

**COMMUNICATIVE POTENTIALS OF INTERNET MEMES IN
CYBERSPACE OF TURKEY:
AN ANALYSIS OF CAPS CULTURE**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN
SOCIOLOGY

AUGUST 2017

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

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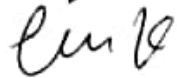
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ABSTRACT

INTERNET MEMES AS CIRCULATING MODES IN CYBERSPACE OF TURKEY: AN ANALYSIS OF CAPS CULTURE

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MA in Sociology

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Eda Ünlü Yücesoy

August 2017, 104 pages

Emerging at the intersection of the components of digitality, visuality and everyday creativity, Internet memes compose a new genre of communication on cyberspace. Both as a tool of everyday creativity and as a tool of public commentary –as the Internet is regarded as a new agora-, these visual imageries has become highly popular throughout the 2000s and illustrated a great site of analysis for exploration on the state of minds of Internet users through collective creation.

This thesis aims at exploration of the adoption of Internet memes to Turkey's cyberspace via focusing on the sociological implications them in relation to *ad hoc* combinations of visual techniques, social modes of seeing and humor. To this end, this study provides an analysis of *caps* culture. Having its roots in a subcultural virtual community and penetrating into popular culture gradually, *caps* creations carry traces of the several 20th century avantgarde movements' motivations, which are the cultural antecedants of Internet meme culture. While this provides a crucial indication for critical potential in subverting the elements of power, the humorous element predominant in these items recalls a longstanding discussion on the relationship between humor and social critique. Taking all these into account, this thesis analyzes a bunch of *caps* collections with a visual rhetoric perspective.

Keywords: Internet memes, *caps*, everyday creativity, humor, subculture, popular culture

ÖZ

TÜRKİYE SİBERUZAMINDA İNTERNET MEMLERİNİN İLETİŞİMSEL POTANSİYELLERİ: CAPS KÜLTÜRÜ ANALİZİ

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Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Eda Ünlü Yücesoy

Ağustos 2017, 104 Sayfa

Sanallık, görsellik ve gündelik hayat yaratıcılığına dair öğelerin bileşiminde ortaya çıkan İnternet memleri siberuzamda yeni bir iletişim janrası oluşturmaktadır. Bu görsel imgeler hem bir gündelik yaratıcılık ürünü olarak hem de –İnterneti bir tür agora olarak düşünürsek- toplumsal bir fikir beyan etme aracı olarak 2000’li yıllarda önemli ölçüde popülerleşmiş ve İnternet kullanıcılarının kolektif yaratımları üzerinden haleti ruhiyelerini göstermek anlamında önemli bir potansiyel sergilemiştir.

Bu tez, görsel tekniklerin, toplumsal görme biçimlerinin ve mizahın kendine özgü biçimde birleştirildiği bu memlerin, sosyolojik anlamlarına yoğunlaşarak, Türkiye siberuzamına nasıl adapte edildiğini araştırmayı amaç edinmektedir. Bu amaçla, Türkiye’nin *caps* kültürü incelenmektedir. Kaynağını altkültürel sanal bir topluluktan alan ve zaman içinde popüler kültüre işleyen *capsler* İnternet mem kültürünün de kültürel öncülleri olarak kabul edilen bazı 20. yüzyıl avantgard hareketlerinin motivasyonlarının izlerini taşımaktadır. Bu benzerlik iktidarın unsurlarını altüst etme çabası bakımından *capslerin* eleştirel potansiyellerine dair önemli bir gösterge oluştururken, bu görsellerde baskın olarak bulunan mizahi unsur da mizah ve toplumsal eleştiri arasındaki süregelen tartışmayı yeniden anımsatmaktadır. Bütün bunların ışığında bu çalışma birtakım *caps* koleksiyonlarını görsel retorik analizi çerçevesinde incelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İnternet memleri, *caps*, gündelik yaratıcılık, mizah, alt kültür, popüler kültür



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Eda Ünlü Yücesoy, for her insightful feedback, guidance and support. I am particularly indebted to Aslı Telli Aydemir for her generous help, who kept guiding me before and after her departure from Şehir University. I am also thankful to Assoc. Prof. Alkım Almıla Akdağ Salah and Assoc. Prof. Erkan Saka for sparing their valuable time and for their comments that helped in completion of this work.

I wish to express my gratitudes to my friends Sinem, Burcu and Sena whose love, compassion, and humor cheered me up and kept me sane in the times I felt down. A very special gratitude goes to Şeyda. She was really generous in reading and commenting on the thesis till the last moments. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to Hakan. He listened to me patiently, and helped me to put the pieces back together when I needed. I would also like to thank Hüsna for her companionship and her suggestions about the thesis and all the other things.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitudes to my family for their encouragement and support. My lovely sisters were unconditionally willing to ease the things for me throughout the writing process. I am especially thankful to them.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

W. J. T. Mitchell claims that, succeeding the linguistic turn, we experience a pictorial turn implying the empowerment of images as the dominant way of communication and representation in the contemporary world (Mitchell 1995). “Human experience is now more visual and visualized than before” adds Nicholas Mirzoeff, reiterating the dominance of images in everyday life today (Mirzoeff 1999, 4). We frequently engage with images, and use them as representative, expressive, and argumentative tools in the contemporary world. It is even claimed that this unprecedented scale of image circulation in everyday life refers to the ‘image revolution’ having a coincidence with the turn to postmodern era (Robins 1996, 3). The power of images and their representative and directive role are not peculiar to postmodernity, but are as old as image presence itself. Still, it cannot be neglected that technological transformations, from the invention of photography to the current landscape of cyberspace, seem to have a crucial place in the emergence of the image as such a powerful tool of representation. Besides, it has also been argued that “digitization often coincides with visualization” (Kuipers 2002, 465). To this regard, cyberspace and digital technologies play a critical role in the preponderance of images in our contemporary existence.

Cyberspace, which is “an imaginary space that exists in, on and between ‘computational devices’” (Bell 2007, 1), has become a fertile ground for the saturation of images with communicative functions and for the enhancement of participation via cybercultural products. Accordingly, an investigation of the visual items in cyberspace opens up the opportunity to reveal the new ways of presenting narrative, meaning and representation, together with their social, collective implications and functions. Among these new ways of representation and expression, Internet memes, generally humorous visual items created by Internet users in variable forms and spread from user to user rapidly, generate a new genre of communication through which making political and social comment is possible. An

Internet meme emerges out of an initial item, on the basis of which derivatives are rapidly created, typically with a humorous approach. Most of them are anonymous creations and emerge on the basis of reference to another. Typically based on a joke, these recently popular images could be conceived as solely entertaining, occasionally ludicrous, and mostly funny artifacts of everyday life circulating copiously on the Internet with no immediately perceptible impact. Yet on my account, both because of the wide circulation, and because they constitute an area that is very closely knitted with several implications for contemporary popular culture, visual culture, cyberculture, and the intersections of all three, they are worth studying from a sociological perspective.

Internet memes generally emerge as a combination of the elements of humor, pastiche, collage and absurdity. It has even been argued that Internet memes emerge as an extension of previous cultures based on copy-paste (Esteves and Meikle 2015, 566). Sydney Eve Matrix mentions the intersection of the age of the virtual with the age of post-modernity in terms of being “a celebration of irony, provisionality, and pastiche, hybridity, the remix, upgrade and sampling” (Matrix 2006, 18). Internet memes as cybercultural productions are reflections of these characteristics of the age of the virtual and post-modernity. They are mostly regarded as constellations of humorous interaction on the Internet, but they also reflect political, social, and cultural issues. In this regard, they stand in an indefinite position in terms of positing a critique or serving solely for entertainment. All these attributes influence the process of meaning making through these items penetrating into the mode of seeing shared between audiences and creators of the items. While such creations can be taken as a form of everyday creation, participation, and online activism in cases where they emerge as an expression of critique, discontent, or protest, it is also important to analyze them in relation to new language they promoted linked to humor and the implications of this language for (de)construction of critique.

Bundling these points on visibility, cyberspace, and the era of postmodernity, this thesis aims at investigating Internet memes in the cyberculture of Turkey. As one way of participating on the Internet, meme culture signifies both the vital place of visibility

with communicative functions in contemporary popular culture and the contributions of cyberspace for remediating language in divergent ways, mostly appropriating humor, absurdity and pastiche. As collective creations evolving over time with each derivative, it is important to look at these collections and the collective modes they represent within social texture. There are examples of Internet memes that are appropriated as a tool of public commentary to respond to current social issues. Yet, their articulation on the basis of humor and anonymity immanent to these items gives them a peculiar tone in the formation of critical nature of them. At this point, rather than focusing on the critical message given with these units of items, it can be much more illuminating to consider the perspective, or in the other words the social mode, each collection represents and the political and social implications of that perspective which will lead us to conceive what is extra-temporal in these memes beyond their singular and ephemeral messages within single items.

Internet memes based on image-text combinations in Turkey will be the unit of analysis of my study. Rather than analyzing them unit-by-unit, I will focus on certain memes that constitute a series meaning the ones that can be bundled as a collection dealing with a certain topic, a personality, an event, etc. Regarding them as collections will lead us to consider the collective code of the collection, and the social mode that gathers many creators and audience. Hence, starting with online memes' political and aesthetic implications in relation to their peculiar articulation of the techniques and language and following with the nature and importance of humor to contribute to the critical nature of memes, I basically trace the question of how do Internet memes as collective collections constitute social modes in Turkey's cyberspace. To elaborate on this, I will explore on their functions and techniques of creation that define the social mode circulating through a collection. Specifically I will question whether Internet memes carry an emancipatory potential for Internet users in terms of opening up a space for presenting critique. In relation with this, I will also explore on humor and how it contributes to the formation of critical nature of Internet memes in Turkey.

The main question of my study will aim at revealing the communicative dimension of Internet memes regarding the fabric of society. In tracing this question, I will deal with the general mode of seeing circulated with Internet memes, which will be unveiled through an account of their general characteristics, points of origin, inspirational guides, etc. Although there is an emphasis on their use as a tool to increase political participation, I will analyze the extent to which these items aim at strengthening oppositional mechanisms and triggering social change through a rhetorical analysis of these items. Accordingly, I will investigate whether a voice of protest is the dominant mode in Internet meme culture. And in relation with this question, I will deal with the nature of humor embedded in Internet memes. Humor, as the basic component of these items, will be discussed with its functions in terms of contributing the critical perspective. Examining the relationship between humor and protest, I will trace the implications of critical humor. Rather than looking at memes as single items and focusing on the messages transmitted through an item, I will inquire whether it is possible to discover a general mode through the collections and attribute an extra-temporality to these items outside of their ephemeral, anonymous, and spontaneous messages.

1.1. Methodology and Outline

1.1.1. Visual Rhetoric Analysis as Research Method

In this study I will offer an analysis of Internet memes in Turkey. I will focus on the collections which are based on image-text combinations and named *caps* in Turkey's cyberspace. In order to do this, I composed a meme pool that includes samples from all kinds of *capses* in order to illustrate general framework of meme culture in Turkey. To this aim, I benefited from the data provided in the infographic¹ prepared by *İnci Sözlük* statistical team which is the birth site of caps culture in Turkey. The infographic introduces the most popular *caps* series circulated between 2009-2014 which constitute the sample *caps* topics used for this study. I remain faithful to the list of *İnci Sözlük* users accepting the team as insider-group of users within the birth site of *caps* culture.

¹ <https://www.sosyalsosyal.com/ulkemizdeki-caps-kulturu-ve-gelisimi-infografik>

Before going into analysis of *caps* collection in detail, I introduced İnci Sözlük and the motivations of the community of website users to give a brief background *caps* culture. To do this, I benefited from two books, *İnci Sözlük* and *İnci Caps*, written by the users of the website one of which is its founder at the same time. In addition to this, I also had interviews with another two users of the website on their motivations to join the website and views on *caps* culture.

The meme pool illustrated in table 1.1 appoints the *caps* collections listed in the infographic. Looking at these topics, I figured out that it is possible to determine four clusters within these collections. Starting with the first meme appointed, *Fatih Terim*, football-related memes seem to construct a repetitive pattern through the collections on *Balo Telli*, *Sabri Reyiz* (Sabri the Chef), and *Dünya Kupası* (The World Cup). Secondly, there is a group of memes that can be clustered under the name of Internet culture-related memes. These are generally topics that spring from viral contents circulating on the Internet, or inside-jokes of Internet users, mostly *İnci Sözlük* users. *Liseli* (High-school boy), *Baykuş* (Owl), *Adam Haklı Beyler* (The man is right, men), *Ünlü Sözleri Trolleme* (Trolling the Words of the Famous), *Hunharca Gülen Adam* (The man laughing bloodthirstily), *GTA* (Grand Theft Auto) gather under this category. Third theme is pop-culture related memes including people, events, issues that became popular through TV or other media content. *Yüzüklerin Efendisi* (The Lord of the Rings), *Leyla ile Mecnun* (Leyla and Mecnun), Kurtuluş Şakirağaoğlu, Salih Amel, İlber Ortaylı, Nihat Hatipoğlu, Nur Yerlitaş are topics of series belonging to the category of popular culture memes. The fourth and last theme that constructs a category of *caps* collections are *caps* collections based on political figures and events and this list constitutes of the following series: Devlet Bahçeli, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Kim Jong, İsmet İnönü, and *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçim Capsleri* (The Presidency Elections Capses).

Table 1.1. Popular *caps* series between 2009 and 2014 presented by *İnci Sözlük* Statistical team

- Fatih Terim (2009)
- Liseli (2009)
- Yüzüklerin Efendisi (2010)
- Baykuş (2010)
- Adam Haklı Beyler (2010)
- Devlet Bahçeli (2011)
- Balo Telli (2011)
- Leyla ile Mecnun (2011)
- Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (2012)
- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2012)
- Sabri Reyiz (2012)
- GTA (2012)
- Kim Jong (2013)
- Kurtuluş Şakırağaoğlu (2013)
- Salih Amel (5. Boyut Dizisi) (2013)
- Hunharca Gülen Adam (2013)
- İsmet İnönü (2013)
- İlber Ortaylı (2014)
- Dünya Kupası (2014)
- Ünlü Sözlerini Trolleme (2014)
- Nihat Hatipoğlu (2014)
- Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçim Capsleri (2014)
- Nur Yerlitaş (2014)

Although there are various possible methods like discursive analysis or semiotics to study these items based on a combination of image and text, I adopt a visual approach, as it will combine “elements of the semiotic and discursive approaches to analyze the persuasive elements of visual texts” (Huntington 2013). Thus, the method of my study is defined as visual rhetoric analysis and the basic unit of analysis will be a sample of Internet memes, as a collection of items, between 2009 and 2015.

The term visual rhetoric, in definition, is used to refer both to visual artifacts that have a communicative purpose and to the perspective adopted by a scholar in analyzing these visual artifacts (Foss 2004, 304). As a method, visual rhetoric analysis consists of an analysis of contextual background, nature, function and evaluation of the function of visual artifact (Foss 2004, 307). Visual rhetoric analysis starts with introduction of the reasons that led to a visual item's emergence and continues with the elaboration of its material, namely, the elements the item consists of. Then, it analyzes the function of the visual product, or in other words what the item evokes in the audience. Lastly it ends up an evaluation of the function revealed.

Adopting a visual rhetoric perspective, I dig into the historical, contextual background of the visual material at the first stage. As I will regard them as collections, I will present the origins of the collection at the first hand. In order to explore on overall nature and material of the *capses* in a collection, I will mention the constituent techniques and components. Then, I will highlight the function of these *capses* from an audience perspective. Lastly, I will elaborate on what they evoke in the audience as a visual material.

In relation to an analysis of Internet memes, the value of the visual rhetoric perspective lies in its focusing on the view of the audience rather than searching for the specific aim of creators in creating a visual product. Huntington proposes that visual rhetoric analysis as a perspective could, in addition to describing an item, grant a lens through which it is possible to view the process of meaning-making via rhetorical elements in Internet memes, and the effects of these on viewers (Huntington 2013). In his study, focusing on an Internet meme collection with visual rhetoric analysis Eric Jenkins highlights that rhetorical criticism of these collections necessitate a shift from a focus on representation to expression (E. S. Jenkins 2014, 457). Namely, the search for the effect of these items on audience rather than particular messages of their creators directs us to find out what they express rather than what they represent. In the case of my study, the focus, as well, will be what kind of social modes these collections express.

1.1.2. Outline of the Study

The following chapter consists of an introduction to the subject of online memes. Starting with a theoretical depiction of cyberspace focusing on Castells' account, I offer a definition of the word meme, and describe memes' position in everyday creativity in contemporary cyberculture. Trying to elaborate on the meme culture's cultural roots in the literature, I emphasize the sociological implications of humor in relation to online activism due to the gravity of humor in the current landscape of cybercultural products in general as well as Internet memes.

In the third chapter, I propose a site-based analysis focusing on *İnci Sözlük*, the birthplace of the concept and first examples of Internet memes based on image-text combinations. Starting with the emergence of Internet memes in a global context, the chapter presents the peculiar way meme culture was adopted in Turkey's cyberculture. I continue with a depiction of *İnci Sözlük* as the initial place of this adoption and as a subcultural virtual community. The rebellious tone and chaotic formation of the community give clues regarding the critical dimension of Internet memes in Turkey. Lastly, in this chapter I present the emergence and dissemination of Internet memes in Turkey without disregarding a parallel discussion of their divergence and convergence to Internet meme literature.

The fourth chapter initiates analysis of *caps* collections that I bound as subcultural phase of *caps* culture. The four categories are further subdivided, according to their source origin and their chronological traces into subcultural and mainstream phase of Internet meme culture in Turkey. Particularly in the fourth chapter, I analyze the subcultural phase memes, early forerunner in Internet meme culture in Turkey.

In the fifth chapter, I analyze mainstream phase of meme culture representing the phase it turns into an Internet classic as a genre of communication. In the second phase, the function of memes as humor based visual materials, as a tool of critique is much more elaborated on in relation to theory of Bakhtin.

Overall, this thesis engages with how Internet memes in Turkey communicate with the audiences of cyberculture in Turkey. Recognizing the importance of Internet memes as representation of social modes, my study traces the metamorphoses of these items in Turkey and how they reflect on political and cultural discussions. By investigating the ways images and texts are mixed together, I explore the nature of their critical voice- their importance in online activism- is elaborated on.



CHAPTER 2

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON INTERNET MEME CULTURE

“Cyberspace has become a global electronic agora where the diversity of human disaffection explodes in a cacophony of accents” (Castells 2001, 138). Describing cyberspace as an agora, Castells’s well-drawn picture of cyberspace helps to explain the rationale behind this thesis, which will focus on a kind of visual artifact of cyberspace that exemplifies mass participation and new ways of articulating language on cyberspace. Cyberspace, with its unique formation, opens up new ways of articulating meaning, representation, and and Internet memes constitute a part of this. Internet memes are a nascent form of the critical attributes of cyberspace that change the nature of communication in the contemporary world. As the artifacts created, recreated, and circulated by the users of the Internet mostly remained anonymous, Internet memes are sites to observe the active and creative audience of the Internet age. Besides, their very existence is based on the multi-directionality of Internet as a media tool that enables the transmissions of messages among on a one-to-one, as well as one-to-many and, many-to-many basis.

As Castells summarizes in his book *Communication Power*, the Internet, and especially the Web 2.0 technologies that make user-generated content creation and sharing possible, has led to a radical transformation in communication (2009). Castells terms this transformation as the turn from mass communication to mass-self communication. While, the design of traditional mass media, like TV, radio, and print press, is based on the transmission of messages from one main source to a mass, the Internet makes the means of communicating available to each user, who is both producer and consumer of the information now. In this regard, the Internet has a creative and active audience who can intervene into process of production of content, and participate in the creation and sharing of the messages. Hence distinctively on the Internet, “the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content

from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected” (Castells 2009, 55).

With the aforementioned particularities, everybody is potentially both producer and consumer of the messages or *prosumer* briefly, in cyberspace. This creates a *sui generis* public sphere, or “agora” in Castells’s terminology. The epithets that call ideal public sphere like agora, Athena, etc., is also present in several other works on cyberspace (Toulouse and Luke 1998 , 5). These attributes may call a discussion on the potentials of the Internet to constitute an ideal public sphere in terms of openness to all in Habermesian terms. Yet, firstly Habermas himself neglects such a potential of the Internet claiming that its only egalitarian influence may work in authoritarian regimes by undermining censorship (Habermas 2006, 423). Secondly, I avoid from doing this because this study will center upon much more upon fluidities, while Habermas’s theory offers strict boundaries between areas of the public and private, reason and unreason, or state and public sphere (Gardiner 2004, 29) Instead of centring my study to a discussion of ideal political public sphere, I will elaborate on miniscule and everyday meanings of creating and sharing Internet memes, and the cacaphonic way of their burst as Castells depicted.

The burst of user-generated content with the current design of the Web mostly corresponds to the expansion of mass participation. However, mass participation is associated with flattening borderlines between genres, fields, and distinctions in time. The annihilation of the distinction between mass and interpersonal communication was first, followed by that of the distinction between professionals and amateurs, which is “especially notable on the Internet, now that audio, still and moving images (real-time and recorded) can be sent and received by both ‘professional’ content producers and by ‘amateurs’” (Bell 2007, 80).

Jean Baudrillard also touches upon the issue of blurring boundaries not as specific to the Internet but regarding new media technologies. According to him, new media technologies have turned everybody into a potential creator (1990, 16), and we witness that boundaries between independent fields are blurred (1990, 14). When

everybody becomes a creator, it is no longer possible to mention about aesthetics, and we experience 'trans-aesthetic' age (1990, 14). Castells takes a different approach regarding the burst of content with mass participation and focuses on the value of information and its place in political struggle: "The borderline between gossip, fantasy, and valuable political information becomes increasingly blurred, thus further complicating the use of information as the privileged political weapon in the Internet age" (Castells 2001, 158). While thinking about cyberculture productions like Internet memes, these tensions of blurring boundaries will be considered as the composite of the meaning-making process through these items.

The Internet meme phenomenon is not exempt from the tensions of being situated in the borderline between entertainment and critique. Among the many new ways of creating meaning, representation, and images that cyberspace provides, Internet memes circulate popularly and epitomize many crucial components of the current state of cyberculture like co-participation, intertextuality, and anonymity. They represent an example of using creative action on cyberspace with particular relationships between audience and creator that make possible alternative formations of the social. The gravity of Internet memes lies in their fruitfulness "for understanding mindsets, new forms of power and social processes, new forms of social participation and activism, and new distributed networks of communication and relationship" (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 201). Proposing new experiences of political and cultural habituations, the study of Internet memes stands as a part of cyberculture studies. Memes, as artifacts of cyberculture, are crucial to study because they are located at the intersection of what is technological, social and political. Now, I turn to the concept of "meme", which has its sources outside of Internet culture.

2.1. The "Meme" Concept and Its Bounds with Digital Culture

Almost all studies on memes start with a reference to Richard Dawkins, who invented the term meme in 1976 in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins uses the term as the counterpart of gene for cultural evolution. While genes imply the basic unit of the physical organism that makes evolution possible, memes imply the basic unit of

culture that spreads from person to person contributing to cultural evolution. Susan Blackmore, one of the most prominent scholars of memetics, defines the concept as “any idea, behavior, or skill that can be transferred from one person to another by imitation: stories, fashions, inventions, recipes, songs, ways of plowing a field or throwing a baseball or making a sculpture” (Blackmore 1999). Although Dawkins’ concept has gained popularity and become the basic reference of the study of “memetics”, it was the Austrian sociologist Ewald Hering who coined the term “die Mneme” (Shifman 2014, 10), which comes from memory to refer cultural evolution a century before Dawkins. Yet, “Dawkins’ meme” deriving from the Greek word “mimema”, meaning something imitated, has become the popular term.

Following Dawkins and the study of cultural transmission from an evolutionary perspective, the controversial field of Memetics emerged out. Meme as a concept is a crucial contribution to refer to cultural elements that spread via imitation. Yet memetics as an approach, which regards cultural elements in the light of a biological analogy has been criticized for being reductionist and disregarding human agency in cultural evolution of things and ideas. The neglect of human agency has also led to the criticism that these studies share the fallacy of equating biological and sociological perspectives. The main opposition to memetics scholar became their framing culture as a self-replicating mechanism, as “it relies on people to propel, develop and sustain it” (H. Jenkins 2009). Hence following the general literature I will use the phrase *Internet memes*, which makes sense in line with the definition of the concept, yet memetics as a perspective will be left here due to the idea that eliminating human agency is a fundamental fallacy for sociological analysis.

It should be possible to study memes without necessarily adopting the perspective of memetics. Here, the word is used for the process of imitation that is at the heart of the items known as Internet memes. Focusing on Internet memes, Limor Shifman recognizes the integrality of human agency in the genesis of the Internet memes. Initially, Shifman offers a divergence from Dawkins’ approach to memes by suggesting that Internet memes should be regarded as groups of items and living entities rather than as units (Shifman 2014, 88). Regarding them as collections of

items but not as units highlights the importance of human agency in emergence of Internet memes, as it is each user's contribution in altering and remixing the image-text combinations that constitute a meme as a collection. I also put emphasis on intertextuality as well as human agency that are the means for attributing symbolic meaning, creating metaphors and speaking to other texts in a collection.

The current attributes of cyberspace and especially participatory Web culture have contributed to the fame of memes to such an extent that memes can be distinguished as pre-Internet memes and Internet memes, as the concept "encapsulates some of the most fundamental aspects of contemporary digital culture" (Shifman 2014, 4). The concept of meme is highly embraced by Internet users with slight changes in description in different contexts of cyberculture. As cyberspace extends and eases the chances of imitation and spreading, which are at the heart of a meme's survival, Internet memes illustrate a dramatic revival of the concept.

Basically, Internet memes refer to any piece of media (a phrase, a text, a video, an image etc.) that spreads from person to person via the Internet. Of these, image macro memes, whose examples in cyberculture of Turkey are the base for this study, are the ones that consist of juxtaposition of a subtitle to an image and they "seem to possess greater endurance" (Wiggins and Bowers 2014, 7) among other types of Internet memes like video or phrase. In general, whatever the form, an original item is replicated, imitated, or manipulated and shared repeatedly by many people, which is the vital process of their emergence as an Internet meme. Viral circulation is not a sufficient qualification for an item to be named as a meme. It is each user's contribution and participation in creating, remixing, reproducing, and sharing them that turn those digital items into memes. At this point, it is the fact that the participatory design of the Internet provides its users the chance to manipulate, alter, and re-produce images as well as share and circulate them that makes Internet memes artifacts of collective creation that are always in the phase of becoming.

Although there are variations in definitions of the concept in cyberculture, before anything it should be noted "an Internet meme is always a collection of texts"

(Shifman 2014, 56). Diverging from Dawkins, Limor Shifman, who has carried out a detailed study on Internet memes, suggests regarding an Internet meme as a collection consisting of many re-productions that share a template with each other rather than regarding each popular item as a meme. A comprehensive definition of Internet memes can also be found in Shifman's *Memes in Digital Culture* in which she defines Internet memes as "(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with an awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (2014, 41). The three articles in the definition of Shifman indeed refer to what Internet memes encapsulate many characteristics of the current digital culture.

The first attribute of Internet memes that is in Shifman's definition is "templatability", namely, that they rely on a template to integrate into a collection and to be legible for Internet users. Secondly, intertextuality arises as a pivotal hallmark of these items because in each creation there are references to other items belonging either to the same collection or to other collections. In relation to the third article, it should be noted that Internet memes' peculiarity in comparison to other spreadable media lies in "the agential activity needed for their reproduction" (Wiggins and Bowers 2014, 18), as well as for their circulation. Participation of people as either a consumer or producer, or as a user that occupies a position at the intersection of both, is an epicenter phenomenon, as a meme emerges and stands out only as long as it is reproduced or shared by other users.

Considering the vitality of imitation that is at the heart of the concept, I will treat memes as a collection of texts in my study as well, which will also help me to explore the value of Internet memes from a sociological perspective. In this regard, Internet memes as collections of texts are collective creations around which anonymous Internet users gather without knowing each other. This collaborative creation at the heart of Internet memes is what makes them "the label for a flagship participatory artifact" (Milner 2012, 10).

Following Shifman's perspective in terms of treating memes as collections of texts, Eric Jenkins proposes that what is circulating with Internet memes is indeed a mode, referring to a common way of seeing or a common energy shared socially. He defines a mode as "collective, emergent phenomena that express the circulating energies of contemporary existence" (E. S. Jenkins 2014, 443). Although the message transmitted between the audience and creator of a specific item may vary in terms of its standpoint, there is a general mode that is emergent in a collection. The articulation of language in these items, the aesthetic techniques employed, and their formative components carry indications of these modes and the energy circulating with them. Focusing on what is rooted in these circulating energies and how they can contribute to making memes extra-temporal artifacts rather than specific messages of unique items opens up communicative potential of Internet memes. In this sense, the investigation of the aesthetic, and cultural roots of Internet memes, and their source of inspiration will be the guiding for the analysis of the items and their historical and contextual background.

2.2. Aesthetics of Resistance: Cultural Roots of Internet Memes

For a study aiming to analyze meme culture with its critical implication and local peculiarities in Turkey, following the line of resistance through visual imageries within that locality is an option to unveil the antecedents and inspirational guides of this culture. At this point, the dynamics of graffiti culture or cartoon culture in Turkey could be a starting point. At first sight, Internet meme culture might be regarded as the transformation of graffiti from streets or cartoon culture from print media to a new media in terms of being a visual product of people that is typically based on humor and having critical traces. An elaboration on the transformation from graffiti or cartoon culture would direct me to more local links and changes in form in visual representation of resistance. Yet, here as I want to focus on techniques of creations in Internet memes assuming that such aesthetic implications are not exempt from political implications, I decided to focus on the movements with which Internet meme culture share several techniques of creation. Hence, I will direct my attention to more universal links of meme culture with several avant-garde movements of the 20th century that have been discussed by several scholars that share a particular

emotional energy as well as aesthetic techniques. In this sense, with jumps in history, I will briefly introduce three cultural antecedents found in the literature of Internet meme culture: Dada, the Situationist International, and culture jamming.

The first antecedent for Internet meme culture was the Dada movement, which spread across Europe at the beginning of 20th century as a reaction against war (Ades 2006, 12). A Dadaist impulse can be found in Internet meme culture, especially in terms of appropriating “techniques of abstraction and photo-montage, assembling fragments of photographs and text into disjointed and sometimes random imagery” (Lievrouw 2011, 32). The Dada movement became a source of inspiration for other avant-garde movements of the century, like the Situationists and Surrealists. Sloterdijk defines it as neither an art movement nor an anti-art one, but as a radical “philosophical action” (Sloterdijk 1988, 391). Using irony and absurdist humor as the chief weapon in their works, Dada appropriated techniques of subversion and manipulation to challenge bourgeois art. Baudrillard cites Dada as the starting point of the age of trans-aesthetics that questioned the presence of aesthetic value judgments in post-modernity (Baudrillard 1990). Dada’s engagement with the subversion of bourgeois artwork or appropriation of everyday life objects as its material pushed the limits of conventional perception of artwork.

Discussing Dada within the frame of cynicism, Peter Sloterdijk portrays Dada’s attitude as playful and productive on the one hand, and destructive and annihilative on the other (Sloterdijk 1988). Putting creative action on already found objects or images is the first aspect connecting Internet memes and Dada. Both use techniques of remix and both are articulated with a humorous language that simulates them in playfulness and productiveness. In this regard, Marcel Duchamp’s work *L.H.O.O.Q.* can be indeed taken as the ancestor of today’s images of Internet memes in terms of playing with the image and superimposing a title (see figure 2.1)². Manipulating the image of Mona Lisa with a moustache and imposing a text that can be interpreted in several ways, including vulgar ones, Duchamp questions the cult of Mona Lisa. In this

² https://www.nga.gov/images/decors/dadainfo_fs.shtm, accessed on 10.01.2016

sense, Internet memes partake in the same process of creation, manipulating images either by collage or remix and deconstructing the settled way of seeing of a certain image. Both propose a new way of looking at what is already present.



Figure 2.1. L.H.O.O.Q. of Marcel Duchamp, 1919

Another cultural root appointed for today's alternative media is the Situationist International (SI), which has emerged in the second half of the 20th century in Europe as a reaction to confinement of everyday life with capitalism. "Like Dadaists, Situationists also believed that there should be no separation of art from everyday life and experience" (Lievrouw 2011, 35). Challenging the boundaries between art and everyday creativity and fighting against the spectacular nature of contemporary capitalism, Situationist practices also resemble Internet memes in terms of the aesthetic tactics they adopted based on subverting images. "Situationism's use of cross-cultural collage pointed the way towards an artistic expression that would ridicule and attack popular culture using its own raw materials, with the tools of parody, irony and pastiche" (Curran 2015). One of the most known tactics of SI is detournement, which "literally means turning around" or "turning upside down" (Wettergren 2009, 2). Detournement is based on subverting, and destabilizing the existing spectacle (Bottici 2014, 122). Playing with the images and manipulating them through remix and mimicry are pivotal for detournement. Again, a satirical humor

operates in the examples of detournement (see Figure 2.2)³, as in Dada art as well as today's digital culture.



Figure 2.2. Situationist Detournement example

In addition to Dada and SI, culture jamming can be described as a much more recent forerunner of meme culture in terms of its strategic use of visual imagery within social movements. In several studies, meme culture has been described as the online form of culture jamming, which itself has its roots in Dada and SI (Ünsay and Ügümü 2014; Lievrouw 2011). Positioning itself in line with other revolutionary movements like Dadaists, SI, and Anarchists, culture jamming emerged during the 1990s as a reaction against the images of consumer capitalism (Lasn 2000). Culture jamming is also a part of remix culture appropriating humor, irony, and pastiche. And like SI, it is also a direct reaction against consumer capitalism, especially attacking billboards, advertisement etc. (See example in Figure 2.3)⁴.

³ <http://www.widewalls.ch/situationism-influence-history/> accessed on 10.01.2016

⁴ <https://sites.psu.edu/comm411spring2015/2015/02/17/culture-jamming-3/>, accessed on 12.01.2016



Figure 2.3. A culture jamming example targeting Coca Cola billboard

Culture jamming is based on the “remix or repurposing of a known image such as a corporate logo and infuses critical perspectives on mainstream trademarks and logos” (Wiggins and Bowers 2014, 13). It is depicted as an action repertoire rather than a movement (Wettergren 2009, 3), or rather as an “artistic ‘terrorism’ directed against the information society” (Lievrouw 2011, 72). According to Lievrouw, “what makes culture jamming distinctive as a genre of alternative/activist new media is that it ‘mines’ mainstream culture to reveal and criticize its fundamental inequities, hypocrisies, and absurdities, very much in the tradition of Dada and the Situationists” (2011, 80). Hence there is an organic relationship between these cultural forebears of Internet meme culture, one especially apparent in their critical stand.

Dada, SI, and culture jamming are the most apparent cultural roots of today’s Internet meme culture. What is illustrative in their techniques of mimicry and remix cultures is that they share a state of mind that brings them together in their methods of creation. All employ techniques of subversion, turning upside down, and remaking. In Dada’s abuse of the works of bourgeois art, in Situationists’ playing with the images of consumer capitalism, or culture jammers’ subversion of the billboards, there are traces of resistance, but using hit-and-run tactics or mingling with humor shows that the practices of these movements are tactical. Internet memes also subvert images of several fields from pop culture to political culture, and remake them in accordance with the idiosyncratic logic of contemporary digital culture.

The tactical nature that ties Internet memes to their cultural forerunners gives clues regarding their nature as a tool of social critique and commentary. Internet meme

culture is much more embedded in everyday creativity as the current design of the Internet makes the tools of copy-paste, remix, and manipulation available to the masses. Aforementioned three movements' ways of intervening to the fields of their target are mostly articulated in a spontaneous, tactical and creative way. Assuming that such an inclination will be present in Internet memes too, I will elaborate on several concepts of Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday life in order to explore on his conceptualization of numerous everyday activities of people as tactical responses to the field of authority.

From Henri Lefebvre to Michel de Certeau, there continues a broad discussion around the possibilities of emancipating everyday life from consumer capitalism. These three movements are part of this search for these possibilities, too. Dada's main target was unsettling bourgeoisie art while SI and culture jamming targeted consumer capitalism in their practices. From several perspectives, they searched for human emancipation in everyday life, which was the base of Michel de Certeau's theory. In order to comprehend the implications of the tactical nature embedded in the technique of subverting images, a brief look into the theory of Michel de Certeau, who delineates everyday life with an emphasis on tactical practices will be enlightening.

Michel de Certeau brings a different perspective to the distinction of production and consumption. He argues that ordinary people do not passively consume, and that there is a creative dimension to their acts of consumption in daily life. Regarding consumption as production, he argues against the idea of total effacement of power mechanisms in daily life. In this regard, he introduces two concepts: strategy and tactic. Strategy refers to "the calculus of force-relationships that becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment"" (Certeau 1984, xix). Hence, strategy refers to the field of authority and calculations of authority figures, like drawing of borders, and settlement of rules, while tactics refer to innumerable ways of acting and reacting in these environments that are difficult to track, and thus difficult to control. In acting on the environment and fields that are defined by strategies, people discover multiple ways of operating, ways of making do,

challenging the idea that they are just passive consumers of the culture produced by those in power.

“Many everyday practices... [are] tactical in nature” argues de Certeau, expanding his examples from reading to walking, and from cooking to talking. The tactical nature of consumption, the innumerable ways that ordinary people make use of the strong, introduces a political dimension to everyday life (Certeau 1984, xvii). It is a tactic which “is always an art of the weak” (Certeau 1984, 37). Hence, the numerous creative reappropriations of the people in daily life creates an emancipatory potential to act on the borders defined by strategies. Although de Certeau focuses on subtle, spontaneous and creative consumption in everyday life, three movements at stake illustrate more crystallized examples of creative consumption, or consumption as production. Dada’s subversion of bourgeois artwork includes both consumption and production. Playing with billboard advertisements is also a way of consuming advertisements as well. Appealing to much wider and disseminated populations, Internet memes also engage with the material from several fields of strategy, like mainstream culture or political culture and transform them into something new. All these carry tactical implications to undermine domination of society by the logic of capitalism or bourgeois rules by intervening into the field of strategy in an uncalculated way.

There are several techniques used in these movements and Internet meme culture that makes possible their discussion with de Certeau’s tactics. Pastiche, copy-paste, and remix, are tactics as are humor and irony. Humor is prominent in all these movements and Internet meme culture and it is single-handedly a challenge against the field of authority in which where a serious atmosphere is dominant. The value of Internet memes as a tool of critique becomes apparent with the predominance of humor in their articulation, which necessitates a brief overview of the sociology of humor and its place in contemporary Web culture.

2.3. Humor as the Meta-Narrative in Memes

*“Every joke is a tiny revolution”
George Orwell*

Regarding Internet memes, scholars have addressed the question of humor in different ways. Some have prioritized their humorous articulation describing these items typically as jokes (Davison 2012, 122). Others have proposed that the predominant purpose of image memes is “satirical humor for public commentary” (R. Milner 2013, 2359). Knobel and Lankshear, who investigated successful memes between 2000 and 2005, argue that humor is a “key component” in Internet memes (2007). The sample of successful Internet memes they studied draws on “the creative energies of people who enjoy playful, absurdist ideas carrying little ‘serious’ content and/or who enjoy humorous ideas carrying serious content which may be considered to be social critique and commentary” (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 217). Hence, both entertainment and critique or commentary may exist in an intertwined manner within memes. One way or another, humor occupies an overwhelming place in the production and consumption of Internet memes, one that serves to amplify the social, discursive and communicative dimensions of these items.

2.3.1 The Social Aspect of Humor

According to Henri Bergson, humor makes life bearable. Also, “it bears national, cultural, and sometimes regional imprints of the environment in which it is produced or performed” (Liebylski 2004, 8). The three classic theories of humor, namely, superiority theory, incongruity theory, and relief theory, offer primarily psychological explanations of humor (Morreall 1987). None of these provide a comprehensive model for the elucidation of humor as a social phenomenon. Yet humor is indeed a “highly complex rhetorical, social and political tool” (Gournelos and Greene 2011) and “extremely strongly bound in social and cultural terms” (Hart 2007, 6).

A bundle of approaches emerged in the 20th century within humor studies with a sociological perspective, including “the functionalist, conflict, symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, and comparative-historical approach” (Kuipers 2008, 362). In this

section, I will focus on the functionalist approach to humor, which draws on humor through its functions in social relations and interactions. The reason for this is the method of this study is visual rhetoric analysis, which necessitates examining the function of the visual products. Humor, as a fundamental component of Internet memes, plays a vital role in the formation of the function of visual products. Hence, I will sum up some basic functions ascribed to humor in the literature.

Older studies on humor emphasized social cohesion function of humor (Kuipers 2008, 364). Laughing at the same thing brings people closer or displays a cultural, ethnic, social, or other type of bond. Yet the opposite is also possible. Humor can also exclude as well as it binds; it “brings people together but it can also emphasize and augment differences in status” (Kuipers 2015, 31). Hence, the social cohesion function of humor is two-fold; it can strengthen communication yet also hinder communication in cases where it is used in a scornful and excluding manner.

The function of humor in communication is not restricted to including or excluding. There are also studies investigating humor’s role as a social corrective mechanism to which excluding function of humor precipitates a base (Kuipers 2008, 366). Related with the incongruity theory of classic humor theories, this function is based on the idea humor or laughter implies what is normal and abnormal in social relations and the mark of something as abnormal through laughter also implies an attempt to correct the thing (move, object, manner, etc.) at stake.

Morreall describes joking, “is a special play mode of using language in which we suspend ordinary rules of communication and give each other comic license to say anything, as long as the group enjoys it” (Morreall 2009, 36). With such a formulation, “humour conveys an image of momentary freedom from the restraints of social convention” (Billig 2005, 208). These statements sum up the relief function of humor. This perspective of momentary freedom coming through humor is also present in the seminal work of Mikhail Bakhtin on the carnivalesque laughter in Rabelais’ world, which will be elaborated in relation to the issue of humor and critique.

Humor, aesthetic experience, and play in general share in creating moments of practical and cognitive disengagement (Morreall 2009, 102). This is also apparent in Billig's statement on humor's resemblance to playfulness (Billig 2005, 182). All involve the suspension of social convention. This disengagement effect of humor does not mean that it is necessarily a positive or negative phenomenon. It can generate harmful effects like irresponsibility when a touchy issue is on the table (Morreall 2009, 102). But this disengagement can help people in communication by breaking "negative emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness, which suppress creativity by steering thought into familiar channels" (Morreall 2009, 113). The sense of play in humor, installs a distance against proposed reality, which are apparent in the above-mentioned cultural antecedents of Internet meme culture in terms of proposing new ways of engagements with what is already present as reality.

The three functions summoned here -cohesion, control and relief- are the ones most frequently mentioned in the functionalist approach. But there are also others recently inserted to the literature. Kuipers cites "expression of conflict, inciting resistance, insulting, ridiculing or satirizing others" (Kuipers 2008, 367) as examples of functions recently ascribed to humor. It is hard to degrade the social functions of humor to a few. Besides, these are functions, which are not totally independent from each other. In pursuing of my research question I will focus on the relationship between humor and critique, which could be related with several functions cited here, including relief, cohesion, expression of conflict, inciting resistance, insulting, or satirizing others.

2.3.2. The Relationship Between Humor and Critique: A Possible Paradox

Both Dada and SI appropriate humor, especially in the form of irony, as the chief weapon against their targets. This relationship between protest and humor is crucially important for understanding the rhetoric of Internet memes and their use in a dissentful, critical, and reactionary tone. There are also other examples using humorous visual materials like Internet memes in recent social movements, which were what originally drew my attention. The basic reference for explaining the vitality

of humor as a rebellious tool has been Mikhail Bakhtin, the most quoted scholar regarding the relationship between humor and protest (Hart 2007, 4).

Although his aim is not to provide a comprehensive theory of humor and laughter, there are important clues in Mikhail Bakhtin's work on Rabelais and his world with regard to the implications of laughter in deconstructing social relations. His arguments revolve around the concept of the "carnavalesque", and take the inspiration from the popular festive forms and carnivals of the medieval ages. In the practices of carnivals of the middle ages and in the carnivalesque images of Rabelais' writing, Bakhtin observes a potential for the emancipation for ordinary people which implies a potential for casting off all strictly hierarchical relations in social, political and domestic settings (Bakhtin 1984, 237). In this sense, carnival "did liberate human consciousness and permit a new outlook"(274), which resembles the disengagement effect of humor.

Morreall argues that one of the intellectual virtues fostered by humor is critical thinking (Morreall 2009, 113). Proposing a different and perhaps challenging way of seeing reality, humor offers a way of voicing the drawbacks of disciplinary society. Yet this relationship between humor and protest or humor and rebellion is not a stable relationship. Bakhtin's interpretation of Rabelais's world displays that laughter is a strong challenging mechanism against authority yet it is a temporary and tactical one. From the start, he says carnival was based on "temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers" (Bakhtin 1984, 89). Within contemporary movements while on the one hand, humor can trigger different ways of thinking and lessen fear within public protest, on the other it can also lead to idleness due to its relation with frivolity and it "may even lessen discontent among the oppressed, which might inhibit the mobilization into action" (Hart 2007, 7). This duality has led to a perpetual debate among humor scholars. Some have focused on its rebellious power and insisted that humour is an effective form of resistance, a boost for the oppressed, and an underminer of their oppressors. Others have denied the effectiveness of jokes and even claimed that jokes are safety

valves that help oppressive regimes to survive and that it is counter-productive to try to suppress them (Davies 2007, 300).

Michael Billig, too, although recognizing the power of rebellious humor, argues that a “feeling of rebellion and an enjoyment of humour that transgresses social demands do not necessarily equate with a politics of rebellion” (Billig 2005, 209). Hence, there is an undeniable aroma of rebelliousness in humorous communication; yet this does not reflect in action as a power challenging mechanism in each case. Here, rather than neglecting its long-standing effect, a new perspective could be installed in line with de Certeau’s tactical practices, which are spontaneous and subtle fissures in the domination mechanisms of capitalism. In sum, the dominance of humor in recent social movements and protests could be a deviation from traditional politics of rebellion. While discussing the issue of critique and dissent in Internet memes, one should not disregard this tension in the nature of humor. All these implications of humor should be taken into account in the analysis of Internet memes and their reflections on social modes.

CHAPTER 3

CAPS/MEME CULTURE IN TURKEY'S CYBERSPACE: FROM UNDERGROUND TO THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

3.1. A Short History of Internet Memes

In line with the definition of Richard Dawkins, an Internet meme is any content that spreads from person to person via the Internet. This definition encompasses a much more broader range of Internet artifacts rather than visual-textual items that will be analyzed in this study. Accordingly, the definition of Internet meme embraces any kind of content, including videos, images, websites, phrases, or activities like parody. The fundamental characteristic of an Internet meme is its spread through reuse and alteration by different Internet users. In the light of this, the earliest known Internet meme is smiling emoticons (Davison 2012). Realizing that misinterpreted humor harmed text-based communication, Scott E. Fahlman, a USENET⁵ user, developed the idea of creating emotion presenting symbols by using punctuation marks (Davison 2012, 124). Fahlman suggested to using “:-)” for a smiley face and to use “:(” for a frowning face to avoid any confusion in online interactions (Börzsei 2013, 156). In this way, Fahlman opened up the way for the transmission of the first emoticons in 1982.

Emoticons have been on the Internet since 1982 , and have evolved and multiplied over time. Emoticons carry the three core characteristics of memes, longevity, copying-fidelity, and fecundity (Dawkins 1989, 194). Firstly, they spread from person to person, and continue to be used today. Secondly, the idea of representing the emotional states via punctuation marks and letters has been the fixed pattern of the meme. Thirdly, they have evolved from the these days of Fahlman, as “many people choose their own preferred emoticons, based on fashion or what their peers are using (e.g. whether to use [:)] or [=)]; [:DD] or [XD])” (Börzsei 2013, 157). As the idea of using punctuation marks within any conversation is easily reused and as the

⁵ Started in 1980, Usenet is a worldwide discussion forum on the Internet that served as a prototype of the sort of user-generated content that burst with the World Wide Web.

marks themselves are easily remixed, emoticons have been one of the most persistent Internet memes since the early stage of the Internet.

The rise of modern Internet memes took nearly two decades on the other hand, and benefited from Web 2.0 technologies introduced in 1999 that allowed user generated-content. It is hard to pinpoint what the first Internet meme was in this popular current sense. Image macro memes seem to be the most popular type of memes today. Image macro is defined in the Know Your Meme⁶ website as “a broad term used to describe captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase” (Image Macros 2012). One of the long-standing examples of this genre is LOLcats (See example in figure 3.1)⁷, examples of which even are exhibited in a gallery in London as works of art (Know Your Meme 2009). The extension of Internet memes as everyday creations of many Internet users to exhibition galleries can be an example to actualization of Jean Baudrillard’s trans-aesthetic age, which he foresees in everyone’s becoming a potential creator.



Figure 3.1. LOLCat meme example

⁶ Know Your Meme is a website founded in 2008 by three Internet investors who noticed the rising popularity of Internet memes. It is a major database based on volunteer contribution for collecting Internet memes (in English mostly) and tracking the story of the origin and transmission behind their rise.

⁷ <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/lolcats/photos/sort/score>

With several stylistic and linguistic changes, image-macro memes diffused into several cybercultures throughout the world. The present work deals with this genre of memes in Turkey's cyberspace. While the word meme or a derivation of it is generally used to refer such items, the Internet users of Turkey adopted the word *caps* which has a specific background in the Internet culture of Turkey. From this point on, I will present the emergence of memes in Turkey's cyberspace, elaborate on the site that gives birth to *caps* culture, and interpret its evolution taking the background of its community into account before going into analysis of the items.

The current use of the term *caps* in Turkey actually coincides with the depiction and description of the items called image-macro memes within Internet meme culture. There is a story behind the use of the word *caps* rather than a translation or derivative of "meme" in the cyberculture of Turkey. The word *caps* in the cyberculture of Turkey actually predates the emergence of Internet meme in Turkey. It is an abbreviation of the word capture, denoting taking a screenshot. In online discussion forums and messaging boards, the word was used to refer to the practice of offering a screenshot from a video or a movie to give an idea about the general content of the movie (Ünsay and Ügümü 2014) before emergence of *capses* in the form of image-macro memes.

The turn in the word's history in Turkey occurred on the website www.incisozluk.com, a user-generated content platform famous for its unrestricted content policies and the popularity of slang among its, which will be discussed below. On this website, the use and sharing of visual items was already popular, though not necessarily in the form of a meme. When the users of this website created the first examples of meme, s in the form of captioned images, they continued to call them *caps* as other visual items shared in the website. The ones in the form of Internet meme among other visual items became fabulously popular and traveled beyond the boundaries of the website. As the popularity of these Internet-meme caps grew, the word's earlier sense fell into disuse. This chapter will trace the historical and contextual background of Internet meme culture in Turkey through an examination of İnci Sözlük and the emergence of caps culture.

3.2. The Birthplace of *Capses* in Turkey: *İnci Sözlük*

İnci Sözlük (Pearl Dictionary) is a website based on user-generated content that was founded in 2009. It is an example of peculiar and popular genre of website in Turkey called “dictionary”, regarding which there are several conceptualizations like open source dictionary, collaborative hypertext dictionary, electronic dictionary, etc. (Gürel and Yakın 2007, 204). It is a genre based on the idea of creating people’s own dictionary and knowledge in line with the rise of user generated content platforms that Web 2.0 technologies introduced.

The first this website in this genre, and one that inspired several others was *Ekşi Sözlük* (Sour Dictionary) which has been founded in 1999 by Sedat Kapanoğlu. Using the motto of “Sacred Information Source”, *Ekşi Sözlük* became one of the biggest online communities in Turkish cyberspace. In the years following foundation of *Ekşi Sözlük*, several other websites in this form emerged. *Ekşi Sözlük*’s founder describes the site as a space that exhibits subcultural components and shows the multiplicity of knowledge and information and unsteadiness of the truth (Kapanoğlu 2003). In this sense, open dictionaries serve as alternative media sites that allow people to provide information, news and stories to the Internet public.

İnci Sözlük emerged as a clone of *Ekşi Sözlük*, as is clear from the similarity of the names and site designs. Yet on certain points *İnci Sözlük* diverged from *Ekşi Sözlük* and other open dictionaries in Turkey’s cyberspace. The websites in open dictionary format generally contain a group of moderators who monitor the content according to the rules of the website. What sets *İnci Sözlük* apart seem to have been its flexible moderation. There was explicit resistance against both to counterpart websites for their rule-obsessions and to daily life and the flexible moderation and suspension of many taken for granted rules in other dictionaries provided a unique freedom for users of the website (İnci and Kullar 2014, 11) according to the founders of the website. The moderators of the website also state that one of the core principles of the website was embracing of the users who dreamed of an uncensored and unrestricted life (Dağlıoğlu 2015).

Flexible moderation manifests itself in the predominance of slang language on the website (Baki 2014, 50). In the use of visual items, there is a predominance of obscenity too. In addition to this, in the use of website as a dictionary, there is a discrepancy between *İnci Sözlük* and other interactive dictionaries. The rule of providing a definition in each posts of users, for instance, is not enforced. This leads to a deviation from the dictionary format, as users ridicule and tease one another under the entries. Another example of divergence is the storytelling sessions held at night on the website, in which users post pieces of stories from their lives while other users comment and react to them. As it stands, the website gathered a vivid virtual community whose members entertain, share with, or react one another in an unconventional manner.

The activities of this online community did not remain limited with their interactions on the website. They dispersed to other mediums and spaces which contributed to their fame to an important extent. The users were highly energetic and creative in multiplying their ways of participation. One example is founding a fanclub for the İstanbul municipality's football team as the team was too lonely in the fields (Cemal and Morhayim 2011). Another unusual practice of the community was a bunch of trolling-like⁸ activities that they playfully name "visit". In their visits, they target a media site be it a major social network like Facebook or Twitter⁹ or a famous talk show on TV and attempted to create a reaction to the target. Manipulating online polls being organized on the website is also another activity of the community, and can be regarded as one of their visits. Mostly mingled with a humorous tone, these visits are a way of shaking up the docile use of media as indicated by a user who participated in these visits (Dağlıoğlu 2015, 63).

⁸ Trolling is a concept that refers to online activities of Internet users trying to distress someone usually just to disrupt and often anonymously (Nicol 2012, 3). The playful acts of trolls are regarded as successful when the target takes this playful behaviours as serious (Phillips 2015, 33).

⁹ These attacks aimed to cause anomalies on the website by abusing some bugs. On Twitter, for instance, they found a way to change and play with number of followers and used it to leave Hollywood celebrities without any followers, or had celebrities become their own followers. On Facebook, they used the crowdsourcing translation system of Facebook to provide some profane translations for the messenger system, and these were actually displayed.

The website quickly attracted a vivid community of users with its alternative style and humorous tone. M.D., one of the early users of the website interviewed for this study, states that it was the normlessness of the website that attracted him. Kullar and İnci associate this the chaotic structure of the website, free of hierarchical relations of knowledge with a kind of rebellious mode of the youth. And they indicate that the website became a home for an excluded, suppressed generation and its different styles of expression (İnci and Kullar 2014). Taking all these statements and practices regarding the website into account, *İnci Sözlük* as a site resembles a subcultural formation in cyberspace. This is apparent in its users' development of a language of their own, their critique of their counterparts, and in their emphasis on style.

Subcultures reveal themselves in differences in style. Depicting subcultures as conglomerations that signify a difference representing both "a semantic disorder" and "a potential anarchy 'out there'" Dick Hebdige associates subcultures with noise rather than sound (1979, 90). Subcultures associate with outsiders and a demand for deviation from the mass in this sense. Becoming explicit in their expressions, styles, activities, clothes, and tastes, subcultures deviate from the path of dominant cultures, and set up an identity in their alternative circles. The subcultural mode of *İnci Sözlük* is particularly noteworthy, and a closer look will help to trace the roots of Internet meme culture in Turkey.

The Internet brought a new dimension to subcultural formations, as new technologies often coincide with new configurations of sociality and formations of communities (Stahl 2003, 36). The claim to be an outsider within dominant culture and making it explicit in the style is at the heart of subcultural formations on the Internet, which are generally regarded as "post-subcultures". "While there are a plethora of alternative cultures at work on the Internet today, it would of course be a mistake to categorize them all as concerned strictly with either democracy or progressive politics" (Kahn and Kellner 2005). The question of to what extent alternative formations correspond to progressive implications is critical for the concerns of this study. Such a concern is relevant in terms of avoiding any overvaluation of the critical potential of *İnci Sözlük*.

Apparently, in their reaction against the exclusion of certain styles of expressions from daily life and docile use of new media, there is a tendency on *İnci Sözlük* to generate an opposition to these in their practices converge them a subcultural formation. Although subcultures are associated with a rebellious tone, as Kahn and Kellner note they are not necessarily engaged in a rebellious politics. İnci and Kullar, too, approve *İnci Sözlük's* the challenge to authority but, accepting the impossibility of total abandonment of authority. They sum up that they as a community of website specify their target and act upon on a specific field (İnci and Kullar 2014, 60). One of the users interviewed also states that the website members did not have a political stance, but there was an apparent critique towards the sites in their visits. Another member even states political issues are one of the few areas restricted on the website. Rather than having a defined political target, *İnci Sözlük* community seems to be searching for freedom of expression in their digital presence.

In relation to subcultural elements of *İnci Sözlük*, there is also another issue to discuss before going into the phase of emergence of *caps* culture. I presented works and practices of several avant-garde movements as cultural forebears of Internet meme culture in general. Before proposing *İnci Sözlük* as the site of birth for *caps* creations in Turkey, I want to elaborate on the possible associations of *İnci Sözlük* as a community with these movements. Duchamp defines Dada as the “nonconformist spirit which has existed in every century, every period since man was man” (Duchamp 1959). Taking Dada as their antecedents, both Situationist International and culture jammers share this nonconformist spirit. As action-based movements, they challenge the domination of authorities in several fields that bother them. Dada makes bourgeois art its target, SI aims at spectacular capitalism while culture jammers targets consumer capitalism focusing on billboards. From this perspective, *İnci Sözlük* shares this nonconformist spirit targeting restricted use of the Internet. Not only do they avoid editorial rules and restrictions within website, they also do not remain on their website, they actively go beyond their website to tease other media sites, be they television programs or a social networks.

The nonconformist spirit *İnci Sözlük* and avant-garde movements display in the face of their targets implies a sense of playfulness. The playful and productive manner of Dada appears in their play with the cult objects of bourgeois art. When the activities of *İnci Sözlük* outside of their website (their visits to other media sites, foundation of a fan club for an unpopular team, etc.) are considered, a playful manner through humor is also apparent. Rather than demanding a change from the target or presenting a well-reasoned discourse, they intrude into the mechanisms of the target playfully.



Figure 3.2. Google search statistics illustrating the search for the keyword “İnci Sözlük” between 2009-2017¹⁰

Hence, *İnci Sözlük* was a site that reserves subcultural elements and this is meaningful in terms of observing the interaction between the underground and the mainstream when it comes to emergence of *caps* culture. As illustrated in the figure 3.1, the website itself eventually lost its initial popularity and vitality after several legal restrictions and pressure on the website. Among the creative actions and organizations within *İnci Sözlük*, meme (*caps*) creation and sharing became the most enduring one, exceeding the borders of the website and becoming popular nationwide. The community no longer continues its trolling activities (as a community at least) or hacking attempts against major social network sites yet *caps* culture remained as a vivid culture and in time permeated into Turkish cyberculture.

¹⁰ The numbers represent the popularity of the search for the term on Google. “A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular.” <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2009-07-05%202017-08-05&geo=TR&q=inci%20s%C3%B6zl%C3%BCk>

3.3. Caps Culture: Emergence and Dissemination

Different from its previous use in Turkey, *caps* is currently used to refer to an image with a text superimposed on a red banner usually at the bottom in a white font. As each cyberculture adopts Internet memes, there emerge peculiar typographic styles of creating memes. In the case of Turkey, using the word *caps* instead of meme is the first peculiarity. The combination of image and text in the company of a red banner and white font is the second. Following the change in the meaning of the word in cyberculture of Turkey, namely expansion on *İnci Sözlük*, there emerged a remarkable interest in the word in Turkish cyberculture.

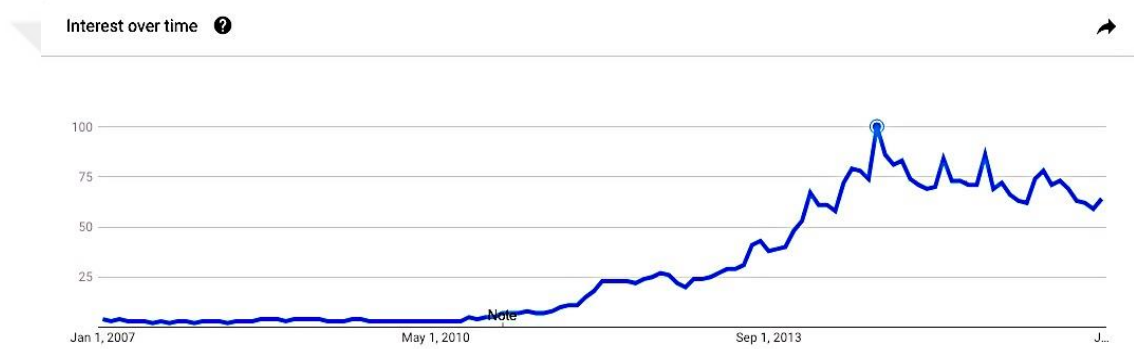


Figure 3.3 Statistics of the inquiry of the word ‘caps’ in Google in Turkey between 2007-2017 (Google Trends 2016)

After the emergence of humorous *capses* on *İnci Sözlük* and gaining their conventional form in time, the word *caps* became a highly interesting part of popular culture of Turkey. The Google search statistics above (see figure 3.3) illustrate the number of searches for the word “caps” on Google by the Internet users in Turkey in a decade between 2007 and 2017. In the first years of that period the use of the word in its original sense was restricted to a small population, while especially after 2010, there emerges a tremendous increase with the use of the term reaching its peak in 2014 (see figure 3.3). This graphic exhibits the line of the word *caps*’s becoming popular. After *capses* attracted a great deal of attention in *İnci Sözlük*, *İnci Caps*, www.incicaps.com, was founded as a separate *caps* hub solely for the creation and sharing of such items. But the circulation of memes did not remain limited to the *İnci*

Caps website. According to an infographic prepared by *İnci Caps* users in 2014¹¹, there were 12,320,000 Facebook users following *caps* pages, and 425,310 *capses* were being shared weekly on personal Facebook accounts. Currently, there are 2 million followers of the most popular page on *caps* share in Facebook¹². The account of *İnci Caps*, in a similar line, has 2,5 million followers on Twitter. *İnci Caps* website, on the other hand, reserves 1,069,935 *caps* creations.¹³

As these statistics indicate, there is a tremendous amount of *caps* production and circulation taking place on social network sites. The easiness of creation, thanks to digital technologies, is a major factor behind this extensive creation. Moreover, *capses* do not remain only artifacts of social media, blogs, and alternative sites like *İnci Caps*. Rather, once they attract great interest from Internet users, they are carried to the mainstream media websites' galleries, and sometimes even find a place in the headlines of mainstream news media websites or discussed on TV programs. The flow of *capses*, in this sense, also illustrates how social media artifacts intertwine with mainstream media channels to exceed boundaries of the place they first arose. Eventually, a concept that was created within a subcultural community is accepted and welcomed, firstly by other social media sites, then by traditional mass media tools.

Among this extensive reservoir of creation and sharing, some *capses* stand out for attracting the attentions of many users in terms of circulation but also stimulating others to join in creation. The role of some Twitter accounts, known as Twitter trolls, is especially marked in creation of *caps* series (Binark and Karataş 2016). *İnci* and *Kullar* mention several meme collections that were triggered by Twitter trolls and then supported by *İnci Sözlük* community. These *capses* end up as collection of items. In accordance with Shifman's perspective of Internet memes as collections rather than units, I will base my study upon *caps series* that constitute a collection of items. Some pieces of *capses* may be viral and shared a lot, but they can remain as unique

¹¹ <https://www.sosyalsosyal.com/ulkemizdeki-caps-kulturu-ve-gelisimi-infografik>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/capsverpic/>

¹³ <http://www.incicaps.com/istatistikler/> (accessed on 8 August 2017)

capses without any derivation. “When spreadable media are altered, remixed, parodied, and so on, they become the emergent meme” (Wiggins and Bowers 2014, 12). Specifying the distinction between viral and meme although they mostly intersect, I will focus on *capses* that constitute a collection and emerge from the collaborative creation of Internet users.

Illustrating the potential for collaborative creation in the current design of the Internet, *caps* culture embodies both strong bonds to overall Internet meme culture and indigenous ways of adapting of a global culture to specific local cultures. Throughout this study, the linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic peculiarities of *caps* culture in Turkey will be addressed in relation to a broader and pre-existing meme culture. It thus may be beneficial to indicate the salient points of divergence and convergence. Following Limor Shifman’s definition of Internet memes, which I detailed in the second chapter, I would like to summarize the basic ways in which *caps* culture corresponds to meme culture.

First, *caps* productions are based on a template, as the first article Limor Shifman’s definition of meme implies. There is a conventional format of combining text and image in image-macro memes, yet stylistic attributes like the font, its placement or its color might be a point of divergence. In addition to basic stylistic commonalities, *capses* as collections share a common stance, or viewpoint, which can be a joke, or a way of playing with image or a phrase. Hence, in terms of both format and content, there is a template innate to creations of *caps* that makes creation easier when one takes the websites that provide templates for *caps* creation into account. The second basic property of Internet memes is that they are created in reference to each other. For the *caps* trends that are focused on certain themes, this is already a given attribute, as they are constituted from derivatives. Third, their emergence as a meme depends upon circulation, reproduction, and imitation by many Internet users as Shifman concluded. *Caps* trends that exceed the boundaries of their birth site and have their places in social media pages and mainstream media are examples of this. Briefly, *caps* culture seems in line with the overall characteristics of Internet meme as defined in the literature.

One of the earliest descriptions of Internet memes by Davison already states that they are “typically a joke.” Accounts of *caps* culture in Turkey also put a great emphasis on the use of humor in *caps* creations. Binark and Karataş describe humor as the most decisive factor of *capses* (2016, 438). Likewise, in introducing the significance of *caps* culture in Turkey, Kullar and İnci emphasize the vital space of these items in terms of constituting a new and vivid kind of humor on the Internet (Kullar and İnci 2015).

Taking all these convergences into consideration, it is possible to regard *caps* culture as a variation of overall Internet meme culture. Yet here I want to re-specify the indigenous existence of *caps* culture to underline the extreme interest in these items in Turkey. Internet memes, as indicated before, can take any form. Rather than a video, phrase, or GIF (humorous items consisting of moving images), the specific form of items called *caps* occupies an overwhelming place in the cyberculture of Turkey, especially for the time period investigated in this study. *Capses* emerge as a peculiar combination of image and text illustrating hybridity in cybercultural productions. The specific attention on *caps* in Turkey can be searched at its embrace as an indigenous artifact to Turkey. Serkan İnci, the founder of *İnci Sözlük*, defines himself as the creator of *caps* culture too. Depictions of *caps* as new Turkey’s art (Tatlıpınar 2014) also illustrate the idea of treating *caps* culture as a peculiar culture apart from its link to global examples of Internet memes. Thus, *caps* is embraced as an indigenous creation of Turkey’s cyberculture. This may help account for the dramatic rise of *capses* from a subcultural community to a nation-wide population.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to present *caps* as a digital artifact of Turkey’s cyberculture by offering its bounds with Internet meme culture, the website that *caps* collections burst out and its widespread circulation currently. While there are a plethora of ways in which *caps* is bound to global Internet meme culture, they remain distinctive in terms of their style and references, as will be seen in the next chapter. In its current phase, *caps* culture no longer belongs to *İnci Sözlük* or to the İnci *Caps* community alone. Due to the multi-vocality and anonymity embedded in *caps* culture, it is impossible to restrict the present study to a single site. Yet to give

a brief overview of the motivations of the creators of these items, *İnci Sözlük* stands out as a site that served the burst of *caps* creations in Turkey. Thus, explaining the subcultural elements embedded in both open dictionary sites and *İnci Sözlük*, in particular, I attempted to present overall history and context of these items before offering a detailed visual rhetorical analysis of them in the next chapter. The subcultural implications of the birth site of *caps* creations in Turkey give an illuminating base for the next chapter, in which I will present an analysis of the *caps* collections that emerge mostly with contributions from this community.



CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF CAPS CULTURE IN TURKEY: THE PHASE OF SUBCULTURE

“Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive; this cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable and unsymbolized, remains the only one possible for all nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself”

(Certeau 1984, xvii).

Focusing on the fissures to mechanisms of power in everyday life, Michel de Certeau’s theory on the practices of everyday life provides a flourishing base to trace the potentials of memes as a means of protest, resistance or expression of discontent. Before starting the detailed analysis of Internet memes within Turkey’s cyberculture, a brief review of the nature of them as an everyday practice, or creation could be enlightening. The question on the critical dimension of Internet memes could be followed from the start, in this way.

As mentioned in the second chapter, Internet created an audience with a dual nature different from previous mass communication technologies. The conceptualization of “social media” signifies the uniqueness of the Internet in this regard, as also implied with the concepts like “prosumption” or “prosumer” to depict intermingling of production and consumption practices on the Internet with the dissemination of user-generated content after the 2000s. Meme culture, as an example of everyday digital creativity, embodies both consumption and production practices on the Internet, since people create, compose, share memes or just react to the memes with laughter as they confront. Although the creators of them can be a minor population, there are also the ones that contribute to their existence by consuming them, by putting them into circulation. As well, those who just react them as they encounter also contribute to their gaining memetic characteristic from a different aspect.

Apart from coexistence of consumption and production practices within meme culture, meme culture itself indicates production as consumption with the terms of de Certeau. Michel de Certeau, other than the discussion on the nature of the Internet, already remarks the invisible creative dimension in consumption practices within everyday life. According to him, “a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called consumption” (Certeau 1984, 31). Neglecting the idea that ordinary people are just passive consumers of culture produced by those in power to define strategies, de Certeau attributes a productive dimension to the everyday uses of products, or to ways of consumption engrained in the any moment of everyday life. With regard to the Internet memes, it is possible to describe meme culture as a way of consumption of the Internet technologies. And as argued that this is a kind of consumption, a kind of use that demonstrates the productive potential embedded in consumption processes (Certeau 1984, xii).

Initially, rather than being an original creation Internet memes are based on alterations of an initial item. In this sense, each alteration implies a creative consumption of the initial item. Besides, these initial items are generally examples of products of the system of productions like television, cinema, or other cultural industries. In this sense, Internet memes display a way of how people use or consume the images of the site of production. The quotation-above is de Certeau’s depiction of such uses as “cultural activity of the non producers of the culture”. In the case of cyberculture of Turkey, *caps* culture arouse from the interactions on a website intervening into other media sites and turned into a creative, cultural activity of many Internet users in Turkey. In this regard, *caps* culture also constitutes an example to the dissemination of marginality to the masses implied in the quotation-above.

Michel de Certeau delineates the creative activities of the non-producers of the culture as unsigned, unsymbolized, and unreadable different from the readable, signed activity of the producers of the culture. In the case of *caps*, their remaining mostly anonymous indicates these features to an extent. Regardless of knowing how popular it can be, Internet users share their remixes, reiterations without leaving a

name on it. In addition to anonymity, as it is difficult to determine an end to a *caps* collection (as there can be continuous flow of works), they are unmappable. Taking this into consideration, also, any attempt to analyze Internet memes within a context would encounter with difficulties arising from their unreadable and unsigned nature.

To start an analysis of cybercultural product is highly challenging because of several attributes in their nature like anonymity, ephemerality, speedy circulation and difficulty to determine its origin. Exactly from these attributes, I foresee a link between them and the depiction of Michel de Certeau's cultural activity of the non-producers of the culture. The first difficulty in relation to the present research was to determine which collections to look at, to draw a border between some collections and others. As from the start, my initial aim is to construe critical implications of Internet memes in Turkey, their use in a tactical manner as an everyday life creation and their ultimate meaning for political and social critique. I preferred to look at a much wider category of memes rather than just elaborating on political memes. This is, at the first hand, due to the vitality of intertextuality within meme productions and intermingling of political and pop culture items within these productions. Secondly, as I also attempt to find out metamorphoses of these memes from the underground to mainstream and unravel the intersections between political, social, cultural and technical, which could flourish in memes from all subjects, I avoid from restricting my sample to a certain category.

As indicated in Introduction, I distinguished the collections in the meme pool to four categories according to main themes dominating the collection. I aim to present a general picture of *caps* culture and exemplify main themes that *caps* creators and audience are both interested in, with this meme pool. Hence, I will be able to trace how Internet memes interact social modes collaborative creations and elaborate on the sites that these productions act as enhancing participatory culture. I distinguished four titles into two, subcultural phase and mainstream phase of *caps* culture. I will discuss football-related and Internet culture related *caps* production in the subcultural phase observing that the works and interests of *İnci Sözlük* users are much more observable in the collections under these categories. And I will examine

popular culture and political *caps* collections under the phase they went mainstream in the following chapter.

Subcultural phase corresponds to the phase of getting acquaintance with *caps* culture as a new form of digital visual material in Turkey. Looking at the chronological order of the list, Internet culture related memes and football-related memes take their places among the first *caps* productions, while political and pop cultural memes increase through the end of the list. As well, Google statistics for the most related topics with the search for *caps* display a density in popular and pop cultural creations.

Four out of first five topics in the list belong to either football related or Internet culture memes. Besides, the particularity of language and references in these memes, as will be seen in the examples, appoints the domination of a specific online group in their formation. A general search on football and Internet culture related memes in this list indicates a density in the *capses* with the sign/link of *İnci Caps*. In this sense, subcultural phase of *caps* culture illustrates a bunch of memes whose origins are rooted in the interests, inside jokes, practices and phrases of a subcultural online community.

The exploration on football related and Internet culture memes directs us to the elements of subculture, as the works under these categories carry the traces of peculiar language and style developed among *İnci Sözlük* users. The term subculture, as mentioned in the section on *İnci Sözlük*, implies the elements of a specific style as elaborated on the seminal work of Dick Hebdige; *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Members of a subcultural formation gather under a common language (Hebdige 1979). With regard to two categories, a general overview of the items appoint a dominance in the themes highlighted in *İnci Sözlük* website. Sometimes directly in the selection of topic as a meme, sometimes in the elements that consist of the *capses*- in the articulation of text or image, traces of language of *İnci Sözlük* community emerge out. The use of slang in the juxtaposed text is a clear hint regarding *İnci Sözlük* community. But most apparently there are *caps* series of which

very existence already originate from the discussions, jokes, and conversations on the website.

Subcultures are known with taking objects of dominant/mass culture and transforming “their everyday naturalized meaning into something spectacular and alien” (Stahl 2003, 27). The use of the word “high-school boy” in *İnci Sözlük* as a phrase of humiliation and ridiculing someone is an example to such a transformation. Attributing new meanings to words, turning them into a jargon of the website, taking some figures or people under specific focus were already emergent in the interactions of *İnci Sözlük* community. Emergence of *caps* culture opened a way for visualization and materialization of these differences in meaning and style that will fade in the detailed analysis of categories and titles of subcultural phase.

4.1. Football Related Caps Collections

Football related memes constitute the most specific cluster among the four titles of memes. In their book about *caps* culture in Turkey, İnci and Kullar discuss such memes under the name of “Sports Caps Trends” (İnci and Kullar 2015, 133-134). Although they regard these collections under a general category like “sports”, a general overview of the titles shows that football, but not any other sports branch, has been the area of reference within these *capses*. The density in such memes in the list, indeed, could be taken as an indicator of the interest of *İnci Sözlük* community, especially when it is taken into consideration that the users of this website has founded a totally voluntary fan club for the football team of Istanbul municipality. Besides, male domination of the website that they are accused of might have been a precipitating factor in this inclination (İnci and Kullar 2014, 38).

There are four collections gathering under this category consisting of the *caps* series based on images of Fatih Terim, Balo Telli, Sabri Sarioğlu and lastly World League in 2014. These titles are not all-encompassing football related memes, but the list offers these four titles as *caps* trends. The first three *caps* collections are based on a personality and the last one on a specific event. The ones based on personalities concentrate on these people’s different, strange or outlandish sides that they express

during the sports events. The captures are of their extraordinary attitudes from matches, articulated with humorous subtitles. While the target of jokes in the series on World League in 2014 are variant having references to specific football players or political figures, or even to the historical conflicts and issues among the countries.

The series on Fatih Terim constitutes one of the first series of *caps* culture in Turkey. Known as the Emperor, Terim was a prominent technic director of one of the biggest football clubs of Turkey, *Galatasaray*, for several years and has been technic director of national team of Turkey too. The exaggerative gestures and facial expressions of Fatih Terim captured during the football events constitute the base for this series. In addition to his exaggerative expressions, his broken English also provide many materials to joke around with. There are various examples listed in the several websites.¹⁴ Exemplified in the figure 4.1, basically Internet users attribute different meanings and translations to the expression captured in the image in this *caps* series. In addition to the images transforming Terim's gestures during matches to everyday reactions, there are also the ones that compare Terim with others, or combine Terim with other *caps* figures. Based on numerous images of one of the most prominent people, who are normally difficult to communicate for ordinary football audience in Turkey, this series became a tool of communication, a way of speaking to Terim independent from him.



Figure 4.1. Fatih Terim *caps*. (Translation: Me while warming next to a stove)

¹⁴ A bunch of them can be found in this address: <http://www.thegeyik.com/fatih-terim-cap/>

The second *caps* series following Fatih Terim *capses* within football memes is of Mario Balotelli, an Italian football player who played in Turkey for a while and got attention with his outlandish moves and gestures again. The series mostly consists of images with his extraordinary gestures and moves in the fields. Images expressing a bizarre kind of joy of score or lying on the ground while other team members are exercising are manipulated with montage and pastiche (see figure 4.2). Montage is a common technique to this collection. His photos capturing his joy of score move are montaged with other photographs to attribute new meanings to this gesture. His interesting and divergent actions during matches are ridiculed in a manner of sympathy and joy in this series.



Figure 4.2. Balotelli *caps*

In a similar line with the collection on Balotelli, *Sabri Reyiz capses*¹⁵ consist images of Sabri Sariođlu, a Turkish football player played in one of the biggest football clubs of Turkey, Galatasaray. *Sabri Reyiz* is the nickname attributed to Sariođlu within *İnci Sözlük* meaning Sabri the Chef with a broken language. The *caps* series on him mostly jokes around with his failures during the matches. Joking around Sabri Sariođlu is already apparent within *İnci Sözlük* conversations to this regard. Under the titles about him, the phrase that “he was born as a reaction to modern football (Sözlük 2010)” is repeated as a definition of *Sabri Reyiz*. His, sometimes, lack of

¹⁵ A digest from the *caps* collection on Sabri Sariođlu listed in the website of TV channel is in the link: <http://www.cnnturk.com/spor/futbol/sabri-sarioglu-capsleri-sosyal-medyayi-salladi?page=2>

understanding at certain critical moments during matches became a general pattern that is re-processed in different alterations of the series (see example in figure 4.3). While it is supposed that such failures might irritate the football audience, *caps* creations and share emerge as a different way of reacting by ridiculing these in a playful manner. Sabri's failures, lack of understanding during matches, or lack of skills with a humorous critique is not necessarily to evoke a harsh reaction in the audience. Rather, calling him as "Sabri the Chef", in an ironic manner, is an illustration of embrace of the footballer with his failures.



Figure 4.3. Sabri Sarioğlu *caps* (Translation: Give three reasons not to go? Reason, reason, reason)

The main themes that put forward these three people as *caps* stars among others are mostly their difference, or idiosyncrasy in their gestures, moves and responses during the matches as very in line with *İnci Sözlük's* motivation for embracing the excluded. Fatih Terim attracts attention with his too excited gestures, Balotelli becomes popular with his bizarre movements, and Sabri Sarioğlu is turns into a *caps* star with his lack of understanding. In relation to the mode of seeing they evoke as collections rather than distinctive units of items, thus all these three collections invite Internet users to celebrate difference, to approach it in a humorous way. Social cohesion function of humor is at work here in a dual way. Firstly, it brings people together in terms of laughing, creating, and sharing these items. Secondly, such a humor reproaches the Internet users and the people at stake at *capses* eventually. Figure 4.4 expresses this rapprochement clearly.



Figure 4.4. Sabri Sarıoğlu *caps*. (Translation: I hear those who ridiculing me/ But now I am silent/ Because I know/ that you love me)

It is not possible to attribute a pejorative manner to all of these memes or regard them from a certain perspective like supporting or opposing the personality or the team they belonged to. Rather, these *capses* became a tool of interaction among football audience themselves and personalities at stake. İnci and Kullar also highlight the deep interest related to football related issues in *capses* and describe the intention in such *capses* not as ridiculing the people on the *capses*, but as evaluating their distinctive gestures with a humorous language (İnci and Kullar 2015, 133). By this way, *caps* series on personalities exhibit how *caps*, as a new genre of communication, opened up new ways of reflecting for football audience. Putting creative potential into action, *capses* become a tool of communication to present critique, to have fun and to needle in an ironic way exemplifying creative consumption that de Certeau highlights.

Last topic of *caps* trend included in this category is *caps* series regarding the World Cup in 2014.¹⁶ This refers to a time period that *caps* culture disseminated into wider populations on the Internet exceeding its subcultural bounds to which more variant references like using political figures in creations may be an indicator. In parallel with the matches and the events during the matches, *capses* are produced and shared seemingly. One of the outstanding themes is regarding the final match of the League

¹⁶ A bunch of them can be found in the following link: <https://onedio.com/haber/almanya-arjantin-maci-sonrasi-sosyal-medya-tepkileri-334840>

that was between Argentina and Germany. In addition to the ones, which joke around with football players, there are also the ones that mingle the issues with political and social references according to the context of the country at stake. The creative consumption manifests itself, again. For instance, the symbolic monument of Argentina, Statue of Christ the Redeemer, becomes a common pattern used in the collection. Its image combined with different sentences vocalizes the defeat of Argentina in the face of Germany (see figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5. World League *caps*. (Translation: I wish I would have opened my arms, and said: do not kick)

The interesting common joke in these *capses* is a reference to historical bonds between Turkey and Germany. Regarding the coalition between Germany and Turkey during the First World War, there is a symbolic, common phrase encountered in the history books of elementary education in Turkey as such “when the Germans are defeated, we are accounted of defeated too.” Rewriting this cliché of official history books and subverting it, anonym Internet users created and shared *capses* with the subtitle: “when the Germans win, we are supposed to win too” after the triumph of the Germans. It is also possible to see *caps* productions relating the issue with fake love relationship between Merkel and Erdoğan (see figure 4.6). The love relationship between Merkel and Erdoğan is a fiction extracted by Internet users through the images of two and used in several collections of *capses*. Hence, football does not stay as only reference in this category of memes. In these creations, users combine their historical, political and social repertoire to reflect on the event.



Figure 4.6. World League *caps*. (Translation: We can share the cup, if you wish?)

The memes falling under this category firstly emerges as a tool of commentary for football audience. Football players or directors are presented with their failures, goofs or eccentricity are mentioned in these images. *Caps* creating, sharing and laughing at them indicate the different ways of consumption of football as an industry. Apart from the live activities and events, football is also highly “embedded within the daily routines and spatial practices of people’s lives” (Stone 2007, 174). Creating and sharing *capses* as an alternative way of consuming football industry signal a tactical manner as consumption and as production. Accordingly, creating their own way of consuming, Internet users gain their voices against the settled scenario of football industry where audience watch, support or oppose while plays are screened. Besides, while doing this, they mix issues of history and politics in a playful manner giving them a mundane voice.

The creative potential of football memes also lies in the ground that they highlight a humorous perspective. The interactions regarding football are generally supposed to be in a fervent, stressful or contentious manner. In the book of *İnci Caps*, sports *caps* trends are attributed a function of softening the aggression that dominates football related issues in Turkey (İnci and Kullar 2015, 133-134). Hence, *caps* series on football become an alternative way of speaking about football which occur in a much more harsh manner in face-to-face interactions or during matches both among footballers and among supporters of different teams. In this sense, the relief function of humor

is also at work as well as cohesion function that gather football audience in laughing at same creations. Overall, football *capses* combining references of political, social and cultural lives gesture a different way of consumption of football industry embracing differences and failures of the people in this industry.

4.2. Internet Culture Memes

Similar to football *caps*, the category of Internet culture *capses* reflect the traces of the voice and interests of *İnci Sözlük* community within *caps* culture, as three topics of the category directly emerges from the jargon within the website. Internet culture related memes, by which I imply the topics whose roots are embedded in online interactions, do not vanish as meme culture is adopted by and integrated to popular culture, yet, the roots of the category is embedded in subcultural sites and phase. There are six meme collections included in this section: *Liseli* (High School Boy), *Baykuş* (Owl), *Adam Haklı Beyler* (The man is right, men), GTA (Grand Auto Theft), *Hunharca Gülen Adam* (The man laughing bloodthirstily) and *Ünlü Sözleri Trolleme* (Trolling The Quotations of the Famous).

The first three collections of the category are phrases that became popular among *İnci Sözlük* community which gained different connotations from their literal meanings. The last three collections are about other digital contents, mostly having the sign of *incicaps* again, but they also carry the traces of co-participation from several websites and networks. Among them, GTA meme refers to the *capses* related to a popular online video game Grand Auto Theft. The second *caps* series of *Hunharca Gülen Adam* (*The Man Laughing Bloodthirstily*) is based on the reiterations and remix images of a viral video of a man literally laughing bloodthirstily. Lastly, Trolling the Quotations of the Famous consists of *caps* productions combining the images of the famous people and adding subverted quotations to their images. Overall, Internet memes based on Internet culture comprise from *caps* collections that have their reference points in online interactions, digital materials or inside jokes of Internet users. In a nutshell, they are the yields of Internet as an *ad hoc* agora.

Manuel Castells depicts the Internet culture “as the culture of the creators of the Internet” (Castells 2001, 36) from an inclusionary perspective. When it comes to the issue of creation/production, the Internet blurs the known borders and distinctions as mentioned. Castells argues that producers of this Internet culture are also users of them (Castells, 2001). He puts forward new conceptualizations to distinguish producers and consumers on the Internet by referring to them as producer-users and consumer-users. He does not deny the overall influence of consumer-users on development of the Internet (Castells 2001, 36). For him, Internet culture shows up in the articulation of four layers of this culture: techno-meritocratic culture, the hacker culture, the virtual communitarian culture and entrepreneurial culture (Castells 2001, 37). With the caption of Internet-culture memes here, the intention is close to the layer of virtual communitarian culture, as the *caps* collections falling under this category are rooted in firstly interactions among *İnci Sözlük* community, which is close to a virtual community. Internet culture memes in question, refer the content that burst out in online interactions within such a virtual community culture.

İnci Sözlük is a virtual network at the first sight. Ultimately, virtual networks, which stabilize in practice, provide support, sociability and a sense of belonging and extend their interaction to offline, carry the potential to turn into virtual communities (Castells 2001, 127-131). *İnci Sözlük*, gathers an active community of people who are attracted by freedom of expression on the website. And it extends its activities to offline social world for a while that makes possible to discuss it as an example of virtual community.

İnci Sözlük community created a language of its own by which other open dictionary website users are also contaminated. The first meme appointed in the list falling under this category is the collection based on the phrase of *liseli* meaning high-school boy in Turkish and implying immaturity according to *İnci Sözlük* jargon. The phrase, before its visualization with *capses*, was already an inside-joke among *İnci Sözlük* community and occasionally was seen in other open dictionary websites. The common usage of the phrase was *liseli detected* when an immaturity is observed in an entry of a user. More precisely, the term is used among users in order to humiliate

someone who is thought to be speaking more than one chews (Dağlıoğlu 2015, 66). This *caps* collection, on the other hand, consists of different images combined with a caption including orders directly to the high school boys. Here, the images vary from politicians to animals, from movie characters to characters from viral Internet videos or images.

Figure 4.7 and 4.8 are two examples presenting the *liseli caps* with different famous images, one is a photograph of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan- the prime minister of the time and other from the cult movie Matrix, respectively. Although the images are captured from totally different contexts, the same sentence (Stay there, high-school boy) is juxtaposed on these images on which the characters are making the same gesture. The depiction of cyberculture products as the products of remix culture manifests itself in such alterations. There is no explicit target of these jokes –as humorous combinations of text and image. Yet, they refer to creative capabilities of the Internet users in terms of prospering the content they deal with.



Figure 4.7. *Liseli caps*(Translation: Stay there high-school boy)



Figure 4.8. *Liseli caps* example(Translation: Stay there high-school boy)

Similar to *liseli capses*, *Adam Haklı Beyler* (The man is right, men!) refers to another phrase associated with *İnci Sözlük* community. Different from high-school boy's pejorative and humiliating connotation, this phrase is a statement of appreciation. The phrase is used when a user writes a proper entry that is liked and drew a lesson from (İnci Sözlükçüler 2013). As a verbal phrase, this is a sign of giving credit and applause. Hence, *capses* on this phrase emerge as a visualization of it revealing the communicative dimension of images. As noted before, *İnci Sözlük* is an open dictionary that uses visual communication much more than its counterparts. Both in the use of *The Man is Right, Men* and *High-School Boy capses*, communication and community formation function of humor is at stake, as these are reflections of common language created in the website. Their visualization, in this sense, hints at enriching the fields of humor that makes sense for a specific group of people.

Following the two phrases of *İnci Sözlük* users, there comes another collection inspired from the conversations within *İnci Sözlük*. *Baykuş*, meaning owl in English, refers to a *caps* series consisting of owl images and juxtaposed sentences that are associated with the expression of the owl in the image. Owl *capses* are a collection under the category of Internet culture memes. Because the source of it is rooted in online interactions of *İnci Sözlük* users, since they associated themselves with owls. Furthermore, it is the symbol of *İnci Sözlük* both in the logo of the website and in their "visits" called interventions to different networks and programs. The association with owl occurs after one of the users shared an image of funny owl from the garden of a military space. There are also users arguing the association results from owl's being a night bird as *İnci Sözlük* users, as young, student Internet users mostly, become active during nights. The images of owl proliferated with emergence of image memes on that base of sympathy towards owl.

Together with owl memes, the first *capses* illustrated in the infographic already appoint a density in using animal faces. İnci and Kullar mention the inclination towards using animal faces, objects or fictional characters as resulting from sensitivity emerges when a real personality became a matter of laughter (İnci and Kullar 2015, 75-76). In other words, animal images work as a safety zone to joke

compared to the images of people like politicians or celebrities. Several other examples from cybercultures outside of Turkey also illustrate the use of animal images as a popular material for image macros. LOLCats (Knowyourmeme 2009), Advice Dogs (Knowyourmeme 2009) and Socially Awkward Penguin (Knowyourmeme 2009) are among the well-known examples for such a general category of animal memes. The humorous articulation in animal face based memes is achieved through making animals speak and attributing them human-like attitudes with the combination of text and image. Combined with the slang of *İnci Sözlük*, owl *caps* make owls speak according to the gesture, facial expression captured in the image owl. *Caps* creators reflect their statements on everyday-life circumstances or associate the facial expression with song lyrics in a humorous way. Besides, there are also examples that put owls into interaction with other meme figures like Fatih Terim as seen in figure 4.9.



Figure 4.9. Fatih Terim *caps* (Translation: What if dude , shall we believe? Fatih Terim: I don't know dude, shall we?)

Above mentioned three meme collections based on inside language of *İnci Sözlük* community are, at the first hand, instances of extension of *İnci Sözlük* users' interaction to visual sharing rather than a textual interaction that traditional open dictionary websites are based on. They exemplify how the community of the website extended their creative capabilities through the potentials Web 2.0 provided. Besides, regarding the role of humor in social interactions illustrating visual humor *ad hoc* to the community of *İnci Sözlük*, these creations engrave for formation and refreshment of community and communication building among the website users.

Another meme of this category is the *caps* series on Grand Theft Auto (GTA), is peculiar to neither to *İnci Sözlük* nor to Turkey's cyberspace. Yet within Turkey, the initiator of this *caps* trend is appointed as *İnci Sözlük* community again (CnnTurk 2015). Grand Theft Auto (GTA) is a top-selling online video game series based on stealing cars but also provides many choice of actions that reproaches the game design to everyday life. There are examples of Internet memes from different cybercultures out of Turkey, as the game is a worldwide mega-hit. Know Your Meme website, for instance, already lists a GTA image macro series focusing on the logic failures in the design of the game that are inconsistent with real life situations (Knowyourmeme 2015). The studies on the game depict the virtual environment of the game neither real nor fictional but rather hyperreal as an open-ended space (DeVane and Squire 2008). All in all, basically the game is on stealing cars and proceeds through the missions given along the way, which are the exact reference points of Turkish GTA memes.

The basic pattern of Turkish memes on GTA is the conversion of the notice in the game given as "Go and Do X". The assignments in the game are reiterated to different contexts in *caps* productions. Hence, it is based on the design of the game like its global examples, yet these *capses* have the references to Turkey's political, social and cultural agenda and figures. Montage is a common technique in constitution of the collection.



Figure 4.10. GTA *caps* (Translation: Shoot out the ball and go)

People from several fields, from politics or artists, a footballer or a professor, are all included within the series with references to their fields. Figures 4.10 and 4.11 are the two examples including references to other meme figures within Turkey's cyberspace. Montaged to the head of Sabri Sarioğlu to the online game space, figure 4.10 illustrates a *caps* that reverses the mission pattern with "Do X and Go" instead of "Go and Do X" touching upon to the failures of the footballer in an implicit way. The other *caps* figure in figure 4.11 that will be illustrated under the popular culture memes is İlber Ortaylı. Apart from these, there are many other *capses* of several politicians, famous people, TV series characters, singers, etc., to the hyper-real space of GTA combining their fun with these figures.



Figure 4.11. GTA *caps* (Translation: Go and destroy the ignorants)

The game itself addresses a small community of its players. Yet, the various references to historical, political and social figures in these *capses* open space for a wider population. There is striking side of the collection in this sense in dressing people from elite positions in real life with game costumes. This invites people to a different way of communication in which there is a suspension of hierarchical relations. The incongruity lying in taking Ortaylı's image from the chairs and montaging it to the game space is an example to such a communication with him which is hardly possible under real-life conversations.

Another *caps* series of the category is *Hunharca Gülen Adam*, image captures from a viral video¹⁷ that has been recorded with a web camera by a man laughing out loud while talking about his son's school life. Seemingly unstoppable laughter of the man attracted such an attention that many parodies under the name of "the man laughing bloodthirstily cover" were created and shared on YouTube. Afterwards, the man himself made a parody of his own video laughing out loud at people who laugh his previous video. Hence the video has been a viral content on which reproductions and reiterations continued for a while. The *caps* series on the images captured from original video signals another path for these viral content. Again a search on these images reveals that majority of these images are *İnci Caps* productions as they carry the link as signature. Basically, the man's facial expressions are captured from the video and reused and remixed as line of images that translates daily modes of seeing.

¹⁷ The video can be found from this adress: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRuhd3BAb2g>



Figure 4.12. The man laughing bloodthirstly *caps* (Translation: Before the exam/While entering the exam/When the booklets are distributed/When questions are seen)

Figure 4.12 is the example that compares several modes and uses the image of the man's facial expressions as a translator. There are several other reiterations and remixing facial expressions in a storyline comparing the modes at certain contexts like in figure 4.12. Hence, the collection is at the first hand is an illustration of how images becomes way of expression and communication for Internet users. The facial expressions of the man become a signifier for daily modes of people, while the storyline combines them in a humorous way. Besides, the collection illustrate the

motivation of Internet users in reappropriating a content in several ways which is at the stake of remix culture attributed to contemporary digital culture.

The last topic of this category is *Ünlü Sözlerini Trolleme* (Trolling The Words of the Famous). This is a series consisting of images and pseudo-quotations of many famous people Turkish or non-Turkish origin including historically critical figures like Sigmund Freud, Bill Gates, Karl Marx, Euclid, etc., or figures from Turkish politics like Devlet Bahçeli. Regarding the trolling of the words of the famous, İnci and Kullar mention in the book popularity of this series from the start within the website but also mention how they get much more popular in the other networks like Twitter (İnci and Kullar 2015, 94). Hence, as the last category of Internet culture memes, this meme collection expresses the extension of meme culture to wider social networks in Turkey for certain.

Materially speaking, the *caps* series constitutes a divergence from the conventional design of *caps*. Rather than superimposing a white font title on a red band, the collection consists of combinations of a sentence next to a black and white photograph of the person at stake. The idea of giving a historical sequence might have led this design. Despite of this material difference, this is a popular collection celebrated under *caps* culture with its peculiar attraction for the power it grants to people (İnci and Kullar 2015, 94), as it brings the idea to make historical characters speak in a mundane way.

Combining the images of famous people from several fields with everyday clichés, this series makes clear the tactics of *capses* like turning upside down, subversion and manipulation that is shared in a bunch of avant-garde movements starting with Dada and having its recent prominent examples in culture jamming movement during the 1990s. In general, the people in these images are drawn out regarding their fields or inventions from a user/audience perspective. Figure 4.15 reflects cliché phrases like “ring up when you have arrived” to the photo of the inventor of the telephone, while the *caps* in the figure 4.13 illustrates Darwin explaining some genetic features with such clichés about relatives. Bill Gates’ description of how to set up a Microsoft

computer in the figure 4.14 is purified from possible technical phrases and expressed in a colloquial speech.

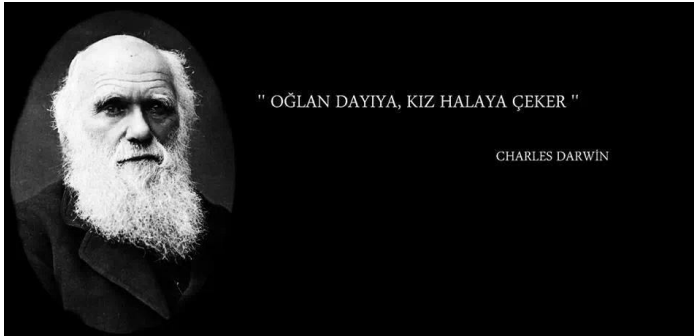


Figure 4.13. Trolling the words of famous *caps* (Translation: Son takes after uncle, daughter takes after aunt.)



Figure 4.14. Trolling the words of famous *caps*(Translation: Press the setup, then next next next)

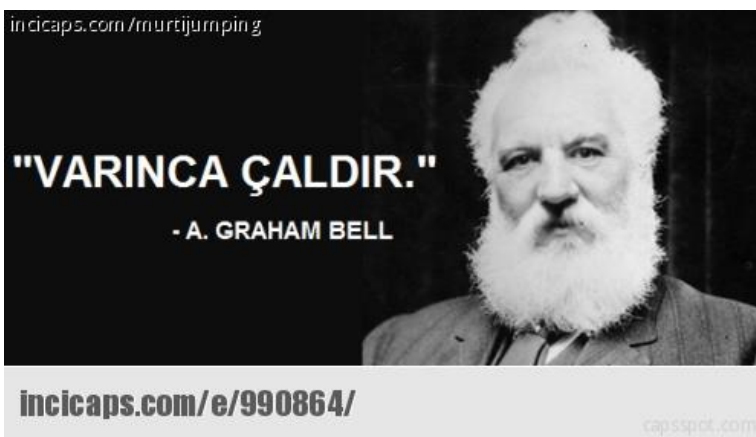


Figure 4.15. Trolling the words of the famous *caps*. (Translation: Ring up when you have arrived)

As noted before, several avant-garde art and social movements of 20th century to which Dada, SI and culture jamming use techniques of subversion, manipulation and

turning upside-down to provide a new way of seeing or to constitute an alternative existence site at the expense of the domination of specific ways of looking. The technical and aesthetic similarity between these movements and Internet memes general in terms of using montage techniques, subversion of images and remix of the content were already discussed. Specifically this series of *capses*, targeting several authority figures, or strategy builders as inventors, initiators, scientists, politician, etc., pinpoints a convergence to these critical movements in terms of their philosophical background. Just like Dadaists played with reputed artworks like Mona Lisa, *caps* creators played with the words of famous people giving them a vulgar voice. The idea behind the Mona Lisa's reversal by Duchamp was to challenge high-art and unsettle the traditional mode of seeing regarding artworks. The pseudo-quotations of trolling the famous' words meme serves for a similar function. Humorous voice of these *capses* lies at the point of reversal of hierarchies between such people signifying an authority in their fields and ordinary people, as colloquial speech is dressed to their images.

The category of Internet culture memes, overall, illustrates materialization of remix culture embedded in the Internet. Internet, as an alternative public sphere, created its material for setting off references of memes. The humorous articulation of the content that have their roots in online interactions is engendered on the base of pastiche, remix and hybridity. *İnci Sözlük*, as a virtual community has been a prominent precipitator for these memes. Later on, it is seen Internet users from different social networks and websites contributed to compose these memes as İnci and Kullar also indicate it. While the first three collections are based on an impetus of visualizing the content popular in *İnci Sözlük*, the latter three collections are variant in terms of reference and roots.

4.3. Evaluation of the *Capses* of Subcultural Phase

The clear common denominator of *capses* on both Internet culture and football is their site of inspiration. They carry indications of not the names of their creators but their links of *İnci Caps* website. As collections they are not in the ownership of anyone, but also everyone who contributes them in a way owns them. In this sense,

they propose a challenging experience of production and consumption on the Internet. Besides, they embody the characteristics of cybercultural productions in terms of being based on hybridity, pastiche and remix and predominated by humor. They emerge as an illustration for creative consumption on the Internet. Football related productions imply consumption of football industry but in a creative way. As well, Internet culture related productions imply reappropriation of already existing content on the Internet. Overall, they can be regarded as means of laughter and instances of vernacular creativity that disseminated to consumer-users of the Internet.

Regarding them as collections instead of units, the general attributes of the collections invoke a sense of playfulness that is also inherent in other practices of *İnci Sözlük* community. In *capses*, both remix culture and humor contributes to emergence of this sense of play. Among the functions of humor, the predominant ones seem like relief function. This makes sense especially when the association of humor and sense of play is recalled.

In the relief function, there is a connotation of momentary liberation which is common with the sense of play. Bakhtin focuses on the role of humor as liberating people from exterior and interior censorship (Bakhtin 1984, 94). Such a demand for liberation is explicit in both *capses* and other activities of *İnci Sözlük*. Calling their interventions to other media sites as visits implies such a play through humor. Regarding *capses* examined in this chapter, such a liberation is at stake especially when the topic or the material concentrates on real people. Without fear of getting harsh reactions, anonymous Internet users joke around people and issues that can be regarded sensitive in daily interactions. Ridiculing on Sabri Sarioğlu's intelligence is an example to this, or joking with Terim's broken English is another example. Humor, in this sense, emerges as a tactical way of communication through which critique, lacking a serious tone, is easy to present.

The critical potential of these collections, to this regard, is also in line with a cynical formation embed in Dada. Apparent in the collection of Trolling the Words of

Famous, there is a playful tendency in formation of these collections. The word trolling can already be substituted with playing to name this collection. This playful orientation approaches these collections to a cynical form. In terms of being an intervention into the area of authority they constitute a rebellious potential, or at least can be condemned as critical. Though, their humorous articulation and subvertive tune direct them to a tactical or rather a cynical form.

The tactical nature of Internet memes results not only from humorous articulation of the language but also from the sphere they are based on. Likewise, the contribution of the Internet in terms of providing anonymity has a certain role here. Anonymity widened the space of interaction eliminating the issue of responsibility to an extent. In the sense of putting responsibilities and restrictions of daily life aside together with dominance of humor in the language, Internet memes resembles a carnivalesque manner depicted by Mikhail Bakhtin.

Examining medieval carnival and laughter, Bakhtin foresees a potential of emancipation within these practices, as they refer to suspension of hierarchical relations of daily life (Bakhtin 1984, 237). The use of images of people as a material to proceed creative action regardless of who it is in the image, be it a politician or an ordinary person, predicates the emancipatory potential of Internet memes. Degradation of people into an image to associate with new meanings resembles uncrowning practice in medieval carnivals that Bakhtin touches upon. As seen from the examples figures from television or politicians, or several authority figures from several fields have become subjects of memes that are in a way uncrowned in Bakhtinian sense in a carnivalesque manner. Not in terms of content but in the very design and articulation of these *capses*, there is a critical, though momentary, streak in abusing the images and words of many authority figures.

It is possible to conclude that subcultural phase of Internet memes in Turkey encompasses the creative consumption practices opening up a new space of communication. Although in these initial *capses*, it is hard to confront a well-articulated, specifically-defined critical stand, their very existence and opening a new

space provide a tool of critique later in a much more clear way. The most apparent critical potential of the memes of subcultural ways is the genesis of carnivalesque demeanour. In both formation of *İnci Sözlük* as a virtual community and in emergence of Internet memes, there is a carnivalesque tune created. *Capses* become a way of engagement with such authority figures, who are normally seen in traditional media channels in serious tones. The position of speaking is exchanged through memes, as ordinary people gained their voice by making authority figures speak in the way they want. Subcultural phase, in this sense, revealed the carnivalesque potential in creation of *capses*. As wider populations of Internet users embrace *caps* culture, this carnivalesque potential is materialized in the predominance of the theme of dealing with authority figures in political and pop culture related memes.




CHAPTER 5

MEMES GOING MAINSTREAM: POLITICAL AND POP CULTURE MEMES

Several studies on Internet memes, from a sociological and communicational perspective, frequently emphasize their place at contemporary popular culture and their role as political participation tool (Kobierecki 2014; Rintel 2013; Tay 2012; Shifman 2014). While *caps* creation and sharing emerged as an entertainment practice of a subcultural group in Turkey, they gradually leaped to other websites. especially social networks, appeared at mainstream news websites' galleries and becomes an issue of discussion in offline interactions. It is hard to attribute the production of *capses* to great masses as -even a little- its creation requires a technical ability, or at least familiarity with several websites that provides pattern for *caps* creation, but people contribute to their existence by putting them into circulation, sharing or reacting them. In a nutshell, the interest in *caps* as a cybercultural product to share and discuss over was apparently on the rise for the time period between 2009 and 2014.

Google search statistics service, Google Trends, indicates the breakout in the search for the word "*caps*" in Turkey especially after 2011, as provided in the third chapter. The data provided by Google also gives clues about most related topics searched in relation with *caps*. Among the top 12 related topics list, there are Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, İlber Ortaylı, Nur Yelitaş, Nihat Hatipoğlu, İsmet İnönü, Devlet Bahçeli, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (see table 5.1) which illustrate a coincidence with the infographic of *İnci Sözlük* to a large extent. Besides, most popular categories related with the word "*caps*" also strengthen the argument here that memes went mainstream with the topics reproached towards political and popular culture. Another interesting theme explicit in this data is that the most popular topics related to *caps* concentrate on authority figures rather than a specific event or TV/movie content.

Table 5.1. The list of top related topics to "caps" search in Google between 2009-2014 in Turkey <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2009-01-01%202015-01-01&geo=TR&q=caps>

Related topics 	Rising  
1 İlber Ortaylı - Turkish professor	Breakout
2 Nur Yerlitaş - Turkish fashion designer	Breakout
3 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan - President of Turkey	Breakout
4 Devlet Bahçeli - Turkish Politician	Breakout
5 Fethullah Gülen - Turkish preacher	Breakout
6 Vine - Service	Breakout
7 İsmet İnönü - Former President of Turkey	Breakout
8 Nihat Hatipoğlu - Turkish theologian	Breakout
9 Johnny Sins - Actor	Breakout
10 Local area network - Topic	Breakout
11 Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu - Turkish Politician	Breakout
12 9GAG - Website	Breakout

The heavy use of personalities, who represent authorities from several fields in most popular topics of *capses* display the direction of masses in appropriating *caps* culture. Having its sources in subcultural streaks, *caps* culture became into popular through the use of popular authority figures from several fields. They turned into a consumption mechanism of popular media content as well as political issues by wider populations eluding from the domination of a single website. Besides, there emerges a strong interaction between pop culture and political culture. The use of elements from pop culture turned into a common mechanism that is used in political memes in a way that deconstructs the hierarchical relationship. The intersection between

political and pop culture materials also exhibits the very nature of postmodern creations that is dominated with hybridity and pastiche.

In this chapter, I will explore on the mainstream phase of *caps* culture by discussing political culture memes and pop culture memes that are extracted from the meme pool presented in the previous chapter. Starting with exploration on overall nature and material of the *capses*, I will highlight the function of these *capses* from an audience perspective. Namely, I will elaborate on what they evoke in the audience as a visual material. Political memes open up the possibility to explore on how political issues are turned to a tool of vernacular creativity and humor. While, pop-culture related memes would display how Internet users appropriate from the content in traditional media sites. Regarding both, *caps* productions exhibit creative consumption potentials on the Internet again. Yet specifically the critical streak of *caps* culture faded in the tendency to deal with authority figures popular in these categories.

5.1. Caps Collections on Popular Cultural Themes

The category of popular culture memes basically implies the reflections of *capses* on other mass culture texts and materials. Under this category, there are *caps* collections fed by the products of culture industry, having their source of inspiration on TV series or shows, movies, etc. The cluster consists of the following memes: Lord of the Rings, Leyla and Mecnun, İlber Ortaylı, Nur Yerlitaş, Nihat Hatipoğlu, Kurtuluş Şakirağaoğlu, Salih Amel. Among these, there are distinctively popular examples like Nur Yerlitaş, Nihat Hatipoğlu and İlber Ortaylı as Google statistics indicates in the above lists of related topics. These three collections are also striking for their demonstration of the encounter between tactics and strategies brightly. Others are based on several TV and movie content. While first two collection of the category is on specific TV series/movie, the last two are based on characters from TV series. Taking account of these examples, *caps* productions firstly may serve as a commentary tool for TV, movie audience to give a reflection to what is seen. Secondly, there are also *caps* productions, which are articulated in a way that satires

the popular culture texts at stake. Hence, it is possible to read *caps* collections under this category either as a practice of fandom or as a critical reflection on culture industry or a combination of both.

Lord of the Rings and Leyla and Mecnun are examples of *caps* series based on a general product rather than specific characters. The *caps* series on Lord of the Rings, the mega-hit movie series adopted from best-seller books, is created by a fan group of the movie. The first examples of this collection were found in a Facebook group created by fans of the series with the name of “monte”(reassembly) implying montage in the creation of the items. Hence, the series, in this regard, appoints the indications of exceeding boundaries of *İnci Sözlük*.

The images captured from the movies are juxtaposed with ordinary sentences in a way that propose a new way of seeing the movie. The fantastic tune of the movie is turned upside down to a mundane manner. Historical references, everyday clichés, and creative reflections on the movie itself are among the themes found in the collection. Overall, the audience of the hit-movie puts their creative potential into action as a fandom practice.

Below are the *capses* that are also creative fandom practices. Figure 5.1 depicts a conversation scene between two characters of the movie one of which does not take place in the original books. Those who can understand and laugh to the joke here are the ones who are enough informed about the book and the movie. Figure 5.2, on the other hand, invites the issues of Turkey’s history to the joke. Gandalf, the wise man in the scene, replies Frodo, who seems looking at the ring, with the cliché sentence that is stated in relation to the Alphabet Reform in 1928 in the period of foundation of Republic in Turkey. Another one displays a crowded war scene from the movie and superimposes the title “The exit of vocational school for girls” referring to the interest of high school age boys to the girls. The collection also includes the examples in which lyrics of Turkish folk songs are associated with the scenes of the movie. Hence, the

fantastic world of the movie and books are interrupted and rewritten by vulgarizing the scene.



Figure 5.1. Lord of the Rings *caps* (Translation: Dad/ Dad why are you not talking to me, something happened?/ I do not want to interact with the character who is not in the book at all.)



Figure 5.2. Lord of the Rings *caps* (Translation: I cannot read it, I guess it is in the Elf language. / We cannot even read the rings of our ancestors, they turned our people to illiterate in one night.)

Another *caps* series dealing with content from TV is *Leyla and Mecnun*. *Leyla and Mecnun* is a TV series that turns into a cult among young generation in Turkey in absurd comedy genre (Lüküslü 2015). Ridiculing clichés and restrictions innate to Turkish TV series culture in an ironic way, the series, itself, can be discussed in the

frame of tactics of Michel de Certeau (Lüküslü 2015). Cutting catchwords from the series and combining with the images of the characters, the collection emerges as a practice of fandom as Lord of the Rings collection.

Different from Lord of the Rings collection, this collection does not use the techniques of subversion, montage or manipulation. Rather, most of the *capses* on Leyla and Mecnun emerges as review of the content of the series. The reason to this seems the predominance of absurd humor in the movie itself. As the script already provides humorous manner, the audience does not necessarily intervene into it. In this sense, *capses* work in their initial meaning of cyberculture of Turkey within this series as it was used for captured scenes from a movie to give an idea about general theme. In addition to the ones that directly copy the script of the movie as subtitle to *caps*, there are also ones that use the frames of minds of the characters as representative to everyday moods (see example in figure 5.3)



Figure 5.3. Leyla and Mecnun caps. (Translation: We when the guests for eid come)

Another two series on TV/movie content are Kurtuluş Şakirağaoğlu and Salih Amel *capses*. But different from the above-mentioned two collections, these are collections based on specific characters one is real and the latter is fictional. Different from other series under this category, these are caps collections that exhibit a dominance of *İnci Sözlük* users again in terms of creation explicit in the dominance of *incicaps* sign in the visuals.

Salih Amel is a character from a TV series named 5th Dimension (*5. Boyut*), which gives normative and religious messages about human relationships based on a strict distinction of evil and good. Salih Amel is the character that appears as the

representative of the good side and he is in the aim of correcting the evil within different narratives in the series. *Capses* on him ridicules the simplistic logic and distinctions of the series depicting the change of the people with the one look of Salih Amel character from evil to good (see figure 5.4). Here, *capses* in this sense emerge as a creative consumption example again yet it is also possible to regard this series much more satiric than two others. *Capses* process the absurdity of his leading transformation of people in a quick sequence.



Figure 5.4. Salih Amel *caps*. (Translation: Heads up / Heads to Kiblah)

Kurtuluş Şakirağaoğlu is an actor who acted for a long while in a daily TV series. *İnci Sözlük* users, attributing the actor the nickname of “Standing Uncle” (*Duran Adam*), turned him into a *caps* figure without any specific reason. There are *capses* that points out exactly the meaninglessness of him in *capses*. He is illustrated in a way that cannot make sense that why on the earth he became a *caps* figure. The common pattern that is copied through alterations is the sentence that “I understood that you do X, but why do you do Y?” with a musing photo of him. As in figure 5.5, the *caps* gives reference to the general mode of the collection. This series, as coming out of *İnci Sözlük* again, carry the manner innate to operations of *İnci Sözlük* users. The

practice of defining a target without any specific reason and concentrating on it with a trolling manner is in relation to their visits to other media websites, or online polls. These practices work for strengthening the community bonds as illustrating their power outside of the website. This *caps* collection about Şakirağaoğlu resembles the same way of conduct in terms of its emergence. The main theme of collection is finding the presence of him as a *caps* figure as he is regarded as a less effective figure in the series he played which is explicit in the nickname “standing man”.



Figure 5.5. Kurtuluş Şakirağaoğlu *caps*. (Translation: What's happening, I do not understand?)

The common function of all four *caps* collections mentioned above is initially reflecting on scripts and characters of popular culture texts. They are examples of extension of watching practices of the TV or cinema audience. Internet, as a peculiar public sphere of the postmodern age, influences the practices of audience of traditional media sites. Internet users, who are also consumers of TV/movie products, reflect on the text they encounter in a creative, playful and productive way.

The function of humor is various but cohesion function dominates the visual materials at stake. In the first two collections examined, the *capses* and humor around them function as a fandom practice. Those who can understand and laugh the jokes regarding Lord of the Rings or Leyla and Mecnun can be the ones who are familiar with the original item. The cohesion function is at stake in the other two collections too, yet in a different manner. Rather than fandom, these collections evoke a sense of ridiculing the material in the audience. The difference of their emotional keying from others firstly results from the fact that their creators are *İnci Sözlük* users mostly. The manner of trolling pervaded to *İnci Sözlük* community's

practices within and outside of the website manifests itself in these collections. Either from a critical or a fandom perspective, laughing upon the same material creates a sense of inclusion among the people who can laugh at it by sharing, creating or liking it. While humor seems at functioning for strengthening communication through these collections, there is the other side of the coin. As argued “[t]he flip side of this inclusive function of humor is exclusion” (Kuipers 2008, 366). These collections, as well, may work for inhibiting communication between who are familiar with these texts and who are not.

The *caps* series on Nur Yerlitaş and İlber Ortaylı are exclusively popular ones among this category and in general *caps* culture in Turkey. As seen in the data provided by Google (see table 5.1), the names of these two figures are among the top phrase searched with the word *caps*. Following them, Nihat Hatipoğlu *capses*, falling under this category, are also among the most popular topics related with *caps*. These are collections on people who became popular through the television programs they participated. All three represent a figure of authority in their specific fields. While they appear to provide information and knowledge, as the site of strategy, on TV, these collections demonstrate how information coming from them can be consumed in different ways than they calculated. In this sense, these collections are good examples to explore on tactical consumption depicted by Michel de Certeau. Hence, I will present a detailed analysis of these series in this section.

The *caps* series on İlber Ortaylı constitutively has the pattern of his disgust towards “ignorants”. İlber Ortaylı is a prominent history professor, who has an eye-catching knowledge store and competence especially with his language skills and accumulation in Ottoman history. Frequently appearing on television programs about historical issues, it is very clear that his accumulation of knowledge is impressive and rare. The point of origin of this meme collection is certainly the line of conduct immanent in İlber Ortaylı’s talks and lectures. In his talks he frequently uses the words “ignorant”, “half-ignorants” or other words which implies ignorance towards Turkish intellectuals and even towards the presenter of the program he

participated.¹⁸ The demonstration of his irritation from people's ignorance implicitly or reference to his wide knowledge triggered this series. Once such an image of Ortaylı referring his knowledge and intelligence and people's ignorance showed up, it triggered many remakes. Attracting a great attention of the Internet users in Turkey, the *capses* are even discussed within TV programs by Ortaylı himself in several times.¹⁹

The *caps* series consists of İlber Ortaylı's images captured from his lectures, talks, TV programs etc. A few of these images are the ones that are manipulated via photomontage techniques, but a major part is used without manipulation. In line with his facial expression and mimicry in the photo, a humorous subtitle is superimposed on the photo. Basically there are two themes in the texts either they refer to İlber Ortaylı's wisdom, knowledge and intelligence or they refer to ignorance or lack of knowledge of the other people. There is not a common sentence pattern, but the word "ignorant" is a popular one adopted in the text. One *caps* showing him with glasses in his hand is titled as "You do not have a vision such as these glasses" or "those who speak less than 7 languages, please, do not ask" (see figure 5.7). In another one he is laughing, the text lets off "my sole rival is Google". Wrinkling his face in figure 5.6, he is attributed with another sentence that ironically touches his hatred towards the ignorants: "You are too ignorant, I wish you would die".

¹⁸ A part of his speech from a TV program, he emphasized the ignorance that irritates him can be found in the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwTVAllyNGs>

¹⁹ The commentary he made regarding his *capses* in a TV program : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gAVBv0DUAs



Figure 5.6. İlber Ortaylı *caps*. (Translation: You are too ignorant, wish you would die)



Figure 5.7. İlber Ortaylı *caps*. (Translation: Those who know less than 7 languages, please do not ask questions)

İlber Ortaylı with his remarkable personal and educational background represents an upper class man and the position of the producer of knowledge and information in his field. From the position of the authority with his knowledge accumulation, he acts in a calm manner in terms of calling people as illiterate, ignorant, half-ignorant, etc. While, the *capses* of İlber Ortaylı has turned upside down the position of speakers of audience. The audience of Ortaylı reflects his speech, his accusations within his speech by creating these items in a way. Through *capses*, the audience gains the position of speaker by rewriting sentences to his glances. Namely, the *caps* series, at the first hand, shows how people consume the knowledge coming from him. The

images of him turn into a material of Internet users to have fun, to practice creative consumption.

Elaborating on the implications of the play with images of Ortaylı brings us to explore on the functions of humor that predominates the collection. Relief, as one of the basic functions attributed to humor, imprints here. The function of relief implies proposing a moment of freedom to the communication and abandoning the formal restrictions. Such a freedom is also related with Bakhtin's connotation that medieval laughter also implies "defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts" (Bakhtin 1984, 92). Presumably, the wide knowledge accumulation of Ortaylı puts him in a difficult position to communicate for ordinary people as he may easily react them labelling "ignorant". While *capses* transcend the impassable communication borders between Ortaylı and Internet users, their humor relieves the restrictions of being formal, serious or of being enough informed to pose a question.

Likewise İlber Ortaylı, Nihat Hatipoğlu, too is a professor that turns into a meme figure in Turkey. Hatipoğlu is a theology professor. The origin of the collection is based on his conduct of a TV program in which he discusses religious issues, and answers the questions coming from the audience regarding these issues. Giving a dramatic tone to his voice, with a melancholic background music, he transmits his religious anecdotes and knowledge store. Hence again, he occupies a position to which questions are posed. He generally appears on one of the mainstream TV channels during Ramadan, the holy month of Muslim population during which they fast from sunrise to sunset. It is also known that he is paid in huge amounts for this program, which becomes at stake in the *capses* about him.



Figure 5.8. Nihat Hatipoğlu caps. (Translation: The wealthy of the 11 months.)



Figure 5.9. Nihat Hatipoğlu caps. (Translation: Of course, it is a sin. Are you mad?)

The *capses* associate titles according to his gestures and move. The dominant function of the humor embedded in the collection is ridiculing. Figure 5.8 exemplifies needling to the issue of his excessive gain. Subverting the phrase of “sultan of the 11 months” attributed to Ramadan, the image is superimposed with “wealthy of the 11 months” and hints at the huge amounts of money he gains from the religious program he conducted during Ramadan. In figure 5.9 there is a humorous touch to the general content of this program. The program consists of his giving talks on religious issues and answering the questions of audience on these issues. Various *capses* of collection joke around the absurdity of questions posed in the program as well as the answers of Hatipoğlu.

The collection on Nur Yerlitaş evokes a mode similar to İlber Ortaylı *capses* in terms of dealing with upper classes and turning positions upside down. Nur Yerlitaş is a fashion designer recently appearing on TV shows and competitions on fashion and dressing. She participates as jury member to a TV fashion show, *İşte Benim Stilim*

(That's My Style), in which participants gain points by dressing stylish each day. The background of *caps* collection on Nur Yerlitaş lies in the observations of the audience of the program. While evaluating the competitors as a jury member, a moment of her grimacing to express her disgust or dissatisfaction is captured and turned her into a “*caps* star”.

The collection consists of combinations of her sour face expression with several contexts and places. Photomontage is a constituent technique in formation of the collection. In one of them, her dissatisfied face is situated to the body of cult picture Mona Lisa, in another she holds the Statue of Liberty and complains from her exhaustion. While in another she is in a scene from the cult movie *Titanic* expressing her dissatisfaction with the legendary ship of the movie. A common sentence copied and circulated among the images is “What kind of a X this is”. There are also other superimposed titles that ridicule her dissatisfaction. Figure 5.10, figure 5.11 and figure 5.12 constitute a sample of examples from the collection.



Figure 5.10. Nur Yerlitaş *caps*. (Translation: My arm is in pain.)

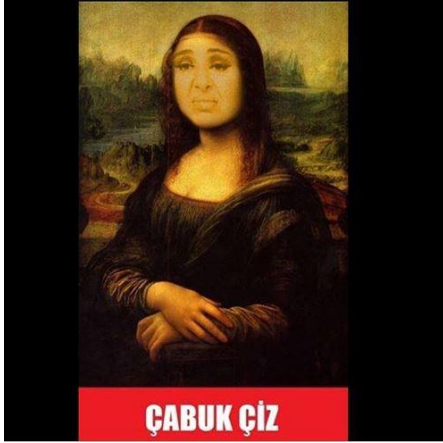


Figure 5.11. Nur Yerlitaş *caps*. (Translation: Draw it quickly)



Figure 5.12. Nur Yerlitaş *caps*. (Translation: What kind of a ship is this)

In a similar line with İlber Ortaylı and Nihat Hatipoğlu *capses*, this collection of texts on Nur Yerlitaş is an intervention into the field of authority. Their positions to judge in everyday life become the point that makes them a *caps* figure. “As in management, every "strategic" rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its own place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an “environment”” (Certeau 1984, 36). In the origins of the *caps* collections on Ortaylı, Yerlitaş and Hatipoğlu, there is a tendency to play with this attempt to distinguish their own place. Ortaylı as a historian, Yerlitaş as a fashion designer, and Hatipoğlu as a theologian represent a site of power in their specific fields as they are in the position to whom people ask for information. These collections, on the other hand, display people do not just passively consume the statements they offer. Especially in the case of Nur Yerlitaş and İlber Ortaylı, their tendency to differentiate their place as the site of authority (by calling people ignorant, or expressing a disgustful face) became a laughing matter for people. Michel de Certeau specifies tactics as the art of the weak briefly. These

collections, in this regard, illustrate materialization of this, as they emerge as an attempt to gain voice in the face of such people of authorities.

The alternative response to their presentation of themselves is a challenge to the positions of authority in *capses* through humorous articulation which directs the attention to carnivalesque atmosphere of the Internet. Bakhtin puts a great emphasis on the suspension of hierarchical relations in the time of carnival (Bakhtin 1984, 10). This suspension opens way for different ways of looking to these relations. In all the three collections examined, there is a suspension of hierarchical relations of everyday life in both challenging their serious positions and in subverting the position of the speaker.

The “temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life” (Bakhtin 1984, 10). The connotation of Bakhtin seems in a meaningful correlation with the existence of Internet memes. Regarding *capses*, explicit in especially the last three collections of this category, there is such a potential in taking authority figures of his/her fields and turning the position of speaker upside-down. Both their character coming from their specific articulation as cybercultural products and humor that dominates the language of them contribute the carnivalesque potential of them. Regardless of the serious positioning they occupy, these collections play with the words, looks, moves, etc., of them. This peculiar communication in which hierarchical relations are suspended, reveals the potential of *capses* as a fissure to authority mechanisms of everyday life. When it comes to political memes, such connotations of *caps* productions would be enlightening in order to trace that is embedded in them.

5.2. Caps Collections on Political Figures

“Politics—both in its broad sense as the societal construction of power and in its narrow sense as a system of governance—is deeply intertwined with the construction and consumption of Internet memes” (Shifman 2014, 142-143). There is an

undeniable potential in Internet memes to be used as a political participation tool as a flagship product of participatory web. Aforementioned examples of *caps* collections already include references to political issues and figures. Yet, here under the category of political culture *caps* collections, there are examples that concentrate on politicians and political events specially. While presenting their criteria for selection of publication of *capses* produced in the website, İnci and Kullar annotate elimination of *capses* about political figures especially if they could be regarded humiliating (Kullar and İnci 2015). In spite of the initial annotation of İnci and Kullar, it cannot be concluded that the production of such memes are prohibited. The first *caps* collection on a political figure (Devlet Bahçeli) emerges within *İnci Sözlük* again. Besides the potential of *caps* creation as a tool of political participation and public commentary, there emerges a keen interest in using political figures or taking political events as a material for *caps* creation. Namely, the present sight of *caps* culture displays a heavy tendency in using images of political figures and investigation of the attitude embedded in the items get nearly impossible in time as they dispersed out of the website and became an important tool of political communication.

The first *caps* collection about a political content is Devlet Bahçeli *capses* as mentioned. To give a brief background, Devlet Bahçeli is a member of parliament also leading a right-wing, nationalist political party Nationalist Movement Party. The most common themes emergent in the collection is Bahçeli's love of tea and his insistence on saying "no" regarding any issue. There are creations that captures the issue totally independent from political conjuncture as well as the ones that satires his stand. The elements from pop culture texts are remixed in a way that creates a common language to communicate with political texts. Figure 5.13 is an illustration of this. Referring to action fantasy film "The Last Airbender", his photo in which he drinks tea is superimposed with the title: the last teabender.



SON CAY BÜKÜCÜ

Figure 5.13. Devlet Bahçeli *caps*. (Translation: The last teabender)



SAKİN OL LİSELİ

Figure 5.14. Devlet Bahçeli *caps*. (Translation: Stay calm high-school boy)

Following Devlet Bahçeli collection, there emerges *caps* series on Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, two of whom lead other two prominent political parties of the country and became two of the most important political figures of the recent years. Since 2010, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has been leading a secular left-wing party that is also main opposition party for the last 17 years, Republican People's Party. And Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is current president of Turkey and was the political leader of Justice and Development Party during the time period these series burst out. The *caps* series on two figures go hand in hand making references to each other as well as containing independent examples. The striking patterns in the collection of Kılıçdaroğlu are his goofs, perpetual dissent, and election campaign promises (see example in figure 5.15). While Recep Tayyip Erdoğan *capses* concentrate on the themes of restrictions he initiated, his inclination to dominate every field, the phrase of "long-man" dedicated to him, or German leader Angela Merkel's glances to him.



Figure 5.15. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu *caps*. (Translation: (İlber Ortaylı to Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu) Is opposition a hobby kind of thing, or do you really earn anything from it?)

A general overview of the collections gives the idea that the *capses* function neither sole as mere opposition nor only support mechanism. Rather there are ones that evoke sympathy as well as the ones that touch the political issues in a subtle and satiric way. Indeed from a general viewpoint these collections can constitute the transportation of ongoing conflict between two parties to new media platform. Here, the indigenous side of *caps* culture as a cybercultural product that blurs the distinctions between conformity and critique manifests itself.

Another *caps* collection that blinks among others is Kim Jong-un memes which is based on a political leader out of Turkey different from all other collections under this category. This is a series that illustrates interaction between cybercultures like the *caps* series on GTA in the Internet culture memes. Kim Jong-un is the young, supreme leader of North Korean Republic known with his consecutive assassinations after coming into power. Know Your Meme appoints the common patterns in this meme as images of Kim Jong-un looking at things. The emergence of Kim Jong-un memes in Turkey displays the interaction among cybercultural trends yet, there emerge also differences when they adopted. In Turkey, the ones ridiculing his exotic ways of assassinations display a majority. Hence Kim Jong-un *capses* emerge as a part of global flow on memes ridiculing Kim Jong un.



Figure 5.16. Kim Jong-un *caps*. (Translation: The joy of assassination with friends)

Another *caps* collection focusing on a personality, and reinvents the people at stake is İsmet İnönü *capses*. İsmet İnönü was a leading person in the period of foundation of Turkish Republic together with the founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He is supposed to be the vice man of this historical period. He was the first prime minister of the Republic and he became the second President after the death of Mustafa Kemal. He played important roles in the War of Independence in critical sites and commissioned as delegate in important agreements and negotiations after the war. Having references to this contextual base, the meme collection on İsmet İnönü concentrates on the idea of his remaining secondary in the existence of Mustafa Kemal.

These memes are based on photos of İsmet İnönü and Mustafa Kemal together, or İsmet İnönü alone referring to the relationship of the two. Photos used in these *capses* are black-white generally without any manipulation or photomontage. So the caption plays a much more important role in construction of this meme collection. Thematically based on İsmet İnönü as the second man, there are *capses* that illustrate Mustafa Kemal reprehending İsmet İnönü or giving directions to him, or that illustrate İnönü's childish manner that presents him as vanishing under the Mustafa Kemal's shadow.

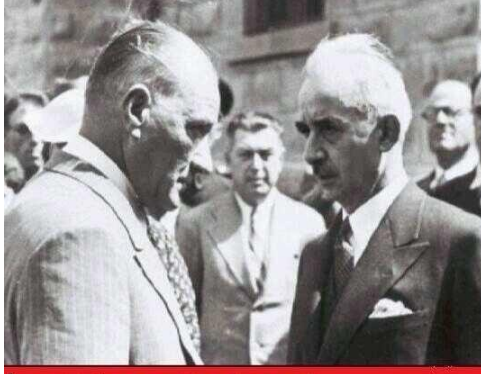
An article on this collection of texts mentions the power of the caps creations in uncovering an archive of historical photographs (Dede, Koca and Erdem 2014, 112). The collection is also intriguing in terms of showing the capacity of *capses* to intervene into political history with an alternative mode of seeing. The change of perspective lies at the change the reading the period as from the history of wins to

the history of defeat based on İsmet İnönü's loss. While the traditional reading/writing of the period of foundation of Republic is associated with the wins, developments and improvements, the *caps* collection proposes images from the period focusing on failures of İnönü in daily life as well as political issues at the expense of Mustafa Kemal.

The images of two most prominent figures in Turkey's political history become a site of creation for Internet users in this collection. The elements from everyday life clichés are in high use in the collection contributing to its humorous articulation. This alternates the official reading of the history. Depiction of İnönü as the secondary man is the mode of seeing that invokes people to the collection. In this sense, the collection functions for sympathizing with İnönü from a different perspective.



Figure 5.17. İsmet İnönü *caps*. (Translation: Did you finish Nutella, İsmet?)



İsmet Paşa: Kızdın mı?
Atatürk: Olm "1. İnönü Savaşı çok tutunca 2.sini yaptık" ne demek lan?

Figure 5.18. İsmet İnönü *caps*. (Translation: İsmet Paşa: Are you mad at me? Atatürk: What does it mean "when 1st İnönü War becomes so popular, we did the Second"?)

The last collection meme pool appoints is the collection on Presidency Elections in 2014. *Capses* take shape in parallel with election campaigns of the presidency candidates. 2014 presidency elections were the first direct election of presidency of Turkey's history. Before the president is used to be elected by parliamentary members. Hence, it was the first time Presidency candidates carried out their campaign by addressing people. There were three candidates of the election; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the prime minister of the time, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the candidate supported by both Nationalist Movement Party and Republican People's Party, and Selahattin Demirtaş, the candidate of the Kurdish and leftists mostly. The winner of the election became Erdoğan. *Caps* creations and share persisted during the election campaign period as well as after the results announced. There are *capses* about each of the candidates, as well as the ones that includes the President of the time; Abdullah Gül (see figures 5.19, 5.20, 5.21 and 5.22).



Figure 5.19. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu *caps*. (Translation: Is there an award for the second? You see, I came just after the first.)



Figure 5.20. Presidency elections *caps*. (Translation: Do not forget me, man.)



Figure 5.21. Presidency elections *caps*. (Translation: You won't leave the President's House without paying the bills dude, will you? They say, two months haven't been paid yet?)



Figure 5.22. Presidency elections *caps*. (Translation: I will become marshall, tooo.)

The basic function of this collection is its service for public commentary. In line with the developments in the political agenda, Internet users reflect on the political landscape they observed. The examples above show that neither of them evokes a sense of supporting or opposing in a direct sense. Rather they play with the seriousness of the issue. Rather than presenting well-reasoned arguments, the general tendency of the collection is vulgarizing the issue. In figure 5.22, Erdoğan's photograph is combined with the sentence: I will become marshall tooo. In a way, this *caps* touches upon his desire for further power positions. Still, it does not do that in a serious manner instead the tone of the dictatorial desire in the sentence is softened with a childishness in writing.

Political *caps* collections, in any case, contribute enhancing participation on political issues, either historical or current. Basically, they emerge as a reflection mechanism for masses. Internet stands as a much open space than any other media sites at this point. Still, mass participation does not correspond with democratization. Rather, there is a peculiar way of approaching the issues explicit in the collections. Putting politicians in a childish situation implies a carnivalesque spirit where the king is uncrowned. Degradation of political authorities to body images that speak in a vulgar tune without their political surroundings can be conceived as the contemporary uncrowning practice in a sense.

5.3. Evaluation of the Functions of *Capses* in Mainstream Phase

The collections of texts examined in this chapter appoint a tendency to intermingle the elements of popular and political culture. While it is possible to see historical and political references within popular culture memes, political memes is articulated with the elements of popular culture. In this sense, they illustrate the power of *capses* in enhancing participation. Without necessarily being a political *caps*, there are political references in an alteration of a collection although it is based on a popular culture text. When it comes to political *capses*, productions do not necessarily articulate the issues in a serious manner that demands a change, presents a clear critique or incites a resistance. Rather, there is a sense of play that emerges as a challenge to traditional perspective of political participation. In all of them, there is a humorous volume contributing to the sense of play with the issues at stake.

Aforementioned that there are various functions of humor in the collections. While it functions as a cohesion mechanism in collections that bounds the audience together in entertaining with the content, it also provides relief or the means for ridiculing the absurdity observed in political agenda, or pop culture texts. The collections on TV/movie content that work as a fandom practice puts forward the cohesion function, as people who can understand and laugh gather around these *capses*. As noted previously, the cohesion function of humor is two-fold. While these collections function as a uniting mechanism for people who can understand and laugh at the jokes, the excluding function, on the other hand, is at work for those who cannot.

Ridiculing or satirizing the target is also apparent in the collections that deal with the absurdity of the material. Related with ridiculing and satirizing influence of humor, relief function predominates the collections in the popular phase of *capses* especially in the ones that deal with authority figures.

Bakhtin's depiction on uncrownings of carnivals also makes sense when it comes the collections that play with the images of authority figures from several fields, either of

a popular or of a political one. While elaborating on the images of kings in Rabelais' novel, Bakhtin conceives an abuse of authority in a carnivalesque spirit. Putting kings into clownish dressings in representation of uncrowning practices share the same spirit of Internet users' taking the images of authority figures and transforming them into a matter of laughter. There is, in this sense, a fissure to authority and this fissure is noteworthy in terms of its potential for social critique.

There is a strong emphasis on power of humor as a tool of social protest (Hart 2007, 1). The examples of appropriation of Internet memes in several social movements like Occupy Wall Street or Occupy Gezi in Turkey might be the example of realization of this argument for Internet memes. Both relief and cohesion functions of humor that are dominant through the *capses* investigated can be connected to such political mobilization from several aspects. Briefly, cohesion function may serve for mobilization by gathering people around, while relief function serves by inhibiting fear or anxiety that retains people from taking action. While their critical power, or the value for political opposition is apparent at their uses in such crisis events or the ones on political issues, events, personalities, etc., as a participatory tool, the operation of this argument crystallized as the mode of seeing or emotional energy they invoke in the audience taken into consideration.

The mode of seeing they invite the audience, firstly, is a deviation from settled ways of approaching the issues. Regarding carnival, Bakhtin notes that it elicits new outlooks and this implies an emancipation of consciousness (Bakhtin 1984, 274). Humor enters into stage at this point. Political *caps* collections illustrate the intervention of humor into serious issues of politics. In this sense, they provide a way for emancipation of consciousness offering a new perspective. Intervening into highly serious issues with a sense of play they rather appoint the blurring lines that separates fields at the age of the Internet. But the main emphasis of Bakhtin on carnival is its being a temporary difference, a momentary relief, a transient suspension of restrictions.

If the issue of general mode of seeing these productions and reproductions is in question, they mostly invoke a momentary relief at the expense of authority. As humor encourages divergent thinking both as creative and critical thinking (Morreall 2009, 113), the value of *caps* culture for construction of critique appears in triggering divergent thinking and positing a way of engaging with the issues diverging from a settled one.



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the visual as a dominant communication tool manifests itself within many spheres of daily life from urban space to various media spaces. Digital technologies have contributed greatly to the deployment of visual materials. My study has explored one particular kind of visual material in digital culture, and the political, social and cultural connotations of the new communication genre that has grown up around it. *Caps* culture, as examined, emerged due to the instinct to visualize within *İnci Sözlük*, a text-based site in its traditional use. As a part of Internet meme culture with its local peculiarities, *caps* culture embodies many characteristics of cybercultural productions. Rooted in a subcultural community and spreading into mass culture gradually, *caps* creations became visual documents of popular culture with a wealthy area of references in terms of content from politics to everyday issues.

The initial *caps* creations in Turkey emerged within a collaborative hypertext dictionary, which is a popular website genre in Turkey. The portrait I offered of *İnci Sözlük* community and its members' motivations helps clarify the background of *caps* culture. *İnci Sözlük* differed from other collaborative dictionaries in several respects. Intervening into other media sites or personalities in a playful way, the community of the website fought for different ways of expression that are commonly excluded or subordinated elsewhere. The site's distinctiveness was reflected in the formation of *caps* creations, too.

The subcultural elements in the background of *caps* culture are connected to several avant-garde movements in the 20th century. These movements were the cultural forebears of Internet memes, and Internet meme culture and *caps* culture resemble them in their techniques of creation and articulation of language. In the works of culture jammers, SI, and Dada, there is a predominance of the techniques of subversion, remix, copy-paste, alteration and manipulation that are at the heart of

caps culture. All, too, share a playful manner in their work, consistent with their common use of humorous language. Another point of interconnection is a cynical orientation towards political issues, which suggests a playful manner does not correspond to a well-articulated demand.

Caps creations, firstly, are an example of a peculiar genre of communication that Internet gave birth to. Internet users appropriate them as a commentary tool to reflect on a wide range of fields, from football to politics, and from pop culture texts to Internet-based interactions. In this regard, they illustrate the Internet's influence on enhancing participation. As the Internet provided a fundamentally different communication system than traditional media platforms in terms of its multi-directionality and openness to people, it inevitably gave birth to peculiar modes of communication. A striking attribute of *caps* creations is their emergence as collections to which Internet users contribute spontaneously and mostly anonymously. Based on numerous alterations of an original idea, image, text, etc., *caps* collections constitute a site in which political, aesthetic and technical dimensions come together.

My initial aim was to understand how collections of *caps* creations constitute social modes that are shared by the audience and creators of these items. Starting by categorizing the topics of a sample of popular *caps* series between 2009 and 2014, I divided the *caps* collections into four groups: football-related, Internet culture-related, pop-culture and political-culture memes. Of these, I discussed the first two as part of the subcultural phase *caps* culture, while the latter two as part of the *caps* culture's penetration into the mainstream. The distinctive feature of these memes in the subcultural phase was their strong links with the *İnci Sözlük* community. In contrast, during the mainstream phase, these *caps* collections attracted attention from multiple sites. The basic commonality between the two phases, on the other hand, is the way *caps* function as a tool for commentary and a means of practicing creative consumption.

Rather than the particular messages of unique *caps* items, I examined them as collections and searched for the meaning communicated throughout the collection. In football-related memes, the repetitive pattern was creation of *caps* collections on people who are divergent, different, or extraordinary in several respects. Such memes flourished in the subcultural phase of *caps* culture, and are in line with the concerns of *İnci Sözlük* community in embracing difference. Most importantly, these collections exemplified a creative energy of football audience in consuming football industry.

In the Internet culture-related memes, the first emergent theme is *İnci Sözlük* users' instinct to visualize. Second, the collections in this category demonstrate the predominance of remix practices in cybercultural productions in line with the works of the movements discussed as Internet memes's cultural antecedents. Internet users intermingle their areas of interest with references from a wide range of different fields of socio-cultural production, from politics to academia. In this sense, the collections embody miniscule interventions in these fields through an attempt to remix their imageries with mundane texts. The collections under this category, in this sense, illustrate the initial examples of *caps* collections that resemble a carnivalesque atmosphere by positing a potential for communication between ordinary people and upper classes. This inclination to use such prominent, famous or authority figures becomes much more visible when it comes to mainstream phase.

As the interests in *caps* culture grew out, it moved beyond its subcultural elements and the interests of the masses became visible in *caps* subjects. This process referred to a density in political and pop culture-related memes. Both political and pop culture-related items constitute a tool of public commentary. The collections on pop culture reflect on pop culture texts. Joking around absurdity within pop-cultural productions or mingling the elitist stance of some popular figures with mundane issues were among popular themes in this category. Among political collections, a concentration on using authority figures is apparent. Imageries of people who are

difficult for ordinary people to communicate within everyday life became the site of play in these creations.

All the collections of *capses* constitute a site of creative consumption during both the subcultural and mainstream phase,. Following Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday life, I depicted the uses of political, cultural, sports-related, historical, and other materials as a base for consumption as production through *capses*. From a general perspective, they are one of a number of ways of appropriating the space of the Internet among many others. If we take Internet as an area on which strategies are settled, people's participation through *capses* is a tactical use of this environment. From a specific perspective, *caps* creations emerge as a tactical appropriation of the images from various fields. Regarding football-related memes, these *capses* are spontaneous creations that constitute a way of consumption in football industry. Football audiences reflect on people or events through *capses*, which imply both consumption and production. Popular culture memes are also a way of consuming popular culture texts in a way, while political memes are also illustrations of how people re-appropriate the flow of information from this field.

There is an emancipatory dimension to *capses* as creative practices of consumption that intervenes into domination of certain expression styles. They emerge in a spontaneous way and frequently address serious issues with humor. In this emancipatory potential of spontaneous, creative practices of *caps* culture that lie outside of the calculations of the system of production, there is a streak that makes the theories of de Certeau and Bakhtin speak to each other. The tactical manner that de Certeau conceives in the miniscule details of everyday life is also apparent and elaborated in Bakhtin's elaboration on the phenomenon of laughter.

Embedded in George Orwell's quote describing each joke as a tiny revolution and Bakhtin's proposal of laughter as temporary liberation, I traced the question of whether critical humor is present in a manner of resistance, expressing discontent or more softly dealing with the authorities. The humorous articulation of these

creations implies an entertainment function but there are also implications of critique or a challenge to authority in terms of giving voice to a search for an alternative means of communication.

The Internet serves as a carnivalesque public space in terms of abandoning daily hierarchies and suppressing different styles of expression. This is most explicit in the collections based on political events or personalities as well as other authority figures from different fields like İlber Ortaylı, Fatih Terim, Nur Yerlitaş, and Nihat Hatipoğlu. At the first hand, these collections emerge as a tactical reappropriation of the knowledge and stance that they present on television. Although they are personalities who are difficult to communicate within daily life, *caps* creations provide opportunities to engage with them from several perspectives, challenging their serious positions in daily life. In this sense, many examples from these collections displayed a resemblance with the momentary relief present within the depictions of uncrowning in Bakhtin's work.

My analysis of the collections indicates that there are two main functions of humor at work: social cohesion and relief. These are functions that tie humor to social protest in terms of triggering mobilization. The first brings people together and the second gives a sense of momentary freedom from anxiety and fear in the face of authorities. Yet the rebelliousness lying at the momentary liberation does not always equate with the politics of rebellion, and they do not generate a social demand (Billig 2005, 208-209). In this regard, *caps* creations mostly emerge as momentary fissures in hierarchies or tactical reappropriations of the spaces of authority. In their sense of play, there is a cynical orientation recalling the cultural forebears of Internet meme culture. Acting out of reasoned and rationalized politics or activism, they create a much more playful language of their own.

Although Internet memes have been described as prominent tools of political participation and satire in several studies, *caps* culture does not seem to fit this mold. Despite the emancipatory potential of the carnivalesque manner embedded in their

creation, they function as neither strictly oppositional nor supportive mechanisms or they do not burst out with a reasoned discourse that present a demand for change. Rather, playfulness is always their predominant feature. In this sense, rather than constructing or devaluing the critique, *caps* culture in Turkey can be regarded in line with the evolution of the nature of critique on the Internet in terms of blurring the line between entertainment and critique.

Overall, *caps* culture encapsulates many implications of the influence of digital technologies on everyday life. It exemplifies the everyday creativity of people on the Internet, the so-called new agora-. Their formation is radically attracting in terms of ownership of the content, has implications for consumption and production. Adding a site to visual culture, it became a remarkable genre of communication. Its critical potential lies in the the divergent and critical thinking it opens up, rather than singular messages or attacks to authority fields.

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