

HUMOR AS RESISTANCE:  
THE CASE OF ZAYTUNG

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Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Sabancı University  
July 2018

HUMOR AS RESISTANCE:  
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Date of Approval: July 31, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### HUMOR AS RESISTANCE: THE CASE OF ZAYTUNG

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MA Thesis, July 2018

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**Keywords:** electronic media, irony, political humor, fake news, Turkey

This thesis focuses on the Turkish fictional/satirical news website Zaytung, which employs humor as a form of resistance. Zaytung makes fun of the political authority and practices of the Turkish mainstream media in its humorous fake news and parody news articles. Zaytung is a social platform in which anyone can sign up and write their own fictional humorous news articles. A humorous alternative reality is produced and presented to the public by Zaytung as a reaction to the discourses of conventional journalism in Turkey. With Zaytung's new perspective surrounded with irony, a different political consciousness is created. There are examples of Zaytung news articles that are taken seriously, and also examples of conventional news articles pointed out for being "like Zaytung news". I argue that not only mainstream representations of reality affect Zaytung, but also the website affects mainstream conceptions of reality by shaping readers' approaches to it as in the example of "like Zaytung news". The website demonstrates the absurdity in that reality by approaching it in a subversive and humorous way. In this thesis, I suggest that plurality provided by parody and irony helps Zaytung play with politics, reality, and the boundaries of humor.

## ÖZET

### DİRENİŞ YÖNTEMİ OLARAK MİZAH: ZAYTUNG ÖRNEĞİ

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Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Temmuz 2018

Tez danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Sibel Irzık

**Anahtar kelimeler:** elektronik medya, ironi, politik mizah, sahte haber, Türkiye

Bu tez, mizahı bir direniş biçimi olarak kullanan Türk kurgu/hiciv haber sitesi Zaytung'a odaklanmaktadır. Zaytung, esprili sahte haber ve parodi haber makalelerinde siyasi otoriteyi ve ana akım medyanın uygulamalarını şaka haber konusu ediyor. Zaytung herkesin kendi kurgusal esprili haber makalelerini yazabileceği bir sosyal platformdur. Zaytung tarafından, Türkiye'deki geleneksel gazetecilik söylemlerine bir tepki olarak mizahi bir alternatif gerçeklik üretilir ve kamuoyuna sunulur. Zaytung'un ironi ile çevirili yeni bakış açısı ile farklı bir politik bilinç yaratılır. Zaytung haber makalelerinin ciddiye alındığı örnekler olduğu gibi, geleneksel haber makalelerinin "Zaytung haberi gibi" olduklarının gösterildiği örnekler vardır. Ben yalnızca sıradan gerçekliğin Zaytung'u etkilemediğini, aynı zamanda web sitesinin de "Zaytung haberi gibi" örneğinde olduğu gibi okurlarının yaklaşımlarını şekillendirerek sıradan gerçekliği etkilediğini ileri sürüyorum. Bu web sitesi, gerçeklikteki absürtlüğü, gerçekliğe değiştirici ve mizahi bir şekilde yaklaşarak ortaya koyuyor. Bu tez, parodi ve ironi tarafından sağlanan çoğulluğun, Zaytung'un siyaset, gerçeklik ve mizah sınırları ile oynamasına yardımcı olduğunu tartışmaktadır.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people that I am afraid of forgetting to thank with my general absent mindedness. I would like to thank:

To my committee members who were always there to answer my endless questions. If it weren't for Sibel Irzik's "how"s and "why"s this thesis wouldn't exist, I still find it incredible that she closely read and commented on every single paragraph of this thesis. Matthew Gumpert, Leyla Neyzi, Hülya Adak, and Ayşecan Terizoğlu generously gave their time and energy to this thesis. Their contributions and criticism shaped every chapter of it.

To my family, not only for the horrible sense of humor they passed on to me but also for their tireless support. I'm grateful to have the parents who haven't said "no, you can't" not even for once. I'm lucky to have a brother who has always been there to solve my problems and suffer my limitless desire to chitchat. I'm also thankful for my little sister who started to cry for forgetting her homework whenever I sat down to write this thesis at home.

To my friends Hana, Serhat, Ayşegül, Bade, Bahadır, Cansu, Ece, Hatice, Janine, Murat, Hazal, and Laura. They filled my Sabancı experience with amazing memories and delicious food. I will always admire this cohort's devotion to cook and carry whatever they prepared all the way to Sabancı. To Tolga, Gülşah, Gökçe, and Emre because they continued to listen to me even when they had no interest in whatever I was talking about. They had to put up with every chapter of this thesis countless times.

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## Chapter 1: THE INTRODUCTION

*Zaytung* is an “honest, impartial, immoral news”<sup>1</sup> website as their motto underlines upon every entrance at the upper left side of the website. The news website like its American counterpart, *the Onion*, posts daily parody news and humorous fake news. *Zaytung* makes use of the mainstream news style while making fun of the political authority and mainstream media. In this thesis, I regard *Zaytung* as an outcome of the political environment of Turkey and as a product of the power relations in Turkey. Current political incidents, public opinions, statements of the politicians, and practices of the Turkish mainstream media humorously find its place on the website every day. *Zaytung* is also a social platform in which members can write their own fictional humorous news articles as the website has over 120.000 registered members. This situation helps the website create a common social consciousness among members and readers. A humorous alternative reality, in accordance with the already existing absurd reality, is produced and presented to the public view by *Zaytung* as a reaction to the discourses of mainstream journalism and the experiences of everyday life in Turkey.

The name *Zaytung*, comes from the German word for newspaper: *die Zeitung*. German connotation is particularly chosen for the incongruity between how serious the website sounds, as accordance with the cultural stereotype that any word sounds harsh and serious in German language, and how it directs this seriousness into absurdity. The website was founded in 2009 by Hakan Bilginer, and now it has over 120.000 members<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Dürüst, tarafsız, ahlaksız haber”

<sup>2</sup> The numbers are given by Bilginer himself.



who actively contribute to the website in sections such as video, blog, cinema, books, games, sports, astrology, magazine, public voice, breaking news, and photo news. The news articles written by the editors of the website do not have any nicknames written under the news but others which were written by registered members are posted with the creator's nickname. The website also receives advertisements, the writers register and write voluntarily for the website, and they don't receive any payment from *Zaytung*, whereas the editors are professionally working for *Zaytung*. There are share buttons for Facebook, Twitter, and Google+; the reader comment to the news article through a Facebook plugin and their comments can be seen right under the humorous news article, and finally if they find the news article offensive or simply don't like it they can press the green button which says "Refer it to Allah's Punishment"<sup>3</sup> which I'll discuss in lines with the borders of humor.

Why did humorous fake/parody news articles started to occur in Turkish humor? What did change in our understanding of "funny" and led us to *Zaytung* news? The conception of humor has always been shaped by the context in which it evolves. Fatma Müge Göçek suggests that political cartoons started to appear in the Middle East and Ottoman Empire as a result of the Western influence at the late 19th century (Göçek: 1998). And Ayhan Akman states that after 1930 cartooning turned into a profession like journalism as the caricature magazines started to flourish (Akman: 1998). There were several cartoon magazines such as *Kalem*, *Karagöz*, *Cem*, *Diken* and *Akbaba*; however from the late 1920s and on numerous cartoon magazines found their places in Turkish media as *Gırgır*, *Mikrop*, *Fırt*, *Deli*, *Çarşaf*, *Avni*, *Limon*, *Pişmiş Kelle*, *Şebek*, *Leman*, *Uykusuz*, *Penguen*... Humor has always been related to youth, and these magazines were shaping the tradition of humor with regards to youth's desires and the language the youth were using (Sipahioğlu: 1999). In 1997 Levent *Cantek* compares *Gırgır* (1972) and *Leman* (1991) magazines and states that "As a result of popular culture's nature, when one is wearing out the other one, namely 'the newer one' stands 'closer' to time and the society ... *Leman*, just as its 'master' whose heritage it received did once,

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<sup>3</sup> "Allah'a havale et"

follows an innovative road catching up very well with the ‘street and time’<sup>4</sup> (Cantek, 61). This is what brings us to *Zaytung*. The space of fast response provided by the internet and social media is one of the major reasons for this shift from caricature to memes and humorous news articles. New mediums not only affect the language of humor but also the approaches to reality. A claim turning out to be a lie may not be as scandalous in this era as it was before (Chapter 3). What humorous fake news does is playing with the desire to believe. Supporters of government tend to believe in pro-government fake news whereas opposers of the government believe in anti-government fake news. Tayyip Erdoğan’s son-in-law and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Berat Albayrak comments on this desire to believe with an incident, he says: “While we were talking with our voting citizens recently, someone said "Vallahi we trust so much in the party Mr. Minister that if our president says that I will make a 4-lane road from there to the moon, vallahi we will believe it."<sup>5</sup> Desire to believe turns the 4-lane road to the moon into a probable impossibility, making the fake believable. And what *Zaytung* does is carping an understanding of humor out of this believable fakeness and absurdity. Besides the desire to believe, social media also nourished another desire: the immediate desire to laugh. A weekly caricature magazine cannot fully fulfil that desire in this era, maybe not even a daily one. What *Zaytung* does is providing its readers with up-to-date humor at any time any place. The one who can catch up with the time and street in 1997 was *Leman* in comparison with *Gırgır*, now it is websites like *Zaytung*, *Twitter*, *The Onion*... If *Zaytung* cannot keep up with the pace of youth and internet, it will eventually be the old one with an outdated sense of humor.

The question I will try to find an answer to is whether *Zaytung* has any effect over politics and reality or not. Does humor actually change anything in resistance? And what role does humor play in this resistance? Humor is generally thought to be the “weapon of the weak” (Hart: 2007) as it provides a distance between criticism and the

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<sup>4</sup> Popüler kültürün doğası gereği biri eskirken diğeri, yani ‘daha yeni olan’ı zamana ve topluma daha yakın ‘duruyor’... *Leman* mirasını aldığı ‘usta’sının vakt-i zamanında yaptığı gibi ‘sokak ve takvim’i iyi yakalayan yenilikçi bir yok izliyor.

<sup>5</sup> <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/197733-cumhurbaskani-ay-a-yol-vaat-etse-inanacak-secmenimiz-var>

joke, therefore working not only as a weapon but also as a shield protecting the joker from the outcomes of the joke/critique from time to time. This concealed manner of critique makes jokes the “weapon of the weak”. But this doesn’t mean that humor does not have any effect over authority. The humorous tone of *Zaytung*’s news articles is a strategy used for attacking the seriousness of the authority. I believe since that serious manner of the authority is an important part of keeping power in hand, attacking its seriousness is actually attacking the essence of authority. Jokes about any authority turns the authority into a subject of laughter while it needs seriousness for discipline. And once the crack is placed on the surface of severity, any reaction toward it just expands the crack. Any serious response to the joke is taking the joke seriously which adds another layer to the humor in it (see the Gollum case in chapter 3). Even the ones who did not laugh at the joke in the beginning, laughs when the authority figure tries to seriously punish the joke. Reactions draw attentions. Attracting people’s attention is related to Joseph Nye’s conceptualization of “the soft power”. He says “It [the soft power] is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye “Preface”, x). Attention brings a shared socio-political environment.

### **1.1. Methodology**

What I mostly did for my thesis research was content analysis and close readings of the news articles *Zaytung* posted to have a better understanding of not only the elements of humor in them but also the borders of humor. I closely analyzed several *Zaytung* articles based on theoretical approaches to humor in the beginning of Chapter 2, I analyzed some based on their relationship with reality as parody news and humorous fake news in Chapter 3, and finally in Chapter 4 I closely read some of the humorous news articles based on how they were constructed to mimic the conventional news style and what their relationship with the “offensive” was. Besides closely reading the humorous news articles, for Chapter 4, I became a member of the website as well. I tried to write satirical news articles in order to understand the strategies of writing a *Zaytung* news article. Trying to write news articles for *Zaytung* helped me analyze the construction of a *Zaytung* article.

For my research I conducted interviews with *Zaytung*'s founder Hakan Bilginer. After founding *Zaytung* in 2009, Hakan Bilginer resigned his job as a systems engineer and started to direct the website fulltime in 2011. The first one of our interviews took place in early 2017, which was before I started trying to put *Zaytung* as a satirical news website into a framework within humor, politics, and reality. And the second interview was in early 2018 as I was writing my thesis I had many questions in my mind not only about *Zaytung*'s position in politics but also the website's construction which he kindly answered. My main plan was to interview not only Bilginer but also the editors of the website in order to analyze their position in the construction of the *Zaytung* news articles. Even though Bilginer first accepted my request for interviewing the editors, after my second interview with him he didn't give me any contact information of the editors and then didn't return my calls or e-mails afterwards. When I tried to reach the editors through different channels, they declined my requests of interview stating that they had no time.

I also conducted an interview with Meral Tutcalı (Chapter 3), as she was prosecuted for sharing a *Zaytung* news article about the Adana governor of Turkey of that time and was sentenced to one year and two months in prison for which she got a postponement, and I was wondering how and why she got accused for only sharing a humorous news article in the creation of which she had no role, the process of her prosecution, and whether or not the lawsuit affected her approach to humor and she stated that:

**MT:** "I regard the penalty given to me as a result of the political pressure on humor in Turkey... It's just that I was very active on social media at that time, and I always thought that they tried to intimidate other activists through me as I had a high number of followers."<sup>6</sup>

I reached Tutcalı through the merits of social media. She didn't lock her account after the lawsuit and she was still using her name and surname on her public Twitter account even though this was a part of what made her face the defamation trial from which I can deduce that she was not intimidated.

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<sup>6</sup> Bana verilen cezayı Türkiye'de mizaha yapılan politik baskının sonucu olarak görüyorum... Sadece o dönem sosyal medyada çok aktifim,takipçi sayım yüksek olunca benim üzerimden diğer aktivistlere gözdağı vermeye çalıştılar diye düşündüm hep.

### 1.1.2. Positionality

Before interviewing both Hakan Bilginer and Meral Tutcalı, I introduced myself as a master's student at Sabancı University wnnho was planning to conduct research on *Zaytung*. I explained them directly what I am doing for my research and why am I interested in interviewing them, and where I will use their answers. I conducted the interviews in Turkish and then I translated my transcriptions to English to use in the thesis, giving the original Turkish versions of their answers in the footnotes.

On my interviews with Hakan Bilginer, me being a young middle class Turkish student put me into *Zaytung*'s target group which may have affected his way of answering my questions. Also, I believe the fact that I am a cis-gender woman may have affected his answers to my questions about borders of humor in some of the news articles on *Zaytung* which were relying on sexist stereotypes as a part of the joke. In the case of my interview Meral Tutcalı, she mentioned that she is a sociology graduate and she was interested in my research therefore there was a common ground between us which may have inclined her to help me with my research and answer my questions.

I think becoming a member of *Zaytung* did not affect my approach to *Zaytung*'s position in politics and media. I did not represent *Zaytung* after becoming a member as becoming a member of the website is quite easy since it only requires a registration with a nickname which can be done by anyone, in anytime and anyplace with an internet connection. There is a "become a member" button on the upper right corner of the website through which anyone can sign up and send their news article drafts to the editors. But trying to write a humorous news article for *Zaytung* helped me have a better understanding of the role of anonymity and punctuality in posting something on the internet (Chapter 4).

## 1.2. Theory

In the second chapter in order to conceptualize *Zaytung*'s humor I reviewed some humor theories. For example, I used incongruity theory not only because *Zaytung* brings together the serious news style and its absurd content or jargon, but also because the website subverts our already formed expectations from things. I used relief theory for *Zaytung*'s news articles which are joking about the repressed. I used superiority theory for the suggestion of change and superiority which underlies in some of the website's news articles. I used the conceptualization of humor as a defense mechanism for dark humor about war and violence on the website which could be considered as a way of overcoming horror. And humor as social corrective was humor's role in othering as *Zaytung* was directing its jokes towards what didn't fit into its own middle class, young, educated, urban sense of humor.

However, as I thought I can't conceptualize *Zaytung*'s position in politics and reality only within these theories, I turned to carnival theory. There is an interesting resemblance between *Zaytung*'s transgression or subversion of reality and Bakhtin's analysis of carnival because upon every entrance to the website mainstream conceptions of reality and the hierarchical order in it are suspended which is triggering the critical minds of the readers with a potential for reversal suggesting that the arbitrary power relations can change. *Zaytung* plays with reality through a suspension of ordinary conceptions of reality upon every entrance to the website. What carnival targets is also the reality. Just like the subversion of reality taking place in the carnival, *Zaytung* chooses incidents from reality and subverts them in a humorous way. I will also discuss the criticisms against carnival's role in resistance as an "authorized transgression" (Eco, 6), and the difference between Bakhtinian carnival and *Zaytung*'s carnival.

These are the general theories that I used to describe some of humor's effects and partly to describe humor as an effect. However, what directed me towards a reading of *Zaytung* as a form of resistance was Foucault's theory over the productive role of power. According to Foucault "[p]ower is everywhere" (Foucault *History of...*, 93) but this surroundedness with power is not necessarily a bad and only-repressive thing. The idea

of resistance and non-compliance with mainstream media is the main theme in all of the three chapters of this thesis. As Foucault says, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault “History of...”, 95). The resistance always takes in relation to power, as an outcome of power. In the third part of the second chapter I discussed resistance as an outcome of power in lines with *Zaytung*’s role in resistance. Foucault endows a creative force to power which I find very useful in this analysis. Power does not solely repress, repression causes reaction and alternative ways of resistance to repression. *Zaytung* resists to silence and mainstream media by producing an alternative reality -tied both closely and subversively to the mainstream representations of reality- and presenting this alternative to their readers, reacting to the discourses of mainstream media. The website plays its role in non-compliance in four different ways. First of all, *Zaytung* makes use of its playfulness in order to crack the seriousness on which the authority depends, and the website refuses to be a part of serious structure of the authority. Second, *Zaytung* opens up a humorous space for political communication which helps the writers convey criticism in a concealed manner. Four, telling a joke is a social incident. As a social field of numerous interactions, the website creates a shared social consciousness with the help of humor. And finally, *Zaytung*’s parody of the mainstream news articles, introduces skepticism to truth claims of the mainstream media while pluralizing the mainstream news article, undermining its truth claim, and triggering the critical minds of the readers to questioning the “truth claim” these news articles claim to have.

### 1.3. Literature Review

There aren’t many articles written on *Zaytung*. Ersoy and Balyemez, in their article “Geleneksel ve Sosyal Medya’nın Haber Dili: Zaytung Örneği”<sup>7</sup> suggest that media is in a transition period and they distinguish traditional and social media in terms of reporting (Ersoy and Balyemez: 2013). They find out that many people assume *Zaytung*’s humorous fake news articles right because of the professional news language

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<sup>7</sup> “News Language of the Traditional and Social Media: The Example of ‘Zaytung’”

being used on the website, long headlines and long news articles with less visual use draws more of a traditional style of journalism, and the fact that the website reached a lot of followers in a short span of time shows us that there is a need for entertainment and humor among people. This research approaches to *Zaytung* either as deception or as entertainment. They do not cover the reasons of some people's tendency to take *Zaytung* news as real, and also the alternative approach to politics and reality *Zaytung* provides which can't be categorized merely as entertainment. In another conference paper Eşitti and Işık take *Zaytung* as an example of satiric infotainment. I find their rejection of the "binary of 'boring news' and 'taloid type of news'" quite interesting. (Eşitti and Işık, 271). I also regard their discussion of the blurred lines between information and entertainments, and their conceptualization of media in Turkey very useful; however, the humor element in infotainment is not discussed in detail. The space of satire for *Zaytung* is mostly provided by the humor element on the website. Oklay (Oklay; 2015) mentions *Zaytung* while discussing "hoax news websites", I find her brief commentary on "hoax news" as a Brechtian alienation effect similar to and helpful for my discussion of parody news of *Zaytung* (Chapter 3). *Zaytung* as an example of the interesting usage of humor in media is not researched extensively. In this thesis I aim to analyze *Zaytung* in detail in order to have a better understanding of humor's role in media, politics, and reality in Turkey.

I wanted to differentiate parody news and humorous fake news in this thesis, and I found no such differentiation in the literature in this field. The terms humorous fake news and parody news are used interchangeably, referring to both categories. Berkowitz and Schwartz put fake news into the category of hyper-reality because of the blurred lines between fiction and nonfiction (Berkowitz and Schwartz: 2016). Zoe Druick makes use of a Bakhtinian living notion of genre and as news parody systematically subverts traditional journalism, she suggests that it turns into a new genre positioned in accordance with conventional journalism (Druick: 2009). For Baym and Jones news parody is both a constructive and deconstructive tool, constructing a new genre while deconstructing conventional journalism (Baym and Jones: 2012). Achter, while analyzing humor in American media after 9/11 attacks, suggests that news parody also constructs a new decorum to address what is not addressable and to discuss the



undiscussable (Achter: 2008). In the articles of Harsin and Norris, we are situated in an era in which nobody cares about the truth, and as Harsin states regime of truth has changed (Harsin: 2015) (Norris: 2012). All of these articles are important to analyze the relationship between what *Zaytung* presents to the public view and reality. However, the reason why I wanted to analyze this relationship with reality in two different categories is what is presented on *Zaytung* can't be categorized solely as parody news or humorous fake news. Both humorous fake news and parody news are related to reality and fiction. But the amount of real and fictional differ in these categories. Parody news are generally more related to the incident which actually happened in reality whereas in humorous fake news the event does not take place in reality but some of the details and characters are closely linked to reality.

## Chapter 2:

### THE ZAYTUNG HUMOR

Humor is an elusive concept to analyze. It is easy to disagree over what is humorous and what is not since humor is thought to be subjective. But if humor is so subjective, how come it is shared so widely in our everyday social interactions, how come it works? How can a website like *Zaytung*, based on humorous fictional news, be so popular among people? What is it in humor that allures people into using it as a medium of communication in their social interactions? More importantly what is humor? In order to have a better understanding of *Zaytung*'s position in politics, I believe we need to understand its position in humor. There have been many theoretical approaches to humor and trying to define humor has been as attractive as employing it. In this chapter there is no attempt to explain and evaluate all theoretical approaches to humor. Instead, I want to show that although arriving at a comprehensive definition of humor has been a desire shared by many scholars, *the definition of humor* is inherently contradictory. Defining a concept is putting it into a box with clear boundaries, it is a way of restricting its changeability. It allows certain expectations and lends a kind of predictability to the concept. The attempt to provide a fixed and final definition of humor disregards the fact that humor depends on flexibility and unpredictability in order to actualize itself. For this reason, most social theories of humor grasp only some parts of what humor is and eventually they leave us with the idea that there is more in humor. Humor is a response and a reaction to reality. In *Zaytung*'s case it is a response to the mainstream media which delivers official "truths" but claims to deliver the "truth". *Zaytung* undermines this claim with its humorous fake news.

## 2.1. Theoretical approaches to humor

Jokes play with the concepts or things we already know. Humor actually depends on the already-existing knowledge of these things; or as John Morreall states, “Humor often involves incongruity based on spatial, temporal, and causal relationships. And so a creature with even a basic sense of humor needs much more than a creature capable merely of emotions – it needs a fairly sophisticated conceptual system” (Morreall, 216). Based on our former knowledge of two disconnected things, humor arises when they are intentionally connected within the joke by our sophisticated conceptual system. This is what the *incongruity theory* of humor suggests. Elliott Oring in his book *Engaging Humor* writes about *appropriate incongruity*. He states that he is not the founder of the concept of incongruity, instead he quotes the 18<sup>th</sup> century poet James Beattie’s proposition that “Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage” (Oring, 2). That assemblage of two unsuitable parts is what humor is all about. According to Oring, his theory of *appropriate incongruity* has two points which makes it different from the *incongruity-resolution* theory. The first difference is that *appropriate incongruity* does not suggest any resolution in the end. “The incongruity remains, even though points of connection between incongruous categories are discovered” (Oring, 2). The second difference stems from the assumption that temporal order exists between the recognition of the incongruity and its resolution. “*Appropriate incongruity* does not presume the order of recognition” (Oring, 2). Our recognition of two incongruous parts does not result in any resolution or order. When we laugh at a YouTube video of bird beating the drum with his beak<sup>8</sup>, the humor is not resolved and the two are now connected just because we recognize the incongruity between the bird and the drum. In our “fairly sophisticated conceptual system” we find an appropriateness between them. The bird’s beak being used as a drumstick is appropriately incongruous within the context of the joke. In the end they can continue to remain disconnected, because these two things were brought together in that instant since it was appropriate to bring them together in order to subvert our expectations and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsLn28TPUT0>

make the joke. *Zaytung* makes use of incongruity for the humor which arises as a result of the togetherness of serious news style and absurd content.

The incongruity theory of humor depends a lot on our expectations. The joke starts from what we have seen or lived before and then subverts these expectations formed by experiences. According to Kant these incongruities of humor are the major ingredients of laughter. *“Laughter is an affect arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing”* (Kant, 161 Italic in original). We have certain expectations from things, which are not met as the major part of the joke. If we return to *Zaytung* for an example to this theory, besides being a joke on our expectations from newspapers *Zaytung* also brings many incongruous concepts together in their news. In this example, over the years as a part of the New Year’s Eve celebrations, we have become accustomed to seeing photos of cities spectacularly illuminated by fireworks. Fireworks in this sense are essential parts of the New Year’s Eve celebrations. The celebration photographs start with a typical Sydney scenery under colorful fireworks and move on to other cities still with

fireworks. *Zaytung* takes these expectations from the New Year’s Eve which have been formed by years of repetition and subverts them in order to joke about current political tensions in the world. In this example the joke is also about North Korea’s nuclear

#### **Kuzey Kore de yeni yıla "merhaba" dedi...**



program<sup>9</sup>. This photograph above is given as breaking news with the headline stating *“Kuzey Kore de yeni yıla merhaba dedi...”* / “North Korea also welcomes the new

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/fotohaberdetay.asp?newsid=334824>

year...”. Humor in this example is achieved through manipulating the already formed expectations from New Year’s celebrations with fireworks and the current tension created by North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear bombs and fireworks generally are not things we bring and think together in our everyday lives. Referring to nuclear bombs as if they were fireworks and as a result turning the concept of welcoming the new year into mass destruction is the incongruity which helps *Zaytung* achieve its aimed effect of humor.

Stating that incongruity between different components of the joke creates humor does not give an explanation to our inclination to use humor in our daily interactions. *Relief theory* tries to give an explanation to that desire to make jokes. One of the most famous examples of the *relief theory* is considered to be Freud’s book *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. In his theoretical approach to humor, Freud considers jokes as a way of releasing energy that was linked to repressed urges and emotions. In his words a joke is “an amount of psychical energy, used until then for charging, to be released” (Freud, 142). According to Freud since we use this psychical energy mostly to repress sexual feelings, we have a tendency to find sexual jokes funnier or prefer to make sexual jokes unconsciously. I agree that people generally tend to laugh at sexual jokes which maybe trigger their unconscious mechanisms. *Zaytung* also makes use of this tendency from time to time and the suggested relief is aimed to be achieved through very gendered sexual jokes, which I will discuss in Chapter 4. In an example from *Zaytung*; in one of its humorous fake news *Zaytung* plays with how sex tapes of politicians are taken really seriously by the public and how they draw reactions. Generally, in the mainstream media right after the release of any sex tape the family of the politician is emphasized, community values are furiously underlined in criticisms, and then the whole thing is completely silenced. As in the example below *Zaytung*’s news article is both political and sexual it is repressed twice as much; therefore, it should be a great example for relief theorists. *Zaytung* at this minute comes out and turns into a medium to release repressed political and sexual feelings while joking about them. The news article is given with the headline:

“*Seks Kasedi Yalnızca 1.5 Dakika Süren Milletvekili Adayı Çifte Utanç Yaşıyor*”

“Parliamentary Candidate Whose Sex Tape Only Lasts 1.5 Minute Lives in Double Shame”<sup>10</sup>

in which one of the parliamentary candidates is ridiculed for his premature ejaculation problems even more than his relationship with a foreign prostitute which would have been the center of the news if it were in a newspaper of mainstream media. This article suits Freudian definition of relief achieved through joking about the repressed, generally sexual, feelings but are we really relieved after joking about them or laughing at them? I don't think we can define humor's effects only in these terms. The only intention behind Zaytung's humorous news articles can't be just achieving relief. Although I think regarding humor only as an instrument of relief is an unjust simplification of its characteristics, I do believe that there is some sort of relief achieved through joking because humor, especially in *Zaytung's* context, helps people to find another way of saying the unsayable. Later in this chapter, I will discuss whether we can consider this comic relief a form of resistance, besides saying the unsayable.

According to the superiority theory of humor, “the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourself, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly” (Hobbes, 42). This is also related to the carnivalesque character of humor which I'll discuss later in this chapter. The joker plays with infirmities and superiorities within these jokes. The one who makes the joke positions the butt of the joke in an inferior place in comparison to himself. In a scenario where the joker jokes about an authority figure, the joker becomes superior than the target which brings along an underlying suggestion of change and superiority within these jokes. The joker can joke about the authority figure, in this context, because the joke opens a fictional space in which the joker becomes superior to the target of the joke. This theory covers only a single aspect of humor and there is the fact that every unexpected achievement of superiority does not result in humor. Besides, I also disagree with Hobbes, because that suggestion of superiority is only momentary; the glory and eminence are sudden and the suggested superiority fades away as the joke ends. Is it so simple? Do people approach the joke like this, meaning it is only

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=100739>

momentary, or are the effects sometimes extended? Do both the joker and the target completely forget the suggested change in their hierarchical positions? In Chapter 3, I'll return to the extended effects of the sudden superiority achieved through a joke which ended up as a lawsuit between a university student and the governor of the Adana province of Turkey. In that case the governor considered the joke as a defamation attempt which may lead to questioning his authority. In another example President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's gold leaf chairs are targeted as an attack on his hierarchical position in reality.<sup>11</sup> In this humorous *Zaytung* article President Erdoğan supposedly responds to the criticisms which were targeting the chairs he used when he hosted Angela Merkel. In this article the chairs which resembled Ottoman thrones are targeted and as a result the relation between hierarchy and these gold leaf Ottoman chairs is subverted. The headline is about Erdoğan's own words:

“Erdoğan, Altın Varaklı Koltuk Eleştirilerine Yanıt Verdi: 'İkea'dan ucuza aldık, Emine Hanım'la birlikte kurduk...'” /

“Erdoğan Responded to the Gold Leaf Chair Criticisms: We bought them cheaply from Ikea and assembled them together with the first lady...”

The Ottoman throne suggests a superiority for the Sultan, but here, in this humorous news article, we laugh because these thrones are turned into Ikea chairs which makes them ridiculous. Within the carnivalesque space provided by the joke, any throne can be subverted to an Ikea chair.

These chairs shown in the photograph below were compared to thrones in the oppositional media also and the price of a single chair was calculated to be around 10000 Turkish liras.<sup>12</sup> They were highly criticized for their high cost. The chairs were a part of the Ottoman heritage and restored for President Erdoğan's use; therefore, they were obviously indicators of a certain status as it was linking the President with the Ottoman sultans. Instead of criticizing the money spent on the restoration of the Ottoman chairs or the throne-like figure of them like its mainstream counterparts, *Zaytung* chooses to subvert the suggested superiority of the chairs and turns them into

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=291658>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/paket-paket-altin-varak-kullanildi-97753.html>

ordinary chairs which could easily be bought from any Ikea store. Besides, in this parallel *Zaytung* universe, President and the First Lady even assemble the chairs by themselves, let alone the 10000 Turkish liras spent on a single chair as it was presumed, they don't even pay for assemblage in this version as if they were a newly-wed middle class couple instead of the extension of the Ottoman Empire which is something highly used in the discourse of the AKP regime.



In a later theoretical approach, humor is given another task: this time it is considered to be a survival strategy and a defense mechanism against the trauma of violence. Since this approach covers jokes about war and violence, the humor employed here is generally described as gallows humor. According to Chaya Ostrower, “gallows humor, is a vehicle for reducing anxiety that accompanies an awareness of death” (Ostrower, 190). We can come across gallows humor in many cultural products produced during or after incidents of violence and trauma. Antonin J. Obrdlik visited Czechoslovakia and started a sociological study of humor there conducting research about some of the incidents in which gallows humor is used among citizens during as well as after the German invasion. Obrdlik states that:



“Gallows humor, full of invectives and irony, is their psychological escape, and it is in this sense that I call gallows humor a psychological compensation. Its social influence is enormous. On many occasions I have observed how one good anecdote changed completely the mood of persons who have heard it-pessimists changed into optimists. Relying on my observations, I may go so far as to say that gallows humor is an unmistakable index of good morale and of the spirit of resistance of the oppressed peoples. Its decline or disappearance reveals either indifference or a breakdown of the will to resist evil. (Obrdlik 712)

Obrdlik in his approach gives humor a big social mission. Optimism is hard to attain during war but it is a psychological necessity for survival at the same time. Robert Corrigan states that “to be able to laugh at evil and error means that we have surmounted them” (Corrigan, 54). Humor is employed as a way of overcoming horror and sustaining humanity in a state where being human is mostly threatened. It is really hard to psychologically deal with the constant awareness of death and serious injuries. In this theoretical approach humor is used as a psychological tool. Rod A. Martin in his book *Psychology of Humor* states that:

“Studies of survivors of extreme adversity such as the brutal conditions of concentration camps indicate that humor, in the form of joking about the oppressors as well as the hardships endured, is often an important means of engendering positive emotions; maintaining group cohesion and morale; preserving a sense of mastery, hope, and self-respect; and thereby enabling individuals to survive in seemingly hopeless circumstances” (Martin, 19).

As a result, this seemingly dark humor about war and violence is actually a way of escaping from or dealing with the brutal reality outside the joke. Between 2015 and 2016 Turkey was shattered by the suicide bombers who were militants working for ISIS. The first bomb attack was on January 6<sup>th</sup> 2015<sup>13</sup>, another on July 20<sup>th</sup> 2015<sup>14</sup>, another on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2015<sup>15</sup>, one on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2015<sup>16</sup>, one on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2016<sup>17</sup>, one

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<sup>13</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20151203090847/http://www.taraf.com.tr/bombayi-niye-patlatmis-inanilmaz-sir-cozuldu/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20150722195635/http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1106032-suructaki-bombacinin-kimligi-kesinlesti>

<sup>15</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20151117030009/http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/\\_Article/pg\\_Article.aspx?Id=4fb00379-6412-4b85-ba20-8c8c630aec69](http://web.archive.org/web/20151117030009/http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/_Article/pg_Article.aspx?Id=4fb00379-6412-4b85-ba20-8c8c630aec69)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gaziantep-te-hucre-evi-operasyonu-yla-buyuk-katliam-onlendi-40014299>

<sup>17</sup> <http://archive.is/abaXn>

March 19<sup>th</sup> 2016<sup>18</sup>, one on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2016<sup>19</sup>, one in June 28<sup>th</sup> 2016<sup>20</sup>, August 20<sup>th</sup> 2016<sup>21</sup>, and one on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2016<sup>22</sup>. As a result of these numerous bombing attacks nobody felt safe and people were afraid of going out of their homes and continuing their everyday lives. Many people lost their lives in these bombings, countless were injured, many lost their loved ones, and ISIS continued their threats of violence against Turkey. Their aim was to spread fear all around the country and these threats began to be taken really seriously. In an environment like this *Zaytung* started to make fun of suicide bombers. In one of these news articles targeting the bombings, *Zaytung* reporters interviewed a fictional suicide bomber:

“Canlı Bomba Olmak İçin Antalya'ya Gelen IŞİD Militanı Sahile Giremiyor: ‘Şezlong 140 lira, damsız da almıyoruz’” /

The Isis Militant Came to Antalya to Become a Suicide Bomber Cannot Get inside the Beach: ‘Sunbeds are 140 liras, we don’t accept anyone not accompanied by a lady’”.

In this example of gallows humor the ISIS militant shares pretty much any Turkish heterosexual single man’s nightmare: the beaches are too expensive, and he cannot get inside without a girlfriend. The only difference between him and other men who are denied entrance is that he does not want to enter the beach to meet hot girls, he wants to explode that beach. In this article the militant, who informs his superiors in Rakka that it is not possible to carry out the bombing mission under these really hard circumstances, demands a woman and additional allowances from ISIS in order to enter the beach. Their response is “we can send one of the slave women, but extra money is not possible”. As a result, the horrifying ISIS militant whom we were afraid of in real life turns out to be this helpless creature who can do nothing to carry out his mission only because he is not capable of entering a regular beach club in Antalya. He is not feared

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<sup>18</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20160330070728/http://t24.com.tr/haber/istiklal-caddesinde-patlama-varalilar-var.332710>

<sup>19</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20160502115706/http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1233135-gaziantep-emniyet-mudurlugu-onunde-patlama>

<sup>20</sup> <http://archive.is/eU2Ye>

<sup>21</sup> <http://archive.is/3pCnW>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/gaziantepcanli-bomba-kendini-patlatti-3-polis-sehit,PhihAhDnIECN7nZ9E-y\\_DA](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/gaziantepcanli-bomba-kendini-patlatti-3-polis-sehit,PhihAhDnIECN7nZ9E-y_DA)

any more, he is laughed at within the space of the joke. This also provides not a permanent relief, but it still is a step towards relief and finding an alternative way to process horrors of violence.

Another mission ascribed to humor is being a vehicle of social control. Henri Bergson links incongruity theory to laughter's functioning as social corrective while underlining the social characteristic of humor. Bergson in his book *Laughter* argues that "Comic meaning is invariably obtained when an absurd idea is fitted into a well-established phrase-form" (Bergson 112). The absurd idea coming out in a well-established way is the incongruity Bergson is interested in. Besides, for Bergson joking and laughing is a social activity. People share jokes in order to achieve approval in the form of laughter. While we are forming a social group through recognition and laughter, Bergson suggests that we also try to outcast the one being laughed at. "Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed." (Bergson, 197). The one being humiliated by the joke is the absurd one who does not fit in the norm. His absurdity is called out and laughed at through the joke, and there is the expectation of correction. Powell regards this usage of humor as a form of mild control instead of harsh critique. "A humour response is often resorted to where there is no significant perception of personal or social threat. The object or agent instigating humour is defined as either being 'not serious' or as 'impervious to change'. Thus, sociologically the communication of humorous reaction serves as a mild control" (Powell, 93). Humor in this approach manages to be significant through seeming insignificant. It is not just a joke, it is a way of calling out for a correction to what seems to be wrong and unfitting. As a result, humor in this context manages to mildly control the target of the joke. As we have seen in the other theoretical approaches to humor, *Zaytung* includes many examples of humor as social corrective. Although *Zaytung* defies some of the norms in society, it reproduces and emphasizes many others. Even though I will discuss the normative structure within *Zaytung* later in the fourth chapter, there are some patterns which emerge several times on the website. Yozgat as a small city of Central Anatolia region of Turkey, for example, is othured and laughed at on many occasions by *Zaytung*'s middle class, young,

educated, urban sense of humor. In one example, people of Yozgat start a petition to change their city's Turkish name to "Yozgat Province" in order to increase its brand value through using "fancy" English words<sup>23</sup>, thinking that it would give them a higher value if they had anything added to their city's name in English. As a result they expect international interest in the Yozgat Province which actually is the same old Yozgat. In another *Zaytung* news article, one of the local newspapers of Yozgat tries to count ten major events which took place in Yozgat in 2017 but once again they cannot find more than seven events but they continue to keep their hopes<sup>24</sup>. In another article, one of the residents of Yozgat decides to protest Netherlands and he carries out his protest through buying a Phillips light bulb and breaking it<sup>25</sup>. When the issue of where the Syrian refugees would settle was a hot debate in Turkey, in one of the *Zaytung* articles some Syrian refugees come to Yozgat by mistake but the people of Yozgat are so delighted to see them because according to the reporters of *Zaytung* no one would go to the city of Yozgat consciously even when they are searching for any place to safely settle<sup>26</sup>. According to the sense of humor of *Zaytung*'s writers and editors, Yozgat is just boring and needs to change and be corrected, and they suggest this change by using humor as social corrective in countless news articles. What doesn't fit into the norms shaped by *Zaytung*'s middle-class educated urban sense of Humor is othered by jokes and directed for social correction.

In conclusion there are many dimensions of a joke. The joke that depended on the incongruity between North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and New Year's Eve celebrations can also be considered within theorizing humor as a defense mechanism against the trauma of violence. It is not much different than the interview with the ISIS militant in that sense. In another case, I gave President Erdoğan's gold leaf Ottoman chairs being an Ikea production as an example to superiority theory; but we can also consider them as social corrective because of the criticism between lines. As a result,

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=328835>

<sup>24</sup> <http://zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=334516>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=319967>

<sup>26</sup> <http://zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=285292>

putting humor into categories does not work in practice because humor is used as a medium to cross boundaries. There can be more than one humor theories involved in a joke. The examples I've given to theories also are not attempts of covering only one theory. One joke can encapsulate different theories.

## 2.2. Carnival

In all of these theories that I tried to explain in the section before, there is a subversion of reality. *Zaytung's* interrelatedness with reality and real life is a topic that I'll deal with in Chapter 3 in detail; however, it is important to underline that these subversions of reality give *Zaytung* its carnivalesque characteristics. Not only politics but the entirety of a country's news and agenda are subverted and carnivalized in *Zaytung*. Whenever one opens the website each transgression or subversion of reality resembles some sort of a Bakhtinian carnival.

Bakhtin in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* distinguishes four categories of the carnivalesque atmosphere. According to him in the carnivalesque atmosphere “All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people*. . . [and] *a new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life” is formed. In other words, the atmosphere provided by the carnival opens the way for a new mode of communication. And this interrelationship is in “half real, and half play-acted form” just the way *Zaytung* is half fiction and half journalism. In this special zone, there is a suspension of hierarchy which enables a new interrelationship between people, of which a hybrid form like *Zaytung* can become a part. In this mode of communication, the second category of the carnivalesque arises: *eccentricity*. Its eccentric form allows “the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves”. What was kept hidden can become visible under the roof of eccentricity. In this free, familiar, and at the same time eccentric atmosphere the third category, *carnivalistic mesalliances*, appears. This category shows similarities to the incongruity theory which I briefly discussed in the beginning of this chapter. “Carnival

brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid”. These inappropriate unifications of carnival bring us to its fourth category: *profanation*. According to Bakhtin profanation consists of “carnivalistic blasphemies, a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body, carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings, etc.” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 123).

I wanted to begin discussing the carnival especially with these categories of the carnivalesque atmosphere, because all of these four categories are also related to the atmosphere *Zaytung* aims to create. *Zaytung* also encourages a free interaction between people through joking about their familiarities, which I consider as the “new mode of interrelationship”. Through humor *Zaytung* aims to turn the familiar into eccentric. And in the case of mesalliances, the carnivalesque environment of *Zaytung*’s humor results from these unexpected and inappropriate unities in many examples. In one example, an ordinary citizen overwhelmed by the gas bills which he must pay throughout the winter is brought together with the Russian President Vladimir Putin in order to reach an agreement for a fixed bill of 200 Turkish liras every month and he offers to pay the money directly to Putin<sup>27</sup>. This ordinary citizen even threatens Putin, who is generally represented in the Turkish media as having an authoritative and tough character. His threat is not turning the gas on for an entire year and he sends to Putin socks as gift. If we return to Bakhtinian carnivalesque categories, the last category, *profanation* is accepted in advance by *Zaytung*. Even the website’s motto is “Dürüst, Tarafsız, Ahlaksız Haber” / “Honest, Impartial, Immoral News”. In addition to having no claim of morality in their fictional news, *Zaytung* internalized the profanity of carnival. To sum up, *Zaytung* bears something from all of these four categories and through them it creates its own carnivalesque environment.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=332736>

According to Bakhtin in *Rebelais and his World* “During carnival there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life . . . an ideal and at the same time real type of communication, impossible in ordinary life, is established” (Bakhtin *Rebelais*, 15-16). In other words, carnival is a state in which hierarchies are suspended and as a result people can talk to one another as equals, and therefore they can actually communicate. Just like this “temporary suspension” of carnival, all the expectations from a regular newspaper are partly left aside and reality itself is suspended upon entrance to the website. However, this suspension of reality is actually a way through which *Zaytung* plays with reality. The most important similarity between the carnival described by Bakhtin and *Zaytung* is that both of them feed themselves on reality and the hierarchic distinctions in that reality. Ken Hirschkop suggests that “The pleasures of carnival are not the pleasures of mere talk but those of discourse which has rediscovered its connection to the concrete” (Hirschkop, 35). *Zaytung* in its carnivalesque character is directly connected to the concrete. The target of the carnival is reality itself, carnival starts from reality, chooses specific incidents from reality, and subverts them; just like *Zaytung*’s writers who choose specific incidents from reality and deliver them in a humorously subverted way.

There are many criticisms regarding Bakhtin’s carnival as some sort of a rebellion against all authority. Umberto Eco, for example, criticizes this kind of hyper-Bakhtinian analysis of carnival and states that “Carnival, in order to be enjoyed, requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognized and respected” and calls carnival an “*authorized transgression*” (Eco, 6). I definitely agree that on the one hand carnival not only recognizes the norm but also reminds us of the norm, but on the other hand especially in *Zaytung*’s case it also reminds us of the absurdity of that norm. Besides, Eco separates humor and carnival and states that “Humor does not pretend like carnival” but then he calls humor “a *cold carnival*” (Eco, 8). Humor is a very important part of the pretensions in carnival. In a humorous approach carnival actually makes people uneasy while delivering the political message that the hierarchical order can be targeted and altered. And *Zaytung* demonstrates how that altered reality is actually a product of the real oppressions in which we live

probably without even realizing the grotesque elements in it in the first place. As a result, the fact that there is a license and a recognition of the norm does not completely eliminate the tension between authority and carnival.

Terry Eagleton begins his analysis of Bakhtin through his description of the upside-down characteristic of the carnival. According to him:

“In a riot of semiosis, carnival unhinges all transcendental signifiers and submits them to ridicule and relativism; by the ‘radicalism of humor’ (Jean Paul), power structures are estranged through grotesque parody, ‘necessity’ turn into satirical question and objects displaced or negated into their opposites” (Eagleton, 145)

Calling the subversion of signification “riot of semiosis”, Eagleton suggests that nothing can avoid the submission to ridicule during carnival. Everything is subjected to humorous reversal as a major part of the carnival. Besides, this is not necessarily a reversal in a negative sense; Terry Eagleton considers carnival reconstructive as well as deconstructive. Carnival through “rendering existing power structures alien and arbitrary. . . releases potential for a golden age” (Eagleton, 146). Before everything, turning something upside down means that it has a potential for reversal and can be turned upside down. It suggests that these arbitrary power relations can change. That visible potential is the reason why for Bakhtin although carnival lasts only for a day, it is unfinished.

When Eagleton turns to carnival’s licensed character and directs his question to this characteristic: “Can their intoxicating liberation be politically directed?” (Eagleton, 148). Do the authority figures intoxicate the public by letting them think they are liberated and actually make the public release their energy so that it would be easier for the authority to rule when that energy is used within the carnival? This criticism shared both by Eco and Eagleton may be right for a Medieval Carnival for example. Nevertheless, in our contemporary times, especially after the Gezi protests in 2013, we can suggest that carnival found itself a new form. Sibel Irzık states that “according to Bakhtin, the word’s rediscovery of its ties with concrete reality lies in the source of the pleasure carnival offers. There is a similar pleasure in reading Bakhtin; because he is the author



of the moment when the word touches life” (Irzık, 32 – My translation)<sup>28</sup>. The discourse of the carnival is actually tied to concrete reality. Reality and the word in carnival depend on each other. As a result, as the reality changes the word also changes and as the word changes carnival changes too. “Dehistoricized and extracted as a concept or as a general principle of revolutionary textual politics carnival is unworkable and untenable” (Young, 79). In any historical context the concept of carnival must be differently conditioned. The Turkish carnivalesque environment that *Zaytung* creates is not something like the German Fasnacht happening one day every year so that people can unleash their energy and continue their everyday lives the day after the carnival. The politically charged carnival of *Zaytung* continues so systematically every day that at some point it starts to crack the seriousness of the existing system which depends on that seriousness to survive. In this post-truth era, there is no such thing as the official truth for the carnival to directly attack once a year. Therefore, carnival is fused into any claim, it takes place everywhere and every day in *Zaytung*’s case. The comic relief is also not the pressure valve, which the authority uses for its purposes, because in this case this comic relief contradicts the oppressor’s expectations, because what the oppressor wants is for the oppressed to be tense and stable and thus disciplined all the time. In the age of VPN configurations, the license authority permits is not as crucial for the carnival’s survival as it was for Bakhtin’s era. Carnival is unfinished as it can always find new forms and patterns concretizing its existence. “The catharsis of laughter is, inseparably, the birth of a new form of discourse” (Eagleton, 150). This new discourse in this example is *Zaytung*’s humorous discourse.

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<sup>28</sup> The Turkish version of the quote is as follows: “Bakhtin’e göre karnavalın sunduğu hazzın kaynağında, sözün somut gerçeklikle bağlarını yeniden keşfedışı yatar. Onun yazılarını okumakta da benzer bir haz var; çünkü Bakhtin sözün yaşama dokunduğu anın yazarı”

Carnival is not a concept we can separate from real life and discuss accordingly. “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (Bakhtin, *Reblais* 7). As the humorous subversion of hierarchy is an idea which embraces all people wanting to get involved in the carnival spirit, it creates a sense of unity among people which makes it a joined event rather than a spectacle. People are part of the spirit which constitutes carnival as well as ideas and subversions. In the paragraph above, I mentioned the Gezi protests, because what went viral and lured people to the streets was the humor and the sense of togetherness in it as well as the political oppression they were protesting. People were taking and sharing humorous photographs from the streets. This photograph of an older middle-aged Turkish teyze/aunt figure wearing a scarf and Guy Fawkes mask<sup>29</sup> was shared a lot for instance. A Turkish aunt is not a usual anarchy figure, but the incongruity between our expectations and her mask gives the message that anyone can participate in this new sort of carnival. She is the spirit of this carnival.



### 2.3. Resistance

What is *Zaytung* humor? It incorporates all the theoretical approaches which I wrote about in this chapter. But more importantly *Zaytung*'s humor is a reaction. Humor is used not only as a shield protecting the users from the reactions to the criticism hidden under the mask of targeted jokes, but also as a weapon directed towards fear, especially

<sup>29</sup> <http://yarinhaber.net/guncel/14560/31-mayis-yaklasirken-gezinin-kahramanlarini-hatirlayalim>

in the case of satire. Humor as a weapon as well as a shield “may be important in making people reflect critically on their situation, allow them to express hostility against those in power, create an alternative space of resistance, or even give people the courage to take up more concrete actions” (Kuipers, 370). It provides an alternative way to cope with fear and oppression. I regard *Zaytung* as a creative product of power, which plays its role as an alternative in resisting silence. In the circumstances of Turkey, which is the country that holds the record of the highest number of journalists being imprisoned<sup>30</sup>, delivering news with criticisms of power is a difficult job surrounded by fear. As of October 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, the number of imprisoned journalists is 152<sup>31</sup>. The charges generally are: being a part of or making propaganda for a terrorist organization, insulting the president, or provoking the people of Turkey to hatred. In these circumstances it is hard to deliver news, ideas, or criticisms without being persecuted. However, according to Foucault: “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.” (Foucault, 194). *Zaytung* is a product of power, humor arises as an outcome of constant oppression and as a result it produces another reality. New ways of resistance are created through these discourses. An alternative reality is produced and presented to the public view by *Zaytung* as a reaction to the discourses of mainstream journalism in Turkey. The language *Zaytung* uses is a subverted reproduction of the language used by mainstream media which is thought to be controlled by the authority. “Controlling language and symbols is an important aspect of upholding a dominant discourse. The ability to name and label the world is just as important for hegemony as physical control through the threat of violence. A consequence of this understanding is that one should not underestimate the threat to the power holder’s dominance that arises from undermining the symbols and language” (Sorensen “Laughing on the way to social change”,141-142). What *Zaytung* does with its humorous fake news articles is to resist that dominant official language. There are several reasons why we can discuss this act as a form of resistance.

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<sup>30</sup><https://www.cpi.org/europe/turkey/>

<sup>31</sup><http://tgs.org.tr/cezaevindeki-gazeteciler/>

One of the criticisms against considering humor as a form of resistance has been its frivolous characteristic:

“The negative image of laughter may be due to its attack on the solemnity and seriousness with which people treat the events they consider important— politics being a major one of those events. Laughter is frequently condemned and is considered offensive because outbursts are usually presumed to be hostile acts. Consequently, laughter is often suppressed so as not to offend ‘political dignity’” (Schmidt, 19)

Humorous criticism is thought to be a lower form of criticism suggesting that it is supposed to be trivial and it can't be taken seriously. This is partly true in the sense that political jokes are indeed transgressing the seriousness of politics. However cracking the seriousness that the authority figures asserted is actually a strategic means of refusing to fit into the structure of the political authority. Behind the joke “the deepest seriousness is concealed and shines through” (Schopenhauer, Vol. 2 100). And this concealed seriousness is not the same authoritative seriousness that is expected both from power figures and criticisms against those power figures. Authority depends on the seriousness that humor attacks, and cracking it is not something that can be considered as trivial. It has some outcomes and consequences. Since the joke is supposed to be trivial when it attacks the seriousness of the authority, cracking its seriousness, the crack expands the moment the authority figure reacts to that attack. Humorous criticism creates a Catch-22 situation for the authority figures. If they leave the joke uncontrolled, it will continue attacking their seriousness; if they react and try to take the joke under control the joke won't be trivial anymore and the crack will consequently expand. One example of this is the Gollum Case in Turkey. In 2014 a Turkish doctor, Bilgin Çiftçi, created a meme which compared President Erdoğan and fictional *Lord of the Rings* character Gollum side by side. It was considered to be an insult to the President Erdoğan by the Turkish officials and Dr. Bilgin Çiftçi was brought to court in a defamation lawsuit<sup>32</sup>. Even the movie's director Peter Jackson got involved in the case, when the judge demanded experts to decide whether Gollum was a good or a bad character. All of these events

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/world/europe/is-gollum-good-or-evil-jail-term-in-turkey-hinges-on-answer.html>

drew international attention to the lawsuit and as a result the effects of the joke expanded. This lawsuit is a great example demonstrating the significance of humor in resisting serious authorities and a good rebuttal to the criticisms considering it to be trivial.

Another aspect of these humorous criticisms is that they find a way to deliver criticism in a concealed manner rather than direct confrontation. Humor finds a way to say the things which would be harder or even impossible to say if they were expressed otherwise. In her analysis of Eritrean politics Victoria Bernal says that; humor “serves as an important medium for political communication, opening spaces for what cannot normally be stated publicly, and new media . . . serve not simply as a means of circulation but also as spaces less restricted by state control and media monopolies” (Bernal, 307). *Zaytung* belongs to that category of new media and it is important that it is a less restricted space than the mainstream media. For example, a Turkish student allegedly called Erdoğan a dictator and was sentenced to 1 year 2 months in prison in 2015<sup>33</sup>, and a journalist was sentenced to 11 months and 20 days for calling Erdoğan “dictator scrap”<sup>34</sup>. From these cases we can come to the conclusion that calling Erdoğan a dictator is considered to be an insult which results in being sued in a defamation lawsuit. As *Zaytung* cannot criticize this situation directly, they joke about it. When the elected rector of Boğaziçi University was not appointed by Erdoğan, they delivered this news with the headline:

“Bana diktatör diyorlar. Ben diktatör olsam şöyle yaparım...” listesinden bir madde daha sessizce silindi...”<sup>35</sup>

“Another article has been silently deleted from the list of “They are calling me a dictator. I would do these things if I were a dictator”

*Zaytung* does not call President Erdoğan directly a dictator as in the other cases, but instead they find a smart and humorous way of pointing out the qualifications of dictatorship partly underlined by Erdoğan himself. This oblique delivery of criticism

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<sup>33</sup> <https://odatv.com/erdogana-diktator-dedigi-icin-23-yasinda-cezaevine-girdi-3107151200.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogana-hakarete-bugun-gazeteciye-diktator-bozuntusu-cezasi/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/fotohaberdetay.asp?newsid=314104>

can happen as a result of the space humor opens up for political communication and resistance.

In “Mocking Fascism” Efharis Mascha analyzes political humor as an example of Gramsci’s counter-hegemony. Mascha suggests that there is no frontal attack in political satire, rather she says, “Political satire, as a counter-hegemonic project, systematically operates as a war of position, since it smoothly degrades official discourse by revealing the weak aspects of the regime and not by actually confronting the power base of the regime, as a war of manoeuvre would do” (Mascha, 195-196). For Mascha this sneaky strategy of political satire helps it in raising political consciousness through sharing laughter. “Laughter escapes social control and the order of the power block, while also creating a common sense with the ones that can share the same laughter” (Mascha, 200). The order was established in complete seriousness, laughing at this seriousness or joking about it means that it can be joked about and laughed at above everything. Through cracking that order, a new sort of political consciousness arises thanks to the maneuvers of humor.

Humor as a social event creates a social consciousness. Sharing a laugh means finding a common ground. *Zaytung* gives us a joke about the cultural environment that we already share, therefore the joke can easily find its place in our common view. In Bernal’s article humor is suggested to be used as a medium in Eritrean politics and she regards the websites on the “online public sphere” as “public counterforces to the state-controlled media” (Bernal, 301). In this case resistance means refusing the state-controlled discourse and the “online public sphere” turns into a ground convenient for generating new counter-discourses. Ethan Zuckerman distinguishes web 1.0 in which physicists shared their research papers and web 2.0 in which people were allowed to share pictures of cute cats. He suggests that “There is a real challenge within the world of lolcats [in web 2.0] – making it funny as well as political and heart-wrenching” (Zuckerman). This cute-cat theory of digital activism analyzes what people expect from the internet: entertainment. As a result what this new sort of activism does is to embrace the banal and become the lolcat itself. This unity between lolcats and activism makes it

hard for the authority decide how to fight this kind of activism. “Everytime you force a government block a web 2.0 site – cutting off people’s access to cute cats – you spend political capital” (Zuckerman). The cute lolcats and digital activism is not an either-or situation in this case, if the authority is disturbed by the activism part of this new blend it has to attack also the entertainment part and this results in disapproval from the public because lolcats and activism is on the same ground in the web 2.0. Humor attracts attention which results in a social exchange. “Laughing together has similar bonding powers like marching, dancing, or singing together” (Hart, 12). There’s a demonstration of power and a sense of togetherness also in jokes and laughter. In 2002 during the protests against the invasion of Iraq, a group of protesters calling themselves “Absurd Response” emerged, doing irrelevant things in the middle of protests with their banner “ABSURD RESPONSE TO AN ABSURD WAR”, Bogad while talking about the Absurd Response activists defines this approach to protests as a “tactical carnival”. Humor is chosen to be used in this tactic because for Bogad “Humor can also add to the efficacy of a demonstration as people are often more likely to stop and listen if they are entertained.” (Bogad, 53). The tactical carnival is different from the Bakhtinian carnival according to Bogad most importantly because tactical carnivals “tend to be more focused and specific in their social critique” (Bogad, 57). A joke is a joke because it is shared. It characteristically almost never stays inside the mind of the joke-teller. The joke needs to be told and shared which turns it into a social event. This is the reason why, from time to time members of the opposition turn to jokes in order to create a new social consciousness due to their social interactions while joking.

In her article Majken Jul Sorensen analyzes how the Otpor movement in Serbia makes use of humor as a strategy against the Slobodan Milosevic. According to Sorensen one thing to keep in mind is that the Otpor movement used a combination of serious and humorous actions. Humor is defined as a form of nonviolent resistance in this combination and there are three features of this humorous nonviolent resistance that she underlines:

“I suggest that theoretically humor as nonviolent resistance can be understood in three different ways: (a) ‘Facilitating outreach and mobilization’ concerning the relationship with people outside the movement; (b) ‘Facilitating a culture of resistance’ within the resistance

movement— building solidarity and strengthening the individual's capacity for participating in resistance; and (c) 'Turning oppression upside down.' This function has the most powerful potential, because it changes the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed." (Sorensen "Humor as a ...", 175)

The first one turns resistance into something entertaining. It offers a direct outcome of entrainment to the members of resistance and consequently more people are attracted into resisting. With this sense of togetherness "a culture of resistance" is born. This is a new, cool, and enjoyable culture which all the members share. As a result, this growing crowd with a shared culture of resistance start to mock and provoke the oppressor which leaves his power in a threatened situation. There are criticisms of this kind of humorous approach to resistance claiming that the joke may shadow the political message behind it, but this kind of resistance is an option which is still better than the no political message and no arguments against the authority scenario.

Another strategy humor employs for resistance is introducing skepticism to truth claims. *Zaytung* parodies the form of the regular news of mainstream media (see Chapter 3), and as a result it underlines the absurdity in them. This strategy is highly criticized for offering no alternative to what it criticizes. It's thought to be just a subverted reproduction of authoritative media, without any resolution. However, *Zaytung's* way of delivering news questions the way news with truth claims are delivered and consequently questions the truth claims they have. "While parody bars the creation of disciples united under a single doctrine, it does endorse the creation of critical thinkers whose political power lies in their ability to challenge the authoritarian imposition of 'truth'." (Kulkarni, 13). Parody of the real news by the humorous fake news of *Zaytung* opens a path for critical thinkers with the skepticism it puts forward, instead of blocking the way or turning the way into an endless cycle. "Humor does real political work, fostering the development of new subjectivities by showing people the status quo from a different perspective than the dominant or official one and also by making visible the act of representing reality." (Bernal, 307) Systematic subversion of the regular gives us an idea of how the regular works because it requires an overall analysis of the regular in the beginning. This understanding of "how things work" can happen only if we look at



it from different perspective. *Zaytung* doesn't have any claims of giving us the truth, as Samuel Schmidt states "A joke need not tell the truth, but by attacking the official truth, it establishes reasonable doubt that questions politicians." (Schmidt, 25). The act of establishing "reasonable doubt" through the parody of the "truth" is the political work done by *Zaytung*. Distancing the reader from the regular way news are being delivered and thus giving them a better sight for conscious political commentary and an opportunity for doubting and questioning the truth value of the regular news is a powerful strategy also for *Zaytung*'s relation to reality (Chapter 3) and humor as a reaction to reality.

## Chapter 3:

### THE ABSURDITY IN REALITY

*Zaytung*, as a satirical news website, provides a new humorous perspective surrounded with irony in order to read and analyze some of the incidents taking place in a country within a day. There is an interesting relationship between *Zaytung* and reality. This interrelatedness with reality fairly affects *Zaytung*'s position in creating a possibility of non-compliance as well. In this chapter, I will try to analyze *Zaytung*'s position in reality and mainstream media with regards to the two sides of *Zaytung*'s relationship with reality and the strategies *Zaytung* employs in order to form this kind of interrelatedness based on the change in public understanding of reality and journalism. I want to analyze not only how this satirical news website feeds itself on reality, but also how *Zaytung* demonstrates the absurdity in that reality by approaching it in a subversive and humorous way, and what role the parody news and the humorous fake news they post play in this approach.

#### 3.1. Pointing out the Absurdity: “Like *Zaytung* News”

There are two very distinct sides in *Zaytung*'s relationship with reality. First, there is the “real” news shared through the channels of mainstream media which are pointed out by the readers for their resemblance with *Zaytung* news because of the absurdity they contain. I don't know how many times I personally have come across with the term “*Zaytung haberi gibi*” / “Like *Zaytung* news” on my Facebook or Twitter news-feed, but anyone typing these words into twitter search tool can observe that it is used abundantly. I believe this shows how we have internalized the already existing absurdity

in reality which *Zaytung* makes use of to craft its own parody news and therefore externalizing that absurdity and giving us a description as “like *Zaytung* news” in order to point out that absurdity in reality and mainstream news. *Zaytung*’s founder Hakan Bilginer seemed in between liking and disapproving this situation during our interview

HB: It’s also a little about the spirit of time and the era which you called post-truth. I don’t like it very much if I need to tell you the truth. I mean that situation “Like *Zaytung* news” is good, it is good in the sense of settling in the Turkish language as an utterance is nice for us. Even for people who don’t know *Zaytung* and who haven’t entered the website before knows that utterance “Like *Zaytung* news” and they have encountered this at some place etc. is good, okay. There is a flattering part in this, which we can position as success. But apart from that, I don’t know, since every absurd news is not something we would produce on our publication line, it is not good either to be suited like this or to be brought side by side. We wouldn’t do news like that for example.

**Why? As far as I understand, is it because there is a work in this after all, you aren’t directly copying a news article and I guess you need a certain tone?**

I mean, exactly, it needs to be interpreted. I mean, if it does exist, the ridiculous in the news needs to be brought out or if it can be it needs to be made a little more absurd etc. In some way, there is a process which cudgels one’s brains we don’t give the news articles as they are.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it is important to underline the choices *Zaytung*’s writers and editors make and the work they put in the jargon with which the news are written. I want to return to the spirit of time later in this chapter while discussing humorous fake news; but even though they share some amount of absurdity, there is a subtle difference between the way *Zaytung*

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<sup>36</sup> Bu biraz daha zamanın ruhuyla ve o sizin post-ruth dediğiniz dönemle ilgili işte şey, çok da benim hoşuma gitmiyor doğruyu söylemek gerekirse. Yani o durum *Zaytung* haberi gibi okay güzel, şey anlamında güzel yani bizim için türkçeye böyle bir kalıp olarak yerleşme durumu güzel. *Zaytung*’u bilmeyen daha önce hiç girmemiş insanların bile “*Zaytung* haberi gibi” kalıbını biliyor olması buna bir yerlerde denk gelmiş olması filan güzel okay. Bunda gurur okşayıcı bir taraf var bir başarı olarak konumlandırabileceğimiz. Ama onun dışında da ne bileyim çünkü her absürt haber de bizim yayın çizgimizde üretebileceğimiz bir içerik olmadığı için onunla böyle bağdaşmak da bununla yanyana gelmek de iyi değil, öyle bir haber yapmazdık biz de mesela.

**Neden? Anladığım kadarıyla burada bir emek de var sonuçta siz bir haberi direk kopyalayıp paylaşmıyorsunuz belli bir tona sanırım ihtiyaç duyuyorsunuz diye mi?**

Yani aynen, onun bir yorumlanması gerekiyor. Yani işte varsa işte içindeki o saçmalığın ortaya çıkarılması ya da olabiliyorsa bir basamak daha absürtleştirilmesi falan filan gerekiyor. Bir şekil üstünde kafa patlatılması gereken bir süreç oluyor orada olduğu gibi vermiyoruz.

delivers that absurd news and the way mainstream media does this. Mainstream media does not underline the absurdity in it, or in other words the absurdity in these news articles of mainstream media is not consciously and strategically there. The absurdity in the news of mainstream media which are described as “like *Zaytung* news” is inherently there in the incident and in the way the incident is delivered to the public. The members of the mainstream media don’t work with a deliberate aim of achieving the absurd effect they end up with. What *Zaytung* does with its news articles is a way of highlighting that absurdity by choosing to emphasize it in its parody news articles. There is a strategy and a pattern they follow while doing this, which compels the readers to find an uncanny resemblance between the *Zaytung* news and the “real” news. That strategy at some parts is parody.

### 3.2. Parody News

To begin with, I believe we need to distinguish two types of news *Zaytung* posts. One of these types is the humorous fake news, which is the news the writers make up; and the other one is the parody news which are about the incidents that have already happened when the writers deliver the news of the day in a different manner. I believe it is necessary to draw a distinction between fake news and parody news to understand both sides of *Zaytung*’s relationship with reality and its position in it. For example Berkowitz and Schwartz in their article “Miley, CNN, and the Onion” discusses Onion’s criticism of CNN for giving Miley Cyrus’ twerk video front page the whole day as if it were the most important and attention-worthy incident of the entire day and they suggest that “[I]n a period of technological revolution, boundaries between ‘fake news’ and ‘real news’ have shifted in both academic and journalistic circles. Fake news is hyper-real because it blurs lines between nonfiction and fiction, which challenges journalistic boundary work when journalistic practices overlap with fake news” (Berkowitz and Schwartz, 4). By fake news they mean the news parody programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, and the news parody website *the Onion*, by which *Zaytung* is influenced. Although I find their analysis of the blurred lines between fiction and nonfiction useful to discuss humorous fake news, I believe fake news and news parody are not interchangeable terms. There are certain elements of parody in the humorous

fake news that *Zaytung*'s writers write; however, the parody news is linked to the event that actually happened much more than the humorous fake news. In both cases the lines between nonfiction and fiction is blurred as Berkowitz and Schwartz suggests but the play between fiction and nonfiction is different in each case as the influence of fiction and nonfiction is in different intensities in parody news and humorous fake news. I will return to the humorous fake news later because it is more related to the other side of *Zaytung*'s relation to reality and the *Zaytung* news which are considered as real news rather than the real news which are considered as *Zaytung* news; nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that in parody news *Zaytung* is not making up an incident as much as it does in humorous fake news. *Zaytung*'s news can be considered as "postmodern ironic parody, [since it is] using the conventions of realism against themselves in order to foreground the complexity of representation and its implied politics" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of 95*) as it constantly plays with those conventions of realism in its parody news.

Linda Hutcheon in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, suggests that "Postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of 94*). *Zaytung*'s critical and creative structure comes from its intertextuality. There is a certain intertextuality between fictional *Zaytung* news and what we may call "real news" namely the news delivered by the mediums of media whose aim is to deliver news. In order to achieve its planned effect, the writers of the website deconstruct and mimic the way mainstream media delivers the news of that day as closely as possible. The members of *Zaytung* act as if they are employing the conventions of mainstream media, but the act of acting is emphasized with irony to such an extent that it turns into a demonstration of the conventions of mainstream media which creates an interesting connection with regular news resulting in triggering the readers' critical minds when they read and think about the news delivered by mainstream media.

In her article "Dialogic Absurdity: TV News Parody as a Critique of Genre", Zoe Druick analyzes certain examples of TV news parody through a Bakhtinian perspective of genre and according to Druick "News as genre in the Bakhtinian sense invites a

reading of news parody as an intertext that both calls on the audience to reflect on the production of television news and, potentially, to question its authority and the official television discourse of the ‘real’” (Druick, 301). This unfixed and living notion of genre opens the way for questioning to the readers because of the genre’s claiming a position in accordance with the positionality of other genres. News parody makes use of the predictability of the regular way of delivering news, and subverts it within intertextuality by positioning itself in accordance with conventional journalism. Something predictable has an action pattern which it follows rigidly and this predictable action pattern that mainstream media follows can be parodied easily by *Zaytung*, eventually generating a new genre by creating a new text of news parody with regards to the other text of journalism. As a result news parody, besides being a strategic critique of genre as Druick suggests, turns into a new genre through this systematic subversion of the predictable conventions of news and journalism. Besides offering a “critical examination of both the information provided by the real news and the agendas that lie behind or beneath it” (Baym and Jones, 5), news parody also generates its own agenda in accordance with and as a reaction to the agenda of mainstream news. This is the reason why Baym and Jones consider news parody a constructive tool as well as a deconstructive one:

“In addition to its deconstructive function—its efforts to unpack the form and content of news—news parody at times performs a constructive role, providing the citizenry with discursive resources often absent in “real” news. . . The various comedians, actors, and puppets around the world who use parody to interrogate the news are at the same time both constitutive and constituent of wider cultural transformations in the nature of public trust and the allocation of authority. Parody rejects the verticality and linearity of news—the built-in assumption that they, from positions of privilege, speak (down) to us, and that we, in turn, have little role in the process but as passive receivers of their truths.” (Baym and Jones, 6)

We, as the readers of news parody, are not passive receivers of whatever truth delivered to us on mainstream media any longer but instead we can judge the “real” and laugh at it. And a certain kind of parody achieves that effect. This is the reason why when the readers observe the absurdity of the “real” news and laugh at it, they directly link it to *Zaytung* even stating that it is “just like *Zaytung* news” because even though they do

that deconstruction by themselves the effect is the effect which comes through what *Zaytung* constructed within the genre of news parody by deconstructing conventional journalism.

As an example to that situation, during the time when the June 2018 early election debates were heated in Turkey, Mustafa Destici, the BBP leader who wanted to become a part of the AKP-MHP coalition, made a statement about the opposition parties. He criticized the opposition parties for opposing Erdoğan and trying to prevent him from being elected<sup>37</sup>, which is generally considered to be the universal role of opposition. The readers who were familiar with *Zaytung*'s jargon and the way its writers construct the parody news shared this news of criticizing the opposition for opposing by underlining that the inherent irony in the statement in this news makes it like a *Zaytung* news. In situations like this one where *Zaytung* does not need to emphasize the inherently absurd situation, the members of *Zaytung* use another strategy in order to emphasize the irony in that statement, underlining the absurdity which is already there. The parodied voices of the common people comes into the picture in these kinds of situations. Since the writers and editors of *Zaytung* don't need to subvert any part of this interesting and absurd statement itself, they give this statement of the BBP leader with commentaries in another section on the website: "Halkın Sesi/ Public voice". In this particular section, as a part of the news parody, public voices are parodied instead of the news articles themselves. One of the members of the public in this parody analyzes this statement and states that:

*"Bunlar çok ciddi suçlamalar. Umarım elinde muhalefetin seçim çalışması yürüttüğüne dair sağlam kanıtlar da vardır. Yoksa altında kalır..."*<sup>38</sup>

"These are really serious accusations. I hope he has some sound evidence that the opposition is also carrying out an election campaign. Or he will need to swallow it..."

What we need to underline here is that even though the statement itself in the news is sufficiently absurd, *Zaytung* needs to put something in it from itself in order to carry on the utterance "Like *Zaytung* news" since these words are not uttered because *Zaytung* directly and effortlessly shares the absurd news taking place in reality but rather it

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<sup>37</sup><https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/politika/2018/04/24/destici-erdogani-sectirmemeye-calisiyorlar/>

<sup>38</sup><http://www.zaytung.com/halkinsesi.asp?vcid=654>

brings those absurd news into its own reality in which it polishes the absurdity in them with irony.

One of the interesting results of this approach to reality is that no matter how much *Zaytung* plays with the expectations from journalism as a genre and subverts these expectations; the members of the website find themselves in a new genre with a new set of expectations. This situation is an inescapable outcome of *Zaytung*'s construction of a different understanding of news parody in Turkey, but the founder, Hakan Bilginer, was especially displeased by this situation in our interview. These expectations from *Zaytung*'s way of playing with the news of the day have been highly affected by its relationship with the politics of Turkey. Even though there are some humorous news articles about everyday situations of common people on the website, about ordinary things that we come across from time to time in our daily lives, there is a great number of articles making fun of the politics and politicians of Turkey, joking about what they said, what they might say, what they did, what they might do. When I asked him the reason behind this disproportion among the types of news they post, Hakan Bilginer stated that:

HB: *Zaytung* actually rather evolved to that, there was nothing like this in the beginning. It is about the country's becoming more political, I mean it is something about the political climate and the spirit of Turkey. After all, since this *Zaytung* is a living organism, willingly or unwillingly since we became more political people in time in comparison with the times we began, in the end of 2009 in 2010s, since politics became a part of our lives more, willingly or unwillingly if we think that not only us but all the people who are writing entries to the website are more political, it necessarily went into that direction in time. This happened in the natural flow, I mean just as we didn't arrange it in the beginning; we didn't do anything for it to be more political later. I mean, even time to time, I was bothered by it. But Turkey was this, even the world became more political, the Onion became a more political medium. The world went to that direction, as Turkey went to that direction so did *Zaytung*.

**How does this bother you?**

From time to time it disturbs me like this: this situation is as if it is taking us into an infertility right? It is as if what you are doing is losing its effect in time when you become hooked on that flow. So people get used to this and when a political incident happens they anticipate how you are going to react more or less. Okay the reader is expecting this from you, they actually direct you into this as well. When a political incident happens, when an important



political thing happens you have to say something about this right? They are waiting for this and you know it, that day you can't post anything unrelated to that incident, if you do it that would be absurd. People would find it weird. Your readers would react to you.<sup>39</sup>

The relationship between predictability and *Zaytung*, the absurd and *Zaytung* is quite interesting. Even though they play with the predictable patterns of mainstream journalism, even deconstructing some of these patterns; the members of *Zaytung* end up constructing new patterns and new predictions. *Zaytung* being defined as a "living organism" is not only affected by the circumstances around it but it also turns into a medium which is changing the constructed definitions all the time. What the reader expects from *Zaytung* is for *Zaytung* to subvert their expectations from the other news. These parody news of the website is underlining the absurdity in reality, it is never an absurdity outside reality. The breaking point of *Zaytung*'s becoming more and more political was during the Gezi protests. Gezi, as a time when everyone became more engaged with the political, created a demand for subversion in the tone of opposition. One of the most famous examples of the slogans used in the Gezi protests was: "*Kahrolsun bazı şeyler/ Damn some things*". It is not "damn fascism", it is not "damn government" it is not protesting any specific thing; it is "some things". Mahiye Seçil

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<sup>39</sup> Zaytung da aslında daha çok ona evrildi hani başlangıçta öyle bir şey yoktu. Ülkenin daha çok politikleşmesiyle ilgili, yani ülkedeki politik iklimle ilgili türkiyenin ruhuyla ilgili bir şey. Neticede bu *Zaytung* da yaşayan bir organizma olduğu için, ister istemez onu üreten insanlar olarak bizler de daha politik insanlar olduğumuz için zaman içerisinde ilk başladığımız 2009un sonları 2010lara göre daha politik daha o anlamda siyaset de daha hayatımızın içine girdiği için, ister istemez sadece biz de değil siteye içerik üreten herkesin daha fazla politik insanlar olduğunu düşünürsek zaman içerisinde yani site ister istemez biraz o yöne gitti. Bu doğal akışında gerçekleşti yani, bizim öyle baştan öyle kurmadığımız gibi sonradan da politik olsun diye bir şey yapmadık. Yani hatta zaman zaman bundan rahatsız olduğum oldu. Ama Türkiye buydu, hatta dünya da daha fazla politikleşti Onion da daha fazla politik bi mecra haline geldi. Dünya o tarafa gitti, Türkiye de o tarafa gittikçe *Zaytung* da gitti.

#### **Bu durum sizi nasıl rahatsız ediyor?**

Beni zaman zaman şöyle rahatsız ediyor, sanki kısırlaşmaya doğru götürüyormuş gibi tamam mı? Hani o anafora kapıldığımız zaman çok fazla kendinizi kaptırdığımız zaman yaptığımız şey de zamanla etkisini yitiriyor gibi. İnsanlar da buna alışıyor falan bi politik gelişme olduğunda aşağı yukarı sizin buna nasıl tepki vereceğinizi kestirebiliyorlar ve biliyorlar filan böyle hani. Okay okuyucu bunu bekliyor sizden de ve biraz da okuyucunun yönlendirmesiyle de aslında yani. Politik bir gelişme olduğunda önemli bir politik gelişme olduğunda illa sizin de bir şey söylemeniz gerekiyor tamam mı? Bunu bekliyorlar siz de bunu biliyorsunuz o gün o konudan bağımsız bir içerik yapamazsınız yaparsanız absürt olur. İnsanlar garip karşılar. Size tepki filan gösterir okuyucularımız.

Dağtaş translates “Kahrolsun bağızı şeyler” as “Down with somethings” and she states that these humorous slogans “drew heavily on popular culture, and created a culture of public joy, lightness, and hilarity in the midst of fear, distress, and anger” (Dağtaş, 12). This creation of hilarity in the mist of fear helps the creation of a new social consciousness which results in resisting to silence. People don’t resist to silence through slogans, slogans never worked, but the humor in these slogans added something to the protest culture. During the Gezi protests people knew the uselessness of slogans but they were there on the streets and on instruments of social media like Twitter making fun of this uselessness of slogans with the new funny and creative slogans which were also underlining the uselessness in themselves. “*Kahrolsun bağızı şeyler*” was not a nonsensical or illogical slogan to use under these circumstance, it became the rational and practical slogan as it reflected the spirit of the time and usefully underlining the uselessness in it. This is the reason behind the changing definition of the absurd within the website as well; it would be absurd for *Zaytung* not to bring out the absurd in reality, because *Zaytung*’s reality is the absurd reality just as the practical slogan is the formerly illogical slogan. I don’t agree with Hakan Bilginer in the sense that as people start forming expectations from *Zaytung*, the effects of *Zaytung* weakens. I believe it is actually the opposite, it shows us that *Zaytung* is indeed attracting people’s attentions. The unexpectedness of *Zaytung* is already there in its tone, in its jargon, and in its jokes. These expectations from *Zaytung* show us that the website is constructing a tradition of news parody. It turns out to be a tradition in which people feel involved and they are getting used to it within its natural flow.

Paul Achter while discussing the strategic role of humor in American media after 9/11 attacks touches upon the notion of decorum; “Generally thought of in terms of ‘correctness’ or ‘appropriateness,’ decorum emerged as an issue in discussions about comedy because the attacks were represented in public discourse as a fundamental geopolitical and cultural change.” (Achter, 276) In a time when people didn’t know how to appropriately laugh “*The Onion*’s carnivalesque meta-discourse created opportunities to address racism, to address fundamental questions about the motives behind the attacks, and to lay out an agenda for learning about the cultures and political histories of the people involved in the war on terror. As *The Onion* shows, the news parody both

constructs and participates in a public discussion of values.” (Achter, 298) Just like the decorum *the Onion* creates in order to find an opportunity and a way to speak about the things which were considered to be unspeakable after 9/11 attacks, *Zaytung* gives people a new appropriate way within inappropriateness to laugh at and criticize the political incidents which are altering their lives. The expectations from the website that I discussed is part of this created decorum which is being accepted as a new public discourse because *Zaytung* offers a platform to participate in the criticisms of the other discourse.

*Zaytung* does not fake the reality of the times but it represents that reality through defamiliarization. The website neither introduces anything that has no connection with things that happened in reality, nor does it try to make the reader believe in the reality of the news they present. Even when they write about incidents which haven’t taken place in reality, they always have a connection with *Zaytung*’s view of reality:

HB: As it is not breaking from the reality we’re trying for it not to break. And for this, for its roots to be completely solid, for its foundation to be strong, needs to be adapted directly from reality. Because we are trying to reveal the thing if there is something to be joked about in reality. If there is no such thing, there is no meaning in what you do. As an example, the President said something, if the man didn’t say it there is no significance in your making fun of it, okay?<sup>40</sup>

What makes *Zaytung* different from other humorous media, like the caricatures or memes, is its position in reality. The reader is affected by the website because of this positionality. As in the example which I gave in the second chapter, if Angela Merkel and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had not sat on those gold-leaf chairs, or if those chairs hadn’t existed at all the news article targeting them not only wouldn’t be funny, but it also wouldn’t have the same effect on the reader. *Zaytung* provides a new way to

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<sup>40</sup> Gerçeklikten kopmadığı gibi kopmaması için de uğraşıyoruz. Bunun için de tamamen kökünün sağlam olması için, temellerinin sağlam olması için, gerçekliğe bire bir uyum sağlaması gerekiyor yaptığımız şeyin. Çünkü gerçeğin içindeki hani o dalga geçilecek bir şey varsa onu ortaya çıkarmaya çalışıyoruz. Eğer orada öyle bir şey yoksa yaptığımız şeyin hiçbir anlamı yok yani komik bile olmaz. Yani atıyorum Cumhurbaşkanı bir şey söyledi adam onu söylemediyse sizin bununla dalga geçmenizin hiçbir önemi yok tamam mı?

look at the incidents of reality, by giving the audience a distance from that incident by means of defamiliarization.

### 3.3. Humorous Fake News

What about the humorous fake news *Zaytung* posts? Humorous fake news represents the other side of *Zaytung*'s relation to reality as sometimes the humorous fake news of *Zaytung* are misinterpreted as real news. Besides mainstream media news, the absurdity of which is criticized for being like a *Zaytung* article, there are many *Zaytung* news articles which are mistaken to be real news. One of the most famous examples of this confusion allegedly belongs to Melih Gökçek<sup>41</sup>, the former mayor of Ankara. During the Gezi Protests in 2013, there was a constant marginalization and defamation of the protestors on mainstream media and *Zaytung* published a news piece parodying that attitude of the members of mainstream media. The protestors were constantly criticized for vandalizing the streets and harming their surroundings. *Zaytung* decided to exaggerate these accusations against the protestors with a humorous fake breaking news article. This breaking news piece was basically about how the police had found some documents about the making of an atom bomb in the evil protestors' tents and how they were planning a new brutality:

*“Yeni Şafak'tan önce bizde okuyun... Gezi Parkı'ndaki çadırlardan çıkan marjinal örgütlere ait vahşet planları... Tüm ayrıntılarıyla birazdan...”*<sup>42</sup>  
“Read from us before you read in Yeni Şafak<sup>43</sup> ... Plans of atrocity coming out of the tents at Gezi Park belonging to the marginal organizations... Soon in all details...”

“The brutal plans of the marginal groups” were discovered and the public was now informed thanks to the brilliant journalism put on stage by *Zaytung*. And Melih Gökçek

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/melih-gokcek-zaytung-haberini-gercek-sandi-1137951/>

<sup>42</sup> <http://zaytung.com/fotohaberdetay.asp?newsid=215173>

<sup>43</sup>Yeni Şafak is a newspaper in mainstream media, which is thought to be close to the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

allegedly shared this *Zaytung* news article on Twitter, trying to reinforce the idea of protestors as harming the country. Even though Melih Gökçek denied this tweet later, it remained in people's minds as a fascinating example of the blurred lines between fiction and reality for *Zaytung*. Here *Zaytung* is not only making fun of one of the members of the mainstream media which is thought to be close to the AKP government, namely the *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, but it is also criticizing the type of news articles mainstream media organs were posting during the Gezi protests. Since they imitate the tone and arguments of the other media organizations, sometimes they are mistaken to be actually a part of mainstream media, and their humorous fake news are read as if they were taking place in reality. But why is this happening?

Jayson Harsin analyzes Foucault's famous claim that each society has its regime of truth, and he suggests that:

“[W]e are witnessing a breakdown of fiduciary status in truth-telling and confirmation/judgment and coordination of apparatuses in a so-called regime (witness climate change denial, among countless others). Foucault's theory appears attached to an age of mass communication, a society of the spectacle. In such a period, fewer channels could be assumed to circulate similar statements and more confidently capture the attention of a mass citizenry. Those days are of course long gone; new self-mass and old mass communication technologies coexist, but with ever fragmenting audiences” (Harsin, 3).

What Harsin calls “a regime-of-truth change” is all about a change in news which focuses on attracting attention rather than conveying the truth. We don't have the mechanisms of fact checking which could work the same way it did when we were getting only a limited number of news from just a few number of sources, and more importantly it seems like we don't care about those mechanisms in this new regime of truth. It is as if it doesn't really matter if we check the truth value of the news or not anymore as long as it fulfills what we desire to hear. News are coming from so many different sources that if a fake news finds a way to find its place in one of these numerous channels and if it attracts attention, its truth value can easily be ignored and left aside. In the Melih Gökçek example above, it is tempting to believe in and spread the news about terrorist protestors who are trying to blow up an entire country. The humorous fake news article *Zaytung* posts appeals to Gökçek's emotions and it meets

his definition of the protestors. Therefore, this news article attracts his attention despite its incredibility.

*Zaytung* is strategically positioning itself in this post-truth era and making use of the concept of post-truth in its humorous fake news articles. Andres Norris quotes Orwell and draws a parallel between one of the characters in the novel, Julia, and American people:

“What Orwell observes of Winston’s lover Julia in 1984 is true of all too many of us Americans: ‘she only questioned the teachings of the Party when they in some way touched upon her own life. Often she was ready to accept the official mythology, simply because the difference between truth and falsehood did not seem important to her.’ How else to explain the widespread lack of interest in the debacle over weapons of mass destruction? Plain lies are greeted either with a shrug or indifference, or a defense of the ‘sincerity’ of the emotion or conviction of the actor.” (Norris, 98)

We can consider this parallel between Winston’s lover Julia and American people in Turkey’s circumstances as well and argue that *Zaytung* arises from a situation similar to this one. Nobody cares about the truth, people’s feelings and what touches their lives is what matters. In a time like this, humorous fake news articles turn out to be a strategic medium for criticism. It is not only an attempt to break the indifference through attracting attention to the disregarded truth value of the news, but also a way of criticizing the value of attention over truth by means of blending the patterns of fake news with humor.

Melih Gökçek is not the only person who allegedly fell for *Zaytung*’s play with fake news. *Zaytung* bends the genres of journalism and fiction successfully, thus resulting in a complicated understanding of reality which tricks people into reading it as regular journalism from time to time. Another example for these blurred lines between fiction and reality was even brought to court in 2014. Hüseyin Avni Coş, who was the governor of the Adana province at the time of the incident, took one of the *Zaytung* news seriously and sued a university student who shared the news instead of *Zaytung*. The student, Meral Tutcalı, was sentenced to 1 year and 2 months in prison. The news was given in one of the newspapers with the headline: “*Zaytung haberini bir vali bir de*

*yargıç ciddiye aldı*”<sup>44</sup> / “A governor and also a judge took a *Zaytung* news seriously”. The disclosure of the judgment was postponed for 5 years because Meral Tutcalı didn’t have a criminal record before that and at the time when I interviewed her, she was waiting for 2 more years for the case to be completely closed which had been making her nervous for the last 3 years. The deleted photo-news<sup>45</sup> was one of *Zaytung*’s humorous fake news. Although it was about the real governor of the Adana province, the incident had not taken place in reality. In the news, the Governor’s photograph in a parade was shared with the title:

“*Adana Valisi Hüseyin Avni Coş, özerkliğini ilan etti. RTE'den daha forslu*”

“Adana Governor Hüseyin Avni Coş has declared his autonomy. He is more influential than RTE”<sup>46</sup>.

The governor considered this news as a serious case and took it to court as a defamation lawsuit; however, the defendant of this case was neither *Zaytung* nor anyone writing for *Zaytung*, since it was a university student who simply shared the news on *Twitter*. According to the Article 125 of the Penal Code of Turkey, which covers insult, “Any person who attributes an act, or fact, to a person in a manner that may impugn that person’s honour, dignity or prestige, or attacks someone’s honour, dignity or prestige by swearing shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of three months to two years or a judicial fine”. This caused Tutcalı to be sentenced to 1 year in prison. But more interestingly since the “offense” was committed on *Twitter* the judge decided that the fourth paragraph of the article, amended in 2005, which stated that “Where the insult is committed in public, the penalty to be imposed shall be increased by one sixth.” should be applied here in this case, resulting in her penalty being increased to 1 year and two months in prison. Even though Tutcalı got a postponement of the penalty, the case highly affected not only her life but also the position of *Twitter* as a crime scene. I believe the reason why Meral Tutcalı was accused instead of anyone in *Zaytung* was

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<sup>44</sup>[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/259710/Zaytung\\_haberini\\_bir\\_vali\\_bir\\_de\\_yargic\\_ciddiye\\_aldi.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/259710/Zaytung_haberini_bir_vali_bir_de_yargic_ciddiye_aldi.html)

<sup>45</sup><http://www.zaytung.com/fotohaberdetay.asp?newsid=235325&mobile=2> this link is no longer available on *Zaytung* but it was a subject to news on other newspapers and websites like *Bianet*: <http://bianet.org/bianet/hukuk/163987-mahkeme-vali-cos-u-ciddiye-aldi-ogrencive->

<sup>46</sup>RTE is the abbreviation of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

because she was there as a person with a name and surname, instead of the anonymity of *Zaytung*:

MT: In the first place my tweet probably dropped there when someone wrote the Governor's name and surname on Twitter. Anyway, they directed me to the prosecutor's office; they had found my house in a completely non-legal way, then left out the search warrant. One morning two policemen came to my house from the Cybercrimes unit to take the two computers for examination. One day later I went to testify with my lawyer, stating that it doesn't contain any insult, but despite that the prosecutor directly filed a lawsuit. In the last trial, two lawyers defended me they explained that this news didn't belong to me but they couldn't convince the judge. There is also a situation like this, the judge was an elderly person he didn't understand social media he didn't know what retweeting was; my case was unlucky a little because of that also.

**How did this case affect your life?**

I got more recognition on social media, I received intensive support messages from people. I think twice now before I share. I do not feel free enough. After the incident I was nervous that the cops will come to the house again, what they will take out from where to blame me unfairly again for a year. I see the penalty given to me as a result of the political pressure on humor in Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

The website uses its anonymity as a strategy for creating a safe distance between the writers and the criticism the news articles deliver humorously. In Meral Tutcalı's case, as she also mentions, even though she only shared the news she was the accused in the trial because she is there with her name instead of a nickname as it happens on the website. It is easier to condemn a person instead of an organization or a nickname in that organization. The case received much attention, and the attention was generally on

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<sup>47</sup> Zaten Twitter arama kısmına valinin ad soyadını yazınca direk benim tweet düşmüştür. Neyse beni savcılığa vermişler, evimi tespit etmişler tamamen yasal olmayan yolla, daha sonra arama kararı çıkarmışlar. Bi sabah evime iki polis geldi siber suçlar biriminden 2 adet bilgisayarı aldılar incelemek üzere. Ben bir gün sonra avukatımla ifadeye gittim ifademi verdim hakaret içermediğini söyledim buna rağmen savcı direk dava açtı. Son duruşmada beni iki avukat savundu hakime o kadar anlattılar izah ettiler bu paylaşım Meral'e ait değil diye ama ikna edemedik. . .Şöyle bir durum da söz konusu,hakim yaşlıca biriydi sosyal medyadan anlamayan rtweet yapmanın ne olduğunu bilmeyen biriydi biraz da bundan şansız oldu benim durumum.

**Bu olay hayatınızı nasıl etkiledi?**

Sosyal medyada daha çok tanındım,insanlardan yoğun destek mesajları aldım. Paylaşım yaparken artık iki kere düşünüyorum.Kendimi yeterince özgür hissetmiyorum.Olay sonrası bir yıl kadar tekrar eve gelecekler polisler, acaba nerden ne çıkaracaklar da beni haksız yere tekrar suçlayacaklar diye tedirgin oldum. Bana verilen cezayı Türkiye'de mizaha yapılan politik baskının sonucu olarak görüyorum..



how the governor, the police, the lawyers, the prosecutor, and the judge took the humorous fake news article seriously. This is the dilemma of the subject of humorous criticism. Even in the situations where it contains serious criticism, the criticism is strategically delivered with a certain tone of irony, and if the subject takes it seriously, that adds another dimension to the irony. Another interesting point is that Meral Tutcalı thinks that the judge did not fully comprehend the issue of humorous fake news because of his age. The judge does not differentiate *Zaytung* from the other members of the mainstream media and the joke and humor are left aside in this case while considering the news *Zaytung* delivered. In *Zaytung*'s circumstances, *Zaytung* does not try to defame Hüseyin Avni Coş by stating that he declared his autonomy to be considered more influential than the president; it is given as humorous fake news in the first place. The conflict arises because of the blurred lines between fake and real that *Zaytung* makes use of.

There are elements of fakeness in parody news just as there are elements of parody in humorous fake news; we don't need to put the news articles on the website only in one category, but still we need to distinguish these two terms in order to have a better understanding of *Zaytung*'s relationship with reality. Elements of fake news may exist in parody news just as elements of parody news may exist in humorous fake news, but this doesn't mean that they are interchangeable terms. This only means that their weight on the news articles may differ. In both of the examples that I'm going to give for parody news and humorous fake news, the way mainstream media delivers the news is parodied and in both examples there are fake elements. As an example to parody news, I want to discuss *Zaytung*'s news article about a sad event that took place in one of the universities of Turkey:

*“YÖK'ten 'Volkan Bayar' Savunması: 'Muhafif bir paylaşımı var mı diye çok araştırdık, çıkmayınca mecburen görevde tuttuk...’”<sup>48</sup>*

““Volkan Bayar’ defense from the Council of Higher Education: We have searched so much to see whether he shared anything dissident, when there wasn't anything we had to keep him in his duty”

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=338792>

In Osmangazi University, A research assistant killed 4 faculty members in April 2018, and it turned out that before the incident he informed the authorities about many faculty members, claiming that they are associated with terrorist organizations, and faculty members filed complaints about his attitude and threats<sup>49</sup>. Even though the other faculty members had to face investigation, it turned out that nothing had been done about Volkan Bayar. *Zaytung* takes this real situation and delivers it parodying mainstream media, in order to criticize the attitude of the authorities in this case. Even though the council did not actually make a statement like that, it is in line with their attitude before the incident for *Zaytung*. This parody news feeds directly on reality. As an example for humorous fake news, I want to discuss *Zaytung*'s delivery of an event that hasn't happened and that has rally low chances of happening:

*“Üniversiteye Giriş Sistemi Sil Baştan Değişiyor: Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Öğrencileri Tek Tek Mülakatla Seçecek...”*  
“University Entrance System Changes Altogether: President Erdoğan will Choose the Students One by One through Interviews...”

This news article does not feed itself on reality in the same way that the other one does. Volkan Bayar did murder 4 faculty members, the faculty members had complained about him before, and nothing had been done. There are direct relationships between the news article and reality, and mainstream journalism is parodied in order to criticize the council's attitude, In the second example no such system of university entrance can happen. It is impossible for President Erdoğan to choose the students one by one in order to decide who will enter the university and who will not. This piece satirizes President Erdoğan's discontentedness with marginal university students. Parody news is more related to what actually happened than humorous fake news which gives the reader an exaggerated sight of what might happen. This is the reason why the news about absurd incidents in reality are considered to be like *Zaytung*'s parody news, as parody news articles are always related to absurdity in reality. On the other hand, when humorous fake news are mistaken as real news, this situation itself is also considered to be humorous because it is not about an incident of reality, it is simply fake as the name underlines.

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<sup>49</sup>[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/955323/Devlet\\_uyumus\\_muhbir\\_vurmus.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/955323/Devlet_uyumus_muhbir_vurmus.html)

### 3.4. A Space for Non-Compliance

How do these playful interactions with reality make non-compliance possible for *Zaytung*? In the second chapter while discussing the website's role in resistance, I suggested that *Zaytung* should be considered as a reaction to the reality we live in. This is a highly politicized absurd reality, in which the search for truth has lost its popularity in public. Both in its parody news and the humorous fake news, *Zaytung* makes use of this loss of interest in truth and approaches to mainstream media with irony. According to Hutcheon irony is a powerful tool and it is "a power to contest the singleness associated with repressive authority, a singleness that is usually ahistorical in its claims to eternal and universal value" Hutcheon, "The Power of..." 38). Irony gives us an opportunity for alternatives, and that alternative in Turkey's case is *Zaytung*. But Hutcheon also questions irony, by asking whether it can do anything beyond political deconstruction. This was also the question in my mind, which I tried to answer in the former chapter while discussing *Zaytung*'s position in resistance. Do irony and humor actually do anything? "In a postmodern age, irony seems to have at least the potential to historicize and politicize, and therefore it has at least the potential to liberate what Alan Wilde calls 'the blocked energies inscribed in the modernist crisis' (1981: 49)". ((Hutcheon, "The Power of..." 46) I believe, that potential is what makes readers and writers of *Zaytung* stick to irony as a tool for resisting to mainstream media. Besides, if it were not doing anything, it wouldn't draw reactions as it did in the "Hüseyin Avni Çoş v. Meral Tutcalı" case. I believe that event, as well as the Gollum case, can be considered as an evidence of *Zaytung*'s actually shaping the reality and affecting the authority figures. It is a sinister effect, since any reaction from the authority against humor and irony has a news value even in the mainstream media. And most importantly, "[t]he news parody opens a space between the audiences and the mainstream news that punctures conventional news assumptions, and playfully detaches itself in order to hold up for examination the styles and topics of the news." (Achter, 299) In other words, *Zaytung* gives the reader a new way of re-reading the mainstream news, and a new discourse to adopt, which makes the reader compare the mainstream news to *Zaytung* news and find the absurdity in which they are living. The website leads

people into comparisons which trigger their critical minds, opening a space in which journalism finds a way for non-compliance to mainstream media and a way to re-represent things in a humorous way which helps emphasize the absurdity in them. *Zaytung* as a “living organism” is reacting to the concept of post-truth, to the fake news finding their place in mainstream media, to the discourses of mainstream media, and to the absurdity of the reality we are living in.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **THE ANATOMY OF ZAYTUNG**

In this chapter, I want to analyze the structure of *Zaytung*. Which phases does a *Zaytung* news article go through before being posted? What is the structure of satirical news articles? How can the criticism of power be placed in these news articles? For this chapter, I became a part of *Zaytung* as a social platform and tried to write *Zaytung* news. I realized that there were many different aspects of a *Zaytung* news article that I needed to take into consideration while writing and posting. The outline of this chapter is very similar to the outline I used when I was trying to write a news article. What are the strategies of writing *Zaytung* news? What are some of the patterns in these articles? How is a humorous news article written? How is it constructed? Besides the methods of writing, I will try to analyze how the line of “offensive” is drawn within humor. *Zaytung* always touches boundaries, in some cases it draws reactions from authority figures, in other cases public reacts to some of *Zaytung*’s news articles. Can we use religion, militarism, gender, or disability as an element of humor? What is too far for *Zaytung* news?

#### **4.1. Strategies of Writing *Zaytung* News**

Identification and data collection may threaten satirists. Ensuring anonymity can help lessen these feelings of threats. Asenbaum suggests that the masks of Anonymous, for

example, “can be read as rebellion against identification and data collection” (Asenbaum, 1557). Nicknames are reactions to blacklisting which comes along with identification. *Zaytung* as a website is designed as a space of anonymity. Anyone who would like to write a news article for *Zaytung* can sign up, take a nickname, write their news article, and send it to the editors of the website. What role does anonymity play in this procedure? Taking up a nickname, allows a safe distance between the writer’s identity and the news article. If we return to the Hüseyin Avni Coş v. Meral Tutcalı case, Meral Tutcalı was the defendant of the case instead of the writer of that news article about Coş or any editor of *Zaytung* because Tutcalı was using her full name instead of a nickname while sharing the news on Twitter and that made her more accessible than a nickname. Through her full name the lawyers and then the police easily located her. When I asked Hakan Bilginer whether *Zaytung* was getting into any trouble or not, he was more interested in the strategies that allowed *Zaytung* to keep a distance from any legal accusations:

HB: “I am not a celebrity. There is no name appearing on *Zaytung*. There is no such thing as *Zaytung* is Hakan, Ahmet, or Mehmet. Since people cannot find an interlocutor on social media... When you don’t respond individually you are not regarded as an individual. Being able to ignore the fans, the commentators. Maybe I mean, since we don’t take what we do seriously, we don’t get into trouble yet. This is also not a single person’s or a group’s job. Readers themselves can create contents in this platform. The number of registered members is over 120.000.”<sup>50</sup>

Being online with a name and surname is a much different experience than having the chance to hide behind a nickname. Nicknames don’t provide any impenetrable protection to writers but it is still harder for accusations to find an interlocutor. I think in the case of *Zaytung* the impression of an organization is what takes nicknames’ safe distance one step forward. Whenever a tweet is shared, it is the nickname’s tweet; but whenever a *Zaytung* news is shared, it directly belongs to *Zaytung* it becomes a *Zaytung* news. Since *Zaytung* doesn’t respond to anything, it makes it harder to embody the

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<sup>50</sup> “Ben bir celebrity değilim. *Zaytung*’un görünen bir ismi yok. *Zaytung* Hakan’dır Ahmet’dir Mehmet’dir diye bir şey yok. Sosyal medyada da insanlar muhatap bulamadıkları için... Bireysel cevap vermeyince birey olarak ele alınmıyor. Göz ardı edebilmek fanları, yorum yapanları. Belki de yani biz ciddiye almadığımız için henüz başımız derde girmiyor. Bu tek bir kişilik bir iş ya da bir grup işi de değil. Okuyucuların kendileri içerik oluşturabiliyor bu platformda. 120.000 üzerinde kayıtlı üye var.”

website as a person as Bilginer was underlining. “Who is *Zaytung*” is a question much harder to answer than “who is Meral Tutcalı”. The nickname is almost never mentioned while sharing these news articles, only under certain news which were written not by the editors of the website. I believe, this is the reason why it is harder to put *Zaytung* as an organization on trial than to target an individual who did not write the news article but still can be blamed for sharing it.

During my experience of writing, even though I didn’t feel completely safe, the shield of anonymity helped a bit. I thought, I need to really offend someone for them to investigate hard enough to access beyond my nickname. But what does this lessened pressure say about our inclination to nicknames? Does saying something in anonymity, which we wouldn’t say if our identities were directly revealed, actually liberate us from the pressures of blacklisting? From that perspective, we can consider nicknames as compromises in the sense that taking up a nickname is accepting the rules and structures of hierarchy and finding a way of existing within these structures. Do nicknames really allow an attack on the system which doesn’t provide its individuals a safe space to joke and laugh, or does it accept and reproduce the system by hiding behind nicknames? While trying to answer that question, I believe we need to underline the fact that the shield of anonymity does not provide an impenetrable safe space as the IP addresses and site memberships can always be investigated and tracked. It is just easier to reach a real name and a surname like in the *Coş v. Tutcalı* case, than to reach an internet persona hiding behind a nickname. However, even that partial evasion of surveillance can boost the impression of freedom. That impression of freedom anonymity allows people to crack the seriousness of the authoritative system by finding a way to exist within the system. In that sense, we can consider anonymity as a counterattack as well as a compromise.

Another important strategy of writing a *Zaytung* news article is punctuality. Internet is a continuously updated area. It is possible for a joke not to be funny anymore even only after 10 minutes of its online lifespan. The website should be up to date all the time in order to achieve its aimed effect. The current news and the joke about it should be perfectly matched within a certain period of time. In *Zaytung*’s case this also means that

the writer should have control over current political occurrences. I think this is one of the hardest sides of writing a humorous news article for *Zaytung*. “[P]olitical cartoons ‘must of necessity cultivate foresight, learn to measure events and anticipate their consequences in time to meet them punctually when they happen’ (Davidson, 2003:5)” (qtd in Popa, 145). These anticipations for consequences and punctual witty repartee are not the characteristics only of political cartoons but also humorous *Zaytung* news. One may even argue that punctuality is even more necessary for the latter because it belongs more to the internet. For example, right before the elections, Turkey was experiencing sharp currency fluctuations. Turkish lira was so unstable that people started to comment on how the price of things, if you calculate them in American dollars, was ceaselessly changing. This seemed like a perfect opportunity to write a *Zaytung* news, since people were perplexed, and the topic was really popular. When I was checking my account summary, which was increasing little by little because of the dollar rate, I came up with the idea of the joke I could make and opened the website to write about it. However, the joke I thought about had already been told:

*“800 Dolarlık Birikimi Sayesinde Her Gün Sigara Parasını Bedavaya Getiren Yavuz Aycan, Ekonomideki Gidişattan Memnun...”<sup>51</sup>*

*“Yavuz Aycan, who gets the cigarette money for free everyday due to his savings of 800 dollars, is pleased with the economic process...”*

Writing a *Zaytung* news requires a certain ready-wittedness. The news article should be written in a very short period of time, and it is the popular topic until another witty repartee takes its place. This news article ceased being interesting the moment the currency fluctuations stopped. The sharp rise of the American dollar over the Turkish lira was the hot topic of that day and it was the thing that attracted much attention. This may also generate a sense of bonding since *Zaytung*'s jokes play with our common understanding of things and the things that we are experiencing together at the exact time that we are experiencing those things. Anything that is in the country's agenda subsequently finds its place in *Zaytung*'s agenda intertextually with mainstream media. The close relationship between a mainstream news article and a *Zaytung* article helps *Zaytung* in their witty repartee.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=341306&mobile=2>



Intertextuality is another strategy employed by *Zaytung*. Graham Allen in the conclusion of his book *Intertextuality* states that “intertextuality reminds us that all texts are potentially plural, reversible, open to the reader’s own presuppositions, lacking in clear and defined boundaries, and always involved in the expression or repression of the dialogic ‘voices’ which exist within society” (209, Allen). *Zaytung* opens an intertextual route between its parody news and humorous fake news, and mainstream news. The website mimics the “clear and defined boundaries” of journalism in order to show what it lacks. The mainstream news article is not a sacred, unquestionable text that only delivers the truth. By humorously parodying a mainstream news article, *Zaytung* makes a subverted copy of it, pluralizes it, and therefore opens the regular news article to criticism. These textual interactions between regular news and *Zaytung* news -as in both issues of “Like *Zaytung* news” and *Zaytung* news mistaken to be real news that I discussed in the former chapter- are not there only for humor’s sake. *Zaytung* makes use of intertextuality to underline the way media delivers and the readers receive the news - and the truths that these news claim to convey as well- in all its borders, rules, and absurdity.

What are some of the similarities between regular news and *Zaytung* news? A regular news article is generally written in the inverted pyramid style or in the hourglass style (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). The inverted pyramid starts with a summary of the topic, trying to answer the questions of what, who, where, when, why, and how; and then leads to supporting details, and eventually to less important details. *Zaytung* not only mimics this inverted pyramid, but also subverts it in the last paragraph of the humorous news article. The headline foreshadows this subversion which will take place in the last paragraph:

“Rapor: Beyaz Yakalılar Arasında Her Şeyi Bir Kenara Bırakıp Küçük, Şirin Bir Kafe Batırmak İsteyenlerin Sayısı Artıyor...”<sup>52</sup>

“Report: The Number of White-Collar Workers Wanting to Leave Everything Aside to Bankrupt a Small Cute Cafe is Rising...”

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=323406>

This news article starts in accordance with the inverted pyramid, what is going on, who is doing it, how, where, and when is this thing happening is briefly explained and then supporting details follows this concise summary of the event. It is about a report of the Turkish Industry and Business Association, the numbers of the report, percentages, and timelines are also given in order to increase the sense of reality. This kind of news articles are closely mimicked until the last paragraph in which the vice president of the association unexpectedly says something like “Yo what were you expecting hehehe” in Turkish slang. Due to this final diversion from the serious tone, the mimicked news style is subverted.

The close imitation of regular news articles provides *Zaytung* with the set of rules to make use of while writing and subverting the rules for the sake of humor and satire. The website also imitates the hourglass style of the regular news, in which the journalists first give the summary of the event and then lead to the narrative. After the summary of the event, statements of the witnesses are inserted to the narrative. In one example *Zaytung* jokes about the awkward outcomes of the strict regulations of the Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK), which demands censorship over the usage of alcohol on TV and even the names of alcoholic drinks being said besides curses and slang:

*Televizyonda Yanlışlıkla 'Bira' Kelimesini Duyan 6 Yaşındaki Yavuz Ateş Eğbeci, Günde 8 Kutu Bira İçmeye Başladı...*<sup>53</sup>  
6-year-old Yavuz Ateş Eğbeci, who accidentally heard the word "beer" on TV, started drinking 8 cans of beer a day...

The 6-year-old boy in this news article is driven to alcoholism just because he heard the word “beer” which wasn’t censored as the supreme council wants it. After the outline of the event is given, what the family is going through and how their lives have changed after that one second their child heard the word is narrated with their sad expressions. What *Zaytung* mostly makes use of during these subverted mimics of regular news is irony. Irony as a rhetorical device gives depth to what is said. The surface and the interior are generally different. Irony challenges the singleness and the stability of the meaning. It provides a space for the word to suggest more. These hidden suggestions are

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=338693>

what make irony a powerful device for *Zaytung*. We can discuss the *Zaytung* news which are mistaken to be real news (Chapter 3) under failure of recognition as ironic since “[t]here is no such thing as a fail-safe diagnostic of irony. All communication takes place at a risk” (Wilson and Sperber, 47). Thus, the website does not openly state that it has an ironic tone but there are subtle subversions which can lead the reader to recognize that irony. In the example above the effects of uncensored alcohol is overly exaggerated in order to intensify the ironic approach to censorship on media. The reader understands that the statements of the child who is in the grip of alcoholism are not supposed to be taken literally, but the news is seriously given as if literal which strengthens humor’s effect. The resemblance between regular news and *Zaytung* news generates some sort of uncanniness as the reader is defamiliarized from the mainstream news article through humorous subverted parodies of it, and that uncanniness increases the sense of irony. As the familiar way the news is delivered is defamiliarized, the mainstream news is put on stage for questioning and satire.

#### **4.2. Taboos and Borders of Humor**

Targeting vulnerabilities and sensitivities or a juxtaposition of a serious and sometimes sorrowful event with humor makes *Zaytung* wander around the borders of inappropriateness from time to time. “In general, a joke is seen as funny if it touches upon a social boundary; but the minute this goes too far, appreciation for the joke quickly fades” (Kuipers *Good Humor...*, 148). And sometimes targeting vulnerabilities makes the joke offensive. Should the news writers touch upon these sensitivities while joking or should they not? Is there a beginning and an end of the non-offensive zone? Or simply is there a non-offensive zone in jokes? How do we draw the lines of offensive? Kuipers suggests that tolerance for a joke is directly related to its humorousness, as “a joke that goes too far is no longer funny, but: a joke that is not funny, goes too far more quickly” (Kuipers, *Good Humor...*, 157). A similar answer was given by Hakan Bilginer:

**Do you think there is a topic which you can't make humorous news about?**

HB: No, there is no such thing. Everything is really about how it can be done right. It's not about the dose but about from where you are approaching to it. Even if it is about the most tragic event, which is what we do. I don't know like there is a terror attack, there is whatever, such and such. Even there, there is a point you can approach, so finding the right spot is important. Okay, you can't make fun of people's cut arms or decapitated heads, we won't at least do this but I don't know the security weakness in the terror attack can be teased.<sup>54</sup>

After the joke, the right spot, and right tone is found the news article is shared on the website. But as the right tone is not the right tone for everyone, and as the website does not refrain from making jokes about any delicate subject, attracting negative reactions in some sensitive topics becomes inevitable for *Zaytung*. I gathered the news that attracted reactions and the topics were as follows: religion, militarism, terror, disability, and gender.

The Charlie Hebdo shootings in 2015 heated the discussions about Islam as a subject of humor. Felix M. Larkin in his essay “Free Speech and Charlie Hebdo” suggests that “we negate our 'freedom to offend' if we exercise it only when it is safe or 'politically correct' to do so - or indeed if we do so only when the target is something not sacred in our own culture” (Larkin, 194). When the target is a taboo for us, things change in our understanding of “freedom to offend” and we often demand standards of appropriateness and political correctness that maybe we wouldn't in relation to another subject. And Islam is generally considered to be a taboo topic, which makes jokes about it easily offensive. Larkin draws a parallel between “the chance to ignore” and “the freedom to offend” and states that the offended can avoid offense by simply disregarding the offender. Any attempt to control the joke would be censorship and tyranny instead of avoidance. But how can we avoid the offensive on the internet? If you know a person who makes jokes that offend you, you can decide not to see them

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<sup>54</sup> **Hakkında şaka haber yazılmayacak bir konu var mı sizce**

Yo öyle bir şey yok yani. Her şey aslında nasıl doğru yapılabileceği ile ilgili meselenin. Dozuyla da değil de nereden yaklaşacağımızla ilgili mesele. En trajik olayla ilgili bile, ki yapıyoruz yani. Ne bileyim işte bir terör saldırısı oluyor bilmem ne oluyor falan filan. Orada bile yaklaşabileceğiniz bir yer vardır doğru noktayı bulmak önemlidir yani. Ölen insanın kolunun kopması kafasının kopmasıyla dalga geçilmez okay de yani bunu yapmayız en azından ama ne bileyim terör saldırısındaki güvenlik zafiyetiyle mesele atıyorum dalga geçilebilir.

anymore, but any joke on the internet is a public joke which lessens “the chance to ignore” and increases the probability of offence. If we return to Charlie Hebdo, *Zaytung* was not silent to the shootings in France and they also released a news about the event:

*İslam'ı şiddet dini gibi gösteren karikatürleri protesto etmek amacıyla düzenlenen gösteride, 3 büyükelçilik binası ateşe verildi. Çıkan olaylarda 7 kişi hayatını kaybederken, 4'ü ağır 30 kişi yaralandı...<sup>55</sup>*

In the demonstration organized to protest the cartoons that depict Islam as a religion of violence, 3 embassy buildings were set on fire. 7 people lost their lives in the outbreaks, 30 people were injured, of which 4 seriously wounded...

This news stems from the protests of the caricatures of Charlie Hebdo in Niger where the protestors set two churches on fire. The irony in violence against the accusations of violence doubles the criticisms of violent responses to humor. Violence, terror, and Islam will continue to be topics of debate, which will also make these issues continue to be subjects to jokes. Another thing that *Zaytung* interestingly does about this sensitivity in the case of religion is to add another share button to the website. The reader has three options on the website: “share it on facebook”, “send it to twitter”, “refer it to Allah’s punishment”<sup>56</sup>. If you don’t like the news article and press the third button, *Zaytung* directs you to the website of the directorate of religious affairs, which shows us that *Zaytung* has found a way to handle the reactions humorously.

Militarism is another taboo topic in the Turkish context. Ayşe Gül Altınay in her book “The Myth of Military-Nation” states that any discussion of militarism and militarization in Turkey is silenced. The silencing of the discussions of the military begins during the early education of every Turkish child. In her words, “Turkish history is written with victories; military service is not only a sacred duty, but a necessary rite of passage for young men; military is a school and students are soldiers; self-sacrifice is necessary for the nation (and the state) to survive and all Turks sacrifice willingly and without hesitation” (Altınay, 125). In this discourse “Every Turk is born a soldier”; and this sacredness and sharedness of military service makes it a taboo topic for humor. The

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=190563>

<sup>56</sup> “Allah’a havale et” in Turkish.

jokes on the website that tackle the military are more often about the compulsory military than militarism itself. These news articles joke about the glorification of ordinary young man who is being sent to do their military service heroically, whereas what they do in this compulsory service is area cleaning and peeling potatoes. In one news the Turkish military employs soldier-robots who eventually take up the duty of peeling potatoes<sup>57</sup>, in another one a young man who is sent to military service with glorifying ovations by his family and friends faces the reality of area cleaning<sup>58</sup>. This glorification of military service is targeted, and the discrepancies between expectations from the service and realities of it are highlighted in these *Zaytung* news. Since these are ordinary memories of military service shared by many who have done it, these news articles provide a somewhat tolerable space for humor about the military. However, the coup attempt on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 added another layer to the tabooing of military service in humor. The first news article after the coup attempt on the website was more about the horrors of that night:

*IŞİD, Türkiye'den Çekilme Kararı Aldığını Açıkladı: "Terör ve şiddet açısından kendi kendine yetebilen bir ülke..."*<sup>59</sup>  
ISIS Announces Withdrawal from Turkey: "It is a self-sufficient country in terms of terror and violence..."

In this news article the leaders of ISIS regard Turkey as a waste of resources and time. They become, as a terror organization, unnecessary in the Turkish context. Nevertheless, although it contains more violence than the area cleaning and potatoes peeling news of military service, even this news article is still not joking about the concept of military and militarism. This news article is about the shared experience of violence and terror of the night of the coup attempt. I believe, the right tone that Hakan Bilginer talked about is directly linked to these shared experiences. If the subject of the joke is something that is shared by almost everyone, then it makes anyone an insider and jokes more tolerable.

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=318755>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=150921&mobile=2>

<sup>59</sup> <http://zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=308212>

The issue of being an insider and an outsider is generally discussed in jokes about disabilities. While discussing the disability humor in the *Onion*, Tom Coogan comments on Alex Lubet's feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence with regards to this kind of news and states that: "[t]his uncertainty over granting permission is clearly related to the way in which parody as a form complicates the issue of intent" (Coogan, 3). For the disabled and for the ones close to the disabled, jokes may become of way of dealing with disabilities, or even making them more visible in public. Coogan concludes that the intent, besides humor and laughter, is to make people think. One of *Zaytung*'s humorous fake news about the police's struggle with the photofit of a thief with down syndrome drew much attention both from mainstream media and social platforms like eksisozluk.com and twitter. Especially on twitter the hashtag #zaytungözürdile (#zaytungapologize) was widely used:

*Bağcılar'da kapkaç olayına karışan down sendromlu bir gencin robot resminden yola çıkan polis, eşgale benzeyen yaklaşık 700 şüpheliyi gözaltına aldı...*<sup>60</sup>

The police, set out from a photofit of a teenager with down syndrome who was involved in a snatching in Bağcılar, took almost 700 suspects who resemble the description

People were divided between two different opinions about this news, one side saying that there is no way one can joke about disability, and the other side saying that the police, not the disability, is the butt of the joke, since the intent is to criticize the ineffectiveness of the police. People supporting this latter opinion also add that people with down syndrome are everywhere, and they should be part of our daily lives instead of being positively or negatively discriminated. From this latter perspective, nothing should be spared as sacred not to be the butt of the joke because joking creates a sense of familiarity and togetherness.

Jeanette Bicknell draws a connection between vulnerability and offensiveness. Jokes about lawyers in her argument don't make them susceptible to injury; therefore, when a lawyer gets offended by a joke they are thought to be 'overly sensitive'. According to her:

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/fotohaberdetay.asp?newsid=188878>

“What is wrong, then, with telling jokes at the expense of marginalized groups is not just that these jokes constitute harm, or that such humor may cause further harm (consequentialism), or that the underlying beliefs of those who tell or enjoy such jokes are morally suspect (cognitivism). The moral fault in telling such jokes lies either in the failure to take account of vulnerability in others, or in the decision to exploit such vulnerability for the sake of humor” (Bicknell, 463)

Even though the usual way of things is suspended while joking, they are not left completely aside. This means that the joke can't be blind to vulnerabilities while it is joking about the vulnerabilities. We can discuss this border of humor in line with rape jokes. The rape threat is the reality of women. In one incident, the allegation that a police officer raped a woman in a police car carried this feeling of insecurity and vulnerability to another dimension. And *Zaytung* posted news about this incident stating that rape was the woman's punishment by the officer for having sex in a car<sup>61</sup>. Even though, one can argue that the police officer is being targeted here, rape is a huge part of this *Zaytung* news. Can such a delicate matter be subject to humor? Finding humor in sexual assault is at the same time trivializing this serious threat. This kind of news not only makes “further harm” more probable or make the ones who laugh at it “morally suspect”, but also it generates the need to resist the exploitation of this vulnerability for the sake of humor.

Besides vulnerability, stereotypes are also widely used in sexist humor as sexist humor is often used to reproduce stereotypes like “women can't drive” (“*Fren yerine klima tuşuna basan kadın sürücü, zatürre oldu...*”<sup>62</sup>/ “Female driver who pressed air-conditioner button instead of the brake, is down with pneumonia...”), or “all a woman wants is a rich husband” (“*Tek Hayali Zengin Bir Koca Bulup Dünyayı Gezmek Olan Gözde Eygin(22) de Kadınların Çalışma Hayatında Daha Aktif Rol Almalarından Yana...*”<sup>63</sup>/ “Gözde Eygin(22), whose only dream is to find a rich husband and travel the world, is on the side of women's taking a more active role in the working life...”), or “if a woman is angry, it is pre-menstrual syndrome because women are always angry ‘in

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/fotohaberdetay.asp?newsid=332631>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=168141>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/haberdetay.asp?newsid=337574>



that time of the month” (“İsrail ordusundaki kadın askerlerin büyük kısmının aynı anda pms dönemine girmesi, Ortadoğu’da tansiyonun bir kez daha yükselmesine neden oldu...”<sup>64</sup>/ “The fact that most of the female soldiers in the Israeli army are on PMS, caused the tension to rise once again in the Middle East...”). These *Zaytung* news drove me to ask the question of whether *Zaytung* makes fun of every absurd norm or does the website have a deeply embedded normative structure underneath the humorous texts? After all, these news articles represent and reproduce several prejudices about women. If I am offended by any of the news I shared above, disability or humor or religion etc., what can I do about it? There are also news articles on the website which criticize the sexist structure of language itself:

Eril dilindeki cinsiyetçi söylemlerinden kurtulmaya çalışan genç, elinde kalan 7 kelimeyle hayata tutunmaya çalışıyor...<sup>65</sup>  
Trying to get rid of the sexist rhetoric in the masculine language, a young man is trying to hold onto life with seven remaining words...

We can discuss this news article as a self-criticism. Just like the sexist structure of language being criticized here, the sexist rhetoric in humor can also be criticized humorously. Because that way, the website has the chance to provide an alternative to sexist humor that it also makes use of.

After discussing humor’s role in resistance, and how it creates an alternative way for non-compliance, I can’t support censorship just because I found some jokes offensive. Jokes are going to offend; the line of offensive is different for anyone which makes it impossible to differentiate the offensive and enforce sanctions accordingly, even in the case of vulnerabilities. What the offended can do about the offensive, instead of censorship, is to make the choice to exploit vulnerabilities and offensiveness for the sake of humor a subject of humor itself. Jokes about racism can stand against racist jokes or jokes about sexism can react to sexist jokes. Within the vast plurality provided by irony, humor opens up many areas to reject and criticize especially for the vulnerable.

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=61017>

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.zaytung.com/sondakikadetay.asp?newsid=319511>

## Chapter 5:

### CONCLUSION

This thesis represents an attempt to analyze *Zaytung*'s position in politics and the website's relationship with reality. The relationship between humor and politics in Turkey is an underworked area in social sciences. In this thesis I've presented *Zaytung* as an alternative to mainstream media and/or silence. *Zaytung* suspends the usual way things are and presents a humorous alternative reality to its readers, in relation to the mainstream representations of reality; therefore, joking about it, pluralizing it, and opening it to criticisms. I believe it is highly important to understand humorous reactions to power in these terms. "Does humor actually change anything" was one of the questions I tried to answer. This is the question that renders around *Zaytung*'s relationship with politics and reality.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I analyzed *Zaytung*'s position in humor by examining some of the theoretical approaches to humor like the incongruity theory, relief theory, superiority theory, humor as a defense mechanism, and humor as social corrective. After giving examples to these approaches to humor from the website, I came to the conclusion that there are many dimensions of a joke for a single theory to cover. But in all the theories that I analyzed, a subversion of reality was suggested which brought me to the carnival theory of Bakhtin. In that section of carnival of the second chapter, I tried to analyze how a Bakhtinian carnivalesque atmosphere is created on the website, and what role do this atmosphere plays. I concluded that chapter by analyzing humor as a form of resistance. In that section, I conceptualize *Zaytung* as a creative product of power which provides an alternative space for resistance to silence. *Zaytung* cracks the seriousness of authority by posting humorous news articles about it.

The website conveys concealed criticisms of power, it creates a social consciousness through sharing laughter, and offers its readers skepticism to the truth claims of mainstream media.

My third chapter is about the truth claims that I mentioned above and reality. In this chapter, I researched the relationship between *Zaytung* and reality. There two sides of this relationship with reality corresponding with the two types of news *Zaytung* posts. The first side of this relationship is the real news which are pointed out by the readers for their resemblance with *Zaytung* news as people share those news articles with the caption “*Zaytung haberi gibi/ Like Zaytung News*” on social media. This approach to mainstream news is about the absurdity of reality outside *Zaytung* which *Zaytung* also makes use of while crafting its satirical news articles. *Zaytung* underlines that absurdity in its parody news. By parodying mainstream media, *Zaytung* doubles it and opens the news article into discussion, triggering the readers’ critical minds through defamiliarization of mainstream news. This demonstration of the *Zaytung*-like character of some of the mainstream news by the readers of *Zaytung* also shows an expectation from *Zaytung*. Whenever an important political incident happens, people expect *Zaytung* to joke about it as they have internalized the websites style and jargon. What can be indicated from these expectations from *Zaytung* is that *Zaytung* became successful in attracting people’s attention and creating a shared social consciousness among members and readers.

The other side of *Zaytung*’s relationship with reality is related to the humorous fake news which are mistaken to be real news in some incidents. The website generates a complicated understanding of reality as it mimics the conventions of mainstream media really closely and accurately. In line with these humorous fake news articles posted on the website, I analyzed a lawsuit that took place as a result of taking *Zaytung* seriously. Therefore, *Zaytung* is not only shaped by the reality but the website also shapes the reality which makes non-compliance possible. The website provides its readers a space for comparison between mainstream news and *Zaytung* news resulting in criticisms of reality.

In the fourth chapter, I analyzed *Zaytung*'s structure. How is a *Zaytung* news article produced? In the first section, I dealt with the strategies of writing a *Zaytung* news article in line with my experience of writing for *Zaytung*. Due to identification and data collection which may result in an unpleasant situation for the writers of the website, *Zaytung* makes its members choose a nickname while registering to the website. The choice of a nickname is actually a strategy for ensuring anonymity to some extent. Another strategy of producing an article for *Zaytung* is punctuality. For the website to survive, and to continue attracting readers on internet, *Zaytung* has to be up to date all the time. In this promptness of internet, every joke has a really short lifespan that *Zaytung* tries to keep up to. Intertextuality was the other strategy used in a *Zaytung* news article. The humorous news article is always related to the tradition of journalism and the news style it parodies. Therefore, there are many allusions to mainstream media. The final question I had for this chapter was besides the strategies of producing a *Zaytung* news article, what were the boundaries of humor that were affecting *Zaytung*'s position? Humor always touches on boundaries. Some of the boundaries that *Zaytung* wandered around was religion, militarism, death and terror, disability, and gender. How do we approach to jokes we don't like? How can the crossing of boundaries and offensiveness be dealt with?

This research does not cover readers' individual responses to *Zaytung*'s humorous news articles. How the reader formulates *Zaytung*'s position within politics and reality can be analyzed more thoroughly. And there are over 120000 members of this website. How are these registered members' relationships with the website? What are their thoughts on humor? These questions should be asked to analyze *Zaytung* itself as a social structure. A comparative research with other Turkish humorous fake news websites such as [resmigaste.com](http://resmigaste.com) and [uydurmahaber.com](http://uydurmahaber.com) would be helpful in understanding the structure of these websites and their approaches to politics and reality.

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