the famous above mentioned socialist publications like the *Yon* magazine (<http://sendika54.org/hakkimizda/>). It positions itself as a part of the class struggle and labour-trade union movements.

Sendika.org describes itself as being a “common platform” for diverse groups in the society ranging from the working class to academics and to “revolutionaries who fight for the establishment of the rule of the working class, the disadvantaged groups and the poor through their own power” (<http://sendika54.org/hakkimizda/>).

Organizational and Financial Structures: The website is based on a voluntary labor, non-hierarchical organization and participation” (Coban & Ataman, 2015:36).

2.5.4. Otekilerin Postasi (The Post of Others)

Originally started as the *Aclik Grevi Postasi* (The Hunger Strike Post), its Facebook page became one of the best-known citizen journalism projects in Turkey after 2013 (Kocak, 2015:272). Just like the *sendika.org*, the *Otekilerin Postasi* has also endured several closures, yet coming not from government authorities but from Facebook.⁶⁶ Yesil notes that “During and in the aftermath of Gezi protests, the OP’s

⁶⁶ Regarding the closures of more than 10 Facebook pages belonging to Kurdish politicians as well the OP’s Facebook page, between 6-12 August 2013, Richard Allen, the Director of Facebook Policy in Europe, claimed that the closures were not about pro-Kurdish views but because these pages contained symbols of a terrorist organization: the PKK (Kurdistan Worker’s Party which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the US and the E.U.)—contrary to Facebook’s policies (Basaran, 2013). All the information from this source is translated by the author.

Facebook page was closed twice, and had to re-open under a different name on each occasion” (2015). In order to fight with the censorship, the *OP* uses a backup service which archives the content and keeps it ready for publication within a few hours after a possible closure (Yumusak, 2015⁶⁷:340). Additionally, through other alternative media, the editors of the *OP* announce the launch of new pages (ibid: 341).

What it does: The Hunger Strike Post’s goal was to inform the public about the 68-day long hunger strikes carried out by Kurdish prisoners in Turkey, one that was not adequately covered by the mainstream media (ibid:272). *Otekilerin Postasi* (*OP*) which was launched on October 21, 2012 on the other hand had a broader goal of covering the issues neglected by the mainstream media and used the following motto: “We carry on the stance of Citizen Journalism, Digital Activism, and Civil Disobedience as an alternative news source and we destroy censorship altogether” (Kocak, 2015: 267).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: According to a self-conducted survey in 2013, the co-founder Emrah Ucar states that 65% of *OP*’s followers were from the pro-Kurdish leftist Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP-Peace and Democracy Party⁶⁸) (Ongun, 2013). But the outlet aims to target a broader audience. After its transformation into *Otekilerin Postasi*, the outlet claimed to be the post or voice of a broader group besides the Kurds. As such, they started to cover LGBT rights, environmental issues, problems of ethnic and religious minorities, workers’ and students’ problems, the “believers and the non- believers” and so on (Kocak, 2015:273). Ucar explains that their “priority” is “Kurdish people and the students” and “this is followed by the LGBT community, feminists and art groups” (Ongun, 2013). As an academic and a member of the *OP*, Yumusak explains that they aim to contribute to the ‘others’ in two ways (2015: 330-331). The first one consists of delivering news, hence the choice of the word ‘post’. The second one is about organizing or leading actions that will initiate the creation of counter -hegemony. In line with this mission, Yumusak also states that the *OP* is “on the side of communication that is against the hegemony of the ruling class” (2015: 330). In the pursuit of these goals, the *OP* uses civil disobedience tactics such as petition campaigns or boycotts in order to “create opposition “(Yumusak, 2015:331). The

⁶⁷ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

⁶⁸ The party decided to unite with the Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP-Peoples’ Democratic Party) in 2014.

OP also aims to “announce all street protests or demonstrations organized by the ‘others’” (Yumusak, 2015:333).

Organizational and Financial Structures: As a citizen journalism project, the *OP* “serves as a hub for user-generated content” (Yesil, 2015⁶⁹). The page uses a couple of editors, who, according to Kocak, function as gate-watchers rather than gate-keepers since they do not change the content of the reports but only intervene with the language issues (2015: 273). It is volunteer-based and not for profit.

2.5.5. 140 Journos

According to its co-founder Onder, the name refers to the 140-character limit on Tweeter as well as their position as non- journalists (“journos” - a slang word capturing this) (Onderoglu, 2013). The platform was launched in January 2012 by three people in their 20s (Onderoglu, 2015) as a response to mainstream media’s indifference to the Uludere Bombings in December, 2011 where 34 Kurdish civilians lost their lives due to a military air strike (Lichterman, 2014; “Turkey clears military after Uludere bombing raids”). The 140 Journos became one of the most publicized counter media projects in Turkey since 2013. For example, the Nieman Reports (Onder, 2014) and Nieman Lab (Lichterman, 2014) of Harvard University as well as the Time.com (Zalewski, 2015) are among some outlets that the work of 140 Journos have appeared in.

What it does: It is a citizen journalism platform which operates through Twitter. As of 2017, the platform has 163,000 followers (<https://twitter.com/140journos?lang=en>) and 300 “volunteer content producers” (Onder, 2014).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: Their activities before the Gezi protests mainly consisted of tweets from court hearings or rallies (Yesil, 2015). 140 Journos increased its tweets and userbase significantly during the Gezi protests⁷⁰ and broadened its goal. Onder explains the broadened goal of the platform as follows (2014):

⁶⁹ All the sources from this source is translated by the author.

⁷⁰ The number of tweets went from 401 to 2, 218 from May to June 2013 and the number of followers increased from 8,000 to 45, 000 (Yesil, 2015).

Now 140journos is moving into an era in which the goal is not only to become a standalone news agency sustained by a network of citizen journalists but a force for creating a civil society, one in which citizens holding divergent views can talk to each other and in which every vote is properly counted.

Among the issues covered by 140 Journos, Onder particularly stated the inconsistencies between the local vote tallies and the results during the local elections in 2014, discussions about the plan to build Turkey's first nuclear power plant, and the mining disaster in Soma where 300 miners lost their lives (2014). While 140 Journos does not have any organic connections with social movements, it occasionally collaborates with other alternative media outlets. For instance, it hosted a thirty-minute show at Acik Radyo between October 26, 2015-April 24, 2016.

Organizational and Financial structures: The *140 Journos* is based on the content sent by the volunteers and has around 7 core staff members who are not professional journalists --and occasionally this number goes up to 20 (Yesil, 2015; Dlugoleski, 2013). Onder explains the daily job of the staff members (2014):

Instead of doing all the reporting ourselves, we focused on collecting, categorizing, validating and Storifying the news content sent to us. To verify news reports, we use free tools like Yandex Panorama (Russia's version of Google StreetView) and TinEye, a search service to help determine if images are new or pulled from websites.

2.5.6. Ucan Haber (Flying News)

Ucan Haber is a news magazine published by *Ucan Supurge (Flying Broom)*, a women's communication and research association based in Turkey's capital Ankara (Tekvar, 2016⁷¹:438).

What it does: *Ucan Supurge* "aims to create a network, an organization, of information and communication to follow women's issues in Turkey and in the world" (Tekvar, 2016: 439). Accordingly, its news magazine *Ucan Haber* aims to "criticize and change the dominant patriarchal structure" (Tekvar, 2016:439). As such, it constitutes an example of feminist alternative media outlet (ibid). The magazine covers topics such as women's

⁷¹ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

place in the local politics (<http://bianet.org/konu/ucan-haber-dergisi>) or forced under age-marriages (<http://www.ankarabarasu.org.tr/Merkezler/CHM/tr-TR/Haberler/5.html>).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: The magazine is a part of the *Ucan Supurge Association* and thus the feminist movement in Turkey. The association sees the media as “both a site and tool of struggle” (Dogan, Personal Interview, 2011). One of the best-known activities of the association is the Flying Broom Film Festival (ibid:439). Besides its training sessions, workshops, anti-violence campaigns and other activities, the association also carries out activities around journalism (Tekvar, 2016: 439). *Ucan Supurge* has created the Local Women’s Reporter’s Network in 2003 where volunteer local reporters write about the local agendas (Tekvar, 2017⁷²:544). These news reports are then sent to the editors in *Kadinlar Postasi* (Women’s Post) --another journalism project launched in 2015 and led by the association--who publish them on *Kadinlar Postasi*’s website (Tekvar, 2017:544; <http://www.kadinlarinpostasi.com/tr/proje-hakkinda>).

Organizational and Financial structures: *Ucan Haber* is a financially independent magazine. However, some of the projects carried out by the Ucan Supurge association such as the Flying Broom festival, use sponsorships or donations from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the European Commission Turkey Delegation, Open Society Foundation or others (<http://www.ucansupurge.org.tr/tr/sponsorlar>).

2.5.7. Kaos GL News Portal

KaosGL is a LGBTQ organization founded in 1994 in Ankara (<http://www.kaosgldernegi.org/kaosgl.php>). The organization uses the motto “Liberation of Homosexuals will also free Heterosexuals” (<http://www.kaosgl.org/page.php?id=23018>). Besides the Kaos GL news portal, the organization has been publishing the Kaos GL magazine⁷³ since September 1994 (<http://www.kaosgldergi.com/dergi.php>). The magazine contains content about the

⁷² All the information from this source is translated by the author.

LGBTQ movement, academic debates, personal experiences of LGBTQ people, short stories and news (<http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19040>).

What it does: The KAOS GL news portal, launched in 2007 is described as “an alternative news portal” <http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19040>).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: The news portal “aims to be the voice of not only the anti- homophobia and anti -discrimination movement, but all social opposition” (<http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19040>). The co-founder Erol explains: “We think that homophobia and sexism cannot be understood on their own, but are fed by and do feed the discriminative ideologies” (Personal interview, September 8, 2011). Therefore, although the news portal is clearly a part of the LGBT movement, its founders Ali Erol and Baris Sulu state they pay particular attention that the portal does not “turn into a particular NGO’s or association’s news bulletin” but “operates as a news portal which carries out a serious reporting function” (Personal Interview, September 8, 2011). The news portal covers a wide range of topics like “women, arts and culture, human rights, media, life” as well as conducting surveys such as “A survey on the victims and witnesses of hate speech crime in 2017”(<http://www.kaosgl.org/anasayfa.php>).

Besides its media activities, the Kaos GL organization hold workshops and publishes handbooks to create an alternative journalistic perspective and language towards LGBT issues.⁷⁴The organization occasionally collaborates with other alternative media outlets like Bianet, to hold local workshops on gender focused journalism (“Toplumsal Cinsiyet Odakli Yerel Habercilik Atolyesi Diyarbakir’da”⁷⁵).

Organizational and Financial structures: Although the news portal is self-sustained, the organization receives funding for specific projects from sources such as the *European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights* (<http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19040>). The Kaos GL website is supported by the SIDA (Swiss International Development Agency). There are only two editors in the news

⁷⁴ Among them are the handbook called ““Medyada Nefret Söylemi, Ayrımcılık ve Alternatif Haber Rehberi” (Hate Speech, Discrimination in the Media and an Alternative News Guide” in 2014 (<http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=20990>) and Yeni Medya Okulu (School of New Media), a training workshop about LGBTQ coverage for volunteer reporters (<http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19040>).

⁷⁵ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

portal--Ali Erol and Baris Sulu--who are also responsible for everything regarding the publication (Personal Interview, September 8, 2011). The content of the portal is based on news articles sent by the volunteer reporters, translations from readers, as well as news articles written by Erol and Sulu (ibid).

2.5.8. AltUst (Bottom-Up)

AltUst is a socialist magazine which launched its first issue in April 2011. It uses the slogan “Ayaklar Bas Olacak!” (The feet will be the head). In 2008, Erdogan famously cited the Turkish proverb “The end of the world would come if the feet become the head” in response to trade unions’ demands to celebrate May first Labor Day in Taksim square (“Ayaklar bas olursa kıyamet kopar” dedi ortalık karisti”).

What it does: The magazine describes itself as “an internationalist magazine published by Turkish, Armenian and Jewish socialists” Respectively an academic and a political activist, Ferhat Kentel and Roni Margulies, explain the kind of publication they have initially imagined:

The goal of the magazine is to discuss, form and consolidate the non-Ulusalcı⁷⁶, non-Kemalist, non-nationalist and non-Islamophobic left’s approach vis-à-vis the developments in the country and the world. We need a magazine that would appeal to, represent and cover the entirety of the internationalist/liberal/anti-militaristic wing of the left; the base that perhaps best manifested with the “Yes, but not enough” (*yetmez ama evet*) Campaign⁷⁷. (Kentel & Margulies, 2011⁷⁸:3)

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: Accordingly, in their first issue they announced that Alt-Ust aims to be that magazine they have imagined. “A socialist magazine, that does not only appeal to the socialists but to

⁷⁶ The word Ulusalcı refers to an ultra-nationalist group in Turkey. Uslu (2008: 73) explains the characteristics of this group as follows: “Despite philosophical differences within the group, three fundamental elements in Ulusalcı thought can be identified: uncompromising anti-Westernism; externalization of Islam from Turkish nationalism; and ethnic exclusionism”

⁷⁷ “An influential body of individuals formed a loose alliance called ‘Yes but not enough’ (*yetmez ama evet!*). Their platform tried to encourage the AKP to take bolder reforms in pursuit of a fully-fledged liberal democracy. While supporters of this alliance voted positively during the referendum, they criticized the AKP for falling short on measures such as proposing an entirely new constitution and bolder measures with respect to the Kurdish opening.” (Ciddi, 2011, footnote 8).

⁷⁸ All the information from this source is translated by the author.

everyone who wants change in Turkey, who is in favor of democracy, peace, all freedoms including the freedom of faith, a magazine that represent everybody's voice" (ibid:3).

The prominent names of the magazine such as Margulies - who is also on the editorial board - are members of Devrimci Sosyalist Isci Partisi (DSIP-Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party) which carried out the "Yes, but not enough" campaign during the constitutional referendum in 2010 (Tistall & Tait, 2010). However, in 2011 Margulies stated that he did not see the magazine as an official publication of the party, but instead as an example of social movements media (Personal Interview, 2011).

Organizational and Financial structures: The magazine is based on subscriptions and sales revenue. During its initial launch, the publication and distributions costs were mostly paid by three people from the magazine including Margulies, and the DSIP covered a portion of the expenses (Margulies, Personal Interview, 2011). The magazine does not have an editor, instead "a board of writers seek consensus for each decision" (Margulies, Personal Interview, 2011). According to Margulies, "mutual goodwill works" in the magazine. One vote for or against an article can determine the final decision (Personal Interview, 2011).

2.5.9. Yesil Gazete (Green Newspaper):

Yesil Gazete was launched in 2011 and describes itself as "[an] ecological, political, participatory and festive internet newspaper" (<https://yesilgazete.org/blog/2011/10/19/hakkimizda-2/>).

What it does: The daily online newspaper covers issues such as "nature, climate change, energy, agriculture-food, environmental struggles, ecological life, animal rights, transportation under the ecology rubric" (Ozdemir, 2016: 345). The news rubric contains sections titled "labour, society, civil society, women, LGBTQ, local". (ibid). The newspaper declares that it uses "sustainable and open sources technologies" (<https://yesilgazete.org/blog/2011/10/19/hakkimizda-2/>).

Its strategic orientation and relationship with social movements: While the founders and the writers are part of the environmental movement, the ecology editor of the newspaper Dudu stated in 2011 that "the publication does not have any direct ties with

the Green Party since no one was chosen for or assigned to the editorial staff by the party" (Personal Interview, September 6, 2011). The newspaper also co-organized the "Alternative media festival" four times with the Yesil Dusunce Dernegi (The Green Thought Association) (<http://yesildusunce.org/project/alternatif-medya-senligi-2/>).

2.6. Methodology and Alternative Media Practitioners' Self-Assessments of their Work:

An examination of alternative media studies shows that to analyze alternative media, researchers predominantly use qualitative research methods such as interviews (Carroll & Hackett, 2006 ; Downing et al., 2001; Rodriguez, 2001) participant observation (Atton & Wickenden, 2005) or qualitative content analysis (Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Harcup, 2003). While these methods offer valuable insights on the news culture of the media organizations and motivations of the producers, Atton argues alternative media studies usually lack a "systematic display of methods, data and analytical procedures" (2009:274). Particularly the following elements of the methodology often remain unclear: "style of these interviews, how subjects were selected, the contexts and conditions in which the interviews were conducted; and what questions were asked" (2009:274).

This "lack of methodological rigor" takes its toll on the quality of the results since it creates "an obstacle to understanding: it makes it difficult to verify, replicate, compare and refine investigations" and arguably it "prevents the critical evaluation and development of methods" (Atton, 2009:275). In order to avoid similar complications, here, I use a detailed description of my methodology.

The findings which will be outlined in this section were collected through face to face interviews with thirteen alternative media practitioners from the nine alternative media organizations outlined in the previous section. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and took place in Istanbul and Ankara. With the exception of two, all the interviews were conducted between June and September 2011. The interviews with the practitioners/founders of *Otekilerin Postasi* and *140 Journos* took place in August 2013.

The interviews are designed as semi-structured interviews and contained guiding questions about concerned media organizations' broader political or civic objectives,

news values (how they define news and which criteria they use for selection), approach to objectivity, relationship with social movements, organizational and decision-making structures, financial structures, relationship with other news organizations and thoughts on media reform. Through these questions, I aim to evaluate these media organizations in terms of the contributions they are believed to provide in the scholarly literature such as creating an alternative epistemology of news (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:1) and creating counterhegemonic/critical content (Sandoval, 2009; Fuchs, 2010) as well contributing to media and societal democratization as defined by Hackett & Carroll (2004). In relation to the former contribution, the definition of news, news values, objectivity and the relationship with the audience are analyzed. In regards to the latter contribution, I defined critical and counter hegemonic content as the content critical of neo-liberalism, patriarchy, destruction of the environment and discrimination of ethnic/religious groups, homophobia and sexism, given the dominant political discourses in the country outlined in the previous sections. Following Hackett and Carroll's definition, media democratization involves the following points: (a) expanding the range of voices represented by media thus building a more egalitarian and participatory public sphere; (b) promoting and exporting the practices of sustainable democracy to other media as well as outside and; (c) offsetting other political and economic inequalities present in the system (Hackett & Carroll, 2004:15).

All the interviews were conducted in Turkish, recorded, transcribed and translated by the author. The organizations in the sample are selected to cover a wide range of issues ranging from women's rights to environmentalism and to the socialist movements which are dismissed by the mainstream media and which form oppositional groups in general in the society. The snowball technique was used to determine the participants.

2.6.1. The epistemology of news (news values, objectivity, stance towards conventional journalism and relationship with the audience)

On Being Alternative: One of the very first questions asked of the participants was whether they defined themselves as "alternative media". Although almost all of them explained in detail how their approach to journalism differs from mainstream media (and sometimes from other alternative media organizations), some felt more comfortable describing themselves with adjectives other than alternative or tended to define other

media organizations as a better example of alternative. For instance, Omer Madra, the founder of Acik Radyo (Open Radio) explained:

No, we don't [define ourselves as alternative]. It is a matter of doing your job properly or not. Journalism is like that, too. You either do factual and correct news or you do something in favor of people who say 'the devil take the hindmost'. You reflect this attitude in the news you air or the music you play. You either serve the interests of the powerful and the wealthy or not. There is a tendency to be seen as 'alternative' when you want to air news or programmes in favor of the ordinary people, the minorities or the poor; you are seen as 'alternative'. [...] Consequently, there is no such thing as alternative; you either do proper and trustworthy broadcasting or not (Personal Interview, August 10, 2011).

While Madra made the point that characteristics attributed to alternative media were in fact part and parcel of what he calls 'proper broadcasting', he saw financial independence as a pre-requisite for 'proper broadcasting':

[...] there is an economy that favors the big corporations. It is the same in the US or Britain, and as a result, a particular type of media that would serve the interests of these corporations emerge...either through corruption or mergers...this means, if you want to be alternative you need to be independent. It is the only way to stay outside of corporations built as a means of political leverage. This is why we continue our listeners' support project for 8 years. Even if it does not cover all our costs, it covers something like 40%. (Personal interview, August 10, 2011)

The founders of the Kaos GL - LGBTQ news portal, LGBT activists Ali Erol and Baris Sulu, defined their reporting as follows:

...[we are] alternative, correct. The term has become some sort of a cliché though. We are doing reporting. Our reporting is rights based and more. Maybe alternative is a better way to put it since we also try to foster a movement too. Bianet is very successful in this, in putting into circulation the things that are not covered by mainstream media. [...] (Personal Interview, September 8, 2011)

Activist Roni Margulies who is among the founders of the socialist *AltUst* magazine and a member of its editorial board remains cautious about calling the magazine an example of alternative media:

I am not sure [if it is an alternative media]. Altust is a socialist magazine. It is alternative to mainstream media in that sense, but Acik Radyo would be closer to 'alternative' in the Western perspective. It is broader and inclusive. We offer a particular--a socialist alternative. (Personal interview, July 29, 2011).

As the literature of alternative media suggests, these organizations not only criticize the existing media structures and ways of doing journalism, but they also offer a critique in action (Atton, 2009:284). As such, they not only broaden the definition of news and diversify the news sources but apply different selection criteria with different priorities.

Definition of news: For instance, Omer Madra considers a variety of genres as components of news and reporting. Responding to a question about the importance of news in their programming and whether they consider themselves a news station, he replied:

What does news station mean? I think this is not a very accurate definition. In Acik Radyo 60 to 65 percent of the programs are dedicated to music. Half of the remaining 40 percent is conversational programming. We have brief news casts, and we have two news programs one of which adopts a sociological perspective and the other is political. Acik Gazete (Open Newspaper-Acik Radyo's news program) is aired for two hours everyday. In the afternoon, we have Acik Dergi (Open Magazine) which is primarily about culture, arts and literature and there is news in it too. [...] (Personal Interview, August 10, 2011).

Selen Dogan, the editor of Ucan Supurge (Flying Broom) and Ucan Haber (Flying News) also explained that, in order to encourage contributions from their participants in their Local Women Reporters Network project, they repeatedly told them that "everything constitutes news and life itself is news" (Personal interview, September 8, 2011). Dogan defined their work and the "perspective they bring to the news" as "gender -focused critical media literacy" and according to her, this perspective along with the definition of news -- which is mentioned above -- are the main things that make their work alternative (Personal interview, September 8, 2011). She also underlined the difference of news values between the mainstream and alternative media:

We learned from the mainstream media how not to select the news. For instance, at the moment we are working on a project on "Child brides". We have difficulties when turning this project into news. When journalists [from mainstream media] contact us, they only ask about the numbers, because they want headlines. They want to see the impact of the numbers. Or they call me and say that they need a woman [to interview] who has got married when fourteen or fifteen. Of course we don't provide them any names. This would double those women's victimization. [...] When we are covering these issues, we contextualize it within the framework of violence against women. Nevertheless, we still come across many journalists who say give us numbers or stories or the editors won't let us to cover this (Dogan, Personal interview, 2011).

News Values: For Sendika.org the coverage of the labour movement and social movements are the main priorities (Ozge Yurttas, personal interview, July 23, 2011). In terms of their news selection criteria, Ucar from *Otekilerin Postasi* says:

We are a side. This does not mean that we are on the side of an organization, we are on the side of people that the mainstream media do not show, do not want to voice. We are on the side of people's consciousness. It is not because we do not consider it news, but we do not cover things like a traffic accident with seventeen deaths. But we do cover something like an individual's death with a police bullet. We don't aim to turn the deaths into some kind of a contest. We cover the issues regarding citizenship, the peace process, discrimination, hate speech and so on, so we are biased in our selection of news (Ucar, personal Interview, July 17, 2013).

Stance in relation to conventional journalism: Yurttas, who is responsible for the news section in *Sendika.org*, underlines the difficulty of appealing to the readers whose expectations are conditioned by the norms of conventional journalism:

Even if the mainstream media don't determine your work style, you are still reaching out to the readers who are used to the rules determined by them. Their perception is shaped by these rules and sometimes this impacts their expectations. One of the areas where we are most criticized is the speed. They ask us why our site is not updated more often. We are not a news agency or we don't have paid subscriptions to three to four news agencies who would provide constant news flow. Our rhythm is not determined by mainstream media, but the rhythm of the class struggle. Even if we cover the same thing, they emphasize the rating generating aspects whereas we emphasize other aspects. And people may perceive this as if there are points that we are missing in our coverage. The most difficult thing is to do reporting against the perception of reporting created by the mainstream media (Personal Interview, July 23, 2011).

According to Onder and Aydogdu, the co-founders of *140 Journos*, what differentiates their reporting style from mainstream media as well as the other alternative media is the fact that they provide "unprocessed information" (Personal interview, July 20, 2013). They state that even if they cover the same issues with the mainstream media, the outputs are quite different.

[...] we realized this in other issues too, when we both covered the same topics, the content that we produce is quite unique. The fact that we are covering the events without the journalistic jargon, we are covering the events as citizens, makes a whole lot of difference. The angle that I capture a photo, the moment that I prefer to start the recorder, the way that we post the source, is very different than the mainstream. We provide everything

untouched. As an uncut block, we do not edit it. [When recording] At the beginning we ask them to introduce themselves and at the end we thank them, and that is it. We then post the recording as it is without editing. We never ask leading questions. (Personal interview, July 20, 2013)

Objectivity: Regarding the stance towards the norm of objectivity, as we have suggested in Hackett and Gurleyen (2015), the approaches of the media outlets in question vary. Mater, who is a journalist and one of the founders of *Bianet*, did not believe in objectivity because she sees news reports as essentially being a form of “fiction” (Personal interview, August 16, 2011). The co-founder of *Otekilerin Postasi*, Ucar, explained their stance as being biased towards a certain side while maintaining standards of objectivity:

I've said that we are a side, and we select our news from the perspective of human rights and freedoms, but within this framework we still aim to report the news in the most accurate way. [...] we are loyal to reality. We have a certain form of objectivity. We always suspect the accounts of people who lie. This can be the political power, a sports club, or competing groups within organizations. We always suspect the power, are trying to look at the things from the side of the 'others'. [...] When we are selecting our news, we objectively select the 'others' (Personal interview, July 17, 2013).

Madra from *Acik Radyo* also reflected a more traditional approach of objectivity:

What we call as news should - as possible as it can be - related to the real world, to its facts and should be verified from a few different sources. You only provide verified things, you try to be at no one's service and you should do this as objectively as possible. You also should provide analysis about these (facts) from sources which you determine to be credible. [...] Your freedom of expression should be limitless but you should not bend the facts. When suspicious, you should verify it from several different sources; you should make sure that your news doesn't manipulate people or cause harm to their rights. (Personal interview, August 10, 2011).

Yet, he also explained that the radio was founded in response to the need of a broadcaster “that would defend the rights of the suppressed, the voiceless and the ordinary people and which would allow them to make their voices heard” (Madra, personal interview, August 10, 2011).

When it comes to adherence to conventional objectivity, *140 Journos* seem to be the most rigid one in their adaptation. They not only refuse the idea of “partisan press” (Aydogdu, Personal interview, July 20, 2013), they also find partisanship as one of the main shortcomings of both mainstream and alternative media in Turkey:

I don't want any comments in my news. You give me the information, I can interpret it for myself. In Turkey, people still take reporting and being a columnist as the same thing. [...] There are groups in the Turkish media, everybody has their own newspaper. For me, newspapers are just a manifestation of political identities and nothing else. Can we call something 'media' if it only reports its side of the stories? [...] People from various groups should be able to see themselves in the news, they should be informed about each other's problems. This is the prerequisite of being able to live together, they should be able to accept and tolerate information that would enable them to empathize with others (Aydogdu, personal interview, July 20,2013).

Relationship with the audience: *Bianet*, *Ucan Haber* and *Kaos GL* news portal occasionally hold training sessions to invite ordinary citizens or local reporters to report for them. *Kaos GL* news portal also publishes personal stories of its readers as well as often inviting them to join in surveys regarding LGBT issues. *Sendika.org* and *Altust* accept reader contributions under certain conditions. Margulies explained: "We are open to different views, but not to everything. You can see feminist articles here, but separatist feminism is not perceived as very positive from a socialist point of view. Nationalist or anti-Kurdish views also would not be published here. We are trying to reflect a wide range of views in accordance with certain principles" (Personal interview, July 29,2011). Dogan from *Ucan Haber* emphasized that they had to close the site to reader's comments due to disrespectful comments, but they do accept news articles from their readers (Personal interview, September 8, 2011). Citizen journalism outlets *Otekilerin Postasi* and *140 Journos* clearly broke the producer/consumer binary just like *Acik Radyo* where listeners could air their own shows.

2.6.2. The question of impact (participants' self assessments about their contributions to the creation of counter-hegemonic/critical content and media and/or societal democratization) and the obstacles:

In general, most participants expressed positive results about their achievements. Madra from *Acik Radyo* (Open Radio) found their contributions on the issue of climate change as their primary impact (Personal interview, 2011). He thought that the media should have the "function of transforming the society" and this could be best achieved through information in his view. For their climate change coverage, Madra said they not only cover the news and conferences, but also make announcements and take part in climate change demonstrations (Personal interview, August 10, 2011).

Mater from *Bianet* saw their main impact concerning the coverage of women's and children's rights issues (Personal interview, August 16, 2011). According to her, their focus on these topics has contributed to both an increased amount of news in the mainstream media about these issues as well as a change in the discourse. She used the example of the widespread adoption of the term "women's murders" instead of "honour killings" in the mainstream media (ibid). She also emphasized the news worthiness of the "media monitoring report" -- a report that *Bianet* publishes every 3 months-- for the mainstream media. Yet Mater acknowledged the limits of some of their work such as the effectiveness of local journalist training workshops and the lack of development of a tool to measure the effectiveness in these issues (Personal interview, August 16, 2011).

For instance, we have done some training sessions in the Black Sea region, we talked about racism, hate speech and all that, but terrible things have happened in Trabzon in the aftermath of these trainings. It is like no training has been done. Two days of training really does not change a lot. (Mater, personal interview, August 16, 2011).

Dogan from *Ucan Haber* (Flying News) suggested that the impact of alternative media in Turkey (including her organization) has a lot of resemblance to the impact of civil society.

[...] We are wandering in the areas that are unattended by the state, the areas where the state does not want to go or is not qualified to enter. We are producing discourse about those areas. And sometimes we provide services that should be provided by a social state. [...] Alternative media's function is similar to this. We are trying to fix the areas where mainstream media fail to provide, where they serve inadequately or are not even qualified to serve. [...] With limited sources and only volunteers, we can still raise our voices about things like the HES projects-where people resist-or women's murders. As alternative media, the organizations like *Bianet* and *Acik Radyo*, we follow each other. And people only know about these issues because of alternative media (Personal interview, September 8, 2011).

She also saw alternative media's absence in terms of TV broadcasting as one of the main limitations in the reach and effectiveness of alternative media in Turkey:

The thing that bothers me most is that you can have an alternative press, but we cannot get into TV broadcasting. We will be much stronger once that area is covered because everybody watches TV. Mainstream media's most powerful tool is TV. Not every household reads newspapers or magazines, but they do watch TV. TV is the medium that serves the most

general population and when there are alternatives on TV, I think that is when we will start seeing the real effects of alternative media (Selen Dogan, personal interview, September 8, 2011).

Ucar from *Otekilerin Postasi* (Post of Others) and Mater from *Bianet* (Independent Communications Network) pointed out that journalists working for mainstream media sometimes contact them to publish the news articles refused by their editors (2011, 2013 Personal interviews). Regarding the achievements of the Kaos GL news portal, Erol thought the news portal had “succeeded in providing a communication line for people who cannot or would not directly reach other such as the liberals, oppositional left, Kurds and Islamists” (Personal interview, September 8, 2011).

The most pessimistic interpretation of the impact of alternative was expressed by Margulies from *AltUst* (BottomUp) Magazine. He said:

A magazine that sells only 1500 copies cannot create an alternative public sphere and this is not our aim here. [...] We had two goals, first, on an abstract level we wanted to create an alternative information and discussion platform. [...] Second, in the last 10-15 years Turkey has gone through a polarization and we aim to be on one side of this polarization- the anti-Kemalist, anti-nationalist, anti-islamophobia, anti-military guardianship and pro-peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem side (Personal interview, July 29, 2011).

Margulies' pessimism was also reflected in his views of media reform:

Mainstream media does not have a democratic function, and Turkish media, just like any other media in the world, does not have such a function. They are dominated by two or three conglomerates. Criticism against mainstream media's manipulation etc. is useless because media's main function is to present dominant classes' perspectives to the public (Personal Interview, July 29, 2011).

Mater from *Bianet* on the other hand saw some ways to transform the mainstream media, even though she expressed her pessimism about the transformations of ownership structures:

There are some ways to transform. You can resist against self- censorship. When covering economic news, you can consult women (which is almost never done). Even this can be a notch [in the system] because our media is a patriarchal media. Likewise, you can consult an Armenian (on issues other than the Armenian problem), you can change something about the language, or news sources... (Personal interview, August 16, 2011).

Obstacles: Almost all the participants brought up the lack or insufficiency of financial sources except for *140 Journos*, whose founders believe that alternative media organizations are over-emphasizing the issue of financial sustainability in an era where technology provides almost cost-free platforms to disseminate information (Aydogdu, Personal interview, July 20, 2013). *Altust* magazine faced difficulties regarding the cost of distribution and emphasize the control of the distribution market by the Dogan Group's Yay-Sat (Margulies, personal interview, July 29, 2011). Ucar from *Otekilerin Postasi* also brought up the shortage of staff who could turn the received information and evidence into investigative news articles (Personal interview, July 17,2013).

2.7. Conclusion

In Turkey, where reporting bans, media blackouts, political censorship, and self-censorship are becoming common practices, alternative media outlets occupy increasingly more essential positions. Due to the vacuum created by the absence of a functioning mainstream media, alternative media in Turkey take on more traditional roles such as the information role and the monitoring (watchdog role) which are essentially part and parcel of the liberal media theories. As mentioned in this essay, during significant events such as the Soma mining disaster, the Uludere bombings or the Gezi Park protests, these outlets constituted the only platform where the public could reach information that was not “tuned” by the government. Besides these traditional roles, some alternative media practitioners emphasize mobilizing as an integral part of their reporting. While co-founder *Otekilerin Postasi* stresses the importance of civil disobedience in its work, *Sendika.org* often announces demonstrations, and broadcasts strikes.

The testimonials of the alternative media practitioners also confirm the rhizome function of alternative media⁷⁹ as described by Bailey et al. (2008:31). Particularly, as one of Turkey's oldest and most established alternative media organizations, *Bianet* brings together human rights movements, feminists and environmentalists. Similarly,

⁷⁹ The rhizome function refers to the fact that alternative media functions as a “rhizome” – providing horizontality of access for diverse groups seeking a change in the dominant media systems, and allowing for “trans-hegemonic collaborations and partnerships” among these groups (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008:.31).

participants from *Otekilerin Postasi*, LGBT News portal, *Sendika.org*, *Yesil Gazete* (Green Newspaper), *Altust* (Bottomup) magazine particularly mention that their news outlets not only favour their own movement but try to be inclusive of all social movements. By doing this, they create a more inclusive public sphere. The constituents of this public sphere -- social movements and dissident groups -- are also the constituents of a counter public sphere as described by the critical scholars in this essay.

Some of the studied media outlets also produce critical content as defined by Sandoval (2009) and Fuchs (2010). Socialist *AltUst* magazine and the labour movement website *Sendika.org* particularly aim to produce content that is critical of all axes of domination. Due to its close relationship with various social movements, Bianet also holds similar aims in its content creation. Yet, it is not possible to say that all media organizations studied here share an explicit agenda for radical social change. For instance, the founders of *140 Journos* state that although they share similar political positions with some alternative media organizations like *Otekilerin Postasi* they prefer to remain neutral in their coverage, only offering 'unprocessed information' that is not found in mainstream media and enabling everyone to be producers. In this sense, it can be argued that *140 Journos* constitutes an example of process-oriented approach to alternative media. The feminist news site *Ucan Haber* on the other hand, offers content that is oppositional to patriarchy and occasionally to the government's policies, yet it does not explicitly aim to target all axes of domination.

It can be argued that the mere existence of these alternative media outlets in Turkey allows to break mainstream media's symbolic power since these outlets offer their definitions of the issues and events. In this sense, they also confirm Couldry and Curran's (2003) conceptualization of alternative media-- "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations" (2003: 7).

The findings regarding the news culture of the alternative media outlets studied here suggest that they indeed change the epistemology of news as the literature suggests, by broadening the definition of news, adopting different news values, rendering the production process more participatory. In contrast to mainstream media outlets which usually compete for ratings and circulation numbers, the media outlets studied here seem to prioritize realization of their social goals in their relationship with

each other. Accordingly, they often collaborate on different projects and cover each other's activities. While these collaborations are more common between *Bianet*, *Acik Radyo* and several social movements' media, they are quite rare between outlets belonging to different leftist camps such as *Sendika.org* and *Altust* magazine. Overall, it can be argued that the non-profit nature of alternative media, combined with the shared goal of creating progressive social change, increase the possibilities of collaboration among the outlets, though it does not guarantee it in any way. However, the increased likelihood alone can help to overcome the main limitations of small-scale and participatory alternative media-- their reach and impact.

Finally, it can be argued that compared to mainstream journalism, the journalism practiced by alternative media in Turkey is freer from the structural restrictions described in the essay. Yet they suffer equally - if not more - from repressive laws and government pressure. Nevertheless, alternative journalism in Turkey is very dynamic and better informed about the ethical concerns and new practices in the field. This is mainly due to the frequent collaborations between media scholars and the practitioners. Prominent media scholars conduct workshops and training sessions for the local and volunteer reporters of *Bianet*, *Ucan Haber* and *Kaos GL* news portal. Additionally, they contribute to the preparation of written sources such as peace journalism, LGBT reporting or violence against women handbooks. As such, alternative media outlets contribute to media democratization by providing educational resources for journalists.

Based on their own testimonials, and a general observation of their activities and content, the nine media outlets studied here contribute to media and societal democratization in various ways. Yet, a more complete understanding of their impact requires critical content and/or discourse analysis regarding their coverage, as well as research to study audience engagement with that content.

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