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## The Ahmet Atakan Protests: On Being Beaten, Detained, and Deported by the Turkish Police

Contributed by:

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There has been a great misconception in Western media that the protests in Turkey died down after the initial Gezi Park protests. In fact, Western media consumers, rather puzzled why people were making such a fuss over trees, turned their attention to other stories after a day or two. Egypt had problems, Syria had problems, and Turkey was forgotten. In fact, through most neighborhoods there were marches every night. In an effort to curb them, the Prime Minister banned banging on pots and pans. Protesters responded with blowing on traffic whistles and shouting political slogans. Every night there were citizens' meetings in the major parks.

On September 10, a young man named Ahmet Atakan died of injuries sustained from taking a gas canister to the head. In violation of international law and sheer decency, police have consistently been shooting gas canisters at citizens' heads, and he is not the first to die this way. Despite widely distributed video evidence and the release of his autopsy, the government insists that he fell from a roof. This, perhaps in conjunction with widespread anti-war sentiment in the face of a Prime Minister rabidly calling for large scale intervention in Syria, sparked a large scale protest, not in Taksim or Gezi, this time, but in my own neighborhood of Kadiköy.

On the evening of September 11, there was a huge march through the streets of Kadiköy. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people joined in. People were spilling out of businesses and apartment buildings, and hanging out of windows to cheer the parade on. The mood, despite the sad cause of the event, was almost joyous. We marched in a winding path through the major roads in the neighborhood. At every new street we called, in Turkish, "Come! Come! Come! Come!" and more people would join. When we arrived at a large intersection by a famous statue of a bull, everyone sat down in the street. We were blocking traffic in a major thoroughfare, but most of the cars and busses were beeping their support. People were hanging out of busses and cheering.

I went home after a while and went to bed. When I woke up at 2 in the morning, my apartment was full of tear gas.

That is a very confusing way to wake up, by the way.

I ran out with my camera. On Bahariye Ave., the main shopping street, barricades were set up, and many things were on fire. Taking photos, I lost count of the number of times I got gassed. When I finally got such a dose that I coughed so hard I threw up all over myself, I had to admit that this is a young kids game, a game for people without damaged lungs. I talked to people taking refuge by a cafe on my street for a bit. They went back into the fray and I reluctantly went home. Though it was four in the morning, it took me a long time to fall asleep.

The next night was worse. The police were ready, and chased the citizens from the peaceful march to Bahariye Ave. Blockades were quickly made from concrete planters and the cobblestones from the sidewalks, and set on fire with trash. In a whimsical note, people were throwing fireworks into the fires, eliciting cheers from all the protesters. Unable to get into Bahariye without creating major damage, the police took to making sweeps of sidestreets. Fortunately many of the businesses around the area kept the shutters down, but were waiting, and when protesters recovering from the gas had to run, there was a cafe or restaurant or even private citizen with an apartment ready to usher everyone in and slam the door or gate shut after. On the twelfth I ran into three cafes and one apartment this way.

On the thirteenth I was not so lucky.

I had taken the night off to have a much needed evening of dinner and too much wine and gossip with a pal, like a normal girl in normal times. But couldn't resist stopping by Bahariye on my way home. The mood was grim. Police had taken over much of Bahariye and the streets were more full of gas than usual. (I would find out later that that night, an acquaintance of mine who worked in a bar on an adjacent street and had a slight heart problem, was overcome with gas when he left work and died.) I stopped to chat with a group of maybe 20 fellas who were gathered at a corner of Bahariye. Maybe 40 yards away there was a platoon of riot police in full gear, but the gas was so thick they looked like a big, black mass. People were throwing rocks and that made me sad- this has been such a peaceful protest, at least on the side of the protesters, thus far, but it appears that things have tipped towards violence on both sides in Kadiköy.

The police suddenly fired two gas canisters- pop-pop!- and charged us. We ran. I had to kick off my wildly inappropriate shoes. I was quickly half blinded by the gas and gasping. Someone grabbed my arm and led me into an apartment building with eight or nine other men. We ran all the way up, banging on doors, but nobody opened for us. The police, illegally, entered the building after us. They grabbed me first and dragged me down by my hair and arm. The fingerprint bruises would take a week to heal. They dragged the rest down to the lobby. Outside there was a line of police with their shields up so no one could see what was happening within.

They closed the door and began to beat us with batons.

I was very lucky- a çapulcu I didn't even know put me in a corner and shielded me with his body, so he took the brunt, but even so I got a bloody head and several impressive bruises on my back.

They dragged us out and made us sit on a curb while they arranged a police van. I made a snap decision at that point: I wan't getting in the van. There have been bad stories of ladies being harassed by the riot police in vans, and whether they're true or not I didn't care to find out. I decided there was enough blood coming from my head to pretend to pass out, and went limp. There was a photographer across the street, and the police had a vested interest in keeping me upright, but it turns out that 54 kilos of deadweight girl is too much for those big tough men. I was shortly on the ground, and they had to call an ambulance for me.

I spent the night in the hospital, with three guards over yours truly. The next day I was in the hell on earth that is Turkish court. There I was found innocent. Yet then I spent three days in detention, much of it in solitary confinement. Then I was deported on a visa technicality that normally would' raise no eyebrows and cost 20 lira to fix.

What I've learned is it's so important to stand up for something you believe in- whether it's fighting against a too-powerful police force with few too controls, or an authoritarian government, or saving a community garden. You may be punished for it, but we all simply must do it. We can't let the bad guys win.

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