SHUTTER, CLICK, SOCIAL CHANGE:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE NAR PHOTOS COLLECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The present thesis explores the practice and ethos of the Istanbul-based Nar Photos Collective. Based on both ethnographic semi-structured interviews and visual analysis, this research specifically examines the complex layers through which Nar Photos produces and disseminates their photography as means to critique normative socio-cultural and political codes and accounts. This thesis explores how Nar Photos positions itself in a variety of ways as an actor involved in a complex process of socio-political change within the context of Turkey. This study focuses on Nar Photos' construction of its practices in relation to a commitment of using photography as a means for understanding and expressing the world. This research reveals how Nar Photos negotiates their critical photographic perspective in relation to notions such as "social change" and their means of distribution and presentation, underscoring their movement across realms of media, art, and even hegemonic institutions. By focusing on the work of Nar Photos, this thesis aims to offer a scholarly intervention to highlight the interplay of visual culture, critical media practice, and politics.

ÖZET

DEKLANŞÖR, ŞİP-ŞAK, TOPLUMSAL DEĞİŞİM: NAR PHOTOS KOLLEKTİFİ İNCELEMESİ

Caitlin Marie Miles

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Anahtar Sözcükler: Nar Photos, Toplumsal Değişim, Fotoğrafçılık, Medya, Türkiye

Bu tez çalışması Istanbul'da bulunan Photos kolektifinin uygulamalarını ve prensiplerini araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Etnografik ve yarı resmi görüşmelere ve görsel analize dayanan bu araştırma, özellikle Nar Photos'un normatif sosyo-kültürel ve politik kodları ve tanımları eleştirmek amacıyla üretip yaydığı fotoğrafların geçtiği karmaşık katmanları incelemektedir. Bu tez, Türkiye bağlamında karmaşık bir sosyo-politik değişim sürecinde Nar Photos'un nasıl kendini çeşit yollarla aktör olarak müdahil ettiğini eleştirel olarak incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın odağında, Nar Photos'un dünyayı anlama ve ifade etme aracı olarak fotoğrafı kullanırken uygulamalarını nasıl inşa ettiği bulunmaktadır. Bu araştırma, Nar Photos'un, "toplumsal değişim," dağıtım ve sunum araçları ile medya, sanat ve hatta hegemonik kuruluşlar arasındaki hareketlerinin vurgulan ış ıgibi kavramlara ilişkin eleştirel bakış açılarını nasıl uygulamaya döktüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu tez, Nar Photos çalışmalarına odaklanarak, görsel kültür, eleştirel medya uygulamaları ve siyaset arasında gerçekleşen etkileşimi vurgulamak için bilimsel bir müdahale sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

To my mom and Phil

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INTRODUCTION

I met Serra Akcan in the Fall of 2013 at the Semiha Es Women Photographers International Symposium—organized by Sabanci University, Koc University, and the Istanbul Women's Museum—which brought together both practitioners and academics for a conference honoring the work of Turkey's first female war photographer. Introduced by a classmate, I learned that Serra was a co-founding member of the local Nar Photos Collective, a group of freelance, independent documentary photographers whose work I had become acquainted with during the Gezi Park protests of 2013. It was during this period of massive political upheaval that Nar Photos became a popular and important visual resource for activists and sympathizers of the protests. In light of a domestic media environment that censored coverage of the events, and the ahistorical international reports simplifying the uprising as struggle between secularism and "Islamic" authoritarianism, Nar Photos' visual accounts provided a unique and local outlet for understanding the uprisings. Thus meeting Serra just a few months after the heat of the Gezi Park events began to dwindle, I pondered the meaning and implication of photographing and documenting social unrest, change, and political violence. With a mission committed to utilizing photography as a tool for "understanding and expressing the world" (Nar Photos, 2012), how did Nar Photos articulate and practice this critical approach to photography? Moreover, claiming to produce photo reportages which question existing circumstances, how did their work contribute towards social change?

My initial approach to the Nar Photos collective was informed by the rapidly changing political environment in Turkey to which I was witness. Having been an active observer during the early stages of the protests, my initial perception was of Nar Photos as a key player in Turkey's social movement media milieu actively using photography to report on socio-political protest. While Nar Photos does occupy a place among activist media groups and practices within Turkey, their work and how they discursively frame their work signal the intricate ways Nar Photos moves through different spheres, such as aesthetics, media, and activism. The picture of Nar Photos that has emerged from a year's worth of mostly ethnographic research underscores that this alternative photography collective works not simply as a visual and informational source during times of political unrest, but situates its practices and photography as *one* facet amidst a larger process of social transformation.

The present thesis explores the complexlayers through which photography is produced and disseminated as means to critique dominant socio-cultural and political codes and accounts. Specifically, it examines howthe Nar Photos collective comes to position itself as an actor involved in a complex process of socio-political change within the Turkish context. This study focuses on Nar Photos' construction of its practices in relation to a commitment of using photography as a means for "understanding and expressing the world" (Nar Photos, 2012). In this regard, my research explores the interplay between media practice, visual culture, and conceptualizations of social change through the work of one group.

As my research draws on a variety of underlying concepts ranging from issues of representation, the question of the "gaze," witnessing and documenting inequality and political violence, global media flows, and citizen's journalism. Narrowing the focus of a project that analyzesthe interplay between perceptions of social change, visual culture,

and media is difficult in that many of the issues I highlighted are intricately intertwined and difficult to separate from one another. Indeed, as I conducted my research I was confronted with the difficulty of narrowing the scope of my research questions and analysis. Through the course of my interviews, noting the creative and practical means through which Nar Photos disseminates their work, I decided to concentrate on analyzing the interaction between Nar Photos' critical impetus and distributive practices. Particularly, I took note of how Nar Photos moved through the realms of high culture, mainstream, and alternative media through their choices of dissemination. Thus by focusing on the relation between photography, politics, and practice, my thesis provides an intellectual intervention into understanding how critical socio-political perspectivesare articulated through both photography and Nar Photos' engagement with other presentation forums.

I.1. Introducing the Nar Photos Collective

Nar Photos was founded in 2003 by a group of photographer friends who were introduced to each other while volunteering at a children's photography workshop following the destructive 1999 earthquake that affected Turkey's Marmara region. Twelve years later, the collective now maintains offices in both Istanbul and Diyabakır with upwards of 20 photographers. The founding members of the collective include Serra Akcan, Mehmet Kaçmaz, Tolga Sezgin, Saner Şen, Özcan Yurdalan, Kerem Uzel, Ilker Maga, and Hüsamettin Bahçe. Prior to joining Nar Photos, many of the original members were either freelance photographers or worked for notable magazines and newspapers. These founding members sought to bring together documentary

photographers in the hopes of creating an environment of support and collaboration (Adal, 2014).

For Nar Photos, what distinguishes their work as collective, rather than simply a group, is reflected in the non-hierarchical organizational structure they have established. Issues ranging from budgeting, office maintenance, and aesthetic decisions, such as the lighting or angles of photos, are made together with equal input.While some photographic endeavors are done together and some individually, the collective decision making seems most apparent during the process of examining and selecting photos for distribution. Members meet together to discuss the project to examine what story is being told and how aesthetic details contribute to or inhibit the intended message. They also meet together to determine what and how to present their photography. That being said, new and junior members of the collective often turn to more senior members for advice when editing (in terms of examining lighting, angles, and selecting photos) and preparing photographic projects.

More than a non-hierarchical structure, Nar Photos has created an environment of support and mentorship.[1]Through their website, Nar Photos claims that the collective nature of their work, i.e. knowledge-sharing and collaboration play a key role in maintaining a socially conscious position. Moreover, the collective asserts that this non-hierarchical collaboration, creative exchange, work-sharing, and decision-making format allow photographers to maintain their creative independence. From the outset, Nar Photos has been concerned with maintaining an unaffiliated and independent

[1]The actual practice of Nar Photos' non-hierarchical structure certainly merits further critical reflection. However, this remains outside of the scope of this thesis. From my interviews, there does appear to be some complexity and tensions within the collective regarding organization. Moreover, several of the founding members appear to exert considerable influence over the collective's functioning. Rather than accept or reject Nar Photos' claim, I leave this issue open by acknowledging the potential discrepancy through practice and mission.

(bağımsız) stance, claiming to retain full creative and operational control over their work, free from the oversight of larger parent organizations such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or corporate-sponsored artistic and journalistic endeavors. Under this paradigm Nar Photos finds that it can more freely pursue an activist and political program.

New members are generally approached by the collective after working together in the field or previous collaborations and chosen based on a variety of criteria ranging from similar socio-political outlook and working style. Nar Photos has created this vetting process as a means to choose photographers who hold similar values such as collectivity and engagement with daily life. While many photographers differ in the issues they tackle, or whether they prefer spot news to longer projects, the collective emphasizes that new members must first and foremost value collective and non-commercial photography. After the vetting process, new photographers are invited to join Nar Photos for full membership after a trial period.

Since its foundation, the collective has worked to establish and maintain a socio-cultural presence, presenting at various exhibitions and museums such as the recent Istanbul Modern exhibit, "On the Road: Images of Turkey from the Nar Photos Archive" (May 28, 2014 – November 9, 2014). Additionally, the collective frequentlyspeaks at panels, such as the Mobilizing Memory: Women Witnessing conference, and distributes photographic work to various magazines, newspapers, and international outlets—such as National Geographic, the New Yorker, Jaddaliyya, and Der Spiegel—through partnerships with photography distribution agencies. The collective has also conducted photography workshops for local youth and amateur photographers. Nar Photos maintains that their photography is about intervening and affecting daily life and that they do this through the employment of alternative working

practices and dissemination. For example, as Nar Photos (2012) has written on their website:

> [The] *agency plans to share the work with people by using alternative methods like street exhibitions, mobile exhibitions etc. to have more effect in and intervene the daily life besides books, internet, publications, exhibitions. One of the goals of the agency is to share knowledge and experience with the young photographers by a non-profit workshop.*

Nar Photos, then, claims that in order to promote a critical perspective their work must maintain a functionality that is partially achieved through the means by which it is distributed and shared. The functionality of Nar Photos' photography rests upon the idea that the manner in which the photos are taken, produced and shared questions the current circumstances surrounding the photographic subject and photographer.

From what I have observed, the collective has diligently worked to establish and maintain a work ethic to distinguish itself from either commercial or photojournalistic work. Nar Photos defines commercial work or commercial practice as that which is focused on the "plastic or aesthetic" (Nar Photos, 2012) value of a photo rather than its (social) function. Indeed, it was reiterated several times that projects are not undertaken nor developed for potential economic gains. Similarly, from preliminary interviews with co-founders Serra Akcan and Mehmet Kaçmaz, there was a strong emphasis placed on the non-photojournalistic stance of the collective. Mehmet explained that the work Nar Photos conducts requires a special set of skills, particularly an understanding of activism and protest dynamics. He finds that such skills distinguish their work from those of photojournalists. Furthermore, he asserted that Nar Photos is interested in a story, meaning a contextualization, deeper understanding of various socio-cultural and political events, whereas he believes photojournalists remain fixated on a single photo to summarize an event. Mehmet argued that while photojournalists remain detached and

objective, Nar Photos is concerned with developing relationships and connections with the story.

As many interviewees have stressed, photographers maintain freedom to choose topics with which they feel a connection. Members often choose topics which resonate with their personal histories or experiences (see Çiğdem's story in Chapter 1), rather than being assigned topics and reports as is common in traditional mass media. Occasionally, the members collaborate on larger projects when there is overlapping interest or need in the case of erupting political events. The collective photographs topics ranging from urban gentrification, poverty, women's rights and activism, the Kurdish issue, worker's rights, and leftistactivism.[2]These subjects are reflective of Nar Photos'original goal of providing an alternative to the tourist image/gaze of Istanbul and Turkey, promulgated through mainstream media, cultural institutions, and government ministries. This marks yet another tenant upon which Nar Photos distinguishes itself from mainstream news and representations, hoping to move away from the orientatlist, essentialist accounts of daily life in Turkey that are often presented. For example, Nar Photos cites the violent media representations of the Gezi Park uprisings and how they attempted to counter these visuals with imagery of the peaceful and even festive environment when police forces were absent.

These topics additionally mirror the members' concerns with understanding and capturing daily life.[3]In recent years, this original mission has expanded and now includes photography of scenes of war, political violence and protest, and an array of

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[2] Nar Photos also occasionally photographs conservative, right protests such as the August 2013 rally in Istanbul, held in support of Egypt's Mohammed Morsi and in condemnation of the Rabia attacks.

[3]The idea of photographic daily life provides the basis for discussion in the following chapter.

other events which reflect a turbulent period in Turkey's contemporary history. Both the Gezi Park protests and the Kurdish resistance against Islamic State forces on the Turkish-Syrian border have presented challenges to the collective in terms of shifting photographic practices. Whereas for the past 10 years Nar Photos has produced photographic projects over longer periods of time, recent political tensions and changes have spurred a slight shift in trajectory. Nar Photos finds itself more and more following and photographing ongoing and developing events both in Turkey and the wider region. The group maintains that despite these changes, they remain committed to asking more questions and encouraging dialogue and reflection through the medium of photography.

These changes in practice however, have not only presented Nar Photos with challenges in terms of operation, but have thrust Nar Photos "front and center" in the debates that mark Turkey's current political environment. Gaining fame[4] for the photographic reportages during Gezi Park, Nar Photos now contends with a larger following that looks to their work for visually understanding the world around them. Furthermore with a newer and larger following, Nar Photos is confronted with debates surrounding what it means to present critical photography within and around neo-liberal institutions, such as the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art and other cultural or media outlets. This is not to say that Nar Photos has not contended with these issues before. On the contrary, as I will discuss later on, Nar Photos has crafted unique engagements with various mainstream and alternative media channels in response to issues of censorship and other political concerns. Rather, Nar Photos is negotiating these issues now within the public eye and amidst new and pressing circumstances such as civil war, political protest, massive censorship, and rapid urban gentrification.

[4]Nar Photos members claim that no significant financial gains have been made since their increased recognition, which has resulted in several exhibitions and increased features in mainstream news outlets.

I.2. Framework and Overview of Chapters

Having been exposed to Nar Photos' work during this critical juncture, I became intrigued by the ways Nar Photos negotiated and maintained its critical perspective through its practices as they were confronted with external changes and pressures. What did this signal for their understanding of the social contribution their work might have? Answering this question is complex and led me to the work of Clemencia Rodríguez (2001), who proposes examining how the political occurs within communicative practices rather than as an end product. Similarly, Nick Couldry (2010) argues that by examining practice (particularly around rather than through media), we open up the field for understanding the dynamic and complex ways by which groups view, categorize, and distinguish their practices and political alignment. Furthermore, recent literature on social movement media has provided insight into situating Nar Photos' practices as part of an ecology of mediated and non-mediated practices (Mattoni and Trere, 2014) and philosophies, which are employed under specific conditions to address historical and social-political needs, desires, and precedents (Rodríguez, 2014). Within this framework, my research endeavors to understand what it means for Nar Photos to formulate and practice their photography, paying due diligence to the socio-political context within which it arises.

Chapter 1 explores how Nar Photos comes to define their photographic perspective as unique and alternative. Given the context within which I was introduced to Nar Photos, when I began my fieldwork with the collective my questions were limited to asking if Nar Photos' work contributes towards social change and what social

benefit their work might have. My understanding of "social change" in this regard was informed by grand notions of emancipation, wherein Nar's photography was part of an overt program of *subverting*dominant socio-cultural codes and stories through photography. Indeed, this has often been a limitation for scholarly research on media for social change whereby critical communication becomes "trapped within a vision of politics and democracy rooted in 'grand narratives of emancipation'" (Kellner, 1995 as cited in Rodríguez, 2001, p. 10). What emerged from my ethnographic research was an articulation of Nar Photos' work as part of a process of making sense of the world, particularly one's immediate environment. By engaging with the local, Nar Photos works to chronicle daily life in Turkey, particularly by exploring the conditions that form these experiences. For the collective, there is something socially beneficial and potentially radical in being able to explore and document the varied facets of one's life. As Lugones and Spelman assert: "Having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it…" (as cited in Benson, 2006, p. 9).

Part and parcel of making sense of one's life and environment for Nar Photos is also about re-orienting our sense of "what is,"and this means taking an active role in the photographic process. For Nar Photos this translates into situating the photographer as an active participant in their community, exploring the socio-historical relationships between the photographer, subject, and space. Thus more than examining how the visual images create a social benefit, Chapter 1 examines the intricate process that informs Nar Photos' critical ethos by theoretically and ethnographically situating how Nar Photos frames their photographic perspective and practices. I explore how Nar Photos subtly articulates notions of "social change" and how this manifests in their practices, such as positioning oneself in the field as both photographer and active

participant. This approach bears in mind Chris Atton's (2003) argument, which situates critical and alternative media as part of a process that is interested in exploring the relationships that form around production.

By considering how Nar Photos' positions itself and work as part of a process of social change, we arrive a starting point for further understanding how they distribute their photography and the position they occupy among other media and cultural institutions. In this regard, Chapter 2 explores the ways Nar Photos engages both mainstream and social media to distribute their work. It underscores that Nar Photos deployment of these different media to disseminate their work reflects changing needs, desires, and pressures, such as maintaining visibility, the nature of mass media in Turkey, and the need for visual and textual information during times of protest. Largely inspired by the recent work of Mattoni and Trere (2014), which proposes examining media use during times of unrest as part of an ecology, we are presented with a picture of Nar Photos' media practices as part of a web of relations between media objects and subjects. Part of this examination entails understanding how Nar Photos discursively situates and locates their work vis-à-vis other media. Nar Photos finds that their work provides something unique within Turkey's traditional media environment, whereby they show what most Turkish mainstream outlets do not or will not as the result of both commercial and state pressure. This largely informs how Nar Photos engages with mainstream media, preferring foreign and international publications over local news outlets, citing their worries over censorship, political persecution, and proper contextualization of their photography. However, rather than accepting Nar Photos' positioning at face-value, Chapter 2 investigates the tensions that arise between Nar Photos desire of accessing a larger audience while remaining critical of the local mainstream media institutions to which they are opposed. For this reason, I explore too

how the collective has come to engage with social networking sites, such as Facebook, and what this means for Nar Photos' critiques of the media.

By examining how Nar Photos comes to discursively position themselves in relation to both mainstream and social media outlets, Chapter 2 further explores the socio-political contexts within which these media deployments arise. As noted above, Nar Photos is hesitant to collaborate with Turkish news outlets because of their worries over censorship. Indeed, journalism and the news in Turkey have often been marked by periods of blackout, direct military and state intervention (Öncü, 2012), and commercial pressure (Yeşil, 2013). This partly explains Nar Photos' trek into the realm of social media, an outlet the collective has generally felt distanced and isolated from. However, Nar Photos engagement with social networking sites has been further mediated by the communicative challenges that the Gezi Park protests of 2013 presented. Noting that Facebook was deployed as an information-gathering source for activists, Nar Photos, too, assumed a more active role on Facebook and Twitter, posting photographic updates and information daily. The choices for how to distribute their photography via the mainstream media reflects the position Nar Photos occupies amongst Turkey's media environment and its role as a visual source during political uprising.

As Nar Photos' media practices shifted during the Gezi Park protests, so too did their public standing. Namely, Nar Photos' work was thrust unexpectedly into the mainstream cultural limelight, culminating in an exhibition at the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art. Opening on May 28, 2014—exactly one year after the brutal police crackdown of protestors in Gezi Park—the Istanbul Modern hosted a retrospective highlighting Nar Photos' work of the past 10 years. Given Nar Photos' critical stance against corporate and commercial institutions, Chapter 3 explores what it means for Nar Photos, both aesthetically and socio-politically, as they display their work in a museum

that is operated through a state-corporate partnership. Many scholars have postulated on the effects that the museum exerts onto objects as they enter this institutionalized space, noting how they are often "stripped bare" and re-contextualized according to the dominant visual regime (Alpers, 1991). In this sense, Chapter 3 examines how the Istanbul Modern Museum comes to frame Nar's photography through its display regime, underscoring what it means for Nar Photos' critical aesthetic angle. What becomes apparent is that rather than neutralizing any potential of critique through their photography, the Istanbul Modern exhibit rather builds upon the context through which Nar Photos' work rose to fame and public acclaim, signaling a seemingly productive partnership that allows Nar Photos to display their work within a highly elite cultural institution.

This does not occur without any tension, however. While the Istanbul Modern does not seemingly negate the socio-political angle of Nar Photos photography, what this "unlikely" partnership does highlight are the contradictions Nar Photos is confronted with by displaying their work in a mainstream, corporately-funded museum. Specifically, we see how the Istanbul Modern, or more accurately their corporate benefactors co-opt critical photography to refashion a tarnished image in the wake of massive political protest and government corruption scandals. Chapter 3contemplates this tension and the ways Nar Photos expresses and frames their partnership with the Istanbul Modern as yet another outlet to raise awareness for their work and reach a larger audience. This does not mean Nar Photos is beyond acknowledging the limits such commercial-corporate spaces exert on their work, but rather Nar Photos hopes the presence of their photography within the Istanbul Modern, with all its tensions and contradictions, might be a challenge in and of itself to the cultural hegemony of the Istanbul Modern.

I.3. Methodology

My thesis research utilized both ethnographic and visual approaches. Given the importance Nar Photos places on the visual as a means for understanding the world around them, this two-fold approach has allowed me to grasp what Nar Photos discursive formulations and choices of presentation signal for their critical approach to photography. Moreover, by deploying both ethnographic interviews and visual analysis of Nar Photos photography, I aim to highlight the diversity of Nar Photos work and ethos, which traverses across realms of visual culture, media, and activism.

After meeting with founding member Serra Akcan in 2013, I realized that the members of the Nar Photos collective are highly reflexive and engaged individuals, coming from a place of expertise within their field. Accordingly, as I began to frame my ethnographic approach, I was inspired by George Marcus' (2007) notion of para-ethnography which calls for the creation of epistemic partnerships, particularly when working with interlocutors from comparable positions of expertise. His proposition of epistemic partnership seeks to move ethnography beyond mere "data" or "interpretation," to ethnography as a form of situated knowledge that recognizes the plurality of participants, such as interlocutors, and perspectives which produce these works. This means taking interlocutors seriously as reflexive subjects. As Marcus (2007) writes:

> *So, the engaged reflexive subject, who cannot be a mere informant or subject of research, but in some sense, must become involved in its intellectual work and scope; the multi-sited arena of fieldwork as networked knowledge sites the ethnography of which is both thick and thin, and is patterned by very politicized relations of collaboration; and ultimately the inclusion of reception itself as an object or site of fieldwork—these together constitute an ethnographic baroque today [...]* (p. 1133).

Here, Marcus (2007) proposes that the researcher acknowledge the contextuality of the field dynamics, meaning the relationship between the researcher and subject, pre-conceived assumptions, and under what conditions our interlocutor's responses arise. For my research, this has meant remaining vigilant to the dynamics of my interactions with members of Nar Photos and situating these interactions in relation to their responses, specifically contextualizing defensive and/or flippant responses. In answering my question as to which galleries and publishers Nar Photos has worked with, one member asserted, "I don't understand the point of this question." While initially unnerved by this response, I came to understand that their flippancy was possibly the result of a recent bombardment of interview and panel discussions that have placed Nar Photos' work and practices at the center of a debate about alternative aesthetics and cultural (counter) hegemony. This debate has put Nar Photos on the defensive, with members finding Nar Photos' conditions of photographic production and presentation questioned in unprecedented ways.[5] Throughout my thesis I have interwoven the details of my interactions and perceptions of Nar Photos to highlight the conditions in which my understanding of their work arose. Furthermore, this ethnographic reflection addresses the context within which Nar Photos currently operates, thereby addressing mutually situated knowledges and approaches.

After several interactions over the course of Spring and Fall 2014, Serra and I discussed the idea of developing a partnership between myself and the Nar Photos collective. Wanting to create a mutually beneficial interaction, I proposed the idea of an internship—specifically help with English translations—so that as I observed the collective's inner workings they too would benefit by my effort to give something back.

[5]While at first upset and quite disappointed by this response, my thesis adviser Dr. Banu Karaca suggested to contextualize this defensive tone. Indeed, after a conversation with a classmate who is a friend of several of Nar's photographers, she suggested to me that Nar Photos might be tired and even off put by the recent bombardment of attention.

Nar Photos daily operations, however, remain in flux with no official office hours, and the office acting more as a hub for coordination than actual formalized duties. Indeed, Nar Photos does not operate on a formalized division of labor, but has a more fluid working environment where those present and their jobs change frequently. Observing this dynamic, I shifted my approach towards dialogical interviews, where I met with various members of the collective to not only ask questions but discuss the issues inherent in each of these questions.[6] What emerged were both group and individual interviews in which various members would chime in to give their perspective.

Serra became my key interlocutor, introducing me to several other members and helping to arrange meetings. A newer member to Nar Photos, Çigdem Üçüncü, was also helpful in suggesting others to contact. In total I conducted nine individual and group interviews. Seven interviews were conducted individually while twowere conducted as a group with two to three members present. Several members of the collective were interviewed more than once based on established rapport and their presence at other meetings. Though I originally planned on travelling to Diyabakır to meet with members of Nar's office there, given time constraints I was unable to do so. However, I did have the opportunity to meet with one of the Diyabakır member's in Istanbul. Below I outline the names and positions of those I interviewed, noting how many times we formally met:

Serra Akcan: Co-founding member, multiple and follow-up interviews

Mehmet Kaçmaz: Co-founding member

Çigdem Üçüncü: Member since 2014, multiple interviews

[6]While the original epistemic partnership I had envisioned did not manifest, I still intend on sharing my research with Nar Photos after defense as to elicit their feedback and share my findings. The members of Nar Photos have emphasized that they value feedback and are curious what Nar Photos looks like from the "outside looking in."

Tolga: Unaffiliated photographer-friend of Nar Photos, present at a group interview with Serra Akcan and ÇigdemÜçüncü

Eren Aytuğ: Member

Fırat Aygün: Member and Diyabakır affiliate

Erhan Arık: Member

Saner Şen: Co-founding member

Tolga Sezgin: Co-founding member

Ufuk Koşar: Member since 2013

In addition to formal interviews, I became friends with both Çigdem and Ufuk, occasionally corresponding with them via Facebook. The majority of my interviews were conducted at Nar Photos' office headquarters in Taksim in Istanbul. However, noticing a certain tension at these meetings, particularly when senior members were present, I conducted two interviews individually and away from Nar's office. Though I had developed formal questions, interviews were semi-structured allowing room for discussion and debate. For example, my interview with Saner led to a debate on Nar Photos' exhibition at the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, which has proven very informative in formulating Chapter 3. Interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours. Eight interviews were conducted in Turkish and one in English. The real names of my interviewees have been used after obtaining their consent. Saner, before granting permission to use his name, asked to see the quotations I pulled from our interviews. Certain minor phrasings and quotes from his interview have been revised per his request. I have chosen to omit names from particular quotes or observations if it relates to sensitive or heated topics within Nar Photos.

My research has further been informed by both other third party interviews conducted with Nar Photos and visual analysis. I also examined their Facebook page to get a sense of the demographic of their followers and the types of comments/discussions

made. I utilized an interview anthropologist Zeynep Devrim Gürsel conducted with Nar Photos in the summer of 2013, which has provided another means of contextualizing Nar Photos' practices. Additionally, I spoke briefly with a friend of one of the newer members and examined the official interview and press release distributed by the Istanbul Modern during Nar Photos' retrospective. My visual analysis consisted of analyzing the display dynamics and details of the Nar Photos exhibit in conjunction with the history of the Istanbul Modern. My approach was largely informed by aesthetic theorists such as Stephanie Moser (2010), Svetlana Alpers (1991), and Theodore Adorno (1996), who have proposed examining the visual not in isolation but in relation to its institutional presentation.

CHAPTER 1

"I'M LIVING THIS LIFE, TOO": DAILY LIFE, THE LOCAL, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

I was first exposed to the Nar Photos collective during the summer of 2013 when massive, anti-government protests were taking place all across Istanbul and Turkey. The Gezi Park Protests began in late May of 2013 after a group of activists were viciously attacked by the police after trying to protect a small, local park in the middle of Istanbul from being destroyed for the construction of a large commercial complex.[7] After the tear-gassing and arrests of the original occupying activists (including one parliamentarian from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy party), people began gathering in mass in the park and surrounding Taksim Square to protest the increasingly authoritarian government. What started off as a small environmental protest mushroomed into a larger uprising against corruption and authoritarianism, with an unseen plurality of different socio-political groups[8] gathered together to call for the

[7]The large commercial complex was said to consist of a shopping center, hotel, and luxury residences modeled after the Ottoman Era Halil Pasha Artillery Barracks, which had been located at the same site. The northern section park also once held an Armenian cemetery, confiscated as part of the late Ottoman Empire's genocidal campaign against its Armenian citizens (Greenhouse, 2013).

[8]Kabir Tambar's (forthcoming) "Brotherhood of the Abject: State Violence and the Ethics of Expectation in Turkey" further explores the discourses of the possibilities of belonging, plurality, and history of state violence that the heterogeneous Gezi Park Protests sparked.

resignation of then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, other cabinet members, and general reform.

An album of Nar Photos' photography appeared on my Facebook newsfeed during that time that a friend had shared in hopes of visually telling the story of the plight of the Gezi Park protestors. These striking visual images prompted me to begin following Nar Photos' work regularly as I started checking their Facebook page for the latest photographic reports. As one close-follower of the events remarked, they began looking forward to each morning that Nar Photo's would post their latest album "as if [their] daily slideshow were his nightly news" (Gürsel, 2013). Like the follower in Nar Photos' anecdote, I too watched closely and intently for their latest post. Thus when I began my work with the Nar Photos collective in March of 2014, I had contextually specific ideas of the possibilities their work offered in terms of providing an alternative visual perspective to hegemonic representations of protest and state violence, because it seemed apparent that so many had begun relying on Nar's photographs for visually understanding the events. Indeed, as Nar Photos member Saner Şen noted, during the Gezi Park protests people began turning towards the work of Nar Photos. In other words, my understanding of the drive of this collective rested upon my exposure to their poignant photos during a time of massive political unrest and violence in which Nar Photos became known for visually showing what mainstream media outlets censored.[9]Additionally, given the scarcity of local news coverage in conjunction with

[9]Media censorship during the Gezi Park protests was marked by both self and government imposed control (Miles, forthcoming). Bilge Yeşil (2014) has argued elsewhere that a larger trend of self-censorship emerges within media institutions in Turkey as a response to concerns for both direct censorship and backlash from managers, editors, commercial sponsors, and the government. This is reflective of media-ownership structures in Turkey, where large corporate holdings with interests in other industries such as construction, finance, or energy, own and operate most media outlets (ibid.). Some media monopolies include Turkuvaz Medya (owned by pro-government Çalık Holding), Doğan, Doğuş, and Çukurova (though many of Çukurova's

the sensationalized, orientalist, and overtly violent representations of the events by international news agencies, as someone who was a physical witness to the unrest (I was tear-gassed several times), but not a *key* participant in terms of organization and occupation,[10] Nar Photos work seemed to honestly tell the story of the events, challenging mainstream discourses of a secularly-driven[11] group of *çapulcus* or hoodlums.

With these pre-conceived notions in mind, I commenced my quest for examining the critical impetus and impact of the work and practice of Nar Photos, as part of what I assumed to be larger mission of grand social change through photography. Intrigued by their work and rise to fame during Gezi, I had envisioned a group with a mission set to change Turkey's current socio-political dynamics through photography. However, the picture of Nar Photos that emerges after nine in-depth interviews and analyses of third-party interviews reflects an emphasis on the daily lived experience of each photographer in relation to their immediate environment. Environment, here, denotes both the photographer's physical and social surroundings.[12] For Nar Photos it seems that the potential for any critical impact of their work might lay in its story-telling.This means that Nar Photos is interested in situating their personal histories and experiences in

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media outlets where sold off by the government to pro-government companies such as Albayrak and Ciner Holding in a partial settlement of tax debt).

[10]While I frequently visited Gezi Park during the protests, bringing supplies and joining a few marches, I do not consider myself an active participant. As an outsider to the inner dynamics of the protests, I liken myself to more of a semi-active observer.

[11]Several international journalists reported that the uprisings were a secularly-driven movement, protesting recent alcohol restrictions (see Harding, 2013). While there was a secular presence in Gezi Park, this was only one facet in an otherwise complex constituency.

[12]I will explicate the focus and dynamics of capturing one's environment in the next section.

relation to those of the photographic subject, environment, and past and present of Turkey. Through photography they are exploring the conditions of contemporary life, the connections between past and present, and the interconnectivity of people. Though this slightly differs from my original conceptions of how Nar Photos' work fits into a program of social change, an emphasis on life and the local does seem to signal something socially beneficial for the members.

Shirking grandiose notions of "social change," Nar Photos frames their work and visual perspective as part of a daily process of understanding and expressing the world, within which lies the social use or impact. In fact, many of the answers to questions on Nar Photos' contribution towards social change and potential social benefit (sosyal fayda[13]) seemed to be conflated, with members referring to Nar Photos as a small piece of a larger process. In determining how best to approach Nar Photos' work terminologically, I aim to look at how Nar Photos positions their photography in relation to these concepts. Thus as I explore the ways Nar Photos negotiates terms such as "social change" and "social contribution" (sosyal fayda) vis-à-vis their photographic perspective, I find it useful to bear in mind the issues raised by Matei Candea's (2011) discussion of a school official's denial of any political motivation in Corsican bilingual education. Here, Candea (2011) contemplates anthropology's search for the political:

> *The problem is not that we are disagreeing with him...but that redefining the whole situation as 'political' thereby renders the distinction [the school official] is attempting to draw unintelligible: we are unlikely ever to inquire what he means by the political...* (p. 311)

When I first began working with Nar Photos, I was searching for an articulation of their work that mirrored what I had experienced during the summer of 2013. My questions reflected this expectation—framed and ready for answers that would describe

[13]"Sosyalfayda" is a term used by the members of the Nar Photos collective when I asked about what, if any, social function their photography may have.

Nar Photos as a collective actively working to visually subvert and challenge Turkey's politics du jour. While there remains some truth to my pre-fieldwork expectations, by paying due diligence to Nar Photos' hesitancies and ambivalences towards my deployment of terms such as "social change" and "social contribution", we can understand what Nar Photos' means by the political and social.

With these thoughts in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to dissect how Nar Photos frames and responds to questions of the socio-political impact of their work. I hope that by examining their deployment of terms such as daily life, story-telling, and emphasis on the local that this chapter may shed some light on to the ways in which Nar Photos maps out their photography. I hope to situate Nar Photos' concern with photographically not only capturing but connecting with daily life and the local as a hook for thinking about the various practice-based and visual components of the work and what such formulations might say about its socio-political impact.

1.1. Understanding Photographing Daily Life

The founding members of the Nar Photos collective met during a children's photography workshop organized by the Toplumsal Dayanisma Gonulluleri Dernegi (Social Solidarity Volunteers Association) after the 1999 earthquake, which devastated Turkey's Marmara region.[14] Several of the founding members,[15] such as Serra Akcan, Tolga Sezgin, Mehmet Kaçmaz, Saner Şen, and Eren Aytuğ—who was present for the foundation but not among the founding members—sought to create a space or platform

[14]The 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck the city of Izmit on August 17, 1999, killing nearly 17,000 people and displacing nearly a half a million more (CNN, 2011).

[15]The founding members I refer to above are those whom I interviewed.

to photographically engage with everyday life, specifically in Istanbul. As Serra expressed in our first interview in March 2014, referring to Istanbul: "The story is here. We are photographing our story" ("Hikaye burda [sic]. Hikayelerimizi çekiyoruz"). For the original members, the platform that Nar Photos established allows for its member photographers to tell the stories of their immediate environment. For example, Mehmet Kaçmaz described hopping on one of Istanbul's many crowded buses one day curious of its destination, realizing that he and many of the members of the collective were unaware of most of Istanbul's "unseen" and marginalized *mahalles.*[16]This trip to the outskirts of Istanbul inspired Nar Photos' *Milyonluk Manzara* or *Million Dollar View* project, which sought to explore the effects of Istanbul's urban renewal-cum-gentrification projects. Specifically, the goal of this photographic endeavor, which was eventually exhibited at Depo in Istanbul and developed into a book, was to capture life in these neighborhoods and how the state-backed process of systematic gentrification and dispossession hascome to and will change the everyday experience of living in Istanbul. The photograph below is of the Başıbüyük neighborhood.[17]

[16]*Mahalle*denotes a smaller neighborhood governing structure as part of the larger*belediye*,or municipality, system. *Mahalle* can also colloquially signal a working class and/or poor neighborhood.

[17]Başıbüyük was the subject of ÖzlemÜnsal's and Tuna Kuyucu's (2010) piece, "Challenging the Neoliberal Urban Regime: Regeneration and Resistance in Başıbüyük and Tarlabaşı," which critically examined the state's urban renewal policies in conjuncture with responses by residents of these neighborhoods.

Figure 1: Başıbüyük

Photo Credit: Mehmet Kaçmaz (2012)

This commitment—or particular photographic language as many of the members define it—to capturing daily struggles and experiences stems in part from a view of not simply photographing life's moments as a passerby, but situates the photographer as an active participant in their environment. A concern for life and the local are intricately linked for Nar Photos. This concern translates into a view of the photographer as an active participant in the world around them. Çigdem's conceptualization of her project in Tarlabaşı highlights how many in Nar Photos envision a relationship between daily life, the local, and the photographer as participant.

Çigdem formulated the motivations for her project on Tarlabaşı—an economically, socio-politically, and culturally 'ghettoized' neighborhood historically comprised of ethnic minorities and undocumented migrants (Ünsal & Kuyucu, 2010)—as a foray into intervening in public space as a photographer. She frames her photography and performance arts background as one in the same, stressing the reactions that both she as a photographer and her subject elicit from each other. Çigdem told stories of being treated as a tourist, threatened, and harassed. In her anecdotes of her outings to Tarlabaşı, Çigdem stresses that she does not remain the invisible photographer (Sontag, 2003), recognizing that by stepping into the neighborhood she becomes a part of the flow of activity:

> *I want to be involved. Of course I can never be a part of Tarlabaşı, I can never be a part of the people, but I succeeded in having a relationship. I had a reaction [sic]. Tarlabaşı noticed me. And this is all I can get.*

While Çigdem is firm in noting that she is not a member of the community in Tarlabaşı, she does position her physical and socio-cultural presence in the community as significant. Particularly when considering her motivations for choosing Tarlabaşı as a subject—growing up in a migrant neighborhood in Germany and feeling as an outsider within her community—Çigdem actively positions her personal history and the social and historical make-up of Tarlabaşı[18] as interconnected. For Çigdem, herein lies the importance and edge of Nar Photos' approach towards the world around them: Nar Photos emphasizes the development of relationships and an engagement with their surroundings. This engagement is based on the personal, meaning what one has lived and is living.

1.2. Negotiating "Social Change"

Nar Photos' members situate their work as a means of "understanding and expressing the world" (Nar Photos, 2012), emphasizing a connectivity between the lived experiences of the photographer, the subject, and environment. These were neither the responses nor framings of the impetus for Nar Photos' work that I expected. As stated

[18]Originally pre-dominantly Greek and Armenian Christians, the make-up of the neighborhood has changed over the years, particularly after the 1964 ban on business dealings with Greeks. As a resultof these developments, the Greek minorityin Tarlabaşı was largely forced out (Ünsal&Kuyucu, 2010). Today the neighborhood mostly consists of Roma, Kurds, Syrians, and African migrants/refugees (ibid.), as well as a sizeable portion of Istanbul's trans-sex worker community. It is a neighborhood that has been socially and historically marked as a place of the marginalized. Tarlabaşı is currently the target a state-corporate gentrification venture, which has and will dispossess the majority of residents.

on their website, the collective claims a commitment to "produc[ing] photo reportages with the idea of trying to change the situation instead of admitting and protecting the existing circumstances [sic]" (Nar Photos, 2012). Thus in conjuncture with the mission published on Nar Photos website—which claims a desire for social intervention—and having been exposed to the work of this collective during a critical moment in Turkey's contemporary socio-political history, my imagination of the work and mission of the collective rested upon notions of *overtly* subversive and political media. I had envisioned a collective that developed and distributed visual reportages with a direct mission of opposing and subverting dominant socio-political and cultural discourses. While Nar Photos' work may certainly be considered as part of a repertoire of politically active media (discussed and conceptualized further in Chapter 2), my frame in questioning the relationship between Nar Photos' work and a program of social change yielded a more ambiguous and subtle negotiation of such terms as "social change" and "social contribution" (sosyal fayda). When I asked Ufuk if and how the work of Nar Photos contributes to social change, he responded that the collective does not go out with the purpose of changing life, per se. Rather, he emphasized that it is from life that Nar Photos finds its inspiration ("Biz ordan [sic] besleniyoruz" or "This is what nurtures us"). Similarly Tolga, noted: "We are living this life and as part of this life we are doing a job" ("Bu hayatta yasiyoruz ve o hayatın içeresinde bir iş yapiyoruz"). These responses to my questions on how the work of Nar Photos might be instigating social change, rendered answers on a smaller, more focused scale whereby Nar Photos vision rests on capturing life's moments, troubles, and transformations.

This isn't to say that Nar Photos' work lacks any critical edge or impetus for social critique. On the contrary, this focus on daily lived experience seeks to underscore what many in the Nar Photos collective see as the overlooked and unreported issues

affecting those in Turkey and increasingly the greater region.[19] Furthermore, many in the Nar Photos collective have been clear in emphasizing that the topics their photographic reports cover, in terms of subject matter, tend to have political connotations. Like Çigdem's story and experience stress, Nar Photos' photographers are interested in capturing not only the events and stories around them, but do so in such a way that interlinks subject, location, and photographer. My sense is that the photographers of Nar Photos, in a similar vein to what Tolga expressed, are trying to not just capture their environment but hope to do so in a manner that weaves together the lives of the photographer, the lives of those around them, and the larger social context. This might not relay into the original vision of "social change" on a grand scale I had envisioned, but for Nar Photos this angle does provide something socially useful, which they root and articulate in their photographic practices as the following section will discuss.

1.3. Theoretically Locating Social Change: The Importance of the Process

While the majority of the responses from Nar Photos' members suggested a hesitance to situate their work as a catalyst for social change, many did seem to propose that their work could be considered as part of a process, likening their engagement with their community and the lives and contexts of those therein as important. Based on these discursive formulations, my sense is that Nar Photos does not deny or reject any socio-political impact of their photography, but rather makes a distinction between larger programs of initiating social-change and what they see as smaller-scale local interventions and engagements *with*and *through* their photography. Photography

[19]The idea of reporting what is "unseen" will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

becomes a tool then, an instrument—a way of establishing new and questioning old relationships and accepted paradigms. Many interviewees emphasized the instrumental nature of photography, with Saner expressing that "photography is our instrument." Nar Photos' positioning mirrors some scholarly sentiments which have critiqued notions of "democratic communication" as "trapped within a vision of politics and democracy rooted in 'grand narratives of emancipation'" (Kellner, 1995 as cited in Rodríguez, 2001, p. 10). Nar Photos does not locate their photography and practice as a means for some grand scheme of emancipation, but again, articulates a sense of re-orienting our sense of the status-quo. As a recent Nar Photos interview with the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art highlights:

> *We know we can't change the world through photography, but we do question whether we could, at least, create some shift in opinions, make up for missing information, and whether we could make ourselves, and also the viewers, take a more critical look at the subjects we deal with, a look that is more concerned with the world; and a more critical look at ourselves as well. This has actually more to do with the way we relate to life than with photography itself.*

Part of Nar Photos' utilization of photography clearly seems to be about making sense of the world. As William Mazarella (2004) proposes, media and the different social and material process it entails is a way of making society "imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations" (p. 346). He sees media and its subsequent usage as part of a social process of making sense of the world, a way of "social envisioning" to borrow Peters' (1997) term (as cited in Mazarella, 2004). Mazarella acknowledges that his conceptualization of media as a mode of making sense of the world requires an approach to culture as part of a social process wherein culture is continuously made and remade "through constantly shifting relations, practices, and technologies [...]" (p. 25). Indeed, Mazarella is not alone in his views as numerous media scholars have postulated the link between media and life, particularly political

life, as part of a socio-cultural process in various contexts (see Martín-Barbero, 1993; Atton, 2003; Rodríguez, 2001). In line with Mazarella's (2004) postulations, for Nar Photos the photographic lens combined with the process of visualizing forms a means of conceptualizing and understanding the world around them. Not only through their visual images, but through the process of creating such images, the world as it is, as it might be, and as it could be become apparent and imaginable.

However, Mazarella's (2004) argument relies heavily on a material understanding of media in the tradition of Marshall McLuhan (1994),[20] whereas Nar Photos does not liken the social importance of photography to the camera itself, but rather to what potential new ways of relating to the world they see as arising through their unique positioning of themselves vis-à-vis their medium, environment, and subject. While photography as their instrument of choice does visually offer a means of imagining and critiquing the world around them, for Nar Photos it is the process which yields any socio-political importance to their photography. For example, several members have stressed the importance of establishing relationships while in the field, and a friend of a Nar Photos member outlined an editing session in which several members critiqued a photograph of a woman taken from above. For those critiquing the image, the angle yielded a photo with the undertone of a hierarchy between the photographer and photographed, as if the photographer were "looking down" to the woman. Through this example, it is apparent that Nar Photos has created a photographic and working ethos that aims to remain aware of their position. As Chris Atton (2003) argues, we must think of alternative media groups or collectives as part of a culture

[20]Mazzarella (2004) goes to quote Marshall McLuhan (1994): "The use of any kind of medium or extension of man alters the patterns of interdependence among people, as it alters the ration among our senses" (p. 359).

"that is equally interested in the processes and relations that form around [...] production" (p. 3). Similarly, Clemencia Rodríguez (2001) has proposed that rather than simply focusing on the end product of critically engaged media, that we question and examine how the socio-political[21] occurs within practices and engagements with, through, and around their medium/media of choice.

Thus in the case of Nar Photos, we are presented with a group that not only claims to photograph local daily life, but frames and asserts to practice their photography in a manner in which the photographer is a participant and remains aware of their position within their environment. Furthermore, this self-positioning does not only translate into the selection of photographic subjects but also informs their utilization of different communicative and distributive formats (discussed further in Chapter 2) as part of a means to sharing and engaging with an audience. Nar Photos sees this as a unique practice that they hope can create and establish new ways of relating to the world in what I take to be both a physical and social sense.

1.4. The Question of the Gaze

While Nar Photos claims that it is not so much the photography which yields any critical importance to their work but the manner with which they deploy and position themselves and their practice, there still remains the underlying question of the visual

[21]Rodríguez's (2001) original formulation deploys the term "democratic," not in its traditional or normative sense, but as a way to challenge "traditional, static and essentialist definitions of democracy, citizenship, and democratic communicative action" (p. 4). Turning to the work of Chantal Mouffe (1988), Rodríguez (2001) uses the term in a performative sense of making one's subjectivity known. I have chosen to use "socio-political," as I believe it reflects Nar Photos' hesitance to directly engage with and utilize weighted political terms.

within their work. "We are people occupied with photography", stated Eren Aytuğ. Similarly, Fırat Aygün noted that if it was not photography, perhaps it would be another medium like poetry or theater. Nar Photos' formulation of photography as an instrument that is part of a process of contemplating and re-thinking modes of being in the world, then, raises several important questions about Nar Photos' claim. Given that Nar Photos seems to position photography as an instrument within a larger process, understanding how they deal with the contradictions and perceived limitations of their medium—both as part of their practice and in relation to the critical potential of their photography—provides insight into why and how they express the idea of social change or social contribution.

In hopes of developing an alternative practice and process of relating to and expressing their environment, it seems that in many cases Nar Photos grapples with the sometimes not so equal relationship between photographer and photographed. Ufuk's comments on photographing a scene of political unrest not just from the sidelines but like an activist underscore how he attempts to at once position himself within the scene like his subject while acknowledging that there remains a fundamental difference. Though the photographer positions themselves as a participant, this does not fully equate to equal participation or distance:

> *For example, when you are in the field taking photos, you are like those protesting out there. You are like an activist. Because to take that photograph you need to see like them, walk like them... At that moment you are next to them...But at that moment you are taking [the picture]. At that moment you are capturing that situation. That is the main difference.*

Çigdem expressed similar sentiments, wanting those who saw her photos to know that she was present in the scene, meaning she wanted to evoke not only what she saw but how she felt. This was not as easy as she had originally surmised, as Çigdem stressed numerous times that the community of Tarlabaşı often reacted to her in negative ways.

She recounted tales of sexual harassment, robbery, and young men warning her that she was not allowed to photograph the neighborhood. Serra noted, too, that one often has to ask for permission before taking the photo of someone, finding that the process of having your photo taken can make people uncomfortable ("Rahatsız edecek bir şey"). In other words, there is an intrusiveness to photography. For example, photographers sometime refrain from sharing or distributing photos of scenes of protest with clear faces shown, as individuals might face personal or governmental backlash (Gürsel, 2013). The collective has also been requested to remove photos from Facebook by individuals who do not want their photo shared. While Nar Photos has developed a system for obtaining permission to photograph someone through eye-contact ("göze göz"), they also place an importance on respecting the privacy and space of the subject by relying on individual feedback and the photographer's ethical discretion.

In recognizing their position as a photographer, Nar Photos contends with the dilemma presented in wanting to both capture the scene as a photographer, a clearly privileged position, and as someone who wants to engage with and express the lived experience of their subject in such a way that might encourage dialogue. This stands in contrast to Ariella Azoulay's (2008) argument that photography is distinct from "directed and intended" gazes. Azoulay's work, based on her time in Palestine during the second Intifada, examines the possibility photography offers in testifying to an individual's (particularly Palestinian's) presence and role within a "space of political relations" (p. 16). Discussing different types of historical gazes, she speculates that photography becomes a new way of regarding the visible, which "departs from the disciplinarian gaze or the pattern of communicating pre-recognized messages" (ibid., p. 92), "refuting anyone's claim to sovereignty" (ibid., p. 92). Situating photography in contrast to state power, Azoulay sees photography as a realm which recognizes a

plurality of participants who are rendered visible by the photograph. While Nar Photos does see photography as a unique means of contemplating what might otherwise be unseen or unworthy of contemplation (ibid.), the photographic medium for them is not necessarily distinct from any "directed" and "intended" gaze. With the camera, the control of the visible is not somehow magically reduced.

Nar Photos' editing sessions, which double as time for self-reflexivity, highlight this issue. For example, in their photo selection processes Nar Photos members have underscored that they pay careful attention to angles, lighting, etc, recognizing that the aesthetics of the image play an important role in the story that is evoked or told.In a sense, editing and photo selection are interwined, reflecting what Gürsel (n.d.) calls"formative fictions."[22] Though her analysis of image selection is conducted within an institutional setting (i.e. wire service news outlets), Gürsel argues that the details of images as they relate to expectations of how it should look and will be imagined by others inform their selection. Here, the comments regarding Çigdem's angle prove even more informative. It becomes important on the one hand to both physically and aesthetically position the photographer and subject in such a way that does not create a power hierarchy. On the other hand, one interview suggested that a certain aesthetic angle also worked positively to evoke and create a certain story around the image. Acknowledging a paradox in the wish for a certain aesthetic and a desire to move away from embellishing their photography, Nar Photos both in the field and in the editing/photo selection process recognizes the contradiction of their instrument and goals as a collective. It appears that the photographers at Nar Photos do their best to

[22]Gürsel (n.d.) defines formative fictions as: "How expectations of what something should look like—the manner in which it is anticipated to be imagined by others—informs the selection of images in institutional settings through everyday discursive interactions and practices of image brokers" (p. 38).

integrate themselves into the scene, as a participant, while at the same time identifying their control of the frame. As Susan Sontag (2003) wrote:

> *But the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace...cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always that image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude* (p. 46).

Perhaps herein lie some further clues into Nar Photos' distinction between some large scheme of socio-cultural and political change through their photography and their expression of a social process through and surrounding their photography. Nar Photos is indeed much more interested in the practice that surrounds their deployment of photography, working and re-working strategies that allow the photographers to develop a relationship and connection with their subject and a process of reflexivity during the editing process, which they hope mitigate manipulative or disengaged images. This concern with the process initiated by and surrounding their photography might hold the key for Nar Photos' hesitance of the term social change and the framing of their work as some great instigator of change within Turkey and the region. This concern with the process might be in a way acknowledging the limits of their work, whereby an image cannot necessarily be taken at face-value but entails a host of practices and stories therein. In postulating on the politics of art, Jacques Rancière (2010) posits that "critical art is not so much a type of art that reveals the forms and contradictions of domination as it is an art that questions its own limits and powers, that refuses to anticipate its own effects" (p. 149). Thus through a more subtle articulation of the concept of social change, Nar Photos might be tentative of "anticipating" the effect of their medium. Instead, they situate their work and their concerns for capturing and narrating daily life as part of a longer process of understanding and contemplating their environment.

And though photography for Nar Photos might not free the frame from directed and controlled gazes, there is something to be said for the ways Nar Photos both practices and defines their practice in relation to the idea of creating a different form of relating to the world and to each other. Nar Photos' practices work to recognize and address their positions as both photographers, and general participants vis-à-vis those they photograph and the social world around them. Maybe these subtle and intricate articulations, which seem disjointed and contradictory at first-sight form what Azoulay (2008) calls a "citizenry of photography," a borderless and open realm, rendering an active civil gaze, "always and only…within a plurality" (p. 93), whereby the photographer recognizes the plurality of participants in the photographic act, i.e. photographer, photographed, and spectator. Conceivably this is where we might locate Nar Photos amidst a web of critical socio-cultural and political practices. Perhaps Nar Photos is working to address the plurality of participants and the complexity arising between the photographer, the photographed, and all the social contexts surrounding them. However romantically, this perspective might be summed up best in Nar Photos' name. When I asked Tolga about the motivation behind "Nar"[23] (pomegranate in Turkish), he explained

> *Don't you think it is pretty meaningful?...In this geographical area the pomegranatehas a significance. Metaphorically speaking, it is whole but when you open it up there are many pieces on the inside.*

[23]Tolga also explained that "Nar" was the name of a publishing house of a friend of many of the collective members. He also noted that "Nar" was easy to say, both in Turkish and English. "Nar" as an alternative to multiculturalism and its different metaphors—also inspired by Armenian imagery—has been used more frequently in the way described above in recent years (Karaca, 2015).

1.5. Thinking of Possible Audiences

Within many of Nar Photos' formulations of the social potential of their work lies the question of who this photography is intended for? As I will outline in Chapters 2 and 3, Nar Photos is concerned with reaching a larger constituency and engaging an imagined audience in the process of critical dialogue and thought that Nar Photos has envisioned. With whom does Nar Photos hope to include in this plural process? When I asked Serra whether Nar Photos has a particular audience in mind, she expressed that Nar Photos does not take photos for a particular audience and that projectsalso remain independent of considerations of an outside audience. While Nar Photos stresses the importance of reaching people through their photography, my conversation with Serra underscored that Nar Photos envisions any formal audience in a commercial sense. Yet, a commercially intended audience is distinct from the imagined constituency Nar Photos continually alludes to when referencing their distributive and presentation practices. While denying a formalized and targeted audience, there still remain references to some sort of constituency at large with whom Nar Photos hopes to reach.

Perhaps herein lies a clue for the role Nar Photos' imagined community plays within theirphotographic process. Rather than explicitly address who their audience is, Nar Photos works to define who it is not, signaling an audience which is unaffiliated and socially-responsible in a similar sense to Nar Photos.[24] Thus the manner in which Nar Photos positions who their audience is not, signals an imagined relationship between the collective, photographers, and those who see their photography marked by

[24]Serra noted that there are those with formal organizational ties, such as feminists or other activists, who utilize their photos for their own work. However, these organizations or activists groups have typically had previous connections with Nar Photos through fairs or workshops and do not make requests for certain photographic projects to be undertaken.

a plurality of participants (Azoulay, 2008), a "we," rather than any structured ties and affiliations. Might this explain Serra's hesitance to define the audience, in that any formal definition might formalize and categorize with whom Nar Photos can engage?

Though Nar Photos denies any formal definitions or ties with a particular audience, we are left wondering if they also rebuff any function of the audience. If Nar Photos frames the visual as a means of encouraging new ways of understanding and envisioning our world, it would seem that the audience is placed in such a way that invites them to ponder their position and what they knowin relation to the photographic subject. The "we" created through Nar Photos rejection of a formal audience is possibly a wayof opening a free and independent space for contemplating where the spectator, photography, and subject stand in relation to each other, power, and history. In her writings on images of pain and suffering, Susan Sontag (2003) suggests that addressing these issues provide insight into the "initial spark" of critical thought or change that the visual might trigger:

> *[It is] a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark* (p. 103)

1.6. Conclusion

Sitting in Nar Photos' office, right off of Istiklal Avenue in Taksim surrounded by bars and small businesses which occupy the same building, various collective members bustle in and out of the office. Several surround a computer while working on an upcoming project that will take place in commemoration of the Armenian Genocide,

one sits on the couch next to the stray cat that has wondered in, rolled cigarettes accompany most everyone's tea or coffee. It was in this scene that Tolga almost defensively asserted, "You can't put it all on the photographer," in response to my question on the connection between Nar Photos' photography and social change. I was somewhat puzzled by this response, as for nearly two years I had envisioned a group of politically subversive photographers whose visual imagery works to challenge the status-quo. For example, Nar Photos has earned a reputation, particularly since the Gezi Park protests, as a "first on the scene" type of group in terms of covering burgeoning and ongoing social and political events that have come to mark this critical and transformative moment in contemporary Turkish history. However, several members have also expressed that while Nar Photos has more recently moved towards "hot news"—following breaking events and stories—the collective has historically preferred to develop and follow longer projects that reflect the photographer's daily lived experience. Therefore, Nar Photos is simultaneously not only working to construct and make sense of their work's place amidst of web of transformative social processes, but does so as the scope of their typical photographic endeavors changes. Thus, while in many ways their work does challenge pre-conceived notions about the socio-political and cultural history of Turkey, Tolga's comments suggest that Nar Photos work is limited amidst its changing environment, encompassing only a small piece of a shifting puzzle. The group remains hesitant and wary of assuming the effect of their work and to position their photographers as instigators of social change. My sense is that such positioning for Nar Photos might neutralize their concerted efforts to remain as part of their environment rather than as external, even above it. Hence, it is not the photographer or image in and of itself that somehow triggers change or provides a critique. For Nar Photos, this potential lies within a process and the relations that are

sparked through this practice of telling the story of life in Turkey. As John Downing (2000) argues in evoking Sheila Rowbothom's (1981) postulations on feminist socialist solidarity, "the vision of a just and culturally enhanced society 'cannot be separated from the process of its making' [...] (Rowbothom, 1981,p. 17 as cited in Downing, 2000, p. 72). By understanding Nar Photos' conceptualization of the notion of social change, we arrive at a starting point for comprehending their motivations for how and why they choose to display or distribute their photography.

CHAPTER 2

TREKKING ACROSS MEDIA REALMS: UNDERSTANDING NAR PHOTOS' MEDIA POSITIONS AND PRACTICES

Meeting with Eren Aytuğ, on a cold January day at Nar Photos' office, he framed Nar Photos' position vis-à-vis the media as part of a repertoire of alternative media practices, finding that Nar Photos offers people a way to experience and follow topics that will not be covered by mainstream outlets:

> *In the last few years, there has been a lot on the agenda, but this has not been shown very much on mainstream media. This agenda does not interest the media. I think this is a reason why people have been so demanding on Facebook. We provide people with updates on the issues they are concerned with but can't follow. There is a lot of news topics that will not be covered if you were just to follow TV or the mainstream media...They can follow this from alternative media.*

Eren's sentiments reflect, in large part, how Nar Photos has come to locate itself amongst a web of both mainstream and alternative media offerings. This positioning, in turn, informs how Nar Photos engages media across technologies, platforms, and categories such as "mainstream" and "alternative." Though, Nar Photos frames their position in relation to the mainstream media as alternative, the collective moves beyond these seemingly stringent categories and technologically deterministic notions, to deploy a range of usages of the media which reflect changing needs, desires, and pressures.

Media and communication studies today are rife with theoretical and scholarly debates about the means to approach activist and political uses of various media, particularly the trend in studying these issues in relation to information and communication technologies (ICTs). There are slews of questions to broach the subject ranging from the constitution of new or different public spheres (Dahlgren, 2005), new ways of sharing and accessing information (Shirky, 2011), the constitution of horizontal modes of organization (Castells, 2011), or the mediation of affective street mobilization (Gerbaudo, 2012). Many of these various theoretical and ethnographic studies tend to focus on particular moments of protest, more formalized and bourgeois advocacy and public sphere activities, or on a single medium or technology. While many of these postulations offer insight into the complex uses of media and communication tools, they tend to overlook the *ecology of media practices*(Mattoni & Trere, 2014; Rodríguez, 2014) not only by individual actors during times of unrest, but by firmly established socio-political groups that operate across time and space to not only work through a social movement, but to maintain a relevance and political edge during moments of relative calm.

With this in mind, this chapter examines Nar Photos' deployment of a variety of communicative practices, which comprise not only a place within Turkey's contemporary repertoire of oppositional social movement media practices but an active negotiation across different alternative and mainstream realms of communication. In other words, the ways Nar Photos works to distribute their photos and communicate with their audience cannot be confined to any single realm of alternative media, social movement media, or commercial media. Rather, Nar Photos employs communicative practices across a variety of media to maintain visibility and engage with as much of the public as possible in hopes of disseminating their socio-politically critical photography.

Furthermore, their practices are not developed in isolation but in response to both established practices and external needs and pressures, which incite shifts regarding Nar Photos' engagement with various media. With these postulations in mind, I examine how Nar Photos treks across different realms of activist, social movement, and mainstream media, positioning themselves as a collective and their work vis-à-vis these different mediated socio-political contexts. The picture that emerges from my interviews underscores that Nar Photos' selection and deployment of different types of media reflect not only their desire for reaching out to a larger constituency, but how Nar Photos views itself as a photographic agency in relation to other media objects and subjects. In this way, Nar Photos has crafted a very conscious map for approaching3 and dealing with both mainstream and alternative media channels. As I explore how Nar Photos crafts its media positions and practices, I will question what such positioning and practices signify for Nar Photos' critical claims as outlined in Chapter 1.

2.1. An Overview of Nar Photos' Communicative and Distributive Practices

Much of the critical impetus of Nar Photos' work lies in its photographic and collective engagement and intervention in daily life. For Nar Photos, this perspective does not just inform their deployment of the camera and approach to the photographic subject, but has come to provide a basis for how the collective hopes to share their photography. In this regard, the collective finds that their alternative distribution and communicative practices underscore and add value to their photographic reportages. The group claims that by using the internet in addition to street and mobile exhibitions they can have more of an effect and intervention in daily life (Nar Photos, 2012).

Specifically, this intervention and effect on daily life rests upon sharing what remains unseen or uncovered by the mainstream press.

In light of these goals, Nar Photos has developed and implemented several communication and distribution methods in an attempt to gain access to a larger audience. For the collective, reaching a vast audience seemsimportant to their goal of encouraging a socio-political dialogue through their photography. Since its inception, the collective has utilized a main webpage (narphotos.net), which broadcasts their latest photographic reportages, an "about" section, profiles for most of the photographers, a digital archive of the photography, and news about the latest collective activities and their features in major mainstream news and cultural outlets. The website currently only has an English option. When I asked Tolga Sezgin why there was no Turkish page, he joked that it was because I had not translated it yet. Switching to a more serious tone, he went on to attribute the lack of a Turkish page to the absence of anyone to translate it, suggesting that there was either a lack of resources or possibly time for translation. Nar Photos also launched their Facebook and Twitter accounts in November of 2012, though Serra mentioned that the collective hardly used the accounts until the Gezi Park protests. Seeing that masses of people and various groups were employing Facebook and Twitter for coordination and updates, Tolga noted that the collective realized that they were "out of the loop" in terms of how information was shared between Gezi Park activists. For this reason, Nar Photos began using their social media accounts more heavily, posting their photo montage of the May 28th attacks[25]as their first photo album

[25]May 28th, 2013 marks the day when several activists were brutally attacked by police after they had gathered in Gezi Park to prevent its destruction after construction crew and vehicles had begun demolition. Many activists present cited that the demolition was illegal as there were ongoing court proceedings regarding the legal basis for the destruction of the park (Vardar, 2013).

on Facebook. Starting with a small personal profile, after the full eruption of the Gezi Park events, Serra noted that their Facebook format switched from a personal to a community page, garnering 21,094 "likes" as of May 2015. The collective hoped that by engaging with Twitter and Facebook, their work would become more accessible to a larger portion of people.

In addition to their social media presence, Nar Photos has developed partnerships with independent agencies abroad[26] in order to distribute their photography to large-scale, mainstream news outlets such as the New York Times, Agence France-Presse, Der Spiegel, among others. These agencies act as brokers, selling Nar Photos' work to large-scale publications on their behalf.[27] Rather than send their photos directly to these news outlets, Nar Photos has developed these broker-agency partnerships in the hopes that their photography does not get lost in the pool of photos sent to these prestigious publications. During our interview, Serra stressed the collective worries that their photos would get lost among the collection of hundreds of photographs submitted to these outlets. Particularly given that these institutions employ their own photographers to go out into the field. Serra noted that Nar Photos has chosen to distribute to foreign publications (though it is mostly their partners who select which agency abroad to distribute the photos). Serra, as well as several others, said that the decision to distribute to the mainstream press abroad was in part because of what they saw as the problematic nature of the Turkish press. In this regard, Serra highlighted

[26]Some agency partnerships include: Redux Pictures (USA), Abaca Press (France), Eyevine (England), and Laif (Germany and Austria).

[27]There is disagreement in the collective regarding the type of remuneration the collective receives once the photos as sold. A few members mention that there is a small amount paid to Nar Photos, while others claim that no money is earned from the sales. This reflects what I sense to be a discomfort when talking about money, particularly from a group which lays claim to a progressive political perspective.

issues of copyright, censorship, and political persecution. In sum, Nar Photos worries that as their photography is thrown in the photographic pool of a Turkish press outlet, they will not receive credit for the work they have done.[28]

2.3. Shifting Practices during the Gezi Park Protests

When speaking with Serra, it became clear that the Gezi Park events marked a watershed moment for the collective in terms of their media and communication practices. For example, while the website allowed for a more permanent display of their photography, social networking sites—i.e. Facebook and Twitter—were fast and constantly moving. They began utilizing this medium as a way of providing visual and textual news of the ongoing events. While their website contains a compiled album of their Gezi Park photography, their Facebook page contains more than a dozen albums of the events. Maintaining that they are not photojournalists, Serra and Tolga found that during Gezi what was necessitated was a more "news-like" format from the collective. "Hot news" (sicak haber) became a focal point of Nar Photos' work during this time of turbulent protest, with the collective pausing their normal long-term projects to follow the quickly shifting stories and developments. This meant more rapid, daily photo uploads on Facebook with a brief update of the events, whether an attack on protestors or a gathering of feminists or other political groups.

When compared with some of their other long-term projects, the differences, particularly visual differences, seem minimal. Indeed, though the Gezi Park protests necessitated quick updates, Nar Photos' visual and textual contextualization of the events do not seem to diverge significantly from those of one of their more well-known

[28]Historically, proper crediting has been problematic within the Turkish press.

long term projects, Million Dollar View. For example, the photos from both projects attempt to situate the scene within a larger context, be it state violence or urban renewal.

Figure 2: Gezi Park Police Attack and Elderly Man in Gaziosmanpaşa

Photo Credit (left to right): Barış Sever (2013); Serra Akcan (2012)

The photo to the left is of a police attack using tear gas guns during the Gezi Park uprising and the photo to the right is of a poor elderly man carrying trash bags near a billboard for a new shopping center and residence complex. Visually, both situate the photographic subject within a larger socio-political climate of physical and economic state violence and marginalization. The Gezi Park photo demonstrates the state's responsibility for overt and disproportionate violence and the Million Dollar View photo underscores the subject's impoverished position vis-à-vis state-corporate sponsored gentrification-cum-dispossession projects. Examining these two projects together, the photos and their accompanying texts describe the scene, the socio-historical circumstances, and seek to explore how these events are lived, who is responsible, and who is affected. Though visually their longer term projects do not vastly differ from those of Gezi Park, Nar Photos was confronted with the challenge of representingphysical violence, which they had not previously done on such a grand scale. Hoping to show the depth of the protests—the lived experience—in a similar vein to their other photographic endeavors, they shared photos such as the ones below to demonstrate the "other side" of the uprisings. They photographed the communal aspect of the protests, such as the food bank that was created, park clean-ups, and planting new

trees and plants where destruction had taken place.Moreover, they held meetings to reflect on the incidents of the day, as they do with their more in-depth projects, to determine what and how to present their photography.

Figure 3: Planting Trees and Food Bank in Gezi Park

Photo Credit (left to right): Serra Akcan(2013); Saner Şen (2013)

The communicative challenges Nar Photos faced during Gezi Park, then consisted of how they engaged different media platforms more than anything visual. As noted, while the website acted as more of a digital archive for compiled photographic projects, their Facebook page during the protests was home to dozens of albums with daily photo compilations.

For Nar Photos, the original purpose of their Facebook and Twitter accounts were not originally designed for providing updated information, but a forum through which to disseminate their photography. The collective remained initially hesitant of the social media scene, preferring their website and more traditional, mainstream media and cultural outlets for the distribution of their work. Beginning a more furious engagement with Twitter and Facebook during Gezi Park, the first photo uploaded to their Facebook account (below) is from the events of May 28, 2013 despite the November 2012 launch of the account. Yet, the collective took note of other activist media practices and the needs of the protests and re-oriented their use of social media to provide "photojournalistic" information. As Tolga noted, Nar Photos realized that during the massive protests websites such as Facebook and Twitter became a key source for

information and news sharing. Therefore feeling the need to contribute and participate, the collective began utilizing a medium they had previously felt distanced from.[29]

Figure 4: Recovering Protestors in Gezi Park

Photo Credit: Eren Aytuğ (2013)

This evanescent mode of communication (Gerbaudo, 2012) though, did not deter from the collective's normal practices of meeting, editing, and reflecting on the photographic project before uploading photos and updates. Serra emphasized that after each outing during the protests, the group would make a point to sit down and reflect upon the events before compiling the photos onto Facebook or Twitter. Thus, while Nar Photos attributes their engagement with social media as a means of sharing their photographic work on a larger scale and audience, they did not fully utilize social networking sites until the eruption of political events. This suggests that the Gezi Park events presented the collective with a challenge to communicate with the public in new and different ways and that social networking sites did not become a fully relevant or useful resource for them until the outbreak of protests.This also mirrors the dynamics of social media usage during the uprisings, whereby activists relied on this medium to share information and coordinate protests, gatherings, and meetings. Social media and

[29]In this regard, Tolga noted: "Facebook, macebookduyuyorduk, ama hic alakamizyoktu". We had heard about Facebook Schmacebook but we didn't have any ties with it.

internet use in Turkey, however was and is already quite extensive with approximately 46% of the population using the internet (World Bank, 2014). Of this 46%, 56% of internet users are male and approximately 35% female, and a proportion of 49.1 of the population has internet access at home (International Telecommunications Union, 2014). Turkey currently ranks number four worldwide in terms of its number of Facebook users (Socialbakers, 2014). These figures are also important given the streamlining of access to information because of media monopolies (see footnote nine on page 20).

Since the Gezi Park protests, Nar Photos has continued their social media presence with regular updates in somewhat of the same manner as during Gezi Park, while the website remains more of a digital archive of completed projects, a store for selling photos, and a section of mainstream features of Nar Photos work.The flow and content of Nar Photos' Facebook and Twitter page seem much more fluid than their website, with announcements of upcoming exhibits or panels, or single photo uploads marking the anniversary of events such as the Armenian Genocide or Soma Mining Disaster. Social media during the Gezi Park events thus signaled a challenge for Nar Photos' original conception of engagement. While hoping to provide an additional forum for accessing their work, the Gezi Park events necessitated a shift in practice around this medium. Nar Photos consequently felt it best to adapt their utilization of Facebook and Twitter to provide more information and photographic depictions of the events.

2.4. Media Practice: Specific Goals and Needs

Based on my interviews, it is clear the Nar Photos collective has adapted their communicative practices and procedures during times of unrest. However, their mediated activities are not solely relegated or determined by a single moment of political uprising. Rather, the ways Nar Photos engages different media to disseminate their photography is based on specific pressing needs and goals, be it procuring visibility of the collective, accessing a larger audience, or providing visual and textual information during times of protest. These are not necessarily practices developed in isolation, but as part of a web of relations with media objects and subjects throughout different periods of time. In other words, Nar Photos' media practices exist as part of an ecology.

To better understand Nar Photos' media practices amongst these different contexts and needs, examining the recent literature on activism, social movements, and media proves useful in better understanding Nar Photos' move across different mediated spheres. In their recent work, "Media Practices, Mediation Processes, and Mediatization in the Study of Social Movements," Mattoni and Trere (2014) invite us to conceive the utilization of media within and around social movements not through a single medium or technology, but as a larger ecology and web of dynamics across different temporalities and contexts. For Mattoni and Trere (2014), collapsing the study of activist media practices into one medium or period of time risks overlooking the role and evolution of different platforms within movements and connections between various technologies, actors, and their practices. This means to fully understand the complexity of media practices within and around political unrest and activity, one must look at how various actors (individuals and/or groups) use media during times of unrest, quiet, and in relation to other groups. As part of their analysis, Mattoni and Trere offer a three layered means of looking at activist and oppositional media uses across micro,

meso, and macro levels: media practice, mediation processes, and mediatization, respectively. Media practices refer to interactions around and with both media objects (i.e. mobile phones, computers, and the internet) and subjects (i.e. journalists, public relations managers, and even activist media practitioners). At this micro level of analysis, they propose to look at the creative ways that activists create unique social practices around and through media.

This signals that a certain set of social relations and frameworks of understanding underlie decisions to adopt or engage with any given media. Activist groups do not just engage with social media, for example, because it is the newest trend (Rodríguez, 2014), but do so to address specific needs, goals, or as the result of interactions with other similar groups and activities. As Rodríguez postulates, approaching activist media engagement as an ecology (i.e. across time and medium)

> *[s]hifts our attention to individual and collective processes by which activists share their experiences and acquire new skills, hybridize media platforms, adapt communication strategies from one context to another, creatively solve communication and technical problems, respond to challenges, by-pass restrictions, use media to overcome interpersonal communication problems, and use face-to-face communication to overcome technical problems* (p. 10)

This micro level of examination proves very useful when approaching Nar Photos' carefully crafted media practices. It underlines that Nar Photos' utilization of various media cannot be collapsed into a single technology or period of time. As David Karpf (2010) argues, this mistakes media engagements as single-minded rather than "as an individual tactic within a broader strategic…effort" (p. 29). Therefore, beginning a discussion of Nar Photos' media practices necessitates examining their shifting adoption of and positioning vis-à-vis different media in relation to both their internal goals and external circumstances and relations. From my introductory overview, it is apparent that Nar Photos engages with different media to both address their needs as a collective and

as a response to external—often times political—developments. In the following section, I apply Mattoni and Trere's (2014) and Rodríguez (2014) framework of analysis for conceptualizing how Nar Photos locates itself as an actor both discursively and through practice in relation to other media. The following section willethnographically explore the inter-linkages of their media practices with their internal goals and external socio-political factors. Meaning, I will examine how Nar Photos comes to locate itself discursively as a collective amidst a web of media subjects and objects, such as the mainstream media and social networking sites. This discussion will underline that Nar Photos' practice with and around media is arbitrated by their practical and socio-political concerns as a collective in relation to Turkey's political climate and the nature of the international mainstream media.

2.5. Critically Locating Nar Photos' Media Practices

From its inception, Nar Photos has positioned itself against dominant, mass media forms, finding that the dynamics of these media institutions do not permit the pursuit of long term projects, which allow for the creation and development of a relationship between the photographer, environment, and subject. This intimate focus on the local, for Nar Photos' members, occupies a unique space among the media and photojournalistic landscape of Turkey. "Haber fotoğrafçı değiliz," stresses Serra. We are not photojournalists. This is a sentiment that has been reiterated throughout the course of my interviews in which each photographer has maintained that the work of Nar Photos offers the possibility of engaging and documenting one's immediate environment, creating a unique media platform among other media outlets. Tolga, for

example, critiqued "parachute" like reporting, in which news agencies send in a photojournalist to snap a quick picture and then leave. Similarly, Saner criticized mainstream outlets as removed and outside of the concerns of daily life. These two perspectives indicate how Nar Photos distinguishes reporting versus documentation. Thus, Nar Photos actively positions themselves on a fundamental level as distinct from the mainstream news. Indeed, all the members of Nar Photos underscored the importance of the independent, commercial-free nature[30] of their work to pursuing photographic projects which would otherwise remain overlooked, even censored in some sense, by other mainstream outlets. As Saner noted:

> *I will tell you why I want to be a part of Nar Photos...Why am I taking photos as a part of Nar Photos? Because frankly, there are not many other places I can take these pictures. I take these photos, but there are not many who want to publish them...For example, if you are working on a certain topic that is related to the companies with which a publication is affiliated, the publication will not want to publish it. For example, I wanted to cover the road construction projects occurring in the Black Sea region. Such a project has certain expenses. You need to rent a car, stay at a hotel [...] So, I suggested this project to one of Turkey's most well-known publications, a publication I had previously worked with. They didn't accept it. They said we cannot publish on this topic. When I asked why they could not publish it, I learned that the publication was affiliated with one of the corporations overseeing the construction...There are instances like this in Turkey.*

The desire for visibility of their work, specifically the types of topics they present, figures prominently into Nar Photos' choices of how to display and distribute their photography. Given that Nar Photos aims to engage with topics which typically remain unacknowledged by or invisible from official Turkish state narratives, they have crafted careful modes and principles for selecting to whom to disseminate their work. This is quite apparent in their outright rejection of the Turkish press. Serra, Tolga, and Saner, three of the most senior members of the collective, were unyielding in their

[30] While some of Nar Photos photography is sold, members have expressed that this is done after projects and their exhibition are fully completed. They claim that there are minimal earnings from their photos and that most photographers support themselves through separate, freelance work.

criticism and frank abhorrence of the nature of Turkish media. During our interviews, Nar Photos members noted an active distrust of the Turkish press regarding how their photos would be credited and contextually utilized. They worry that the ownership structures in conjunction with state intervention muddies the waters of reporting, putting the manner with which their photos are utilized at risk. As Saner asserted:

> *These daily newspapers are outside of our views on life. Because when I don't know what is going to be written under [the photo], I become uneasy. Maybe I wouldn't be this uneasy if I published abroad. But whenever I publish in Turkey, with the Turkish press, I become uneasy [...] I don't know what they are going to be reporting. I can't be sure. Even if I were sure of what they were reporting, I wouldn't know if they were going to publish the photo in a way I would want. I don't know whether or not it will be censored [...] For this reason, [Nar Photos] isn't really working with the Turkish press.*

Tolga reiterated Saner's comments, finding that Nar Photos worries about a history of manipulation within the Turkish press, given Nar Photos' specific point of view. Serra further underlined that collaborating with the Turkish press made the collective feel uneasy given the frequent imprisonment[31] and intimidation of the Turkish press by the government. Indeed as Ayse Öncü (2012) has noted, the Turkish press has historically been marked by intense periods of blackout, persecution, and political and personal suppression. According to a Freedom House (2014) report, Turkey currently ranks first among journalists imprisoned worldwide.[32] The nature of press ownership in Turkey, has created a precarious public-private partnership, wherein most mainstream outlets are owned by holding companies with forays into construction, finance, energy, and mining

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[31]AhmetŞık, a former member of the Nar Photos collective and prominent Turkish journalist was imprisoned in 2011 and charged with membership in the Ergenekon organization (allegedly a group involved in an elaborate plot to overthrow the government). His arrest came just shortly before the publication of his book, *The Imam's Army,* on the FetullahGülen organization and its connection with the police. At the same time in 2010-2011, many other journalists were indicted for alleged KCK affiliations. The KCK is a loosely affiliated governing system with ties to the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

[32]Freedom House (2014) reported that a total of 59 journalists are currently imprisoned in Turkey.

(Öncü, 2012), who frequently bid for precious government contracts. What emerges is a media environment where complex forms of censorship emerge so that these large holdings stay in favor with the ruling government (see Yeşil, 2014; Freedom House, 2014). The dynamics of the Turkish press have certainly influenced how Nar Photos both views itself and employs various media. For example, during the Gezi Park protests, the massive Turkish media blackout prompted Nar Photos to adopt a more photojournalistic format, as I have mentioned elsewhere. These instances underscore Nar's view of themselves as a forum for showing what other such news agencies cannot or will not. As Saner noted of the Turkish press during Gezi: "They did not show anything" ("hiç bir şey göstermediler"). Therefore, in working more with foreign news agencies rather than the local press, Nar Photos believes that they are able to use their photography to draw attention to political situations which would remain under-reported or skewed in a Turkish press report.

Nar Photos' distrust and avoidance of the mainstream Turkish media has, however, presented them with a dilemma in their desire of disseminating their work to a large audience and creating a certain level of visibility for the issues with which they are photographically engaged. Arguably, by refusing to send their work to Turkish news outlets, Nar Photos might be unwittingly excluding the public with which they hope to access—the public that through their photographic practices they have aimed at engaging with on equal footing. In an effort to avoid the politically treacherous territory of Turkish journalism, the foreign agencies to which Nar Photos sends their photos, while potentially protecting Nar Photos work from *domestic* journalistic manipulation and persecution, risks insulating the collective from key demographics of the audience with which Nar Photos hopes to reach. As Ayse Öncü (2012) has noted in her study of the Turkish media, there remains a large segment of the Turkish population excluded

from "serious" press access such as women, minorities, the uneducated, and the urban and rural poor. Though Nar Photos does not frequently work with the Turkish press, Ayse Öncü's findings still remain relevant given that the mainstream media in which Nar Photos is featured are typically foreign language publications, accessible only through special subscriptions or internet access.

Visibility of both Nar Photos as a collective and the subjects they explore, in this instance, becomes a double-edged sword. In hopes of avoiding potential censorship of their work—not only in terms of rejecting the photo but of improper contextualization—Nar Photos might be excluding the constituency with whom their work addresses. Herein lies a key paradox for how Nar Photos both positions itself and utilizes mainstream media channels. By avoiding platforms they find might limit their engagement and presentation of critical photography, Nar Photos might in fact become somewhat invisible to their local audience—not to mention that the foreign press is not above political suspicion. As Zeynep Devrim Gürsel (2013) confronted the collective on this issue during an interview she asked, "are people not skeptical about the foreign press?" While the answer somewhat avoided the question, asserting that the foreign could not get away with "such bold-faced lies" as the Turkish press, my sense is that Nar Photos deployment of other communicative forms, such as social networking sites, seek to address what they sense is the ubiquitous problematic nature of corporate and/or state owned mainstream media.

Erhan, for example moved beyond a critique of the Turkish media to state that Nar Photos shows and photographically captures what the mainstream, contemporary, and international media does not/will not show. While many other members were more highly critical of the domestic media, Nar Photos' trek into the realm of online social networking sites, particularly how they frame the deployment of this tool, signals the

tensions Nar Photos addresses in procuring visibility for their photographs and in negotiating their critical social positions vis-à-vis these mediated outlets. As I mentioned previously, Nar Photos did not fully embrace social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook until the eruption of the Gezi Park protests, as the rapidly changing and deteriorating political climate presented Nar Photos a challenge to communicate and distribute their work in a different manner. However since Gezi, the collective has come to utilize and articulate their usage of social media in such a way that reflects their self-articulation as an alternative media/photography collective.

As Serra noted, when Nar Photos established their website, it arose from a feeling of isolation and detachment from the public that Nar Photos hoped to reach, though who this public is remains largely open (see Thinking of Possible Audiences in Chapter 1). Thus, moving to the realm of social media reflected a desire to further engage and access a larger crowd. Tolga similarly asserted Nar Photos deployment of social media in terms of their ethical position on accessibility, framing social networking sites as an alternative platform for the collective to share and distribute their work in the absence of formal partnerships or contracts with major newspapers and magazines:

> *[Social media] is the most alternative, most pleasing, freest [platform]...How can I exist as a photography agency if I don't have a newspaper or magazine? The only place to show [the photography] is social media. I think it is a good outlet for agencies like us.*

Examining Tolga's comments in conjunction with other sentiments expressed throughout the course of my interviews, it is clear that Nar Photos has come to articulate their utilization of social media in relation to their position as a collective which provides people with easily accessible photographic narratives of stories and experiences which might otherwise remain unseen. Thus, while they attribute their more aggressive deployment of social media channels to the changes brought forth by the

Gezi Park protests, Nar Photos has come to express their presence on and use of social media in terms of their ethical positions. Case in point, though Nar Photos has derided local media, their emphasis on some inherent accessibility and visibility of content through social media signals their reticence of mainstream media's reporting and material. For example, Serra was emphatic in noting that a large part of the photography Nar Photos' chose to distribute through Facebook and Twitter during Gezi Park were those of the daily life of the protests, in direct response to the violent imagery shown on mainstream media. While Nar Photos' is hesitant of mainstream media—positioning their own practices and perspective in contrast with those of mass news—they still boast about their photographic features in mainstream newspapers and magazines on their official website. This discursive and practical discrepancy certainly highlights the complexity of Nar Photos' media practices.

Yet, Nar Photos' praise of the qualities they attribute to social media remain a question in their minds, still. In praising social networking sites as a free and alternative platform, Tolga paused to mention, as a side-note, what he sees as the possibility for controls within this medium:

> *Well, I don't know how free [social media] really is. In the end the state is going to start exerting control on it. They will start repressing it [...]*

Saner, too, has his concerns, noting that while social media provides a useful forum of sharing Nar Photos' work, it cannot be the only one. In this sense, Nar Photos is coming to negotiate and address the limits of their "newfound" communicative tool. What they saw as a free and accessible platform does indeed have socio-political and economic limits. Though Turkey ranks number four worldwide in terms of its number of Facebook users (Socialbakers, 2014), as noted above, examining the profiles of the Facebook and Twitter users who follow Nar Photos work, it seems that many hail from

urban backgrounds, are politically active students, had previous links to oppositional political activity, or are members of Turkey's art world.

In addition, the legal infrastructure surrounding the internet in Turkey[33] has created an environment of frequent blackouts of various websites. For example, in early 2014 Twitter was blocked for two weeks (Özbilen & Coşkun, 2014)following the leaking of tapes with then-Prime Minister Erdoğan and other ministers discussing hiding large sums of cash. Now as president, Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party, more than fully censoring the internet, are actively constructing a discourse of fear around social media, whereby those who share photos, videos, recordings and other information via these platforms should be feared by their loyal followers (Tufekçi, 2014).

Thinking through the true accessibility of Nar Photos work by a large segment of the Turkish population in relation to the realities of internet usage, it appears that large segments of the audience Nar Photos hopes to reach might be again unwittingly excluded. Furthermore, the legal environment surrounding the internet and social media in Turkey has an uneasy environment, with sporadic and unpredictable cuts to access. In fact, the true nature of equal participation and accessibility of social media has become the subject of academic critique.[34]For example, examining user policies and agreements,

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[33]Internet Law 5651 was originally passed in 2007 which granted the state legal authority to shut down a website for reasons ranging from child abuse, obscenity, to "insulting" Mustafa Kemal (see Turkish Telecommunications Authority). The law was expanded in February of 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2014), just after the leaked tapes, to grant the state authority to shut down websites without a court order if they were deemed to violate privacy or national security. A court has overturned the provision which allows for the closure of websites without a court order (European Digital Rights Initiative, 2014).

[34]Several academic studies have explored the concept of the digital divide, such as how minorities and the socio-economically disadvantaged are excluded from technological access in a host of ways. For an example, see Joe Straubhaar's (2011) book, *The*

scholar Laura Stein (2013) notes that despite claims that these sites offer the possibility of equal creation, participation, and accessibility "users do not fully control communication on these platforms" (p. 353). In her argument, Stein has presented us with a picture in which convoluted processes and user agreements, limit and deny access to how users can access and engage with social networking sites. In this sense, Nar Photos—though not explicitly—seems to understand the limits of what it means to engage any form of mediated channel in distributing their work. While they frame themselves as a free space to create and share photographic stories of daily life in Turkey, as they move their work outside of the collective they realize that their careful positioning and uses of media entail limits and contradictions. Out of necessity, they have developed vigilant reflexivity and assessment for how to share their work in a manner that ensures proper contextualization and maximum accessibility.

2.6. In lieu of a Conclusion: Implications and Nar Photos' Evolving and Ever-Transforming Practices

What Nar Photos' engagement with the mainstream media, their website, and social media demonstrate is that the collective's media practices cannot be collapsed into a single medium, media subject, or period of time. Rather, Nar Photos' employment of media underscores a variety of internal needs and negotiations amidst a web of other external political and/or practical considerations. For example, while a desire for visibility and accessibility remains a key underlying tenet for the ways in which Nar Photos employs different media, other mitigating factors such as erupting protests and concerns regarding political persecution signal transformations in the ways Nar Photos

chooses to employ these media. So for example, while engaging with the Turkish press would certainly provide Nar Photos an outlet for reaching the wider Turkish public, political and contextualization worries deter the collective from pursuing this medium.

What remains to be answered is whether or not in the long term, Nar Photos media practices constitute the alternative distributive and communicative means they see as so important to their work. Certainly, the ways that Nar Photos has engaged with media in response to the collective's goals, as well as political and practical concerns has consequences for whether or not it is truly able to establish unique lines of communication so as to reach the public. However, rather than providing an answer, I aim to "walk through" the potential implications of Nar Photos' media positioning and practices. In the second layer of their analysis, Mattoni and Trere (2014) propose looking at mediation processes as a means for examining the longer term patterns and effects that activist media practices might have. Building upon the work of Colombian scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993), mediation processes signal how different daily practices around media constitute or support new flows of information, meanings, discourses, and interpretations. Thus, as Nar Photos works to distribute their work through both mass and social media, are they (1) able to establish new ways of communicating with the public, and (2) does this communication offer new ways of experiencing and conceiving life in Turkey as Nar Photos hopes?

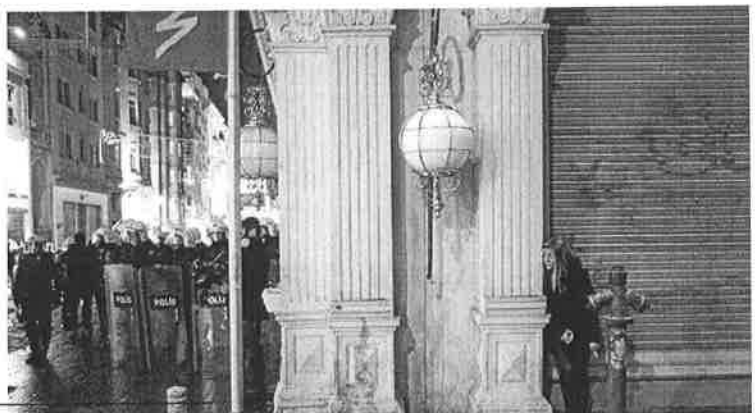
These are no easy answers to these questions, nor might there be any answers at all. However, what remains important to address is how Nar Photos' practices and discursive constructions of these practices relate to their critical ethos. Nar Photos has certainly constructed a host of media practices in relation to distributing their photography, though they often contend with the limits of each medium in terms of accessibility and politics. However, something must be said for the "intermodality"

(Lim, 2012) of Nar Photos' media practices. As Merlyna Lim (2012) notes, this "overlapping of networks of various media is necessary…to move beyond its online flowing to a larger and larger audience" (p. 241). More than constituting an alternative or new flow of communication, this intermodality signals the complexity of communicative tools Nar Photos employs to gain relevance and visibility.

An additional angle worth considering is how the flow of communication established by Nar Photos might encourage or at least incite the critical dialogue and debate they hope to foment through their photography. For example through Facebook, when Nar Photos uploads a photographic album, the comment option invites people to engage with and discuss the photo. The comment section from an album of the protests against government corruption marking the December 17th operation,[35] for instance, shows people joking, somewhat eerily, about the nature of state violence. The photograph (below) of a woman smoking around the corner from riot police carried the following comments:

User 1: Cigarette Break
User 2: A woman smoking in public? The reaction's a bit extreme

Figure 5: Protestor Hiding from Riot Police



[35]The December 17th corruption operation involved the uncovering of widespread government corruption regarding construction contracting and money laundering. Some conspiracy theories have linked the arrests of several ministers and businessmen to the Hizmet movement under the auspices of religious leader, Fetullah Gülen. The once close relationship between the AKP and Hizmet movement has become increasingly marked by animosity.

Photo Credit: Eren Aytuğ (2013)

Through its employment of social media, Nar Photos invites people to discuss and share their work and its possible implications. In this way, Nar Photos establishes a relatively egalitarian format to encourage discussion and debate that is neither top-down nor bottom-up. Rather, Nar Photos facilitates a conversation through their photographic posts, more in the fashion of a "choreographer" (Gerbaudo, 2012). Thus, through its deployment of Facebook to disseminate and share their photography, Nar Photos helps to assist and coordinate discussions around the implications, meanings, and hidden messages of each photograph.

These media practices signal longer term consequences for the collective's role as part of a process of social change through not only their photography, but the means through which they engage the audience with the photos. While perhaps limiting their reach with the desired constituency in some ways, by using mainstream news and social media outlets, Nar Photos' media practices work as a form of public relations for the collective, whereby their mediated activities move from the online realm to the offline realm by word of mouth. In other words, these intermodal interactions increase the visibility and audience of Nar Photos not directly but indirectly. However, while these variegated media practices might signal a unique mode of indirect dissemination and engagement with its desired audience, whether or not Nar Photos' forums for presentation and distribution truly encourage and spark the type of discussion, discourses, and reinterpretation of Turkey's social, cultural, and political history that Nar Photos seeks remains to be seen. As Paul Dahlgren (2014) argues

> *There must exist spaces in which citizens belonging to different groups and cultures, or speaking in different registers or even languages will find participation meaningful* (p. 152)

Considering Dahlgren's supposition, it merits further examination to contemplate whether the mediated spaces and practices Nar Photos has carefully crafted operate as a "node", so to speak, for people to gather and reflect on their daily experiences and frameworks for understanding life in Turkey vis-à-vis Nar Photos' photography.

Throughout this discussion of Nar Photos media practices I have aimed to demonstrate that the complexity of Nar Photos engagement with various media objects and subjects cannot be collapsed into a single medium, outlet, or time period. The way that Nar Photos works around and through media, while on a certain level reflecting a desire to remain visible and reach a larger audience, is mitigated by a variety of external dynamics and pressures ranging from the eruption of political protest to worries about the nature of the state of journalism in Turkey. Nar Photos' media practices are ever shifting, responding to their views on the nature of mainstream and social media, which are informed by a reflexive process of how and where Nar Photos' ethos and practices fit among these media(ted) institutions. At this micro-level, Nar Photos' employment of and interactions with and around both mainstream and social media signal how the collective shifts their practices and approaches to meet pressing needs and desires—all of which remain in flux.

CHAPTER 3

AESTHETICIZING POLITICS: THE NAR PHOTOS – ISTANBUL MODERN EXHIBITION

Visiting the Nar Photos' retrospective at the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art last summer, I was excited to see the photography of a collective I had been intently following for the past year displayed in a highly regarded and elite space. Located in the gentrified port district of Tophane,[36] the Istanbul Modern, at first glance seemed to provide a validating and esteemed location for the work of a collective which has risen to fame for their critical and engaged photographic reportages of Turkey's past and contemporary socio-political history, particularly in relation to daily life. Yet, what I came to realize was the potential contradiction and tension inherent to what Nar Photos claimed to be collaboration between them and the dual state-privately funded Istanbul

[36]Tophane is a rapidly gentrifying district, just down from Taksim Square near Istanbul's Golden Horn. Known in the 1970s as an area for international travelers, hippies, and heroin users, migration from Eastern Turkey has changed the composition of the neighborhood as the conservative population has gained infamy often acting as proxies for the government or the police in beating protestors who flee Taksim Square during May 1st protests, Gezi Park, or other events. Local residents have attacked patrons at gallery openings (Ahiska, 2011), signaling a contested neighborhood as artists and galleries move in. While gentrification has indeed played a part in the attacks, many of the mob organizers are actually local real estate owners who have "galvaniz[ed] local discontent" (Karaca, 2011b, p.7) against what locals see as divergent values (such as drinking smoking, and the mixing of men and women) between them and the art community (ibid.).

Modern. Indeed, how does a partnership come about between a socio-politically engaged photography collective and an institution that is known for its conservative, commercially oriented, and pro-government stance? What sort of exhibit are we presented with in the museum under these conditions?

The museum has often been studied as a unique institutionalized space in which particular notions of history and culture are employed in the creation of grand or meta-narratives, particularly those of cultural integration, continuity, and in the creation of the nation-state myth. In this regard, special attention has been given to what happens to varying objects as they enter the museum and how the museum's visual regime works to endow these objects with certain meanings so as to further create and support the story being told. This process of "aestheticization" has been theoretically debated by numerous scholars and philosophers seeking to understand what happens to an artifact as it enters this transformative place. Does the object lose all function and meaning? Does it die, as Valery (Adorno, 1996) proposes? How are objects molded through their placement, presentation, and description to fit in with the program and perspective of the museum and its benefactors? While many of these discussions have examined this process of "aestheticization" and its effects for dominant, hegemonic cultural and historical tropes, in this chapter I aim to examine this process when it meets Nar Photos' visual program of socio-political critique. In other words, as a visual perspective based on a critical socio-political ethos enters the institutionalized space of the museum, what does that signal for a political and socially-conscious program?

Looking at the recent exhibit at the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, "On the Road: Images of Turkey from the Nar Photos Archive," which took place May 28-November 9, 2014, this chapter examines the impact, if any, the museum exerts on the work of the Nar Photos collective as the museum's perspective and agenda are

interpolated through the process of "aestheticization." Given Nar Photos' unaffiliated, non-commercial stance in comparison to the large-scale corporately-sponsored Istanbul Modern, I consider what happens to Nar Photos' proclaimed alternative visual angle as it enters this mainstream space. What are the implications for Nar Photos' work as it enters into partnership with an institution seemingly at odds with their socially conscious visual viewpoint? Based on interviews with members of the Nar Photos collective and a visual analysis of the exhibition, I argue that a double-bind emerges wherein the presentation and display through the museum's visual regime aids in infusing and yielding the socio-political significance and potential of the photography, yet this is a process mediated by both Nar Photos' input and their work's importance outside of the institutional context. In other words, while the Istanbul Modern's arrangement and display of the work of Nar Photos helps to infuse it with meaning, this is not solely achieved through the museum but arbitrated by external contexts. Implicit to this finding, is a contradiction in which critical visual culture and politics (mainstream and oppositional) find an eerily comfortable coexistence, claimed collaboration, and co-dependence in the museum.

3.1. Juxtaposing the Istanbul Modern and Nar Photos

The Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, founded in 2004, marks one of the most elite and corporatized museum spaces and institutions in Turkey. The mission claims to "embrace a global vision to collect, preserve, exhibit and document works of modern and contemporary art and make them accessible to art lovers." It is chaired by Oya Eczacibaşı, a member of the industrialist Eczacibaşı family by marriage, and whose father-in-law Dr. Nejat F. Eczacibaşı was the main force in financing and establishing

the museum. The museum's permanent collection is on loan from Oya Eczacibaşı and her husband, signaling the Istanbul Modern as a specially crafted space for the Eczacibaşı's to re-invest in their collection. As BanuKaraca (forthcoming) notes, museums have often acted as a space for private donors to "ensure an increase in value of personal collections through the sanctioning power of the museum" (p. 113).

Other members of the board of Istanbul Modern include Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbaş and former Minister of European Union Affairs Egemen Bağış, both of whom are members of the ruling conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP).[37] The museum relies on sponsorship from major Turkish corporations for its programs, exhibitions, and maintenance noting that

> *Aware of their social responsibilities, Turkish companies have supported, and continue to support, the various programs and exhibitions undertaken by the Istanbul Modern. To date, our exhibit sponsors have included some of Turkey's leading corporations* (Oya Eczacibaşı, 2014)

Oya Eczacibaşı's welcome note on the Istanbul Modern web page underscores the significance the museum places on their corporate ties and relationships, and the belief that such partnerships contribute to and highlight the importance of the Istanbul Modern for Turkey and the world. This signals a pairing of art and capitalism, which the Istanbul Modern both promotes and emphasizes as an essential feature of their mission. As Angela Harutyunan, Aras Ozgun, and Eric Goodfield (2008) have underlined, such structuring dynamics "epitomize the ways contemporary art institutions have reorganized in conformity with the contemporary forces of economic rationalization" (p. 480).

The financial and administrative make-up of the Istanbul Modern is quite distinct from that of the Nar Photos collective. Hoping to merge aesthetic and documentary style photography, Nar Photos gives importance to their independent

[37]Translated from official Turkish name of AdaletveKalkinmaPartisi.

stance. Accordingly, they are largely supported by funds collected from its members or through modest sales. Furthermore decision making remains collective and fairly non-hierarchical, with modest influence from more senior members. As previously stated, Nar Photos' vision and work rose to popularity during the 2013 Gezi Park protests, attaining a level of publicity not only among the politically active but among mainstream news and cultural outlets. Their rise in popularity during and after the Gezi Park uprisings (arguably) transformed their work into culturally viable products in mainstream institutions. Following their photography on Gezi Park, Nar Photos' work began popping up in mainstream news outlets and in various cultural exhibitions. It was within this context the Nar Photos collective was approached by the Istanbul Modern about the possibility of arranging a retrospective of their work. Indeed, many at Nar Photos emphasize the point that the collective was approached about creating an exhibit rather than vice-versa. For Nar Photos, creating this distance seems important for signaling that they remain an independent and critically engaged outlet hesitant of working with corporately sponsored institutions. This commercial-free, independent environment is a key tenant of their working practices, as Nar Photos finds that with any sort of corporate or commercial oversight they would not have the freedom to pursue the topics and projects they desire.

These two entities appear rather distinct: the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art a forum for the nouveau riche/bourgeois to consume the latest high contemporary art and culture from both Turkey and abroad, and Nar Photos a self-proclaimed alternative group which has striven to move outside of the elite artistic circles of Turkey. However, understanding their respective backgrounds presents a starting point for examining (1) how such "unlikely" collaborations begin, and (2) what these collaborations signal for the "aestheticization" process of socio-political imagery within the museum. Prior to

engaging in a theoretical discussion surrounding the implications of Nar Photos' exhibit at the Istanbul Modern, I will provide an overview of the textual descriptions and visual displays accompanying and framing the exposition.

3.2. On the Road: Images of Turkey from the Nar Photos Archive

On May 28, 2014 the Istanbul Modern opened its newest temporary exhibit, "On the Road: Images of Turkey from the Nar Photos Archive,[38] displaying a selection of Nar Photos' works from its inception in 2003 to 2013. The date for the opening of the exhibition is quite interesting and symbolic, as it marked the first anniversary of the brutal attack against environmental activists in Gezi Park, which later sparked wider, more massive unrest.[39] The retrospective curated by Sena Çakırkaya, "present[ed] a panorama of events and situations which took place in Turkey's recent history or whose effects are still felt today" (Istanbul Modern, 2014). In its description of the exhibit, the Istanbul Modern frames the exposition as an "unpredictable journey" through the records and stories of Turkey "which have been left in the shadows" (Istanbul Modern, 2014). Through their photography, the museum claims, though reiterated by Nar Photos as well, that a collective memory of the recent past is created whereby the photographs act as a visual archive that "do not show facts as they are presented to us; rather, they

[38]Translated from Turkish: *Yolda: Nar Photos Arşivinden Türkiye Fotoğrafları*

[39]Speaking with Serra about the significance of the opening date, she noted that this was unintentional and was selected based on the completion of the previous photographic exhibit at the Istanbul Modern. However, she did mention that the Nar Photos retrospective was originally to be held on the same date in 2013, the exact date when the Gezi Park events erupted in full force.

display steps of a journey toward questioning the things that are accepted as facts" (Istanbul Modern, 2014).

This "visual archive" presented in the museum does not simply stand "as a mere witness," Çakırkaya writes, but serves to intervene and invite the spectator to "confront and reckon with our times...trigger[ing] change by creating a social consciousness" (Istanbul Modern, 2014). As the Nar Photos collective described their work in the exhibition publication (as previously noted), they posit

> *We know we can't change the world through photography, but we do question whether we could, at least, create some shift in opinions, make up for missing information, and whether we could make ourselves, and also the viewers, take a more critical look at the subjects we deal with, a look that is more concerned with the world; and a more critical look at ourselves as well* (Nar Photos, 2014)

This theme of utilizing photography as a means to trigger memory, debate, and discussion seemed to provide the basis for configuring the display of Nar Photos' work within the walls of the Istanbul Modern. The photos were to walk the museum patron through a journey of Turkey's contemporary history, particularly those events which remain "unseen," inviting the viewer to think about different possibilities for what is and could be (socio-politically) for Turkey.

The exhibit was held in the photography gallery, downstairs from the main entrance. One was confronted with the slate colored walls offset by long pieces of cardboard upon which the photos were placed. The placards, too, were printed on the same cardboard. The utilization of cardboard against the grey walls not only made each photo appear more prominent, but gave one the idea of being in an "underground," alternative, even marginal environment.

Figure 6: Exhibit Design at the Istanbul Modern

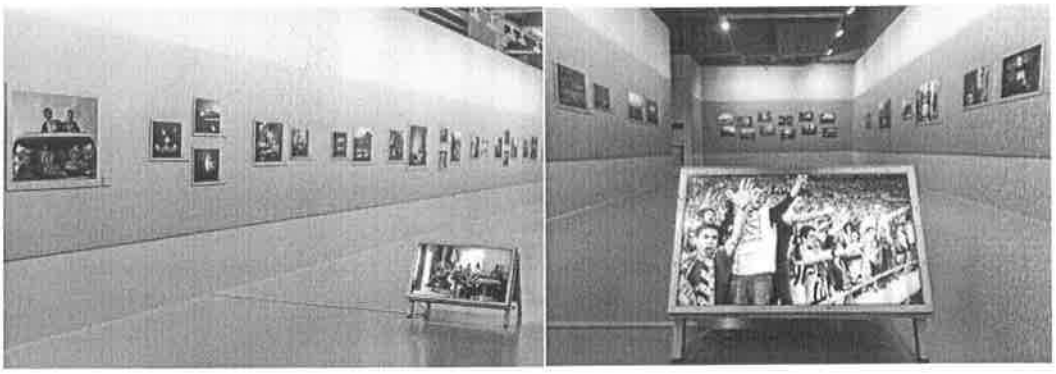


Photo Credit (left to right): Artsy.net (2014); Istanbul Modern (2014)

The gallery space was a narrow hallway, controlling the flow of traffic in one direction. However, the arrangement of photos on either side of the hallway encouraged the visitor to zigzag about the space. As you walked through the hallway, photos on either wall were displayed singularly, while some were clustered together in bunches. Some photos were clustered in small groups of two to three while others were in groups of 10-12 photos. In addition to the clustering of various photos, seemingly following no thematic pattern, the spacing of each photo and group of photos was also disconsonant, with some photos highly syncopated and others remaining more isolated. This discordant flow of both spacing and pairing disrupted the eye as it followed along the narrow hallway/gallery space. The almost "bumpy" quality of the gallery's spatial and display design certainly conjured the notion of a long and arduous journey as one meandered through the visual path that Nar Photos and the Istanbul Modern paved.

The pieces presented reflected the work of 20 members of the Nar Photos network. A diverse range of their past and ongoing projects were displayed, showing visual imagery from the collective's project on urban transformation, "Million Dollar View,"[40] the Gezi Park protests, features on aging in Turkey, mining and its working

[40]Translated from Turkish: *MilyonlukManzara*. Milyonluk roughly translates to "worth millions" in English.

conditions, International Women's Day, Greek Orthodox ceremonies, and scenes from across "diverse geographies such as Kars, Ardahan, and Ararat" (Istanbul Modern, 2014). Each photo was accompanied by a placard providing the photographer's name and a few sentences about the location and context of the photo, written in journalistic, descriptive language.

Many of these photos were not necessarily arranged according to themenor chronological order, and were often grouped together. Certain photographs, however, were larger and displayed more in isolation. For example the photographs below, displayed separately from the others, were larger and used to promote the exhibit on the Istanbul Modern's website, flyers, and art blogs and reviews. The photo to the left is of an Armenian woman, who grows tomatoes in Vakıflı, one of the few remaining Armenian villages in Turkey. The photo to the right is of a child holding a bird in the Dersim military barracks, which were constructed in 1938 prior to the Dersim Operation.[41] The barracks have now become a refuge and home for Dersim's (now officially named Tunceli[42]) poor.

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[41] The Dersim Operation was a mission carried out by the Turkish government to forcibly integrate Alevi Kurds into the nascent Republic of Turkey. When the locals rebelled, the government responded with force, killing and forcibly removing thousands of residents. Ismail Beşikçi was the first scholar to call the Dersim Operation a genocide, noting the passage of the Tunceli Law of 1935 which set the basis for systematic,deportation, alienation, and killing of the local population (Ismail Beşikçi Foundation, 2015).Scholar Martin Van Bruinessen (1994), on the other hand, has called the Dersim Operation *ethnocide,* arguing that the Dersim Operation "was but the culmination of a series of measures taken in order to forcibly assimilate the Kurds" (p. 7).

[42]Tunceli translates to *Bronze Fist* in English. Place name changes have been a part of demographic engineering in Turkey (Karaca, 2015).

Figure 7: Vakıflı and Dersim Military Barracks

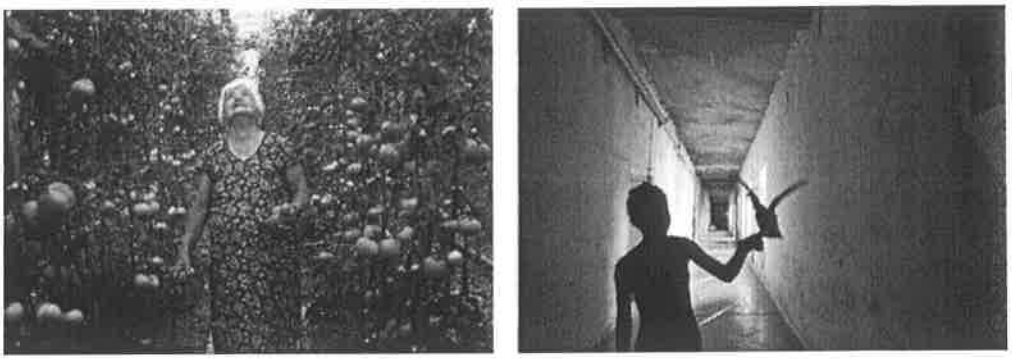

Photo Credit (left to right): Tolga Sezgin (2008); Serpil Polat (2013)

I highlight these two photos and their accompanying descriptions to highlight that certain photos were given more space and exposure throughout the exhibit. The selection of these two photos is quite interesting and reflective of the emphasis both the museum and collective placed on creating a contemporary discussion and memory for the past. It is appears to be an attempt to bridge the conditions and daily experience of the present with a violent and/or overlooked past.

3.3. Pressure on the Way of Seeing?

After visiting the exhibit, I met with Nar Photos co-founding member, Serra Akcan, at the Nar Photos office in central Istanbul. Aware of Nar Photos' rooted goal in using photography as a means of critically contemplating daily life in Turkey, I asked if she felt the exhibit was able to show this perspective. Serra replied succinctly, "the photos did"("Fotoğraflarımız gösterdi").Here, Serra attributed the success of the exhibit to an *a priori*socio-political quality of the photos. For Serra it was not the construction of the exhibit which created the message, but the photography itself. The museum, then, was simply a vessel for carrying the message to the spectator. Yet an affiliate of the Nar

Photos collective, Tolga,[43] while believing the exhibit was a success in portraying the social ethos of the collective, wondered whether someone who was not familiar with the work of Nar Photos would have been able to fully grasp the scope of the group's work and point of view. Furthermore, he found that not all of the works were overtly visually political, specifically noting the Dersim Barracks photo, and that it was the placards providing context, which aided each visitor in understanding the photography's and collective's larger socio-political importance. These two divergent comments underscore the potential implications that the aestheticization process signal for the politics of Nar Photos' work. In other words, engaging both Serra's and Tolga's respective viewpoints necessitates asking what the Istanbul Modern exhibition highlights both aesthetically and ethically for Nar's photography.

Svetlana Alpers (1991) argues that as an object enters the museum it becomes re-contextualized according to a dominant visual regime. The museum exerts a "pressure on the way of seeing," guiding and encouraging the visitor to look and experience the object in a particular manner. This is mostly accomplished through the careful construction of visual aids around the object to construct a display so as to elicit certain feelings, memories, and connotations. Similarly, Stephanie Moser (2010) invites us to conceptualize the museum not as a passive space, wherein objects are simply placed, but as a place of active knowledge production wherein "details such as lighting, display, furniture, and spatial arrangement function as devices that work together to create an environment" (p. 23) that is culturally informing. Yet, this visual arrangement of the object is not about simply visually representing a piece or object, but about experience. The display is a visual tool by which the museum carefully crafts the object to pull at the memory and individual conscious to elicit certain thoughts and

[43]Tolga is not a member of Nar Photos but retains close working and personal ties to the group.

connotations about the piece (ibid.). In this way, the museum reinvigorates the object with a new context, breathing in a second life (Adorno, 1996), essentially neutralizing it. The object becomes "withdrawn from the world" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004) and re-infused with meaning through its careful visual construction and placement that pulls at the conscious of the viewer.

The "On the Road" exhibit certainly provided plenty of contextualization and visual support to encourage each museum patron to think through the history, relevance, and impact of each photo—essentially creating a bridge between the past and present (Ergener, 2009). For example, the use of cardboard, the random jumbling of photos, the bumpiness of placement, and even the way one must move constantly across the narrow space created a complicated mix of anachronism, co-temporality, and isolated movement. Additionally, the placards read like journalistic accounts of each scene, guiding the viewer's imagination and speculation (ibid.). As Jean-Francois Lyotard proposes, art in this way works to "stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with recognizable meaning, to reproduce a syntax and vocabulary which enable the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly" (as cited in Malpas, 2002, p. 200). For Lyotard, this is how art serves to disrupt hegemony. So, within the Istanbul Modern we are left with an exhibit which utilizes a careful construction of visual and textual context to elicit specific meanings, which in the case of "On the Road" is an attempt at disrupting normative and official understandings of the connection between Turkey's past and present.

Reflecting on this literature, Tolga's comments certainly seem to resonate as it is clear that every detail in the exhibit worked to clarify and make accessible the goal of the retrospective. Yet, it did so by pulling at the memory of each visitor, which was not mediated by the museum but by external contexts. Therefore, when we evaluate both

Tolga's and Serra's comments, they are not as divergent as they appear at first sight. While the Istanbul Modern exhibit's visual and textual aids worked to contextualize and place the photography within the desired narrative, this does not seem to arise from the museum's "dominant" visual regime. Rather, the textual and visual tools relied on external context for their success in pulling at the conscious of the audience. So as Serra forcefully asserted that it was the photography itself which contributed to the effectiveness of the "On the Road" exhibit, she is not wholly off base. Her comments reflect the argument that art, and in this case photography, acts as a medium through which the artist is part of a collective emotional, sensual, and visual experience with the audience (Collingwood, 1945). Thus, Nar Photos' works themselves do retain some internal socio-political power in that they act as a bridge between the audience and photographers, mediating a shared experience of political protest and turbulence.

The "On the Road" exhibit, beginning amidst the political climate of Gezi Park, the December 17th corruption operation, Soma, and death of Berkin Elvan,[44] marked a promulgation of Nar Photos' work into the limelight. The photography of Nar Photos offered those who were part of the oppositional political activities a way of visually contemplating and understanding the events. Therefore as their work was presented in the museum, Nar Photos' photography already had a large following and significance in regards to the dissident and political actions from the previous year. Many of the photos displayed in the exhibit touched upon those themes which brought Nar Photos oppositional popularity. So as people visited the exhibit, the photos were not previously unseen visuals, but part of a repertoire of works that had become quite well known

[44]As previously noted, the December 17thscandalrevealed widespread government corruption regarding construction contracting and money laundering. Soma was a mining accident in May 2014, in which 301 workers were killed. Berkin Elvan was a 15 year old boy who died as the result of head trauma sustained from a blow to the head from a tear gas canister thrown by police during the Gezi protests in the minority neighborhood, Okmeydanı.

through Facebook, and Twitter, and some foreign mainstream news and human rights organizations reports. Hence, the photos were partially responsible in delivering the message Nar Photos desired, in that many—irrespective of their placement against the cardboard, and journalistic description—had previously become part of a memory of political opposition and state violence. They had become visuals by which people both experienced the ongoing events and as visual archives, "anchoring" the events into memory. Thus, Serra is right in asserting that the photography did contain a sort of *a priori* political significance outside of the Istanbul Modern. Therefore, examined in conjunction within the context of the "On the Road" exhibit, there is an interplay between the external significance of the photography, the shared experience of the audience and photographer(s), and its (re)contextualization, or perhaps mediation, within the display structure of the Istanbul Modern.

In this context, "aesthetic objects and practices" (Frost, 2010, p. 436) *do not* fully sustain their independence "from the theoretical and interpretive practices which frame or supplement them" (ibid., p. 436); nor are they truly the dead surfaces Georges Bataille (1986) envisioned with their presence in the museum. The case of the Nar Photos exhibit at the Istanbul Modern presents a dependence on both the realms of the visual (i.e., aesthetic), experience, and internal and external context to contribute to the successful transmission of Nar Photos' message. While the environment the Istanbul Modern crafted surely buttressed a purported goal of encouraging social contemplation and bringing to the forefront a history that has remained in the shadows, the following Nar Photos has procured from the previous year and the role its photography served during intense moments of unrest provided an important basis for the exhibit's success. As Bataille (1986) writes, "it is *within the crowd* that the streaming play of lights and of

radiance, technically described by authorized critics is produced" (p. 1930, emphasis added).

3.4. The "Unlikely" Partnership

After visually examining the "On the Road" exhibit, on the surface there certainly appears to be a positive pairing between Nar Photos' socio-political ethos and the exhibition and visual display regime of the Istanbul Modern. Where one might easily assume an uncomfortable collaboration between an activist and independent group of photographers and a large, corporately sponsored art institution, there emerges a surprisingly comfortable, if unequal, partnership. Visiting both the exhibit and speaking with members of the Nar Photos collective, I readily assumed to encounter a contentious preparation and exhibition process, whereby the photography presented and its message would become water-downed versions of what Nar Photos normally presents on their webpage, Facebook, and Twitter. Yet, sometimes violent photos (such as the one below) highlighted anti-government activism despite the composition of Istanbul Modern's Board of Directors.

Figure 8: Protestor Shot by Water Cannon during December 17th Protests

Photo Credit: Eren Aytuğ (2013)

Furthermore, given Nar Photos' commitment to the accessibility of their work, showcasing in an institution which charges quite high entry fees proves slightly contradictory. Yet, when speaking with Serra about the collaboration, she emphasized that it was a cordial and productive partnership in which the collective and curator of the exhibit worked together to select photos, colors, lighting, text, etc. At first this seems to break with much of the literature of museum aesthetics, which suggests that dominant tropes are projected onto the object through display/visual regimes. However, again, the display of the work of Nar Photos in "On the Road" seems to reinforce their socio-political perspective.

Under the neo-liberal, capitalist paradigm, perhaps such pairings are not so contradictory but rather symbiotic, whereby as the dominant system exerts pressure on the rules of operation for visual arts and cultures, alternative groups such as the Nar Photos collective both support the corporate art agenda and benefit from their showcase in these museums (see Tao-Wu, 2003 below). Essentially, these tenuous relationships serve to support the visibility and viability of both the corporate-museum and the more marginal politically-engaged collective. In the case of the Istanbul Modern – Nar Photos partnership, there emerges a collaboration that provides an "edge" and sense of solidarity with the public for the Eczacıbaşı Corporation (not to mention the other corporate moguls and governmental figures on the board) and a larger sense of relevance and publicity for Nar Photos. In other words, hegemonic actors are able to work through the museum—through their patronage—to support their interests while offering more marginal groups a token of prestige and visibility.

3.5. Istanbul Modern: Corporate Patronage and Publicity

As I previously mentioned, the Istanbul Modern was founded, and remains run by the industrialist Eczacıbaşı empire in addition to receiving various forms of support from Garanti Bank, Ülker confectionary, and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.[45] Furthermore, the museum receives media sponsorship from media giants under the umbrella of Doğuş Holding[46] and Doğan Holding. These media outlets include CNN Türk and Hürriyet under Doğan Holding, and CNBC-e and Star TV under Doğuş Holding. Through their patronage of the Istanbul Modern Museum of Art, these companies, institutions, and their affiliates can work to promote their image to the public. As Chin Tao-Wu (2003) notes in her work on the privatization/corporatization of the museum, "businesses have successfully transformed art museums into their own public-relations vehicles, by taking over the function, and by exploiting the social status, that cultural institutions have in our society" (p. 29). Therefore, the Istanbul Modern marks a museum in which not only has an art institution's structuring dynamics yielded to the pressures of the practices of the corporate world, but has in fact been created by the realm of capitalism. Thus the Istanbul Modern serves to support and promote the goals and image of each of its corporate (and government) sponsors.

Tao-Wu (2003) argues that companies do not just use the museum and arts patronage as general social relations tools, but do so to specifically manage, ameliorate, or perhaps even erase from public consciousness tarnished images and disreputable business practices. These dynamics are not seen more clearly than in the "On the Road" exhibition. It was here that governmental and corporate actors worked through their

[45]Translated from Turkish: Istanbul BüyükşehirBelediyesi; The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality typically provides nominal or in-kind support (BanuKaraca, 2015).

[46]Doğuş Holding is also the parent company of Garanti Bank.

support of an alternative, political exhibit to amend their political and corporate images which had suffered during the tumultuous year prior. For example, Garanti Bank, Eczazıbaşı Holding, and both Doğuş' and Doğan's media enterprises such as NTV and CNN Türk, came under heat during the Gezi Park protests of 2013. Garanti Bank was criticized and boycotted after its parent company Doğuş holding's NTV "self-censored" coverage of the ongoing protests and state-violence (Al-Monitor, 2013). Similarly, CNN Türk was also parodied and ridiculed through a slew of internet memes after airing a documentary about penguins in lieu of covering developing events. Eczazıbaşı's elite, luxury shopping mall Kanyon (located near Istanbul's financial district) also became the site of impromptu demonstrations, as people began boycotting shopping malls during the uprisings and continued state violence. Finally, politicians on the board such as Egemen Bağış and Kadir Topbaş have been the subjects of public criticism given the former's "off the wall" comments in defense of Prime Minister Erdoğan and implication in the December 17th corruption scandal, and the latter's involvement and support for Istanbul's massive wave of urban gentrification-cum-dispossession. Thus approaching and sponsoring Nar Photos' exhibition in the Istanbul Modern was not so much contradictory as it was a tool to appeal to a public which had become disillusioned with the state and corporate politics du jour.When I discussed this issue with Saner in an interview, he partially attributed Istanbul Modern's collaboration with Nar Photos to the museum's economic motivations, citing that the Nar Photos brought in a large crowd. While economic considerations are certainly a motivating factor when crafting an exhibit, these economic factors are further mitigated by a desire to use visual arts and culture as a means to (re)fashion corporate images (Karaca, forthcoming).

The selection of Nar Photos then was by no accident, but a calculated and conscious attempt by some of Turkey's leading corporate and political actors to choose

a group which had been active in visually narrating the Gezi Park protests, December 17th corruption scandal, and many other events underscoring the public's disillusionment with the "powers that be." Hence, as these corporations (and government actors) attempt to exude an aura of "corporate social responsibility," the support of radical and/or political art serves to not only soften the corporate image, but to frame them as part of mass political struggle, even though Eczacıbaşı, Garanti Bank, Doğuş and Doğan Holding, Kadir Topbaş, and Egemen Bağış are the (direct and indirect) subject of critique. Perhaps in this way, through Nar Photos' visual aesthetic—pulling at the memory of each museum visitor—these hegemonic actors can positively insert themselves into public discourse and memory about the issues of Turkey's past and present.[47]Kadir Topbaş would no longer be regarded as an architect of Istanbul's gentrification process but as a sympathizer, as one looks at a photo from Nar Photos' Milyonluk Manzara project, and Eczacıbaşı holding would no longer be considered an elite empire of capitalism, but an institution which funds and supports critical socio-political programs and art.

Moreover, through the Istanbul Modern these institutions do not just constitute themselves as part of the larger public debate and socio-political activism, but use and view their patronage to supposedly encourage socio-cultural and political activity. Therefore, in a different manner, the perceived contradiction between Nar Photos' work and that of the museum's benefactors morphs into a favorable tool for Eczacıbaşı, the government, and other corporate sponsors to place themselves as important ellicitors and outlets for political and social action. As Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı stated in regards to his company's stance on the arts: "Every investment in the arts and culture directly

[47]BanuKaraca (forthcoming) makes a similar argument in her discussion of the impetus of German and Turkish art collectors to share and donate their works, citing that for a Turkish collector, her collection "is a way of inscribing her name in the local and national future" (p. 112).

contributes to the development of society's wealth, to the economy and politics and to the whole fiber of society." Indeed, hegemonic institutions do not necessarily shirk away from the work which might critique them. Banu Karaca (2011a) emphasizes that cultural policy makers argue that the critical impetus of art is desired "because it nurtures processes of societal reflection and mirrors the maturation of society and the political system" (p. 157).

3.6. Nar Photos: Accessibility, Visibility, and Prestige

The relationship between the corporate-government enterprise of the Istanbul Modern and Nar Photos is not one-sided. While the corporate and government benefactors benefit from a polished-er-refashioned image by supporting socio-political artworks, by the same token the Istanbul Modern offers a "prestigious" outlet for Nar Photos to offer and present their work to a sizeable and undoubtedly important audience, signaling the sanctioning power of the museum(Karaca, forthcoming). For groups such as Nar Photos, whose work is mostly supported by their personal earnings through freelance work, the opportunity to present in an elite, highly regarded cultural institution provides access to a network of influential patrons and even potentially the audience that Nar Photos hopes to access and influence. Though Nar Photos rejects any formal sponsorship or patronage of their photography, the audience that the Istanbul Modern provides certainly broadens the pool of those with whom Nar Photos works.

Nar Photos claims that they employ a variety of distributive methods to display and showcase their work. They pride themselves on utilizing and organizing alternative methods such as public photography workshops and mobile street exhibitions to not only circulate their work but to engage the public. For Nar Photos, wider accessibility is

a key tenet in the impetus of their visual aesthetic and operating procedures. With this in mind, I asked members of the collective if they found their showcase in the Istanbul Modern to be contradictory to the goals of the collective given the museum's reputation as an elite institution (not to mention the steep prices for admission). Both Serra and Saner stressed that the collective was not uncomfortable showing in the Istanbul Modern as the museum provided another outlet for reaching new and different groups of people.[48] While somewhat acknowledging a tension between the motivations of Nar Photos and the Istanbul Modern, they were careful in relativizing (and downplaying) the contradictions, emphasizing that the collective displays and shows where they can reach the most people. Saner noted that in as much as the Istanbul Modern used Nar Photos for their own purposes, Nar Photos, too used the Istanbul Modern: "We also used them. During that time we reached thousands of people."

The emphasis on the accessibility of socio-political art and visual culture seems to be a ubiquitous concern and driving force within the critical, contemporary art scene of Turkey. Banu Karaca's (2011a) ethnographic work with artists from the 2005 Istanbul Biennial underscores the importance contemporary politicized artists in Turkey give to the accessibility of their work. Artist Halil Altindere, a featured artist and curator of *Freekick* at the 2005 Biennial, underscored the need of contemporary art and artists to expand their audience: "I do not aim at a certain elite, or small group; rather I want to include broader segments of society, get a reaction from them, include them into something transformative (p. 162). Therefore in the search of an audience, groups such as Nar Photos collaborate with institutions which on the surface might appear counterintuitive to their goals. They do so in the hopes of including a wider spectrum of viewers, aiming to increase the visibility of their work.

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[48]Tolga on the other hand expressed that he did not see the point in such exhibits.

Furthermore, collaboration with institutions such as the Istanbul Modern offers Nar Photos a certain amount of esteemand capital to the collective. Tao-Wu (2003) notes that corporate sponsored art institutions often offer awards and recognition to artists, increasing their visibility, prestige, and granting access to a wider network of important actors who can contribute to furthering the work of these political artists. So for Nar Photos, their collaboration was beneficial and supported their program by strengthening their visibility, accessibility (however ironically), and status. In an interesting turn, through the very institutions they critique and aim to move away from, Nar Photos finds a partner that caters to a part of their impetus. The institution the collective might discursively reproach is a means with which to distribute and illuminate their critical aesthetic. As Elena Stylianou (2014) invites us to envisage: "If this type of art ceases to exist as soon as the event ends and refuses to be circulated in the conventional discourse and art narratives, then is it safe to assume that it also fails to reach a wide range of audiences?" (p. 196).

3.7. Negotiating the Contradiction: Challenges from within the Museum

While many in the Nar Photos collective were mostly positive regarding the recognition that the Istanbul Modern retrospective brought, my conversation with Saner signaled how the contradictions and tensions that have arisen with this partnership are discursively negotiated. "Is there such a place, as a *clean* place?" Saner rhetorically shot back as we debated the Istanbul Modern exhibit. He posited that if it had not been the Istanbul Modern perhaps it might have been another local gallery, noting that Nar Photos does what it can to share their photography:

> *We must work. Of course I want someone to send me money from the sky, pay my rent, feed me...[If that were the case] I would spend all day and all night to devote myself to documentary photography and I would exhibit those photographs in the cleanest place...But is there a reality like this? There is not.*

For Saner, the Istanbul Modern retrospective is just another outlet for Nar Photos to access an audience and disseminate their critical point of view. What remains important, though, is that Nar Photos retains their commitment to critically engaging with life around them through photography despite where the work is shown and distributed. This is a sentiment reiterated by others in the collective, such as Serra, who found that despite their exhibit in the Istanbul Modern, their work still remains committed to the same social issues. Tackling the criticism of their followers during the exhibition, Saner articulated that as long Nar Photos remained dedicated to their critical impetus, the criticism incurred during the exhibit was unwarranted. Any tensions that thus arise within Nar Photos' display at the Istanbul Modern, was relegated to the conditions and "rules of the field"—to evoke Bourdieu's (1993) terminology—where in order to access a larger audience and maintain visibility, Nar Photos must work through institutions which normally prove contradictory to both their practice and ethos. Yet, Saner's comments also show that Nar Photos not only employs a pragmatic approach to this dilemma, likening the position that Nar Photos occupies in relation to the Istanbul Modern as a challenge from within:

> *Think of it like a match. You are struggling against something. And during that struggle they are trying to defeat you and you are also trying to defeat them. We are trying to exist within this capitalist system and produce something that is clean. When there are so many people around the agency who take photos that are possibly living in poverty, one tries to convince themselves to continue taking photos...I think what is important is that the we continue to produce this work. But if we change one day...For example, if we produce a book sponsored by...the AKP and speak in their language, then [the people] must shame us. And they would have the right from the earth to the sky to do so. But aren't we keeping our promise?...We are keeping it. And we are saying it in their garden.*

"Their garden" refers to Nar Photos' presence in dominant cultural institutions, specifically the Istanbul Modern. For Saner, Nar Photos' Istanbul Modern exhibition signals a space wherein they visually and ethically challenge the composition of the museum. His comments are evocative of the cultural studies turn towards the work of Antonio Gramsci (1973), which elaborated on the Frankfurt School to an understanding of culture as a battleground through which the "unseen" or marginalized voices could seep through the cracks. As Raymond Williams (1973) argued, hegemony must remain alert to ever changing dynamics and challenges in that while it renews and recreates itself, it is also continually resisted, altered, and challenged. This signals changing pressures and limits (ibid.), wherein powerful organizations such as the Istanbul Modern are confronted by alternative practices and perspectives. Herein lies the key for how Nar Photos internally negotiates their exhibition at the Istanbul Modern. In as much as the museum offers another space for engaging with the audience, it might too offer the possibility of challenging the dominant visual regime through Nar Photos' alternative practices and visual point of view. To evoke Rancière's (2010) postulations on the politics of art, for Nar Photos their presence in the museum might be a challenge towards cultural hegemony in that it highlights the contradictions arising between the form of production and the presentation space.

3.8. Implications

Rather than draw a conclusionin an attempt to resolve this tension inherent to the showcasing of Nar Photos' work within the Istanbul Modern, I invite us to think about and work through this tension-partnership and what it might signal for the politics of both Nar Photos' work and other socio-politically geared art collectives and artists. As

previously stated, while from the "outside looking in" there appears to be a contradiction in the successful display and partnership established between these two entities, for both the Istanbul Modern and Nar Photos it is not so much a contradiction but a (mostly) symbiotic relationship. The benefactors of the Istanbul Modern, through its sponsorship of critical art, may recoup their public image in the face of several political crises by utilizing the aesthetic of Nar Photos to recode their role in several political and economic corruption scandals. Nar Photos, on the other hand, claims to benefit from the prestige and potential audience that the Istanbul Modern and its wealthy, elite supporters offer. Moreover, some Nar Photos members have come to frame this partnership in terms of visually challenging the Istanbul Modern and all it represents.

Visually and aesthetically speaking, scrutinizing the display and arrangement of the "On the Road" exhibit vis-à-vis the dynamics of the relationship between the Istanbul Modern, its benefactors, and Nar Photos, there emerges a retrospective which benefits and is successful for all parties. The museum and its affiliates, at least according to Serra, offered a collaborative space to present a visual aesthetic aimed at encouraging social contemplation about the photographic scenes presented. The divergent economic and perhaps political goals of the various parties did not seem to neutralize any commitment to the political arts, in contrast to the postulations of Harutyunyan et.al. (2008) which argues that "a complicity in the market and aesthetic [of] capitalism alongside [a] rhetorical commitment to…radical activism effectively neutralizes its ethical agency" (p. 485). Instead, both parties express that they benefit from the relationship, particularly Nar Photos, whose exhibit aesthetically and visually seemed to support their mission.

However, while these partnerships and collaborations between hegemonic actors and the political art world might in effect be beneficial to both parties, the contradiction nevertheless remains. There are issues of censorship by both direct interventions of the museum and state and through self-censorship by the artists themselves (Karaca, 2011a). For example, Serra expressed that all of the photography presented was selected in an apparent harmonious group effort between Nar Photos and the museum. Despite her claim though, her insistence that the removal of violent images from consideration as part of a collective decision not to desensitize the public to violence could underscore unspoken pressures to self-censor so that Nar Photos can maintain their access to the benefits of displaying in the Istanbul Modern. We must wonder then, was the aesthetic, visual, and socio-political success of the exhibit the result of this collaborative partnership or because of hidden and subtle censorship disguised as the "selection process?" Moreover, as the Istanbul Modern hosts and sponsors groups such as Nar Photos, does this signal a hidden interference of the public sphere by economic and political giants? Is the political potential of art and its critical message becoming domesticated as actors like Eczazıbaşı and Egemen Bağış begin to support and offer a "place" for the arts to be presented?

Moreover, confronted with the bold statement that Nar Photos' presence might signal a challenge to the dominance of the Istanbul Modern and all its benefactors, the question remains of what it indicates for dominant players to actively take part in this process. In other words, if Nar Photos' presence signals a challenge to the cultural hegemony of the Istanbul Modern, what does it mean that this institution and its Board of Directors are actively co-opting Nar Photos' perspective and photography to repair and refashion their own tarnished images? There are no easy nor clear answers to such questions, but rather a conundrum in which critical visual culture and commercial-

corporate enterprises clash in the museum. From the wreckage, a partnership emerges in which corporate benefactors benefit from the critical impetus of Nar Photos while offering them the possibility of prestige, visibility, and even an ironic venue for critique. However, this is mostly accomplished at the expense of Nar Photos who must recoup their image and standing as an alternative photography outlet amongst their followers as the Istanbul Modern Board members profit with little to no cost.

Analyzing the aesthetic and political implications of collaborations between alternative visual culture and its producers and the mainstream political and economic realm, we are met with a paradox in which these larger, hegemonic actors exert force on the rules of the game. As Serra said—mirroring Saner's comments—Nar Photos, despite their alternative practices and goals, still occupies this world and must "play by the rules." Thus, groups such as Nar Photos become subject to the pressures of the powerful, attempting to work their message of social change in Turkey through this elite at times. But, perhaps this is the nature of political art and visual culture: subjecting it to potential interventions and pressures in the hopes of "intervening in daily life" (Nar Photos, 2012). I will end with Mary Devereaux's words on how we might begin to understand political art under the forces of economic and political "pressure"

> *Either [we] embracethe political character of art and risk subjecting art and artists to political interference, or we protect art and its makers from political interference by insisting upon their "autonomy," but at the cost of denying the political character of art and its broader connection with life* (as cited in Karaca, 2011a, p. 172)

CONCLUSION

Since their foundation in 2003, Nar Photos has worked to establish a unique perspective and practicewith and around photography to understand their surroundings. Photography, more than an end in and of itself, is an instrument for them to contemplate and express the connection between history and contemporary, daily life in Turkey. Though concerned with the world around them, the impetus of the Nar Photos Collective is not to go out and initiate major social change, but to contemplate what is accepted as fact and the real experiences of the photographer and people around them. For Nar Photos, more than a mission with an ultimate goal, this approach to photography is a process focused on their local environment and the relationships created therein. It entails recognition of the other and the connection between present lives and Turkey's socio-cultural past in order to question what we know or think we know. Nar Photos members claim that this is not only a photographic perspective, but reflects anapproach to life that questions the world around us.This involves a selection of topics which are typically unseen or controversial within the Turkish (or even regional) context, giving Nar Photos' work a political edge.

Nar Photos' articulation of their ethos and practice contrasts with my initial conception of their drive to document life in Turkey. Whereby I approached their work as part of a grand scheme seeking to ignite socio-political change and activism through photography, I came to understand that they are more concerned with a *process* of creating and sharing photography. In this vein, I found Rodríguez's (2001) approach to

critical and alternative media productive to demonstrate the discursive and practical means through which Nar Photos situates themselves as an actor part of a process of social change. This means conceptualizingNar Photos' practices and photography not as a spark of social change but as a mediated and visual segment of a larger web of socio-political change, uprising, and its actors in Turkey. Indeed, more than the photograph itself, the process of creating and sharing the work is of equal importance to the collective in order to maintain an independent platform that is free to engage in socio-politically important and sensitive issues.

For this reason, I outlined and analyzedthe position Nar Photos occupies amidst a repertoire of media and artistic practices and institutionsto understand how they negotiatetheir ethos in changing political climates. For example, during the Gezi Park protests Nar Photos shifted from their traditional long-term projects to more photojournalistic style reporting in order to provide updates and information during a widespread local media blackout and inaccurate/sensationalized foreign reporting. Thus as part of their ethical and photographic approach, Nar Photos has created working and distributive practices which they define as complimentary and essential to remaining socially-geared and active. Their host of media practices—ranging from the creation of a Facebook and Twitter page to the distribution of their photography to foreign mainstream outlets—address their worries over censorship, proper contextualization, and accessibility. They traverse across notions of mainstream and alternative channels to share their photography hoping to gain access to a wider audience, avoid the treachery of the local press, and to encourage a discussion around their photography. Nar Photos mediated practices then, demonstrate the interrelation between internal definitions of what socially conscious photographic practice means and external pressures encompassing censorship to the explosion of political unrest. By examining

their media practices and positions in relation to discussions of what social change means for them, I have demonstrated how media uses move beyond strict categorizations of alternative and mainstream. They reflect an ecology (Mattoni and Trere, 2014) that emerges as the result of both internal and external concerns.

The ways Nar Photos' practices, particularly means of distribution, shift is not entirely without conflict. Gaining a large following after the Gezi Park protests, the Istanbul Modern retrospective marked Nar Photos' entrance into the mainstream cultural realm in an unprecedented way. Having shown at alternative and independent galleries such as Depo, the Istanbul Modern exhibit presented Nar Photos with a challenge in terms of both public criticism and in negotiating the contradiction of showcasing in an elite institution with ties to both the state and corporations. Though Nar Photos has been hesitant to attribute their social contribution to photography itself, they claim that their political edge was not deterred by the hegemonic museum, as it was the photography that showed their perspective.They likened their presence in the museum as at once an internal challenge to its cultural dominance and means for accessing a larger audience. To evoke Rancière (2010), Nar Photos both refuses to anticipate the effect of their work yet sees a potential in their photography within the museum, perhaps if only to challenge its hegemony by exposing the inconsistency between the form of production and presentation. Though offered a new and prestigious outlet for presenting their photography, the Istanbul Modern exhibit highlights the often contradictory and tense conditions groups such as Nar Photos face when they are confronted with mainstream recognition.

While Nar Photos remains a collective focused on documentary photography, their aesthetic and distributive practices underscore the hybridity of media and visual culture to highlight that groups who are visually or artistically oriented do not remain

isolated to one realm, but synthesize mediums to present their socio-politically geared message. Activist-inclined groups or collectives who utilize various art forms or media in the traditional sense must be understood in their complexity to acknowledge the various layers of their work, which are not solely artistic or mediated but often times cross-pollinated (Rodríguez, 2014). This analysis allows us to see the interrelation between practice, ethics, and politics to understand how approaches to photography, the media, or art itself shift to address pressing needs or desires (ibid.) and how these shifts might be understood or articulated by practitioners and/or activists. Furthermore, my research posits that this is not without conflict or tension, particularly as groups such as Nar Photos are confronted with new opportunities for presentation and recognition, whereinalternative practices and programs encounter mainstream, dominant culture.

Recognizing the intersection of visual and alternative media practices and cultures, my thesis raises questions for further research, particularly in a region that is faced with ongoing civil war on its borders, increasing authoritarianism by the Justice and Development Party, and censorship policies which traverse media and art. For example, the Justice and Development Party's development of aesthetic policies in conjunction with social media blackouts, the expansion of internet law 5156, and a recent court ruling banning the depiction of "unnatural sex"[49] mark an increasingly difficult and dangerous terrain for visual and media practitioners. These laws and policies underscore a political climate that targets artists, media activists, and journalists alike, forming a streamlined ban on government criticism. A regional comparative study exploring the intersection of visual cultural and media practices in light of the these developments would be insightful for comprehending the increasingly challenging

[49]The Constitutional Court ruling makes the storage or depiction of "unnatural sex" an offense punishable by up to four years in prison. According to the ruling, "unnatural sex" includes oral, anal, group, gay, or lesbian sex acts (Bianet, 2015).

environment of producing alternative modes of understanding and expressing the world, particularly in Turkey.

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