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"HE DESIRED TO LOOK: *The* INTERNET *and* OBSCENITY *by Robert George*

POWER TO THE PEOPLE?

by Robert Malka

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plus DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY
and A REVIEW *of*
EVGENY MOROZOV'S "THE NET DELUSION"

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In his bestselling prophecy of doom, *After America*, author Mark Steyn proposes a thought experiment: Consider a man, your average, no-frills American, living in these glorious United States 100 years ago: the Year of Our Lord 1913. As of March, Woodrow Wilson is president. Women do not yet have the vote. Rosa Parks is just being born. And in the category of cutting-edge technology: The zipper is patented.

Drop that man, suddenly, in 1963. It's not just a different country—it's a different planet. Set aside the nation's political and social convulsions. Just consider the average house: It has a radio, a vacuum cleaner, a television. If he wants to travel, the nation is now connected by a sprawling highway system—or he can hop on a jetliner. Two years earlier the Soviets sent a man into space.

Fast-forward another 50 years. Different planet? Not so much. The kitchen, the living room, the neighborhood look generally the same—most things are just smaller, handier. Telephones are cell phones. There is a sleek television not just in the living room but in every room.

But there is a strange item on the desk: the personal computer. Fire it up, and inside is the Internet. Here is, probably beyond arguing, the great innovation of the last half-century. "There is no Frigate like a Book / To take us Lands away," wrote Emily Dickinson. But she never had access to Google.

Still, what is the Internet? It's a central knowledge bank, but discriminating between truth and falsehood is not always easy. It is a global message board, connecting opposite corners of the globe—or is it more along the lines of comedian Jon Stewart: "The Internet is just a world passing around notes in a classroom"? It is a crucial resource for terror cells in the Middle East, and home to Buzzfeed "listicles" such as "9 Reasons the Loon Is the Best Bird."

Struggling with the Internet's many tensions is the task of each of this issue's feature articles. Robert George ponders the Internet's predilection to smut, while Robert Malka and Evgenia Olimpieva look at the Internet's potential for bringing democracy to oppressed peoples—and the possibility that the Internet might end up oppressing them further.

Our student reports take up these same questions—but from the perspective of the streets: In our case, from the streets of Istanbul, Turkey, where multiple St. John's students joined millions of Turks in this summer's protests against Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. And rounding out the issue, Chang Liu takes a look at one of the most censored societies—modern China—and how, for the first time in a long time, government policy is beginning to respond to public opinion.

Information and disinformation, inspiration and victimization—you name it, there's a website, or thousands of websites, devoted to it. It's all online, on the Internet—out there, somewhere. The size of the Internet, the scope of its content, the innumerable possibilities for its application make it a technology that stimulates and challenges and frightens. That is a good reason to consider it carefully and cautiously. We hope this inaugural issue of the 2013-2014 *Epoch* contributes, in some small way, to that task. Like every technology, in the end the Internet ought to be man's servant, not his master. But whether that will be the case remains to be seen.

—Ian Tuttle, Editor-in-Chief

FEATURES

"He Desired to Look"

The Internet and Obscenity

BY ROBERT GEORGE

I caught up with a childhood friend this past summer while visiting my family. When we were young, this friend was the only Internet-savvy kid in my small rural hometown. He was steeped in and privy to a rapidly evolving Internet culture that I only became aware of years later. What did this mean? It meant that he knew the best bands, the best movies, the best websites. In our secluded town, we received modern pop culture through him. However, hand-in-hand with this cultural education came an exposure to unusually provocative content. He would proudly proclaim that he had watched "Two Girls One Cup" (an infamous viral shock-video of women defecating and vomiting on each other) and that it wasn't as bad as everyone had said. He would watch videos of atrocities and deaths, then relate them to us (not at our bequest). His air indicated that he recognized that these videos were extreme and obscene, but still he recounted them casually. These videos had become an accepted part of his cultural life.

I wasn't surprised, then, that, seeing him again this summer, he had a new video to relate to me. This time, the video was actually an audio sample taken from the movie *Grizzly Man*, directed by Werner Herzog. In the film, Herzog documents the life of Timothy Treadwell, who spent 13 summers living with grizzly bears in the Alaskan wilderness until he and his girlfriend were eaten alive by one. Treadwell documented his life with the bears, so their deaths happened to be recorded on tape. In the documentary, Herzog listens to the audio, but mutes the track to spare the audience the experience. However, intrepid audio engineers have amplified the muted track, and now you can go online and listen to a man and a woman get eaten alive by a bear.

My friend had watched the clip, and he related to me what he had heard: the sound the frying pan made as the woman repeatedly struck the bear as it devoured Treadwell before turning on her; the initial terror in their voices, followed by the awful resignation of their moans. He recounted this to me with ease and comfort. These deaths had taken up comfortable residence in my friend's mind, and he did not seem disturbed by their presence there.

The Internet is bloated with such content. Every type of violent or sexual pornography imaginable is accessible for your consumption at any given moment.

I could go on. The Internet is bloated with such content. Every type of violent or sexual pornography imaginable is accessible at any given moment. If you own a smartphone, a library of such obscene material is in your pocket at all times. How do we account for the pervasiveness of this material? Why is this what we choose to

show ourselves, to share with each other? What is it about the Internet that allows, and perhaps encourages, the propagation of such content?

Any attempt to answer these questions would be incomplete without acknowledging the Internet's myriad faces and functions. If the Internet were merely a forum for the type of content I described above, there wouldn't be much to say about it. People who desired smut would go to the Internet looking for smut. But it is, of course, much more than this. The Internet has created a new horizon of social interaction, connecting people across continents and ways of life. These connections have made accessible vast, untapped reservoirs of information, and enabled us to document in a new way the human experience. The thoughts and ideas that inspire us have never been available to so many. Because of this, our generation looks at the Internet with a culminating pride: 'We gave mankind the Internet,' we declare, patting our own backs. Most remarkable is that while our pride is probably premature (it remains to be seen what we ultimately do with the Internet), these approximations of the Internet's importance and relevance are not hyperbolic. The Internet has changed and will continue to change the way we do commerce and interact, the way we remember and think.

What has given the Internet such breadth of content and widespread acceptance? Two things come to mind: the Internet's openness as a medium, and the influence that we as users have over what we find there. Internet content is equal but not equally treated. All material is equal in that it has a place on the Internet (illegal and grossly pornographic content, like that described above, is discouraged, perhaps, but still easily accessed), and once it is there, we vote on it with our views, clicks, likes, shares, and tweets. With these votes—online expressions of preference—we determine what we expose ourselves to and what we think others should be exposed to, as well. Following the sway of these votes, equally accessible material is unequally promulgated: Content with the most votes is promoted over that with less. This helps determine what shows up in your Google searches, on the front page of YouTube, in your Facebook feed, and elsewhere.

So how do we decide what to vote on? It seems that our inclination to online content is guided by a personal lack. We are drawn to material that speaks to desires in us. Our turning to the Internet addresses some perceived deficiency, whether it is a lack of information or intimacy, in ourselves or our environment. We flock to political sites, feminist blogs, fetishist forums, the Facebook profiles of old friends, celebrity Twitter feeds, the imagined reality of online video games, looking for materials that satisfy our feelings of deprivation. We spend our time on the Internet attempting to appease deep, multifaceted, complex desires: youthful curiosity, the longing for human connection amid a lack of community, a noble desire to stay informed, the urge to view the obscene.... From our most virtuous desires to our most depraved, the Internet has content tailored to sate them.

We are drawn to material that speaks to desires in us. Our turning to the Internet addresses some perceived deficiency, whether it is a lack of information or intimacy, in ourselves or our environment.

Perhaps the foremost desire to which the Internet caters is diversion. If you look at YouTube's list of most-watched videos, you are not going to find life-affirming exposés, the video blogs of political activists, or other testimonials of personal achievement. You will find sensational music videos, Miley Cyrus twerking, adorable cat mashups, spoof trailers, ironic has-beens, sar-

PHOTO BY KEVIN STILLEY

castic up-and-comers, and all other sorts of gratifying time-wasters. The desires for diversion and community intersect in our decadent indulgence of YouTube's greatest hits. Such visual pleasures include us in this growing society of starlets and wanna-bes, a community defined by the ability of its citizens to point and laugh at the same thing at the same time.

All of this will sound familiar to those who grew up with the Internet. Indeed, far from being the generation that gave the world the Internet, we are more likely to be remembered as the first generation that wasn't given the choice to opt out of it. However, by reflecting on the mechanics that have become second nature to us, the Internet reveals itself as a fundamentally democratic institution. The classic philosophical tenets of democracy are identical to those upon which the Internet is based, something like the following: The highest end is personal freedom in the form of freedom of expression and freedom from tyranny. The best way to guarantee these personal freedoms is to give the citizens the responsibility of self governance. As patrons of the Internet, we've been handed a similar responsibility for the content found there and our relationship to it.

The Internet's democratic character makes it and us susceptible to the same consequences common to the democratic community.

But this means that the Internet's democratic character makes it, and us, susceptible to the same consequences common to the democratic community. In Book Eight of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates offers an image of the life of the "democratic man" and his regime. Socrates' articulation of democracy's failings can also serve as a critique of a culture gone increasingly online. Socrates' portrait of the democratic city focuses on the pervasive freedom found there: "In the first place, then, aren't [the citizens] free? And isn't the city full of freedom and free speech? And isn't there license in it to do whatever one wants?" And "just like a many-colored cloak decorated in all hues, this regime, decorated with all dispositions, would also look fairest." Surely the Internet allows for the same license to express, and offers a similar rainbow of content. As for the kind of man who lives in such an indulgent city:

> If he has good luck and his frenzy does not go beyond bounds . . . then he lives his life in accord with a certain equality of pleasures he has established. To whichever one happens along, as though it were chosen by the lot, he hands over the rule within himself until it is satisfied; and then again to another, dishonoring none but fostering them all on the basis of equality.

At a certain point, says Socrates, permission to satisfy any and all pleasures makes us unable to discriminate between them:

> [The democratic man] doesn't admit true speech if someone says that there are some pleasures belonging to fine and good desires and some belonging to bad desires, and that the ones must be practiced and honored and the others checked and enslaved. Rather, [the democratic man] shakes his head at all this and says that all are alike and must be honored on an equal basis.

By acknowledging the democratic nature of the Internet, we can begin to understand the pervasiveness of the perverse and obscene material we find there. Uncomfortable though it might be to admit, this content corresponds to desires in us. Its presence in a public space reflects which desires we have permitted in our own persons. In his recent Friday Night Lecture, Mr. William Braithwaite provided a formulation for obscenity (included here with permission): *Obscenity is eros twisted by one who panders to our craving to touch the ugly in order to relieve an itch in the soul.* The Internet is, in part, a record of which 'itches' we seek to satisfy and the ugliness we use to scratch them.

And this content is not viewed without a consequent effect on the viewer. It influences what we permit into ourselves. To see content treated with such equality teaches us to treat our own desires with a similar liberalism. It tells us that any inclination, any fancy, any desire that arises in us is as worthy as any other. When my friend was a young teenager, he desired a sense of cultural involvement. Since the culture he saw on the Internet did not discriminate, what could he learn except an undiscriminating acceptance of whatever site he happened upon? And what could this teach him but to not discriminate amongst the desires in him associated with this content?

When will we have looked our fill?

As our eyes grow more accustomed to what was previously considered obscene, what kind of content will we create to satisfy our jaded vision? What will we look like when we lose the ability to discriminate between what is highest and lowest in the world around us and in ourselves? What will we look like when any attempt at discrimination is overcome by the desire to look at what should not be seen? To this last question, Socrates gives us a possible answer:

> I once heard something that I trust. Leonitus, the son Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus. . .when he noticed corpses lying by the public executioner. He desired to look, but at the same time he was disgusted and made himself turn away; and for a while he struggled and covered his face. But finally, overpowered by the desire, he opened his eyes wide, ran toward the corpses and said: 'Look, you damned wretches, take your fill of the fair sight.'

When will we have looked our fill?

We use the Internet to satisfy all manner of itches, not just the misguided desire to look upon the ugly. We turn to the Internet for connection and for community. We accumulate hundreds of "friends" to whom we do not speak, thereby degrading the meaning of friendship. We spend more time arguing politics on forums than taking meaningful political action in our lives. The Internet supplies us with content that temporarily comforts our sense of lack, but much of that content is a mere image of what might give us real satisfaction. The companionship of a close friend is not replaced by the agglomeration of the thoughts of every person you ever met in passing. The intimacy of a loving relationship cannot be manufactured from the voyeurism of Internet pornography. A sense of place in a community cannot be authentically recreated in a video game. Finding temporary satisfaction online for what we lack in our lives only puts off the time when we must create and discover the means to authentic fulfillment in reality. ■

THE INTERNET

Power to the People?

The Internet can drive democracy—but also its destruction.

BY ROBERT MALKA

If you paid attention to the "Arab Spring," the domino-like sequence of revolutions the Middle East two years ago, you might recall how commentators, expert and pundit alike, spoke of social media as a key to regime change. It's no surprise that we're eager to demonstrate that the Internet is a democratizing force that conquers totalitarian regimes: The institution of democracy is our modern Manifest Destiny, our way of expanding American culture outside of our borders.

What, then, to make of the fact that the guide, produced and handed out to willing participants of the Egyptian revolution by its leaders, said on its first and last pages: "Do not use Facebook and Twitter"? And what of the fact that the Jasmine Revolution in Iran failed, that the Arab Spring was crushed in Bahrain, that—beyond the Middle East—China quashes discord with an Internet police force?

The sobering evidence continues: As We The People have gotten more advanced with our technology, so have our governments.

The sobering evidence continues: As We the People have become more advanced with our technology, so have our governments. In China, microblogs dominate the virtual landscape, but the top dissenters get blocked and jailed, and proxies (computer network services which allow for indirect connections to other networks) are monitored obsessively—and frequently shut down; in India, "depraved or corrupt" content is deleted; and even in our own United States, 1.7 billion emails are downloaded onto the National Security Agency's servers every day, and every conversation over any form of media recorded and stored.

Governments, malignant or benign, take an active interest in social media, and the reason is obvious: Social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have identifying information that governments can mine. A key word in a Facebook post or a dashed-off Tweet can be cause enough for legal action—and that's if your country has a functional legal system. In other places, it could mean incarceration, torture, or worse. And, of course, the Internet is more than social media sites. Text messaging can be shut down by governments in the event of an "emergency." Emails can be freely accessed at any time by virtually any major government (the U.S. is not the only country with massive electronic surveillance data mining programs). A democratizing force, the Internet is, indeed—sometimes.

But it seems, too, that the Internet has become a way to 'democratize' governments' ability to spy on citizens, whose governments tend to justify such abhorrent behavior by calling their enemies and their actions "terrorists" and "terror threats." The suppression of citizens' privacy is rationalized by a blanket term that accounts for fewer total deaths than the amount of gun violence-related deaths in the United States alone. (Worse, the term 'Terrorism' is increasingly meaningless: Everyone from Tea Partiers to labor union bosses have been labeled "terrorists.") And that's not just dangerous—it's lethal. It's an Orwellian dream not so far from being realized.

So what are we supposed to do about it?

Well, suffice it to say that in terms of altering the fundamental infrastructure of the Internet so that citizens have the advantage, or can serve as a check on the power of government, the ship has sailed. The structure of the Internet is such that privacy is a gift of benevolent governments; it exists by their grace. The United States in particular has dedicated a massive amount of energy to ensuring that every smartphone is remotely accessible; the NSA can access iPhones, Android devices, and Blackberry phones. The servers of a number of major companies—Facebook, Microsoft, and Apple, among others—allow the NSA access to certain information at any time. It's even worse than the average U.S. citizen might guess. Per the *New York Times*:

The structure of the Internet is such that privacy is a gift of benevolent governments; it exists by their grace.

> The [NSA] has circumvented or cracked much of the encryption, or digital scrambling, that guards global commerce and banking systems, protects sensitive data like trade secrets and medical records, and automatically secures the e-mails, Web searches, Internet chats and phone calls of Americans and others around the world, documents show.

And the drive for more information continues. As communications become less and less anonymous, it becomes easier and easier to keep track of everyone's footprints. In fact, virtually no communications are anonymous anymore. One of the last vestiges of anonymity are anonymous Bulletin Board Systems, such as 4Chan—but even those can identify you by your IP address. As long as one is plugged into the Internet, there is no escape from prying eyes.

Yet when one attempts to reveal what it is governments do, the penalties are stupendous and unprecedented. One need only look at Edward Snowden, Bradley Manning, or Julian Assange to see what sorts of penalties are being meted out to "whistleblowers" (once an admiring, but now a pejorative, term). Surely all can agree that if there is no encouragement towards a check-and-balance system, then abuse will flourish. Absolute power—and isn't power over information the most absolute form of power?—corrupts absolutely.

So, in order to counter any potential future abuses that come from this sort of free access to the world's information, one needs to work within the system—or outside of it. To work within means lobbying Capitol Hill and influential companies; provoking conversation through media; and funding new technologies which might lend privacy a chance in the future. To work outside of the Internet would be to abandon it. To most of us, either option seems impractical, however much we care about the cause. And as this issue becomes increasingly important in our daily lives, it becomes clearer that we need to take action rather than make conversation. Contact your congressman. Find non-profit organizations which fight for your privacy. Because the very thing that allows one to discover and to create is the last thing that should be suppressed. ■

Books

Dreams and Delusions

Evgenia Olimpieva

Drawing upon memories of the Internet-organized protests in Russia in 2012, and watching similar events unfold this summer in Turkey and Brazil, I set forth to pen an optimistic article about modern technology—and especially about the Internet, and its role in promoting democracy. My initial assumption: that freedom of expression and access to uncensored information are not only the building blocks, but also the instigators, of democratic change. The Internet—the incarnation of freedom itself, the megaphone for the silent and oppressed, the supreme facilitator of human communication—just had to also be the right hand of Democracy, its handmaiden and herald.

In the course of verifying my intuitions, I came across a book called *The Net Delusion* by Belarusian writer Evgeny Morozov—an expert on technology's social and political implications. A few pages in, *The Net Delusion* had changed my perspective entirely, proved my intuitions delusions, and rendered my former ebullient thesis nothing more than idealism.

WORK REVIEWED

The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom
by Evgeny Morozov

In the introduction, the author recounts how he came to be interested in the Internet's role in democratization: Morozov, a political activist, once sought to promote democracy in Belarus by means of the "samizdat" of the 21st century: websites, social networks, and blogs. This process—promising in words, but, as he observes, ineffective and even counter-productive in reality—turned Morozov from idealist and firm believer in the Internet's ability to change the world into cautious realist and skeptic.

"Let them tweet and they will tweet their way to freedom" is one of many popular net delusions, and the first confronted by Morozov. He reminds his reader about the events in Iran in 2009, when thousands of Iranians came out on the streets to protest alleged fraud in the nation's presidential election. News about the protests spread quickly online, owing to the fact that most of the protesters were young people with smartphones. Morozov recounts the reaction of the West: The general impression was that a "Twitter Revolution" was happening in Iran. Authoritarianism is doomed, argued optimistic observers, for people around the globe are now armed with tweets.

Never mind that the protests in Iran were poorly organized, lacked strong leadership, and were opposed by a significant number of Iranians who thought the elections fair. Ignore the fact that, as Morozov puts it, "If a tree falls in the forest and everyone tweets about it, it may not be the tweets that moved it"—that is, if the social unrest is happening in Iran and people are posting about it on the Internet, it might not be the Internet that caused the unrest, just as Radio Free Europe was hardly responsible for the fall of the Soviet Union. Never mind all this, and, instead, like Internet guru Clay Shirky, post on your Twitter account: "This is it. The big one. This is the first revolution that has been catapulted onto a global stage and transformed by social media."

This sort of thinking, says Morozov, is a perfect example of what he calls "cyber-utopianism," "a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside." Apparently, not only neophytes of social movements and liberal arts undergraduates are susceptible to the disease of cyber-utopianism. According to Morozov, the world's top leaders, journalists, and political scientists are not only susceptible, but among those most responsible for the spread of such delusional thinking.

The Internet does not change the environment that it is in but, rather, adapts to it. It is a tool that can be used for both evil and good, depending on the resources and intentions of those who use it. During the Iranian protests, few observed that the Internet facilitated communication not just among the protestors but among the authorities looking to jail those in the streets. The chapter, "Why KGB Wants You to Join Facebook," discusses how modern technology makes our personal information vulnerable to misuse and abuse. For example, videos of protests in Iran posted on YouTube, meant to inspire and promote the democratic spirit, backfired: Faces were tracked, names discovered, phone calls traced, and, as a result, thousands prosecuted and imprisoned—dreadful consequences due to one video carelessly posted to YouTube.

Cyber-utopianism: "a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside."

Morozov is adamant: The mere introduction of the Internet into a non-democratic state is not going to magically transform it into a free and prosperous nation. On the contrary, as with any strong tool placed in the wrong hands, information technology can just as easily be a means for oppression and general wickedness. The Internet has a "dark side." Russian Neofascists use the Internet to locate minorities on interactive online maps and organize pogroms, while the Chinese and Russian governments use the availability of all kinds of free online entertainment, from video games to pornography, to "dedemocratize" and "depoliticize" their citizens. What do Chinese and Russian citizens search for when they face the abyss of information lying behind the search bar of Google and RuTube1? As Morozov notes in the chapter, "Orwell's Favorite Lolcat", "The most popular Internet searches on Russian search engines are not for 'what is democracy?' or 'how to protect human rights?' but for 'what is love?' and 'how to lose weight?'" The Internet might be too big to censor, but there is no need for censorship in societies hypnotized by free entertainment kindly sponsored by their government.

Still, *The Net Delusion* does not completely denounce the possibility that the Internet can spur positive societal change. It does, though, call for an unbiased and thorough approach to the study of the Internet. The author wants to draw our attention to the complexity of the phenomenon at hand, and to the fact that its nature resists categorization as either "good" or "bad." "The premise of the book is thus very simple: To salvage the Internet's promise to aid the fight against authoritarianism, those of us in the West who still care about the future of democracy will need to ditch both cyber-utopianism and Internet-centrism," which, together, add up to *The Net Delusion*.

The future of the Internet depends on our awareness of its complexity and ambiguity. If we are interested in acquiring the power to control, or at least predict, the consequences brought about by the Internet, then, according to Morozov, it is necessary to have an unbiased and deep understanding of the phenomenon, which demands thorough scientific analysis and careful evaluation. ■

REPORTS

THE MIDDLE EAST

The Right to the City

Yearning for democracy in Turkey

BY CEM TURKOZ

Since the 28th of May, Turkey has been witnessing nationwide public protests unprecedented in its history. The protests, which have escalated into violent clashes in some places, reveal the latent discomfort of a significant portion of the population with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. For the most part, the protests have focused on public concerns about a decade-long sequence of regulations, legal reforms, and proposals by the AKP government, among them tighter restrictions on the sale of alcohol and a ban on all alcohol advertising, the removal of restrictions on religious schools and Qur'an courses, and increased government intervention in family life, from a campaign to ban abortion to a proposal to ban adultery. Erdoğan has recommended that families have at least three children.

"Turkey is secular, and secular it will remain."

Additionally, the AKP government has been prosecuting and imprisoning prominent intellectuals and critics of the regime, as well as dozens of current and former military personnel on anti-state charges. Erdoğan's criticism of various journalists has caused media outlets to fire anti-AKP staff, creating a culture of self-censorship in the press. The European Human Rights Court received nearly 90,000 complaints against Turkey for breaching freedom of press and freedom of expression in 2011.

Almost all of the regulations AKP has passed or proposed in the last decade suggest, to a significant portion of the population, a movement towards an authoritarian, anti-progress agenda. This has frightened the secular segments of the society, especially the Kemalists (supporters of the ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and served as its first president). They fear that AKP is corrupting the fundamental values of the republic, and that its efforts could result in a change in the nation's political regime—that is to say, a shift from a democratic, secular state governed by the rule of law and founded on human rights, to an autocratic, Islamic state governed by the rule of shari'a, or Islamic law. A series of peaceful mass rallies against the AKP government and in support of a strict state secularism took place across Turkey in 2007 under the slogan: "Turkey is secular, and secular it will remain."

Yet neither these rallies nor the secular opposition in general have succeeded in defeating the party. Voters have reelected the party twice; in each election, AKP's percentage of the vote has grown. So it was not secularists' fear that triggered the current protests in Turkey; the failure of their previous attempts had dulled their assertiveness. Rather, it was the resistance of a few environmentalists camping out in Gezi Park in Istanbul, who refused to let the government demolish the park and replace it with a shopping mall. That day, May 28, police forces used tear gas to disperse the

Crowds in Gezi, Turkey. *PHOTO C/O WIKIMEDIA COMMONS*

protestors and burned down their tents. The more oppressive the government's tactics, the more the protests grew. The more the protests grew, the more severe the government's tactics.

The size of the protests increased rapidly, largely because of online activists' calls for support against the police crackdown. The number of sit-in protestors reached 1,000 in Istanbul, and within 48 hours the state was engulfed by protests in several cities. Riot police turned Istanbul's busiest district, Taksim, into a battleground, using water cannons and pepper spray against thousands of protestors. According to the Interior Ministry of Turkey, 2.5 million people attended Gezi protests across Turkey between May 31 and June 21.

The protests were not just about a group of trees. They were about the personal freedom of citizens whose rights had been taken away, one after another, over the course of a decade.

The protests were not just about a group of trees. They were about the personal freedom of citizens whose rights had been taken away, one after another, over the course of a decade. People who cared little about changes to the constitution or prohibitions on the sale of alcohol suddenly found themselves protesting on the streets. Perhaps there was something about the demolition of a park—an area of land set aside for public use—that made tangible the wounds that the government had inflicted on its people. The freedom to reshape or preserve the city was tied to the freedom to reshape the individual, and it was obvious to everyone that the government had just usurped the people's right to their city at Gezi Park.

As the protests grew, the incident developed a number of unique and eye-opening characteristics. After police abandoned the area, protestors blocked access roads to Gezi Park against a possible police raid with barricades of paving stones, traffic signs, and whatever else they could find. Meanwhile, Gezi had become a kind of utopian dwelling place wherein even diametrically opposed ideologies could coexist. It was a place where the young and the old, the secular and the religious, the soccer hooligans, the handicapped, environmentalists, liberals, nationalists, homosexuals, anarchists, and communists slept side by side. Before Gezi, these groups had never found common cause. Now they had an opportunity to recognize and acknowledge one another fully.

The camp had a hand-drawn map, a public toilet facility, a fully operational kitchen, an infirmary, a library, a stage, and even a veterinary clinic. Although the riot police violently, indeed desperately, endeavored to disperse protesters who tried to enter the park, it wasn't the police violence that startled me: It was the perfect organization of the protesters in the park, their perseverance, and, especially, their insistence on resisting, not reacting. All protesters were unarmed. And though they reacted as they could by breaking things and writing on the walls, they neither attacked the police nor provoked them. Instead, one can say that the primary weapon of the protesters was humor. For instance, in response to Erdoğan's description of the protesters as looters (*capulcu*) demonstrators took up the name as a symbol of pride, called themselves looters, and identified their peaceful resistance as *chapulling*. Penguins were adopted as a symbol to protest the self-censorship of the Turkish news media that aired, instead of reports on the protests, penguin documentaries. It was what the BBC called "an explosion of expression." Protestors rebuked Erdoğan: "You're messing with the generation that beats cops in GTA," a reference to the video game *Grand Theft Auto*. Guy Fawkes masks, dust masks, and swimming goggles were used to protect against tear-gas.

There were no party flags, no party slogans, and no operating party functionaries. The

demonstrations had arisen from bottom-up processes, and, in all likelihood, heterogeneity and the absence of a leading figure was exactly what the protestors wanted. They did not allow anyone, any organization of any sort, to lead them, to make decisions for them, even to play the mediator between them and the government. In short, they demonstrated that they did not want to be directed or ruled in the truest sense of the word and in the noblest sense of human freedom.

Yet the diversity had a frightening aspect, too. To me, the combination of circumstances resembled a war in which young souls from myriad backgrounds, all with different origins, different beliefs, different ideologies, and different dreams, pursued one and the same cause. But what was the cause? Clearly, it wasn't to deter the government from demolishing the park anymore. From the slogans shouted, it sounded like each group had its own demands, ranging from the cancellation of some ongoing construction to demands for sexual freedom for homosexuals, for the legal sale of alcohol, and for an end to Internet restrictions. But all of these demands converged at one point: to frustrate the plans of a deluded leader, to remind him that he is not a supreme ruler, that the land belongs to the people living on it, and that the citizens have to have a share in the decision-making power, especially when it comes to the fundamental rights that underlie human existence: the right to the self and the right to the city. These protests demonstrated that it was impossible for man to distinguish and detach the city from himself. In this case the city was the site of history, within which men resided as citizens and actualized their being. They exhibited the imperishable interdependence between the citizen and the city. Gezi was not only a park, but a political—now historical—site.

Manifesting that the Turkish citizens had to have a share in the power of decision-making was the most important achievement of the entire struggle. They had to because the Gezi Park incident and the following nationwide protests proved that Turkey is not one of those Middle Eastern countries in which a democratically elected leader can turn into a violent autocrat whose word is law. The citizens had to because they had a social and political awareness that Erdoğan had failed to perceive. They had to because democracy and its fundamental values were inalienable for them. These protests reveal that in just 80 years Turkey's shift to democracy has been completed. Not just the laws, but, more importantly, the people have become democratic.

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Nonetheless, the protests in Turkey have surprised not only the prime minister and the AKP government; we, the generation scolded as apolitical and apathetic, amazed ourselves. Masses of students proved to everyone, but most importantly to themselves, that they can acquire and develop an active political character when the circumstances call them to action.

Over the years, Turkey has faced several military coups. Were they necessary, we might now wonder? Or was the self-recognition of an entire nation delayed? Perhaps democracy and its core values were more deeply rooted in Turkey than many people thought. It may be the enduring irony of Erdoğan and the AKP's increasingly intolerable rule: that its oppression helped Turkey realize a side of itself many would not have guessed existed. ■

Camping in Gezi: Two Perspectives

In the last week of May, a small group of environmentalist protestors camped in the public Gezi Park in the center of Istanbul. They were there to protest the "reconstruction" that was supposed to happen in the park: in place of the park, a mall, by the diktat of the prime minister. There are more than 80 shopping malls in Istanbul, over 30 in the construction phase. By contrast, there are only 20 in New York City. It was clear that Istanbul did not need any more shopping malls.

On the third morning of this small group's camping protest the police walked into the park, burned protesters' tents, and seized their belongings. It was only after that morning that the entire country became aware of the plans for the destruction of the park, and the brutal actions of the police forces against the environmentalists were all that the country needed to explode.

On May 31 of this year, more than a million people took to the streets to protest in cities all over Turkey. Two things were shocking to all: the brutality of police forces and the absence of media coverage. The mainstream media ignored the protests, but people came up with alternative ways to spread information. Social media was used extensively, and soon enough alternative TV channels started showing live streams from the protests. Because of the rough clashes of the protestors with the police, many people were injured and needed medical help. By the night of June 1, thanks to volunteer doctors and donated medical supplies, every big protesting area had a functioning health clinic.

Meanwhile, the ambulances were carrying supplies of tear gas to the police forces.

But people would not leave Gezi Park despite the police violence. On the contrary, within days the protestors were joined by folks from other cities, protesting in their local parks. Thousands of the protestors were arrested. Hundreds were injured. Many were blinded when police misused gas capsules.

The first death happened on the June 4: Abdullah Cömert, a 22-year-old activist. Nine others have died since because of police violence. On June 23, Prime Minister Erdoğan congratulated and praised the police forces for their heroic action.

I was there at Gezi Park at the beginning of June. At that time, the park was turned into a communal living area with discussion forums, art, and food available 24 hours a day. Donations were flowing to the park non-stop from everywhere in Turkey. For the first time in my life I saw a free restaurant and free cafes; I saw health stations unable to accept any more help or donations.

Apart from camping at the Gezi park, I joined the marches almost every night, and experienced the energy of people determined to fight for justice in the only way left to them: getting together, making themselves heard, walking every street of Istanbul, and inviting others to join the movement. Many joined every night. Many others prayed for the protesters as they watched us walk through the streets.

It was inspiring to me that the whole country seemed to be united in the protest. All through the summer, every night at 9pm hundreds of people would express their indignation with the political situation in the country by loudly banging the saucepans on the balconies and flickering the lights. Five-year-olds and 95-year-olds, cats and dogs—all were out there on the balconies, and this was happening all over the country.

Unfortunately, I cannot say that this summer's protest movement has brought about

tangible political changes. However, it showed the citizens of Turkey that opposition exists, that it is strong, and that people can and are willing to gather and express their views. For many supporters of the AKP, the protest was an eye-opening event; it shed light on the true nature and intentions of the ruling political party.

The Gezi Protest was a movement created by the Turkish youth. I am proud of my generation for their lack of political complacency and their open protest against the unhealthy political system, which, unfortunately, persists still in Turkey. ■

— Gurer Gundondu

When I set out on my trip to Europe this summer—you know, the one all semi-privileged kids take as a coming-of-age thing—I never expected to find myself in the middle of a violent protest. Alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, kidnapping, prostitution, sure. But tear gas and water tanks and staying in tents, protesting the unjust Turkish prime minister day and night, that is another story. That is my story. Or rather, I am a small part of that story.

I arrived in Istanbul at the end of May, just as the unrest was growing. Fresh off the plane from Barcelona, where all I did was party, I was in the mood for something new. I went into the city to meet two of my friends from St. John's College—one Turkish, one Brazilian—and when it was suggested that we go to the protests, I jumped at the chance. Just before I had boarded the plane, my dad had warned me over the phone not to go. But my curiosity got the best of me, and so I went, armed with flimsy pharmaceutical masks and swim goggles bought for ten turkish liras.

At first it was all good fun, just another notch to add to my bedpost of experiences during my trip. Camping out in Taksim square in a tent, screaming out things that sounded similar to whatever the Turkish people were shouting, reading satirical comics about the government, blowing my whistle to the beat of the protest chants (incidentally, the rape whistle given to all freshmen at St. John's), dancing to the live music. But slowly, over my first week in Istanbul, I got to know the words and meanings of the protest chants, the number of people that had died for the cause, and how unjust the prime minister, Erdoğan, had been to the Turkish people for the past ten years. My friends and I had to run from water tanks, fearing our safety. Fellow protesters told me about how they had been tear gassed multiple times. I saw the pictures—the ages and the occupations of the persons that had been killed in the protests. Suddenly, it wasn't just fun and exhilarating anymore, and when my Turkish friend's aunt asked why I was protesting, I knew exactly why: Human rights were being violated, and I had both a right and a responsibility to at least voice my indignation about it.

There were beautiful moments, too. My friends and I tried to offer our services to the makeshift medical tents and the food kitchens at the protests, and our offers were graciously rejected because, according to the people in charge, they had a surplus of help, both of material and labor. When I accidentally cut my foot on a broken beer bottle, the medics patiently calmed me down (in English), and mended my injury, leaving me both grateful and awed at everyone's generosity.

As I write this from the safety of my apartment in Annapolis, there is still great political turmoil in Turkey. Western media outlets have long since moved on to more eye-catching news about Syria and Egypt and wherever else. And while I do believe that these countries deserve their spotlights and wish them nothing but peace, I hope that this bit of writing is received as a small contribution for peace and justice in the country I fell in love with. ■

— Jandi Keum

CHINA

The People's Republic Goes Nuclear

BY CHANG LIU

One day after a rare public protest, Chinese authorities said Saturday, July 13, that they were abandoning plans to construct a uranium processing plant in southeastern China, where residents raised concerns about its safety and potential environmental impact. The quick cancellation of the 37-billion-RMB ($6.1B) project is surprising, offering new insights into the influence of public opinion on the Chinese government's nuclear policy.

A *New York Times* article on the protest leaves the impression that the Chinese government was merely reacting to a spontaneous and unanticipated shift in public opinion. It failed to mention the Heshan City government's role in setting up a series of public outreach efforts during the pre-development planning phases as early as October 2012. These included a visit to an existing uranium plant in Sichuan by a delegation of officials. After months of preparation, the government finally contracted with the China National Nuclear Corporation and paid 140-million-RMB ($23M) in compensations to peasants living at the proposed site.

The pre-development phase included construction of a weather forecast station for data collection (whether this was the beginning of official construction became a problem later). The government posted news on the construction plan and even a blog post that welcomed comments and suggestions on its website, following up with continuous updates on the subsequent stages of the project. Additionally, face-to-face meetings with netizens were held and posters were made accessible to the public, explaining the clean technology employed in the project.

Yet the government's effort to build public support for the project didn't seem to pay off. A majority of people found the notion of "nukes" objectionable and frequently cited the dangers of nuclear technology demonstrated by Chernobyl and Fukushima. Most of them ignored the few but knowledgeable voices in support of the government arguments: increased economic benefits and relief from energy shortages.

The concern over nuclear technology escalated, when, on July 4, the National Development and Reform Commission posted online its "social risk assessment," an evaluation of the risks of key government investments to social stability. The local mayor claimed, "The project won't be approved unless agreed by the people."

Thanks to the growing sophistication of Chinese social media technologies that have made it harder for the government to censor the Internet, numerous "Wei Bo" tweets (Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging service) called for protests. In response to the crisis, the government arranged several media conferences in which experts offered scientific and technical explanations, hoping to alleviate major concerns about the proposed nuclear plant. Those efforts did not stop the mass protest, and the government gave a firm order to cancel the project altogether.

PHOTO BY NBCNEWS

Reflecting on the chain of events, it is clear that the government's constant attempts to claim authoritative scientific knowledge were based on the assumption that, because the general public knows little about the relevant scientific matter at stake, education will naturally will naturally dispose them to agree with any project involving science and technology. This assumption (from the famous "deficit model," which attributes public skepticism or hostility to a lack of scientific understanding) is severely challenged in this case, where presenting pure scientific facts failed to convince the public.

Research in science communication has shown that "science literacy plays a limited role in public perceptions and decisions." Despite the government's efforts to educate, and its sincerity in communicating, fear and distrust in the technology or the government (or both) dominated the public consciousness, forming two dominant narratives, or "frames," bridging the technology issue and the public concerns:

1. "I just don't like the prospect of a nuclear plant here. No matter how much you maintain it is safe, Fukushima and Chernobyl told me: The (disastrous) aftermath can be too serious." This fear reflects the frame that nuclear energy is a "Pandora's Box," liable to have irreversibly disastrous effects.
2. "Even though the government claims that this plant is harmless and 100 percent safe, we just don't trust them. . . . We're already scared to drink the water. Maybe it will be okay for this generations, but what about the next?" Past government mismanagement of environmental and food safety issues remain sticking points, making the public accountability frame very effective.

By adhering to the deficit model, instead of discerning existing public values and utilizing preferred communication channels, the government risks widening the knowledge gaps, or losing the opportunity for effective communication. The French government, by contrast, had some success in popularizing nuclear energy despite initial protests by framing the issue in ways that were culturally acceptable. The Chinese government could commit more to early public engagement to achieve effective science communication: Perhaps with appropriate frames and dialogues, a collective decision could be reached that wouldn't put experts and the public on a collision course.

Nevertheless, in this case, the Chinese government clearly foresaw the potential objections to its nuclear project, then invited expert opinions and media coverage—all long before posting the social risk assessment, which is part of a structured initiative for systematically determining public opinion toward government decisions and improving government transparency.

Unfortunately, this mode of communication still operates on the deficit model. It focuses mostly on disseminating knowledge to diverse, unengaged audiences. For three months between signing the contract and posting the assessment, the expert opinions reached officials, media, and certain interested citizens. Until the public comment period was approaching its end, a majority of the people were either uninterested or unaware.

Behind this incident lie growing public concerns about increasing environmental hazards created by the China's rapid economic development. I would call the cancellation a victory for the will of the people, especially the rising middle class who consider themselves capable of influencing policies. In fact, the cancellation of the Heshan uranium plant is not unique: Among the 51,000 key government investments since 2011, over 900 were cancelled because they presented serious "social-stability risks," and 3,100 were modified.

"The leadership of China decided a while ago that they would distinguish two kinds of protests," an adjunct professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong observed. They will crush those perceived as anti-government or anti-Communist Party, while telling local governments to compromise on demands that are environmental or economic in nature, he said. This might explain the fact why the illegal protest was not touched at all.

Acknowledging the growing influence of China's civil society, the government has become more accountable and shown increasing sensitivity to public concerns in environmental and technological issues. The important point to note here is that a fuller account of the events leading up to the cancellation portrays an image that is quite different from a stereotypically top-down, authoritarian policy-making system, where no protest would be tolerated (or reported). This cancellation indicates the slowly growing influence of public opinion on China's policymakers and experts—and, what is more, it is a trend to an extent facilitated by the government. ■

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