

**Folds of Authoritarianism:  
Political Mobilization, Financial Capitalism, and Islamism in Turkey**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Science

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2018



## **Abstract**

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Beginning with 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has mobilized millions of Turkish citizens from the most impoverished districts of Istanbul. Based on two years of ethnographic engagement in two districts of Istanbul (Esenler and Kucukcekmece), the party's stronghold, this dissertation focuses on the conjunction of neoliberal economic transformations, mass mobilization and political Islam. By paying close attention to personal histories, daily capacities, emerging hopes and inter-generational grievances of the party members and sympathizers, it investigates how material and financial transformations facilitate and even promote a popular knowledge that authoritarian politics, embodied by the AKP in Turkey, are the only solution for the predicaments of late capitalism. The project aims to problematize some key presumptions of contemporary social scientific analyses, namely individualization, depoliticization, and economic rationality, and investigates the emergence of alternative practices in their steads: self-negation, authoritarian mobilization, and fundamentalist disposition.

To this end, the dissertation intervenes in four current debates of social scientific and public significance. Firstly, against the long standing debates about the character and consequences of neoliberal transformation in the global south, in which the general consensus is that these new economic practices have resulted in depoliticization and apathy among the masses, the project demonstrates that the very same economic policies

and practices result in the promotion of a form of mass mobilization that is authoritarian in its characteristics. Second, it intervenes in a related literature about depoliticization, which claims that the contemporary form of capitalism produces isolated individuals, i.e. individuation. The dissertation shows that neoliberal transformations have precipitated a wide range of political and social practices, like self-sacrifice of partisans, which produce alternative modes of political identification and new identities conditioned by economic vulnerability. Third, the research and analysis argues that the critique of bureaucracy and bureaucratic regulations, conceived as sources of unproductivity and institutional rigidities by neoliberal thought collectives, has been appropriated by the masses in Turkey as a part of anti-formalist policies that the AKP propagates. However, the popular critique of bureaucracy among the AKP partisans does not produce a version of liberal governance, in which transparency, flexibility, and accountability are dominant values, but a popular conviction that rules, regulations, and laws may be suspended for the interest of “the people,” thus legitimizing the violation of “bureaucratic” rights, be they human rights, freedom of speech, or fair trial principle. Lastly, this dissertation furthers a significant body of anthropological works on political Islam that complicates the relationships between secularism and religiosity by showing their co-constituted histories. However, it substantially diverges from the trajectory of this literature by shifting the focus from morality to efficacy, from cultural politics to political economy. Ultimately, the purpose of the dissertation is to understand how neoliberal economic transformations provided a suitable social, material and political context for religiously informed authoritarian practices without attributing any essentialized qualities to their religious characteristics.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After having finished writing a dissertation, I can more confidently argue that any work of intellectual exertion has characteristics and qualities resembling those of a section or a chapter from a longer book. Events take place; characters enter and exit; and the protagonist(s), generally, lives through. A story unfolds. This dissertation is a small part of such a story that many people, including myself, witnessed its many different aspects –aspects that sometimes intersect and sometimes not.

The setting that rendered possible many of the ideas in the dissertation was generously provided by Columbia University, more specifically by the Department of Anthropology, and even more specifically by my committee members. Rosalind Morris played an immensely influential role in bringing out each and every possibly meaningful articulation in this work, punctuating the rhythm of my thinking and writing, expanding the horizon within which my intellectual speculations travelled with her compass. I am forever indebted to her. Nadia Abu El-Haj has been an invaluable benchmark to measure the validity and intelligibility of my writing, not to mention her persistent support in hard times. Naor Ben-Yehoyada joined our department after I finished my field research, but his amazing sharpness and passionate engagement helped me define my project in ways that I would not be able to come up with by myself. Miriam Ticktin and Louis Fishman acted more than external committee members and provided crucial support that shifted my perspective on many questions that I tried to ask in the dissertation.

Beyond my committee, the Department of Anthropology turned into a home for me. Elizabeth Povinelli has inspired many of my ideas and theoretical attempts. She showed me the possibility of combining ambition and rigor into one's work. Apart from being an academic legend, Partha Chatterjee is one of the most generous intellectuals I have ever met, whose

support at the hardest times was definitive. Brian Larkin, Audra Simpson, Marilyn Ivy, Catherine Fennell, and Maria José De Abreu have all created an institution that many great scholars and students come together and generously converse the most substantial as well as most trivial matters in life.

Not only did I find a home for myself in New York, but also a family. They have been the major characters from my point of view. Aarti Sethi comes first, and not only because of a logographic obsession that secures her place by doubling the first letter in the alphabet. She has been the most. Seung-Cheol Lee is both a companion and a brother to me, who thought me serenity under extreme duress –including some unusually strong turbulence interpreted as a fatal accident above the Aegean Sea. Being the most tactile thinker I have met, Sumayya Kassamali embodied affective delicacy and cerebral violence, a rare combination that allows her to think beyond the immediate perception. Soo-Young Kim led me into the world of rye whiskey, cutting-edge art, and the persistence of truth. I learned from Amiel Melnick how to write grants and how to gently read the most unfamiliar anthropological texts. Tzu-Chi Ou, and her great present for our family –Fusun-, has been a great source of support, inspiration, and comradeship. Clare Casey appeared as a miraculous portrait (literally) in my study, drawn by her mother, watching over my shoulder without me knowing her identity. And Natacha Nsabimana, my sister from my other family in Rwanda, made the life in New York such an adventure, her name and the city conjoined in my mind forever.

My cohort, my family, did not stay unchanged in this story. It expanded to include other, most amazing people at Columbia. Deniz Duruiz gave without holding anything back, even her house when I needed most. Julia Fierman became part of my life so deeply that I cannot see myself in the future without us passionately discussing our works. Danielle Judith Zola Carr has

been a true gift, an immense source of energy, joy, and love. Fernando Montero, Tori Gross, Murat Guney, George Bajalia, Xenia Cherkaev, Ana Miljanic, Fatima Mojadeddi, Naeem Mohaiemen, Selim Karlitekin, and Madiha Tahir will always be my comrades in arms. Adrien Zakar and Ulug Kuzuoglu provided much needed refreshments, music, and conversations at famous #8C. My expressions of gratitude would not do justice to Peneranda Sisters for their love and absolute brilliance. Without this extended family, I would not have enjoyed my life and my work in New York.

Like all stories, there is a historical background. My love for thinking, writing, and reading was not originated as part of a ready-made, professional trajectory but rather emerged as a contingent event. I do remember that event quite well. At Bogazici University, Suna Ertugrul was giving an open lecture on Heidegger's Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics in 2004, explaining to us, undergraduate students, how the question of Being has been forgotten, and how such forgetfulness resulted in the technical enframing of the world within which we live. Unfortunately, I had to leave at the very middle of that lecture for something that I cannot remember today. But I do remember that I was shaking, having realized that many of my questions as a young Marxist might have some answers. I have tried to recover that second half in my master thesis in Istanbul, and then in my dissertation in New York. I am still trying.

My brother Bayram cannot be forgotten here. We started our journey together in 2001, and we are still looking for "that" leftist group in different campuses, -the group that would fit most into the stories we grew up listening to. Bahar, Balca, Mert, Pinar, Basak, Erguven, Evren, Imge, Melissa, Mesut, Bora, Erkal, and Firat Kaplan were, and still are, the major characters of that continuous history. Mine Yildirim has been my closest companion and witness to this continuous past. With her intelligence, sensitivity, and sarcasm, she defined me in so many ways.

Istanbul has always been a gravitational center both as my home and as my field. My debt to my interlocutors from my fieldwork cannot be put into words. They did not hold themselves back, accepted me as a family member, and shared everything that they had. I am sorry that I cannot write their names here. But I can write the names of some of my comrades, with whom I had the chance to partake in a radically different political project than the one I was studying. “Baskan” Seref, Silan, Dilan, Dilara, Huseyin, Seda, Zeynep, Soner, Besi, Fesi, Ali Abi, Masum, Rubar, and Nesim have been my comrades even at the most dangerous moments. During those turbulent times, we lost the ones who were the most precious: Erdal, Cihat, and Nejat.

My first family was there all the time: Gulay, Leyla, Nurhayat, Abdullah, Kemal, Cagla, Taha, Tayfun, Rabia, Tohan, Line, Hale, Zine, Hayrettin, Mehmet, Zeliha, Aliye, Halime, Merve, Nusret, Serdar and my countless cousins. Yes, we are a tribe. My mother, Selma, deserves much more than a dedication. Her openness to “whatever,” ranging from the unendurable to the most obscure, a capacity to take seriously everything that the contingencies of life bring, is that from which I learned most. Finally, I thank Fortuna, who, during my research, led me to my partner Berfe, the one who has the best smile, kindest touch, and deepest love.

*For my mother.*

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **I. The Question:**

This dissertation grew out of a conviction that everyone is equally intelligent, they do the things that they do within the world that they find themselves in, and act through the forces of ontological contingency, mostly around and within historical and ontological limitations. This theoretical orientation is by no means an original point of departure; after all its pedigree can be traced back to Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, where the philosopher famously states, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." (103). However, what has been surprising for me, in both North America and Turkey, is that this well-acknowledged orientation falters in response to a simple question: "how and why do people support political movements which can be defined as authoritative?" People mobilize around political projects that promote enmities, demand obedience and provide solutions to the contemporary problems in such ways that intellectuals and progressive-minded people would find unacceptable. It is hard to understand how and why Trump supporters enjoy the sadness that the liberals feel and express when Obamacare is being threatened, despite the fact that it is those Trump supporters who would benefit most from the program. Or, when thousands of people threw their bodies under tanks moving at full speed in Turkey, violently butchered by heavy machine gun fire, it was not clear "under which circumstances" people made this particular, horrifying history. This dissertation is an attempt to take those people seriously, listen to what they say, and observe what they did between 2012-2016.

When many partisans of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), about some tape

records incriminating Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his family, emphatically stated, "we do not believe in those tapes, even if they are real,"<sup>1</sup> it is hard not to resort to the conceptual tools like misrecognition, collective hysteria, or nepotistic indoctrination. However, I propose to do something else: focus on the capillaries of the daily life of the people mobilized around an authoritarian populist project in order to see the entanglements of materialities, the emergence of historicities, the dissipations of some potentialities, and augmentations of other potentialities. I believe such an approach is substantially different from the available studies on mass mobilization and political subjectivization. First, the question of politics has been approached by many contemporary studies from the perspective of "apoliticization," whereby the ideological and material consequences of neoliberalism produce "individuals" whose primary occupation is to extend the logic of the market into the other regions of life while carving out the political character of those regions. I will discuss examples of this literature throughout the dissertation.

However, there is another body of work that problematizes the question of politics in a different way than the studies on neoliberalism. I have two major kinds of this literature in mind: populism and authoritarianism. I would like to briefly discuss why I think my project is different from these two large clusters of social scientific approaches.

Studies on populism, from the very first examples in the literature (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969), have referred to a strange characteristic of the phenomenon. Although it is easy to recognize whether a political movement is populist, it is nearly impossible to find a conceptual denominator that crosscuts every instantiation of populism. In order to find a solution to this problem, Ernesto Laclau's seminal work (2005), which has become a major source of reference

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was made by Burhan Kuzu in a tweet, but appropriated by many of my informants, in a manner of joke, to indicate that their love for the party, the movement, *dava*, and the leader could not be shaken by few tape-records.

<sup>2</sup> One of the most popular urban legends about communists, which had still been quite popular during my fieldwork,



for studies on populism, redefined the concept as an ontological category instead of an ontic one. Laclau claims that populism is a formal procedure that articulates different demands in a specific way, rather than being the name of a specific political project. In a nutshell, Laclau's argument starts with a distinction between fulfilled demands and unfulfilled demands. According to his theoretical framework, politics does not emerge if demands are fulfilled. Only when various demands are left unsatisfied, there emerges politics as a possibility to create an equivalential chain –that is, a chain based on the universal equality (negativity) of all the unfulfilled demands. Thus, populist projects are the processes aggregating a series of negative entities, i.e. unfulfilledness of several demands, under an empty signifier. Since satisfying those demands would mean the negation of the condition of equivalential chains, Laclau claims that populist projects are amorphous movements that derive their force from unsatisfied demands and cannot do much in satisfying those demands. He claims that this is the very reason why the name of a leader is so important for a populist project: the proper name signifies something without any particularity, and it does not offer anything but a pure political position.

Although there are countless varieties of this interpretation, the conviction that populist projects cannot really satisfy the particular demands of their constituency is still prevalent. I believe that this conviction is a result of a liberal premise from which Laclau and many others start their analyses: if a demand is satisfied, it is not political. My research shows an exactly obverse relationship between demand satisfaction and politicization: exactly because some demands are satisfied (religious liberties, distribution of jobs and power positions, social assistance schemes, economic networks and so on), those demands become a part of a political constellation. This juxtaposition of the satisfaction of mass demands with the politicization of the masses is a result of material practices that carve out a space of life at the expense of another part

of the social body. Accordingly, while Laclau and others have conceptualized the political distinction between enemy and friend as discursive registers, my research shows that such registers are practical dealings, outcomes of which are the fulfillment of demands for some and social and material destruction for others.

There is also a body of work in political science that focuses on this material dimension of authoritarian political systems. Although such studies associate authoritarianism and populism with the "arbitrariness" of power relations and thus attribute a sense of anti-institutionalism to such regimes, these scholars conceptualize authoritarian regimes as coercive apparatuses, as a set of institutions that exert "coercion" over a population. Employing a top-down approach, they take their point of departure from "political elites" and high cadres rather than from grassroots activism. Considering classical models of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and post-Soviet geography, this interpretation is quite accurate. However, with the emergence of what scholars call "competitive authoritarianism" or "democratic authoritarianism," wherein authoritarian violence is claimed to have an electoral base, "coerciveness" becomes less effective in explaining the phenomenon (Brancati 2014; Brownlee 2007; Levitsky 2010; Svoboda 2012). Such studies focus on how the intimidating performances of the authoritarian state shape the political sphere (Magaloni 2008; Wedeen 2008), how the institutional structure of authoritarian management subsumes social discontents (Blaydes 2011; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007), and how the patronage relations and clientelist networks "buy" political support (Stokes et al. 2013; Hilgers 2012; Lust-Okar 2009). Notwithstanding its explanatory power regarding the question how authoritarian regimes can sustain their existence, the literature on authoritarianism posits a simple dichotomy between consent and resistance, obedience and defiance, without spending much time on the possibility that there might be a popular base for promoting authoritarianism in

a given society.

In sum, three literatures on politics (neoliberalism as apoliticization, populism as discursive struggle, and authoritarianism as coercive arrangement) fail to address the material conditions of the lives of the masses from which contemporary political movements arise. The studies on neoliberalism assert that the material restructuring of life through neoliberal policies promotes an ethics of self-fashioning and demotes the possibilities of collective action. The literature on populism emphasizes, quite correctly, the logic of discursive articulation of discontents among the masses for populist projects, however at the cost of emptying out the content of those discontents. Finally, social scientific studies on authoritarian regimes look at institutional structures, analyzing the social and political situation through a given dichotomy of control and freedom, obedience and dissidence. Put differently, works on authoritarianism assume that people do not participate in the production of authoritarian politics but find a possibility of living in it, while, tacitly, desiring to have a life more akin to western liberal democracies.

The three main strands of works on the question of the political thus do not pay sufficient attention to the possibility that people around authoritarian and populist political projects do find the world that they create by their political activities as epistemologically, ontologically, and ethically meaningful. In other words, there is an assumption that there must be something wrong, a form of misunderstanding, on the part of the supporters of such projects. Trump supporters, political Islamists around Erdogan, Putin's militants, and many other forms of popular movements around authoritarian figures cannot be as successful as other political projects in building a world. This is most understandable since such projects participate in the distribution and promotion of racism, misogyny, ethnic hatred, and bigotry -forms of thinking whose components cannot withstand the critique of secular reason. I define myself as a follower of the

tradition of enlightenment and secular reason and politically take a position militantly inimical towards such destructive political projects. Nevertheless, I am convinced that enlightenment and secular reason, howsoever we define them, are not the expressions of pristine human capacities, which await to be uncovered, but active political engagements that require immense effort to be built, sustained, and expanded. The thinking that there is an inherently closer relationship between the secular reason of enlightenment and nature itself is a grossly mistaken attitude that turns a blind eye to the differing capacities of human beings in creating worlds. Although many scholars have criticized this association between the enlightenment and nature, I strongly believe that it still remains unquestioned in many scholarly and political investigations. There is still a liberal constellation comprising notions democracy, wealth, economy, power, science, and technology, and thereby implying that the historical specificities of the western experience have to be reproduced in other settings in order to attain any part of this constellation: without democracy, a country cannot have a strong economy to produce wealth, or without immense investments in scientific reasoning, a society cannot have democratic institutions. Although the historical trajectories may vary on which part of the constellation should come first, the general consensus is such that the components of the constellation of liberal modernity necessitate and promote each other.

I think this is the major reason why scholarly investigations come to a halt in focusing on the practical achievements, capacity enhancements, and political inclusions of such authoritarian and populist projects. Recognizing the contingent autonomy of the political may require us to accept that some political projects, however violent and unacceptable to us, could build worlds within which their supporters, in massive numbers, attain higher capacities of action and being. In other words, the partisans of the populist movements might have solid reasons to partake in

political activities other than just a name of a leader. My claim is that those reasons can be found in the material transformation of the world that has been shaped by various international networks: flexible labor regimes, international financial systems, and globalized commodity markets. Rather than reframing a functionalist, structurally deterministic account that articulates authoritarian and populist political movements as passive conveyors of relations on the economic base, I want to approach the question from the constitution of what Ian Hacking calls "ecological niches" wherein the potentialities of certain projects and networks are augmented, while others get attenuated.

Ian Hacking uses his concept of ecological niche in order to explain a now extinct category of mental disorder: fugue. Fugue was categorized as a mental disease that made people travel for some span of time about which the patient did not have any recollection. The illness emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France, many debates revolved around the problem, several case studies entered the literature, a strong body of scholarship was produced by the best doctors, and the category vanished after few decades. Hacking argues that the emergence of something called fugue became only possible within an ecological niche that was produced by the combination of a few social and material vectors at the historical juncture of 19<sup>th</sup> century France. Medical taxonomy at the time was suitable to accommodate the condition either under the general category of "epilepsy" or "hysteria." There was a cultural polarity that would associate fugue with popular concepts like "criminal vagrancy" or "romantic tourism." Furthermore, a new material-institutional network had just been established before the emergence of fugue. Documentation and tracing mechanisms were made available for the diagnosis thanks to military conscription procedures, police activities, and border patrols. And finally, fugue was conceived as a release –a solution to a problem that many working people were suffering as a part of the

generalized feeling that they had lost control of their own lives. For Hacking, these four vectors, discursive and material, created the necessary conditions within which something like fugue could potentially emerge as a reality. His approach goes beyond discourse analysis, and for this reason, I find the concept ecological niche very useful. Putting a distance between his approach and Foucaultian discourse analysis, he states,

Of course, language has a great deal to do with the formation of an ecological niche, but so does what people do, how they live, the larger world of the material existence that they inhabit. That world must be described in all its peculiar and idiosyncratic detail. I hope that my example, drawing on diverse vectors of different types, may suggest the importance of not focusing on just one thing, not just discourse, not just power, not just suffering, not just biology, when one speaks of a niche. (1986: 98)

Similarly, the question of authoritarian and populist mobilization can be approached from a perspective that Ian Hacking employed in explaining the emergence of fugue. And for anyone who would like to understand the remarkable rise of such authoritarian political mobilizations, Turkey is one of the best cases in the world.

Founded by a group of Islamist politicians in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by current president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been able to mobilize millions of people in poor neighborhoods in Turkey. The party has the most widespread political organizations in the impoverished areas of the country, controlling every state institution as well as nearly all local municipalities where relatively poor people live. In this context, I start with a question: why is there still an increasing surge of political support amongst the poor despite a very marginal improvement in their economic conditions and a continuous onslaught on their social and economic rights during the last fifteen years of AKP rule? High unemployment, low wages, and illegally long working hours continue to plague vast sections of the Turkish population. Despite this precariousness, Turkey's poorest districts overwhelmingly support and vote for the AKP, as evidenced in a staggering nine million active party members from amongst

the most impoverished neighborhoods in urban Turkey.

Contrary to a widespread popular and academic assumption, I will try to show that political Islamist mobilization in Turkey, embodied and materialized in the AKP's hegemony in the Turkish public sphere, is not contrary to the global capitalist order. That is, the co-existence of authoritarian politics along with liberalized financial markets in contemporary Turkey is not a puzzling paradox. Rather the global capitalist order itself, beginning with the currency devaluations and inflation crises in the 1990s, has provided an ecological niche within which the failures of Turkish capitalism are explained as the incapacity of 'secular individuals', against which the AKP marshals a logic of collective, authoritarian, political mobilization as a bulwark against global financial markets. The mass gatherings called by the party, in which the poor are summoned to demonstrate their strength and watch the value of the Turkish Lira rise, is just one example of this strange conjunction of contemporary forms of capitalism with authoritarian mobilization. I will try to demonstrate that residents living on the margins of Istanbul and around the networks of the AKP create new mechanisms through which they translate their precariousness, life stories, and disappointments into social, political, and economic capital. However, substituting the failures of Turkish capitalism with a critique of secular bureaucracy and western modernity, the AKP promotes among its constituency a logic of war mobilization against political, religious, and social differences within Turkish society. Now let me to talk about how I conducted my fieldwork, before sketching a short history of Islamist movements in Turkey, out of which the AKP emerged in 2002, and outlining the chapters that will follow this introduction.

## **II. Fieldwork and Methodology: The Story of a Failed Project**

I found myself working on the question of authoritarianism, mass mobilization, and political Islam through a detour that forced me to study what was encroaching on me during my fieldwork, despite my recalcitrance in pursuing a project that I invested so much time and energy. I started my field research to analyze how the language and practices of humanitarianism in Turkey have turned the problem of poverty into a kind of natural disaster. Using the institutional framework developed by the World Bank to enable a humanitarian response to the 1999 earthquake in Turkey, the Turkish government restructured poverty alleviation programs as an extension of this humanitarian approach and thus transformed the ways poverty is understood, how it is to be solved, and what are its futures.

This project was a part of my personal history that led me to refuse to work on two major determinants of Turkish political landscape: the Kurdish question and political Islam. Having grown up in the first Islamist squatter neighborhood of Istanbul, Kagithane, as an assimilated half-Kurdish person, I wanted to approach the question of poverty from a less expected trajectory: how do people ask the question "why" concerning their social and economic positions in a given historical conjuncture? In a sense, I wanted to do a political anthropology of causation, focusing on material and social networks through which people build causal relations in explaining and acting in the very world in which they found themselves. I thought that it was a good idea to start with the global governmental logic which defines "humans" as the primary agents of life instead of "workers" as the agents of a political society.

However, I found myself incapable of tracing the networks of causal reasoning from neighborhood organizations to the World Bank programs, for one simple reason: the AKP filled every position in every state institution with party sympathizers, if not with partisans. All humanitarian NGOs in Turkey had already been openly Islamist since the early 1990s, starting



with the Bosnian War. Having found myself surrounded by the party members everywhere in the fall of 2013, I decided not to take a drastic step, but a slight reorientation and thus convinced someone in the Esenler AKP organization that my research on poverty was politically harmless and might be socially beneficial in the future. Being impressed by my academic credentials and my ability to blend into "neighborhood" culture, they allowed me to conduct my research in the social services department of the municipality, focusing on home visits, the municipal employment agency, and the distribution of poverty relief packages. I was able to continuously tape record and take notes until the end of 2013.

What is now called "17/25 December Conspiracy" by the AKP members was the turning point for me. The AKP had been using the human resources of an Islamic group led by an enigmatic preacher, Fethullah Gulen, a group commonly called *Cemaat*, "the Community." The community was one of the strongest Islamist groups in Turkey, mostly because of their strategy of not being involved in politics but heavily investing in education. They were providing free supplementary education for successful children in poor neighborhoods, regardless of their political and religious positions, so as to enable them to get into the best universities in the country. Through their educational activism, they acquired a massive number of sympathizers and members, who had been occupying powerful positions in government, academia, and business. Primarily based on neighborhood mobilization, the AKP used the networks and human resources of the Community in its fight against the "secular bureaucratic elite." However, the AKP and the Community engaged in destructive warfare with each other, for reasons unknown, starting with the release of tape-recordings that contained Erdogan's conversations about some money transfers.

The political situation getting too tense, my capacity to pursue my research became harder

and harder with each passing day. My political affiliations, as a youth leader of the HDP (pro-Kurdish socialist party) in one of the adjacent slum areas, did not help my position, even though no one learned of my political activities during the fieldwork. The pressure on me, coming from the party members in Esenler who became suspicious of my activities, became quite palpable. Some high cadres were visiting the social services while I was doing my research and asking me why I could not finish my "homework" even after few months of intense work.

Just I was on the brink of giving up, I decided to take a path against the grain. Rather than taking a step back from the party, I decided to get close to it. I called my old friend S, whom I knew had an uncle in a high position in the party. The uncle was very friendly and did not ask about how critical I was about the political activities of the AKP, but made me promise that no proper names would be used in the final product of my research. Being vouched for by such a significant name, I gained exclusive access not only to Esenler district but also to the adjacent ones, Bagcilar and Kucukcekmece, all the most important strongholds of the AKP. I started to spend my days and nights, in municipalities and party headquarters, around the lowest cadres of the movement, i.e., partisans and sympathizers. I have to confess that even with such a strong reference, the mid-level party members rarely allowed me to use a tape-recorder in our interviews, and kept a distance that would ensure that I was not spying on their "faults." However, I was not interested in what they were doing in the first place. And for the lowest cadres, the backbone of the movement, who did all the political, social, and economic jobs on the ground, I immediately became a brother who could talk to whoever he wanted, stay however long he thought necessary, and get in wherever he needed. Such access would not have been possible only by a reference, howsoever strong it might be, if I were not coming from a similar socio-economic background, acting and talking like a neighborhood guy, with a tad of fluke that

allowed me to travel abroad. My eager participation in everyday activities, from praying to fasting, from religious talks to political meetings, stamped me as a neighborhood brother. This remarkable advantage took its own toil. As the political discussions grew constantly more intense, I was unable to say anything but listen to some of my dear interlocutors, while they were talking about my comrades in such ways that I would prefer not to recall.

One quick note about my usage of the word "political Islam." As I see it, political Islam is a denominator that designates a set of practices and discourses that refer to religion in an explicit manner in partaking in political, social, and economic activities. More specifically, I use the term for a simple reason that the secular opposition accuses the AKP members of being political Islamist, whereas not one single person during my fieldwork rejected the label, and many openly embraced it. The formulation, if I am to condense several distinct statements into one, can be expressed as follows: anyone who openly states that s/he engages in politics to promote "the welfare of the Ummah, for the sake of Islam, or for Allah's blessing" is a political Islamist. I am not interested in competing interpretations of Islam or the varieties of historical criticisms out of which Islam emerged. From a phenomenological perspective, Islam is significant for me due to its capacity to operate as a mode of fundamentalist reasoning, a reasoning that stops any further inquiry by stating "that which is unquestionably true." I will discuss this significant aspect of religion in Chapter 5, but it suffices to state here that I am not interested in whether one interpretation of Islam, which would fundamentalistically forbid people from further inquiries, is "real." I am more interested in the practical consequences of the uses of religious idioms, stories, and imperatives in the daily life of Istanbul's poor neighborhoods. Thus, if my informants say that, for example, "for the welfare of Ummah, for the sake of Islam, and for Allah's blessing, we organize people to go to church three times a day," s/he is a political Islamist for me. I am

convinced that, even in such a hypothetically exaggerated case, the question whether s/he understands Islam correctly is not something that anyone who is not a political Islamist can ask<sup>1</sup>.

### **III. Background: A Brief History of Islamism in Turkey**

Islamism as a political question in Turkey goes back to the 18th and 19th centuries when the attempts to reform the Ottoman State began in order to compete with the newly ascending European powers whose military prowess displayed unquestionable superiority. Since as early as 1774 (the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca), the Ottoman sovereigns had been looking for Western models to compete with those European powers as well as to control the newly ascending local leaders across the empire. Soon enough, it became apparent that it was impossible to transfer military technologies and institutions without adopting other aspects of European culture, politics, and science.

Being concerned with the protection of the state and empowering its institutions, the Ottoman elite had not much interest in the transformation of the social, but rather in its management (Mardin, 2000). However, the political developments in Europe, especially the French Revolution in 1789 and the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, had immediate repercussions in the Empire, leading the Ottoman elite to reorganize and reform institutions that had a direct bearing on the lives of its subjects. The Imperial Edict of Reorganization in 1839 and Imperial Reform Edict of 1856 attempted to insure that non-Muslim populations in the empire would not rebel as was in the case of Greek Uprising in 1821. One of the most traumatic consequences of such reform acts was to dismantle the tripartite authority structure in Ottoman society, namely Military (*seyfiye*), bureaucracy (*kalemiye*), and religious scholars and judiciary (*ulema*), by removing *Ulema* from the equation. Seeing this removal of the religious authority from social

life as the beginning of Islamist movements, many scholars argue that the Ottoman state tried to substitute religion with laic-intellectuals in the state machinery (Bulac, 2005: 55). However, the project of secular modernity and constitutionalism did not achieve the ends of keeping non-Muslims as the subjects of the Empire, for the nationalist movements continued sweeping the region in the long 19th century.

As a response to the failures of modernization and secularization attempts of the Ottoman Empire, one of the major theorists of Turkish nationalism, Yusuf Akcura, wrote a political treatise which demarcated political possibilities in the region in such a definitive way that, even today, the text is still cited by many politicians and scholars. Published in 1904, "Three Types of Politics" (*Uc Tarz-i Siyaset*) asserted that there were three possibilities for the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the century. First, Ottomanism, a form of cosmopolitanism, could be the political identity for the populations in the Empire, but historical experience showed that non-Muslims wanted independence regardless of any reform attempt. Second, Islamism might have provided the Muslim subjects of the Empire with an identity, but Akcura thought that, even though Islam preponderated over ethnic identities at the grassroots, the Western powers would not allow such a unification at a large scale. The third and the last option for the Empire, Akcura claimed, was Turkism, a unification based on nationality, as the only possible future for a state in place of the Ottoman Empire. He finished his treatise with remarks that still resound in Turkish political thinking: "In sum, from the very beginning, a question occupies my mind all the more tenaciously, waiting to be answered: Between Muhammadanism (*Muslimanlik*) and Turkism (*Turkluk*), which one is more beneficial and possible to be executed?" (1995: 40).

Although the Turkish Republic, which was established after World War I in 1923, never openly embraced Yusuf Akcura as a major theorist of its nation-state project, one of his solutions

to the Ottoman problem, i.e., nationalism, was effectively implemented by the political cadres of the new republic at the expense of the other, i.e. Islamism. For many Islamist writers, two historical moments, 1856 and 1924, represent two greatest traumas for the Muslim masses. While the 1856 reforms ended the hegemony of Islamic laws, the Kemalist cadres abolished the figural leadership of Islamic community (Ummet), i.e., Caliphate, in 1924. After 1924, the Early Republic attacked all the symbols of religious veneration, banned Islamic orders, and even forced mosques to broadcast prayer calls in Turkish translations –a gesture that is still considered by many to be an irreligious and blasphemous act. Although the period was called the Early Republican era, the only political party allowed to participate in elections was the Republican People's Party (CHP), founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, thus associating the meaning of laicism with the name of the party, a conceptual collocation that is still valid in contemporary Turkey.

Until the 1950s, Islamist political movements remained in the dark, without many activity at the grassroots, under the pressure of the single-party rule, whose adamant adherence to laicist modernism suppressed all religiously oriented communities. However, the beginning of the Cold War reshaped the international order. Turkey was more than willing to take sides with the Western Powers and sacrificed the lives of 1000 Turkish soldiers in the Korean War for membership in NATO. Simultaneously, single-party rule came to an end in accord with suggestions from the Western Block, which saw the repression of religion as closely affiliated with totalitarian modernization projects, whose tendency for leftist politics should be tamed. Accordingly, in 1950, Turkey entered into a new political phase, which is called "Multi-Party Political Life," opening the public sphere and political sphere to alternative projects, although under strict institutional control of the laic and modern Turkish state.

In the elections held in 1950, the Democrat Party (DP), founded as an alternative to the CHP, won an overwhelming majority, harboring collective resentments towards the Kemalist state project, articulating different interest groups and political ideologies, including religious orders and religiously oriented intellectuals. The Cold War ideological atmosphere was especially conducive for a marriage between right-wing pro-Western politics and Islamist sensibilities, since the preconceptions about leftist politics in Turkey<sup>2</sup> directed the attentions to the communist threats, despite Islamists' long-standing problems with the Western Powers (Palestine, Colonialism, etc.). The DP used this sensibility, frequently accusing the CHP of aiding and abetting the destructive communist groups. In this way, the DP translated its political contest with the CHP into greatly distorted popular idioms: religious vs. irreligious, communists vs. USA supporters (Americans were presented as a people of Allah's other book, i.e. the Bible), and patriots vs. traitors. During the political control of the DP, between 1950 and 1960, Islamism did not appear as an autonomous movement but an auxiliary to the anti-leftist, right-wing political mobilization in the country.

However, the DP's increasingly authoritarian politics turned into open hostility against the CHP as well as the army that was considered loyal to the party that founded the republic. In 1960, a coup d'etat put an end to the DP's rule, executing its leader and then prime minister Adnan Menderes. With a perspective that could be called partially democratic, military rule lasted one year, establishing the State Planning Organization, creating a parliamentary system that would allow even minor parties to be represented in the national assembly. The period

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most popular urban legends about communists, which had still been quite popular during my fieldwork, was as follows: in communist countries, there was a hook next to the door of one's house. If the man saw a hat hung on the hook, he immediately understood that his wife was having sex with an unknown man. Since there was no private property in such countries, the man needed to respect such an arrangement and take a walk until they finished their jobs. The story exemplifies the state-led prejudices about the left-wing politics, although the revolutionary groups in the country have their shares in promoting such egregious misconceptions.

between 1960 and 1980 thus witnessed an impressive variety of political organizations that resulted in a deepening cleavage between left and right, which had itself turned into a kind of civil war in the 1970s and culminated an even more violent coup d'etat in 1980.

The first autonomous political organization of Islamists in Turkey emerged in this context, proposing a middle way between right and left. It claimed to be neither capitalist nor communist, promised the coming of a “just order” (*adil duzen*). In 1970, the first Islamist party, the National Order Party (MNP) was established by Prof. Necmettin Erbakan, only to be closed down in the same year by the Constitutional Court for “violating the laic characteristic of the state and the clause regarding the protection of Ataturk’s revolutions.” In 1971, Erbakan founded another Islamist Party, under the name of the National Salvation Party, which lasted until the coup d’état in 1980, after which all political parties were banned for two years. In this first period (1970-1980), the Islamist movement relied on educated cadres and businessmen from Anatolian cities for organization and mobilization, but were unable to penetrate into impoverished urban neighborhoods, which were primarily divided between a revolutionary left and a reactionary fascism.

A few remarks may be required to clarify some aspects of Turkish Islamist mobilization and its idiosyncratic characteristics. First, the adjective "national" should not be conceived as a part of the nationalistic discourse. Erbakan's ideological program for political Islamism in Turkey was named "National View," *Milli Gorus*, and has still been openly embraced by many political Islamists, including the members of the AKP. The adjective *Milli* can be translated into English as National, but it is substantially different from *Milliyetcilik*, nationalism, although coming from the same Arabic root. The term "*milliyetcilik*" is a secular concept, conscribed by several political projects in Turkey, including far-right racism and Kemalist secular



modernization. However, the root of *milliyetçilik* (nationalism) comes from millet -a word that corresponds to "nation" as well as to a religiously invested concept used in the Ottoman state tradition. For the Empire, the basic modality of governing the social was to divide population groups according to their creed, thus combining different linguistic communities under the same category of "*millet*:" Christian *millet*, Jewish *millet*, and Muslim *millet*. Thus political Islamists in Turkey prefer to use "*Milli*," signifying its difference from "*Milliyetçilik*," a term that, Islamists argue, means "*kavimcilik*," "tribalism," which is openly against the orders of the Quran. So the adjective "*Milli*" tacitly invokes the meaning of "Islamic Community," "*Ummet*" without directly using the word -something that could have been used by the judicial bureaucracy against the movement. Secondly, this slight but significant difference in meaning is one of the major reasons why the political parties associated with "National View," from the MSP in the 1970s to the contemporary AKP, have been successful in the Kurdish cities, since for the Kurds distant from leftist Kurdish movements (the PKK being the foremost example), the term *Milli* (national) is much more inclusive than *Milliyet* (nationality) and *Milliyetçilik* (nationalism).

There is another characteristic of Turkish Islamism that can be considered as exceptional among many examples across the world, but that characteristic emerged in the 1990s. After the coup d'etat, another political party named the Welfare Party (RP) was founded under the leadership of Erbakan. Until the RP, political Islam in Turkey had been displaying similar characteristics to many Islamist fundamentalist movements in terms of the composition of the leading cadre of the party. Its leader Erbakan was a famous professor in one of the best technical universities in Turkey, having received his Ph.D. in one of the best universities in Germany, with several patents to his name. Similarly, many of the leading positions in the party were occupied by educated elites who did not sever their relationships to the Islamic tradition and Anatolian

culture as in the case of secular elites. In the 1970s, Erbakan was reluctant to expand the political base into impoverished urban areas, for keeping the party within the confines of a small group was a way to sustain and support high quality in terms of education and social class (Cakir 1996). This is the classical model for nearly all religiously oriented fundamentalist movements. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the party became unable to resist the political opportunities to expand its base, partially thanks to the military intervention that had destroyed leftist groups in the urban areas.

Thus the 1990s represented a substantially new phase in the history of Islamist movements in Turkey if not in general. Despite the immense consternation of the secular sectors of the society, the RP started to surprise many people in local and general elections. In 1994, two megacities, Ankara and Istanbul, were captured by the party, a process that brought non-elite party members into positions of power in municipalities. This was occasion of the major appearance of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the public sphere, who climbed the ladder of political hierarchy rather fast during the 1980s. Based on the successes of services provided by its municipalities, the popularity of the party and its local leaders attained widespread recognition among the poor across the country and around the world. A few years after Islamists captured Istanbul and Ankara, the Christian Science Monitor reported in 1998, "Three years ago this town [Sincan, a district of Ankara] was known as 'Mud Sincan,' because of neglect from previous secular local governments, which residents say were also corrupt. [...] But Sincan today is well-paved, boasting green areas and a huge children's park, and most people have water. Largely because of that, Sincan is a Welfare stronghold -a case study of how grass-roots good works by Islamists have been turned into political support" (quoted in Akinçi 1999, 77). The material transformation of the lived worlds of the poor was thus not only capturing the attention of the

poor at the margins of Turkish urban areas, but also that of an international audience.

However, the general elections in 1996 turned into the beginning of an end for the RP, when the party became the largest in the national assembly. Because the political conjuncture at the time did not allow any coalition government without taking the RP into the equilibrium, the RP became a major partner in a right-wing coalition government (REFAHYOL) despite strong protests from secular groups. The coalition was ended by a military intervention, which is called "postmodern coup," because the army did not directly intervene but put on a televised secular-militaristic display in which dozens of tanks moved to the streets of Sincan. The National Security Council demanded from the coalition that it take precautions against the rise of political Islam, suggesting it shut down many religious schools, ban religious orders, and increase primary school education to eight years in order to prevent religious education before high school. For an Islamist party, those demands were equal to political suicide. Although Erbakan was forced to sign those decisions, the coalition ended. In 1998, the Constitutional Court decided to close down the RP due to its systematic violations of the clause stipulating that Turkey is a laic country. The Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) followed the RP, only to be closed down in 2001.

In 2001, something unprecedented happened to the Islamist movement in Turkey. For the first time, a division came to the surface, and two parties emerged out of the Virtue Party: the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi) and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP represented a "revisionist" branch, whereas the SP was labeled as "traditionalist." This was a bold move on the part of the revisionist group, since the rejection of the will of the leader, Erbakan, was tantamount to betrayal in a movement for which "biat" (the submission of one's will to a leader) has a constitutive role. Erbakan, until his death in 2011, kept claiming that Erdogan had betrayed the movement and taken sides with the Zionist USA in their project called

"moderate Islam." It has remained a matter of controversy whether Erdogan and his friends ever gave up Islamism as Erbakan believed, since for many secular critiques, the AKP was employing a tactic called "takiyye," acting like someone else until achieving one's purpose. It is not settled when the reformists abandoned the Islamist project and when they reclaimed it, if ever.

Questions abound, but one thing is certain. All the grassroots cadres, with negligible exceptions, directly and immediately went to the AKP neighborhood organizations. Out of 25% share of the RP, the SP retained only 2.5%, whereas the AKP overtook the entire support base of the Islamist movement and expanded it to %35 in the 2002 elections. The party's representation reached a level of around 50% in 2007, and with the exception of the election in 2015, which was renewed within a few months and ended up with a victory of 50%, the party did not fall behind 50% in several elections whose participation rates were more than 80%.

#### **IV. The Outline of the Dissertation:**

The dissertation argues that over the last three decades neoliberal economic transformations have produced and intensified material and discursive connections between socio-economic vulnerabilities and authoritarian practices. I am going to illustrate the particular consequences of these transformations for those living on the margins of the Turkish economy in five chapters. My starting point is that financial capitalism has a certain tendency to facilitate and promote authoritarian political mobilization. I will take my departure from one of the most significant steps in the financial liberalization of Turkey: free-floating exchange regime and inflation targeting. These two major macroeconomic policies were implemented in 2002 after the greatest economic crisis in the history of the country. They aimed to limit political interferences (like populist policies) by expanding the "self-regulating" mechanisms of financial markets. While the

Central Bank had been making the decision of what was the value of one Turkish Lira vis-à-vis a Dollar during the 1990s, what is called "fixed exchange regime," the free-floating exchange regime left the determination of values of currencies to the actors (financial institutions, companies, and households) in financial markets. It was formulated as a part of democratic capitalism in which "transparency," "accountability," and "credibility" are the central values to ensure constant and reliable communication.

The liberalization of financial markets thus assumed that once political interests and interventions are isolated from the region of money, people start to act in an informed manner, inflation comes under control, and the value of money is stabilized. However, my research shows that the attempts to separate the political and economic spheres result in different, and mostly destructive, forms of relationships between politics and economics. Making financial markets more transparent results in public knowledge that the value of money is sensitive to political developments, even to micro developments like meetings and protests. Economic stability and political stability converge to such an extent that people started to see their actions, e.g., going to meetings, supporting an authoritarian party, or dissuading their neighbors from participating in dissident demonstrations, as part of the financial mechanisms that sustain and even increase the value of their money. The result is a conflagratory social and political tension that divides citizens into those who produce value (monetary, social, and political) through their support for political stability and those who damage value by their opposition.

The novel entanglements between the political sphere and economic relations are not limited to financial markets. Chapter 3 shows that the changes in the labor market, as well as the transformation of relations of production that devalues the significance of productive labor power, enhances new political projects and creates new forms of subjectivities in Turkey. My

research claims that the socio-political networks of the AKP translate the precariousness of the unskilled workers into trust-based, intimate relations in order to sustain and expand its networks. In this sense, "intimate social relations," which arguably constitute the mainstay of the Islamist mobilization, work as a means of cushioning the precarious working conditions of the poor. Through low-paying jobs accessed through the networks of the party, bestowed on claimants as a mark of the Party's efficaciousness and commitment, the unskilled poor find alternative registers (intimacy, trust, and loyalty) for their social, economic, and political survival. In other words, the dissolution of the formal structures that regulate and shape economic relations between labor and capital opens new spaces in which the value of labor, the prospect of life, and the success of an action have alternative modalities of realization.

One highly interesting modality of such new subject positions in Turkey is self-negation. This will be discussed in Chapter 4 which aims to complicate the discussions about individualization and neoliberalism. I focus on the increasing compulsion in the contemporary Turkish public sphere for showing that one is not thinking of oneself. Extending the sociological and anthropological insight that the self is not a substance but a practice, my project shows that the gripping appeal of newly ascendant notions and models of *nefs* (the control of the inner self), *vesile* (being the vessel of divine will), and *biat* (the subjection of one's will to a leader or a cause) cannot be understood apart from the historical wounds and disappointments of the poor. I examine a vast array of examples to show that those who do not have a CV, i.e., a socioeconomically acceptable life story, publicly mimic the actions and words of historical, religious, and political figures to enhance their capacity to act in social settings. My ethnographic data shows that the people who are engaging in self-negation associate the question of self with the question of efficacy, agency, and history. In this sense, although culled from Islamic

tradition, self-negation is the contemporary form of an answer to the failures of modernity as a national project in Turkey. These new modalities, I argue, produce a democratic, authoritarian model of state power and popular politics based on the constant expansion, and valorization, of "the majority" at the expense of all differences in Turkish society.

Chapter 5 aims to discuss the unexpected ramifications of neoliberal deregulations and the concomitant critique of bureaucracy as a major cause of the economic and social problems in modern Turkey. Among the supporters and sympathizers of the party, the formal structures from the period of the Welfare State and Fordist scale-economy are popularly conceived as the causes of crises and disappointments of the 1980s and 1990s. The widespread critique of bureaucracy incorporates this grievance, explaining the suffering of the poor through the formally guaranteed rights and entitlements of the working classes during the time before the AKP. Understanding their previous exclusion from social services and political center as a result of this "bureaucratic mentality," people around the networks of the AKP, living in the poor districts of Istanbul without exception, associate bureaucratic formalities with the failures of the Turkish economy and suffering of the masses. Under this category of bureaucracy, people constellate several themes and concepts, ranging from the form of action in bureaucracies to the time that they experience in their encounters with bureaucratic machinery. Against the constellation of bureaucracy, politics emerges as an alternative grammar, which constellates a symmetrical but radically different conceptual and practical cluster. I argue that continuously relating "unproductive rigidities" of bureaucracies to socio-economic failures, the neoliberal global dynamics have simultaneously been augmenting potentialities for, as well as producing the conditions of, a political mobilization that aims to destroy formal structures and entitlements, including but not limited to human rights, freedom of speech and the rule of law.

The tension between secular past and rising Islamism is the major theme for Chapter 6. Rather than assigning fixed values and definitions to the concepts of secular politics and the Islamist project, I focus on the political rupture that the AKP represents for its members, namely a concerted response to the suppression of religious practice in the public sphere in the name of secularism, civilization, and development. I read this political rupture as a matter of causation since my informants present their arguments against the secular state (in the forms of stories, examples of practice) as a discursive comparison. Following the phenomenological tradition and the insights of science and technology studies, I problematize causal relations and analyze how people politically engage in the construction of causal networks between people, objects, and ideas. More specifically, I focus on how Islamist mobilization equates secular practice with acts of formalization, plans, schema, and abstraction. In a sense, the political Islamists' critique stipulates that secular causation is symbolically constituted, unrelated to the real world and thus responsible for the failures of previous economic policies. As many of my informants insistently argued, the secular elite of the "old Turkey" had relied on the deification of human reason, abstract thinking, and western tradition, while forgetting about immaterial qualities that empowered Muslims in the Ottoman period. In contradistinction to secular causation, religious causation is associated with the indexical constitution of causal relations that directly incorporates the dictates of the religion and religious authorities, which mean, for my informants, undisputable reality (*hakikat*). Accordingly, the notions of responsibility, temporality, and efficacy gain new meanings around collective understandings of religious practices, social engagements, and economic policies.

Taken as a whole, the dissertation illustrates how macroeconomic transformations, especially the pivotal role of financial markets, indelibly transformed the Turkish political



landscape in the early 1990s, such that the poor sections of the Turkish society find collective political practices as an effective antidote against the financial crises of the post-industrial economy. In tracking those developments, I intervene in long-standing debates about the character and consequences of neoliberal transformation in the global south, in which the general consensus is that these new economic practices have resulted in apoliticization and individuation. To the contrary, I argue, neoliberal transformations have precipitated a wide range of political and social practices that produce alternative modes of political epistemologies and new identities conditioned by economic vulnerabilities, which are decidedly dogmatic, collective, and religious in character. The purpose of my dissertation is to understand how neoliberal economic transformations have provided an ecological niche for religiously informed authoritarian practices without attributing any essentialized or Orientalized qualities to these characteristics.

## Chapter 2. Political Mobilization as Valuation: “We keep the Turkish Lira valuable!”

“Faith is such a thing, it can milk a male goat.”  
Recep Tayyip Erdogan

“Whatever you have in your hand, it will be three times more valuable under the regime of the  
presidency.”  
Yigit Bulut, the chief economic advisor of president Erdogan

### I. Introduction

It is hard to decide whether it is ironic that the turn of the century has been worthy of its name. Turkish political, social and economic history presents a strange convergence at that very moment: the end of the inflationary era, fully integrated global financial/exchange market, and the single party rule. Is it the case that these three seemingly distinct developments are separate moments of differential histories? How do people calibrate these trajectories in the stories of their daily lives? What sort of understanding do people have when they see these three moments not as a haphazard synchronicity but as purposeful constructions that are the result of massive political mobilization?

Muharrem took a banknote from his pocket and placed it on the table around which I, along with other members from the AKP were gathered. We were discussing the economic and political prospects of Turkey. He asked me, the only ‘outsider,’ i.e., the only person who was not from Esenler district, how many zeros I could see on the banknote. It was one of the smallest banknotes, a 10 Turkish Lira. I said, "one." Smiling victoriously, he replied:

Muharrem: you see, we had once 6 more zeros in this banknote. We were like mathematicians; billions, trillions, quadrillions... Every year we were adding new zeros but losing money at the same time. We had the inflation monster once. But people from your university (*Bogazici*) do not know this.

Firat: Not everyone from my university. Also, I am not that young, brother Muharrem. I remember well the times of inflation. But honestly, I do not know where the monster has gone.

Muharrem: We killed it, the AK party killed it. Erdogan killed it. If we stop backing him up, it will return, those people who sucked our blood will return. They did it to Erbakan, I mean, he achieved first balanced budget (*denk butce*) in the history of this country and they took him down, they took down the future of this country. But not this time, this “people” will not allow it.



Figure 1.

I was captivated by his adamant resolve to keep the value of the Turkish lira high and support the AK party, and doing it in a way one reinforced the other just like a positive feedback loop. What intrigued me more was the absolute self-confidence and certainty that designated a kind of knowledge, however controversial, about how the mechanisms of this valuation work. What sort of agency did Muharrem see in his act of political support and membership? Since I have encountered similar claims in several contexts, it cannot be Muharrem's individual peculiarity. Many people in contemporary Turkey have the conviction that the value of the Turkish Lira is high and inflation rate low as a result of the political stability provided by single-party rule and the support of "the real people" (*gerçek halk*). While such a radical assertion about consonance between political agency and the value of currency might strike an outsider as

unreasonable, I will try to show that my informants are making a valid, and what is more, efficacious point: the political behaviors of the masses have gained a certain observable capacity to affect the value of the national currency –howsoever controversial the extent or meaning of this capacity is. But to understand what this strange political-economic agency is, we need to understand the material transformation of economic relations themselves: the new techniques, new materials, and new actions that facilitate interactions between micro-political developments and values of currencies. We have to focus on what Ian Hacking calls "the ecological niche" (1998) or "historical ontology" (2002) to understand the conditions of the emergence of these new possibilities in order to understand how Muharrem is materially making the Turkish Lira more valuable.

My primary argument is that financial capitalism has a certain tendency to facilitate and promote authoritarian political mobilization. I take my departure from two most prominent forms of financial liberalization in Turkey: free-floating exchange regime and inflation targeting policy, both implemented in 2002 after the greatest economic crisis in the history of Turkey. They both aim to limit political interferences (like populist policies) by expanding "self-regulating" mechanisms of financial markets. Free-floating exchange regime leaves the determination of values of currencies to the actors (financial institutions, companies and households). Inflation targeting aims to control inflation (the value of national currency) by constant public communication and managing expectations of the actors (again, financial institutions, companies and households all together) about what the value of money will be in the future. Both reforms were formulated as a part of democratic capitalism in which "transparency," "accountability," and "credibility" are the central values to ensure constant and reliable communication. The liberalization of financial markets thus assumed that once political interests and interventions are

isolated from the region of money, people start to act in informed manners, inflation gets under control, and the value of money is stabilized. However, my research shows that the attempts to separate political sphere and economic sphere results in different, and mostly destructive, forms of relationships between politics and economics. Making the financial market more transparent results in a public knowledge that the value of money is sensitive to the political development, even to the micro developments like meetings and protests. Economic stability and political stability converge to such an extent that people started to see their actions, e.g. going to meetings, supporting an authoritarian party, or dissuading their neighbors from participating in dissident demonstrations, as a part of the financial mechanisms that sustain and even increase the value of their money. The result is an increasing social and political tension that divides people into those who produce value by their support for political stability and those who damage value by their opposition.

Reading political mobilization as valuation will enable me to engage and depart from anthropological studies on value, money, and politics. Drawing from Marx (1990) and Mauss (2002), the concept of 'value' has been an important analytical tool in the social sciences to connect material relations with socio-political relations (Appadurai 1988; Biernacki 1995; Boltanski and Thevenot 2006; Gaude 2005, to name just a handful). In this vast body of work, anthropology has made a significant intervention by showing that value is not a static thing but a dynamic relation, not a mere idea but an action. Anthropological theories of value in and as action, i.e., as valuation, are of particular significance for me in understanding how people see their agency as intrinsically value-producing: to make things valuable, increase or decrease their values in dynamic ways (Elyachar 2005; Graeber 2001; Lambek 2008; Munn 1986; Turner 2008). I am following this theoretical trajectory throughout my focus on how the AK party

member and sympathizers see and relate their actions as a part of valuation of the Turkish Lira in particular and the Turkish economy in general. I aim to make a contribution to this literature by bringing politics back into the discussion.

My ethnographic analysis makes two interventions in anthropological theories of value. Firstly, I aim to further anthropological discussions on money. During my fieldwork, the Turkish Lira appeared as a particular instantiation in local discussions of how the actions of people affect value in the Turkish economy. Anthropologists have already drawn our attention to the political character of money (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Hart 1986; Guyer 2004; Keane 2001; Maurer 2005; Muir 2015; Parry and Bloch 1989). However, I wish to focus on the relation between collective action and the value of money, rather than the alienating and uprooting effects of money's institutional character. My second intervention is related to the first and politicizes the money-relation: I employ Schmitt's analytics of the friend/enemy distinction in the practices of valuation (2005) by focusing on how my informants see themselves as those who bolster the value of the Turkish Lira, and thus as 'friends', in opposition to the 'enemy' whose actions devalue the national currency.

To this end, I will divide my argument into two sections. First, I will provide a detailed account of how financial liberalization took the form of a "reflexive valuation" after the end of the Bretton Woods System. I will try to show that the inflation targeting policy and the free-floating exchange regime are macroeconomic practices enmeshed in practices of communicating with publics, establishing credibility, and managing expectations. In the third part, "Mass Mobilization as Valuation: History, Experiments, and Politics," I will focus on my ethnographic data to see the ramification of such macroeconomic practices. I will argue that the policies of

reflexive valuation have the potential to generate collective mobilizations around authoritarian projects in order to sustain and augment the value of financial markets.

## **II. The Macroeconomic Transformation of Value: Reflexivity, Credibility, and Accountability**

Starting in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there emerged new possibilities for the valuation of national currencies, and these possibilities are mostly conditioned by political economic developments under what is generally called neoliberalism<sup>3</sup>. What basically happened was a thorough material restructuring of economies around the world by “opening” them up. This process has brought into being what economists call an “impossible trinity” (Obstfeld et al. 2004; Mankiw 2010).

According to their theorem, a country cannot have three options at the same time: (i) stabilization of exchange rate, (ii) control of international capital, and (iii) independent monetary policy. Such an impossible interrelationship was not emphasized until the 1980s for one simple reason; the second pillar, the control of international capital, was not even an option for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. After the start of the globalization in the late 1970s, many countries responded to economic problems by a combination of the first and the third option: fixed exchange-rates (mostly in the form of a crawling peg) and establishing independent central banks that would be in charge of emissions and interest rates. It became immediately obvious that fixed exchange-rate regimes were so volatile that they were producing some of the most destructive financial crises in the developing world. Turkish history still bears the burden of such crises in its social and political life. But this is not the main reason that I am bringing this problem up in my discussion.

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<sup>3</sup> Definition and the scope of the term is so ambiguous that I prefer to use it in a very strict sense and trace its movements not as ideology but as material practices: retreat of the state from production, financial restructuring of economies, re-regulations of borders with respect to currencies, commodities and people. It is close to a creed that scholars use the term to designate any activity that might be collocated with the material transformations that I have enumerated above. The consequences of such attitude are astonishing; from romantic relationship to music industry,, every aspect of life has been labeled as “neoliberal.”

<sup>4</sup> Although the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been understood as the most “open” market economy in the history of humanity, one should keep in mind that monetary policies of the period were an outcome of immense labor, mostly by British Empire and France . The Gold System was a product of such effort and resulted in WWI. (Stiglitz 2010)

After the crises ridden 1990s, the Turkish economy gave up the idea of controlling foreign exchange and let it float freely. In a world there can only be two options in macroeconomics<sup>5</sup>, i.e. stabilization of exchange rate and independent monetary policy, it has turned out that there is only one policy: monetary policy (Obstfeld 1998, 14).

Although structured and conditioned by international political economic developments, macroeconomic practices are developed in a manner that resembles experiments in laboratories (Cartwright 2007; Latour 1986; Muniesa and Callon 2007). Just as research on skin problems may lead to a pharmaceutical therapy for migraines, macroeconomic experiments may result in “miracles” that are not expected. One such miracle happened in New Zealand on New Year Eve in 1989. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ) decided to announce the expected inflation rate of the coming year to the public, as an experiment in what is called “expectation management.” What followed next was quite remarkable: the inflation rate remarkably approximated the announced level. The public announcement of a target realized itself, just as in the case of self-fulfilling prophecies, by means of having announced to and being known by the people who are expected, at the end, to determine the outcome of the targeted inflation. After 1989, inflation targeting (IT) policy has rapidly become predominant monetary policy that is currently being considered “orthodox” by scholars. Today, most of the economists consider IT as one of the main reasons for the low level of inflation in countries across the world, a case that was quite unimaginable during the 1980s and most of the 1990s.

Inflation has had countless definitions and there are still several causal frameworks used to explain its basic mechanisms, but the “persistent” inflation that most of the Third World

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<sup>5</sup> Having said that, there are some exceptions to the general trend of unlimited globalization of financial capital, foremost of which is China. For the other developing countries, non-orthodox economists suggest alternative paths like regulation of real exchange rates for competitiveness but they are far from being effective in the world of policy makers (Packard 2009).



suffered can be characterized as a problem of price-setting behavior (Fuhrer 2009; Menguy 2009). According to this framework, persistent inflation might be caused by the expectations of market actors about what will be the future inflation, thus in a self-fulfilling manner, expectations produce inflation. This public comprises not only companies, but also households, for inflation is a collective phenomenon, something called “price setting behaviors.” It is related to the consumption patterns of households and individuals: when and how quickly to buy the things they want, how much price fluctuation they consider acceptable in shopping, and how much increase they demand from their employers. For mainstream economists, an inflation targeting regime has a remarkable success in establishing and sustaining credibility, keeping inflation under control, and coopting “the public” into the mechanisms of macroeconomic regulations<sup>6</sup>.

As I have already mentioned, such technologies like the IT were not discovered or did come into being by mere chance or personal efforts. They are the products of historical and material constellations that facilitate certain methods and techniques. The history of macroeconomic thought is full of discussions regarding the nature and transformation of economic relations and objects. Therefore, in the age of gold standard no one had considered “publicly” announcing an inflation target and thereby “anchoring the public’s inflation expectations” (Bernanke et al. 1999, 275). Having been based on an intrinsically valuable commodity (gold), money was largely a problem of accumulation and international coordination that the western banks (primarily based on London) were using sophisticated technologies to ensure the coordination of values (Eichengreen 2008, 50). In this historical period, inflation was a ratio between a currency and its gold equivalence. However, after WWI, during which the

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<sup>6</sup> However, non-orthodox economists underline that the mainstream economists forget to tell us the cost of the IT policies which are including but not limited to: abandoning all the concerns for employment, growth, and foreign-exchange fluctuations, whose effects are devastating for the middle classes and the poor (Epstein and Yeldan 2009,14).

international monetary system was suspended, there emerged material constraints over returning to the gold standard. Simply put, the British Empire was not in a position to ensure the stability of the mechanisms of international trade by backing up the Sterling and thus the gold reserves of many countries were flowing to the USA and France as reparation payments and debt installments accrued during the war.

After the war, the separation of gold and money created a new sphere of action that had hitherto been unavailable for policy makers. The Keynesian dictum “money is not neutral” (1933, 411) became predominant in newly carved-out, “closed,” national economies. An increase in money, without allowing gold to circulate in the international sphere, would achieve something substantial: it could incite demand and run the engine of economy to its potential level. Thus it was Keynes who, most clearly, linked the monetary side of an economy to the real side, that is, output and employment (Skidelsky 2009, 71). The historical conditions of Keynesian revolution, its ecological niche, are so large in number that enumerating all of them here is a hopeless task. But the two of them should be named: the capacity and incentives of nation states to close their economies into their national spheres, and the capacity and power that the working classes had in defending their wage level. They were interrelated phenomena and did produce, according to Keynes, a virtuous circle: increase in the amount of money could lead to increase in consumption, which eventually would lead to the increase in employment. Thus we had, for the first time in the history, a causal relation between inflation and employment, whose formal representation is commonly known as “Phillips curve” (Phillips 1958). Until the late 1970s, the empirical and analytical works suggested that there was a clear causal relation between employment and inflation such that the decrease in the level of prices was associated with a decrease in the aggregate output of a given economy. However, with the emergence of

“stagflation,” i.e. the co-occurrence of inflation and stagnation, the connection between employment and inflation was broken.

The stagnation brought an end to the Bretton Woods system and Keynesian macroeconomics, and the economists began to conceptualize inflation as a problem of the “beliefs” of the rational actors. Taking their departure from the rational expectations revolution (Muth 1961), economists such as R.E. Lucas and T. J. Sargent argued that, although being rational and thus predictable in the short run, the agents in a given economy are the organic parts of economic models, and they transform the model that the policy makers implement and thereby change it in the middle and long term, thereby making predictions impossible. For these new neoclassical economists, the only way to predict the future was to go to the microfoundations that regulate individual behaviors (preferences, beliefs, material capabilities, etc.) (Phelps et al. 1970, Weintraub 1977). Robert Lucas finishes his Nobel winning article with a reference to what I am trying to articulate as the question of reflexivity:

In short, it appears that policy makers, if they wish to forecast the response of citizens, must take the latter into their confidence. This conclusion, if ill-suited to current econometric practice, seems to accord well with a preference for democratic decision making” (Lucas 1976, 42).

Here we witness something extraordinary: it was “discovered” that the Keynesian aggregate structures were not working anymore. Imagining a totality and acting on the basis of that imagination were becoming gradually harder and harder, since the agents were not mechanical parts of a national economy anymore, but dynamic and organic components that shape and are being shaped by the policy frameworks and decisions. After the 1970s, the public became an active force in the production of economies and their functioning. Thus it became possible to think that low inflation could be achievable through the use of a nominal variable to anchor inflation expectations (Granville 2013, 60). Articulating the public itself into macroeconomic

decisions, the value of money has become a matter of “convincing the public” and “tying down” the public’s inflation expectations (Bernanke 1999, 42). What I am trying to do here is to problematize the consequence of this new arrangement by means of registers other than “democracy,” “accountability,” “transparency,” and “credibility.” These conceptual registers are based on an analytical construction of a “rational” subject who seeks to maximize his/her interests in a universalizable manner. Hence there is no difference among unskilled blue-collar workers, political Islamists, women, socialists, or minorities. When it comes to inflation, expectations are expected to be homogeneous.

But I propose to go beyond the conventional criticisms about rational agents, because, even though the success of inflation targeting remains controversial under the conditions of the contemporary capitalist world system, the techniques of reflexivity in economics have become the dominant paradigm. Thus these “democratic” techniques of reflexivity, i.e. credibility, transparency, and accountability, are worth analyzing in their applications: when do masses encounter, receive, participate, and even manipulate these new economic dynamics? I argue that it is exactly in those moments of intersection that credibility, accountability and transparency turn into authoritarian subjection, political mobilization and the dissolution of the self. And the most salient practice of reflexivity is the best point to start such an inquiry. It is the new orthodoxy in macroeconomics: inflation targeting.

Up until now, we tried to recount the brief history of monetary arrangements and their relations to the specific policies. In the gold standard era, international cooperation between central banks and their active engagement sustained the international monetary system. After the war, the gold standard became impossible to sustain, and a new monetary arrangement was established, i.e. Bretton Woods. The Bretton Woods system was based on reciprocal valuation of

national currencies vis-à-vis the dollar that had remained convertible to gold until 1973. With the OPEC crisis and the ensuing stagflation, for the first time in history the exchange rates started to float freely. Without any material anchor to stabilize the value of money, national economies started to experiment with alternative modalities of regulation. In history, the source of value has changed but remained, mostly, an intrinsically valuable commodity. Before the gold standard, it was bimetallic valuation, a combination of silver and gold. Under the gold standard, it was gold; in the Bretton Woods System, it was the dollar convertible to gold. But the new macroeconomic orthodoxy provided a new anchor for valuation: nominal anchors to manage expectations.

Inflation Targeting is not the only nominal anchor that the central banks have used. There are nominal anchors for monetary base (M0), exchange rates, and inflation (Mishkin 2000). But as economists observe, thanks to a history of painful experiments in economics, the first two anchors are not sufficient to materialize the public's expectations (Cabos et al. 2001). The monetary base is too complicated and obscure for the masses, and exchange rates are especially prone to manipulations by financial investors (Mishkin 2000, 9). In the open world of financial capital, the only expectation that masses have control over is inflation –i.e. price-setting behaviors. To see the mechanisms of this practice, let me to start with a classical definition of the IT provided by Bernanke et al. at the turn of the century.

Inflation targeting is a framework for monetary policy characterized by the public announcement of official quantitative targets (or target ranges) for the inflation rate over one or more time horizons, and by explicit acknowledgment that low, stable inflation is monetary policy's primary long-run goal. Among other important features of inflation targeting are vigorous efforts to communicate with the public about the plans and objectives of the monetary authorities, and, in many cases, mechanisms that strengthen the central bank's accountability for attaining those objectives. (1999, 4)

Although this definition would not strike the reader at first, the most important change the IT represents is located in the emphasis on “communication with the public”. Price stability has

always been a problem for economists, but the predominant approach, from classical to Keynesian to neoclassical, was to “indirectly” manage it (Haldane 1995, 2). The IT is the first attempt to “directly” attain price stability by tying the public’s expectations back to itself to reflexively materialize a stable value for the money. For another concise definition, we can look at the dictionary on Financial Times’ website:

Inflation targeting is a monetary policy strategy used by central banks for maintaining prices at a certain level or within a specific range.

Using methods such as interest rate changes, this could help guide inflation to a targeted level or range.

This policy is designed to assure price stability. Initially, it was a radical plan adopted by New Zealand in 1989, although other countries, most notably Germany, had evolved something close to inflation targeting considerably earlier.

The term “inflation targeting” does not have a formal definition and is practised in different ways around the world. It does have some core elements. There is an explicit inflation target; it is announced to the public; the monetary authorities aim to hit that target at a defined point in the future; there is some leeway for inevitable errors and shocks; and the monetary authority is not told how to hit the target but is accountable to the public for its performance.

Another benefit is transparency. If the monetary authorities have sufficient respect and credibility that people believe the target will be hit, households and companies can plan ahead, negotiating wages on the basis of expecting low and stable inflation. The policy is self-reinforcing: low inflation expectations lead to low inflation, confirming the low expectations and so on.

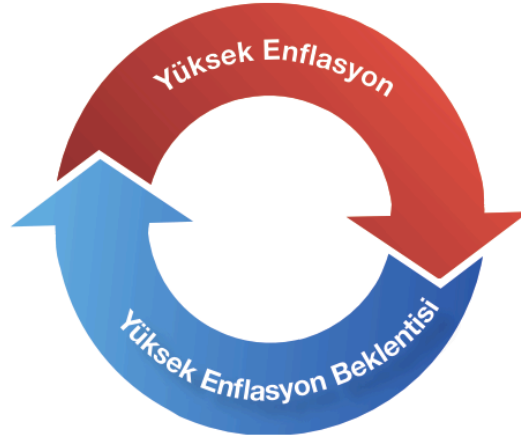


Figure 2. The figure from Turkish Central Bank showing the relation between “High Inflation” and “High Inflation Expectations”. (TCMB 2013, 5). The bank promotes the exact reverse of this structure: low inflation expectations causing low inflation rates.

This circular causation, the reflexive valuation of money by “the public’s understanding and involvement in the policy-making process” (Bernanke et al. 1999, 37), is not magic, as the economists say. The original developer of the IT, the president of Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Dan Brash warns other countries about the danger of taking inflation targeting as “a kind of magical ‘credibility dust’ over the macroeconomic landscape, ensuring that price stability is here to stay” (Brash 1988, 224). Although complicated in this manner, my fieldwork suggests that Turkish people are still convinced that the “claims” of the ruling party and the collective support of the party members sustain the inflation rate and the value of Turkish lira. But more importantly, in the very same key note that Dan Brash gives, he contradicts himself on that point and says, “In the meantime, it serves central bankers well to be reminded, as Alan Blinder has done, that while monetary policy makes progress as a science, it is still something of a *black art*. Let me add my own measure of progress to that. Perhaps when we started inflation targeting we were uncertain about how much we knew. Today I can confidently say that I’m certain that we are uncertain. I’m just looking for a few good rules, that’s all.” (227, emphasis is mine).

Although almost two decades have passed, the uncertainties surrounding the IT have remained somehow intact (Orphanides 2010). Yet the mechanisms of the IT has shown great progress and the emphasis on its “democratic” dimension have become gradually more pronounced.

The mechanism of inflation targeting aims to convince people, i.e. producing credibility, that the target will be implemented as announced to the public. Thus we have a circle: the announced target can be achieved because people believe that the target will be achieved. To ensure that end, there are several means to adjust interest rates in accord with the changes in inflation rate. There are many ways to establish this feedback mechanism like the Taylor rule. But the point is that, in most of the cases, the knowledge that the central bank will use “this” instrument in “that” situation is what really regulates price behaviors. As the president of RBNZ Dan Brash says:

In other words, the mere fact that the financial markets understood that we could adjust the quantity of settlement cash in the banking system, thereby tightening or easing monetary conditions, was sufficient to produce a change in monetary conditions consistent with our objective of meeting the inflation target, without the need for any actual change in settlement cash. (Brash 2002, 63)

But there is one problem that the policy makers face all the time: how to “convince” people. Since there is always the possibility of manipulating the target for “cynical political ends,” as Brash puts, it is necessary to produce “credibility”. However, as Goodfriend clearly states “no fully satisfactory theory exists to explain the loss or acquisition of credibility for low inflation” (2007, 65). Economists identify some ways of building credibility for those who don’t have it like most of the developing world (Granville 2013, 58-82). First one is to import credibility by anchoring the exchange rate to a foreign credibility as currency (dollar, euro or frequently their combination). It became painfully apparent that in a world of mobile international capital, this is not a viable anchor anymore (Obstfeld and Rogoff 1995). The second



one is to establish institutional independence, a guarantee for the central banks that the political authorities will not interfere in their decisions. This is the most common practice to ensure credibility in developed countries, since it has been assumed that the political system is mature enough to respect contracts and official announcements. Not only is such institutional independence always questionable in developing countries, but developed countries also have their share of political intervention and calibration in monetary policies (Jonas and Mishkin 2005). This point brings us to the core of the question, the last but essential means of making credibility: political will (Granville 2013, 71). Both for developed and developing countries, inflation targeting is a political activity to ensure people that their own actions, with the transparently transmitted set of instruments that are directed towards the predefined goals, will define the value of money. Inflation targeting, at the end, is a political decision that aims to “depersonalize monetary policy and make the role of the central bank more consistent with the principles of a democratic society” (Ball and Sheridan 2005, 273; Bernanke et al. 1999, 333). However, the struggle for depersonalization, credibility, accountability, and transparency does not necessarily mean de-politicization. The Turkish experiment with reflexive valuation clearly shows that this new paradigm is actively appropriated by the masses to achieve, sustain and further the goals that are promoted by the international financial order. This means collective mobilization towards financial stability and high rate of growth without paying any attention to what sort of political tensions and conflicts it produces on its way.

I tried to sketch above the ecological niche, the material and theoretical horizon, that has defined the political, social and economic developments in Turkey since the 1980s when the Turkish economy was opened up by the military coup d'état. Between 1960 and 1980, the Turkish economy was a closed economy, structured through plan-based models and protective

policies, according to the predominant macroeconomic policy of the period: import substitution industrialization. In 1980, Turkey was at the threshold of an economic crisis as a result of the immense increases in energy prices after the OPEC decision. With the directives of the IMF and the WB, the government at the time tried to initiate the neoliberal project in the country, through a set of notoriously violent policies, commonly known as the January 24<sup>th</sup> decisions. No political party were able to back up the plan, and, under the increasing political strife between left-wing groups and right-wing fascists, the 12<sup>th</sup> September coup d'état took place.

The road to the military intervention was full of contingent and structural factors, but there is a scholarly consensus that after the OPEC crisis and the subsequent end of the Bretton Woods system it became obvious that developmentalist policies had become impossible to be sustained (Keyder 1993,35). The first sign of the crisis was the value of money. Inflation started to rise up to 107% just before the military intervention in 1980, which was in stark contrast with the Bretton Woods period's average of 4.5% (Kilicbay 1984). After the coup d'etat, the inflation rate fell to 36% in 1981 and then 27% in 1982. For the reasons that we cannot delve into here, three military interventions in Turkey did not result in long-term military governments. In 1983, Turkish democracy was nominally restored by free elections, and a newly founded liberal right party, ANAP, had gained the majority of the parliament and furthered the new economic policies. However, the inflation rate started to increase and fluctuated around 50% until the 1990s. These were the first moments in Turkish economic history that people started to see a correlation between political stability and the value of money.

The move towards opening up the economy started with the January 24<sup>th</sup> decisions in 1980. The decisions effected (i) the abolishment of price controls, (ii) the gradual liberalization of foreign trade, and (iii) the determination of interest rates by the financial markets (Nas 1992,

11). After the 24<sup>th</sup> January decisions, the central bank started to publicly announce exchange rates on a daily basis, gradually making the American Dollar and the Deutsche Mark public entities about which people talked and had political discussions. In 1989, the full convertibility of the Turkish Lira was established and international financial markets integrated Turkey into its massive web of mobility (Ongun 2002, 45). However, the value of the Turkish lira vis-à-vis foreign currencies was to stay under the control of the state by means of direct valuation in which the Central Bank was announcing the exchange rates on a daily basis by measuring and determining their values in the interbank market. Against all admonitions from international agencies, the IMF, WB, and GATT, Turkey did not let the foreign exchanges float until the most devastating economic crisis in its history in 2001<sup>7</sup>. Between 1989 and 2001, the country witnessed an abrasive relation between inflation rates and foreign exchange: crises, devaluations, and continuous high rate of inflation that approximated to the level of 70% on average (Aydoğan 2004). The 1990s were the years that the high level of inflation was continuously impoverishing masses and accumulating social and political tension around the question of the value of the Turkish Lira. It was then the inflation monster appeared first time –the one that Muharrem referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

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<sup>7</sup> As early as 1976, IMF started to promote floating exchange rates to the third world countries according to the amendment of the Articles of Agreement of the IMF at Kingston, Jamaica, in January 1976 (Obstfeld 1985). The newspapers reported that IMF strongly recommended Turkey to initiate preparations. However, after the 1999 crisis, it was again IMF that suggested Turkey to employ currency peg program that eventually led one of the most devastating crisis in the history of the country. Although the scholarly consensus at the time indicated that pegged currencies produce crisis, the reasons for IMF's insistence, against its own position about the matter, remained mysterious up until today.



Figure 3: “The bread is in the month of Inflation monster.”

After the introduction of implicit inflation targeting<sup>8</sup>, by the newly elected single party (AK party) government, inflation rate steadily decreased. In 2006, the government declared that they would switch to open inflation targeting and “remove six zeros from currency” as an act of revaluation of the Turkish Lira. In this way, the expectations management of inflation targeting took a political form and merged with single-party rule in the parliament. In the public sphere, financial stability had been anchored to the authority of a single-party. There are various interpretations about how the inflation was controlled in Turkey and who was responsible for this achievement. Let me quote here the short history of the introduction of the IT in Turkey as articulated by one of the top officers in the Turkish Central Bank between 2001-2006, Mehmet Mehmetoglu<sup>9</sup>, who initiated the IT policies and established the system.

Mehmet: At the beginning of the 90s, the Central Bank was trying to explain [to the powers that be] that monetary targets were important. But long after we had realized that

<sup>8</sup> The difference between implicit and open inflation targeting policies, although the names imply exactly the reverse, does not mean a lot for my purposes. The only difference, in Turkish case, is the use of other targets together with inflation target. But the basic mechanism remains the same: producing transparency and self-reflexivity that price-setting behaviors would be stabilized by the agents’ recognition of the exact mechanisms of inflation targeting and partaking in that mechanism.

<sup>9</sup> I am using a pseudonym in place of his real name as I do for most of my informants.

in an inflationary context, the demand for money is too volatile, thus it is impossible to declare a monetary target. Again, at the end of the 90s, that famous 2000 program [tried to control] inflation through foreign exchange rate targets... And it collapsed after the 2001 crisis. We did not have much alternative. This did not work, that did not work, but there is also something people call inflation targeting, many countries use, it works. And we had the conviction that the expectations are the most important. This was not something every economist shared at the time. Only at the end of the 1990s we understood that there are two things influencing inflation: one is foreign exchange rate, and the other is inflation inertia. And what determines inertia was adaptive expectation. People expect high inflation, then inflation becomes high. We thought that only if we changed people's expectations, we could succeed, and we did.

Firat: Did people in the Central Bank think that it would be this successful? My interlocutors during my research kept telling me that it was the AKP that decreased the inflation.

M-That is not true.

F-Now, as far as I understand, the Central Bank believes that because the Central Bank took the task seriously, people start to expect...

M-We started [the inflation targeting regime] during the coalition time.

F-Sure, but since its effects came during the single party...

M-Right, it might be the case that effects came later, but my belief is that we were responsible for the decrease. For many years, many governments came, and did nothing. For people, they did not have credibility. However, then someone called Kemal Dervis [a bureaucrat appointed as a minister of economy after the crisis] came. If it were not for the extraordinary conditions of the time, that man would not have stood a chance in Turkish politics.

F-Certainly.

M-There were extraordinary conditions and such a man came from the World Bank. People started to think that things were going to be different. He played a significant role.

F-Do you mean that the most important factor was the name of Kemal Dervis?

M-His name was very important. Another significant factor was the independence of the Central Bank. No politician in Turkey could have done this [making the CT an independent institution]. Because of the context, Kemal Dervis could have done it. My guess is, people's expectations had changed because: the independence of the Central Bank, the fact that the staff in the Central Bank had a clear vision, and the [X] of the Central Bank, that is me, appearing in public (*meydanlara cikip*) and telling people that we are going to do this job [decreasing the inflation] and providing the trust to the people.

F-So you say that the politics stayed behind.

M-I will say it directly: they did not even understand what was going on. I believe it was us who convinced the people.

Mehmetoglu's account is a history of inflation targeting in Turkey in a succinct manner, foregrounding that public communication, building credibility, and influencing public

expectations became the major concerns and techniques of the macroeconomic policies in Turkey at the turn of the millennium. At the same time, however, his account made clear that this reflexive valuation is a political matter, a battle field on which different actors wage a war to claim who is responsible for establishing credibility and influencing people's expectation. In this sense, I am not interested in who is "really" responsible for convincing people that inflation was going to reduce: Mehmet Mehmetoglu, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Kemal Dervis, or some other institution or personality<sup>10</sup>. I am also not interested in the "reality" of this situation in the sense that whether it is a coincidence or an empirical necessity that low levels of inflation, high levels of growth and a single party government co-occurred. What I am interested in is what happens when people at the grassroots level, my interlocutors, argue that the single party government, political authority, their mass support and the value of the Turkish Lira are causally interrelated – despite Mehmetoglu's "belief" that they are wrong. What are the practices of such causation? What are the techniques and technologies that sustain political conjecture of this co-occurrence?

### **III. Mass Mobilization as Valuation: History, Experiments, and Politics**

In the poor districts of Istanbul, the political mobilization of the AKP has reached unprecedented levels. Although opposition groups claim that the 'official' numbers released by Erdogan's party are intentionally inflated, the import of these numbers is nonetheless clear: 10 million party members predominantly from the poorest districts and cities of Turkey. There is no political party in Turkish history, that has ever had anything close to this number of members, and despite the valid suspicion that the numbers are exaggerated, the massive political mobilization that the

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<sup>10</sup> In a parallel fashion, economists do not have an exact answer for what the source of low inflation in the world is. Some scholars claim that it is a result of technological development (Kahn et al. 2002), some others say it is good luck (Stock and Watson 2003), and many argue that we owe macroeconomic stability to the macroeconomic policies and inflation targeting (Romer and Romer 2002).

AKP has achieved is historically unique. I will discuss different dimensions of this political mobilization, its material constellations, ecological niche, and its practices across the dissertation. For now, I will follow the path opened by the dialog that I quoted at the beginning. How exactly does Muharrem see his political participation as an activity that keeps the value of the Turkish Lira high?

In order to answer this question, I begin with the life stories of my informants. These stories exemplify how the poor in Istanbul, especially those who are close to the AKP, use stories about the 1990s to ‘prove’ a certain increase in their capacity to affect the economic wellbeing of Turkey. In this sense their narratives correspond to two recent shifts in Turkish history: the 1990s (a time of unstable coalitions) and the 2000s (the single-party rule of the AKP). The 1990s also witnessed the liberalization of financial markets. Inflation rates routinely touched 100%, foreign monies (particularly the Dollar and Deutschmark) were allowed to circulate within the country without restriction, thus becoming a topic of public concern. In this first stage, the value of the Turkish Lira vis-a-vis the Dollar was determined by public authorities. This is what economists call a “fixed exchange rate.” Interestingly, there is a narrative conjunction between money and political authority/agency: since the value of the TL during the 1990s was determined by public authorities, my informants narrate their life stories in a way that the loss of value in money in this period was a result of the actions of unscrupulous politicians. This causal construction allows people to understand the value of money as being closely related to political developments. In this way, the losses endured and disappointments suffered become meaningful: former politicians (before the AKP and Erdogan) were responsible for the sufferings of ‘the people’ during the 1990s. The section “Decade of Catastrophes: the Long 1990s” follows this trajectory.

The second stage, which began in 2002, was different; beginning with the mercurial rise of the AKP, lead by Recep Erdogan. Historically, the rise of the moderate Islamist AKP corresponds to a radical transformation of the Turkish economy. A single-party rule was established in 2002. Six months before the elections, following a tested IMF<sup>11</sup> recipe, Turkey had liberalized financial markets completely, and implementing a free-floating exchange regime and inflation targeting policy. This new financial system assumed that the value of currencies (the Turkish Lira, the Dollar etc.) is best determined by the markets not by public authorities. Since the control over the value of currency was delegated to the markets, there remained only one medium of intervention in prices in order to manage inflation: expectation management through public communication.

This system was framed as ostensibly part of the democratization of Turkey on the assumption that the value of the Turkish Lira is determined by the people, not by a public authority prone to populist concerns and interventions. Since the Turkish Lira is left to the expectations of the people; the mechanisms of valuation are supposedly transparent; there is accountability (the central bank is independent), and thus the system is credible (“the political will” of the AKP assures that the inflation will be kept under control). Thus, as a response to the dynamics of globalization, the Turkish Central Bank created a vast network of reflexive valuation through which constant public communication was established, credibility became a major resource, and expectations and their managements turned into the principal economic values. The assumption behind this new financial system was that prices must be democratically determined, i.e. by the market and by the people, rather than bureaucratically and autocratically imposed, i.e. by unscrupulous politicians. However, the stories of my informants and my observation of their political behaviors during my fieldwork show that the consequences of this

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<sup>11</sup> The Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Undersecretariat of Treasury, Letter No: B.02.1.HM.0.DEI.02.00.500



“democratization” is far from what the proponents of financial liberalization imagine. Many people in the poor districts of Istanbul assiduously follow the fluctuating value of the Turkish Lira during a day. And this form of continuous public ‘monitoring’ produces, and consolidates, a public knowledge that the value of the national currency responds favorably whenever the single-party consolidates its power (by political meetings, political events, or election results) and unfavorably whenever the single-party faces political difficulties (dissident demonstrations like the Gezi Park Protests, losses in local or general elections, outbreak of political accusations, or judiciary decisions against AKP policies).

As a response to the vast network of reflexive valuation, my informants make causal connections between actions that support the authority of the single party and the economic well-being of Turkey. This is not just a cognitive activity but a performative one: the AKP partisans and sympathizers experience a kind of agency under AKP rule, in stark contradistinction to their felt passivity during the 1990s. Going to an AKP meeting is a way of making one’s national currency more valuable; dissuading a neighbor from participating in a political protest is preventing one’s currency from losing value; voting for the single-party is how you sustain your economy. The new financial mechanisms of valuation thus enable the forging of such causal connections, through the mechanism of continuous communication: the value of money seems to immediately respond to political developments and this change may be seen on the electronic boards of local exchange offices, on television, or on your smartphone. This connection between politics and economics is viscerally experienced: by means of their political activities, the masses around the AKP see themselves as the main source of the value of the Turkish Lira. The AKP and party members frequently underline this relationship. In the first two years of assuming power, the AKP explicitly announced that political stability had been achieved with the help of

‘the people’ and that the party would, ‘remove six zeroes from the Turkish Lira, so everyone can see what the people of Turkey have achieved’. In the section “Experiments of Valuation,” I follow my informants’ life stories, their explanations of how the Turkish economy achieved stability, and their political practices to promote and sustain the economic value that they claim to have produced during AKP rule.

### ***The decade of catastrophes: the 90s***

The 1980 coup d’état was a rupture in the postwar history of Turkey; forcibly opening the Turkish economy to the world. Liberalization had already begun as a gradual experiment, however, starting with the liberalization of exchange rates and reducing taxation on foreign trade. The IMF, WB, and GATT played their respective roles. In the 1980s, Turkey was the country that received the largest amount of assistance from the IMF and was considered as an ideal model for the transition to “export-oriented growth” from a small closed economy (Boratav 2014). In the process of opening up the economy, 1989 was a significant moment in which IMF accepted Turkey’s application for complete currency convertibility (Yeldan 2001). Muharrem cannot remember who is responsible for bringing US Dollars and Deutsche Marks into his daily life, but this doesn’t stop him from cursing those “powers” which made his national currency worthless.

I am asking you, what happened in the 1990s? Who brought all those dollars here, who made our money worthless, who stole the money from these people’s pocket? Who made this country in need of 20 cents? I will tell you who did it; those who engage in corruption, those who are real thieves, those who make money out of interest rates.

This is not just Muharrem’s narrative: stories about foreign exchange, how persons secretly saved some dollars from other family members to buy a household item, how dollars were received as a gift in weddings, or, most frequently, how debts were doubled by political

decisions regarding the value of the Turkish Lira, i.e. how devaluations ravaged family assets are the stuff of everyday conversation amongst the poor in urban Istanbul. Although foreign currencies were allowed to circulate within the Turkish economy since 1989, it was not until the 2002 crisis that exchange rates were allowed to fluctuate freely. Thus looking back, people see the mechanisms whereby political authorities were responsible for the devaluation of their money by political decisions that made the Turkish Lira less valuable vis-à-vis the Dollar in the 1990s. In the 1994 devaluation, brother Kasim, a close friend of Muharrem's, had to sell the workshop he spent years buying to pay off his debts. In a world where the value of money was constantly decreasing, people resorted to lending and borrowing money in a more stable currency. But there were risks when the central bank recalibrated the value of money.

What should I tell you? You should have seen it. There was no justice, only one day, and that's it, your life is gone. Some people became Karun<sup>12</sup>, we became miserable. We were unable to pay the debt, so we sold the workshop.

The Dollar enters everyday life as gifts, surprises, and unexpected chance but mostly as an agent of destruction. The newspapers of the 90s attest to the doubled character of this foreign source of value. Shortly after the introduction of exchange offices, newspapers started reporting heist stories and brutal murders. As the reign of dollar extends, fortune and misfortune intersect in public knowledge.

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<sup>12</sup> Karun (Korah in Bible) is a character of a parable from Quran. It is stated that he was so rich, even a group of people would not be able to carry the keys of his treasure. Having lost any sense of decency and humility, Karun refuses to acknowledge Moses' miracles and he is eventually destroyed by the God just like Pharaoh and Haman.



Figure 4. One of the first armed robberies of exchange offices in 1989. In a few years, newspapers were filled with breaking news about robberies and murders around foreign exchanges. However, Dollar also became an object of desire in public, as the news on the right report, the famous models participated in an opening of a new office in Mecidiyekoy/Istanbul in 1994. The news is entitled “Fashion Show of Foreign Exchange”. Models seductively advertise the major commodities: Dollar and Deutsche Mark.

The early 1990s brought dollars into daily life not only as a source of value but also a source of speculation. Political authorities were held responsible for conceding to the demands of foreign authorities and institutions like the IMF and rating agencies, and devaluing the Turkish Lira vis-à-vis the dollar. Residents of poor neighborhoods still recall the devaluations, the rates of devaluation (though much exaggerated), the social discontent aroused, symptomized in the suicides associated with Dollar debts. April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1994 is a particularly significant date in public memories of this time: the devaluation was near 100%, and the subsequent inflation touched almost 150%. Many working class families, who had hoped to buy a house with foreign exchange credits, were saddled with debts that could not be paid off with a lifetime of work. Dozens of people committed suicide, countless demonstrations followed, including a death fast.

# Ölüm orucunda 5. gün

Volkan KANBOLAT - ANKARA

DÖVİZZEDE 5 vatandaşın DYP Genel Merkezi'nin hemen arkasındaki sokakta başlattığı "ölüm orucu" beşinci gününe girdi. Ölüm orucuna Mikdat Özgündüz, İsmail Yılmaz, Sakine Mıgan, Recai Ertürk ve Nesrin Ataman katılıyor.

**Dövizzedelerin DYP Genel Merkezi'nin arkasındaki sokak grevi sürüyor**  
Her şeyin 5 Nisan kararlarının ardından başladığını belirten emekli işçi Mikdat Özgündüz, "37 bin mark kredi çektim. O günkü parayla 220 milyon lira borlanmışım bugün borcum 2 milyar 150 milyon liraya çıktı. İntihara teşebbüs ettim, eşim kurtardı" dedi.



Figure 5: "The fifth day in the death fast". A retired factory worker says "I took 37 thousands mark as credit. It was 230 million TL at the time, but today my debt is 2 billion 150 million TL. I tried to commit suicide; my wife saved my life."

The destruction wreaked on the small assets of the poor by currency devaluations and the subsequent waves of inflation are today interpreted as resulting directly from the decisions of political figures: prime ministers, political parties, international organizations, and rating agencies are held responsible for these misfortunes. This is, formally speaking, a valid interpretation since the value of the Turkish Lira had been officially determined between 1980 and 2002. Thus people frequently refer to the devaluations as a "politicians' job", the betrayal of the people by political elites acting under the influence of foreign powers.

During the 1990s, although being a cause of destruction, the dollar also remained a source of wealth and value. It was, and is still, a material anchor that would keep secure the value of whatever one has. "Dollar, gold, and land," Kasim argued, maybe with a touch of regret, "these are the things in which you put your money. But we were following *sunnet* (the path of the prophet Muhammed)." And he quoted with a pride of righteousness, "the nine out of ten of *rizk* is in trade and in courage." He was not an exception in pointing out the ambiguities of dollar. Foreign currencies were definitely not *haram*, as is the case for interest, but still, for the majority, for the poor, there was something uncanny in the dynamic valuation of the dollar. As

Kasim said before, people sense a problem of justice in a case where you give one Turkish Lira to your friend today and take two tomorrow.

Firat: But your friends were also cruel in asking you the same amount of Dollar. Didn't they know that you had just borrowed the money?

Kasim: You say that, brother, but look from their own perspective: that was their saving, they would have lost a lot if they gave it to me in TL.

F: But what if you did borrow after devaluation? You needed 100 TL, let's say, you would have borrowed the same amount of money in TL but less in Dollar.

K: Ohhh, that would have been so good, but how can you know when they devalue money? *Kismet...* It was our fate.



Figure 6: The comic from 1994 states that “people start to shop with the dollar in bazaars as well (from the press),” “Washington [a kind of Turkish Orange] Orange for 1 dollar”.

The dollar provides safety for one's savings; it works against inflation and it gives you a sense of security about your future. But also you can gain something, although it is hard to define what it is. Kasim did not articulate the difference theoretically, but we can try to illustrate the mechanism based on their stories. There is a time discrepancy (what economists call “temporal disequilibrium”) between prices of goods that Kasim wants to buy, and the cost of those goods that are related to the dollar. Since the increase in the value of the Dollar vis-à-vis the Turkish Lira cannot be homogenously reflected in the prices at large immediately, there is a temporal lag between today's prices and tomorrow's prices. Within that lag, “some” people, who have either luck or insider information, may take advantage of devaluation and, manipulating Marx's

commodity-money circle a bit, follow the route C-TL-\$-TL'-C' as in the case of arbitrage trading. But only a few people can do this. Thus Kasim and Muharrem curse those who are responsible for currency devaluations, thinking that those responsible for monetary policy benefitted from the devaluations, without themselves being able to express how exactly they worked the system to their own advantage. Instead they tell the story of an economy full of crises, composed of liars and cheats: "Those who are selfish," "who don't fear the wrath of God," "who embezzle," "who work for the Jews," and so on.

Suat and Muharrem are right about the 1990s being a crises-ridden era. Between 1991 and 2002, the country witnessed 6 different coalitions, 5 prime ministers, very high levels of inflation (around 90%), a series of currency devaluations, several economic crises (two of which were historically unprecedented), and one "post-modern coup d'état". But what is more interesting is how they ask the question of "why". What conjunction of material and historical forces do they call to account for these crises? How do the poor narratively build causal relations in their explanations? What is the place of their own 'agency' in these explanations? Paying attention to how people build causal relations shows us that causation is a practice in a grounded sense of the term: we do things by attributing causes to effects. In this sense, the attribution of causality is a performative act through which we make things (Austin 1975; Butler 2015; MacKenzie et al. 2007). We provide models (how to act in a certain situation), we solicit agreement (defining who is responsible for what), we call for taking positions (thus defining who is an enemy) or we determine the moment of subjection (defining when one cannot act). So an economist would say that inflation and the exchange rate, though connected, are not mutually determining, that there are other variables that influence both such as the expansion of the

monetary base. But for Bayram, an established local political figure, from the early political Islamist movements (*Milli Gorus*) to the contemporary AKP, the story is rather different.

Coup d'états are good for discipline but they are not good for economic profits. On the other hand, political stability facilitates development. Coalitions result in loss of money and time. If there is a coalition, there will be devaluation, why? Because the owners of finance would put pressure on you [coalition] for devaluation. They do not want you to make decisions on your own. So they make you borrow money from the IMF, and then you have to do whatever the IMF wants you to do. We, thanks to Allah, broke this vicious circle.

This is a common constellation among the urban poor who support one party rule in Turkey: selfishness, spirituality, development, foreign powers, and value are concatenated in different combinations to make sense of political, social and economic developments in Turkey. Through these combinations, a transition is narrated from the “vicious circle” in which a country cannot decide its own destiny and is manipulated by outside forces, to a sort of Keynesian virtuous circle in which people pursue their destiny and use their resources in order to increase the values they have. In a popular rendition of it, the 1990s is not an “abstract rationality” that only interprets actual states of affairs, but a material process through which people find their “agency” in the contemporary world and act on it. Nearly all accounts of personal history and interpretations of the political developments in the 1990s revolve around a notion of “passivity” that inflicts pain on the poor of Istanbul. Meryem, who is Muharrem’s right hand in the district, tells me that they, the poor, were “abandoned without any one looking after them”.

*Ablam* [your sister], I am telling you what I know: we did not have anyone before. No one was asking what we were doing or how we survived before the Welfare Party. We did not have any confidence to go to a *kaymakam* and ask for something for ourselves. If you didn’t have money, you were no one in those times.

Of course money does not cease to be effective today. People still complain about having no money and claim, “how much money you have, that much human you are,” but people



generally see an increase in their capacity to influence the world even without having much money. Making a living is still a must, but one does not have to have a lot of money to be influential. President Erdogan and other Islamist politicians are good examples for those who do not have much but aspire to do things that have been hitherto experienced as restricted to the “educated, privileged elites”. Meryem accuses those elites of using the resources of the poor for their own selfish interests and abandoning them to destitution. For her, there is no explanation for why basic infrastructure and services were not provided to the margins of Istanbul. Meryem, Muharrem, Suat, and Bayram all agree that inflation, devaluation and crisis were the symptoms of elitist rule, secular hegemony, and foreign influence. “What has changed?” I ask. “People” she says, “people made a claim on their own country (*insanlar memleketlerine sahip cikti*)” and she adds “these people put an end to the tutelage [*vesayet*] [of elites]. That’s the reason why there is no inflation.”

### ***Regaining Agency through Valuation: From Passivity to Activity***

Many things have changed since the early 1990s, and the 2001 economic crisis was a breaking point for the Turkish economy. The Central Bank of the Turkish Republic (CBRT) wrote a letter of intent to the IMF, indicating that Turkey was willing to switch to a complete liberalization of foreign exchange markets (free-floating exchange regime)<sup>13</sup>. Political interventions into financial markets for populist reasons, it was assumed, are no longer feasible. However, the liberalization of financial markets is a political act in itself. The exchange rates continued to react to political developments, but this time not through the decisions of authorities but through price movements in financial markets. Before 2001, the value of Turkish Lira was announced daily and it stayed the same throughout the day. After 2001, the value of the Lira became a topic of daily

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<sup>13</sup> The Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Undersecretariat of Treasury, Letter No: B.02.1.HM.0.DEI.02.00.500

conversations as people followed the fluctuating value of the Turkish Lira throughout the day. Foreign exchange offices not only proliferated across the country more rapidly than before, but also began placing digital screens so they faced the streets so passers-by could see the fluctuating value of currencies. More and more people began tracking the daily value of the Dollar vis-à-vis the Turkish Lira and a sort of ‘common-sense’ was forged around an understanding that the “lira-dollar parity” seemed to respond immediately to political developments in the country not simply at the level of a general statement of ‘political stability’, but the slightest political tremors such as a political party meeting.

Muharrem and Suat are close friends and their political activism is an organic extension of their daily lives. Political meetings, activities, and social visits do not comprise a distinct sphere but comprise a continuity between party politics, social life and familial life. Their wives complain frequently that they talk politics all the time, with the infrequent intrusion of sports, and they take politics too seriously as though, “they themselves will save the country”. Nonetheless, all family members are engaged in party politics in one way or another. Wives are usually members of a “women’s branch” of the party, engaging in social work, collecting information on the problems of the poor, visiting the houses of party sympathizers and discussing the problems of the country, the city, and the district. Their sons and daughters are also actively engaged in politics through the “youth branch” of the party. In a sense, like many others in the poor districts, their life trajectory is closely, but not for that symmetrically, knitted into the political trajectory of Turkey in general and the AK party in particular. When I asked “when did inflation stop being a problem?” Muharrem recounted his life story, in a familiar rhetorical habit, which pushes political events back in history to coincide with a point he associates with formative events in his personal life.

Muharrem: Now I had my third shop here in the 1990s, we survived all those crises, and I will not tell you lies, we had done really good business. But the whole country was hit by the 1999 earthquake. We did not see that it was only the beginning. People were miserable then, they lost everything that they had. In one day. Then the 2000 crisis came, I said to myself, “this is going to be bad.” I knew it because I know Ecevit<sup>14</sup>. He was old and weak.

Firat: He was not like the *Karaoglan* he used to be.

M: No, no... I told myself that this guy does not have authority. It was a coalition. What happens when there is a coalition? They all focus on their own interests; no one cares for the country. What happened? Sezer [the then president of Turkey] threw the constitution book at the face of the prime minister. It means you are not worth as much as paper.

What happened? Our money became paper. If you cannot stand right, if your own people do not trust you, if you cannot give people that sense of trust, then other [foreign] people come and take your money. The value of the dollar rose 150%. All orders were cancelled, we tried to keep the workshop open, but the market was dead. So we closed down.

The 2001 crisis is probably the most vividly recalled moment in the personal histories of many of my informants. Everyone remembers it vividly, though not necessarily accurately, and the common consensus is that the crisis was a result of a weak coalition. The breaking point was really the moment when the president threw the constitution at the prime minister and the prime minister complained to the press, saying “this is a serious crisis”. Without getting entangled in minute details, we can say that the economic crisis was the structural outcome of a long history of Turkish economic policies but the breaking point was a political crisis wherein people narrate a direct relation between political stability and the value of money. The rise of the AKP is thus narrated as emerging from a collective decision whereby people consciously chose an alternative to existing political parties in order to provide political stability. Suat intervened in our

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<sup>14</sup> Bulent Ecevit was a prominent center-left politician in Turkey, becoming an impressive political leader in the tumultuous years of the 1970s, known at the time as “*Karaoglan*,” the dark boy, due to his thick and black hair, and his resemblance to a popular hero of the same name. He took the leadership of the secular Kemalist CHP and made the party a popular one. He became prime minister between 1999 and 2002, when he was over 75, and his health was frail. He played a major role at the break of the 2001 crisis due to his fight with the president about the correct interpretation of the constitution. It was reported that the president threw the constitution book at his face. Apparently being afraid and seemingly broken, he appeared before TV cameras and said, “this is a serious crisis,” resulting in the outbreak of the worst financial crisis in the history of the country.

conversation and underlined, “people chose stability [*istikrar*], we were sick of coalitions.” I wondered and asked whether they found what they were seeking in the first years of the AKP. Muharrem said “we were part of the movement from the beginning, so we knew from Erbakan *Hoca* what our people can do. But all the people here also saw that.” He added “two years after being in power [2004], we removed six zeroes” with a touch of pride in his voice.



Figure 7: The AKP poster around the country states “Six zero has gone, my money gained value” “we removed 6 zeros from Lira” with the addition of the party motto “it was a dream, now it is real!”

People thus seem to have an absolute conviction that it is a matter of *fact* that the numerical value of money and political stability are closely associated not just indirectly—stable politics is better for growth, investor confidence, business etc—but directly and visibly—political support for the AKP numerically, and immediately, impacts the daily value of the Turkish Lira. Thus it is not unusual to hear a member of the party or a sympathizer claim, “if people do not trust the government, will they make investments?” Trying to avoid any impression that I am critical of the party, I then asked, “but there are many people who are in debt, shouldn’t we be more careful about indebtedness?” Answers varied; some conceded that

there are still economic problems, but for some, the source of investment does not really matter, since the value of money is high and their trust in the government is stable. One of my informants even claimed that, “if people are in debt, it means people have greater trust in the party, in this country. Otherwise if you are going to borrow money, you would earlier think twice, since you may lose money that you do not have. But if it is your own money, spending it is easier, you can even be profligate.” Despite this public confidence however, everything did not go as the party wished.

It is difficult to accurately date the transition of the AKP from a party of moderate Islamists, to a party with strong authoritarian tendencies with a propensity to mobilize people against the opposition(s); and it is not my intention to re-trace or recuperate this history. I am not interested in an anthropology of authoritarianism through an examination of the AKP itself—the organization of high cadres of the party, their ideological commitments, or the official discourses produced at the national level. Rather I am interested in authoritarianism as a praxis comprised of sets of relations among masses, economic practices and local political networks. I began my fieldwork in 2013, when sharpening tensions between the ruling party and dissident groups had reached newly exacerbated levels. The Gezi revolt, a dissident political act of occupying the central square in Istanbul occurred in 2013. Since then, the Turkish political situation has continued to be unstable and inflamed. During my fieldwork, I witnessed one local election, one presidential election, two general elections, a series of political scandals accusing Erdogan and party members of embezzlement and bribery, and finally an attempted coup d'état in summer 2016. While each of these ‘events’ structure my analysis through the dissertation, here I would like to talk about what happens when political stability is perceived to be in danger.

Nearly one year after the Gezi revolt, in the run-up to the municipal elections of 2014, a group of AK party members and I were sitting around a table in a mosque's teahouse, after the Friday prayer. Muharrem was explaining to me, the "American," why it is so important to demonstrate the power of the party in the local elections. According to him, if the party has a weak showing in the elections, not only will the political sphere be affected but also the economy will immediately be rendered fragile. Hasan, who is also a leader of another neighborhood, agreed with Muharrem, and turning to me said:

*"Hocam, you are interested in the economic conditions of the poor. But you also see the situation here. We have achieved great development in Esenler. The income of the poor has increased in the last decade; no one can deny it here. And this is because AKP is the voice of the silent masses."*

For Muharrem and Hasan their support for the party, participation in elections, is not predicated on membership in a parliamentary democratic structure but is an active engagement with the wellbeing of the country, and take their support as a part of their collective effectiveness in the political and economic life of the country. Being intrigued by the connection that Hasan made between being "the voice of the silent masses" and achieving economic development, I asked him how it is that "the silent masses," can have such an immediate effect. A senior member of the party, Veysel, who was attentively listening to our conversation, asked permission to say something:

*Hocam, in the workplace of my son too, everyone accepts the services done by the AK party. During the Gezi events, money stopped. We were unable to make money because no one wanted to spend it. Then the AKP held a huge meeting here, two million people came. Do you know what happened next? The dollar fell, the stock market rose. People bought their future. We all knew it, we went to that meeting to support our country, our economy. But the others were trying to hurt the party without thinking of the country, they just hate the AK party, they do not care what will happen next.*



Veysel was referring to the “Respect for the ‘National Will’ Meeting” (*milli iradeye saygi mitingi*) called by the AKP and led by Erdogan on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Although in the days preceeding the meeting the value of the dollar had fallen and the stock market had risen, there was a reverse patter after the meeting. Many journalists and dissident intellectuals put the blame on Erdogan for reversing the movement of the market with his belligerent comments. Nonetheless, two things were certain: on the one hand, the meeting was a spectacular show, reminding dissident intellectuals of the Nuremberg rallies of the Third Reich.



Figure 8: Respect for the National Will Meeting

On the other hand, there was a relation between the meeting and the movements of the value of the Dollar, howsoever controversial the exact meaning of the move is.

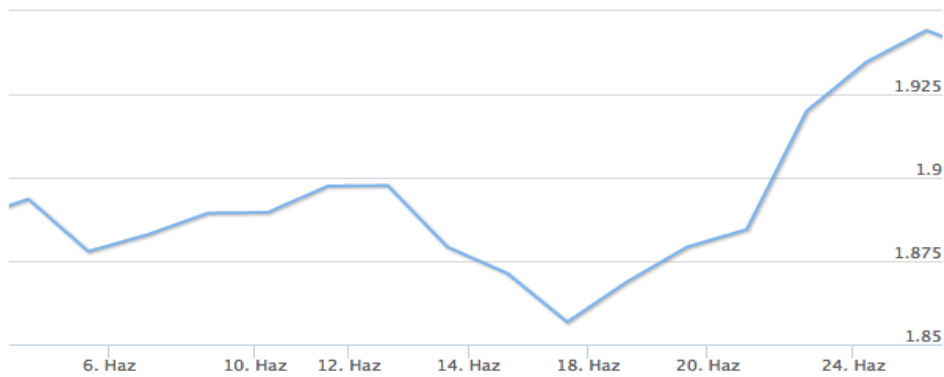


Figure 9: The graphic shows the value of Dollar was falling towards the day of the meeting, 17<sup>th</sup> June, and rising thereafter.

My informants insisted that the value of the dollar was rising as a reaction against the disruptive behaviors of *Capulcus*, the Gezi occupiers, who were disturbed by the party's achievement of gathering millions of people. They claimed that foreign investors were fleeing the country because they were afraid that another coup d'état against the national will of Turkey was about to take place. They thought that showing the world that the "silent masses" were backing their party and the leader was a way to sustain the value of the Turkish Lira. After all, inflation had ended (or, had been controlled) immediately after the establishment of single party government in Turkey. The time of coalitions, uncertainties, and political instability was over; stability had been sustained by the realization of the national will, as the title of the meeting suggests. During my two years of fieldwork, the terms "national will," "the value of the Turkish Lira," "stability" and the "masses" were combined in familiar constellations to describe political and economic developments in Turkey, in one form or in another. A father of four children, who still struggles to make ends meet, finds an iteration of his personal efficaciousness in political mobilization:

We are, as a family, the AK party supporters. Many people have benefitted from being party members, but we didn't. Even two of our sons are unemployed; one has graduated from college [fk. two years education in university]. But we are concerned about our country, about our religion, not ourselves. We try to go to meetings as much as we can, because we know that if the AK party goes, this country will be in peril. The value of our country has been tripled during the AK party's reign. The neighborhood gains value; the



Turkish lira is strong; the stock market breaks records. But they want to bring an end to this. Why? Because the people (*halk*) have gained power for the first time.

To my informants, the experiments of valuation show that the masses can exercise practical effects over the material registers of value. They can change the value of the dollar and the value of the Turkish Lira according to the forms of support that they present in the public sphere, i.e. meetings, elections, or rallies, or to the forms of opposition that they perform in the same sphere, i.e. demonstrations, elections, or occupations. The decade of catastrophes, the 1990s, showed people that political decisions are essential in determining the value of money, and in an indirect way, the value of their houses, their labor, and their products. If “people” make a claim on their own country, or as Veysel says, want “to buy their future,” they can succeed in ways that might seem impossible or miraculous today. But “who” is the one that the people would find worthy to follow, and “who” is the one against whom the people will organize? Following Schmitt (2005), but with a twist, we can say that if valuation is a political act, there needs to be an enemy against whom value is defined, enhanced, and protected.

### ***The Friends and Enemies of Value***

Although economists underline the contribution of single party rule to financial stability, there is a paucity of scholarship that attempts to conceptualize what exactly is going on in the Turkish economy. On the one hand, leftist intellectuals and heterodox economists advocated caution with the high level of growth since they thought that economic growth based on financial capital and the inflow of short term credits is unsustainable, and Turkey had to do something about the liberal circulation of international capital. Supporters of the party had a different vision of the contemporary situation. The chief economic advisor of president Erdogan, Yigit Bulut, writes a weekly/monthly/something column in a daily newspaper *Star* that is openly aligned with the

AKP party. In his repetitive, and propagandist writing, he promotes the presidential government system as an alternative to the current parliamentary regime. His basic claim is that the system of the presidency will institutionalize the achievements of the AKP, which can be summarized as, quoting the title of one of his articles: “A Significant Anchor in Economy: Leadership, Political Stability.”<sup>15</sup> According to his writings, “the leadership that provides trust” is the main source of economic stability that Turkey has been witnessing in the form of low rates of inflation, high rates of growth, and low interest rates. The presidential system, accordingly, will eliminate the risk of discontinuity between the national will and political order, since a president must necessarily represent more than 50% of the people in the country<sup>16</sup>. Such a system, he promotes, will advance ongoing change in the form of “valuation.” The institutionalization of national will in this way will unleash “our realities that we derive from our history, our essence...” and thus finally enable us to show “our capabilities.” “A new Turkey valuation<sup>17</sup>,” he claims, will “triple every value”. In a nutshell, he claims,

If Turkey will endorse the presidential system, whatever you have will be at least three times more valuable. Incoming cash from outside will boom; every value will be redefined. The money that you make, the value of your house, the equations that value our assets and many cause and effect relations will reach incredible points.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly his performance as propagandist leaves room for improvement. But at issue is not the validity of his claims but what happens when people accept and act upon this basic assertion. Bulut is not talking nonsense, and neither do my informants. It is common knowledge that the Turkish economy is based on the continuous flow of international capital in order to sustain the existing dynamics of the economy. But this knowledge, and the agency that it imputes to the

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<sup>15</sup> *Star*, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> *Star*, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> *Star*, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> *Star*, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

masses as the source of stability, is not a critical democratic reflection that would open a venue for critical reason in the public sphere as liberal democrats assume, but rather it leads to a coalescence of power dynamics (political, social, and economic) around an authoritarian network. This authoritarian formation enriches the public sphere with certain practices and moments of attunement within which the masses recognize their agency. This is a subject that I investigate in subsequent chapters. For now, I want to focus on how valuation practices are performed via the dialectic of enemy-friend in order to ensure the self-reflexive constitution of “the people” as the source of value.

If the source of value is “the people” itself, it is not easy to answer the question “who is the enemy of value?” That which is said to lie outside of the collective self-identity of “the people,” the enemy that devaluates the values of the Turkish people, varies continuously. Jewish persons are a constant point of reference. Many of my informants, without having ever known a Jewish person in their lives, deploy the figure of the Jew as the limit of humanity. An officer from a humanitarian organization focusing on poverty alleviation in Istanbul encapsulated the anti-semitic disposition of the poor by bragging about the universal character of their humanitarian activities and saying “everyone is a human being for us, except Jewish people.” But, with the exception of the ‘stable’ figure of the Jew, the “outside” of “the people” changes in accordance with the political context. Preceding the local elections in 2014, many of my informants were spending nights posting AKP posters around their neighborhoods. The posters attest produce identificatory relations between different social and political moments: political support, mobilization, open country, agency, enemies, trust, stability, development, and “the servants of the people” are common themes that are associated with each other by means of narrative and statistical knowledge.



Figure 10.

The two posters above are good examples of the narrative and statistical knowledge that the party supporters and sympathizers deploy to bolster their arguments. It is a dialectical practice, rather than a top-down, trickle-down spread of information. In other words, the posters and official discourses provide a ground for Party members and sympathizers to propagate the party's practices, but the activities of sympathizers and members feed back into the party's discourse and practices. I provide a translation of the poster on the left to demonstrate my point.

“Let Stability Continue. There is now stability and trust in Turkey. There is no more fear of “what will happen tomorrow?” While the whole world struggles with crises, the Turkish economy is solid. Our national income has been tripled. Our exports have been breaking records. We are finally free from the bondage of the IMF. Our citizens have subsistence, jobs, and houses. The enemies of Turkey are disturbed by these achievements. The promoters of interest-based economy (*faizciler*), the traitors, the agents of tutelage, and the parallel state are all together. They want to bring back the old

Turkey, which is closed in on itself and powerless. They want a country that cannot produce, struggling with crises, begging for credit from outside. They are against giant projects and major operations (*icraat*). On 30<sup>th</sup> March, do not give any passage to those who want to go back to the old Turkey. On 30<sup>th</sup> March, put your seal on the stability and future of Turkey.”

The poster on the right is a statistical comparison between the Turkey of 2001, just after the “biggest economic crisis of the history of the republic” and the Turkey of 2015. Two of them together display the collective memory of the catastrophic 1990s. “The debt to IMF was 25.6 billion dollars” it says, in stark contrast to the statement, “Turkey [of 2015] that lends money to the IMF.” After demonstrating this victory against the IMF, achievements regarding inflation are demonstrated: from 68% to 7%. The coupling of the IMF and inflation is not a coincidence. It is the party’s claim, and public knowledge, that inflation is a product of political instability and the lack of will on the part of the government—international agencies and their “tools” within the country are the major enemies of value.

Although, as in the case of anti-Semitic tendencies that I have briefly touched upon, there is a certain vein of xenophobia, it is not a figment of imagination that valuation and devaluation are related to the “outside.” After the opening-up of the economy in the late-1980s, the movement of international capital was gradually unhampered within the national borders. The crises and devaluations of the 1990s were related to the decisions and policies of those international organizations. For example, the newspapers of the 1990s explicitly show that rating agencies were a matter of public controversy during the 1994 devaluation<sup>19</sup>. Because of the new necessities of the international capital market, especially Yankee Bond Market, Turkey applied to rating agencies to be rated in 1989<sup>20</sup>. Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s rated Turkish economy for international credit markets and kept a close eye on the country. As many newspapers

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<sup>19</sup> For some examples, see *Cumhuriyet*, May, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1993; *Milliyet*, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1993; *Tercüman*, December, 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1990

reported in 1994, Moody's declared that the Turkish government abuses the rating they receive from Moody's (a BBB) by acting irresponsibly<sup>21</sup>. A few weeks after the Moody downgrading, the Turkish Lira was devalued by 100%. The second largest devaluation, in 2001, was also conducted on the advice of and conditions stipulated by international organizations, the IMF, and ranking agencies.

In a sense, economic developments in Turkey were, if not orchestrated, certainly conditioned by international agencies. The rise of the AKP and its political discourse organizes itself around a critique of this 'orchestration' of internal developments by international forces, to valorize instead the recovery of personal agency by the masses in the economic sphere. Memories of the 1990s are invoked by the Party as signifying a radical passivity of the masses in the face of a rapidly transforming economy. In the political language of party supporters and sympathizers; collaborating political parties, incompetent coalitions, and selfish politicians are positioned as the direct extension of "outside forces" like the IMF, rating agencies, the WB, or the EU. Instead, by "laying a claim on their own country," the masses have a material effect on the economic wellbeing of Turkey in terms of the value of money. Ali from Kucukcekmece, a sympathizer of the party and a long time member of a religious group in the district, recapitulates this story of agency regained by the masses.

**Ali:** This is the truth that things in our country are going well, since the first time in history, the will of the people is being represented in the parliament. But if we go back to a coalition government, things will be disastrous again.

**Firat:** But brother, isn't it also the will of people? Maybe people want coalitions.

**Ali:** No, people do not want any coalitions; those who want coalitions are trying to manipulate people. If there is a coalition, you can't keep the dollar low. Interest rates will be higher, inflation will boom again. Now, every one in this district knows this, even the most ignorant ones. If there is one party rule, if it represents the interest of the people, there is trust in that country. Then foreign investors will come, because they will know that there is stability there, money will flow, and the country gets rich. But who would lose? Those who think of their own pockets. Those who want to keep foreign investors

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<sup>21</sup> *Milliyet*, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1994

for their own country. They ask investors to spend their money in Germany, in Israel, but not in Turkey.

Ali is convinced that politics is effective when, as the unofficial slogan of the AKP says, the politicians are only the servants of the people that they represent. When they display no selfish attitudes, the value of the country will reach its true potential. The major reason for the failures of the past was a lack of identity between politicians and people. When the gap between the political sphere and the people is closed, anything becomes possible.

Muharrem brought me to Kucukcekmece, a district adjacent to Esenler, to introduce me to some of his friends who are engaged in social policies towards the poor. He says, “you have to talk to these people as well, they have achieved wonders here, you have to tell our story to Americans.” In the social service building of the municipality preparations were underway for the district Congress. I was taken to a large conference hall. I had been told that 25 thousand party members had arrived to discuss the problems of the district and decide on preparations for the upcoming general election. As it is the tradition for political Islamists in Turkey, the congress opened with the recitation of Islamist poet, Necip Fazil Kısakurek poetry, reminding all of us that miracles are imminent:

As the day comes and all the teeth of the cogwheel get broken,  
Our wheel continues to spin.  
A hand from the skies wipes the tears of those who cry  
Joy fills our houses.  
The cliffs disappear; we walk on straight paths,  
We finally arrive at the day without night.  
Slings against missiles,  
It is the difference between our world and other worlds.

Some people began to cry; the room was suffused by an air of sentimentality. But as soon as the official song of the party, an adaptation from a Turkic war song, began to play, people immediately stopped crying, vociferously participating in the singing. The Congress began and

the district cadres made speeches. When declaring their aim for the elections, the leader of the district ended his speech, to thunderous claps and chants, by stating:

We will make a civil constitution, this constitution is a chain shackled to the people. When we make a civil constitution, Turkey will be one of the largest economies in the world. The words of Turkey will be much stronger! Why? Because we will see the true value of this country, what the people of this country can achieve, when we have a constitution that is made by the very people of this country. To do this, we need to have 367 parliamentarians in the parliament to change the constitution only by ourselves.

It is like the reflexive valuation of inflation targeting: when people face a constitution made by themselves, without mediation, they can achieve unimaginable things that cannot currently be envisioned ruled as ‘the people’ are by a law that is not theirs. This is a global challenge, however, since it is always the world against which one presents oneself and from which one seeks recognition. Against the world, and for the world, a “people” must undertake its destiny and present itself as what it is. By turning into itself, by making itself a source of itself, people become the source of value for and against the world. After the general elections, the front page of an economic newspaper attested that the efforts of the “people” did not go waste.



Figure 11: ““Single Party” boosted the market”. “Dollar fell 0.11 tl;” “Interest rates fell into single digit;” “Stock market broke a record”



#### **IV. Conclusion:**

Macroeconomic liberalization and the ensuing global integration result in a public knowledge that the financial markets are causally related to political developments within nation states. This "poisonous knowledge" (Das 2000) propagates a popular conception of agency: when the masses, under the name of "the real people (*gerçek halk*)", mobilize for political stability, e.g., a single-party rule, financial markets respond favorably: the value of the Turkish Lira rises, and inflation slows down. When some people, under the constant threat of being labeled as traitors, organize against the injustices of the single-party rule, it is being interpreted as putting the economy in danger and making the Turkish Lira lose its value.

Although the so-called democratic concerns like transparency, accountability, and credibility try to address the problems in developed and developing countries, the associated economic practices might have consequences going far beyond a unified conception of "democracy." The Turkish case is exemplary in this sense; a democratic polity aiming to promote growth in the age of financial capitalism might very well promote authoritarian mobilization, intolerance towards difference, and collective identification with brutality and power. In this sense, Turkish case shows us the ongoing relevancy of the classical discussion between means and ends (Agamben 2000; Arendt 1998; Derrida 1982; Kant 1997). Political values like democracy, transparency, accountability, and credibility are important not because they are efficacious in the realm of economics but because they are among those incommensurable values that anthropologists studied in many different cases (Lambek 2015; Povinelli 2001; Wiener 1992). The contemporary attempts to make them commensurable, productive and profitable have the specific tendency to produce an ethics of efficacy: values are important as long as they produce desirable outcomes and no matter what they might cost on their way to be efficacious.

This is a political decision *par excellence*, and it asserts a sharp distinction between friends and enemies. However, when the financial ends define the friends and enemies of value(s), political, social, and cultural differences might very well turn into "means," or worse, into the major targets to be eliminated by the "friends" in order to stabilize markets, to promote the growth of the country or to make our currencies valuable.

### Chapter 3. Intimations of Precariousness: Translating Unskilled Labor into Political Mobilization

It must not be forgotten that the unskilled are a dangerous class; inadequately fed, clothed, and housed, they threaten the health of the community, and, like all the weak and ignorant, they often become the misguided followers of unscrupulous men.  
(Abbott 1905, 324)

They [the unskilled] do not know their selves or where they will go. They do not know what they want.  
(An HR professional in a mid-sized company)

Sir, should we be oppressed because we don't have an occupation?  
[*Beyefendi meslegimiz yok diye ezilelim mi?*]  
(An unskilled worker in Esenler, 2014)

#### I. Introduction

A charming young woman was sitting in the office of ESKAM, Esenler Career Center, talking about the difficulties of finding unskilled laborers, keeping them in their jobs, and managing their behavior in the workplace. She was working in the human resources department of a large company specialized in cleaning services. She complained about how the unqualified<sup>22</sup> (unskilled) people, who lack proper education and training, cannot comprehend the basics of social communication. She said, “they are like children, you should see them not here but in the workplace. They are either too shy, unable to answer a question, or too impertinent, acting as if they are your best friends.” She could not help but laugh. However, this was not a sign of her taking my research lightly, since she made it all the more obvious that she respected me for what I was trying to do. After all, we share the quality of being qualified, i.e. educated. “You have to hear this story” she added, and narrated an event that exemplifies what she understood from the term “unqualified”.

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout the text, I frequently use “unqualified” in places where an English speaking person would use “unskilled”. By this idiosyncratic use, I am trying to retain the sense of Turkish word “*vasifsiz*” which can literally be translated as “one who does not have qualification” or “one without qualification.” The antonym of ‘*vasifsiz*’ in Turkish is either “*vasifli*” (“one with quality,” “one who has quality) or “*kalifiye*”. *Kalifiye* is a Turkish word directly taken from French (*qualifié(e)*) and people commonly use it interchangeably with *vasifli*.

After the end of a day, I was preparing to leave the airport. You know, it is far away, and bringing people from here to there takes a lot of time. I got out of the building, lit my cigarette, and saw this woman crying. I knew her. I brought her to the airport a couple of months ago. I went close and asked why she was crying. She told me that she missed the shuttle and she didn't have enough money with her to take a bus! I asked her, "why are you crying, it is nothing! Why didn't you tell us? Me, or a friend of yours?" But she was looking at me perplexed. They are like babies; they do not know what to do and when to do it. They are too shy to ask such a simple thing. But when they get intimate [*"yuz buldular mi"* in Turkish it literally means when they find a face (from you)], they do not know where to stop. I am dealing with such people every day."

I did not have a chance to ask that woman why she was crying that day, why she did not ask any of her friends or supervisors for such a small amount of money, or whether she had acted "too friendly" if her supervisors treated her kindly. But I spent several months in those "careers centers" in the poor districts of Istanbul, observing how people try to find jobs, how job counselors in the career centers of municipalities, who are all AKP (Justice and Development Party) members without exception, find those jobs, convince applicants to take the offers given, communicate with the unemployed and, not infrequently, talk about politics and frame their interaction within the developments of the nation, region and globe.

This chapter has three coordinated arguments. The first is that the precariousness that is being produced by the global structuration of economic relations is not exclusively a negative determination that only disables people but might be a positive determination that enables certain people, enhances certain practices, discourses, and capacities, and thus empowers certain political networks and projects. By focusing on the productive capacity of precariousness, I do not by any means intend to assert that we should look at precariousness as a positive quality but rather as a resource that certain political projects can use to expand their constituency and political networks within a given society –in my case Turkey. I will try to show that certain characteristics of the contemporary economic relations, that is, flexibilities, informalities, and

uncertainties, can be subsumed by political registers like intimacy<sup>23</sup>, authority, and love. In this sense, I argue that the socio-political networks of the AKP translate the precariousness of the unqualified workers into trust-based, intimate relations to sustain and expand its networks.

The second argument I propose is that the dissolution of the formal structures that regulate and shape economic relations between labor and capital opens new spaces in which the value of labor, the prospect of a life, and the success of an action have alternative modalities of realization. It is especially pertinent that the translation of precariousness into mass mobilization puts a specific demand on the unqualified workers, which can be best characterized as self-negation. In a world of human capital, the unqualified laborers in Turkey are expected to display their love for work and disregard for self-interest, with the expectations that the political networks of the AKP would miraculously reward the unselfish behaviors in an uncertain future. I will argue that this widespread demand for being unselfish can be best understood by bringing the anthropological discussions of gift back into the discussions of precarity and the socio-political niche surrounding it.

Last but not least, the chapter has a third argument focusing on how the unqualified masses can push the limits of intimacy and self-negation to a point of radical egalitarianism. Accordingly, while contemporary capitalist relations promote the forms of precariousness that can be translated into mass mobilization, the political character of this translation has an uneasy tension with the conditions of its emergence. The rejection of self-interest and the engagements

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<sup>23</sup> The term “intimacy” might be confounding for native English speakers since its equivalent in Turkish, *samimiyet*, has an interestingly different semantic scope, the consequences of which deserve a longer study. While the term intimacy designates closeness and familiarity within the confines of what we may call private sphere, *samimiyet* combine concepts like intimacy, sincerity, and genuineness, thus traverse different social and epistemological regions, from private to public, from knowledge to practice. Therefore, *samimiyet* may capture practices based on face-to-face interaction, but also indicates a truthfulness and transparency based on sincerity. Since *samimiyet* is an emic concept, a term that my interlocutors frequently use to explain, index, and prescribe a variety of actions, undertaken by themselves, their partisan friends, or their enemies, I prefer to keep the word intimacy both as an analytical device and an empirical anchor.

in trust-based intimate networks allow the unqualified to question the very political organization that promises an alternative way of life in the time of economic uncertainty and fragility.

In making these three coordinated arguments, I divide the chapter into six sections. After a brief discussion of how I use the concept of precariousness and the literature that I based my analysis on, I will set the ethnographic stage in the third part, exploring two major figures in the curious setting of career centers at the margins of Istanbul: job consultants, who are all AKP members without exception, and unskilled workers. In the fourth part, I will focus on the techniques employed by the party members in convincing the unqualified people to take the jobs that pays very little and demands so much. In this part, I will discuss the ethnographic details regarding how the forces of global capitalism inform the AKP members in employing political registers of intimacy, love, and authority. In the fifth section, I will investigate the demands those political registers put on the unqualified people. Starting with the question “what can the unqualified people give to an employer in a world human capital?” I will discuss how the capacity of being “trustable” emerges through demands for self-negation. In the final part, I am going to investigate the limits of political translation of precariousness into mobilization and argue that a possibility of radical egalitarianism haunts the political networks of the AKP in the process.

## **II. A Conceptual Trajectory**

Precariousness, precarity and precarization have become major themes for thinking –and intervening in- labor and life in the times of global structuration of economies (Gill and Pratt 2004, 3). Outside anthropology, the literature on precariousness and the forms of labor relations produced by contemporary neoliberal capitalism have two predominant strands. The first one focuses on the negative dimension of precarization whereby previous social, economic and

political networks are being disentangled or plainly destroyed. (Bauman 2005; Beck 2000; Beck and Ritter 1992; Bell 1973; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Bourdieu 1999; Rifkin 1995; Sennett 1998; Standing 2009; Valencia 2015). The second one, originated by the Italian autonomist thinkers and taken up by social scientists, shifts the emphasis towards the positive dimension of precarization in which the precariat replaces the proletariat and plays, or gives the signals of, a revolutionary role in transforming the existing social, economic and political conditions (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004; Lazzarato 1996; Lotringer and Marazzi 1980; Negri 1979; Negri 1989; Virno and Hardt 1996).

Both of these approaches share similar characteristics that are derived from contemporary economic and social transformations but show divergences about their respective trajectories. Both strands define individuals as the major product of the aforementioned processes and investigate different forms of individuation within which individuals come into being. While the first strand reads individuation as disruptive and destructive, the second one, following autonomist theoreticians, claims that global processes producing individuals also foreground “the multitude” that promises new forms of resistance and the possibility of a revolutionary movement (see especially, Hardt and Negri 2004; Virno 2004). From this perspective, the social scientists inspired from autonomist theories are closer to my concern in paying attention to the productive capacity of precarization. However, my fieldwork displays a substantially different trajectory from those who find the precariat potentially progressive.

Following Sakai (1997), Neilson and Rossiter understand the relations of precarity as “harbor[ing] new kinds of political possibility” (2004, 65). However, their conceptualization of politics is based on a constant effort of translating the heterogeneous experiences of precarity into “the common” (Hardt and Negri, 2009). I believe this universal capacity to translate

precarities into the common has one problematic assumption. Put simply: if precariousness is to be translated into collective mobilization, it most likely will be progressive. This theoretical stance is understandable from two interrelated points of view. First, these scholars are looking for an heir for the place once occupied by the working class and it seemed natural to substitute the proletariat with the precariat. Secondly, most theoretical and empirical studies are directed towards “creative industries” and “creative laborers” (Christopherson 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005; Peck 2005; Pratt 2005); hence the skilled stratum of the precariat occupies the central stage in most of the available studies<sup>24</sup>.

Against these two predominant strands, there is a third line of argument that one finds among anthropologists and that I aim to contribute to. Although anthropologists had not neglected the question of precariousness, for a long time they did not engage the literature in as direct and focused manner as the autonomist theoreticians and sociologists. Instead, anthropologists focused on the effects of economic transformations on everyday life. Labor processes (Blim 1990; Procoli 2004), familial relations (Ong 1987; Yanagisako 2002), political subjectivities (Cole 1997; Ong 1999) and social marginalization (Biehl 2005; Bourgois 1995) became the objects of scrutiny and an invaluable body of work emerged. More recently, anthropologists have started to actively engage in the literature of precariousness. I believe this is partially an outcome of the discipline’s increasing attention to financial markets and the uncertainties produced by financial relations (Ho 2009; Tsing 2005). It is important to note that the two most salient aspects of financialization of everyday life have been “indebtedness” (Elyachar 2005; Han 2012) and “the affective investments” that indebtedness demands from ordinary people (Allison 2012; Rudnyckyj 2010; Muehlebach 2011; Muehlebach 2012a; Molé 2010; Molé 2012). Although much of this newly emerging body of research concentrates on the

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<sup>24</sup> For a more incisive critique of the conceptualization of precariat from a feminist perspective, see Fantone, 2007.



negative dimension of precariousness, they have not neglected the productive side whereby ordinary people are actively building the world they inhabit in their precariousness (Cross 2010; Millar 2014; Molé 2012). In this sense, they go beyond precarity as a structural condition and investigate the reflexive and dialectical relation between precarious labor and precarious life, the precariat as a labor condition and the precariat as an ontological experience (Millar 2014, 35). Taking my cue from this rich literature, I ask a question, the answer to which seems to me the obverse of that which is given by anthropological research to date. Molé ends her captivating article on the metadiscursive experience of neoliberalism and precariousness as follows: “Italy’s late-modern worker-subjects refocus our gaze on neoliberalism’s most neurotic internal paradoxes: individualization yet dehumanization, and uncertainty notwithstanding desires for safeguards” (2010, 48). My field research illustrates a different dialectic between uncertainty and certainty, one that runs against individualization and articulates an alternative agency through collective mobilization. In this sense, I return to the autonomist literature but from a different point of view: the multitude of the precariat might be politically mobilized, but it is more likely to be destructive rather than progressive.

### **III. The Setting: “Career Centers”**

The western outskirts of Istanbul have been the abode of the poor since the 1950s and several shantytowns and illegal housing shelters had been built until the late 1990s. The increasing need for unskilled labor power led the Turkish state to connive in the construction of unregistered and illegal houses. Recently migrated peasant families occupied public lands without encountering much resistance from police forces. Some private lands, most of which once belonged to displaced non-Muslim people, were bought cheaply to build unregistered houses. This was the

simplest and most effective solution for the demand of unqualified labor but it turned Istanbul into a megacity whose population today borders on some 15 million persons.

The “Career Centers” of the poor districts were founded in these neighborhoods as a part of social municipalities (*sosyal belediyeçilik*) that provide relief for the poor, jobs for the unemployed, and socialization for the excluded (women, the disabled, the lonely, the elders and others). The first center was established in 2009 in Esenler, one of the major fields of my research, and it provided other municipalities with a model. In a booklet informing applicants about ESKAM (Esenler Kariyer Merkezi –Esenler Career Center) and its origin, Tevfik Goksu, the mayor of the district, narrates the story of how they founded this first “career center:”

“Spectacular developments in the twentieth century resulted in deep transformations in all societies in the world. From the perspective of employment, we see that this transformation foregrounded quality. The increasing significance of education in making qualified labor power made it necessary that both the state and private actors have to look for new alternatives. On the other hand, local solutions are gaining prominence in a macroeconomic issue like employment.”

Locating the origin of employment-oriented social policies in the 1990s, Goksu defines the objectives of the center under two headings. On the one hand, the center aims to solve the problem of “quality” by vocational training. During my fieldwork, this dimension had been mostly disregarded and many of those training courses were attended by local people simply for “spending their empty time,” “making connections with the party members” or “enhancing already existing social relations.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the center aims to bring together “those who are looking for a job” and “those who are looking for workers.” This second point is in fact

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<sup>25</sup> From a larger perspective, a similar point is underlined by the World Bank in its report “Turkey: Evaluating the Impact of Iskur’s Vocational Training Programs” (2013). From a sample of 5000 applicants, the WB researchers find it puzzling that “the overall impact of ISKUR training on employment is negligible” (2013, 20). Their research is based on short surveys and thus it is understandable that they cannot see the “socialization” part of these trainings. When it comes to the training courses provided by municipalities, even in coordination with ISKUR, socialization and political mobilization acquires higher significance.

the major practice that the job consultants in career centers perform. It is obviously a variant of the neoliberal conceptualization of unemployment as a structural imbalance where demand and supply present discordance. It is explicitly argued that there are available jobs, and suitable people looking for those jobs but they cannot find each other. Hence the need for a mediating agent to bring them together.

You may peruse the booklet, see the smiling face of the mayor, or read an appended copy of the letter by then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who wholeheartedly congratulates the municipality for such an inspiring and revolutionary contribution to social policy in Turkey. You see how many people have been placed in jobs so far –numbers close to tens of thousands, proportions around 60%. You may expect that a job counselor will either find you a job that is appropriate to your skills and experience, if you have any, or direct you to a training program where you will gain the necessary qualities that the booklet ambivalently mentions. But, if you are looking for a job, you have to wait in a packed, small room until your turn comes to see a job counselor.



Figure 12: People are waiting their turns for a job consultant in one not so crowded day. I had not experienced such a low level of crowd during my fieldwork, but the picture perfectly represents the order of waiting and the size of waiting rooms in many career centers in municipalities.

When your turn comes, they call your name. You enter a small room and sit down on a relatively comfortable office chair across the desk from a job consultant. In these rooms, the optimism propagated in advertisements and booklets dissipates easily, if it has not already vanished entirely where you were waiting in the entrance. On the walls, there are some religious symbols and statements attributed to the words of the prophet Mohammed. In Suat's office, for example, there was a large poster across from the seat where applicants sit. It ominously says:

[There are] The five unknowns: 1. *Rizik* (livelihood, job), 2. *Izdivac* (marriage), 3. *Dogum* (Birth), 4. *Olum* (death), 5. *Kiyamet* (doomsday)

One might expect more determination from an institution that claims itself capable of finding jobs for thousands of unemployed people. But few of the applicants have any chance to look around and see the poster, since consultants, who have to deal with more than fifty people each day, immediately start to ask questions. They see the "CVs" of the applicants from their computer screens, based on a form that the applicants fill out while they wait in the hall. The consultant knows the age, experience, and education of the applicant but still asks related questions because many people omit details. "I worked in a catering firm for a few months, do you have such jobs?" asks an applicant, for example. Hasan gets furious and says "my sister, why didn't you write that down here?". The answer is, nearly without exception, as follows: "I didn't know we should write every job. There are countless jobs that I did for short periods." Hasan complains about them and says, "They do not know anything, but the real problem is that they think they know everything. So they do not listen to us. We are the experts; we know what kind of jobs they can find. They do not listen to us, but eventually all of them come back here, crying, full of regret... They understand who is right, but only when it is too late."

*a. The Experts of the Unqualified: A Matter of Intimacy*

Hasan is not an exception in considering himself as someone who is specialized in job consultation. During my fieldwork, I spent months in different AKP municipalities (Bagcilar, Esenler, Kucukcekmece, Esenyurt) that specialize in social services. Only two of the job consultants had a level of education higher than high school, let alone a degree in labor economics. However, the definition of expertise, as many anthropologists have already demonstrated (Carr 2011), is not a stable one, it is not a matter of “something” that experts have, but rather a dynamic social relation in which expertise is performed and enacted. Job consultants, at the margins of Istanbul, engage in exactly this kind of “enactment.” They do not have a specific language (Agha 2007; Silverstein 2006), or symbolic capital that distinguishes them from lay people (Bourdieu 1986). But, as Suat claims, they “know the people”. He continues, “because we came from among these people. We are not like arrogant and distant (*halktan kopuk*) bureaucrats. I grew up among these people so I know what they feel, what they think, how they think.” Their capacity to attain the status of expertise, thus, is not an exclusionary performance that needs to leave a large part of the population outside the ranks of experts (Mitchell 2002). Although this specific kind of self-defined “expertise” might be seen, in the first approximation, as a misapplication of the term by my informants, I believe that Hasan and his colleagues have a point that captures one of the most essential dimensions of the use of the concept. They employ the term “expert” to signify a capacity to attain knowledge about the local people, to understand how they act in certain settings, and thus finally to motivate those people to take actions in ways consultants see appropriate for the conditions of the unemployed. Their authority is not based on specific information. On the contrary, it is based on reclaiming a long forgotten and disrespected form of knowledge: the intimate knowledge about lay people.

After receiving a call from the receptionist of ESKAM, Suat got visibly upset. The receptionist was simultaneously doing several jobs, as it is usual for many positions in the municipality. This time, she was simply acting as the manager's assistant and letting Suat know that the manager thought he was spending too much time with applicants. He shouted, complained, and finally, as expected, retreated, accepted and told her that he would "see" more applicants from now on and gather pace. He briefly explained to me this unacceptable notification. How was it possible that his supervisors and his brothers in arms (*dava arkadaslari*) in the party could not see the significance of what he was doing there? Just as we were talking about the problem, another applicant came, someone who Suat knew from his neighborhood where he was the leader of the party branch. Like most others, she was considered unqualified, and was looking for a job where she thought there might be a future for her. After a short chat about the neighborhood, Suat gave her some options: picking over burrs of kitchen utensils in a plastic factory (-"I cannot stand the smell"); bicycle assembly (-"It might be too heavy for me"); quality control in a slipper factory (-"Again, I have an allergy, I cannot stand the smell"); cleaning in a huge shopping mall (-"I cannot do those shifts, my father will not allow it"). Suat turned to me and said "*hocam* (my teacher), you see, they do not have any qualification but they are still picky." Returning to her, looking directly at her eyes, he solemnly started one of his usual tirades: "daughter (*kizim*), you have not any experience outside of textile workshops, but you don't show any sign of willingness to work. You have to give something to the employer so he can see something in you, so he can trust you. But if you just want to take, then you will find nothing. Trust me, take this job in *Gezer* [a slipper factory], we know the people, they are honest, religious, and will pay you on time. Today, you do not know how to receive an order, but if they

see you working hard, they might try you in other departments, then you may have a shot in their shops, then maybe you will be a manager. But you have to start at the bottom.”

Although Suat could generally go on like this for a long time, she interrupted him and said, “Brother Suat, I am not that ignorant. I worked in a pharmacy for a few months, I know how to receive orders”. Suat looked at his computer, “but you have not written that here! You see *hocam*, we have to do everything! Why didn’t you tell me that before! I have a job as receptionist in *Ensar* Hospital, but they demand experience in health sector. You do not have much, but I know the manager, I will talk to them about you.” Proudly turning to me, “you see *hocam*, they complain about how much time I spend here, but I found out that this young girl can work in a hospital. Who could have done it? If our party will not “touch” people, will not reach its arms to the most distant members of this society (*bu halkin en ucra kosesine*), how will we pursue our goals? I need to listen to these people and they want to be listened to. Like a doctor! I am a doctor of these people. More than that! Doctors do not listen to people. When you go and see one of them, they say “write down, my daughter [to his assistant], this and this drugs”. What is this? Look at the patient, pay some attention! But, no! They know everything. I am the real doctor!” The girl interrupted again and asked, “My brother is also an asthma patient, he works in textiles, he has to take drugs everyday. Can you find a job for him?” Suat, still enjoying his victory, turned to the girl and said in a calm voice, “Look, I am a doctor, I cannot say anything before seeing him, he should come, I see, then I can tell you”.

The job consultants claim that they have to know people in order to find appropriate jobs for them and to convince them to take those jobs, since they often have unrealistic dreams of easy, desk jobs -something they will never get. But most importantly the consultants claim that they can get intimate with people since they are one of them. As in the case above, Suat, by his

capacity to make people comfortable with him, made them see him as one of them and thus enabling them to speak who they were, what they wanted, what they needed, and what they could offer. That was a political gesture *par excellence*. Not only in the sense that intimacy is political, as was made clear by the feminist theoreticians long ago, but also in the sense that the agents, Suat in my case, conceptualized what they did in reference to the political mobilization around the AKP. The chief of another career center, Mustafa, explained this tradition as the culmination of the struggle of people against the bureaucratic, secular, western state tradition. “For us”, he said, “politics mean blending in with people (*halkin icine girmek*). For a man who comes here, being listened to is the most important thing. To be treated like a human being, it is what people want. Humanity has finally entered the municipality!” Most of the job consultants in the social service departments of municipalities considered their expertise an extension of the political practice of the party. Against the secular, bureaucratic state tradition that their discourse provided as a background, they represented their position as the intimate confidants of people, as those who were closest to the lay people because of their origin, and as those who could animate people to take action.

Old Turkey	New Turkey
Distant	Proximate
Alien	Intimate
Secular	Religious
Bureaucrats	People ( <i>Halk</i> )
Selfish	Unselfish
Experts/Elites	Lay/Common
Teaching/Transforming	Encouraging/Inspiring/Leading
Dependent	Independent
Weak	Strong

Figure 13: The discursive frame of the historical trajectory of Turkey. Regardless of its historical accuracy, this Manichean structure is essential in constituting the practical relations in many social settings, thus having a material efficacy.



In short, in contrast to Handan, the human resource professional whose story I have narrated at the beginning, they claimed that they could understand why a woman cries when she misses her shuttle bus, why she cannot ask for money from her supervisors, and how to make her able to ask when such an emergency appears. By dint of intimacy, as many of my informants claimed, people “trust” party members, and thereby are inclined to take actions appropriate for their conditions. As Suat said to that girl, she had to trust him and take the job. Even though the job offered no prospects at the first sight, Suat suggested that there would be some opportunities for her progress. But the first step was to have faith in the goodwill of Suat and accept his offer. The first step was to trust.



Figure 14: A group of candidates who took the leap of faith, as Suat suggests, and thus proudly posing before the camera in expectation of something that is not specified but is going to happen.

Thus the job consultants in career centers grasped an essential dimension of expertise in enactment: they can enact trust relationships. In an entirely different setting, focusing on the practices and discourses of the physicists in CERN, Knorr-Cetina discusses the role of trust in the making of expertise and says, “experts, then, are those who have learned to engage with

objects in reliable trust relationships and who, therefore, are trusted by colleagues who cannot engage in these relationships directly” (1999, 135; cf. Latour 1987, 64). But my informants show one distinctive characteristic irreconcilable with the physicists in CERN: they are not experts by difference but by similarity. Even in the case of medicine, as Suat exemplified, one should relate to the person, one should listen to her, one should share information; in short one should take her seriously. This interaction, taking someone seriously, is only possible if the parties share a common ground, that is, a political and/or biographical background. Enactment of expertise in politics thus is one of intimacy and trust<sup>26</sup>. However, at this moment, an anthropological study should direct its gaze at those to whom these experts talk. How is the authority of the expertise established in practice, and what does it demand in return? But before investigating such practices and techniques, let me talk a little bit more about the other major actor in this story: the unqualified worker.

### ***b. Unqualified Curriculum Vitae: A Matter of Morality***

In the appendix of this chapter, I articulated the short and curious history of the Turkish working class from the perspective of unqualified labor. I have argued that the peculiar trajectory of the country, together with Fordist industrialization, resulted in a relatively strong position of the working class. At the end of the Fordist period we can see a transformation of the question of unqualified labor from a resource to a problem. In a way, the appendix follows the genealogy of quality in that the concept is not a universal category by itself but it is historically forged, contested and transformed. This is not a new argument by any means. As Standing (1999)

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<sup>26</sup> Although criticized by sociologically oriented scholars like Cihan Tugal (2016), Jenny White is one of the first scholars of Turkish Islamist mobilization who draws attention to trust and intimacy as the major practices in building political “webs” in Istanbul. She underlines that “crucial to the development of trust is continual face-to-face interactions” (2002, 71). Two decades after her research, the observations she made are no less accurate, albeit in different contexts and scales.

pointedly argues, skill is an obscure notion, the definition of which is a field of struggle for different interests, political projects and social actors. This is the reason that I want to keep the rather awkward Turkish equivalent for the term “unskilled”, since the concept “unqualified” (*vasıfsız*) makes it more conspicuous that labor is socially qualified, rather than materially quantified (through time, piece or a similar unit)<sup>27</sup>. My fieldwork thus highlights the social and political dynamics in defining quality. In career centers at the margins of Istanbul, the definition of the unqualified, its scope, and its future has been actively and explicitly constructed, contested and undone.

During the first months of my fieldwork I was trying to get a somewhat coherent definition of the term unqualified. It is one of the most common concepts that people use: job consultants, applicants, human resource professionals, businessmen and so on. For a concept that everyone uses so frequently, I expected that there should be at least a loose definition. But much to my dismay, everyone was using it in different and even contradictory senses: “Those who do not have formal education”, “those who do not have formal *and* informal education,” “those who do not have informal education (also called “ignorant with diplomas”),” “those who do not know what they want,” “who do not have patience,” “who do not like any jobs” and so forth. Only after months of fieldwork, did I start to understand that the concept is being used not in constative speech acts but in performative ones. In other words, unqualified is not a description of a worker but an entrance point for the negotiations over wages, prospects, and the forms of work. The wage is minimum, the prospect is uncertain, and the form of work is flexible in terms of job definition and working hours. The point is why and how one should accept a job that pays little, has ambiguous prospects for promotion, and has terrible working hours and shifts.

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<sup>27</sup> To see the different practices of measuring and quantifying labor and their relations to the socio-political contexts within which they are practiced, Biernacki’s work is a good case in point (1995).

Although companies have their human resource departments, many small, middle and even some large companies rely on the career centers at the margins of Istanbul to find people who are willing to work as unqualified laborers. As a human resource manager in a mid-level company once told me “everyone needs unqualified workers. Our turnover rate is so high that we cannot ensure the level of production. Municipalities help a lot, but even they are not enough. People are picky and unnecessarily selective. The biggest problem is that the unqualified people select jobs. Who are you to pick? It would be ok if you were qualified.” I think this is a crucial point to understand the unqualified as a problem: they are not free to choose but try to choose nonetheless. Many job consultants explicitly say this to the applicants: “now brother, do not misunderstand me, but you don’t have the freedom to choose jobs or dislike a job. That is something you should have done years ago [in school or in early job experience].”

This non-freedom is not necessarily a result of one’s previous mistakes. Of course, lack of education and changing too many jobs are contributing factors but even in the cases that one needs to change a job for which she is considered qualified but unable to work for some reasons, one immediately turns into an unqualified person. This was most succinctly exemplified during one of the conversations that Hasan had with Mehmet who had to quit his job in the leather industry due to his lung disease. Mehmet was rejected by a cleaning company to which Hasan sent him. An old AKP member was with us during the conversation.

**Mehmet:** He took 6 people from 14, but not me...

**Hasan:** That was your fault, when he asked you how much money you are making, you said 2500 TL (Turkish Lira), you destroyed your chance.

**M:** If he understands such a thing from what I said, I would not have worked for him anyway.

**H:** I had prepared the ground for you (*senin altyapini yaptim*), when you said 2500, you disturbed the man’s [HR manager] psychology. He misunderstood you. He rejected one person for being too thin and one for being unable to speak. Like picking tomatoes or apples, he picks the best.

**M:** [turning towards me] I gave up my job that pays 4000 TL because it was taking 5 of my 10 years.

**H:** Then you should have said “I was getting 2500 TL but that job was eating me away, I only want a stable company.” First, no one would hire people with high wages. Second, having worked in a job for a long time is always good. Also, your age was a snag [he was 45].

**M:** I have destroyed my life with my own hands. After midnight, three of my credit cards will go to the collection. My father has been paralyzed since 77(?). I have 19 billion [19000 TL] to get back, but people don’t pay their debt to me. I am thinking, I will do, I will get the gun from the closet, I will commit suicide.

**H:** Why did you use credit cards?

**M:** I used them because people owe me money.

**The old guy:** Everything is from Allah, keep your faith in Allah, have patience.

**M:** Everything happens in a moment, people do things in a moment...

**H** [turning towards me, in a solemn voice]: the change from one job to another is like this.

**M:** I am pushing myself to death, in one way or another. I am not going back to my old job. I do not want to get sick again.

**H:** Work 3 months, pay your debt!

**M:** At least one year, but what if I get the same disease?

**H:** You are dying anyway; live! Work and live!

**M:** ...I feel bad, I am going.

I was unable to ascertain how much of the conversation was a performance and how much of it was real. It is common in the career centers that people inflate numbers, exaggerate their pasts (how rich they were once and how they lost it), or suggest that they would commit suicide. They do these performances with a slight hope of receiving additional assistance such as poverty relief packages. Each party, both the applicant and job consultant, knows that there is a space of exaggeration. That space invites the other by means of moral registers that bind the two parties to one another: religious gestures (beard, headscarf, bodily comportment, or use of vocabulary), humanitarian emergencies (health or suicide), or legal predicaments (debt collection or imprisonment). It is well known by both parties that the outright rejection of such gestures, however impertinent or unreasonable it is, is unacceptable in a setting like a municipality. In a company one may disregard them, but in a municipality such a rejection would lead to a series of

accusations. Although business “may” reject morality<sup>28</sup>, politics is essentially bound by it. Hasan’s turning towards me and saying “the change from one job to another is like this” was also an invitation: a moral invitation that calls me to attest to the inevitable tragedy when one fails in one’s occupation. Reasons vary as to why such changes of occupation take place. Health problems, global competition, familial problems are frequently invoked. But in a world where the state’s direct presence in the economy continuously and inexorably retreats, these failures call for moral assessments that compel the parties to respond without any official, bureaucratic form of acknowledgment that would have provided a sort of guarantee in the previous era, i.e. in the welfare state of the Fordist period<sup>29</sup>.

Although Mehmet (the applicant)’s problem remained unsolved, Hasan did his best and used his personal connections to ensure his taking the job. Hasan’s statement “I had prepared the ground for you” indicated this fact. Hasan had built a trust triangle between himself, the applicant, and the employer, but Mehmet destroyed that bridge by giving the impression that he was making a lot of money and that he would therefore expect similar income from his new job. As Hasan said, Mehmet could still have had a chance, had he declared his dedication to trust relations by making a statement like “that job was eating me away, I only want a stable company,” that is, a company that he can trust. But instead, he broke the trust relations. Mehmet nonetheless retorted, “if he understands such a thing from what I said, I would not have worked for him anyway.” Here Mehmet asserted that if the manager was not going to trust his goodwill,

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<sup>28</sup> The point is, there is a public consensus regarding business decisions, like profit-making as the major and legitimate concern of a company. Although actors should still respect the moral codes of communities around which they operate their businesses, they are, at the last resort, bounded by the economic law of profit-making. During my fieldwork, this “law” was never challenged or questioned just as in the case of global market turbulences that I will discuss below.

<sup>29</sup> At this point, Robert Castel fails to refer to any other registers for social existence in the post-industrial, post-Fordist societies, and thus proposes disaffiliation (*désaffiliation*) as the only outcome of the retreat of the welfare state (2000, cf. Castel 2011). Although this might be the case for European countries, other geographical regions may respond to the crisis of so-called welfare state with different forms of socialization and mobilization, rather than with disaffiliation and social exclusion.

and if he was going to think that Mehmet was trying to get a wage as high as possible, then it would be impossible to have a healthy, trust-based relation in that company. If the manager would interpret every word Mehmet says in the most insidious way possible, as if all the parties were trying to maximize their benefits at the expense of each other, then Mehmet claimed that he would not like to work there. We cannot know whether Mehmet really meant it or he was just trying to get a higher wage, but he immediately changed the direction of the conversation from his personal “fault” to a moral misunderstanding. This was a political gesture that implicated everyone in the room in this specific affair. In his enactment of being offended “how could he think such a thing!” he sought our affirmation that he, of course, valued trust more than money. Everyone conceded to this point since the AK party was supposed to be where people value morality, spirituality, immaterial qualities, selflessness and altruism. Challenging one’s moral commitments, however suspicious he or she might be, was impossible in that context.

Yet Mehmet also failed eventually. He lost a possible job, his second moral assertion, i.e. debt-death imbrication, failed to bring any solution to his predicament, and finally he was left with no other option but to leave. The power of moral argument, its remarkable plasticity in such practical settings, is also its weakest point: it has no promise. Mehmet was virtuous in his thinking that he just answered a question (“how much are you making?”) with all his honesty, he was not concerned with material wealth, he was not trying to insinuate something, like a sub-text (“I am worthy of 2500TL”). The HR manager failed to acknowledge that moral stance and thus put himself into a negligent position if not a sly and disingenuous one. Mehmet thus opened a moral space for his move away from his personal responsibility (telling the manager he is making 2500TL). But even in the best case scenario, this could result in Hasan’s turning to me and showing the tragic dimension of changing jobs: “the change from one job to another is like

this.” His second moral attempt received no favorable response from Hasan, although the stakes were higher that time: life and death. But this time he couldn’t squarely place his position into a moral standpoint. He could not answer to the demand “[to] have faith, get into the work, and pay his debt.” Mehmet’s position was conditioned by his concern about the relapse of his disease. But this fear seemed too calculative for Hasan: “You are dying any way.” Mehmet’s concern made him lose his moral edge, he forgot the first lesson: there is no guarantee in morality.

Thus for both sides, the party members trying to convince the unemployed to take the available jobs and the unqualified workers looking for the best job they can get, the terms of negotiations, intimacy, morality and trust, revolve around the question of politics, traversing the networks of the AKP. Here we witness a curious practice of translation on the grassroots that articulates the irregularities of economic relations into affective political registers. This translation takes place through two major techniques employed by the party members, referring to the authority of the inflexible global forces and intimate authority over small things.

#### **IV. Political Techniques of Translating Mass Precarity into Mobilization**

The precariousness that Mehmet’s case so strikingly exhibits could have been otherwise. Mehmet left the career center without finding a solution for his problems but I heard from Hasan that he came back later for other job calls. Hasan did not make any detailed analysis of Mehmet’s case, but it was apparent from his comments that declaring one’s contemplation of suicide in public, like a municipality building, would weaken the sense of trust among interlocutors. Hasan briefly dismissed my concern about Mehmet’s wellbeing and said “he would not have talked about these things if he were serious”. Although Mehmet was a lost case for Hasan, he and his colleagues achieved some modest successes in making people act in the way that they suggested: taking a job, talking to managers in certain ways, demanding less wages, working more and so



forth. The precariousness of the unqualified is not only a tragic event that happens to the poor but also an incentive for the poor to act in certain ways and a resource that can be directed to unlikely but possible ends. Daily encounters between job counselors and applicants are full of details about how to establish the rules of the game that both parties are playing.

I use the term technique in the sense that Mauss uses it in his paper “Techniques of the Body”. Although he focuses on corporal practices that he calls “habitus,” Mauss goes beyond bodily performances and conceptualizes technique as any “action which is effective and traditional” (1973, 75). He was the one who insisted, against positivist and idealist currents of his time, that in technique, sociological, biological and psychological aspects of action intermingle – in what he calls “physio-psycho-social assemblages of series of actions” (85). This approach complicates the analysis of power and authority and goes beyond the couplet of power/knowledge. In Mauss, we find an understanding of power whereby affects (confidence, fear, familiarity etc.), materials (bodies, rivers, trees etc.), and spirits (“moral, magical and ritual”) are included in analyzing the effectiveness of certain actions<sup>30</sup>. His conceptual intervention allows me to trace how different registers, from global markets and the Chinese economy to religion and intimacy, interact towards certain practical ends, e.g. accepting a job offer, not asking for wage increase, or working overtime.

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<sup>30</sup> Here I prefer not to incorporate Foucault’s discussion of the distinction between technique and technology, although it has certain advantages that can be used in this setting. The basic problem his philosophy poses for my analytical concerns here is that Foucault does not allow coexistence of different ontological regions whose regulatory frameworks might be indifferent/independent from each other. Although his later works, starting from *Security, Territory and Population*, according to Collier (2009), discuss heterogeneous regions (e.g. security, sovereignty, discipline), techniques in a given region are necessarily bounded by the technologies of that region (Foucault 2007). This is partially because his later commitment to theorize freedom/thought as outside of and subversive for established power relations. As it might already become apparent so far, I do not conceptualize freedom necessarily subversive but also potentially complicit, conservative and violent. Here again, I find it more useful to refer ecological niche as that which encourages, facilitates, and renders possible a set of actions or discourses without attributing normative qualities.

Hamit told me more than once that they did not only find jobs for the unemployed but they also taught them how to keep those jobs. When I asked what he meant by that, he said, “these people are good people but being unqualified they do not know what to do, when and how. We are coming from these people, so we understand them very well. We make them trust us and then send them to other trustable people [employers]. We never send them to jobs without social security or irregular payments.” During my fieldwork, I had the chance to observe how job counselors “make them [the unemployed] trust” and the particular techniques that they employed towards that end. This was a crucial part of their expertise; they had to get intimate with people and build trust relations. Job counselors make certain that the applicant knows her options, what she can do, what she can expect, and how she should act. In most of the interviews that I had chance to participate in or witness to, job consultants used what we may call the “techniques” of intimacy that not only make applicants understand the full extent of their precariousness but also make them able to trust job consultants.

When an applicant enters the room, the job counselor welcomes her in a friendly way and invites her to sit down on the chair across the desk. He looks at his computer to see the person’s CV and if she should be considered unqualified, which is mostly the case, the conversation has a certain way. Instead of “mister” (*beyefendi*) and “miss” (*hanimefendi*), job counselor uses “brother (*kardesim* or *abim*)” and “sister (*ablam* or *bacim*)” in order to establish the primary coordinates of intimacy and to break the distance that official formalities might produce.<sup>31</sup> He then starts to tell her about possible jobs. They are vaguely categorized as unqualified in the sense that everyone, educated or uneducated, can immediately, or just after a brief training

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<sup>31</sup> With few of the qualified candidates, unless the person is really young, job counselors predominantly use mister and misses. In, again, very few cases, when the applicant is considered unqualified but is a woman and looks like secular and modern (and “attractive” in the cases I witnessed), there is a tendency to use “misses,” though not predominantly.

session, start to work. Without exception, jobs pay the legal minimum wage per month (900TL, at the time it was around 500\$), demand long hours of work (between 10 and 20 per day), often with shifts and ambiguous terms of promotion. If the person accepts one of the options, the conversation ends there and the parties go their own ways. But when the applicant does not like the job, as is most often the case, another process is about to begin. There are no clear rules or regulations for this new stage, but there are a few signposts that we can follow to make sense of how precariousness is being turned into a resource in this institutional setting and how specific power relations produce a network of intimacy that facilitates certain behaviors.

***a. The Authority of the Inflexible: Global Markets***

In cases where the applicant is unwilling to take any of the available jobs, the most likely answer she would receive from a job counselor is a picture of the world economy. Since job counselors are also party members, these conversations never point at a weakness of the party or its policies. As if being writ small, the Turkish economy is presented as an open economy in which its citizens experience the smallest disturbance anywhere in the world. To a young man who did not want to work in a manual job but preferred a desk job, Suat replied:

Look at me my brother, I do not have any lies. The economies around the world are in crisis, all the countries are going down (*batiyor*), and many companies are going bankrupt. If things get worse, how are you going to find a job? Take this job, I will later find you another one that you would like more. But in the meantime, you will make some sacrifices (*ozveride bulunacaksın*).

There was no place to put the blame on the political decisions of the party since, according to job counselors and many of my informants, it was not reasonable to ask too much from the government in a time when neighboring economies (Greece, Southern Europe, the Middle East and the like) were crumbling. As I discussed in the previous chapter, many people believe that the single party rule provides the economy with crucial stability and thus ensures the best

environment for business, development and the welfare of all. Another applicant who wanted to get out of the textile industry summarized this position pretty well. While consulting Hasan for a job that provides secure income, he turned to me and said: “Brother, I will talk to you openly. I am sick of textiles. There is no trust in textiles. If something happens to the government, to the AK party, you are gone. Whatever happens in the world, there is an immediate correspondence here. This is not something that you can control.” For him a single party government was an invaluable phenomenon in that markets were consolidated around its power. However, there are things outside of the party’s will and determination, like international markets. Job counselors continuously referred to the possibility of an economic turbulence that would further eliminate the job opportunities that many applicants found dissatisfactory. Suat, for example, explicitly invoked this global challenge to convince unqualified workers that their options were severely limited. The global market is a figure that directs one’s actions and decisions according to inflexible boundaries upon which political mobilization has no effect whatsoever. However, the problem with this strategy is that it is not a reality per se. It is rather an impending threat that one should take into consideration in her decisions. It has an authoritative effect on applicants, or it is assumed to have one. But since it is not a reality but a possibility, the applicant needed to believe Suat about this threat being something to be reckoned with. Here we see Suat’s expertise to incite a certain form of behavior by making people trust him by saying “If things go worse, how are you going to find a job? Take this job, I will later find you another one that you would like more.”

The authority that Suat derived from such an inflexible register was limited but still effective. Even when it failed to incite a particular form of behavior, the authority of the inflexible figure of global markets showed that intimacy and trust play significant roles in

addressing the precariousness of the unqualified and turning precariousness into a source of action. By reminding the applicant of his precariousness, Suat asked him to trust his words. Global markets and its inflexible boundaries were immediately turned into the means of personal/political connections that bind two strangers to one other. Suat was trustable, he was a member of the party, he was coming from a similar background (“from these people”), and he was transparent (“I do not have any lies”). In return, Suat expected the young man to take a leap of faith that would cross the vast terrain of the unknown, reminiscent of the “five unknowns” poster in Suat’s room, and take action in that good faith. “Take this job for the time being, also as a token of your willingness for hard work, and in the meantime I will find you a better job<sup>32</sup>” was most likely, the most common form of invitation that the applicants receive in career centers. However, as might be expected, there are other techniques that come into play when the inflexible register of global markets fail to elicit appropriate behavior.

### ***b. Intimate Authority over Small Things***

Roughly put, there are two forms of authority that one can observe in the career centers at the margins of Istanbul. The first one is what I call the authority of the inflexible, the authority of an outside that defines relationships, potentialities and responsibilities for the poor in Istanbul. This form of authority is external in the sense that it is explicitly argued that no one has any control over it. The 2008 global crisis of capitalism is of this sort. Even among the least educated and most impoverished strata of Turkish society, there is a vague consensus about the inevitable boundaries of global economic conditions<sup>33</sup>. But the second form of authority that I had the

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<sup>32</sup> This is a representative formula for the many answers that I collected, rather than an exact reproduction of a dialog.

<sup>33</sup> The crisis thus resembles the great wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike the other crisis that I have analyzed in the previous chapters, especially those that took place in the 1990s, people are less inclined to put the blame on the government. There are few reasons behind this disinclination. First, there is a continuous economic growth for the

chance to observe and I will try to conceptualize here is more fluid and ambiguous in its emergence. The major denominator for most of the practices in this second category is an emphasis on “intimacy”, which is in direct contrast to the first category where the authority is based on immutable external boundaries. In a sense, intimacy is being conscripted in the form of authority that is both familiar and mutable and thus capable of amassing the irregular ruptures of the open market that is in itself considered as inflexible and immutable. In other words, my argument is that the first form of authority (the inflexibles) is actively translated into the second form (intimacy) and in the process produces particular forms of trust-based socio-political networks. This second form is necessarily minimal; it focuses on insignificant details, poses small challenges, and shifts from one point to another without a logical connection or coherence. In a sense, it is an authority over small things.

Being conceptualized as a nodal point between interior and exterior, private and public, spirit and body, intimacy has occupied a special place in the social sciences as well as in anthropology. Studies focusing on sexuality (Berlant 1997; D’emilio and Freedman 1988; Foucault 1988; Giddens 1992; Luhman 1986) specifically foregrounded the concept of intimacy to reintegrate politics and power into the questions that had been depoliticized and naturalized before. The closest, most intimate moments of life, e.g. sex, family or love, are thus investigated in tandem with the macro-dynamics that shape, regulate and produce those experiences. Since then, social sciences and anthropology has certainly pushed the discussion far beyond intimacy as the region of sex, family or love and shift the focus to liberal citizenship (Mody 2008;

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last 15 years, except one year 2009, when the crisis was at its peak and the political support for the party was at its lowest level ever. Secondly, even in 2009 when the dissatisfaction about the economy was translated partially to political preferences, people were still holding fast the belief that the single party rule consolidates economy better than any coalition, and since there was no other candidate for another single party rule, people thought that there is no alternative but to support the AKP.

Povinelli 2006), national belonging (Herzfeld 2005), state violence (Zengin 2016), and colonial histories (Stoler 2002).

Out of the vast terrain of scholarly works on intimacy, I find two theoretical interventions most useful. Firstly, I follow Povinelli's distinction between intimacy and intimate event with one twist. She defines intimacy as radical contingency whereby social relations are rendered enduring and are being intensified (2006, 179). Against this fundamental ontological condition, she posits intimate event, something I prefer to call intimacy-as-enacted, that which "is thought to be a mode of the self-other relation that links together a number of key institutional orders of modern social life, themselves said to be a condition and reflection of this mode of affective and ethical self-positing. And yet what is also clear is that the intimate event is only incoherently linked to these institutional orders and is, at best, an indeterminate form of self-other relation." (182). I am exactly interested in that indeterminacy around institutions. However, not as failures of power relations but as resources that can be conscripted for production, reproduction, and expansion of certain power relations.

Secondly, Lynn Jamieson makes a very important intervention with her observation of the literature. "Existing research suggests," she says, "that elements of practices of intimacy can be transposable, that is one practice of intimacy is sometimes able stand in for others, making it as-if other practices of intimacy were also in place" (2011, 2.7). This observation concurs with the Lacanian concept of subject as metaphor. Bruce Fink provides us with an invaluable recapitulation of Lacan's argument on the emergence of the subject. The subject is a moment of flash, a spark, it appears just at the moment it disappears. Although this formulation seems obscure, Fink clarifies it by connecting the emergence and simultaneous disappearance of the subject to the act of metaphorization. The subject is nothing but an electric current that jumps

from one point to another to relate those points to each other. As one word stands in for another by a metaphor's "creative spark," the subject is being precipitated (Fink, 1995: 70). In this sense, a subject is always a production of sense, a sense-making activity. Intimacy, in an analogous way, produces something by its mere capacity to stand in for other forms of intimacy. This is the significance of the concept intimacy: it connects one form of proximity, e.g. brotherly connection, to another one, e.g. political identity. The vagueness of the term and the indeterminacy of its social form is not related to a theoretical or practical failure but to its very practical efficacy.

During my fieldwork, I have witnessed countless moments of authority regarding small things and how they are related to larger social, economic and political frameworks. Let me start with one instance. Although it did not take place between the low rank political cadres and their constituency, the example is still relevant to show how the display of power on insignificant matters can be openly argued as a sign of intimacy and a part of compassionate treatment. Rustem's case might be illuminating here.

Rustem was deaf, as people were saying. But in fact, he was using a hearing aid that helped him to figure out what was said to him, though with great difficulty. His speech was impaired by the irregular and belated use of the machine, for his family was only able to afford it at a relatively late stage of his physiological development. I got the chance to know him from the municipality's career center where he frequently visited for job opportunities. Having some connections to the party (being the son of a friend of a neighborhood chief of the party, precisely speaking), he was employed in the municipality to fill the legal quota for the disabled. On one of the first days of my participant observation in the career center, he entered Hasan's room, looking for a USB cable in one of the shelves. Once he found it, just before he left, Hasan got



angry and asked, “did you ask me?” Rustem was apparently afraid of what was about to come; Hasan furiously got up, walked towards him, took the cable and put it back on the shelf.

Grabbing the cable back from the shelf, he asked, “who wants this?” Rustem barely mumbled the name of an officer who was preparing a slide show for some visitors. Hasan said “Why do you give things that are not yours [to other people]? What if something happens to the cable?”

Rustem, being already too afraid, reluctantly said that he would buy a new one. Hasan started to shout again, “do not give the things that are not yours! I am your brother; I am saying this for your own good. This cable might be broken. This is USB! This is sensitive (*hassas*)!” He handed the cable to Rustem, and Rustem left the room. When he left the room, Hasan turned to me, smiling in a solemn manner, and said, “this is how he will learn gradually (*boyle boyle ogrenecek*).”

I was taken aback on several fronts: (i) an apparent overreaction about something trivial; (ii) lack of logic (fragilities of USB cables?); (iii) his swift mood changes from fury to compassion. Slightly agitated by the scene that just happened before my eyes, I asked him whether it was too much to talk to Rustem in that way. He reminded me of the conversation we had with Handan a few days previously. Handan complained about the lack of comprehension on the part of unqualified laborers, especially when they were unable to accommodate the harsh forms of communication with supervisors. She said, “I myself have had many fights with the boss but I didn’t quit the job. They [the unqualified] act without thinking. I knew many people who quit because of their supervisors. After a certain age, men cannot take harsh treatment.” Imbued with an air of wisdom, he said “I am teaching him about the outside world; people need to learn that they cannot act by themselves (*kendi kafasina gore hareket edemez*).” For Hasan, the outside world, the world of economic relations, is one of cruelty and hardships that damage

unqualified people. His pedagogical approach towards Rustem was a way of helping him. Hasan claimed that he taught something to Rustem, and his intentions were clear since his intimacy was something Rustem should accept without question. “I am your brother” was the indicator of intimacy, which reminded Rustem, during their conversation, that Hasan’s harsh comments were “for [his] own good.” By having good intentions for Rustem, and even turning that intention into a pedagogical practice, Hasan prepared Rustem for the velocities of the market, its coldness and professionalism. In a sense, his proximity, intimacy, and compassion were mustered against the predicaments of global realities. After this encounter, I realized that he and other people were using the same method to teach the unqualified about the cruelties of the world – its whimsical, irregular, and irruptive movements- but in a close and intimate manner.

There are several moments that enact different modalities of authority in an intimate and friendly way. One of the most frequent performances was what I call “insignificant impossibilities” whereby job consultants demand an act that cannot be satisfied but delineate the limits of the applicants’ capabilities, that is, her “place.” A typical form of such dialogue goes as following:

**Hasan:** Where do you live? [the job has a shuttle only to some districts]

**Applicant:** *Nine Hatun* district.

**H:** Why do you not live in *Birlik* District?

**A:** My family found a place in that [*Nine Hatun*] district...

**H:** Do you know anyone from *Birlik* District?

**A:** No.

**H:** [slightly smiling] Why?

**A:** ...

Although the dialog had an air of joking, it prepared the applicant to the feeling of “not having control”. This gesture was in accord with the general conviction that the unqualified have no freedom but to take the offered jobs on account of their lack of quality. But the air of joking

principally contributes to establishing a sense of intimacy. People “share” the slim chance of doing good, what we may call “the unlikely<sup>34</sup>”, when they show that chances are not good, but that there is still hope if one commits to the spiritual qualities described by the officers and party members. Trying to negotiate the terms of a job with a vocational high school graduate<sup>35</sup>, Suat provided one of the best examples of this kind.

**Suat:** What did you do for your profession?

**Applicant:** I have good theoretical knowledge, but no practical one.

**S:** I know... you are all empty inside. Now you go to school and chat with the girls. You want to get away from your family, hang out with girls, and then turn into a good for nothing. This is the lack of spirituality, you did not improve yourself spiritually. Your spirit is empty but your CV is full. What is this [waving his CV]? What is it good for?

**A:** Brother, they did not allow me to do something else. Every employer wants workers with at least 4 years experience.

**S:** Is there any other way than taking the job that I offered?

**A:** But brother, some people find good jobs with good payments.

**S:** Where? Bring me a job that gives 2500 TL (800\$) to a person like you! Bring me that person! Find me one?

**A:** Brother, I cannot. If I can find one, I would take it.

**S:** That’s what I am saying, so there is no such job. If you look for another way, you will be unemployed for ten years, but if you listen to me, you will improve yourself. This is an established firm, with good morality. The owner is from our party; he is a good Muslim [*mumin*]. He would not be unjust to you. But you have to show something. You have to work without expecting anything in return. You will gain trust, then you can climb the ladder within the company.

Here Suat’s demand “bring me a job that gives 2500 TL” was an *insignificant impossibility*. Each party knew very well the implausibility of the demand, but the demand itself

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<sup>34</sup> What I call “the unlikely” is a phenomenon close to Berlant’s concept “cruel optimism” in that it sustains the precariousness of a living by holding fast to the promises that will never come true (2006). However, I use “the unlikely” in a specific sense that promises can be realized but their distribution is without order and guarantees. Furthermore, the slightly miraculous distribution of these promises is necessary to sustain social, political and economic networks that make those promises possible in the first place.

<sup>35</sup> The reader might be surprised to hear that a vocational high school graduate does not have qualification. However in Turkey only few of those schools are able to train technicians, and most of technicians are predominantly among those who would go to a 2 year college to attain their status. Also in this specific case, the person graduated from accounting division of vocational school, which is considered an oversaturated discipline with a touch of degradation.

demarcated the boundaries of capabilities. It was a gesture<sup>36</sup> that did not signify much by the seriousness of what it demanded but by the way it showed the applicant that there were few choices before her. The interactions revolving around insignificant impossibilities are of a different kind than professional job interviews. During professional interviews, some of them take place in career centers, conversations are scripted in a formal way. HR managers, no matter their political affiliations, do not explicitly challenge an applicant. “We will call you” is the most standardized answer for rejecting an applicant without saying it. For few direct rejections, “We do not work with X, Y quality (age, education, experience etc.)” is the generalized form. In both cases, the impersonal character of interaction is underlined. However, the reason for the exponential rise of career centers is that job counselors perform a task that is exactly the obverse of professional distance. Mehmet, a veteran job counselor, once complained to me about the number of people who took a job with a Turkish Airlines’ subcontractor. Out of 158 applicants, 17 were employed, 11 quit, 40 received negative reviews (health, criminal records etc.), 9 gave up, 51 were not interested anymore, 6 did not even go to the job on the first day, 21 were out of reach. Mehmet said, “Turkish Airlines called the applicants, they did not *touch* them one by one (*birebir temas etmediler*), so they lost hundreds of them. If I were to go with them, explain to them, they would have stayed.” The formal structure of the dialogue between applicants and HR

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<sup>36</sup> This gesture is apparently related to Lacan’s notion of empty gesture. In empty gestures, as Žižek shows, the “system is compelled to allow for possibilities of choices which must never actually take place, since their occurrence would cause the system to disintegrate, and the function of the unwritten rules is precisely to prevent the actualization of these choices formally allowed by the system” (1997, 37). He gives the example of a competition between close friends. In case one wins a prize, say a position, that both of them want, the winner offers to retreat for the sake of the other. However, Žižek underlines, this gesture is “[an] opportunity to choose the impossible, that which inevitably will not happen” (36). The purpose of the act is not at all what it signifies as its content (giving up the prize for other’s behalf) but rather its very predestined trajectory. By rejecting the offer, doing the exact thing the winner expects from the loser, the social bond is being confirmed. But in contrast to its Lacanian counterpart, insignificant impossibility does not demand a seemingly egalitarian participation from the parties. There is no space for the applicant to take action, to be active, in the reaffirmation of the existing social order. It is the inaction on the part of the applicant that the social positions are constructed rather than being reaffirmed. People construct the social order by means of their inability to enter the symbolic exchange. In this sense, insignificant impossibility is not “empty” but “full” and it demands what it signifies: the recognition of an impossibility.

professionals, Mehmet claimed, could not produce the desirable effects on the actions of applicants. Suat, Hasan, Mehmet and many others were preparing “the ground” for applicants so they could accommodate the working conditions of a particular job. They were performing this task in an intimate but authoritarian<sup>37</sup> manner, thus ensuring that applicants would accept the conditions of a job however unpleasant it was and however unlikely it would satisfy their expectations.



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<sup>37</sup> Here I partially follow the generic definition of the term authoritarianism. The classical definition of the term in political science is “a style of government in which the rulers demand unquestioning obedience from the ruled” (Allison 1996, 30). The reason for which I use this term here is to underline the dialectical tension between following a rule or an order and questioning it. During my fieldwork, this tension had continuously been underlined by many of my informants, and just like in many of my examples here, it had been actively invoked in imperative forms: “do not ask wage increase,” “do not expect anything at first” and so on. In this sense, the term captures the dynamic relation between consent and coercion in that a rule seeks “consent to be coerced” in the ruled one.



Figure 15, 16, 17: “Being in touch with people” or briefly called “touching” is the backbone of intimacy that sustains socio-political networks around the party. From preparations for interviews (I), to transporting workers to factories (II), job counselors accompany applicants in every stage, thus touching them in the literal and figurative senses of the word. It simply means “being alongside people,” physically and continuously.

The feeling of powerlessness is mediated in the career centers in an intimate way. Job counselors try to convince applicants by inviting them to trust, in a sense, to take a leap of faith<sup>38</sup>. Job counselors frequently promise that they will be watchful for applicants’ behalf if they commit themselves to their jobs, do their works diligently and unselfishly. In return, they promise to call the unqualified worker, in case an opportunity for a good job arises. This is far from being a formalistic relation, but rather a network based on trust and intimacy. The job counselor promises the applicant that he will be looking for a job that the applicant wants. But the applicant should do two things: first, she has to take the job; second, she should visit the

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<sup>38</sup> As is well known, Kierkegaard never uses the noun phrase "leap of faith," something unduly attributed to him. Yet, his insistence on the use of the concept "leap" is apt in this context as he defines the term as follows: "the leap is the category of decision" (2009, 84). The leap here designates a certain capacity of actualizing one's existential capacity in "qualitative" manner as opposed to the quantitative one whereby one calculates and rationalizes according to Kierkegaard. Here, he claims, individual enters in the ethical sphere of good and evil. Since in the case above the decision is a sort of a decision concerning the faith in intimacy, I think it is suitable to use the misattributed phrase. Accordingly, my usage attempts to capture the move (qua decision) that promises a change in the conditions of the agent, e.g. livelihood, employment, or well-being, without quantitatively explaining how the change will be accomplished. For a detailed account of Kierkegaard's use of the term, see Ferreira 2006.

municipality and the career center frequently. She should remind herself of the job counselor so she will not be forgotten. As Suat often tells applicants: “coming here frequently means making things easier. If you come here, I will order a tea for you, ask how you are doing. You will stay in my mind.” Thus there establishes an intimate, trust-based relation that is saturated around a socio-political project (municipality and party) and translates the precariousness of the market into a resource for economic relations (unqualified labor), political mobilization and social association. Here is a concise example of how the precarities of the market turns into intimate relations.

**Hasan:** We did call you, why didn't you come to the interview?

**Applicant:** Brother, I swear, you didn't call.

[Hasan checks the list; he can't find the name of the applicant.]

**H:** [giving up looking at the list] Didn't I send you to *Titiz plastik* before? [another job]

**A:** Brother, it was long ago.

**H:** You see, if you quit your job without informing us, you get lost in the records. You should have come here and told me about it. You should have visited me. What did I say?

**A:** But brother, you wrote my name down when I came here a few days ago.

**H:** Didn't I find you a cleaning job [a previous job that he found long ago]? I gave you three chances, three! What else can I do for you? You tell me. Tell me!

**A:** ...

**H:** [lowering his voice to a normal level] Ok... I renewed your record. Would you like a cleaning job, three shifts; 8-16, 16-24, 24-8.

**A:** Weekends?

**H:** One day for holiday, weekdays. But you immediately ask about holiday. You do not need holiday, every day is a holiday for you [turning to me, laughing as if seeking my approval]. You just work 8 hours.

**A:** A relative of mine is working there, we asked his help but he didn't do a thing.

**H:** I am your brother, I am helping you!

The flow of the conversation is not extraordinary. Job counselors perform shifts, cuts and jumps during conversations as the means of directing a dialogue, silencing an applicant, or indicating the fact that the man without quality, i.e. unqualified laborers, has no power over conversation. The sense of powerlessness was diffused throughout the dialogs by such instances but those dialogs rarely attained the status of controversy. The fact that insignificant

impossibilities were always on small matters is what turns them into a token. Since it is not only insignificant, but also impossible, the gesture invokes an air of joke, a brotherly challenge, or a genuine interest in showing what the real issues are at stake. Invariably, an offer follows an insignificant impossibility: a job, a certain form of behavior, or a reconciliation. Thus insignificant impossibilities signify an act of giving, a gift. In the above dialog, the applicant remains silent after Hasan's question "what can I do for you [after all that I have done]?" The silence means his acceptance of Hasan's *generosity*, although it was apparent that Hasan lost the records and forgot to call him for the job interview. It is obvious from the conversation that the applicant had been frequenting the center during his unemployment. Hasan chided the applicant for failing to show up when he quit his job. He got "lost in the records" since he did not make necessary effort to sustain the brotherly, intimate relation with Hasan. Records, documents and other bureaucratic mediums have this tendency: they get lost. Since he did not have qualification that would make him stand out, the applicant had to resort to other sources that cannot be found in records but may have significant roles in his employment. It is thus building trust relations that one can get into a promising job. But what kind of a promise can the unqualified expect? Do promises of this kind come with conditions and expectations, i.e. reciprocities? What should the unqualified do so as to fulfill the expectations of such promises? Is this an exchange? What should the unqualified "give before asking anything"? What do they have?

#### **V. Giving That Which One Does Not Have, or How to Make a Living in Precarious Times**

As I have already indicated, the distinction between qualified/skilled and unqualified/unskilled is a social construction. However it has a recognizable form for the agents in a given field. People value some skills and qualities: engineers, doctors, and technicians are among those of the few who have it. And the rest are related to the Turkish concept of "unqualified [*vasıfsız*]," meaning



“without quality [*vasif*]”, “without adjective [*sifat*<sup>39</sup>]”, pure and undifferentiated. Those who do not have anything but their labor power are called unqualified and, as my reading of the history of Turkish labor power shows, they are bereft of any value in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are still necessary for production and services but considering the high levels of unemployment, and their sheer number, they are burdensome rather than valuable in the social life. “Brother, I would do any job” (*Ne is olsa yaparım abi*) is an idiom that the unqualified use frequently in their job searches. Most of the time, job counselors deride the unqualified for this idiom, since they claim that the idiom simply means “I do not have an occupation.” Once a valuable source of development, pure labor is now a problem that requires immense effort to be translated into something of value.

In this context, “I would do any job” is conceived as an act of thoughtless desperation rather than a sign of willingness or generosity. The job counselors complain about these people and say that the unqualified do not know what they want. Thus the dialog below is not infrequent.

Nesim: Let’s put you to work in Gezer (slipper factory)

Applicant: What is the wage?

N: The first thing you do is asking the wage. What can you do?

A: Anything (*ne olursa*)

N: You do not even know what you can do but ask about the wage!

Although Nesim was angry at the applicant who asked about the wage before the job, he underlined that unqualified people were not interested in “what” they would do in their jobs. “Anything,” in this context, signified not a dissimulation but a genuine lack of knowledge and orientation in the world full of volatilities and irregularities. About this lack, Suat provided me with a detailed explanation that, as I attested countlessly, was shared by his colleagues. He gave

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<sup>39</sup> *Sifat* (adjective) is a derivation of *vasif* (quality).

me a concise account of how they approached the problem of the unqualified, the merit of which I appreciated only in the later stages of my research.

They [the unqualified] are terribly afraid of interviews. They don't know how to fill a CV. The guy (*adam*) changed ten jobs easily; he can't find the job he is looking for. He cannot show patience (*sabir gosteremiyorlar*). He is doing the things that he doesn't want to do. He doesn't know what he likes. We are here to find out what they would love. We arrange a marriage between employer and employee.

Here the basic themes that orient the actions and discourses of job counselors, party members, and even, only partially and sometimes subversively, the unemployed at the margins of Istanbul start to unfold. "Love" occupies the central stage. As if the precarious conditions under which the poor try to eke out a living are not structural –something many people delegates to the realm of inflexible global markets-, job counselors foreground affective qualities like love that have potentiality to complement what the unqualified lack in their CVs. The theme of "love" thus opens a space of possibility. If you find a job that you would love, you would hold on to that job, you can make progress, and you can even be a manager or employer. Although it is globally conditioned, there is an affective dimension of precariousness in which hopelessness can turn into hope, impossibilities into miracles, and the worthless into the invaluable.

In this sense, love is a bridge between precariousness and security. People do not know what they want, i.e. what they love, and thus continuously drift from one job to another in search of something that they do not know. Most of the unqualified applicants are looking for what is vernacularly called "desk jobs," which is a substitute for white-collar jobs or office jobs in the service sector. Although there is nothing wrong with this kind of job, the major problem is how to get them. For the qualified, though the term is constantly changing and volatile, it is relatively easy. If you can speak a foreign language, if you have a college diploma, or if you have a technical mastery, then you can work in a relatively comfortable environment, without much

physical strain, and with reasonable working hours. However, the unqualified do not have any of these valuable assets. Having no quality and specialization, they can do what everyone else can: anything. Since anything is not something valuable in the contemporary world, the unqualified have to turn this capacity for anything into something valuable. Hasan gave a general framework of such reasoning and provided a young unqualified man with a possible orientation.

Today you do not have anything. You say that you have experience, but you have spent your life in textile workshops. What can you offer to employers? Look, you will provide trust to the man [employer], you will win from this point. If you love your job, if you do your job as if it is yours, if you do not complain about wages or overtime, the boss will like you (embrace you) (*benimseyecek*). We know the man [employer], he is one of us [AKP supporter]. If you show yourself there, you will stay there. Otherwise, 5 years later, I would not be able to find you a job, even if I want to. You will stay like this.

The global capitalist relations that produce precariousness are also something detrimental to capitalist interests. While people are making investments in their CVs, their profiles, and their “qualities,” they turn into competitive individuals to whom one can barely trust. Those qualified people are necessary for production processes and thus they are valuable. But on the way of generating quality, they become unreliable. Their motives are based on self-interest; they do their jobs professionally. But there is also a need for those who treat the job as their own. Thus love plays its role as a bridge between precariousness and security by making people “own” the job that they do<sup>40</sup>. This “owning” is not possible for the professionals, but it is a chance, however hard and unlikely it is, that the unqualified have. Hasan says “you will win from this point” to indicate this possibility. One’s precariousness might be translated into a resource for trust relations; but only if you do your job as if it is yours, if you do not ask for your wages, if you do not mind overtime. In short, by renouncing one’s self-interest, one can attain a higher level of

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<sup>40</sup> Among others, Povinelli aptly demonstrates the assertive discontinuity between love and calculation: “Eventually, *love* absorbed the semantics of *intimacy* and stood as if on its own, opposed to interested attachment, to use, to usury. To assert a bond of love was to assert simultaneously a rejection of social utility. And, simultaneously, nationalism absorbed the structures of this recognition: We-the-People emerged as a transposition and lifting-up (*Aufhebung*) of the dialectic of the intimate I and thou.” (2002, 230).

socio-political existence based on moral and affective qualities rather than professional (secular) ones. This new stage, supposedly, might bring its own rewards, far exceeding the opportunities available to the professional classes. While explaining how to achieve success to a young man who was hesitant about a job offer, Suat provided another brilliant example:

Suat: What kind of job do you expect?

Applicant: It doesn't matter.

S: Assembling bicycles?

A: Any other?

S: You just said that it doesn't matter!

A: Since I am working in a heavy job, I meant heaviness doesn't matter.

S: Where did you work?

A: Printing, denim washing...

S: Would you like a denim washing job?

A: No, I have already quit that job, I want to learn a trade.

S: Would you like to learn how to assemble bicycles?

A: Would there be any progress?

S: Of course! They will be looking for how much you can show yourself. You will show that you are not for a temporary job. You will prove that you embrace the workplace. You will work as if it is your own job. Then, the work will be yours, and the man [employer] will see you as one of his own, as a family member. After that point, your path is open. However, first of all, you will not be selfish; wage, overtime, you will not make them a big deal.

A few days later, he enacted a somewhat theatrical performance to another candidate, which further exemplified what he meant above by the statement "your path is open." He explained how one could attain higher rewards by means of owning a job and producing trust relations, although this simultaneously means foregoing immediate expectations from a stable and satisfactory job.

I am putting myself in place of an employer. [slowly standing up] I rise/grow, I rise/grow (*buyuyorum, buyuyorum*) and now I watch my employees, I oversee them. If you are trustable, if you are hardworking, I would like to keep you. Maybe I will leave the company to you. But if you say I am such a person, I am that special, I want a desk job. Then you will have a hard time.

These two accounts are the most succinct examples of the kind of demands that unqualified workers encounter for having a future, having a stable job, and making progress in

life. The unqualified have nothing and thus they can do “anything” which has no value in and of itself. Job counselors, in their efforts to convince candidates to take the available jobs, ask them to cultivate a relationship of love that may produce a specific kind of bond between the worker and the work. This relationship has the form of ownership. By means of love, Suat says “you will work as if it is your own job,” as if it is a marriage. This ownership is of course without entitlements. You will love your job and work as hard as you could, without asking much. You will embrace it as it is yours, but you will not demand anything. You will own it to a degree that you will not think of yourself, you will not be selfish, you will not be a calculative person who asks for perks, entitlements or rights. As in the case of morality, here calculative reason comes to a halt. No more planning, no more control, no more demand. Since there is no need for the employer to employ a specific unqualified person (by definition an unqualified person is without distinction), the person should translate that indistinction, the fact of having no quality, into a love relationship in which the line between employer and employee, the boss and the worker, the self and the other vanishes. What does the unqualified have? She “doesn’t have anything” as Hasan said. Suat warned against the danger that she must not think like “I am such a person, I am that special.” This is an illusion that afflicts the unqualified. There is no special self that the unqualified may imagine having. And the only salvation, although it is only a slight chance, is to forgo the illusion of being special, being a specific self. In order to make a living, the unqualified should give that which she does not have in the first place: herself. After that, the employer starts to see you as a part of him, as a part of his family, as someone whom he can trust.



Figure 18: The photo is about one of the most dramatic instances of “giving oneself”. It went out to newspapers and websites on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The (most likely unqualified) worker is employed by a subcontractor company working for an AKP municipality in Afyonkarahisar, a city in central Anatolia. During snow removal works, he was asked to be a “bollard (*direk*)” to fix security cordon tape. Against the charges of inhuman conduct made in social media, the municipality stated that they “do not know why” he was used in such a way and they will conduct an investigation. No further news has been received since then.

When Suat talks about the relation between love and owning interchangeably, giving and taking as simultaneous gestures rather than being opposed to each other, he surreptitiously brings us to the question of the gift –the question that occupies a central and originary position in the history of anthropology. His colleagues’ and his own remarks and actions point to the very heart of the socio-political translation of precariousness into intimacy. This translation process takes the form of the gift at the very moment of its realization, at the moment when the action, that is, taking a precarious job by and for intimate relations, takes place, although one party (the unqualified) must be convinced to partake in it. Here we have the intermingling of three conceptual/practical positions: love, intimacy, and self. The logic of the gift is the key that coordinates these seemingly disparate positions.

Benveniste shows that in the most of Indo-European languages, the verb “\*dō- means both “to give” and “to take” (1971, 272). This point has not been missed by Mauss, although in a different manner, when he points out that in gift giving, it is not a simple object that is being exchanged but much more than that is at stake. The tripartite structure (giving, receiving, and reciprocating) signifies that “a power is present that forces gifts to be passed around, to be given, and returned.” (2002, 55). Mauss diligently shows that the spheres of action that we consider separate by nature (economics, law, religion, or politics) are actively “isolated” from each other in our “more modern” setting (30). He goes so far as to claim that even persons, families, living and non-living things have to be produced as distinct entities, and isolated from each other in order to take their distinct forms. Thus today a tree in one’s garden is not an extension of one’s being, but this is not because they are distinct entities, but rather they are made into distinct categories with a labor of millenniums’ work. Following Mauss, we might say that the social is a field of war within which entities, relations and persons emerge, intermingle, contest and, sometimes, vanish. This field of war becomes conspicuous at moments of exchanges and contracts<sup>41</sup>. It is thus no surprise that Derrida, following Mauss, draws our attention to the dialectical tension, or rather exclusive relation, between subject and gift: “there where there is subject and object, the gift would be excluded” (1992, 24). Every act of giving, however distant they are from being “pure,” displays this intermingling in which the self and the other loses their demarcations, only in order to delineate the boundary once again. Thus the logic of gift invades capitalist calculation. It is certainly possible to claim that every calculation relies on the logic of the gift, and it is the case. But the Manichaeian distinctions have been playing a central role in making and sustaining many differential regions like individuals, families, companies, public

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<sup>41</sup> “In short, this represents an intermingling. Souls are mixed with things; things with souls. Lives are mingled together, and this is how, among persons and things so intermingled, each emerges from their own sphere and mixes together. This is precisely what contract and exchange are. (Mauss: 25-26)”

goods, environment and so on. The gift has been active in capitalist contract, calculation and exchange but only by its conspicuous repression, denunciation and deletion. At the contemporary stage of capitalism, the precariousness that capitalism produces calls the gift back into the very heart (bottom?) of its engine. There we find the translation of self-interest as it splits into two halves: self into self-renunciation, interest into love and intimacy.

What is being asked of the unqualified is an impossible exchange from the viewpoint of capitalist calculation: to work hard for very little, work more than legal limits, and work with no security or prospect. The job counselors repeatedly say, “you have to work without expecting anything in return. You will gain trust, then you can climb the ladder within the company” and “you will love your job, you work as if it is yours.” They speak as if they read Emerson’s essay “Gifts”, as Mauss did before writing his book:

“We can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving it from ourselves; but not from any one who assumes to bestow. [...] The gift, to be true, must be the flowing of the giver unto me, correspondent to my flowing unto him. When the waters are at level, then my goods pass to him, and his to me. All his are mine, all mine his. [...] The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me.” (Emerson 1997, 26)

Intimacy and love as “indeterminate forms of self-other relation” are being conscripted for the intensification of capitalist exploitation and endurance of the masses during that intensification.

To put it another way, giving oneself, self-renunciation, builds socio-political networks in a context within which self-interested individuals have no incentive for taking action –accepting low payments, condoning illegally high working hours, and enduring the complete lack of job security. People translate this abhorrent economic exchange into a gift relation in order to endure, persevere in their being, under the conditions that necessitate that very exchange. This peculiar relation thus expands the socio-political network that performs the task of translation. This socio-political network goes beyond economic relations but it incorporates those economic



relations into its own movement. Thus the unqualified concede to accept job offers with the hope that the party and party members can intervene on their behalf in an indeterminate future time. If one does not have self-interest, even though it is because of the lack of an appropriate biography, the employer can trust that person, the party looks after him, or some other chance, however undetermined it is, might come true. The employer can make her a manager, as his eyes and his ears in the workplace. Who knows, maybe he leaves the company to her.

## **VI. Who Has Quality? Or the Possibilities of a Radical Egalitarianism Based on Having No Qualification**

So far, I have tried to make two arguments. I started with a historical background that might help me explain the meaning of the term “unqualified” in Turkey (see Appendix). Although it was considered an inferior form of value vis-à-vis qualified labor power, unqualified labor had retained its meaning of “being valuable” until the 1990s. This was a result of the combination of a few factors: the relative belatedness of primitive accumulation in Turkey, the relative ease of class mobility, and, last but not least, the high international demand for Turkish unqualified workers. The 1990s have witnessed the substantial erasure of the value of the unqualified, in accord with the developments in global economic relations, and resulted in a shift from unqualified labor as a resource to that which is a problem to be solved.

After tracing the historical trajectory of unqualified labor, I switched my focus to career centers. Located at the margins of Istanbul and operated by municipalities, these employment agencies have been providing unqualified labor for industrial and service sectors in Istanbul for minimum legal wage, with long working hours, and in precarious conditions. My ethnographic research in those career centers allowed me to investigate the productive dimension of the precarious conditions that are produced by global relations of production. Focusing on the

question how these career centers work on the question of unqualified labor, I examined how the unqualified as a category is being defined, which parties participate in this enactment of definition, what forms of authority that this engagement produces, and how these forms are entangled onto each other (intimacy, expertise, global inflexibilities, and small impossibilities). My first argument was located in this context. I argued that the forms of precariousness that global capitalism produces today are translated into intimate, trust-based relations across the socio-political networks established around the AKP and its institutional body.

My second argument was related to a central ramification of the first argument. What is it that being demanded from the unqualified in asking them to take the jobs that give no guarantee regarding the future but expect the unqualified to believe in a vague promise that might provide miraculous opportunities. Against the impersonal, violent and unpredictable forces of global markets, I tried to show, the unqualified are being expected to build intimate trust-relations with employers by constantly negating his or her self-interests. Through the continuous erasure of the self, I argued, there emerges a certain capacity of “being trustable”, presented as a rare quality, although cannot be certified by any diploma or put in any CV.

In this last section I want to focus on a certain appropriation of the forms of authority and de-subjectivizations that I analyzed above. Although I witnessed countless instances that job counselors convinced the unqualified to take certain jobs and act in certain ways, there were also many instances in which job counselors’ efforts failed. Most of these failures had the ordinary form of inaction: not taking a job, not answering the calls from the career center or companies, or quitting the job after working only one day. But there were also some instances in which the infelicities of the job counselors’ actions and discourses took a form of subversion and the unqualified challenged the options presented to them by means of the exact registers that job

counselors use to convince the unqualified.

As I have already pointed out, people generally share the conviction proposed by job counselors that there is no unemployment but only *not liking any job*. During my fieldwork, the AKP members, sympathizers, municipality workers, unqualified workers, retired elders, civil servants, in short, most of the local people in the poor districts in Istanbul partake in the hegemonic discourse that the unqualified is a problem to be solved. They commonly stated that the unqualified -sometimes including themselves- do not want to work, they are looking for their own comfort. It is equally accepted that the unqualified, in order to achieve a certain level of success against the precariousness of his situation, has to make some sacrifices. One of my informants in the waiting line of Esenler career center explained his situation to me as follows: “I didn’t go to school, of course I have to work in unqualified jobs (*vasıfsız işlerde*). But if you ask why I am not working right now, I would say that I am looking for a better job. But if I were starving, of course I would have done any job that I can find. Thanks to Allah, we are not that much in need.” This typical account represents the publicly acknowledged relation between “having no quality” and “having no option.” If you are unqualified, you cannot make choices. Only if you have other resources (savings, familial supports, inheritance etc.), can you wait until a slightly better option becomes available. This equation can also be read in reverse: those who are qualified have the right to choose. But even the merits of qualification can be questionable sometimes. In many instances, my informants question the real value of so-called qualified people. A former construction worker, who cannot work in constructions anymore because of his herniated disks and is looking for a stable job in a trustworthy company, was complaining to me about the undeserved title of “qualification” for engineers in his former occupation.

How many agricultural engineers, how many mechanical engineers, how many civil engineers have worked in the field (*sahada calismis*)? That’s the reason why we are

unable to succeed in development. [Impersonating the voice of authority] Brother, are you an engineer? What is your occupation? Agricultural engineer! You will go to this and this village of this city. How do the men sow the seeds of grain, how do they plough a field, what is their productivity rate, how much grain do they get for how much seed? You will teach these to the men in the village... They all want to have desk jobs, easy jobs. Civil engineers! The man got the diploma on paper, by writing on paper. Today, in reality, in practice, one foreman (*kalfa*) is better than ten engineers. For example, the man says this axle (*aks*) is not like this. The engineer says I went to the university. My friend, I have been doing this job for twenty years, this axle can't be as you describe. No! He is the engineer, he went to the university, it will be as he says. Has this guy bind an axle, or bind a stirrup (*etre*), mixed a bag of cement in his life? Have you calculated how much water is needed for a bag of cement? You have; but on paper, in theory. But is it the same in practice? Is the final concrete equal to your calculations? Can he do such things? No!

As I have already pointed out, the literature shows that the skill/quality is something socially determined and politically contested rather than having objective standards. Even engineering, which is, together with medicine, one of the least contested forms of skill in Turkey, can be challenged by unqualified workers. The income that the qualified earns can thus be questioned on the basis of "who really does what". When it comes to desk jobs in the service sector, the boundaries get blurred more and more, and challenges become much harder to put aside by job counselors. During my first week in Kucukcekmece Career Center, I witnessed such an event, the kind of which I had encountered throughout my fieldwork. A young man came to the career center together with his mother. From the conversation, I gathered that the man had served 13 months in jail because he was convicted of selling drugs, a crime which would be particularly condemned by Islamists in Turkey. His mother was arguing that he got framed by his friends due to his natural inclination to trust people. It was not apparent whether he finished high school or was about to, but he claimed that he was also preparing for college entrance exams (OSS) and civil servant exams (KPSS). He did not like the available jobs that Nesim suggested and he warded off the advances Nesim was trying to make with his classical techniques of intimate authority.

**The Applicant:** Were it not for that accident, I would have been in your position right now. We are coming here with what hopes, do you know that? And you are giving me jobs for people with no education, with no “qualification” (*kalifikasyonu olmayan...*).

**Nesim:** Look, you have this disadvantage; you have to work extra hard to complement it. First, you are going to make some sacrifices.

**A:** I am the leading person in the neighborhood for the AK party, we work everywhere, we do everything, but no one thinks about us.

**N:** Take the job in this cleaning company, come here every week, I promise, I will find you a better job, but first you have to spend some effort.

**A:** You have a job, you are comfortable, but no one sees us. I am the most important person in the party in my district, I have a computer certificate, I speak beautifully (*konusmam guzel*: I am very articulate), but no, there is no job!

**His Mother:** [shouting] What will this boy do if you do not give him a job!

**N:** But you only ask without giving anything first!

**A:** I registered for OSS and KPSS. I do my best! I was working in *zabita*<sup>42</sup> in municipality, but they fired me after subcontracting is prohibited.

**Mother:** [sobbing] I would die for this party anyway...

**N:** Allah is my witness; it was not up to the party. When subcontracting was prohibited, it became like this.

**A:** If only I were one of the personnel here... they work with few words: yes, no, go, come. I swear I can do everything that people do here, better! Way better!

**N:** Have you ever gone to any interview?

**A:** I want to work here. Since I have a criminal record, they do not give me a job. I want a clean job, I would pray for you until the end of my life.

**M:** [shouting] We have come here 4 or 5 times! I got platinum for my knees [knee replacement] because of the sadness!

**A:** [turning to me] If I make a start, then I will take it up from there, but they do not allow me to make that start. If I make a start, it will go on... Darn (*yaziklar olsun*) this country, if they cannot find me a job!

Understanding that he could not convince the applicant to take an action for the available jobs, Nesim started to talk little. The young man and his mother shouted at, challenged, and questioned Nesim. He was entirely silenced by the aggressive attitude of mother and son. However, Nesim's retreat was not simply because the son and mother were simply shouting (though that has a certain part in this game). They were making a challenging claim that many people who work in the municipality, in desk jobs, and in civil service are not “qualified.” After all, what is the definition of quality? The young man claimed that he could do better than anyone

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<sup>42</sup> *Zabita* is a term that designates municipal police forces that do not carry guns but inspect market places and a variety of small businesses.

in the municipality. If it were a matter of “trust” he had been an active and significant member of the party for a long time. He was also preparing for college exams, which is a degree most of the people in municipalities didn’t have. What was the legitimate basis of his not being hired? Intimate relations, moral argumentations, and affective dimensions seeped into the conversation. Where the party was strongest turned into its weakest point. Going beyond the cold and impersonal formalities of the market, intimacy and morality might mediate the actions of the masses but with one caveat: the masses might demand too much. Many times I heard, while waiting for their turns, people complain about the unjust distribution of jobs and resources: “People make money without doing anything. Civil servants make money without doing anything. I tell myself, what is it that I do not have but people working in municipality have.” Trust, morality, renunciation of the self, and intimacy may also work as the vectors of a radical egalitarianism in which people see no difference of quality but unjust distribution of resources. This is a widely acknowledged possibility, or danger, by the people who provide social services to the poor of Istanbul. While explaining to me what they do in career centers, one of the managers confided to me the aporia of the affective turn in social policies.

-People are used to being idle, we are trying to convince them to take action, we are trying to touch their immaterial/spiritual parts. People need this. We have done many great things here by combining politics and business. Do not misunderstand me, when I say politics, I do not mean that we do not help the CHP members (secular republicans), we are not interested in that. For us, politics is the tradition of the AK party, its intimacy, being among people, being a part of people. That is the reason why people have faith in us: they trust us. That is what we call social policy; that is what social policy is. But these social policies have undesirable consequences too. The guy receives coal aid, food packages, and money. You see, sometimes people trust too much, this is also very bad. Then he says I am unemployed. You have to persevere; those who want to find a job can find a job *somehow*.

FK-Maybe there are not enough jobs, the unemployment rate is above 10%.

-No, it is because there are many people who want desk jobs. The man says, “I want your job!” When we make our people used to one thing, it is over. This is too much trust and it is bad. Then they expect everything from the party! Furthermore, when he gets a job,

after a while he says, “I am doing the same thing that the other person does. He gets 2500 but I get 1500”. He rebels. He doesn’t even think, “I was unemployed one year ago.”

Here we explicitly see that there is a shift from intimacy as value to intimacy as a problem. Although the AKP and its members engage in translating the predicaments of contemporary capitalism into intimate, trust-based networks, the masses push back at the limits of those networks towards a critique of its own foundation: Why are we not getting as much as others if those who get more are from our own people, from among us? The job counselors responded to these charges by accusing applicants of being selfish and demanding things without giving anything in first. However, the demand for a radical gift, giving oneself, is a tenuous gesture. It holds, it moves people from time to time, but it is not absolved anyone from a counter-claim, a suspicion that “what if those who ask us to be unselfish are themselves selfish”. This means that the demand for renunciation of the self is necessarily to be accompanied by constant vigilance against exploitation and abuse of workers. Although there is no guarantee that the employer will fulfill his untold promises, there should be no sign of self-interested distance, a sort of professionalism from which the AKP’s socio-political network tries to maintain a critical distance. In other words, the employers are expected to invest in other things than capital accumulation and wealth, like political activities around the party. Otherwise, the promise of intimacy is bound to be infelicitous; how can one build an affective trust relation with someone who does not even care about it in the first place? The frequent remark “he [the employer] is one of us [from the AKP]” has this function, it promises a sort of guarantee by socio-political associations. Since the person is from the AKP, he is not going to use you for his self-interests. In fact, he has a genuine capacity to care for his workers, but since his workers are self-interested, only concerned with “wages and holidays” rather than their jobs, he cannot get intimate with them. As Handan says, when you get intimate with the unqualified, they do not

know where to stop. The only solution to this dilemma is, though without being exploited, cultivating a habit of self-renunciation. For the unqualified, those who have no quality, this is not an end, but a beginning, which traverses a whole gamut of social and political life. Here we find the rise of self-negation; but again, both as a resource and a danger.



## Chapter 4. Self-Negation: A New Form of Capital?

### I. Introduction

After a political crisis within the party, of which we have very limited public knowledge, Ahmet Davutoglu, then the prime minister, gave a talk at his party's group meeting. There were rumors that president Erdogan did not want him in the cabinet as prime minister and that he considered Davutoglu too independent minded and too ambitious. As rumor has it, Davutoglu wanted to replace Erdogan, he was secretly working to undermine Erdogan's credibility, in order to establish himself as the unquestionable leader of the party. In such a context, Davutoglu gave a talk and made it clear that he was ready to resign, and that it did not matter whether Erdogan demanded it or the AK party members found it necessary.

We are unlike any other parties; we are not among those who are after political interests (*siyasi menfaat*). Our only concern is to make Turkey reach its goals. We are here under this holy roof only for this purpose. We will not abandon the truths that we believe or give up clean and unblemished politics. Those millions of people who put their hopes in the AK party should not be worried. I would trample on my own self (*nefsimi ayaklar altina alirim*), I would reject any office that no mortal could imagine refusing, but I could never break the heart of any of my comrades in this blessed movement.

The sentence "I would trample on my own self (*nefsimi ayaklar altina alirim*)" immediately caught my attention. The concept "*nefs*" was quite familiar to me from my fieldwork experiences. It is a particularly difficult term to translate. It comes from Arabic *nafs* (نَفْس) but it has a life of its own in Turkish without losing its Islamic connotations. In Islamic tradition, the term *nafs* means "the self or true self; interpreted as the spiritual reality of all living creatures." (Esposito 2004; cf. Messick 2001). In Sufism, the concept has various levels and stages and is generally understood in a negative sense. Since the appropriation of the word in Turkish is closely related to the Sufi traditions in Anatolia, the *nefs* has negative connotations in its daily usage. "Control your *nefs*" (*nefsine hakim ol*) is an idiomatic usage one can hear frequently. Yet,

a systematic interpretation of *nefs* in the public realm by constantly referring to the *nefs*, its meaning, its negation, and its control, is a new phenomenon which emerged after the rise of Islamist political movement in the 1990s. I believe that the explicit references to the concept *nefs* make up only a part of a larger transformation that constitutes a general problematization of the self in the public realm.



Figure 19. The poster for a political meeting says “Take a stand against your self (*nefs*), turn to worship”

### Outline

This chapter is an effort to push forward the ethnographic analyses I made in the first and second chapters. In the first chapter, I started my argument with showing that the contemporary macroeconomic practices, inflation targeting and liberalization of exchange markets, appropriate the techniques of “reflexivity,” mostly derived from engineering (feedback mechanisms) and physics (dynamic modeling). Since the 1970s, it has been argued that what we may call the reflexive turn promotes “democratic” sensibilities in policy making, such as transparency,

accountability and credibility. Rather, I tried to show that those reflexive mechanisms constitute an ecological niche for the political mobilization of the masses towards an increasing unification in the political sphere for the sake of financial stability and economic development. The second chapter shifted the focus from macroeconomics to microeconomics, focusing on how the same political mobilization, the AKP in the Turkish case, absorbs the precarities that global economic structures produce –the economic structures that facilitate, as the first chapter argues, the exact forces behind this political mobilization. The second chapter attempts to show that precariousness produced by global economic structures is not detrimental, at least for the time being, for the political authoritarianism in Turkey but is an abundant resource through which the AKP has expanded its constituency. The chapter concludes with an observation that the micro dynamics of authoritarian mobilization are based on a constant translation of precariousness into political intimacy. The chapter suggests that the limit of this translation is the logic of a radical gift whereby the precariat is expected to give their very “selves” for an ambiguous hope of a miraculous return.

This current chapter carries the discussion of “giving oneself” to a new level and analyzes certain political and social practices along the networks of the AKP that promote public declarations and practices of self-negation. Taking my departure from sociological, anthropological and philosophical studies, I investigate the meaning of practices problematizing certain forms of selves when people explicitly and publicly assert that those forms should be negated. I take three of the most salient instances at which I had the most chance to observe the practices of self-negation during my fieldwork: *Nefs*, *Vesile* and *Biat*.

The second argument that I propose is that the three forms of self-negation I observed are direct products of Turkish modernization and are related to the social, political and economic

history of the country. My ethnographic data shows that people engaging in self-negation associate the question of self with the question of efficacy, agency, and history. In this sense, although culled from the Islamic tradition, self-negation is the contemporary form of an answer to the failures of modernity as a national project in Turkey. I argue that the efficacy and agency that self-negation promises can be understood as a new form of capital: political capital. Unlike physical capital, human capital or social capital, this new form is based on negation, whereby people publicly show “whom they are against,” “who they are not” and “what they will not allow.”

In the concluding part, I will try to show that the popular use of political capital might be an indication of a new form of subjectivity. Reading Etienne Balibar and Carl Schmitt together, I argue that the modern predicaments of citizenship might lead to the rise of the figure of the partisan who continuously destroys every difference for the sake of his political commitments. I will use my ethnographic material to show that within the dynamics of mass mobilization in contemporary Turkey, in accord with Schmitt’s predictions, the use of political capital began to go beyond self-negation to blur the line between life and death, both for the partisans and their “enemies”<sup>ii</sup>.

## **II. The Self as a Problem**

During my fieldwork, I witnessed countless practices and discourses that had explicitly pointed out the negative dimensions of the self and how to manage, or sometimes nullify, them. However variegated, these discursive frameworks and daily practices generally aimed to achieve certain ends: being a good Muslim, supporting a leader (Erdogan), helping the party (the AKP), fulfilling God’s wish, working for the *Ummet* (Islamic community), or fighting for the cause (*Dava*). Although it is not always clear what the perils of the self and what the virtues of its

negation are, we can investigate the conditions within which the self emerges as a problem.

Three forms of appearance were dominant ones during my fieldwork.

*a. Nefs*

The municipality of Kucukcekmece and the AKP branch located in the district worked very hard for several weeks in order to host a social event for the disabled people living in the neighborhood. Having been neglected for most of Turkish history until the rise of the AKP, the disabled have recently gained a considerable degree of physical mobility and social acceptance and have thereby started to enjoy a concomitant social life. Even though the new life of the disabled is organized and concentrated around AKP networks, many people in poor districts see this change of affairs as an immense improvement. The event in Kucukcekmece was a kind of attestation for the party's involvement in the daily life of those who are at the very margins of the society. In a sense it was a metaphor for the AKP's constituency, as the members of the movement define themselves as “blacks” [*zenciler*], “victims” [*magdurlar*], “those who have no one” [*kimsesizler*] or “orphans” [*yetimler*]. For a political movement that defines itself as a rebellion of the silent masses against the secular, modernizing, and western elite, a social event for the disabled of the neighborhood meant much more than a simple occasion. It was a moment within which the symbols, practices, and discourses of the political movement were condensed for a few hours.

Having spent months in the municipality, in the neighborhood and in the party buildings for my research, I became one of those close associates from whom party members might occasionally ask some help for large social events. Working together with the social service workers of the municipality—who at the time were charged with the task of catering the event—

I was both a guest, sitting with the party members, and an assistant responsible for table settings and decorations. We were working in a “wedding saloon” [*dugun salonu*], a traditional Turkish assembly hall that serves for special events like weddings, circumcision feasts, or political meetings. A very large space under a glass dome, covered with red carpets, the place was hosting more than five hundred people, mostly categorized as disabled and their families. We carried food and drinks, arranged tables, directed families to the assigned tables, and finally sat down to eat and watch the program. Being one of the most socially active disabled people in the neighborhood, Dilek was the host for the night, calling on singers and politicians to make their speeches. She was a municipality worker responsible for social services for the disabled, and an ambitious politician with high hopes to be a parliamentarian one day. She didn’t have a university degree but was working to get a diploma from a distance education program. With a slight touch of a demagogic style, she announced, just after welcoming our guests, that the AKP broke the barrier between people, between those who are ruled and those who rule, between lay people and bureaucrats. She said with all confidence,

“before the AK party, we the disabled were entirely forgotten. We were living in the dark. People were treating us as something to be ashamed of, something to hide. For those who govern, those who are comfortable, those who live outside of this people, we were not humans. They were not thinking anything but themselves. Yet, these people know one fact: we are all subjects of Allah, we are no different from each other. They thought that they were different and they had a right to do whatever they want. Through bribery and corruption, they wasted the resources of this country. They left our country to the mercy of the IMF. But we will put our cause (*Dava*) before our *nefs*. We are all equal before Allah. We can never forget this, because it is Allah who gave us our power. I want to tell you a short parable, something told to me by our deceased brother Recep (*rahmetli* Recep *abi*). He was always reminding us that if you modestly get down one step for the grace of Allah, Allah would raise you one step up. Only if you can get down to the level of a person one step below you... No matter what is your spiritual (*manevi*) or visible (*zahiri*) level is. And he used to tell us this parable, an example from His Holiness Prophet Omer, our lord (*efendimiz*). One day, Prophet Omer was seen on the street carrying a heavy bag of flour on his back. *Sahabe* (the community of the people who actually saw Prophet Muhammed) was surprised, everyone was looking at each other

without knowing what to do. Omer was the chief of believers (*muminlerin emiri*). He was the leader of the State of Islam. Would a leader of a state carry flour bags? It didn't fit in any comparison; it didn't fit in any calculation. They knew the other chiefs and leaders; there was no comparison. His son, Abdullah, saw him, ran to him. "I am your son, if you can't find any slave to carry it, ask me!" he begged. "Why?" asked Omer, "did you, the son of caliph, get offended? Are you ashamed of your father, the chief of believers, because he carries flour to the poor? I am training my *nefs*, I am the best slave in the world." We will all depart from this life (*topraga gidecegiz*). Is there a point for being conceited, vane, or for self-exaltation? To whom are you bragging? I have a diploma, I have money, I have my shop, I am beautiful, I am young. You don't have anything! You are nothing! Everything belongs to Allah."

The speech was too long to replicate here, but it was capable of inciting intense emotions among the audience. The shift from being the disabled to being the supporters of the AKP was anything but subtle, yet it flowed naturally in that context. People were not only influenced by the shared trajectory of two oppressed groups, they also saw a normative and efficacious way of acting in the world. Although it was the party members themselves who "once" felt shame for their disabled relatives, the reason why they were dismissive towards the disabled was framed as the part of selfish behaviors of the elite. The elite, as it might be surmised from Dilek's speech, is an ambiguous actor to say the least. They might include the educated, rich, beautiful and many others kinds of people -as long as it implies a sense of distinction and possessiveness. Those who think of themselves as different from others, from the common people, assert their distinctiveness based on "something" that they have (money, beauty, education etc.) and thus forget the way the most precious lesson –we do not have anything before Allah. However, this formulation, which was shared by many of my informants, is by no means a merely normative statement suggesting that one should stay away from being selfish so as to be worthy of Allah's grace in another world. The form of the narrative aims to bring forth the efficacious capacity of selfless behavior embodied by historical figures as well as the contemporary party members. On the one hand, Dilek underlined the relation between selfish behavior of the elite, the previous

ruling classes of Turkey, and the corruption and bribery of that period. Bribery and corruption were conceived as the most salient form of decadence in Turkish society. It explains why “we,” Turkish people, remained underdeveloped, poor and weak in comparison to Western powers. In a situation within which people are motivated by self-interest, it is implied, a country cannot develop its own powers to a sufficient level. Being “left to the mercy of the IMF” is the paramount example of this incapacity.

On the other hand, the parable proposes an alternative to modern Turkish selfishness. Performed by great historical figures, like Prophet Omer, and also, although to a lesser degree, by the partisans of the AKP, there are what we might call the theologically inspired modalities of action. With slight variations, Omer’s parable was especially popular among my informants whenever we discussed the question of *nefs* and the negation of the self. Being one of the greatest leaders in world history, Omer was a perfect example of efficacy of self-negation: lower than a slave, higher than any mortal. Exactly at this moment, the causal structure of efficacy shifts into a theological terrain. We cannot know how this efficacy works: “It didn’t fit in any comparison; it didn’t fit in any calculation. They knew other chiefs and leaders; [but] there was no comparison.” Dilek, deriving immense force and legitimacy from her own history of disability, asked if there is any point in being conceited. Just like Omer, just like the disabled, just like the partisans of the party without a diploma, one can do great many things, like defeating the IMF, by not thinking of oneself. By declaring that one is nothing, is not special, has nothing, Dilek urged us to pay attention to those who do the same, those who renounce themselves, since it is exactly those people who can make a change in the world -unlike selfish people who can steal and plunder but cannot make any positive difference. In a sense, her formulation states: the lesser one becomes, the greater one can act.



The night was packed with a series of political, social, and religious speeches by several party members, followed by a music concert, whose major star was “*Cilgin Sedat*” (Sedat the Crazy), an *arabesk* singer and a father of a disabled child. Finally having got the chance to sit down and eat, we were both talking about the event taking place before us and trying to enjoy it. I heard many praises concerning Dilek’s speech, stating how moving and effective it was. Towards the end of the night, Safak, a neighborhood leader (*mahalle baskani*) of the AKP asked me to get in his car for a lift, together with two women temporarily employed by the municipality. After dropping the first woman somewhere near my destination, he playfully said that he didn’t want to be separated from me and insisted that I be the last one to get out of the car. I agreed to his offer and we continued our ride until Merve, the last woman in the car, got off. Then Safak turned to me and said:

S: Look *haci* (brother), it is not that I don’t trust Merve or that she would do something. But this is the way the human *fitrat* (characteristic) is; it is not related to the person himself/herself. Related neither to me nor to her. It is that while we are travelling together, the devil plays with your *nefs*, uses your *nefs* against yourself. This is possible. We humans have this sexual desire. Allah formed the character (*fitrat*) of humans like this. Allah created her out of your rib, the place closest to your heart, so that you love her; you would be directed towards her. That is the reason Allah did not create her from your head or foot. This is the reason I asked you to come along. You had to come so as to prevent the possibility of that kind of interaction. If you approach your *nefs* with pride, saying “I can handle it, *haci*,” then you are doomed. This line is so thin that it is impossible to discern. Once you let it go, it is impossible to undo. It is exactly the same way in politics, there is no difference. Once you lie, once you look for your own interest, once you are unfair to someone... it is over! This is the reason why you should keep your friends from this cause (*dava*) close to you. They will control you, you will control them. Otherwise, even the most solid person among us would go astray. I have a brother that I loved so much, the most pious of all our friends, continuously praying (*namazdan basini kaldirmiyor*). One day, he thought that nothing would happen if he gives a lift to the girl working in his shop (*tuafiyeye*). This girl put her hand on his leg...and that is all it takes (*film kopuyor*). They started to see each other, and his daughter caught them together. Terrible, disaster... Since the girl was at the same age with his daughter, what kind of a person he became in the eyes of his daughter. And also *haci*, they got caught next to his own house.

FK: What! What do you mean next to his home?

S: Think of two homes, next to each other, two apartments, adjacent.

FK: But brother, it was his fault, why didn't he go somewhere else?

S: That is what I am saying, *haci*. I am telling you that his fate is bound (*basireti baglanmis*). When your fate is bound, you cannot do much. Only before that, you can prevent things from happening, prevent yourself from being a vessel of evil. We will control each other (*kollayacagiz*), I, for example, should call my friend, ask about him. His wife, for example, will not leave him absent (*eksik birakmayacak*; here he means "sexually satisfied"). His *nefs* should not expand (*kabarmayacak*) so he would not be searching [for sex]"

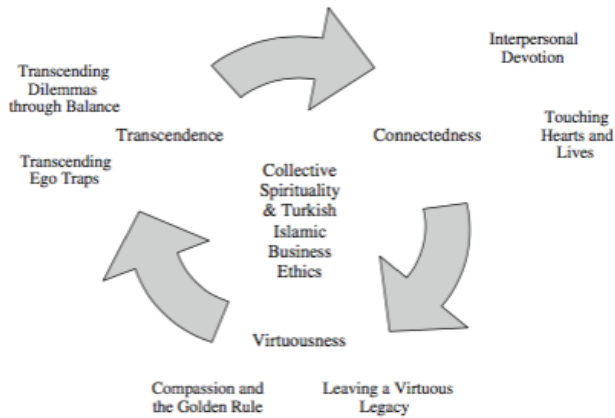
My encounter with Safak should not mislead the reader into thinking that the concept *nefs* is only related to sexuality. As I have already indicated, the concept is a malleable one, which fits in many different contexts and purposes. Yet, as might be seen here, it has certain characteristics, or say, directionality, that has a centripetal tendency, pulling things towards itself without much consideration to outside forces. It signifies an illusion of self-sufficiency that is associated with pride and asocial behavior. Sexuality, in this sense, is a specifically conspicuous instant of *nefs* through which one's powerlessness becomes obvious. One cannot control oneself but what is more important is that the illusion of control brings evil. The virtuous brother of Safak made a mistake that resembles Sufi stories related to me during my fieldwork. The generic form of those stories is as follows: an important religious character practices pious and self-abasing behavior for a long time. But at a certain moment, he thinks that he has reached a certain stage and that he is better than the others or he is certainly saved from the sinful inclinations of his nature. That is the exact moment in those stories when the character fails and learns his lesson: it is impossible to be powerful before God Almighty, we are entirely powerless and the only thing we can do is to subject ourselves to Allah, entirely and unquestionably. Analogously, the virtuous brother of Safak made the first and only mistake when he thought that there is no danger in staying with a young woman alone and that he has control over himself. Even his mistake of bringing her to the apartment adjacent to his to make love with her was just a part of the concatenation of events

going beyond human control. Once a person stops paying attention to the powerlessness of the self, s/he may drift to utterly destructive situations. The self is something to fight against, something even “to kill”, and something which one should keep weak and insignificant.

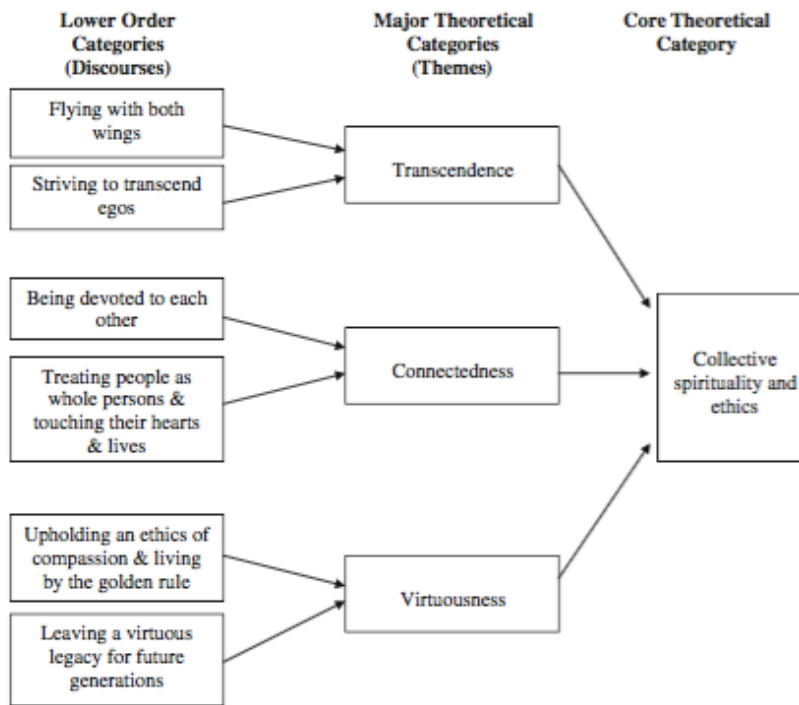
The techniques for negating the self, teaching ourselves that we are nothing, vary and many religious communities adopt different methods to this end. One interesting but still parallel example may be found in Indonesia. A popular human resources program called Emotional and Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) training uses mathematics to teach the workers the relations between the self and the divine.

Another aspect of engineering Islam was evident in the widespread use of mathematical formulas to affirm the truth of the religion. [...] The formula for the zero mind process was displayed boldly on the projection screens as  $1/0 = \infty$ . In the equation, 1 symbolized an individual, 0 represented the individual’s ego, and infinity referred to Allah. The lesson that participants were to draw from this formula was that by reducing one’s ego one could, according to Ginanjar, “get closer to Allah.” (Rudnyckyj 2010, 117)

Among very few studies on the significance of the self-negation in Turkey, there is an article that finds a close association between Islamic business ethics and anti-egoism. The writers argue, “[C]ollective spirituality seems to be intrinsically related to transcending dilemmas and ego traps to achieve full balance and reflexivity (transcendence). In addition, it reflects a shared sense of interconnectedness and a collective search for high-quality connections and rapport (connectedness).” (Karakas et. al. 2015, 814). They even create some very useful charts that depict the relations between the self (in their terminology “ego”), collectivity, and the divine.



**Fig. 1** Collective spirituality themes in Anatolian tigers



**Fig. 2** Data structure

Figure 20: The charts mapping the relations among the self, Allah, and ummat (collectivity).

Both examples, one from Indonesia and the other from Turkey, underline the integration of Islamist reasoning and economic practices, but they are different from my analysis. For Rudnykyj, reducing one's ego is a part of discursive strategy in producing neoliberal

subjectivities and individualizing responsibilities, despite the apparent contradiction with the explicit insistence on the necessity to negate the individualistic tendencies. I think that this is mostly because of Rudnyckyj's subscription to Foucauldian framework according to which neoliberal practices necessarily produce the figure of individual in every context –despite all the explicit accounts stating otherwise. For Karakas et. al., since they are from business departments, “striving to transcend ego,” what I call self-negation, is a culturally unique way through which Turkish culture and Islam are being articulated within modern production relations in a seamless manner. This reading is a result of their departmental orientation as well as, I suspect, their political affiliations. I, per contra, focus on the political, social, and material claims that such self-negating discourses and practices assert.

Accordingly, I argue that Safak's method captures an essential dimension of those different techniques of self-negation: the self can temporarily be negated, or controlled, by means of collective action. We should phone each other; we should stay together; we should not be left alone. Otherwise, the self starts to dominate and makes us believe that we are in control, which is one of the worst illusions. In this sense, Safak employed the political and social networks of the party in negating the self and attaining a higher capacity for action. But what is the self if not an autonomous agent acting in the world? There might be countless answers to this question but my fieldwork brought a certain one before me more frequently than others: one is, if correctly conceived, the vessel of the divine will.

#### *b. Vesile*

A few weeks after the concert, people started to talk about an upcoming local convention in which party members gather together and discuss what they can do to achieve the target that Erdogan set for them: 400 seats in the parliament of 550. I analyzed a part of that meeting in the

first chapter, wherein people were ecstatically chanted about their capacity to increase Turkey's economic performance by bridging the gap between the state and society. But that meeting was a long one, and so were the preparations for it. Days before the meeting, many of my friends at the municipality and the party center started to make jokes about how I would be able to see what real politics is (*gercek siyaset neymis*).

The day of the meeting started as usual. We were working at the municipality and I was mostly helping social workers make home visits. During those visits, the so-called social workers, who are mostly party members and temporarily employed by the municipality, decide who should receive social assistance, in which form (monetary or subsistence), and how much. Towards the end of the day, the excitement among my "colleagues" became apparent. They were making several phone calls in order to coordinate many party members with whom they have especially close, personal relationships. We met at the front of the district's party center in order to take the buses going to the Yahya Kemal Beyatli Congress Hall, one of the largest meeting places around the neighborhood. Inside the bus, people were making jokes and taking pictures so as to immortalize the moment and share them on Facebook. Refraining from taking pictures, I was just posing for whoever used his/her cellphone. As was usual for such gatherings, people on the bus started to pose with the political gestures closely associated with the AKP and Islamist movements. One of them was popular at the time. Raising four fingers of the right hand and folding the thumb inside, it was a Rabia sign, signifying political solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, against the atrocities committed by the el-Sisi led coup d'état. Though posing to the cellphones, I refrained from performing the gesture in order not to be associated with the movement and to remain as a confused researcher from the US. Sister Ilknur, detecting my hesitation, came close and said aloud "don't be distinctive [*cikintilik yapma*]! Do as everyone

does!”. As if sensing my *nefs*’ intervention, she felt the compulsion to intervene, to take me back from my distinctive position, the false solitude of my own self, into the smoothness of the common and the divine serenity of the cause [*dava*].



Figure 21. Having seen that I am not participating in the indexation of political allegiance, Ilknur made an intervention, saying “don’t be distinctive! Do as everyone does!” and forcing me into the sign of Rabia,

We finally arrived at the congress hall. The meeting was overcrowded. Due to the limited seats for audience, many people, especially young ones, were standing up and participating songs and poems with all their might from the back. Towards the end of the meeting, hundreds of young party members, all standing at the back of the hall, started to recite a stanza, shouting aloud, dominating the meeting with their high pitch voices. Many people joined them in reciting the poem, though I was trying to understand its words. It was from a prominent political Islamist poet in Turkey, Necip Fazil Kısakurek:

[Shame on]  
Scatter the seeds, if they don't grow, shame on the soil  
If it does not reach its target, shame on the spear!  
O Kuheylan [purebred Arab horse], look for your own run,  
If you die on the way, shame on the mare (which gave you birth)!

Young members' performance was a reply to the speech of Orhan, the president of the youth branch of the party in the district, in which he underlined that they are not working for "this-worldly ends" but striving for "the distance beyond the world." After he said "we are for the will of God [*Riza-yi Bari*], and we will hopefully [*insallah*] attain the grace of God [*Riza-yi Ilahi*]" young members made their poetic intervention. Although I was unable to understand what the poem signified, I had some chance to make inquiries about the local interpretation of "Shame On". One young member, Numan, told me that their poetic intervention was a manifesto displaying their loyalty to the party, to the cause, and to the leader (Erdogan). Talking in a way that implies a certain political knowledge and experience, he confidently told me that they showed to the whole crowd that the young members of the party are dedicated, they are not thinking of themselves, and they are ready to die, if need be, just like in the case of Kuheylan. Numan was insisting on their difference from other young people, whether politically affiliated or not, and making comparisons between their selflessness and the degeneration of the others (the seculars).

I drew his attention to the first lines though, and told him that I do not understand the point of shaming the spear that I had thrown. He told me that the real problem of *nefs* is that it urges people to claim responsibility for the things happening in the world, which are obviously the products of Allah's will. "The rain for example," he said, "they teach in universities that it falls from the sky, with this and that characteristics. But do they know, despite the speed with which it falls, how it doesn't fall like a bullet and kill all of us? No, science is also puzzled and helpless before the miracles of Allah. They are everywhere if you know how to look." This is a common story in Turkey, with false scientific claims and preconceptions. I knew well that there is very little, almost nothing to gain in arguing against the small miracles that Allah shows to the



eyes knowing how to look. So I changed the course of the conversation to a non-miracle, according to my eyes. I told him that a spear that I throw is not a miracle like the rain, since I can throw a spear whenever I want, but no one can make the rain fall from the sky (a form of reasoning Islamist people love to hear from me, since I concur with them about the obvious miraculousness of the rain). Smiling wryly, he nodded his head a little, with an air of religious inspiration and authority. He told me that I am only partly right, since it is told by the prophet that we can only strive for the ends we wish, but the success and failure come from Allah. If our wishes are in accord with Allah's, they are Allah's wishes then, and we are just the vessels for his will. Nothing more.

Of course, I could have asked him whether our ill-wishes are also the wishes of Allah, the Medieval scholastic question that had occupied the most brilliant of minds for centuries, without a definitive answer, under the rubric of "theodicy". But I was captured by my close observation of his enjoyment, of his happiness, which he derives from the claim of being Allah's will. At the expense of losing his authoritative and pious manner, which was a little in contradiction with his young age in the first place, he was recounting to me, with excitement and eagerness for my confirmation, the story that the AKP had achieved everything by virtue of being in accord with Allah's will. He was talking about bridges, roads, and infrastructure projects that the party had built, and the IMF, the WB, and international organizations whose grip on Turkey was shaken off due to the efforts of "our" people. The usual registers that the party members use to make political arguments. Through such registers of success, he was making it clear that all the previous plans, projects, and talks (*laf*) of the secular governments preceding the AKP failed to make any substantial difference in the country. They have failed because they were only thinking about themselves, working for their individual, material interests, and thus going against the will

of Allah. Only by working for the ends that Allah announced as his will, we can do anything in this world. We can spread the seeds or we can throw the spear, for the promotion of values and ends that Allah made clear in Quran, and then pray for their efficaciousness. No plan or scheme can guarantee the outcome without taking into account the will of Allah, the will being the connection point between one action and the other, a cause and an effect. Only our understanding of this reality makes us able to act efficaciously in the world.

Few months later, I had another chance to listen to a conversation that articulates the question of the self as *vesile*, as the vessel of the divine will, impressive in detail and exposition. I was talking to a group of women who work under the auspice of the municipality, the party, and the governorate of the region. They were active in “social work,” as they called it, providing charity for the poor. They claimed that they are not doing anything but being a bridge between those who have and those who have not, making connections between different needs (need to give vs. need to receive), and doing all these things for the grace of Allah, by the means of Allah. At a certain point of our conversation, one of the old members of the group mentioned that she has many proofs that she is nothing but a vessel of the divine will. Although they were making the claim from the very beginning of our conversation, I was surprised to hear the word “proof” and inquired further about it. With an excitement and pleasure reminding me of the young party member Orhan, she said that there are many secret doors [*sir kapisi*] in their line of duty and they provide ample examples of such proofs<sup>43</sup>.

-FK: Sister, you were about to tell me your secret door story. I was really intrigued, but you have forgotten.

-Sidika: Do you know why I am telling you this secret door? At that secret door, I realized that I don't do anything. It is Allah who does everything. This is the reason why I am telling you the story. I am doing nothing. I am doing nothing.

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<sup>43</sup> Secret doors are frequently used by the local people to designate some small miracles that happen in everyday life and signify the existence of the divine intervention, which are mostly political in their meaning.

-FK: I am really excited.

-S: Now, I had a family once. I was serving them [*hizmet ediyordum*]. Tuberculosis [*verem*], but a very serious one! The father couldn't even stand up and they were all living in a *gecekondü* [squatter's house], with very high humidity [*rutubet*]. The children were also infected. [...] we were trying to put the father into Heybeliada Sanatorium, but the man was continuously escaping. I sent people from the party but he slipped away every time. One year had passed, the husband's condition became very serious. The woman took the man to Yedi Kule Respiratory Hospital. The doctors immediately hospitalized him. This woman called me. "Haci Mother," she said, "my husband should be hospitalized today at 1 pm, but he doesn't have anything. Underwear, pajamas, sweatpants, shoes..." And only one day before, we had distributed a large sum of donations. I had neither money nor any personal belongings (*esya*); nothing! It was 10 am. She was in Gaziosmanpasa, asking from me clothes, pajamas, sweatshirts, shoes... I was talking to myself, saying "Allahim [my God], I don't have anything, what am I going to do?" But I was also telling her that Allah is great, *insallah* we will find something, God is great, *insallah* we will find a solution. I said that three or four times. I hung up the phone and it was 10 am. I had three hours before 1 pm. I was thinking desperately: I told her that I would find something, but how? I had nothing. Then the phone rang. Someone whom I love so much, who lives in Yesilkoy [a relatively well-off district], asked me if I am at home. She said she would stop by for a minute. I told her "why for a minute, Necla? Come, drink a cup of coffee". She said, "no, I am in hurry, I have to drop a package to you [for charity]." I asked what is in the package. She said that they are her husband's clothes, pajamas, sweatwears and shoes. Afraid of a disappointment, I asked her about the size of the shoes. She said it is 42. I immediately called the family, asked the woman "what is the size of shoe for your husband." She said "Sister Sidika, it is 42." -[Another woman from the group]: I am telling you about this: Allah connects one moment to another [o ani o ana birlestiriyor].

-S: I hung up the phone but I was crying. I said "Allahim, you have tested me, haven't you. I could have answered [the call for help] by saying 'aaa, why did you wait until the last moment, how can I find you something within few hours?' but I said 'Allah is great, Allah would show his greatness, Allah knows what is going to be'. It was a test whether I am a volunteer [for him] or not. I now got it. Now I will be the carrier [*hamal*]. You have sent; I will deliver. Thus Allah opens secret doors. It is You [Allah] who does, who performs [*yapan sensin, eden sensin*]. You made your poor ask, you made your rich send. You made us the vessel [vesile].

Sidika's story of the secret door reveals the popular conception of agency and efficacy that are unquestionably promoted by the recent history of Turkey. Her emphasis on non-agency ("I am doing nothing") is a way to underline a capacity for efficaciousness that is not centered around the concept of individual. Being a vessel, she occupies a position of interaction between points ("moments") –a position that is capable of responding to an emergency much more

efficiently than the former bureaucratic structures of the country. Such emergencies are systemic contingencies that are actively left out of formal structures. In this sense they are produced and intensified by the deregulation of social services in Turkey. What she immensely enjoys as the revelation of divine will and miraculous capacity is nothing more than the informal subsumption of systemic contingencies through a particular modality of political association. As Safak claimed in the case of his virtuous friend, individualistic tendencies produce perilous contexts within which various dangers, towards oneself and the others, abound. Sidika analogously deduced that if she had thought herself as an agent (“how can I find you something within few hours”), she could not have found a solution to the emergency. But how was that solution possible in the first place? Invoking unselfish motives and going beyond formal distinctions (“I was serving them [the poor family]”), her social and political networks allowed her to be a bridge between those who have and those who have not. In the absence of progressive taxation and formal social services, the negation of individualistic tendencies provides the necessary socio-political background for the subsumption of systemic contingencies (as personal crises and emergencies): efficiently, joyfully, and miraculously.

*c. Biat*

In the first two ethnographic examples, I have tried to show that the self emerged as a problem in contemporary Turkey. *Nefs* is an emic category explicitly problematizing the self as an individualistic tendency. *Vesile* is another category that provides an alternative modality of agency and efficaciousness, once again problematizing the figure of the individual, which is supposedly a signifier of the secular past of the country. The last form that the question of the self takes in the contemporary Turkish socio-political life is “*biat*”. The word was taken from Arabic, which simply means “to sell.” It has also a specifically political meaning in the Islamic

tradition, designating an “allegiance” that one declares for a leader. This second meaning is the predominant one in Turkey and generally is used as a slur by the “secularists” to claim that Islamists in Turkey are willingly abandoning their use of reason and will to a strong political figure. Yet, the term is so popular, especially among the constituency of the AKP, that it does not designate a weakness but a capacity, not a vice but a virtue. During a political crisis in 2014, one parliamentarian, Mehmet Metiner rebutted that secular critique by saying, to thunderous applause: “if it is *biat*, it is *biat*; if it is obedience, it is obedience! Yes, we are the people of *biat*. We are the essence of *biat* in loyally following the leader of our ideals.”

Similar to the other two moments of the self, *biat* was a concept which my informants frequently and explicitly used in their narratives and actions, a term that goes beyond the speeches of public personalities like Mehmet Metiner. Showing one’s loyalty to the leader, to the party or to the cause [*dava*] is one of the primary modalities of political action in the poor districts of Istanbul, where the party is strongest. The starting point for the people who tried to legitimize their “loyally following the leader” was almost always a reference to Islam, a register that is supposed to be closed for re-interpretation or contestation in the local settings like my fieldwork<sup>44</sup>. But as the conversations went on, my informants invariably shifted into explanations that emphasized the “collective” dimension of the political action. In this way, people argue that *biat* is a result of their collective practice –a claim which shifts the emphasis from theology to politics. Brother Selami, a veteran neighborhood politician in Islamist movements, provided a succinct example for this type of political comprehension.

During one of our classical “tea talks,” Brother Selami was making a point that the constituency of the AKP is the source of stability for the country, since they are different from

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<sup>44</sup> For ...

the people of other nations and are concerned with immaterial (spiritual; *manevi*) values rather than material (*maddi*) ones. Greeks and Argentinians are the typical examples in such conversations because of the riots during their economic crises. Unlike those rioters, as the argument goes, the people supporting the AKP are spiritually motivated and disregard their individual interests for the collective stability.

-FK: But how can people have such a common view? For me, there are things that I support and there are others things that I am critical of. How can you...

-S: Because the common view is an immaterial/spiritual thing. Maybe you are not yet at that point. If you have some immaterial/spiritual power, you don't object to the other person. For example, if he says one thing, you say another thing. If you have immaterial power, you don't say "I don't want that." What you want is a secondary thing. You know, reporters frequently say that in the AK party, in the Welfare Party [the AKP's predecessor], there is *biat*, that people follow the words of their leader, their elders. But if I am in the same frequency [*seninle ayni frekanstaysam*] with you, I can't think differently. This is a characteristic God has given to us. People who go to the same place have the same kind of thinking, people who act in the same manner have the same thought.

[...] They [the seculars] say "I am such that, I am like this, I did that, I achieved this". Don't we have such people [meaning successful people]? You have just said it, he [an Islamist politician, Necmettin Erbakan] is world known, but he doesn't insist on "I am"! For this reason, the other side [seculars] cannot perform *biat*, they follow their own truth [*kendi dogrusuna gidiyor*], they think of their own interests.

[...] Also, the country was in such a state when the AK party came into power; begging the IMF, being humiliated... they dishonored this people. Why? Because they were not thinking about anyone but themselves. Erdogan doesn't go to the USA by himself. He represents us. In Davos, for example, against Israel, we saw that he said what we say, what our hearts say. This is frequency; this is *biat*. We are now one and the same. I do not suspect that man. My faith in him is absolute.

What Selami calls frequency is a theme that I encountered many times among the party members and sympathizers. Hearing from a leader what he himself wants to say is narrated as a common but divine experience –something like cement for the movement. This will be the main problematic of the final chapter in which I will examine the circular movement of political themes between people and politicians through weekly surveys. Rather than being a divine coordination, this is simply the product of information technologies that allow the ruling party to

conduct frequent surveys about variety of issues and then present that information as “what people really want”. The short circuit happens when people start to assume, metalinguistically, that the statements of the party members are already based on the surveys that represent the constituency of the party with which they, the party sympathizers and followers, identify themselves. These short circuits show peculiar tendencies that escalate political violence and intensify authoritarian practices just like a feedback loop.

However, in this chapter I am focusing on the microdynamics of this movement and asking what happens when people start to see the recognition of oneself in another’s words and actions as a modality of political action. *Biat* here signifies more than simple obedience, but a claim for being in the same collective entity at the expense of “individual distinction”. You can punch a prominent journalist for the sensibilities of that entity, and enjoy a certain impunity; you can ask for help for your investment, claiming that high members of the party have trust in you, and collect 50 million dollars; you can go on political trips outside of the city that you live in, even though as a woman your family wouldn’t have allowed you to stay outside after 6 pm. In short, your capacity for action immensely increases as long as you can show that you are doing things for reasons that are not “selfish,” “individual,” or “distinctive.”

Consequently, *Biat* is the explicit and public performance of self-negation through the political indexation. Dilek’s aspiration to be an MP by claiming that she is “no one;” Safak’s call for collective action against *nefs*, or Sidika’s insistence on being a vessel are moments that can easily be coordinated with *Biat*. They are all “in the same frequency” as Selami insists. In *biat*, one’s renunciation of the self can be translated into a political symbol that might have an assertive effect. Ilknur’s correcting my “distinctiveness” and bringing me back into the collective indexation of Rabia was just one instance of such an effect. A facebook photograph can also

signify one's being no different than the party people, showing that the person mimics the leader or a prominent party member<sup>45</sup>. Rabia sign had been on Facebook pages for a long time and performed by many people, during political or social meetings, such as concerts, festivals, or religious talks. Gestures, statements, and forms of action spread quickly as they show a possibility for showing one's attunement with the people, one's renunciation of the self for the sake of the cause.

One such instance was narrated to me by the young members of the party in Esenler and some photographs were shown as proof of the local craze. After hearing the story of a small miracle that features Erdogan achieving an incredible feat, the young members took the so-called challenge and reproduced it on their Facebook pages. Reportedly, during a visit to Anitkabir, the memorial tomb of Ataturk, Erdogan walked on the path towards the tomb without taking his sunglasses off and without looking at his steps. The catch here is that, as the story goes, the path called Aslanli Yol (the path with lions) was built in a way that makes it impossible to keep your head up. The spaces between the pavement stones are large enough to tumble down but their arrangement was mathematically planned in such an irregular way that it is impossible to find a pattern and to walk without bowing one's head.

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<sup>45</sup> No wonder that my fieldwork gained a considerable momentum after my picture of Rabia was posted on a party member's Facebook account.





Figure 21: Aslanli Yol (the path with lions).

It is claimed that the secular authorities built the path in this particular form so that people could not disrespect Ataturk –a project considered by Islamists as a sort of pagan worship. When Erdogan walked the pavement without bowing his head and also without tumbling down, it was, supposedly, a sign of divine efficacy through which immaterial powers overwhelm material ones. Restaging the act became popular among the local youngsters, who were eager to show their participation in spiritual warfare [*cihat*] and to prove how self-renunciation for the sake of the cause [*dava*] can achieve the impossible.



Figure 22: Hakan mimics Erdogan's miraculous feat of walking without falling down.

I was unable to confirm the date of Erdogan's walk or to realistically assess the risk when one walks on Aslanli Yol without bowing one's head. It is also apparent from the picture in which Hakan walks in the graveyard that self-renunciation might take a symbolic character and does not necessarily restage the danger of the original feat. But that was exactly the point: my informants were showing these pictures as a moment of *biat* in which they partook in a collective sign, thanks to its reproducible and distributable capacity. "We were showing our support, we were walking like our chief!" said Hakan. A performance of *biat*, in this way, can be recorded, recalled, distributed and finally (re)presented whenever someone, even from America, asks some questions about the political developments in the district.

### **III. Political Capital: Agency, Efficacy, and History**

The ethnographic data that I derived from my fieldwork allow me to map the vectors problematizing the self in the daily life of the poor districts of Turkey. There were three points that incessantly came forth whenever people talk about the question of the self. First, the problem of the self is related to the question of efficacy, taking a popular form of argumentation that posits a stark distinction between selfish behaviors and unselfish ones and articulates their differential effects on the material realm. Second, my informants provided historical accounts that gave meaning to their public statements and performances of self-negation. Lastly, rather than being a background matter, the self was explicitly problematized in an explicit manner, thus becoming a popular subject. Taken together, what is the conceptual counterpart of their intersection in social sciences? I believe that the rise of self-negation is an answer to the failures of the modernization project in Turkey, which had taken a secular form for a long time, but more importantly it signifies the potential of a new form of capital for the impoverished segments of society, which we can call "political capital".

As Fukuyama once indicated, the varieties of capital, especially social and human capital, started to attract more and more intellectual attention after the fall of Berlin Wall (1997). Basic intellectual trust behind this motive was how to reconcile the individualizing tendencies, which the global capitalist order continually produces, and the informal communal norms, which are required, or at least more efficient than formal structures, for facilitating economic transactions. If human capital is a potential based on “what one knows”, it can be intensified by education and skill-training. On the contrary, social capital is a network residing within communities, based on trust-relations and interconnectedness, i.e. “who one knows,” and it cannot be intensified by direct intervention. Social capital emerged in a context where physical capital and human capital fail to make a significant change in the developing world.

The question of “self” in social sciences gained new significance in exact coordination with the rise of social capital as a program. “Entrepreneurial self,” “individualization” “flexible citizenship” aim to address problems posed by neoliberalism. I will try to show that social capital and the question of the self converge not only in their historical ascendance but also in their contemporary failures. Let me start with the self.

The anthropological literature on the question of the self is so vast that it is not possible to capture all its theoretical subtleties. But the starting point for me is the anthropological insistence on deconstructive reading of the constitution of the self. Although many anthropologists, starting with Mauss (1985), rely on what philosophers call “the minimal self,<sup>46</sup>” ethnographic studies show that the forms that the self takes in different societies display considerable variations. Starting with a rather crass distinction between sociocentric orientation and egocentric individualism (Dumont 1986), the discipline expanded its purview to increase

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<sup>46</sup> As one of the predominant paradigms in the literature, the concept of “minimal self” is especially popular among analytical philosophers. See Henry and Thomson 2013; Strawson 1997.

dynamic characteristics of being a self, covering a huge terrain from fluid personhood, in which personal boundaries are porous and continuously changing with interactions (Marriott 1976; cf. Daniel 1984), to the figure of the “dividual,” who is “constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced [herself]” (Strathern 1990, 13). Maybe the most emblematic quote that encapsulates this deconstructive approach belongs to Geertz:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures (1984, 126)

So, if I say the anthropologists working on contemporary societies focus on the self from the perspective of “possessive,” “centrifugal,” “constructive” characteristics, it would not be accurate. The fact that there is a huge literature on such “positive” forms of the self is a direct result of the object of analysis of the anthropologists. The contemporary global capitalist relations facilitate, promote and even dictate certain forms of the self: flexible citizens (Ong 1999), entrepreneurial selves (Freeman 2014), or cosmopolitan professionals (Tsing 2005). Despite the beginning of the discipline, at which point scholars were problematizing the presumptions of the universal self, anthropological studies of the neoliberal present focus on the practices whereby certain forms of self are being globalized. This is not a coincidence. Nikholas Rose, in his impressive book “Inventing Ourselves”, clearly states that many diverse forms of positive subjectivization are parts of the general political rationalities of advanced liberal democracies.

In all these diverse machinations of being, in all these heterogeneous assemblages, a number of themes recur: choice, fulfillment, self-discovery, self-realization. Contemporary practices of subjectification, that is to say, put into play a being that must be attached to a project of identity, and to a secular project of 'life-style', in which life and its contingencies become meaningful to the extent that they can be construed as the product of personal choice. It would be foolish to claim that psychology and its experts

are the origin of all these subjectifying machines - it is rather a matter of how assemblages of passion and pleasure, of labor and consumption, of war and sport, of aesthetics and theology, have accorded to their subjects a psychological form. The essays in this book have simply made a start at tracing out the ways in which psychological modes of explanation, claims to truth, and systems of authority have participated in the elaboration of moral codes that stress an ideal of responsible autonomy, in shaping these codes in a certain therapeutic' direction, and in allying them with programs for regulating individuals consonant with the political rationalities of advanced liberal democracies. (1996, 195)

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Rose asks whether it is possible to talk about “unbecoming selves” through which we can “disinvent ourselves.” Clearly influenced by Foucault’s claim that the matter of the body exceeds the formal structures of rationalities and power, Rose sees a progressive potential in our constant efforts to (at least) invent ourselves differently.

However, my question is a little bit different than searching for a possibility of non-hegemonic modalities of self-making. Against the “positive” background of self-actualization, immense debris, which recalcitrantly remain un-captured by the economic logic of governance, loom large. Neither human capital nor social capital is productive, efficacious or inhabitable for innumerable people. For those who are abandoned, I claim, there might be another capital, political capital, which provides distinctive models to our minimal selves –one that is characteristically negative and destructive. But first I have to clarify the relation between the question of the self and the varieties of capital.

It has been noted by economists that the most important advantage of social capital and human capital over physical capital is their peculiar quality that the more they are used, the more they increase (Grootaert and von Bastelaer 2002, 4). Being a flexible source, human capital was the first concept that attracted the interests of the scholars who tried to circumvent the material limitations of economic productivity and efficacy (Becker 1964). However, the increasing cost of energy after the OPEC crisis and the excess of cheap (de-politicized) labor force after the fall of

Berlin Wall made it clear that the “human unit” of human capital cannot suffice to stimulate the pace of growth and to subsume increasing unemployment (Rifkin 1995). Although this context was interpreted by some as the delegation of responsibilities from the state to “civil society,”<sup>47</sup> the concept was used around notions like efficacy and agency from its emergence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Farr 2004). Its popularity after the fall of Berlin Wall is particularly significant if we consider the agential dimension of the concept<sup>48</sup>. The question to which social capital is assumed to give an answer has been how can one act if one doesn’t have either physical capital or human capital? If it is too expensive to educate or train the self (the human unit of the human capital) for development programs, productivity of the [failed] individual can be augmented by other sources: by using trust relations, adaptability, norms and networks, all of which are all already present as resources within communities (Francois 2002; Nanetti and Holguin 2016).

The genealogical trajectory of the concept of social capital shows that forms of capital are organically related to the developments, crises, and predicaments of global capitalist relations. If we read this interpretation with the anthropological insight that the self is not a universal substance but a socio-historical practice, it becomes intellectually interesting to see how and where the forms of capital and subjectivization converge or diverge.

As the social scientific literature shows, “the problematization of the self” is directly related to the subjectivization processes of late capitalism in which selves are being conscripted for various forms of normativities that prescribe how to act, how to be and for which ends. I am not particularly interested in the “positive” dimensions of this subjectivization process for which many studies rightly focus on “what one has” (economic capital), on “what one knows” (human

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<sup>47</sup> Fine (2000) asserts that the WB sees social capital as interventions in civil society which facilitate non-market reactions to market imperfections and thereby seeing ‘civil society’ as the buffer zone between family and State.

<sup>48</sup> The World Development Report 2000/2001 doesn’t use the terms efficacy and agency but rather claims that social capital is essential for “promoting opportunities” and “facilitating empowerment.”

capital) or on “who one knows” (social capital). My fieldwork shows a different topology of efficacy and agency wherein it is also equally, if not more, important to show “who one is against,” “who one is not” and “what one will not allow.” What I call political capital is a certain set of practices and discourses that index the enemies and friends and locate a certain form of self on “the right side”. My observations, records, and researches show that a negative dimension is publicly and performatively highlighted and foregrounded by many people as a way of extending one’s space of action and intensifying one’s range of capabilities. These performances are negative in the sense that the most common form of action and discourse is to show that oneself is not “the other kind of self”. More specifically, the impulse to show that “one is not thinking of oneself” is a way to show that one is not “elite,” “secular,” “foreign to one’s own people,” “selfish,” “individualistic,” in short “not the one whom “we” are against.”

Now if there is an analytical relationship between the formations of self, i.e. forms of subjectivization, and the forms of capital, is it possible to analyze the current public performances of self-negation in Turkey as a specific form of capital? I believe this is possible for two reasons. First, the Turkish case of self-negation is explicitly associated, both in practice and discourse, the questions of agency and efficacy. Second, the discourses and practices of self-negation frequently have a historical dimension that attributes certain forms of selves and certain modalities of actions to a former period, to the old Turkey.

In this very sense, the public discussions around the concept of self are beyond a “religious nostalgia,” “the return of nafs” or a “return to the golden age of Islam.” Similar discussions can be found in other religions and they are not exclusive to Islam. However, the problematization of the self in Turkey signifies a specific solution to the problems of agency and efficacy that have historical roots in the Turkish modernization project. Although the discussions

that I had chance to take part in generally started with religious paradigms, idioms, or parables, I did not witness, out of dozens of examples, one single instance that articulated self-negation in purely altruistic terms. Put differently, whenever the practices and discourses of self-negation emerge, there appeared an explicit and strong assertion regarding the efficaciousness of this mode of agency, i.e. self-negation, in historical or in comparative terms.

In the second section, I have mentioned Dilek's political speech during which she drove the attention of the audience to the practices of self-negation, giving an example from Omar the Caliph. She explicitly asserted that the similar practices of self-negation led to Turkey's recent economic growth, as a result of which, among other things, Turkey got rid of the IMF's bondage. Or Numan, the young party member who reminded me of the miraculousness of the rain, diverted our conversation from the agency of the individual to the infrastructural developments that the AKP had achieved by amassing selfless devotion of its cadres. All these conversations depicted a history of Turkey in which the secular, bureaucratic cadres of the state were disregarding the realities of the Muslim population and enforcing a western scheme of development. Relying on an educated, selfish elite, the former policies resulted in disasters and economic crises. Corruption, stagnation, and underdevelopment had inflicted Turkey until the rise of the AKP. A certain form of subjectivization, a formation of the self, had failed. Those who are educated, western-oriented, and secular were unable to fulfill the promises of modernity. Istanbul remained in need of infrastructure; the Turkish economy suffered high inflation and financial crises; and the IMF humiliated Turkey with their orders and attitude. The self that represents "the old Turkey" had become a target that one should publicly attack and denounce.

What is the advantage of self-negation over the selfishness and individualism of secular modernity? How and why is the self-negation more efficacious than self-affirming practices of



the old Turkey? Here the concept “*vesile*” has a function like mana in Mauss’s *The Gift*; it explains the unexplainable. God’s will is working through those who believe in God, who believe in the self’s (*nefs*) incapacity, and who believes in the necessity of following one’s (ideals’) leader. This is partially an analytical necessity because the popular critique of secular modernism argues that plans, projects and abstractions fail since human comprehension is always fallacious. Like in the case of the rain, science is a partial knowledge and fails to explain even some very basic phenomena. The secular elites of the country built the Aslanli Yol with their selfish arrogance in a way people could not be able to predict the pattern on the pavement and thus necessarily bow their heads before the tomb of the man who built the secular republic, abolished the caliphate, and banned public religious practices. But Erdogan achieved the miracle, however small it was, and walked the path, his head straight, without slightest hesitation. It was against any calculation, but that was exactly the point. The real source of efficacy is not a positivity, something one “has” or something one can calculate, but a potentiality that comes from the recognition that one has nothing, one is nothing, just like Dilek says.

Fatih, one of my close informants, was frequently telling me that I should not rely on my education and qualities, though he truly respected those things about me. He claimed that those who believe have an advantage of action, a certain capacity, over those whose faith is not strong. Implicitly bragging about his capacity to summon those believers,

You know Salih. If I call him and say “Salih, these and these guys are insulting Allah-u Teala or mocking our prophet. Go and kill them! You will, with Allah’s permission, go to Heaven”. He would say “of course brother Fatih, my life is not an issue (*can feda*).” Believing is something like this. Never forget: a Muslim believer is worth an army. Such a guy pulls out a knife and challenges everyone. If people are weak in their faith, they would scatter. Why? Because there is a chance for each and every one to get hurt. That possibility could destroy the entire crowd. Everyone thinks himself; no one stays. But this guy is successful. Why? Because he is not interested in this world. With these people, we changed everything; and only with these people, we can succeed.

For Fatih, this was the question and the task: how to use the power of faith in order to transform the country and make Turkey a world power. This power is a power of negation: “my life is not an issue.” Unlike those who calculate the “possibility” of getting hurt, believers can achieve the unthinkable, the incalculable. Plans, projects and blueprints are not necessarily degraded or treated as useless. Certainly they are important; like my education. But secular modernity in Turkey had failed to understand the Mana of efficacy. As Sidika’s friend said “Allah connects one moment to another.” The plans of secular modernization are not the source of success but the will of God is. What one has, what one knows, or who one knows are important but not enough. It is necessary to be on the side of believers, those who are dedicated and those who do not think of themselves. There emerges political capital: one can and should publicly display whose side s/he is on and whose s/he is against. The self is a register that encapsulates the failed history of Turkish modernization; it is something to be publicly negated, to work against, in order to declare one’s allegiance –that is, *biat*. However it was not a coincidence that Fatih’s example of the capacity for self-negation revolves around blurring the distinction between death and life. This distinction is where I want to conclude this chapter.

#### **IV. Who Comes After the Subject? The Partisan**

In 1989, the famous French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, following the tradition of the Enlightenment, posed a question to a number of philosophers: “Who comes after the subject?” Claiming that the subject has been liquidated and that its return is all but impossible, the letter of invitation asked who would follow the figure of the subject (Nancy 1991, 5). Among many noticeable answers, Etienne Balibar’s was the most controversial and enduring one. His answer is important for me to trace an originary tension in the constitution and sustenance of the modern form of subject formation.

In his answer to Nancy's question, Balibar surprisingly asserts that the transition from the subject to "some one else" has already taken place and the figure that has replaced the subject is none other than the citizen (1991, 38). For Balibar, the generative tension for the western political tradition since 1789 was the aporia inherent in this concept of citizen. While the concept of the citizen shifted sovereignty from a transcendent register (God, the king etc.) to the citizen's self, the self also came to fore as the subject of its own laws. He conceptualizes this duality as "the subject's becoming the citizen" and "the citizen's becoming the subject." In other words, there are two faces of the citizen-subject: Citizen who makes the law and thus being "above" any law and the citizen who obeys the law and thus being "under" the law. Here Balibar asserts a constitutive paradoxical unity of a universal sovereignty and a radical finitude, a continuous oscillation between the active citizen who legislates and the passive citizen who obeys the law, between collectivity and individuality, between public and private. I am inclined to read this tension as a modern trajectory comprising two constitutive forces: on the one hand, there is a centripetal force constituting the self as a possessor, as Macpherson calls it (1962), and on the other hand, a centrifugal force which continuously claims equality for all the selves. For Balibar, these two sides are in an "infinite contradiction" with each other, not only producing many contemporary problems but also being the force behind emancipatory movements (1995). Following Negri's discussion of the distinction between constitutive and constituted power, Balibar finds a revolutionary potential in the citizen, through which every subjection and finitude, what he calls anthropological differences, are subjected to the demand for equality.

In this concluding part of the chapter I want to speculate, through my ethnographic material, what might happen if one of the two forces constituting the citizen, the centrifugal one, is being bent towards the other, centripetal one, and thus constantly negating "the

possessiveness” of the individual while bringing forth the consensus of the community. What happens when one part, the universal sovereignty, “negates” the other, the radical finitude? I believe the public practices of self-negation in Turkey signify a potential agency that is not citizen, a form of subjectivity that is not individual. On this possibility, Carl Schmitt’s discussion on the concept of the partisan might be illuminating.

Carl Schmitt’s late work, the *Theory of the Partisan*, can and should be read as a conservative response to the political potentiality that the communist party in the USSR represents to the world as a new order (*Ordnung*) and law (*Nomos*). He starts with a historical trajectory of the concept of the partisan and analyzes its various instantiations in civil wars, colonial settings, and conventional occupations. Claiming that the partisan was a response to the national modern armies, which emerged during Napoleon’s campaign in Spain in 1808, Schmitt points that the partisan is a form of democratization of warfare and argues that there are four basic characteristics of the phenomenon. The partisan is (i) an irregular fighter and has (ii) an “intensely political character” such that his individualism gives way to “total integration”. In terms of spatial configuration, the partisan is (iii) extraordinarily mobile but has (iv) essentially tellurian character, which means he defends his land but doesn’t attack the others. Although this first historical stage of the partisan sounds politically acceptable to Schmitt, as self-defense, he thinks the figure of the partisan turned into a planetary problem in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He argues that it was Lenin who “blindly destroyed all traditional containments, [thus] war became absolute war, and the partisan the bearer of absolute enmity against an absolute enemy.” (2004, 64). In converting partisan warfare from a defensive position to an attacking one, Leninist theory opened the container that keeps the partisan limited and unleashed a negative potentiality that might destroy the planet. In this sense, Schmitt talks about the figure of the partisan in a positive way,

when s/he defends his own country from foreign invaders; but he underlines the destructive potential of the partisan when s/he “abstracts” the enemy, as in the case of class war, and expands the war field from home country to the whole planet. In other words, for Schmitt, the problem resides in the political gesture of the Leninist theory that shifts a particular negation (real enemy), say, a Germany that threatens Russia, to a generalized formal negation (absolute enemy), i.e. bourgeoisie, which culminates in “the world-wide civil war.”

What is important for me is that whenever the partisan as a total integration, I read as self-negation, shifts from defense to attack, a necessity of total annihilation ensues. Schmitt says

[the ultimate danger] consists in the inevitability of a moral compulsion. Men who turn these means [or destruction] against others see themselves obliged/forced to annihilate their victims and objects, even morally. They have to consider the other side as entirely criminal and inhuman, as totally worthless. Otherwise they are themselves criminal and inhuman. The logic of value and its obverse, worthlessness, unfolds its annihilating consequence, compelling ever new, ever deeper discriminations, criminalizations, and devaluations to the point of annihilating all of unworthy life [lebensunwerten Lebens]. [...] Annihilation thus becomes entirely abstract and entirely absolute. It is no longer directed against an enemy, but serves only another, ostensibly objective attainment of highest values, for which no price is too high to pay. It is the renunciation of real enmity that opens the door for the work of annihilation of an absolute enmity. (2004, 67)

I fear that the practices of self-negation, however one assesses their authenticity or political efficacy, promote a logic of total war in which there is “no price too high to pay.” Balibar places every anthropological difference (sex, race, age, abnormal, criminal, immigrant etc.) in generative tension with the question of equality, liberty and citizenship. Claiming that anthropological differences are irreducible to any framework of universality, those “differences are not merely added to the universal in a contingent fashion, arbitrarily limiting it or overturning its signification, but rather contradict and thereby actualize it” through emancipatory movements (2017, 300). However, we may have the exactly reverse picture in the case of the partisan, whereby all anthropological differences are subjected to “ever new, ever deeper discriminations,

criminalizations, and devaluations to the point of annihilating all of unworthy life.” In a strikingly parallel fashion to the members of the AKP, Schmitt’s conceptualization of the partisan combines two characteristics: “no price is too high to pay,” including oneself, and “obligation to annihilate their victims.” In a sense, the partisan is the capacity to transform the self-negation into total destruction.

*Biat* is the perfect example to illustrate the partisan’s capacity to perform such a translation. After the outbreak of the political crisis of 17/25 December, the partisans gathered around the airport, waiting for Erdogan’s return to the country. As a mimetic performance of the famous motto of the party, “we [the members of the AKP] set off on our journey by wearing our *kefen* (a linen shroud),” the youth branch indexed the meaning of the statement, a form of radical self-negation for the sake of a cause, by welcoming Erdogan in their shrouds.



Figure 23: The youth branch of a district of Trabzon went to the airport to display their support for Erdogan and the party, by bodily indexing the party’s famous motto “we set off our journey with our shrouds!,” meaning they are ready to die (or, in a sense, already dead).

With increasing political tension, the public sphere has been receiving more and more statements, performances, and practices of self-negation, resulting in less and less distinction between life and death. Self-negation as the primary form of political capital in Turkey gradually

blurs the line between life and death and opening further venues for the agency of the partisan.

After the coup, I took the picture below in a meeting of 4 million, which says “Regardless we die or return home, rejoice!”



Figure 24: At Yenikapi meeting, a youth organization [apparently having organic connections with the party] brought this large poster, stating “the [our] Chief; our heads up; regardless we die or return home, rejoice!”

The imperative “rejoice!” signifies the partisan’s capacity to act in such a way that the boundaries regarded as universal, natural or unbreachable for many, like death, do not have any effect over the partisan. Continuous public performances of self-negation thus turn into affective registers through which political capital can be mobilized. One’s being ready to die is a sign of one’s efficaciousness, as Fatih told me with respect to the insignificance of human capital like education or CVs. However such negativity cannot be confined into the limits of the self, or into the region of “being ready to die”. This negativity immediately extends to the region of “ready to kill”, as Schmitt’s discussion on the partisan indicates. Having disregarded their own lives, having lost many of their fellow partisans during the coup, the partisans of the party claim that they have every right to punish whoever they think the enemy. The emblematic photo just after the night of the coup perfectly captured the partisan’s capacity to annihilate.



Figure 25: A partisan whipping the foot soldiers participated in the coup, while police officers were watching the scene without intervening.

Historian Michael Ignatieff calls the rise of popular authoritarianism of our time a counter-revolution. My ethnographic data concurs with his argument on the part of “revolution”. But our views diverge as the causes and contexts of such a revolution. While he claims that it is a reaction against the unprecedented liberties and wealth of the first decade of the millennium, I suspect that that the very same period facilitated and even promoted the political tendencies of our time. What kind of selves and subjectivities the contemporary state of the world is producing will be the crucial question that every political project needs to address. I suggest in this chapter, deriving from my ethnographic reading of contemporary Turkey, that the partisan might rise as the new form of subject in the context of massive impoverishment and widespread exclusion from the contemporary forms of capital. However, even if my answer has any validity, what matters most still remains unanswered: what kind of partisans the masses will be, and what kind of party they will be integrated into.



## Chapter 5. Belligerent Grammars: Formalist Bureaucracy, Substantive Politics, and Full Life at the Margins of Istanbul

The bureaucracy takes itself to be the ultimate purpose of the state. Because the bureaucracy turns its "formal" objectives into its content, it comes into conflict everywhere with "real" objectives. It is therefore obliged to pass off the form for the content and the content for the form. State objectives are transformed into objectives of the department, and department objectives into objectives of the state. The bureaucracy is a circle from which no one can escape. Its hierarchy is a hierarchy of knowledge. The top entrusts the understanding of detail to the lower levels, whilst the lower levels credit the top with understanding of the general, and so all are mutually deceived. (Marx 2005, 46-47)

Erkan entered the AK party district headquarter, enraged in such a manner that he was looking much more intimidating than his unusually large frame and solemn countenance generally invoked among those who didn't know him well. Without waiting for us to ask any questions, he started to explain what had been happening since early in the morning. Simply put, he was overwhelmed by the dozens of phone calls he had been receiving all day with respect to a particular "bureaucratic" problem. "I can't believe that woman," he was telling us repeatedly, "She is telling everyone that she can't give any "certificate of indigency" (*fakirlik kagidi*) because some judge somewhere in Anatolia persecuted a *muhtar* [for issuing one of those documents]." Although it might make sense for many people that she refused to give such certificates due to the legal ramifications of the action, in this specific context, Erkan considered her rejection to be unacceptable.

For Erkan, that woman, being a woman *muhtar* and thus already suggesting a political affiliation that is inimical to his political party, represented a part of Turkey that he and many of the AKP supporters call "the old Turkey." What captured my attention was the ways in which he was combining several themes and concepts in his attacks against what he perceived as a part of "bureaucratic mentality." She was responsible for Erkan's spending time for nothing. She was sticking to formal statements and documents rather than being concerned with how to solve the

real problems of the real people. She was not coming from a background that would enable her to communicate with people as smoothly, genuinely, and effectively as Erkan could. His anger being funneled toward her, or whatever he thought she represented, Erkan kept making statements about who she was, what she could and could not do, and what she should do. All these statements revolved around the word bureaucracy, which became a gravitational center in his discourse, and the old Turkey, a country in the past where the bureaucratic mentality had once reigned and whose remnants are still damaging the new Turkey.

The constellations within which the problem of bureaucracy emerges signify a socio-political transformation that goes beyond a popular critique of institutional shortcomings of the previous epoch. In a sense, the popular critique of bureaucracy condenses many registers, discursive and practical, that shape the world within which the people of contemporary Turkey are trying to live. But, analogous to the previous chapter’s discussion on the mutually exclusive dynamic between the self-construction of secular citizens and the self-sacrifice of partisans, this brave new world, encapsulated in the term “the New Turkey,” is in constant tension with its own history, i.e. “the Old Turkey” – a tension which is remarkable destructive.

Old Turkey	New Turkey
Vesayet (tutelage) Elites	Victims, Orphans, Those who have no one, Oppressed, Black people
Bureaucracy	Politics
Writing/Procedures	Trust/Proximity
Temporal Abrasion of Linearity	Immediacy
National/Citizen	Ummet/Human

This chapter is concerned with the critiques of bureaucracy among the supporters and sympathizers of the AKP. However, my purpose is not only to make a discursive analysis that would focus on how the concept is being used by the party members but also to trace the life of this critique through different facets of daily life. When do people raise the issue of bureaucracy?

What kind of actions do they take when they refer to the shortcomings of bureaucratic mentality? What are the instruments with which they associate their “anti-bureaucratic” and “political” behaviors? Can we talk about tactics, or even strategies, that they claim to use against bureaucratic machinery?

Bureaucracy has become a popular critical trope for the masses in Turkey, but the form of this critique, I believe, is different than the classical complaints people used to hear every day. It is not that people engage in a negative critique, by which they show the problems of bureaucratic mentality and machinery, but rather people engage in a positive critique, by means of which people explain why they behave in certain manners or prescribe how to behave in certain situations. Bureaucracy invokes a collective memory for the impoverished masses in Turkey and signifies a certain set of practices and discourses that are meant to explain the country’s failures in the past, relating economic crises, the social abandonment of the poor, religious repressions, or the continuous exclusion of the masses from the resources of the country. Against this history of disasters and failures, the popular critique of bureaucracy provides the people around the networks of the AKP with an alternative grammar of action, agency, and being that revolves around the concept of politics. During my two-year long fieldwork, I got plenty of chances to observe numerous encounters, observations, and dialogues that can be used to distinguish, delineate and clarify these two constellations and their grammatical constitutions.

What these two grammars do is to associate bureaucracy and its formalism with the failures of the old Turkey, thus legitimizing and promoting alternative modalities of action that are emically called “political” (*siyaset*), which are assumed to have greater success due to their anti-formal characteristics. I think such anti-formalist tendencies are not intentional consequences of the global neoliberal projects, since, as Mirowski claims (2013), “deregulation”

in neoliberalism is not a total deregulation of everything but in fact a certain set of reregulation or, as Aelbers (2016) have pointed out, the overregulation of many other things<sup>49</sup>. In other words, the dissolution of formal structures has been accompanied by the solidification of other formal structures –especially “independent” governing bodies and regulatory agencies (from Central Banks to public auditing firms, from the telecommunications sector to energy markets) (Breger 2014; Gilardi 2008; Rodine-Hardy 2013; Sosay 2009). In this sense, neoliberal policies are selective in their deregulative and reregulative tendencies. While destroying trade unions and welfare schemes, neoliberal agendas frequently promote new forms of property rights, financial instruments, and service industries. However, despite this “double movement,” “the language of antibureaucratic individualism” has been adopted by the Right of all political hues since the collapse of welfare states (Graeber 2015, 5). In their relentless attacks against the bureaucratic foundations of the welfare state, the IMF, WB, Ranking Agencies, and orthodox economics have gradually forged an underdetermined<sup>50</sup> connection between bureaucracy and social and economic predicaments of the late twenty and early twenty-first century. Thus, although far from entailing a total deregulation, neoliberal macroeconomic policies spread the popular knowledge that bureaucracy means economic inefficiency and organizational rigidities.

This chapter is concerned with the popular consequences of this ambivalent double movement, deregulation and reregulation, under the name of bureaucracy. I observe that, in line

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<sup>49</sup> David Graeber observes the same preponderance of regulatory encroachment over the deregulative retreat of the welfare state (2015). However, I find it difficult to share his conceptualization of “total bureaucratization” for the reasons to be explained in this chapter.

<sup>50</sup> I use the term “underdetermination” following Quine’s argument that incompatible scientific theories can accommodate any given set of empirical data due to their being largely outside of the region of experience (Quine 1951); but with a difference. Rather than making a largely pragmatic point as Quine does, who poses the question as a matter of explanatory convenience (scientists pick up the most convenient formulations for the questions at hand), I use it in a political sense: underdetermination may be a means of prescribing the forms of action to be taken without determining its validity in the first place. So the convenience of underdetermining the relation between bureaucracy and economic inefficiency is to facilitate further actions whose relation to the problem is not clear. This is the formal expression of the well-known fact that appears during any public debates about privatization of public institutions.

with many academic discussions, within which the theme of deregulation overshadows the fact of reregulation, the popular critique of bureaucracy has a peculiar tendency to turn into a critique of formal structures through which anti-formal modalities of action are being legitimized for the masses under the concept of politics. In other words, the popular critique of bureaucracy constellates several themes under its name (forms of action, mediation, space and time) which people commonly associate with formal structures of the bureaucratic past, and proposes a new constellation under the name of politics. However, the peculiar tendency that this critique has is to expand anti-formalism to a point of a partial critique of neoliberalism itself. Because of these anti-formalistic tendencies, Graeber's formulation of "the language of antibureaucratic individualism" contains the seeds of negation of individualism as well as the promotion of collective mobilization. I will show at the very end of this chapter the true extent to which the popular critique of bureaucracy in Turkey can incorporate anti-formalism and argue that it has the potential for a popular suspension of law in which rules and regulations lose their force in daily life.

Before delineating the map of the chapter, I would like to clarify a few concepts that I will be using throughout. Starting with Hegel (Hegel 1991; Marx 2005; Sager and Rosser 2009), bureaucracy has been conceived as a particular version of formalism, a formulation that still echoes in vastly different venues, from the corridors of Ivy League Universities to the slums of Istanbul. Against a philosophical and theoretical insistence on the primacy of formal structures in bureaucracies, anthropologists have shown again and again that bureaucracy is not all formalism, but woven into the fabric of the social. But my point is that the popular critique of bureaucracy is a critique of formalism, regardless of whether bureaucracy has ever been formalistic. In this sense, I am not trying to "complicate" the picture by showing either that bureaucracy is not

entirely formal or that anti-formalist tendencies among my interlocutors are not entirely outside of formalist structures. It is a truism to assert that things are complicated and interwoven in any sphere of existence. What is required is to follow what people do with such distinctions, what the observable consequences of the uses of such distinctions are, and which potentialities they enhance and which possibilities they drain. To this end, I will be employing Wittgenstein's notion of "depth grammar."

The Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* (PI, 2009) is remarkably different from the young Wittgenstein who wrote *Tractatus* but is not out of touch with his own historicity. *Tractatus* was an attempt to fully cover the possibilities of human "proposition making" by following the formalist project of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to its very end. Starting with the conviction that there are atomic facts, which necessarily exist in all possible contexts, Wittgenstein was aiming to build secure foundations that could logically coordinate our thoughts and the world, thus ensuring the truth-conditions of propositional statements. However, and this is the reason that I find Wittgenstein particularly useful in discussing concepts like "neoliberalism," the late Wittgenstein criticizes his earlier project on the ground that many philosophical problems and confusions are results of our not paying attention to how we use the terms and concepts in certain characteristic ways and disregarding the circumstances in which we learn to use those expressions (see Baker 2004; Baker 2009; McGinn 2011). So, for example, understanding, thinking, and meaning are taken in philosophy as extraordinary mental feats with miraculous powers of representation, strange happenings inside the mind that capture realities outside. However, Wittgenstein urges us "don't think, but look!" (PI § 66), directing our attention to when a child uses the word "think" or "understand," in which contexts, with what combinations (always with the first person "I"). Thus rather than starting with presumptions

about a concept (“thinking” is this; “understanding” is that, neoliberalism is this; bureaucracy is that etc.) and then being amazed about the discordance of the concept and our experience of it, Wittgenstein tries to show us “possible” ways of clearing up philosophical confusions.

One of the means he uses to disillusion us about the uses of concepts is the grammatical investigation. His notion of grammar is different from the syntactical or semantic use of the term, which he roughly calls "surface grammar." His grammatical method, "depth grammar" as Wittgenstein calls it, is to look at the actual uses of the concepts and words and delineate the regions within which words are employed in our life with language. The primary purpose of such grammatical investigations is to "see connections" between different uses, in line with his conception of family resemblances, and thus to attain "surveyable/perspicuous representations" (*ubersichtliche Darstellung*) (Baker 2004, 56). As Baker argues, Wittgenstein aims not only to rearrange patterns of uses in order to reach a deep structure but also to explore new dimensions by surveying connections between different uses (84). Thus, his invitation is to enter new regions to discover “new connections”, so as to expand our knowledge about the uses and employment of our concepts in different forms of life.

I want to look at the concepts “bureaucracy” and “politics” from this Wittgensteinian perspective in order to follow connections that the uses of these terms build in the daily life of Istanbul’s poor neighborhoods. I want to see what kinds of constellations these words harbor in speeches, interactions, and practices of the people around the AKP networks in Istanbul. However, such investigations in the grammars of bureaucracy and politics can be more enhanced, I believe, with a few additions from different disciplines. Since I am particularly interested in how different uses collocate with each other, I believe Goethe’s notion of elective affinities (*die Wahlverwandtschaften*) and Freud's concept of condensation might be clarifying

for my investigation. Elective affinities mean the propensity and potentiality of certain characteristics to attract each other for certain combinations (in Goethe's novel, this combination is, of course, a matter of romantic affiliation)<sup>51</sup>. I find the concept and its use productive, for it is not prescriptive and deterministic but still capable of displaying certain tendencies that augment certain possibilities. In a similar line of thinking, I am also convinced that the concept of condensation is a remarkably productive analytical tool, which does not in any way requires our subscription to the psychoanalytical project in total. Together with elective affinities, we can investigate how certain dimensions and parts of social problems, say, Kurdish towns using “unregistered electricity,” start to colonize other parts and dimensions of the social life, say, Kurdish language’s being “a language without regularity<sup>52</sup>”, which does not have any direct relationship to the issue at hand.

By looking at how certain grammars collocate and associate different concepts and themes, we can analyze the mechanisms that condense several different and seemingly unrelated phenomena. This is how, I hope, we can understand the ways in which the popular critique of bureaucracy can grasp welfare policies as something detrimental to the wellbeing of the poor and the socio-economic development of a country. To this end, I divide the chapter into two large sections: The grammar of bureaucracy and the grammar of politics. Each section will focus on the constitutive themes and concepts that comprise the constellations of bureaucratic grammar and political grammar respectively: forms of action, mediums, space, and time. I will try to show

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<sup>51</sup> For the theoretical affinities between Goethe and Wittgenstein, see Rowe 1991.

<sup>52</sup> This is a popular discursive collocation that many Turkish people, especially educated secular nationalists, frequently perform. It implies that the Kurdish language does not have a standardized version across different regions because Kurdish people are too primitive to build a state for themselves and create a standardized language. The further implication of this collocation is that Kurdish people are incapable of social and political organizations, thus they refuse to obey rules and regulations. Another further implication of this reasoning is the legitimization of assimilationist politics: since Kurdish culture is a culture inimical to rules and regulations, only way to make them citizens is to make them Turkish through teaching them Turkish and prohibiting the use of Kurdish language.



that in each domain, time especially occupies a central conceptual position that coordinates the critique of bureaucracy and the ascendance of politics in its stead.

The main lines of my argumentation are as follows. Among the supporters and sympathizers of the AKP, heretofore “people around the networks of the AKP,” the formal structures from the period of the Welfare State and Fordist scale-economy are popularly conceived as the causes of the crises and disappointments of the 1980s and 1990s. The widespread critique of bureaucracy incorporates this grievance, explaining the suffering of the poor through references to their exclusion from the formally guaranteed rights and entitlements of the working classes during the time before the AKP. Understanding their previous exclusion from social services and the political center as a result of this “bureaucratic mentality,” people around the networks of the AKP, mostly living in the poor districts of Istanbul, associate bureaucratic formalities with the failures of the Turkish economy and suffering of the masses. Under this category of bureaucracy, people constellate several themes and concepts, ranging from the form of action in bureaucracies to the time that they experience in their encounters with bureaucratic machinery. Against the constellation of bureaucracy, politics emerges as an alternative grammar, which constellates a symmetrical but radically different conceptual and practical cluster. I will try to show that the changes in social experience of time has a central position in coordinating these two grammars, marking the transformation of the time of life at the margins of Istanbul. My argument is that it is impossible to understand the rise of politics in Turkey without this complicated imbrication, the co-constitutive dynamic between the history of bureaucratic practices and the contemporary form of political mobilization. However, such an intricate dynamic does not mean that the Turkish case is a simple aberration. I will conclude the chapter by arguing that continuously relating the “unproductive rigidities” of bureaucracies to

socio-economic failures, the global neoliberal dynamics have simultaneously been augmenting potentialities for, as well as producing the conditions of, a political mobilization that aims to destroy formal structures and entitlements.

## **2. The Intimate History of Bureaucracy or the Critique of Bureaucratic Mentality**

Many conversations that I had with my interlocutors invoked the history of bureaucratic encounters that resulted in bitter memories and sad disappointments. The AKP represents for many people a certain break with this history of bureaucratic devastations. Hospitals emerge in such stories as compressed spaces within which poor patients wait for days without receiving medical care. Drugstores rely on specific lists and bureaucratic regulations according to which only certain patients can have access to certain drugs. Water, electricity, and gas provision frequently fail due to the self-centered, individualistic bureaucrats in search of bribery and personal gain instead of providing the public with “services.” Sister Melek, a staunch member of the party, told me her story with a determination to make clear why people in poor districts support and mobilize around the AKP, a story that can be considered a typical example of this genre.

Born in one of the poorest cities in Turkey, Mus, which is informally a part of Kurdistan, Melek came to Istanbul in 1979, just after starting her primary education. She and her family began to live in Zeytinburnu, Cirpici Neighborhood, with her uncle and his family, before finding a squatter house for themselves. The first thing that she remembered about her time in the neighborhood was the queues for water since the infrastructure for water provision in the area was not well developed until the 1990s. Although Zeytinburnu, at that time, was a working-class neighborhood infamous for the poverty of its inhabitants, they moved to an even more impoverished neighborhood, Bagcilar, where basic infrastructure was largely absent, and living

conditions were less favorable in 1985. As if continuously falling down the ladder of the social hierarchy, Melek sarcastically quipped, she had to marry a man whom she didn't like at the time and gave birth to his first son, Eyüp, in 1986. While he was 2-months old, Eyüp had a severe fever, went into a coma, and stayed in intensive care for three months. They were late going to the hospital, for the family didn't have social security. And just as they feared, the hospital forced them to sign a promissory note for the belated treatment, an amount that exceeded their income by many times. Eyüp was held in that public hospital as a "hostage," said Melek, and they had to borrow money from everyone that they knew in order to save their son from that public prison. For her, this was a clear indication that the state was not theirs, and worse, the bureaucrats in the state were treating the poor, "the real people," as enemies rather than as citizens. A considerable amount of money being paid, Eyüp was free to go home, but only "like this," Melek said, smiling wryly, meaning that Eyüp was to live his life with mental retardation and continuous epilepsy crises.

She put the blame on the bureaucratic structure of the social services of the time and the political authorities supporting that "bureaucratic mentality." She insisted that Eyüp might not have been "like this" if they didn't have to wait so long for the treatment, or if health care was accessible to all, regardless of the patient's employment status<sup>53</sup> -something that, Melek argued, became a reality for the masses after the AKP came to power. Her point is that the bureaucratic mentality was responsible for dividing people into those who are formally employed, those who are civil servants, and those who are military personnel, thus providing people with different social services according to their status. Consequently, she claimed, those who did not have

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<sup>53</sup> Turkey's welfare system and health provision of the time can best be described as a "protective welfare state," in that social rights are directly correlated to the positions in labour market (Yilmaz 2017, 51). Accordingly, before the health care reform that the AKP initiated, the access to health care had been differentially structured in a way that informally working people occupied the lowest level, while civil servants were at the top (Gunal 2008). For people at this lowest strata, getting into massive debts for health care were anything but rare (Bugra 2008).

anything or "those who are without anyone looking for them" could do nothing but wait on endless queues, at the end of which sons, daughters, husbands, and parents died or became disabled.

The violence of bureaucratic machinery was thus a trope for my interlocutors, condensing many personal stories, biological and social traces, and economic and political histories<sup>54</sup>. While we were talking about the mass support for the AKP from the poor sections of society, Melek succinctly and explicitly articulated her position as follows:

You know; they say, 'the poor (*dar gelirliler*) support the AKP for *menfaat* (self-interest).' I can't lie to you, have I received assistance? Yes, I have. Is my daughter working for the municipality during Ramadan? Yes, she is. We have benefitted from the party a lot; no lies. But they ask why we don't go to other parties, for example to the CHP, parties other than the AKP. Let me tell you: for me, the period before the AKP means Eyüp's scars. When I see these [showing me the scars on his left wrist], I remember those days, our desperation. How they made us wait in queues for very little, how they sent us from one place to another for the medicines this child needed.

She continued to explain to me that because of the bureaucratic drudgery imposed on the shoulders of the poor, she had to leave Eyüp at home, tying him to a tree so he would not get lost, and tried to fulfill several bureaucratic demands to get medicines necessary for Eyüp's epilepsy crises. The scars were the remnant of those days, marking Eyüp's body with the time that his mother had to be away to collect several forms and signatures from many bureaucrats who were treating her condescendingly. Remembering those days, she thanked Erdogan and the AKP for providing medicines for all the poor and said, "I was spending days and weeks to get

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<sup>54</sup> This is certainly a well-known subject in the discipline of anthropology. For example, Herzfeld's concept secular theodicy (1992) is one of the prominent examples, through which he analyzes how people attribute failures of bureaucratic structures not to the bureaucracy itself but to the people who occupy bureaucratic posts thereby exculpating the bureaucracy of the nation-state from systemic violence –an analogy to theodicy whereby scholars had been trying to make sense of the evil in the world despite the existence of an almighty and benevolent God. Hull observes similar tendencies among bureaucrats who claimed that "politics has just been another name for instability, systemic disruption and disunity" and thus attributing the failures of bureaucracy to political interferences (2012, 239). However, I am following a reverse path here and focusing on how the popular understanding of the masses works as an iconoclastic gesture against the "secularized theology" of bureaucracy, putting the blame on bureaucracy and asserting the effectivity of politics.

some medicine, but always less than he needed. Now we can get as much as we want, and Eyüp drinks his medicine more than necessary (*bol bol icebiliyor*)." A sign/scar embodied in Eyüp's wrist thus became a condensed signifier gathering different themes from Turkish history: the transformation of the Turkish social security system, bureaucratic procedures consuming the time and life of the poor, and corrupt bureaucrats supported by the previous governments. But more importantly, this condensation under the constellation of bureaucracy pits the social rights of the working classes against the despair and suffering of the poor. Melek's account relates bureaucratic procedures, which was consuming the time of the poor, to the privileges of the working class in formal jobs, whose right-based social insurance was conceived as a bureaucratic scheme that disregarded the rights of the informally working poor. Far from being an aberration, this formulation is surprisingly popular among the supporters and sympathizers of the party.

While bureaucracy becomes an intimate history for the poor, the right-based social services provided to the working class turn into a moral problem through which shortcomings of bureaucratic practices and discourses reveal their violent nature. "The old Turkey," the concept designating the period before the AKP, thus condenses many themes that we can call the constituents of the bureaucratic constellation. Following Wittgenstein, I am convinced that there is no definition that we can find among the Turkish poor, which provides us with a precise definition of the phenomenon. However, we have a set of concepts whose relations to each other can most accurately be described as a family resemblance: "distance," "idleness (*bos oturmak*)," "spending time for nothing (*bosa zaman harcamak*)," "writing," and "documents." During my fieldwork, these words appeared irregularly and in free association with each other, whenever the word "bureaucracy" was used to describe the old Turkey. I think this set of "uses," in accord with Wittgenstein's employment of the term, provide us with clues about the significance of the

popular critique of bureaucracy, through which we can comprehend the depth grammar connecting these uses. In one way or another, most of the thematic constituents of the constellation of bureaucracy are related to the experience of time for the poor at the urban margins of Istanbul. The solution the poor around the AKP found against the destructive experience of time in the bureaucratic state is politics and the time it perpetuates. For this section, however, I want to focus on the constituents of the bureaucratic constellation: action (idleness, spending time for nothing), mediums (documents, regulations, rules), space (distance, visibility), and time.

*a. Acting through Bureaucracy*

The forms of action commonly attributed to bureaucratic practices and discourses are related to the governmental and municipal practices in the 1990s, which are frequently labeled as "laic" and "elitist." As I have already discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the 1990s occupies a central place in the memory of the urban poor in Turkey. An exponentially increasing urban population, widening budget deficits in municipalities as well as in the central government, and the implementation of outward-looking, market-oriented macroeconomic policies resulted in "the widespread perception that the state is basically a corrupt mechanism for allocating rents to favorites" (Bugra and Keyder 2006, 212). Today, the predominant political Islamist movement, embodied in the AKP, grafts the memories of corruption not so much onto the state itself as onto bureaucratic practices and mentalities of the old Turkey. During our conversations, many party members and sympathizers were accusing those with a supposed bureaucratic mentality (*memur zihniyetli*) of not doing anything but receiving high wages. Workers employed by the state were the first targets for such critiques in that those who had job security were not doing anything, were concerned only with their self-interest, and conspicuously displayed their "distinction."

Hasan, a neighborhood leader who was employed as a social worker in Esenler Municipality, provides an excellent example of this popular critique. While attacking the bureaucratic mentality of the old Turkey, he talked about Meltem, a municipality worker who had a "cadre/staff" (*kadro*) from the previous Republican Party's rule and thus still enjoyed a considerably high wage (5,000 TL in comparison to 1500 TL of average wage for the same job). The first thing that the AKP major did when they got the municipality was to move them to the most physically demanding jobs in order to force the workers from previous period to quit. Since their position was permanent "worker cadre" (*isci kadrosu*) and they had job security and high wages, it was impossible to fire them without getting into too much legal and bureaucratic procedures. Putting people, especially women, into most unsuitable jobs for their gender, position, education, or age, was the strategy of Islamist municipalities to get rid of "the old mentality."

*Haci*, people like Meltem are the last remnants of the old Turkey. Now, we have to get rid of them entirely. What does this woman do? Nothing! But her salary is 5000 TL. The CHP and SHP filled them into cadres/staff everywhere, and you cannot fire them. The princes should sit there [*Oyle otursun prenses*]! For us [the AKP people], no one has any superiority over the other. The superiority is in piety [*ustunluk takvadadir*]. You have cadre/staff; you have diploma. Ok, but these are not important. What do you do? I sit, I drink tea, I order, I ask! We are working here like a dog. We do things, they talk.

Hasan was talking with reference to a popular motto of the party "they talk, the AK Party does," connecting the failures of the 1990s to the empty talk produced around bureaucratic practices without achieving anything practical.



Figure 26: Airways became People's way. I now travel by plane. They talk, the AK Party does.

According to this framework, the "talk" produced by the bureaucratic mentality of the old Turkey was a means to distance the elite from the poor, the elite being not an unreachably distant social position but a privileged social difference in any possible setting. In other words, the people of the old Turkey were using "talk" and not doing any real thing, whether they were high-level bureaucrats or workers formally employed by the state with job guarantees and good paychecks. From this perspective, the Fordist model of differentiation and mass employment turns into a moral decrepitude, whereas Post-Fordist modalities of action and production are translated into the idioms of piety and immaterial qualities. One of the oldest cadres of the party, Suleyman, once explained to me how they succeeded in dismantling Fordist organizational logic by the political insistence that workers should work regardless of definitions, rules, or regulations that formally demarcate regions of activities for the workers. During one of our usual gatherings with party members, he wanted to explain to me what bureaucracy means and narrated his first day in Kagithane District Municipality, the very first and most important neighborhood that Islamists won in the elections of 1992, a neighborhood where I have been living since 1994.



Suleyman: The department was filled with too many people during the social democrats' rule. It was like this; 97 people were given to a workshop, and we reduced the number to ten. Everyone was responsible only for one thing. Electrician, battery, caterpillar, heavy truck, light truck...

Firat: Weren't they doing their jobs?

Suleyman: Now, the electrician was doing only electric jobs; the person responsible for batteries was dealing with battery problems; the heavy truck operator for heavy trucks; the tire repairer for tires; their assistants, assistants of assistants... they were bureaucratic jobs, paper jobs, not real. They were doing their jobs but in too limited a fashion. Then we had a meeting in the municipality, the directorate of technical works asked me if I could give them thirty men. I said I could. I gave them the list of the names. Every one was looking at me like this [a surprised facial expression]. People came from the trade union first. Then, union representatives came. "What are you doing? Who are you? How can you send these people to other departments? Everyone comes here willingly! No manager can send them away. Only if personnel want, can they go." I said, "What do you mean? I am the manager. If I want them to work here, they work here. If I do not need them, I send them to other departments." They went, they made a hassle for one or two months, and then they stopped making noises. After that, another department asked another thirty people. I gave. And then, another thirty. I gave again.

One should not take his words as words of a ruthless capitalist in the traditional sense of the term. As it will be clear later (in this chapter), Suleyman did what he did with pious incentives that put "serving" Muslims over anything else -including workers' rights. But here, his interpretation is pertinent, for bureaucratic state tradition, which was itself a part of the developmentalist/Fordist era, appears as a theme that condenses the registers about the old bureaucratic Turkey wherein actions were ineffective in so far as they were regulated, written down, and strictly determined. The time was being wasted exactly because of the too-regulated nature of the working conditions. If everyone had continued to do only one thing, a sort of Plato's utopia in the Republic, how they, the Islamist municipality, would have fulfilled the promises given to the poor -the promises addressing the injustices of the 1980s and 1990s, its corruption, and moral decadence. The period preceding the Islamist take over the municipality was a sort of sin, a morally unacceptable situation, since many Muslim brothers were to eke out a living with

many times lower wages than those unionized, state employees, who had formally delineated rights and responsibilities. With a conviction that he and his party had political support from the masses, Suleyman believed himself right in demanding the most within the given circumstances.

*b. Mediums of Bureaucracy*

But before going into the depths of the political forces that claim to have changed the material and immaterial terrain of Turkey, I want to discuss more the mediums of the bureaucratic mentality, about which my interlocutors said that it had exhausted the time as well as the life of the poor in the old Turkey. Suleyman's quick mentioning of "paper jobs" in this sense is not an exception but rather a rule when talking about the old Turkey and its bureaucratic incompetency. The term "paper" does not signify mere material dimension of bureaucratic practices but a general form of mediating actions through official relations and formal channels: what forms should be filled, who should sign those forms, from which offices one should acquire other necessary documents to support one's file, and so on and so forth. In this sense, "paper" is more than a sheet of processed cellulose, although the term includes the material dimension itself, but it signifies a certain set of discourses and practices, let me say "an ontology," that presupposes the world as representable by abstract structures whose components can be manipulated by means of forms, plans, pictures, and signatures (Heidegger 2002; Heyman 2004; Mitchell 1991; Nancy 2007; Vattimo 2016; Weber 2005). Many scholars have shown the complicated relationship between documents and practices, foregrounding the ambiguous characteristics of documents as both means of formal regulations and instruments of dissent and negotiation (Hull 2012; also see Das 2004). I want to further this discussion with a twist that takes its departure not from the documents themselves but their popular criticism. Accordingly, the reason why I am focusing on what Gupta calls "modalities and techniques that enable bureaucracies to be

indifferent to the social suffering of the poor” (2012, 41) from the perspective of the poor is in order to find out what are the alternative modalities and techniques that the poor have developed in Turkey against such indifference.

The widespread critique of bureaucracy among the political base of the AKP builds conceptual associations between bureaucratic formalization and the failures of Turkish modernity before the ascendance of the AKP. Among countless examples I would like to discuss my interaction with Hayrettin, an example that I believe aptly captures the point I want to further my exploration of the constellation of bureaucracy. Hayrettin was one of the oldest members of the party in Esenler, and his political history goes back to the 1970s. During a political discussion that we were having with a group of local people, he wanted to intervene to clarify the distinction between the old Turkey and the new one in terms of the changing capacities of people doing daily tasks against procedural bureaucracy.

Hayrettin: If you want to understand what has changed, you should look at funeral services. It has changed a lot, and this is very significant, really good. Fifteen years ago [the time before the AKP], if you had a funeral, you had to give bribes to get a piece of land for the deceased, and you had to go the Funeral Administration to hold a funeral. How old are you?

Firat: Thirty-two

Hayrettin: But you have your hair greyed hahaha... Now, you wouldn't know, at that time...

Firat: I am not that young, I do remember those times.

Hayrettin: Then you would know. When you had a funeral, there were people waiting to get paid [bribery], so they could do their jobs. Old civil servant mentality. Now, these funeral things are excellent. There is a funeral center in Besyuzevler; you go there and tell them you have a funeral. They give you a car and an imam; they do the washing there; they give you a car with a cooler. In old times, we couldn't find a place to put the deceased, but that is also easy now. Note this; it was so hard to carry the funeral to the hometown [*memleket*]. Do you want to go to your hometown? They [the police] would stop you on the way. You needed to have documents, but they would take a few days: go today, come tomorrow. There is a saying in Arabic "*Suttu Muttu*," meaning *sallamak* [postponing, deferring, delaying]. They were doing *Suttu Muttu*. They were acting like that. We were unable to find anyone to talk to [*muhattap bulamiyorduk*]. So people [*vatandas*] didn't have many options. They were putting some clothes on the deceased, making him/her sit on the back, like this [leaning towards one side]. They were stopping cars frequently then. Like

this: the deceased stay still, and there are men inside the car! The man had to drive his father in such conditions from here to Sivas; 1000 km. The police stop you! You say, "I am sorry, my father is sick." and he says, "ok, let him sleep." In fact, he is dead! Then [when you arrive at the hometown], they would fill out the forms as if he had died there and then they would bury him. It was too hard, I mean. To tell you the truth, there are still difficulties, things go smoother, but there are still remnants [*kalintilar var hala*], especially civil servants from that period.

Hayrettin's story is one of many stories and narratives encapsulating the problem of bureaucracy, succinctly combining some major components: distance ("we were unable to find anyone to talk to"), corruption, time, and documentation. In the old Turkey, even simple actions, like burying one's father, had so many bureaucratic requirements, from arranging transportation to finding a piece of land, people had to put on theatrical performances. Reminding us of Kafka's stories, Hayrettin was painting a picture wherein people would lose their way on the labyrinthine paths of bureaucracy, if unwilling to pay bribes to unscrupulous civil servants. However, his story indicates that the corruption of civil servants was facilitated by the documentary requirements through which "*Suttu Muttu*," i.e., postponement, could be performed. Like many other people, Hayrettin was thinking that documentary circulations imposed by the bureaucratic structure are nothing but a waste of time, which profited selfish civil servants and damage the real people.

Documents have this peculiar capacity for justifying *Suttu Muttu*, delaying essential services, and hiding the insidious agencies of selfish-civil servants who are looking for some additional income. This capacity that *Suttu Muttu* signifies, I assert, is the capacity for abstraction; the written forms can claim representative power over the material realm and demand from people compliance with this claim<sup>55 iii</sup>. However, this mysterious and dark power

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<sup>55</sup> The distinction between representation and abstraction can best be understood as the systematic efforts in associating representations with each other on a semiotically homogeneous plane. Although representation is an omnipresent phenomenon throughout human cultures, their systematic associations are of modern concern. In order

resides in the movement that mediates signs and things. Plans, certificates, or signatures encode something about the material they represent; yet they do more than represent. In their representations, they foreground otherwise invisible characteristics of entities<sup>56</sup>. Thereby they both represent things and disclose (in fact produce) the relations that regulate them. A document in this sense is not something that states who died where as in Austin's notion of constatives. A document also immediately inscribes what should, can, or will be done, building relationships between different offices, different documents, and different representations of practices. Thus, though based on representation, abstraction is more than representation. Because of the distance between a thing and its representation, abstraction can build relations between representations, assuming that those relations can hold true in the material realm as well. This purely formal characteristic of bureaucracy is what Young Marx was criticizing by arguing that "[F]or the bureaucrat the world is a mere object to be manipulated by him." (2005, 48). Marx knew well that while the connections between representations cannot be limited by anything but the fundamental rules of logic, relations between things are much more embedded in the world that they are taken from. In other words, while possibilities are nearly infinite in the realm of abstraction, they are far more limited in the material world. At exactly this conjunction, we find the political contestation between the old Turkey and the new one. The old one relied on the logic of abstraction, on which bureaucratic mediation was built, and abused the capacity for infinite abstraction in order either to do nothing and enjoy apathy or to prevent the "real people" from doing anything. The new one, the subject matter of the second section of the chapter, relies on political forces, mobilizing people and transforming the material world with that mobilization. Relating to me a fascinating account of a legal dispute between an AKP municipality and a

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not to disrupt the flow of the text, I put the explanations of my use of the distinction and the philosophical sources to the endnote number (i).

<sup>56</sup> For a similar line of argument, see Damerow 1996: 376-380.

bureaucrat with the mentality of the old Turkey, Mustafa explained how the abstraction of the old Turkey works in a detailed way.

-Mustafa: With malicious intentions, inspectors might come and look for a fault [*acik arayabiliyorlar*]. Especially those with the mentality of the old period. But if you are looking for a fault, it is always possible to find one because not everything can be detected and determined. For example, an investigator came a few years ago. Seeing walnut trees, he asked what we did with the walnut of this tree. Of course, we said, "We are doing nothing. The workers here crack them and eat them." He started to calculate: "how much does a tree yield?" "How much is a kilo of walnut?" "How much is the total loss?" Then he wrote the bill for the one in whose name the tree is registered.

-Firat: But the municipality cannot sell them in the first place! Shouldn't it [the municipality] establish a company for that?

-Hasan: The municipality cannot engage in commerce in anyway. He was trying to create problems.

-Mustafa: This is still not that bad. You can change such decisions by appealing to the regulations [*mevzuat*] in the court. But there are issues that are not covered by any regulations, laws, or legal precedents [*ictihat*]. If you go into detail to this extent [*bu kadar ustune gidersen*], you cannot provide any service here. However, service is not the concern of these people. The purpose is to make trouble on the paper. They are not interested in what is really going on. Look, there are two events like this. The last one was about road cleaning. The guy said, "You invited tenders and determine the price of the service." Like these avenues, these streets, let's say 20 km. Now, do you know streets crossing avenues?

-Firat: Yes.

-Mustafa: He asked whether we calculated them.

-Firat: How?

-Mustafa: Like this: Let's say the avenue is vertical, and there are streets crossing it horizontally. The inspector said, "The intersection areas were already cleaned; why do you count those areas?"

-Firat: But how can the vehicle proceed?

-Mustafa: He was not asking that question! As if we would elevate the vehicle, take it from one end and put it down on the other.

-Firat: I would understand if the cleaning material were too expensive, or the thing that they spray on the road. But there is depreciation, workers' wage, gas...

-Mustafa: Definitely! But the man was not interested in serving people. For him, he says, "I found a weak point (*acik yakaladim*), I will create trouble." They did something worse to the metropolitan municipality [of Istanbul]. You know that the roadway lines are intermittent.

-Firat: Yes.

-Mustafa: But we do the calculations in terms of km. Let's say 50 km. The inspector said, "These lines are intermittent. You should have initiated the tender for 25 km."

For Mustafa, like many other party members and sympathizers - regardless of their positions in the party or the level of education they have- this bureaucratic tendency for

abstraction has been a persistent source of failures in providing people, especially the poor, with basic services -health, gas, water, roads, and so on. Focusing on documentation and abstraction results in nothing but unnecessary hassle, a pure formality without content, from which no good has ever come or will ever come<sup>57</sup>. Such a bureaucratic structure, as the AKP motto emphatically states, can do nothing but talk, whereas the militants of the new Turkey can "do," regardless of how they do or what they do. I have heard countless times that what is really important is doing something, since people are desperately looking for things to happen, not for the talk that people can only listen to. Thus the bureaucratic practices of the old Turkey signify a formal structure within which the endless chains of documentation and abstraction take place but the poor receive nothing while spending their life and time waiting.

However, I have to underline that it is not documentation and abstraction by themselves that result in the waste of time and lives of the poor. Documents have this capacity to abstract things *ad infinitum*, but people can be cognizant of this shortcoming rather than indulging in unnecessary formalizations to refrain from real work. Documents are dangerous, but their potential danger gets realized when the civil servants are "malicious," as Mustafa pointed out. Why are they malicious? There are countless answers to the question, but most of them revolve around the question of "self" that I have discussed in the previous chapter. Here I am interested in what people, those who are mobilized around the AKP, think of the experience of this maliciousness in relation to the question of bureaucracy. In other words, what is it that these people find, or claim to have found, as the particular motivation behind constant abuses of documentation and abstraction?

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<sup>57</sup> Feldman displays the crucial role of "privileging rule over reason" for analytics of government (2008, 16). For the classical discussions regarding the popular complaints about bureaucracies, see Beetham 1987; Britan and Cohen 1983; Haines 1990; Heyman 1995; Katz 1973; Peters 2001.

*c. The Space of Bureaucracy: Hierarchical Distances of Distinctions*

The primary social consequence of the formal bureaucratic capacity for infinite abstraction and mediation, as my interlocutors constantly hinted and sometimes explicitly stated, was to create distance between the people and the elite/the privileged -in this case, civil servants<sup>58</sup>.

Hierarchical divisions based on abstract relations of offices were making it, according to these popular stories, impossible for the poor to reach anyone who had any power. Once again, like Kafka's the Trial or the Castle, one could rarely see someone who could really help. The distance between two segments of society, the elite and the poor, was once so large that even seeing a mid-level civil servant was nearly impossible. Hamit, an engineer and local politician, narrated a similar story as a tug of war between secular bureaucracy and political Islam, at the end of which the AKP emerged as victorious. He saw the Welfare Party (RP), from which the AKP is thought to have originated, as the turning point for the dissolution of the old Turkey and its bureaucratic body. According to his narrative, people learned the first time that municipalities have responsibilities to serve people when the Islamist Parties start to take over municipalities in the early 1990s. The mentality, he said, has changed from a bureaucratic one to the one that is "people-centered" (*halk odakli*). He used his own life experience to make his point:

In 1985, I started to work for a construction company belonging to our people [the people of the RP]. We were unable to enter even the rooms of municipality engineers. When we saw the mayor or one of the deputy mayors, we were like seeing the president. They were inside of an unreachable shell. This was a bureaucratic structure. Orientation towards the people started with the transformation of municipalities in the 1992 local elections. Then it was revealed that the true masters of municipalities are people.

Although Hamit's account is more refined and conceptually sophisticated than many others, his points have widespread relevancy for the masses around the AKP. I have listened to countless stories narrating how hard it was to see anyone beyond the lowest level civil servants,

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<sup>58</sup> Gupta detects a very similar situation in India where "the lure of degrees, documents, and the written words" produces social distinctions and distances (2012, 225).



let alone high echelons of bureaucracy. And even those lowest-level civil servants were acting as special people who treat the poor in a condescending manner, relying on the vast distance between their privileged positions and the (non)place of the masses. The AKP claims to bridge that gap, making people coextensive with the state, and thus providing service to people and "doing" things, like infrastructural projects, widespread health care, or poverty relief packages, which were all considered absent or poorly performed before the AKP.

The distance separating bureaucratic positions from the masses was articulated by my interlocutors as one's incapability to see who is responsible, talk to that person in his office, and explain his problems face-to-face, rather than filling out forms and reducing their experience to abstract formalities. The political turn, which I will describe in the second section of this chapter, addresses this incapacity and makes claims to develop the country by bridging the space between hierarchical distances produced by the formal relations of bureaucracy. The elaborate relations between offices in bureaucracy, according to this popular critique, produce endless chains of referential abstractions without achieving anything in the material world<sup>59</sup>. This is what Suleyman meant by the term "bureaucratic jobs, jobs on paper" (*kagit ustunde isler*) -jobs that do not correspond to anything in the world. Or what Mustafa meant when talking about "troubles on paper" -troubles that arise when focusing on papers too much. The waste of time and life had thus been sustained by the abstractive capacity of documentation and the hierarchically distant offices produced by this process of formalization. Suleyman explains to me how they did solve

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<sup>59</sup> Lefort is one of the most astute observers about bureaucracies' self-sustaining referentiality. Following Marx's critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Lefort criticizes the Soviet bureaucracy for fulfilling the function of social differentiation through formalistic reproduction of its own conditions of existence (1986). His effort is more pertinent for me than, say, Bourdieu's, whose work complicates, but also obfuscates, the distinctions between bureaucratic tendencies and class dispositions. Thus in *Distinction* (1986), we rarely encounter the word "bureaucracy" or "bureaucrat," and in *Homo Academicus* (1988), he brilliantly displays the social and class origins of academic positions, but largely disregards bureaucratic particularities of academic discipline. For another study that separates class conflict from bureaucratic structuration, that is, "political demands from economic demands," see Castoriadis 1988, 14-24.

this dilemma when they came into power in 1992, defeating secular social democrats and taking office in order to show the masses, the first time in the history of Turkey, that the pious common men can achieve wonders beyond bureaucratic structures.

As soon as I got the position I went to the workers, sat on a table in the teahouse of the department, drunk tea and started to converse with them. Everyone was surprised. They had never seen the manager before. He was that distant, that unrelated. Orders come; there is a signature on the paper. Can someone be a mere signature? When we won the elections, the first thing that we did was [to establish] intimacy. I will put these men into work; I will make them work. If they do not know me, how can I ask them to do something? We needed spiritual/immaterial connection, not a material one. We had 300 people in Kagithane. I was keeping a record of all their private lives, the sick in their families, disabled ones, their fights, their broken hearts... I was then keeping a log of every small detail.

Suleyman here gives us an invaluable account of how the people around the AKP perceive the hierarchical distances produced by the abstractive capacity of bureaucratic formalism. The privileged people of the old Turkey, who had either isolated offices or job-guarantees that kept them apart from the common people, were incapable of action because they were enjoying their privileges and not engaging in real life. Remember what Suleyman did shortly after he was assigned to his post. He sent many workers from his department to other departments in order to force workers to work, outside of their job descriptions. He saw his actions as productive, something against the apathy of the workers with job-guarantees. Formal job descriptions had no meaning in the face of the need to serve people. Formal job-security in this sense was a part of bureaucratic abstraction that was keeping people in stable and hierarchical positions. A manager did not need to show his face even to the workers beneath him since he could send documents that he signed as a set of orders. However, such a distance between people -between the masses and bureaucrats and among bureaucrats themselves- resulted in inaction and corruption. As Suleyman asks, "I will put these men to work, I will make them work, if they do not know me, how can I ask them to do something?" According to him, in

the old Turkey, there was no real connection between people, only abstract and formal connections which were incapable of producing action and, frequently, promoting corruption. For the masses, the "real" people, the poor, as my interlocutors were frequently underlining, bureaucratic distances were the spaces within which people spend their time and lives, expecting services but not getting any, waiting to talk to someone in person but finding no one, suffering destitution but encountering indifference. In a sense, the popular critique of bureaucracy posits the time of bureaucracy as erosive -as that which destroys life through time.

*d. The Time of Bureaucracy: On Waiting*

Now we can integrate the conceptual clusters that comprise the constellation of bureaucracy. Their coordinating theme is time and the specific experience of time in relation to bureaucratic encounters. The question of time, as a theme, appears in connection with most of the other themes that I tried to collect under three major clusters. When complaining about the inaction of old bureaucratic cadres or the idleness spreading throughout the offices of the old Turkey, when explaining the deleterious effects of documents that abstract daily life and endlessly circulate their representations, or when comparing the two Turkeys and saying "it was impossible to see anyone responsible at that time," stories, memories, and propagandas of the people around the AKP converge on the point at which the lives of people dissipate through waiting. In this sense, Melek's story showed that the time she spent for preparing bureaucratic documents was translated into the scars of Eyüp. Waiting in queues was the reason she had to tie Eyüp to a tree, just as the lack of formal employment and social security made them wait for Eyüp to get better by himself. Suleyman acted on Melek's behalf, for the sake of the poor who had failed to receive any services properly, and demanded the workers perform tasks outside their job descriptions, insisting that the real life goes well beyond any abstract categories and formalities, and people

could only sit idly and do nothing concrete, if they refuse to go beyond what is formally delineated on the paper. Suleyman, in this sense, was trying to save the time of the poor by acting according to what should be immediately done, regardless of what documents say. He was trying to change those workers who only do "*suttu muttu*" (delay), as Hayrettin was complaining. Against the bureaucrats of the old Turkey, who continuously look for loopholes in documents, Mustafa was reminding me that they would not have had much time to do things in real life if they didn't give up on the primacy of documentation and formality. And finally, like Hamit, many of my interlocutors were insisting that the bureaucracy means abstract distinctions producing vast spaces between people, within which the poor got lost in waiting and through which no useful action had been taken.

Thus the word bureaucracy revolves around concepts designating inaction/idleness, abstraction/mediation, and distinction/distance but always comes back to the question of time. The combination of these three clusters produces a social understanding of bureaucracy as a specific experience of time that separates, isolates, and excludes people -in a sense, individualize them. Melek's waiting in queues thus become intelligible: in the old Turkey, hierarchical structures based on abstract rules imposed upon the poor a restricted social space, appearing as "distances" between different segments of society, keeping the poor in waiting without much changes happening. Thus the stories and narratives of the poor of Istanbul cohere around an experience of time that suspends life in waiting in queues and erodes life continuously to a point of destruction and damage, for which Eyüp provide only one example.

Undoubtedly, the conversations that I had with people around the AKP networks have many valid points, and they rightly express certain shortcomings of bureaucratic structures similar to those in many other countries (e.g. Gupta 2012). Furthermore, some scholarly works

opt to focus on the productive dimension of waiting in bureaucratic settings. Following organization theory (Schwartz 1974), for example, Sellaars (2008) argues that the central significance of waiting in bureaucratic settings is to facilitate actions by cooling down frictions between individual cases (also see Gasparini 1995). Although with entirely different agenda, anthropologists have recently approached the question from the perspective of this “productive dimension,” arguing that enforced legal waiting produce new forms of socialization (Doughty 2017) or waiting among immigrant families sustains migratory networks as affective capital (Kwon 2015). However, the destructive effects of waiting has not been disregarded, thanks to the works focusing on “enforced patience” of the poor (Auyero 2012) and governmental ethics of waiting that de-legitimize political impatience (Hage 2009). However, I aim to take not “waiting” itself as my object of analysis but rather its popular critique in order to see how people understood it in relation to practices and discourses such that it becomes meaningful.

Thus I suggest that the popular critique of bureaucracy is closely connected to the social and economic transformations that marked a shift from the developmentalist state based on Fordist production and bureaucratic precision to an export-oriented neoliberal state. I do not mean that this critique is an ideological misrecognition professing to solve the problems of the economic base in the realm of superstructure. Far from it. The “use” of the critique of bureaucracy, I assert, is a gesture that legitimizes the enlargement of the life sphere of the poor at the expense of the dissolution of formal entitlements and rights of the working class. Scholars have documented that the uneven distribution of resources in many welfare states, as a result of employment-based entitlements and rights, has harbored massive grievances among the excluded poor (Agartan 2008; Bugra and Keyder 2006; Esping-Andersen 1990; Gellisen 2002; Nattress and Seekings 1997). In the Turkish case, time occupies the central conceptual position that

coordinates the critique of bureaucratic structures of the old Turkey, explains its dissolution in moral and practical terms, and legitimizes the practices of the masses in the new Turkey. Let me give another example from an encounter in my fieldwork, which shows, although in a subtle way, the strong bond between the time of bureaucratic structures and the changing conception of time in the economy.

While a group of party members and I were talking about the significance of the social policies for the poor, Emine, one of the social workers focusing on the disabled, underlined the role of time in achieving real changes in the world.

-Emine: "I met Omer thanks to our working together in disability services (*engelli hizmetleri*). It was like; there is this disabled person, there is this problem in this neighborhood. He was coming from the district (*ilceden*) and taking us with his car. We were making home visits, informing them about the laws (*yasalarla ilgili bilgilendirme yapıyorduk*): You can get nursing at home payment (*evde bakım ücreti*) from this institution, disability pension from that institution.

-Omer: I forgot it. We did, didn't we?

-Emine: We did.

-Firat: What?

-Yusra: Home visits.

-Emine: Informing people. Brother Omer was taking us from the district; we were going to the houses of families, explaining to them: You will apply to this place for the nursing at home payment; that place for the disability pension.

-Omer: This is how the social municipality should be!

-Emine: Look, I would like to say we were doing better in the organization [of the AKP]. We are still unable to get rid of the civil servant mentality. We couldn't get rid of eight-to-five mentality [working hours: 8am-5pm].

-Yusra: You know that I am so much against it.

-Emine: On top of that, when you work from outside [working as a party member for free] we saw people asking "are you dumb/gullible [*enayi* ]?"

-Yusra: We have to destroy bureaucracy.

-Emine: We haven't destroyed it yet. I think we are not working hard enough to destroy it.

-Yusra: In order to destroy it, we have to [discard] the old staff who have that point of view...

-Emine: The old staff must be removed. They keep people busy doing nothing [*yerli yersiz insanlari ugrastiriyorlar*].

This conversation is full of condensations and constellations that capture the analytical

scaffold I am trying to build here and hints at the path towards the next section -the time of politics. To begin with, Emine's remark binds "civil servant mentality," read as bureaucracy, to Eight-Five mentality in contradistinction to political practices in which people spend their time without any return -or, better to say, any precise and calculated return. The eight-to-five mentality refers to the working hours that are precisely delimited by the welfare state, according to which workers are supposed to get their wages and receive overtime payments. In her depiction, it is apparent that one cannot do well ["we were doing better in the organization"] if only concerned with the abstract regulations that formally determine how much one should work.

I would hesitate to call this "flexibility" since it is generally understood as working on "demand" and irregular working hours.<sup>60</sup> However, Emine directs us to a radically different position. Those who have rights and entitlements, the staff from the old Turkey with job security, approach the practices conducted by the people around the AKP as signs of being not smart, being dumb, and being in fact exploited for not getting paid for the time they spend. The time that they know is a time that separates, isolates, and excludes, for which one should receive something exact in return -a definite wage. However, their way of doing things results in spending people's time for nothing, without achieving concrete results. In their formal delimitation of what should be or can be done in an office, they isolate themselves in privileged spheres, keeping people out, making people wait for nothing, and extinguishing the time and life of the poor in the interstices of the bureaucratic machinery. In contrast, Emine talks about another possibility -a possibility that one can live life, spend time, and do things without waiting in queues and wasting the time of life. In a sense, she claims, a full life is possible for the poor.

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<sup>60</sup> Certainly the literature of flexibility is massive and cannot be reduced to this sentence (Beck 2000; Standing 1999; Thomas 2009). However, the oversaturated significance of "demand" as the most conspicuous expression for "market forces," although based on completely justified analytical concerns, is distracting for the structure that I am trying to build here.

This life, she hints, translates inaction/idleness into service, abstraction/mediation into intimacy and trust, and distinction/distance into proximity. This is politics. And against the time of bureaucracy in which people get separated, isolated, and excluded, the time of politics promises gathering, association, unification, and inclusion for those who had been suspended in interstices of the old Turkey.

### **3. The Fall of Bureaucracy and the Rise of the Politics**

Many scholars, from anthropology to philosophy, show convincingly that the contemporary forms of economic relations lead to the de-politicization of the masses and the individualization of subjects whose interest in political projects has long been lost (Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Brown 2005; Castel 2009; Demmers et al. 2004; Muehlebach 2012; O’Flynn 2009). In the previous section of this chapter, I attempted to show that bureaucracy appears as a popular theme in local discussions about the failures of the 1980s and 1990s in achieving socio-economic transformation in Turkey. Rather than being a simple word, the concept bureaucracy condenses several distinct thematic usages whose relationship to the experience of time by the poor is constitutive. According to the popular distinction between the old and new Turkey, bureaucracy collocates with different stories, criticisms, and memories signifying the loss of time and life of the poor, whereas the new Turkey emerges as a new space of life within which bureaucratic mentality is being negated, and the poor can have their time unassailed. This new space/time is, on the contrary to the conviction in the literature, of politics -at least, politics as emically understood and thematized. In this section, I will follow a parallel structure by which I analyzed the popular critique of bureaucracy in order to trace the social life of politics as an answer to the failures of bureaucratic mentality. In other words, I will look at stories, memories, documents, and conversations to understand conceptual clusters corresponding to and providing



solutions for inaction/idleness, abstraction/mediation, and distinction/distance of the bureaucratic mentality of the old Turkey.

What was most striking during my fieldwork about the question of bureaucracy and the rise of politics as a response to that question was that these two concepts had been explicitly and frequently articulated by many of my informants. Their collocation in the daily usage allows me here to map corresponding thematic clusters that coalesce around these two poles: politics and bureaucracy. However, I would like to say a few things about this collocation before getting into the details of how bureaucracy and politics come together in the local context of Istanbul's poor districts. Since the very beginning of the AKP, there have been public discussions about the struggle between the party and the bureaucratic elite and its mentality. Although the critique of bureaucracy had always been a part of right-wing politics, its articulation had never attained such widespread currency and explicitness. Furthermore, what is especially new about this critique is the direct collocation of bureaucracy and politics, a gesture that openly brings these two constellations into a conflictual relationship. One of the most prominent Islamist writers, Ali Bulac, who had been a foremost supporter of the party until the recent conflict between the *Cemaat* and the AKP, gave a perfect example of this combination in 2009 to start with.

The bureaucratic center does not want to let the power go. The bureaucratic center in Turkey is composed of six key institutions: the military, civil bureaucracy, the judiciary, the rich created by the state, universities, and the majority of intellectuals. These groups have a historical alliance with each other. They are trying to hold on to the center and administrative center of the country.<sup>61</sup>

The Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Husbandry, Mehdi Eker, was following the same trajectory when explaining the success of the AKP against the bureaucratic structures and their mentality in 2013, the year I started my fieldwork.

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.nasname.com/a/demokrasinin-gelismemesinin-en-onemli-sebebi-vesayet-rejimi>

Turkey is a country which is now a lot more democratic, in which the mentality of civilians is more dominant in comparison to ten years ago. The influence of bureaucracy is remarkably weaker than ten years ago. It means bureaucracy is now under the command of the politics, under the command of the people.<sup>62</sup>

Although underlining the need to further the war of politics against bureaucracy, since the achievements were still far from conclusive, the then leader of the AKP and the Prime Minister Binali Yildirim were making similar statements in the same year.

Although, under the power of the AKP, there have been significant improvements in the relationships between the state and the people, it has not been completely possible to bend [the power of] the bureaucracy in the state. Bureaucracy still continues to direct politics from time to time. Bureaucracy makes politics dysfunctional. It brings politics into disrepute. The laws [that the bureaucracy brings on before us] are blocking our way. The law means taking initiative. The man who does not take the initiative becomes incapable to do anything. According to these laws, the task of the bureaucrat is to impose laws and to disable politics. Politics should gain more prestige.<sup>63</sup>

There is no doubt that one can find countless discrepancies between the use of the distinction bureaucracy/politics among the high strata of the party and the use of the same distinction among the poor of Istanbul. For example, most of the statements above are directed to powerful bureaucrats, military generals, and the judges in the constitutional court, rather than to workers with job guarantees or the lowest level clerks. However, my purpose is neither to follow the trajectory of conceptual distinctions and uses within the AKP nor to claim that such uses are universally accepted as valid in Turkey . I just want to underline that there is a publicly well-known relation between politics and bureaucracy, that it is political and belligerent in nature, and that the AKP and its supporters see politics as a force of people against the bureaucratic mentality that hinders the power of people by preventing them from taking action. Now, I can

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<sup>62</sup> <https://m.haberler.com/gida-tarim-ve-hayvancilik-bakani-eker-adana-da-5098003-haberi/>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-burokrasi-siyaseti-siyaset-2263256/>

start investigating the capillaries of daily life within which I had the chance to observe how and when people bring up the question of politics against the problem of bureaucracy. Thus I will follow the trajectory of the distinction in, so to speak, a horizontal manner rather than a vertical one -in a way that I focus on the synchronicity of the question, not on its diachronicity. In two senses of the term it is horizontal: First, I am not looking at the historical trajectory of the distinction, which is entirely different in terms of the methodology I employ here. Second, I am not focusing on the differentiation of the use of the distinction within the party hierarchy since I talked to only a few dozens of mid-level party members in comparison to hundreds from the lowest echelons of the party and its natural habitat during my two-year fieldwork. Let me return to Esenler District, where the AKP had a staggering 70% electoral support.

Hatice was a long time party member, responsible for the distribution of social assistance packages, with a specific focus on women under duress. Before that position, she had worked in a women's shelter operated by the district governorate, which provided a home for women whose husbands might be dangerous and threatening. At the time of our encounter, Hatice was trying to find a position in the disability services of the municipality, for she had a sister who is disabled due to a childhood disease, thus claiming to know the problems of the disabled better than most. Although she was then employed as a subcontracted worker [*disardan istihdam*] without job security, she was not applying for a position in civil service, despite the apparent chance she had thanks to her experience and connections. I was intrigued by her insistence on not being a civil servant. Notwithstanding the criticisms against the unquestionable job security and unfair social distinctions that the title civil servant connotes in daily life, many people from the party were eager to get one of those positions whose total number was dwindling and whose formal status was continuously being eroded. She explained to me that her political career is more important

than securing a position as a civil servant, making it clear that in the war between politics and bureaucracy, politics means having a capacity to do things in the world.

-Hatice: If I switch to civil servant status, I cannot officially engage in politics. Since I don't want such a thing, I am working outside, like this, with [temporary] contracts.

-Firat: But you are working here already, what advantage does politics provide for you?

-Hatice: Thanks to politics, you don't get stuck in bureaucracy. I can reach to the people who can make decisions way quicker. Now, I will go and talk to PMs next week during the iftar [the meal one breaks fasting during the Ramadan]. To do this, you need to pass countless steps in bureaucracy, but I will go and say, "I am from the AK party," from this and this neighborhood, they will say, "Please, this way." I can then say, "these are the problems people have, these are the solutions, do this and that. In fact, in the National Assembly, this is quicker. You can make law directly. I have been to Ankara, in the Grand Assembly.

-Firat: Wow, did you see people there?

-Hatice: Sure! I met with our president [Erdogan], with several PMs. About the disabled, about what we can do. We can make connections like this in politics. But bureaucracy means waiting, it makes you wait. Because no one [in bureaucracy] has to give an account of what they do (*kimse hesap vermez*). There are men in the bureaucracy who do not act without guarantees (*garantici adanlar olur burokraside*). Politics is important for this reason.

Hatice's reasoning echoes the stories of those whose life had been eroded within the interstices of bureaucratic machinery of the old Turkey, when people, especially the poor, were exposed to the endless waiting through the chains of formal relations between different offices. She offered to me an alternative way of being -a way through which one can jump over the offices and distinctions and talk to those who can take action. Unlike abstract relations of bureaucratic offices that ensure no one is really responsible for anything, she thought that the region of politics is a space within which real people can encounter, communicate, and solve problems. Since I was trying to understand what she was doing with this framework, rather than merely conveying a political discourse, I expressed my enthusiasm on the subject but indicated my suspicion if politics can ever be so direct in its practice, considering countless protocols in political meetings. She proudly went on explaining to me her latest achievement with regard to

her political capacity in bridging the distances of protocols -distances which are quite different from the hierarchical distances of bureaucratic distinctions.

In politics, I mean if it is the politics of the people, you can find infinite ways of reaching out other people. You are not bounded like that [like in bureaucracy]. In the special iftar, we prepared for the disabled, I made sure that each vice president sat at a table of a disabled person placing them throughout the hall. Thus we got rid of the protocol. Knowing this sort of things, building relationships (*iliski kurabilmek*) are very important. Are there no problems? Of course, there are. But there are also solutions. We have to express this [...] For me, politics is the obverse of bureaucracy. We have a hierarchy in politics, but somehow you can get together easily. Who was there during that night [of the iftar]? The mayor, deputy mayors, members of the municipal council, the district leader [of the party], the members of the administrative board of the district branch [of the party], women branch, youth branch, some PMs, in short, whoever I might need, they were there.

Hatice's account of politics against bureaucracy provides me with an opportunity to adumbrate the conceptual constellations around the term politics, and to understand how politics is claimed to provide a counter position against bureaucracy in social practices and discourses<sup>iv</sup>. In her explicit account of politics and critique of bureaucracy, Hatice claims that she can do things, whereas bureaucracy makes people wait. Therefore the form of action that politics promises to the masses at the margins of Istanbul is going beyond waiting and taking action. Second, the medium that enables this increase in the capacity to act is intimate interactions based on listening and talking, through which material changes in the world can be effected. While abstraction and documentation are considered a means of making people wait and consuming the life and time of the poor, politics promises immediate connections between people, thus enabling the masses to change the material world. Third, against hierarchical distances of distinction in bureaucracy, politics negates distances, gathers people to facilitate communication and intimacy, and produce proximity without equality. All together, politics would eventually enable people to make things done -whether repairing gas pipes in a neighborhood, or building a new mosque, or increasing the number of food packages in certain districts.

Against the clusters comprising the constituents of bureaucratic constellation that I have investigated in the first section –forms of action (idleness, spending time for nothing), mediums (documents, regulations, rules), and spaces (distance, visibility)-, the alternative constellations of politics around these questions provide the people at the margins of Istanbul with a distinctive experience of time: the time of politics.

*a. Acting Through Politics: Service*

The form of action that politics promises the masses in Istanbul is in stark contrast with that which bureaucracy promotes -idleness, inaction, or waiting. This contrast makes the form of action in politics seem rather obscure and indefinite, so much so that one is inclined to call it "doing anything instead of doing nothing." In fact, this formulation had been a widespread figure of speech during my encounters with the people who are politically active around the networks of the AKP. I cannot remember how many times that I was told the merits of doing something in politics, regardless of its content, rather than doing nothing. A somewhat politically disheartened inhabitant of Esenler, Aynur, articulated this position in a sarcastic manner. While talking about how the AKP did wrong to her by not giving a position that she deserved, she explained to me the essence of doing politics, as she understood.

-Aynur: As a *bayan* (miss/lady), I have organized hundreds of home talks, but the central committee in the district didn't give me [...undecipherable..]

-Firat: What do you talk about during home visits?

-Aynur: Just like what we do now, talking about politics. We talk about the thing that we have done and the things we are going to do. Sometimes we promise things that are not going to happen [laughing].

-Firat: What do you promise [laughing]

-Aynur: I mean, it is not a lie but some exaggeration.

-Firat: Wouldn't it be possible without exaggeration? Ok, but let's say, a lady who is coming to a home talk, doesn't she know that you exaggerate?

-Aynur: She does, would it be possible she doesn't? But in general, exaggerations happen.

-Firat: What would happen if you do not tell exaggerations?

-Aynur: If you don't tell [exaggerations], what are you going to do? Sitting idle? We are putting our hands under the rock in one way or another. I think this is what really matters. I mean, if something has changed [with the AKP], this is the most important one. People are doing something now [insanlar artık birseyler yapıyor]; we are not waiting anymore.

I wanted to quote this interaction because I think it illuminates a dimension that might be overlooked in Hatice's account. Hatice was explicitly articulating the shortcomings of bureaucracy and claiming that while bureaucracy makes people wait, politics enable people to take action. However, Hatice did not provide a definitive formula with respect to the form of action that politics facilitates. How can one increase one's capacity for action through politics? There are some mediums, which I will talk about later, but the basic form of action is "something," a term that captures an infinite variety of forms of action. In this sense, Aynur's point is relevant; if the formally delineated actions of bureaucratic structures cannot effect any real change in the life of the poor, doing something, without having any formal definition, is much more effective. At the end of this section, I will argue that this anti-formalist predilection is about an experience of time: what really matters for the poor at the margins of Istanbul is to spend time doing something rather than waiting and being exhausted. In a sense, politics become a form of life for the poor, through which one can live her life. As Aynur insists, it is not incomprehensible that people spend most of their time around the party networks and its activities without expecting a definite return as in the case of patron-client relationships. Doing something or doing anything is a way of making the statement that one is doing politics, and politics, unlike bureaucracy, is to take action without formal structures and delimitations. It is completely legitimate to exaggerate what the AKP is going to do, in so far as such exaggeration facilitates people coming together at the house of a party member, eating some food, inviting important people, talking about local and national politics, and thus spending time together. Accordingly, politics, as Binali Yildirim asserts in the above quote, is "taking initiative" and

"capacity to do things." However, at the end of the chapter, as a conclusion, I will question the implications for the widespread anti-formalist tendencies under the name politics and argue that they are likely to suspend laws and regulations in daily life, the consequences of which might very well be destructive for all those living in Turkey.

However, as I have indicated before, the rise of politics as the increase in the capacity of the masses to effect material change in the world does not arise as an independent phenomenon but rather takes the form of an answer to the historical collocations around the concept bureaucracy. Put it in another way, my informants had almost always related the effectivity of politics for the masses to the ineffectivity of the bureaucratic mentality and practices of the old Turkey. Remember the story told by Suleyman, who sent dozens of workers in the municipality from formally defined jobs to other departments for different positions with the conviction that the Islamist politics would produce results in real life by destroying the bureaucratic barriers of the old Turkey. He was insisting on his point that in order to "serve" people, the party (the AKP's predecessor) needs to do whatever it takes -mostly meaning the dismantlement of formal structures in order to facilitate taking actions. In complete accordance with the shift from a Fordist economy to a Post-Fordist one<sup>64</sup>, Suleyman was telling me that the bureaucratic structure of the old Turkey, embodied in the figure of the worker/civil servant with job security (*memur* or *kadrolu isci*), was responsible for most of the sufferings of the poor. Stable, secure, and well-paying formal jobs were being associated with "talks," "inaction," and "idleness" -a set of characteristics that makes people wait and exhausts their lives and time of the poor. Exactly in this context, the term "service" has gained widespread currency, signifying a form of politics that

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<sup>64</sup> For a good compilation of studies on Post-Fordism, see Ed. Amin 1994. For a trenchant critique of the term, although I don't think that it is valid in my case, see Dunn 2004. For a research that shows the relevancy of the concept through painstaking attention to data sets, although within the limits of the regulation approach, see Koch 2006.



produces results in real life in contrast to bureaucratic structures of the previous period<sup>65</sup>.



Figure 27: Continuous Service, Continuous Development!  
We have never left anything incomplete or halfway. We have never postponed today's work to tomorrow.  
We have finished every task we undertook.  
/We provided continuous service  
Through the power we derived from the people, we became the servants of the people  
/We have been thinking about tomorrow as well as today  
We have been lightening the way towards Turkey's future.  
Our Job is to Serve; Our Power is the People  
(Cağlar et al., 2015: 32)

The above poster is from the local elections in 2009. It exemplifies the significance of the concept "service" that captures the meaning and uses of the term politics among the poor of Istanbul. Politics can frequently be used coextensive with "service" and stands in stark contrast to bureaucracy. Politics as service does not provide us with a definite content as to what can be counted as service. In this sense, it is different than the promises of politics in the old Turkey, in which "opening factories," "creating factory jobs," "increasing civil servants' wages," or "supporting the peasant" had particular validity in the public sphere (Duman and Peksen 2013; Ozkan 2004; Tekeli 1983), This does not mean that the concept "service" excluded the productive dimensions of a national economy as a matter of course but rather it captured something more dynamic, flexible, and indeterminate that fitted well with the formations of

<sup>65</sup> For the significance of service sector in Post-Fordist times, see McDowell 2009. For the meaning of the term "service" (hizmet) in Islamist circles, although the book was financed by the notorious Islamic community "Cemaat," the organization whose cooperation with the AKP came to an end before the coup d'état, see Walton 2015. Walton defines the term as follows: "hizmet (khidma) demands the integration of all actions in accordance with a comprehensive, altruistic piety oriented toward the fulfillment of divine service in this world" (44).

economic relations in the new Turkey. I have already noted that corruption as a social problem had a particularly increased circulation in the public sphere at the beginning of the neoliberal reformation in the Turkish economy. It was enhanced in the sense that although corruption has been a problem in Anatolia since the 16th century, at the very moment of the radical economic transformation in the 1980s and 1990s, the term gained a social and political momentum (also see Bedirhanoglu 2007). The state-owned factories had been perceived as unproductive economic units vacuuming public resources, civil servants as selfish individuals who could do anything for bribery but nothing for public services, and municipalities as the institutions primarily responsible for the failures of infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity, etc.). Starting with municipal elections, the rise of Islamist mobilization took place in such a setting, promising a material change in the life of the poor and putting an end to the exploitive tutelage of the secularist bureaucracy. The term "service" [*hizmet*], connoting the Islamist conviction that man is the "servant" of Allah and bound to serve its path (*dava*) rather than his personal and egotistic inclinations, began to be widely used by Islamists as a promise to change the life of the poor from abandonment and exclusion to empowerment and inclusion.

However, unlike the welfare projects and developmentalist plans, or neoliberal insistence on the privatization of the public sector, "service" is a product of mass mobilization as is clear in the motto of the party, "Our Job is to Serve, Our Power is the People." According to the formulation, serving people require politically mobilizing people and incorporating them into "continuous service." When telling me that "[P]eople are doing something now [*insanlar artik birseyler yapiyor*], we are not waiting anymore," Aynur was trying to bring my attention to this dimension. This is the reason why service and politics can be used coextensively in many different settings. Only through political mobilization around a party, can service emerge. Doing

politics is serving the people.

In this sense, politics as service is different than both the global neoliberal project and the models of the welfare state. It is a critique of the welfare state in positing bureaucratic formalities and rationalities as the root cause of the exhaustion of the poor's life and time. Nevertheless, it is not an appropriation of neoliberalism *in toto*, for the critique of bureaucracy is folded over the questions of isolation, individualization, and distinction. The vehement attacks on bureaucratic abstraction and its formal distancing are in apparent contradiction with the figure of neoliberal subject that formally calculates its interests for individualistic projects (Cooper 2017; Cruikshank 1999; Davies 2014; Dean 1994; Foucault 2008; McNay 2009; Rose 2008; Walters 2012). The form of action that politics promotes, which I think best captured by the popular term "service," is a collective practice that requires the masses being organized around the party, engaged in social and political activities, and working as a "servant" whose personal self-interest is secondary to the interests of the masses. What is really distinctive in the rise of "service" in Turkey, considering its religious connotations, is that popular criticisms of job security and welfare policies are associated with the processes of individualization, isolation, and distinction. In other words, the critique of the welfare state incorporates a critique of neoliberalism to a certain extent. The claimed ineffectiveness of the welfare state project, with job guarantees, workers' idleness, and overloaded staffs, does not necessarily lead to a normative neoliberal trajectory that suggests an increase in human capital, proliferation of experts, or emphasis on "personal development." On the contrary, these themes were welded into the decrepitude of the old Turkey together with bureaucracy, abstraction, and social distinction. In a sense, the critique of bureaucratic formalism starts to colonize neoliberal policies, their effects, and their mediums. Expert knowledge, primacy of individuals, property rights, apolitical professionalism are some of

the themes subjected to criticism by the political mobilization around the AKP networks. Consequently, politics rise as an alternative to both neoliberalism and the welfare state and thus brings its own special modalities of action. Instead of abstraction and mediation, it promotes intimacy and trust relations. Instead of hierarchical distances of distinction, politics serve people in the space of proximity and social gathering. Let me continue with the medium of politics, after which I will talk about the space of politics.

*b. Mediums of Politics: Intimacy and Trust*

As I have quoted our interaction in Chapter 2, Mustafa, the chief of a career center in an AKP municipality, explained to me his understanding of the distinction between the old Turkey and the new one, between politics and bureaucracy. "For us," he said, "politics means blending in people (*halkin icine girmek*). For a man who comes here, being listened to is the most important thing. To be treated like a human being, it is what people want. Humanity has finally entered the municipality!" Although his account was overdramatic, it was one of the many examples that underline the significance of personal interaction over bureaucratic documentation and formalities. Those accounts generally draw attention to the incapacity of abstraction in capturing the specificities of life and to the immense capacity of politics in solving problems, providing service, and engaging people in social and political networks. "Listening" and "touching" are most common verbs that are used by the people around the networks of the AKP in order to explain how the political acts of the AKP differ from the bureaucratic tradition of the old Turkey. While the circulation of documents based on abstract relations between offices in the bureaucratic machinery was consuming the poor's life and time by making them wait indefinitely, politics makes people spend their time in interactions. "Touching the people" or "listening to the people" invokes this interactive dimension that promises the masses the change

that they had been waiting for a long time before the rise of Islamist politics. Suleyman, who sent dozens of workers in the municipality to different tasks and different departments, explained to me that such intimacy is necessary for doing things in the world. Let me use the quote from our conversation once more:

As soon as I got the position I went to the workers, sat on a table in the teahouse of the department, drunk tea and started to converse with the workers. Everyone was surprised. They had never seen the manager before. He was that distant, that unrelated. Orders come; there is a signature on the paper. Can someone be a mere signature? When we won the elections, the first thing that we did was intimacy. I will put these men into work; I will make them work. If they do not know me, how can I ask them to do something? We needed spiritual/immaterial connection, not a material one. We had 300 people in Kagithane. I was keeping a record of all their private lives, the sick in their families, disabled ones, their fights, their broken hearts... I was then keeping a log of every small detail.

I did not have the chance to see that small notebook that he used to record the details of the workers in the municipality, but our conversations over two years showed me how he was conceiving those intimate moments as constitutive in changing the material world. Without face-to-face contact, as he constantly used the word "touching the people," papers circulate between offices without effecting any change. The conviction that interpersonal communication, based on listening and touching rather than signing and delegating, was shared by most of my interlocutors who insisted that documents are rather limited and limiting means in understanding the conditions of the life of the masses. Fatma, a social worker at the disability department (called *Engelliler Sarayi*, the Palace of the Disabled) in Bagcilar Municipality, compared these two systems, bureaucratic and political, in order to make clear to me how politics is capable of transcending formal characteristics of bureaucratic structures.

When I started to work first in the AK Party, they were criticizing me. 'People spend three minutes at other party members' desks, but they do not leave yours in ten minutes.' they were saying. I told them this: 'It is not that I don't do anything. When this person

comes, s/he asks about the disability pensions. But tomorrow she will ask about the wheelchair provision; I keep her/him to tell all these things at once. When I see this person's medical report, I ask him/her if s/he gets home care provision.' [...] I need to know this person here. We learn much. Now, you [plural: those who do bureaucratic jobs] ask questions to these people, do a survey, but we talk to these people, just as you [singular: Firat] do here. During our conversations, we learn unexpected things, things no one would predict. I send him/her to employment desk, to psychologists, or to home care department. And also, there is another thing. These people are overwhelmed [*bunalmis*]. They have serious problems. Our job is to listen. I mean, we are the best to listen, to help them get relief. This means service. I mean, it is not necessarily a bureaucratic thing: you will do this, do that. No, it is more than that. If you ask these people questions, like in the mentality of the old state [the old Turkey], only within three minutes; no, it would not work. They would feel valueless; they would not feel belonging here. I mean if we say that we are the ones for those who have no one [the party's motto], we have to substantiate the claim.

Fatma's account articulates a different sense of time than waiting in the old bureaucratic Turkey. Spending time with the poor, asking them personal questions, drinking tea with them, engaging in personal interactions are ways of making them "feel belonging here," *here* being the name of the party, local community, district, and country simultaneously. Thus, spending more time is not spending the time of the poor, which is considered abrasive and destructive, but spending time together and building intimate relations that would solve problems and be effective in the real world. Life cannot be abstracted in documents; exceptions, particularities, or peculiarities, in short, what Fatma calls "things that no one would expect," dominate life. Bureaucratic formalities and regulations are impediments to understanding this complexity and making apt interventions. Suleyman's insistence that "we need spiritual/immaterial [*manevi*] connection" is exactly related to this point. Workers do not work for a bureaucratic entity, or what Suleyman calls "a mere signature." Bureaucratic structures, based on abstract distinctions, produce vast distances between people, -distances and crevices within which the poor lose their time and life, and workers with job security lay idly without doing anything. That is why it was a problem that the workers had not seen the face of the previous manager, and that is why

Suleyman started his post by having regular and intimate conversations with the workers.

Knowing the details of the workers' life, from their marital problems to health issues, facilitates communication between people so as to effectively serve the masses who had been abandoned before the rise of the Islamist movement. Only if people feel like they are being listened to, being touched (in a sense, if they feel belonging somewhere), can they act and change the world.

Infrastructure projects, social services, and economic development ("Continuous Service, Continuous Development!") are based on intimate associations between people, which can only be achieved by politics.

What is the practical consequence of such political associations? What kind of help does intimacy around political networks provide? There are several dimensions of politics that are crucial for the life of the poor, but to understand this, we can focus on the use of the word "trust," which is almost always associated with intimacy and politics. According to this popular framework, intimacy and personal interactions produce services for the people and the material change in the country because the trust that the political movement of the AKP provides for its members facilitates actions in the world. In other words, the AKP networks provide people with the possibility for intimate interactions; such interactions produce trust among the people (the poor, party members, and workers around the networks of the party); and trust facilitates actions in the world. Although the social scientific literature insists on the capacity of documents to stabilize representations and communication, people around the AKP see an obverse relationship between documents of bureaucratic structures and the ability to effect changes in the world. During one of his frequent visits to Bagcilar municipality, an old cadre of the Islamist movement in Kagithane, Abdullah, once explained to me this connection in rather a succinct manner.

Now in your university, I don't know whether you support the CHP [secular People's

Republican Party], those university students, those who are called "*Gezici*" [protesters in Gezi Park], they ask how Erdogan's son has made such a fortune, how his family has become rich. Since these CHP supporters don't have *manevi* [immaterial/spiritual] powers, since they are selfish, they think everyone is like them. They think that everyone thinks only himself; they live like that. Look at their parties or businesses. Everyone thinks of himself, so they work against each other [*birbirinin altini oyar*]. They can do business only through documents and bonds [*senetle, belgeyle is yaparlar*]. Why? You cannot trust those people, that is why. How can you trust them? He attacks you from behind. This is the old civil servant mentality; you should do everything with a signature, with documents. [...] However, our people trust each other. If I put this glass here, they know that that glass remains there. [...] If a man fears Allah, he does not do wrong. [...] What was I saying? Bilal Erdogan [Erdogan's son]. He has ships; he made them from zero. Of course, he can! I would also give him money if I could. I could be a business partner with him. Because I know him, there would be no harm from him. [...]

Abdullah's point is clear. If people do not trust each other, transactions between them cannot take place easily. This is not exclusive to business and commerce, but also inherently related to social services and other political activities in the form of communication, which can be conceived as a particular version of transaction (Rothschild 2001, 240). The politics of the AKP provides people with intimacy and trust and thus enables them to take actions. While the formal capacity of abstraction in bureaucratic documentations can be extended ad infinitum and thus making concrete changes harder and harder, intimacy and trust that the AKP movement provides enable people to act without thinking all the details and particularities of situations. In fact, in a similar fashion to the ambiguous legal concept Good Faith [*bona fides*] (Zimmermann and Whittaker, 2000), Abdullah insists that documents cannot capture the infinite richness of life and only religiously oriented projects (the AKP) can ensure the trust and faith that might remove the friction of the modern self. With the suspension of self-interest, both "development" and "service" become possible for the masses in Turkey. People can receive service thanks to Suleyman's forcing workers to work in the departments that their formal job descriptions do not include. Likewise, people can make fortunes, like Erdogan's son, if they are known as reliable people, because then they can find trust-worthy business partners. In a sense, material change



can happen through immaterial qualities that the politics of the AKP promotes. While documents and abstractions were producing distance between people, thus making interactions more difficult and ineffective, political intimacy and trust facilitate actions by bringing people together and making them belong "here" [the AKP]. This belonging, unlike hierarchical distances of distinction in the old bureaucratic Turkey, gathers people together. This is the space of politics.

*c. The Space of Politics: Proximity*

At the beginning of the second section of this chapter, I used two quotations from Hatice, showing how she understands the distinction between bureaucracy and politics, and how she uses politics to achieve certain ends. For her, the immediacy of politics produces more effective and timely solutions to the problems of the poor, surpassing the limits of bureaucracy whose effectivity is curbed by endless formal mediations. Rather than waiting for a possible response from the bureaucratic machinery, she used political relations to reach people, organize them, and convince those who have the power to take action. In this sense, her strategy of bringing people together was bridging the barriers of bureaucratic distinctions, as she says, "I made sure that each vice president sits in a table of the disabled, spreading them all over the hall. Thus we got rid of the protocol." Across the AKP networks, from partisans to sympathizers, this characteristic of politics had continuously been foregrounded during my interactions. Nearly all *muhtars*, for example, had a photo in which a small group of *muhtars* stands around President Erdogan, thus proudly indicating that there are interpersonal relations between everyone in the AKP.



Figure 28: Muhtars posing next to President Erdogan.

This emphasis on the proximity of party members is especially apparent in one of the popular sayings of the Islamists "*ustunluk takvadadir*," meaning superiority is in piety. The statement should not be confused with a socialist or communist sentimentality<sup>66</sup> since it rather designates social similarity and proximity, not economic, social, or political equality. In Chapter 2, I investigated how a discourse of radical egalitarianism emerges as a possibility at the fringes of social life when people around the AKP question the uneven distributions of social and economic positions across the party networks. Some of the encounters that I had the opportunity to witness indicated that people use intimacy and self-negation as a departure point for the critique of how the AKP distributes resources. The formulation in that analysis basically states, "if we are all equal as absolute subjects to Allah, and the only distinction is the distinction in

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<sup>66</sup> Yet, there have been some small groups in Turkey that aim to establish the connection between Islamic equality and socialist project, although without much success. See Ozdogan and Akkoc 2013.

piety, why do some people get jobs while others don't?" In the sphere of politics, such immanent frictions also happen, but I want to focus on what kind of space politics opens against the memories of bureaucratic Turkey. So let me start with an example from our interaction with Fatma. After we had one of our daily conversations in the Palace of the Disabled, she invited me to a committee meeting in the AKP branch in Bagcilar District, comprising nine people. Together with Metin, Fatma was a sort of leader in the group, whose expertise on the subject made her opinions more authoritative and directive than the others.

Metin: If the AK Party withdraws from politics, or someone else [from other parties] becomes the prime minister or the president, we will return to the previous stages. That is what I see.

Fatma: But we have gained something, the shyness and passivity of our people are gone. In the old times, people were saying, "I should not be cross with this person [*aman ters dusmeyeyim*], should not make this person angry. However, people are much more comfortable today. They can go and scold the district governor [*kaymakama firca atabilyorlar*]<sup>67</sup>. They came to understand that the other is also a subject of Allah; no one is superior to the other. Could we speak up before, for God's sake? We can now speak up!

Firat: This is very important what you said.

Sedat: Of course, the district governor comes and joins our programs, it was not like this before... "The District Governor" will come and join our program! They would not condescend to participate in the programs prepared by the common people or their NGOs. Many things have changed in Turkey. I mean the citizens gained confidence/trust [*vatandasa bir guven geldi yani*], there is confidence among the people, it was not there before.

Kasim: Yes, there was this thing before: if I complain about a civil servant [*memur*], he will not serve me later on. As if this is something his personal affair. Who is that person? Allah? Who is he? He is a subject of Allah like you and me. He is a weakling maybe; maybe if you hit him, you can put him down. But when he sat down that chair, he is a sultan. This is over now. Everyone is the same. Now we chastise the mayor!

Fatma: We should not be that overconfident, be in a selfish position asking for everything. There are extreme examples among us. We have to balance them. People may want things unrelated to the person in question. For example; "my president [to the mayor], find me a girl to marry!" "My president, my disability pension has been suspended!"<sup>68</sup> These are not related to what we do here.

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<sup>67</sup> Throughout my fieldwork, I had witnessed many encounters that common people could harshly criticize and even publicly rebuke persons in power. Having said that, my observations convinced me that such actions were only possible for certain groups of people: old men, old women, mothers, and the disabled.

<sup>68</sup> Her statement underlines the fact that it is not the mayor who can do something about disability pensions but administrators in Social Security Institution.

This interaction perfectly illustrates how the popular understanding of politics puts intimacy and trust (the mediums of politics) into spatial register. People who occupy the positions of power should now be available to come and go, to participate in organizations prepared by the local people, and blend in among locals, as Hatice arranged the seats for a meeting in an adjacent district meeting, Esenler. The logic is not that of one-way function, though. It is the responsibility of powerful people to respond to the local demands for gatherings as much as the capacity of the local people to have the mobility to go and see the people in power. The photos of Erdogan in “every” Muhtar’s office are special tokens, reminding people of this capacity to come together and bring together. Exactly in contrast to bureaucracy's keeping people apart and isolated, politics promises a congregation of people, a capacity that can make real changes in the world. This promise had come before me so many times that I cannot exhaust my data on the point. But one time was special. It was from my close relationship with an unusual partisan.

During my fieldwork, I came to know Declan Yusuf; a devout AK party member coming from Cameroon, living in a house for which he was in arrears, claiming that he was a student, without a student visa, and not infrequently asking for monetary assistance from the party and municipality. We met through some party members who asked my help to translate what he says, for he was able to speak fluent English. Yusuf and the other party members had been communicating with each other before my arrival, but since people in the district were rarely proficient in English, their communication was slow and rather simple. Despite the apparent linguistic disadvantages he had, Yusuf was accepted as a part of the movement and was an active member throughout his stay, which had to be ended in 2016 with his return to Cameroon for family reasons. It was thus possible to see Yusuf at many party activities: at music concerts,

panels on religion, local party congresses, iftar meals, Friday sermons, and so on. My friends in the municipality and the party were especially eager to bring us together so they could communicate faster and in a more detailed manner.

I immediately understood why people loved Yusuf. He had a charming personality, was full of positive energy and passion for his political activities. He called people from the party his "AK party friends." I didn't want to question his sincerity or intention in any way. Yusuf was the Muslim name that he picked up for himself, despite his claim that he came from a Muslim family in Cameroon. He did not perform prayers correctly, but party people attributed that to rather weak religious education in his home country. He was constantly asking for some form of assistance: food packages, cloths, rent assistance, monetary assistance, or temporary jobs. He was practically making a living while working for and living around the activities of the AKP. I never questioned how sincere he was in his political engagement, but he had a grand plan for which he was asking my help.

I never learned what was the core of that grand plan. He was saying to me that if he were to reveal the message before it's due, the whole endeavor would go to waste. His plan was as follows. Being impressed by the way "the AK Party people" do politics in Kucukcekmece, he wanted to bring together political leaders of the district, Istanbul, and Turkey so he could deliver his message, which would change the world -a message that God had prepared for him and the others. To this end, he wrote a letter in English so I could translate it into polished Turkish. He was hoping that with the help of the people in the local party branch, he could reach Erdogan and the other people mentioned in the letter. Bringing together politicians from each scale, from the lowest to the highest, seemed to him a possible course of action.

His letter was interesting, to say the least. Declan was using a formal bureaucratic language

that I was unable to see in similar letters written by local people. He was using "the almighty God" rather than "Allah," which people in Turkey consider inappropriate in general. He was quoting Mitterrand, hailing Erdogan and saying "un seule mot, continués!"

Since I came under your political concept of democratic government (AK parti) I am overwhelmed with joy the way you exercise your political activities towards the people of your nation Turkey. Namely

1. You have made the people to understand the secret of being happy is doing thing for other people. This has been demonstrated in so many events you have carry out e.g. the center to careters for under previledge in the society (humanitarians works) just to name the few)
2. That we find our own sense of peace, we contributes towards the goals of the whole.
3. That the greatest thing to embrace in life is the love and affection you impact on others.

[This is a facsimile of his letter. For a copy of the whole letter, see the appendix]

His letter cannot be conceived as an ideal type in the Weberian sense since both the language and content show an extreme eclecticism, reminding the reader of a combination of Christian missionary rhetoric, political Islam, and postcolonial culture. But this does not change the fact that Yusuf had grasped two things essential for the political mobilization that the AKP sustains in Istanbul. First, "continuous services" provide people a life of dense social networks in which many people, from the poorest households to a Cameroonian without documents, can find themselves a place. Second, it is imaginable to bring people together, from the lowest party member to the highest figures. Unlike the bureaucratic organization of the old Turkey, within which even the lowest level civil servant would not listen to a poor citizen, the AKP promises infinite possibilities for the masses to come together with those who have power -local party members, neighborhood leaders, districts leaders, Istanbul PMs, ministers, and the president. Yusuf failed to bring those people together. But he insisted that I help him in his attempt. And I did everything that I could do, albeit with a lack of faith.

What really amazed me was that his "AK Party people" also helped him a lot in

coordinating different people within the party for this congregation in which Yusuf was claiming to reveal God's message to Erdogan and the others. They were never heavily invested in the affair, but many people didn't understand my confusion about how Yusuf would think that such a union is possible in the first place. I was constantly hearing, "it is not impossible, but given the political situation right now, they would not have time for this." Even a young member of the party, Kerem, made a joke, changing the motto of the party, "other people talk, Yusuf does!" I think that their taking Yusuf's request not as a crazy idea but, although very hard, a possible one is closely related to what they understand of the concept of politics, the conceptual constellations this concept correlates like a family resemblance, and its grammatical relationship with the popular understanding and critique of bureaucracy. Politics opens a space of proximity that everyone can come together throughout political networks and through political connections. For another example, Mevlut, another neighborhood leader, boasting to me about his political tactfulness, invited me to hang out with him to observe how real politics should be done at the grassroots.

I can bring the men at the top... here... today! Mr. Hasim! I can bring the top and bottom together. I can do that which cannot be done. Everyone says, "it is impossible, no one can do that!" But they would be amazed!

He never clarified what he means by "impossible," but considering our time together, he was talking about things like a problem in gas provision, pavement restoration, social assistance, finding a job for a person in stress, or organizing a talk or meeting in his neighborhood. However, the kind of agency he was seeing in doing such things, making small changes in everyday life, was comparable to miracles in his understanding, indicating a jump in the capacity of the ordinary people to make a change in the world, from infinite waiting within the quagmire of bureaucracy to endless possibilities in politics. Although he thought he was particularly tactful

in politics, he was showing me what could really be done through politics so I could spread his knowledge with my institutional connections. This was, according to his understanding, the change the AKP represents for the masses. By breaking down bureaucratic structures and by destroying formalist practices of the previous period, it is assumed, a political space emerges as that within which people can communicate and take action to solve their problems by dint of anti-formalist practices. Trust and intimacy emerges as the major registers of action and thus allowing people to "by-pass" bureaucratic procedures. Within the anti-formalist space of politics, where the abstract distinctions between people vanish, or at least get attenuated, people can come together, coordinate, communicate, and thus act in the real world and effect certain changes.

*d. The Time of Politics: A Full Life?*

In the last part of the previous section, in which I studied the conceptual constellations around the question of bureaucracy, I claimed that the constitutive themes for the popular critique of bureaucracy are the form of action (idleness and inaction), the medium of action (abstraction and documentation), and the space of action (distinction and distance) and that these thematic clusters gravitate towards a common conceptual register that we can call "the time of bureaucracy." I asserted that the question of time crosscuts nearly all instantiations of the popular critique of bureaucracy and it incorporates both a critique of the welfare state, in line with the global neoliberal doctrine, and a critique of the neoliberal project, in an unexpected way. While the working hours of the Fordist production style and the guarantees of Welfare State are turning into objects of public criticism, the figure of entrepreneurial self, the protagonist of neoliberal project, has been attacked on the name of another agential potentiality that the political networks of the AKP has been propagating at the margins of Istanbul.

What I have been doing throughout this chapter is to chart the uses of the critique of



bureaucracy in making sense of political activities in the poor neighborhoods of Istanbul. To put it in a simplified manner, while the time of bureaucracy means continuous separation, isolation, and exclusion of people the time of politics brings people together, associates, includes, and build trust relations through which people can do what they could not in the old Turkey's bureaucratic maze. Confirming Mevlut's claim that he can act as a mediator between the lowest and the highest, a senior party member, Recai, narrated this comparison in a compact manner.

Now here, and Istanbul, the change began with the Welfare Party and they wanted to spread [the change] all over Turkey in 1997, but they were stopped forcefully; I mean until the coming of the AKP. That is the reason why municipality services developed first. Everyone started to receive service from their own neighborhoods. If there were a leftist party here instead of the AKP<sup>69</sup>, we would not have received such services. For example, I said, before Ramadan, "there are awnings in the courtyards of all mosques, why don't ours have one?" I immediately gave a call to our Mevlut, may Allah bless them, they took care of it immediately. I mean, we have a system of work (*calisma sistemimiz var*). The most important thing is that what you say reaches [to others] (*en onemli sey soyledigin sey in ulasmasi*).

This account hinges on several themes that constitute the major points in my analysis: service is the term that designates the changes in the life-world of the poor in an undetermined, unformatted way; immediacy is a distinctive feature in the AKP's providing people with service; the old Turkey (leftist, secular, the CHP) was incompetent in achieving such ends; the people around the AKP networks have "a system of work" that relies on trustable relaying of accounts rather than abstraction and documentation. Immediacy is especially important in marking the distinction between the old Turkey and the new one in that the formal mediations of bureaucratic abstraction can be overcome through political networks in order to achieve results -even a simple result like installing awnings to provide shadow for Muslims. The old Turkey was unable to achieve those effects since the defining characteristic of the period was the disdain for the

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<sup>69</sup> Bagcilar had been a part of Bakirkoy district until 1992. Being a neighborhood populated by educated middle classes and civil servants, Bakirkoy was a relatively progressive district, with certain tendencies for leftist politics, thus continuously electing mayors from secular, mid-left political parties (the CHP).

common people and the ways in which they live their lives and their religion. Excluding the masses, what is called "the people," did not achieve anything promised such as modernity, development, or wealth but only perpetuated the rule of the elite, who had been after their self-interest, and nothing else. The figure of the civil servant signifies this history, articulating themes like isolation, selfishness, distance, contempt and suchlike. Being obsessed with only his or her position in the hierarchy of bureaucracy, the figure of the civil servant reminds people around the AKP of the limited working hours in the welfare state and Fordist period, during which the masses had been deprived of many of their basic rights -water, gas, health, sheltering, prayer, or food. A party member in the district organization of Bagcilar, Samet, whose responsibility was to coordinate several neighborhood leaders, explained to me why the time of politics differ from the time of bureaucracy while talking about why those who work for the municipality should not consider working hours as a binding framework.

If we are talking about the municipality in particular, but also relevant for politics in general, there is this fact: you cannot think of service as a business [*is yeri*] or as a job. You should think here as a part of your family; the intimacy is the key. And more importantly, this is not a job; people here must be aware of the *dava* (*dava bilincinde olacaklar*). The AK Party is too big now, and it may not be possible to expect the same intimacy from everyone. But this dedication to the *dava* keeps the movement strong. That is the reason why passionate members are so valuable. [...] When this is the case [the person is a partisan], s/he would not run away from responsibility. If I call him at 11 at night, he would come to the help of the municipality, work for the party. I mean, he would not think like a professional. For example the CHP. They say they are against immaterial values (*maneviyata karsiyim der*), they are against religion, but what do they do? He goes to the party, only when he needs to. Those people are comfortable in general (*tuzu kuru olurlar*). They do not know the sufferings of the previous period. Much more in the mentality of civil servants: from 8 to 5. But we listen to every kind of man here, millions of different problems, trying to provide solutions. That is why you cannot say, 'it is 5. My job is done here.'

Samet's and Mevlut's accounts show that the popular conception of time in politics differ in substantial ways from the time of bureaucracy in that politics refuses delimitation of time according to abstract rules and formal regulations, and it demands a complete immersing oneself

into the relations across the AKP's networks. The term immediacy, as many of my informants were continuously using during my fieldwork, signifies this immersing: people associated with the party, whether employed in a municipality or a politically active party member in the neighborhood, should be able to respond the call whenever or wherever it comes. Only with this reflexive immediacy, i.e., the capacity to respond to the demands of the people simultaneously and without mediation, is politics capable of transforming the material world -even if it is only a matter of awnings.

What does this immersion mean? The critique of bureaucracy draws a picture for the people around the AKP networks within which the welfare state provisions and Fordist modalities of work result in failures of material change in the world. Within the interstices of the old Turkey, the time and lives of the poor were coming to a grinding halt, people dying in queues, scars emerging on wrists, or houses hopelessly waiting for electricity and water. The only way to provide service for the masses was then to abrogate the distinction between work and life, the superior and the subordinate, politics and quotidian. The figure of the partisan who would wake up at night to go help the people for the sake of *dawa* is not a contingent figure that appears to entice people but a model that makes sense for the poor in Istanbul. This model combines the work required for the material change and the time desired for life into a continuous form that allows people to wake up at night and run to the help of their friends in *dawa*. This is the same conception of time, unfragmented time, that allows Yusuf to imagine that he can bring together the highest and the lowest or Fatma to spend more than ten minutes with the poor to build intimacy and touch them. The time of politics thus replaces 8-5 with 24 hours, a fragmented time and life with a continuous one.

This continuous time, however, should not be conceived only in terms of work but in its

totality. Across the networks of the AKP, there are not only works to be done but also continuous social activities including mosque visits, travels to outside of the city, daily conversations in the municipality, drinking tea together in a party branch, football games, political congresses in Ankara, internet connection in the party building and so many other social gatherings. This is exactly the point. It is the capacity to condense the material efficacy and daily life into a continuum that allows the AKP to mobilize people through political networks. While the neoliberal agenda was pushing toward a to flexible labor force, the dismantling of scale economies, and the reorganization of production through subcontracts, scholars and political activists assumed that the political character of mass movements would also be dissolved in the process, leaving behind individuals who are struggling to increase their individual "human capital" in order to endure in the precarious world of neoliberal order. Few people asked what is happening to those who do not have much chance to invest in their human capital since they do not have any prospect to be competitive in the brave new world (Sanyal 2007). The rise of politics that the AKP represents in Turkey is a poignant answer to that question: the poor can have a life as long as that life coincides with politics. Hence the rise of politics derives its propulsion from the failures of the welfare state as well as the failures of the neoliberal project when the masses don't have much hope of inclusion in any conceivable future. Political mobilization thus promises the masses the material changes that they have been expecting since the 1980s, without abandoning the hope for the inclusion of the masses<sup>v</sup>.

Thus the time that people spend around the party networks condenses several registers, combining forms, mediums, and spaces of political actions, and pitting this politics against the constellation of themes around the concept "bureaucracy." During this process, I argue, there emerges the time of politics within which the poor in Istanbul can live their lives through getting

together, associating with each other, and effecting material changes in the world. From the perspective of the poor, this represents a massive increase in one's capacity to take action in life. Being able to claim that one "can do that which cannot be done," as Mevlut announced to me, is just one of the many examples. However, the members of the youth branch in the party may be the best examples for the illustration of this time of politics and the increase in the capacity to take action. Many young members, during our conversations, drew my attention to the significant changes in their families' approaches to the time that they spend outside.

Before my joining to the AK party, my family would not even allow me to go to the foundation in Aksaray, now I can spend the whole day outside, even until the late nights. My family knows that I am working for the party. They trust the party, and it is the most important thing. (Cemile, 19)

Here our younger friends are coming from poor households. They made a survey here a few years ago; it says "70% of people in Esenler have not seen the Bosphorous yet." I think it was before our activities here. We arrange many travels and visits. These are really important. You can only understand when you see the faces of those people when they see Bosphorous, or when they see Canakkale, or when they see the Green Mosque in Bursa. Those people change thanks to our visits, they work here in the party wholeheartedly. This is something immaterial/spiritual (*manevi*). Once s/he feels the attachment (*bir kez baglandi mi*), once s/he sees our intimacy, I don't think anyone can break off. (Hakan, 28)



Figure 29: The youth branch is on their way to Canakkale

Firat: Does your family have any problem with you going out of the city?

Dilek: My family would not even let me stay in front of our apartment after the evening prayer! Now I can go to Ankara, Canakkale, Bursa, Konya, everywhere. But they know that this is not a personal thing, I mean, I don't travel for the sake of my pleasure (keyfinden gezmiyorum ki). Our family is the lover of the AK party (AK parti asigidir), they trust Erdogan. (Dilek, 22)

These accounts are just a few examples that attest to how the political mobilization around the AKP increases the capacity of people, young people in these cases, to act in terms of space and time. While they can travel to the places that they would not imagine going without their families, they can also spend enormous amount of time across the networks of the party as a legitimate way of living one's life. My argument is that the possibility of such a life cannot emerge as an autonomous form that is based on universal propensities of human beings, much in line with liberal thought, or as a reclaim on tradition, which provides a historical sedimentation of discursive practices that provide people with a way of virtuous being. To put it another way, the expansion of life sphere and the increase in the capacity to act are not natural processes of economic and social “development” of Turkish society. Such expansions and increases are also not parts of “discursive tradition,” a la Asad et al., signifying “a recuperation of a set of traditional practices” (Mahmood 2005, 116). Far from both options, the political life in the margins of Istanbul could only emerge as a response to contemporary problems by building conceptual and practical constellations that correspond both to a contemporary understanding of historicity (critique of bureaucracy) and to an ontology of the present (partial critique of neoliberalism). In other words, the rise of politics is an ontological answer in that all practices and discourses about the constellations of bureaucracy and politics refer to the question of efficacy, i.e., the capacity to effect changes in the real world. This is the reason why all the encounters that I had the chance to observe associate the distinction between bureaucracy and politics with the failures of the old Turkey and the successes of the new one. The use of

"politics" and the use of "bureaucracy" can only be understood in relation to this popular conception of the shift from the old Turkey to the new one.

Throughout the chapter, I tried to illuminate how this popular conception of the shift selectively appropriates the critique of the welfare state and the critique of the neoliberal agenda. In many different contexts, social scientists have convincingly showed that the crisis of the welfare state and the following economic and political transformations produce certain consequences whose "family relations" might be best captured by the term neoliberalism: the increasing significance of expertise, whose knowledge is a source of authority and whose characteristics are immensely distant from the common people; human capital as a new source for individuals to endure in neoliberal precarity; individualization processes that erode collective identities and movements; and the concomitant depoliticization that posits every problem as isolated, individual issues which can be solved only by expertise and not by collective mobilizations. These are undoubtedly the most common forms that the clash between the crisis of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal agenda takes. However, I believe we should not confuse the phenomenal forms that this clash takes with the clash itself. In other words, although financial liberalization, deregulation of labor markets, or regressive taxation policies might produce these "neoliberal" forms, these forms are not neoliberalism itself. Some policies might result in very different modalities of being and action: intimacy instead of expertise, self-negation instead of individualization, or political mobilization instead of apoliticization.

I have traced in this chapter the clash between the crisis of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal agenda from a very different angle. Attending to the minute details of the daily interactions between myself and the people around the AKP, as well as among those people

themselves, I have focused on the use of two conceptual constellations and their grammatical constitutions: when do people talk about bureaucracy? How and why do they criticize it? With whom and with which political projects do they associate what they call bureaucracy? My observations, records, as well as publicly open sources, displayed that this popular critique of bureaucracy never emerges isolated but almost always in relation to another conceptual constellation -politics. Thus I mapped some thematic clusters that coordinate these two constellations with each other. While the constellation of bureaucracy collocates with themes and concepts related to forms of action (inaction/idleness), mediums of action (abstraction/documentation), and spaces of action (hierarchical distances), the themes under the name politics collocate in a parallel manner with other forms of action (service), mediums (intimacy/trust), and spaces (proximity). I argue that the most frequent denominator that crosscuts all these themes was time and its differential experiences in two different constellations. While the time of bureaucracy is that which separates, isolates, excludes, and thus extinguishes the poor, the time of politics gathers, associates, unifies, includes, and thus enlivens. If the time of the old Turkey means the effacement of lives of the poor, the time of the new Turkey means immersion and saturation, within which a form of life, that is full and capacitated, is possible. In this sense, time being the major register of intelligibility for the shift from the old Turkey to the new one, the grammatical war between bureaucracy and politics marks the transformation in the social experience of time, from one that is shaped in large-scale industrial production to another one that flexible labor markets and service sector are dominant. The grammar of politics enables the masses in Turkey in enduring, surviving, and even thriving in times that are inimical for their existence. However, this grammar is not only enabling for the excluded masses but also destructive for anyone who might be categorized as not fitting into the



category of “the people.”

### **After the Conclusion: Beyond the Law**

Kafka's story "Before the Law" has been taken by many scholars as a perfect allegory for the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state as well as for the infinite "structure of referentiality" that bureaucracy produces. Every gate being guarded by a doorkeeper more frightening than the previous one, the law emerges in modern societies as nothing but the infinite concatenation of procedures, i.e. gates, behind which the law is supposed to be waiting. But what would it be like if the man from the country found the doors open and the doorkeepers gone? Following Benjamin, Vismann suggests that we return to the past to find the answer since the future might not be conducive for such an unlikely scene: "The power of barriers resides in their ambivalence—an equivocation of the law that Walter Benjamin criticized. The law erects barriers to create an area of execution that is barred from view. Based on secret laws, Benjamin writes, "the prehistoric world exerts its rule all the more ruthlessly." This prehistoric legal world operates in a twilight zone. Barriers are porous as well as inaccessible; they emerge and disappear. They provoke indictments without acts, offenses without intent, verdicts without law. They enforce a permanent trial over one's own self." (2008, 21). Both Benjamin's and Vismann's interests are more philosophical than social scientific, and thus an anthropological or historical comparison might not be productive. However, the confluence of ordinary and extraordinary, passages and barriers, and intention and obliviousness sounds familiar in the global state of exception within which we live.

In this chapter, I demonstrated several ways through which a popular critique of bureaucracy incorporates the crisis of the welfare state and translates the components of that crisis into a political project. What is interesting in the Turkish case is that this critique does not

mean a complete embrace of the neoliberal agenda. On the contrary, many continuities between the two different projects, like the importance of expertise, record keeping, or documentation, are critically articulated in the popular answer that Turkish society has given to the predicament of the welfare state. While the fixed working hours in the Fordist establishments and the formalities of welfare state bureaucracies turn into objects of criticism for the masses, the distinctions between experts and lay people, isolated individuals and mass movements, the human capital of individuals and political capital of partisans get blurred. The ramifications of such conflation are significant in number and cannot be exhaustively investigated in this chapter or this dissertation. Nonetheless, I will, for example, focus on these form of action that the politics promote as efficacious in the next chapter, arguing that the question of efficacy is central for our investigation of the ontological crisis of neoliberalism. Accordingly, I will try to show that how the neoliberal policies have been conflating two constitutive concepts of modern capitalism, that is, efficiency and efficacy, resulting in the colonization of efficiency by efficacy. However, let me finish this chapter with an epilogue on one of the many ramifications of the popular critique of bureaucracy, discussing what could happen, as in Benjamin's prehistoric world, if the rule of documents, abstractions, and bureaucratic regulations are suspended, when the anti-formalist gesture becomes completely generalized.

In 2005, at the beginning of the AKP's rule, when the institutional structure in Turkey and the bureaucratic Kemalist "elite" were suspicious of the party for hiding its true objectives, the US Ambassador Eric Edelman gave a speech, just a few weeks before his resignation. His statements appeared on the front pages of many newspapers, but one of them, an openly Islamist newspaper called *Milli Gazete* carried the front-page headline: "EDELMAN THOUGHT HE WAS IN IRAQ!"

Just before his resignation [*giderayak yaptigi konusmada*], 'the ugly heads of those who are boycotting American companies should be crashed at once!' said Edelman. Claiming that there is disinformation in Turkey regarding the USA, he underlined the necessity for preventing such efforts. Edelman also critically noted that the trade between Turkey and the USA has not sufficiently developed and said, '[here is] too much bureaucracy, corruption, and too much civil-servant mentality. A dynamic, transparent, and free business environment might be effective in developing the trade [between two countries]. Do not take these [statements] as criticisms, but as incentives for taking further action'.

It is true that Islamists were enraged at the time mostly because Edelman criticized them for boycotting American products. Be that as it may, it was still the case that an American Embassy was considered wrong in openly and publicly attacking Turkey by attributing to the country too much bureaucracy, corruption and civil-servant mentality -as if Turkey were Iraq. In 2016, when the relations between Turkey and the USA were much bleaker as a result of the diverging policies of the two countries toward Syria, president Erdogan was describing to district governors [*kaymakam*] how to eliminate the civil-servant mentality and the bureaucratic regulations that perpetuate such a mentality.

After stating that the administration as an organization can easily be reformed but the daily running of affairs are harder to change, Erdogan went on to say, 'In order to achieve its objectives in 2023, Turkey needs to complement administrative reforms with mentality reforms. We will increase the possibility of attaining our objectives as much as we can increase the number of administrators who have a vision, have leadership qualities, who are well-trained and are continuously informing and renewing themselves. A bureaucracy which guards the status quo can keep the country stuck in its place. This is my request for you. Regulation is this; legislation is that... when the time comes, put the regulations aside, put your own mental reformation in its place. Say 'I can do this somehow!' and do it! This is the use of administration. For whom are you using this [power]? For the people [*vatandas*, may mean both the people and citizens]! Never hesitate! Use it!'

His speech, when I heard it, reminded me of a conversation that I had with some young people in Esenler just one year before. We were drinking tea and talking about politics as usual. This time, there were only two persons from the AKP, Salim and Furkan, and three from another Islamist party [footnote]. Although there were some issues over which they vehemently

disagreed with each other, both groups are organically linked in terms of their political histories and practices as well as family connections between party members. Salim was passionately defending the party and Erdogan, saying that many of the non-Islamic regulations that passed under the AKP rule have been the result of global realities that demand elasticity for Muslims to survive and gather strength. Except for one legislation.

Salim: Brother, you know me well, I am a great fan of Reis [Erdogan], but this guy is right about one thing. He is my brother; I mean, we are the followers of the same *dawa*. They criticize us for some things, and sometimes they are right.

Firat: Like what?

Salim: Look, brother, adultery [*zina*] should be prohibited. We should not have repealed it. Firat: But there was also adultery in the past, wasn't it? In the Ottoman Empire, or in the Welfare Party's time...

Salim: Look, brother, this is different...

Furkan: Look brother, I tell you what. In this Menekse Street down there, these Syrians were selling their wives, their daughters... the local people suffered a lot from their immorality. We called the police; they came and did a quick investigation. Then they told us, "We cannot do anything. Adultery is not a crime anymore. There is nothing to do." Of course we got very tense, but one of the police officers took us aside and said, "We are bound [by the institution], but can't you grab stones?" They went; we started to throw stones at their houses [smiling and waving his head in a solemn manner]. Thanks to Allah, they were gone next morning.

Three accounts together capture the sense Benjamin was trying to get at in referring to the "prehistoric times" -the times when the laws were not written, and regulations were secret. In fact, Benjamin's text, "Critique of Violence" does not provide us with a genealogical reading through which we can see the shifts and transformations of the application of the law. Rather it is a philosophical intervention that displays what still resides behind the operations of law and the bureaucratic facilities. Comparably, his reading of Kafka, far from reaffirming that Kafka provides a trenchant critique of modernity and bureaucratic machinery, directs us to a different space, where we can recognize the mystical foundation of authority: "In Kafka the written law is contained in lawbooks, but these are secret; by basing itself on them, the prehistoric world exerts its rule all the more ruthlessly." (1999, 797). Therefore the suspension of law, the ambivalence

surrounding its (non)presence (whether there are laws or not, since they are suspended but not negated), opens a performative dimension for the force through which “a violence without ground” can mystically re-constitute the already existing law (Derrida 2002, 269-270). It is a violence that is mystical inasmuch as it is in law as an instance of non-law. What Benjamin and Derrida show us that this mystical gesture is not a one-time event, but a continuous (non)presence and an imminent possibility.

As a twist of fate, the demand for the resurgence of this mystical dimension came from an American embassy in the form of a set of collocations that bring bureaucracy, civil-servant mentality, and corruption together. Of course, he did not mean a total suspension of the rule of law and regulations, but "dynamic, transparent, and free" cannot be considered as clear definitions of what should be done in order to increase the capacity of commercial interactions between countries. As if following Edelman's imperative "do not take these [statements] as criticisms, but as incentives for taking further action," Erdogan found a way to solve the dilemma: do somehow! In a dynamic world in which problems of the real life cannot be fit in abstract rules and formal categories, laws and regulations frequently become hindrances for our capacity to transform the real world -the objectives of Turkey for 2023 [footnote]. Erdogan shows people a different potentiality that does not correspond to the mediums of Edelman's project but can fit well for the ends of that project. Solving problems in the moments of their emergence, prompt responses to the demands of the people, or swift interventions into disturbances are more important than the formal legitimacy of actions. Formal structures thus give way to practices that we may call "substantial," whose validity and legitimacy can only be measured by the ends that they achieve. Thus we arrive at the formulation that can be observable from the top of politics in Turkey to the lowest level part members: "Do somehow, it is justified

as long as it is in line with what the people wants." However, the ends that are to be achieved "somehow" are also far from being clearly defined. Expanding commercial relations, building globally massive infrastructure project (the largest airport in Europe, a canal that would divide Istanbul, etc.), keeping Turkish Lira valuable, or achieving world record growth rates are all being justified as part and parcel of "the power of the people" and for the sake of the people. It is not a coincidence that the police officer in Furkan's story refers to his predicament of being bound by the rules, something many people in the party also complain as restricting. Furkan interprets the statement "we are bound, but you..." as that which affirms a conviction that "rules and regulations may frequently be hindrances before the justified demands of the people ("Of course, we got really tense")." If rules and regulations of the bureaucratic structures keep people within the space of exhaustion, within which nothing happens and the poor spends their time and life without effecting any real changes, politics reminds people that they can organize, associate, unite, and do "something." Thus the poor attain an enhanced capacity of taking action, effecting changes, and living a full life without waiting for bureaucratic procedures and mediations. However, the changes that they effectuate may be more than growth rates, infrastructure projects, gas provisions, or the cool comfort of awnings; those changes may include putting the regulations aside, unbinding the masses from this or that legislation, as Erdogan suggests, and then throwing stones to where Syrian refugees live so as to force people to leave their houses and rectify the moral disquietude that their presence evoked to the people.

## Chapter 6. Fundamentalism, Secularism, and Small Miracles: Towards a Political Anthropology of Causation

We are a people worshipping Hakk (God, the True). It is not that “if you do this or that, this will be the outcome;” but we should think like “If we do this or that, Hakk would be content with us, it would translate that outcome into the good.” It is not without good reason that we have been told [in Quran], “there may be evil in things you consider good, and good in evil.” Perish the thought; we are not “forcing Allah to succeed!” There is an Allah who sees, hears, knows us, who has the absolute right to decree, who makes things be when it says “be,” kill, when it says “die,” who commands fate, livelihood (*rizk*), and the time of death, who is omniscient, omnipotent, and we are obliged to be the vessels (*vesile*) of the realization of his will.

Abdurrahman Dilipak (11/30/2017, Yeni Akit, "While opening up to the world [*Disa Acilalim Derken*]")

Some people come and say different things. I too say different things! Do I need to say the things that the other people say? I am saying: interest is the cause; inflation is the result. So, this is my claim! [S/he] says, inflation is the cause, interest is the result. To where does s/he connect [interest]? To inflation. If inflation falls, they will decrease interest [rates]. This means you are in a wrong path... There is no use of making fun of these people, entrepreneurs, and investors.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan (01/31/2011)

### I. Introduction

These two quotes above somehow capture the sense of what I am trying to investigate under the category of "causation." Their value does not reside in how well they represent the real state of affairs: is it God who organizes the world in accordance with His independent will, or is it Nature which shapes existence according to the laws that bind entities together and that we can investigate down to its infinitely minute details? Is it interest rates that work as disincentives for people, preventing them from making investments, producing goods and thus decreasing prices? Or is it inflation that makes people refrain from saving their money, spend it as soon as they get their wages, and thus increasing interests rates to induce savings? For the purpose of this chapter, I am not primarily interested in the reality of such statements, i.e. how well they correspond to

the actual state of affairs in the world. I aim to do something different: to understand what people do with causal explanations. Are there different ways of building causal relations between entities and events? Can we identify different explanatory frameworks that have distinctive ways of building causal relations? And if we can, are there any relationship between different causalities that are socially built and sustained by different actors or groups?

I will try to give affirmative answers to each of these questions. My argument is that causation is not only a pure cognitive faculty but also an active engagement, a performative way of being in the world. In other words, I will argue that our explanations of causal relations in the world are frequently used as active ways of intervening in the world, changing it, and making things happen. However, going beyond the distinction between subject and object, cognition and action, is two-way street that requires us to consider the other direction: the world also intervenes in the ways we causally make arguments about the world, changes the ways we build and understand causal connections, and makes us be in certain ways, while disabling certain other forms of being. Thus when I argue that "fundamentalist" reasoning on causation, of which the two quotes at the beginning are perfect examples, is becoming more and more widespread among the inhabitants of impoverished neighborhoods in Istanbul, I mean neither that this is a functional response to the neoliberal restructuring of economic relations started in the 1980s nor that "fundamentalist" reasoning is part of a tradition, culture, or ideology that has an autonomy vis-à-vis the material constitution of the world. Instead, I argue that the "fundamentalist" reasoning, a certain way of making causal relations, is a part of the material constitution of the world, in a sometimes cooperative and sometimes belligerent relationship with different causal networks in the world.

In this sense, I put forward the idea of taking Dilipak's and Erdogan's words and statements



as seriously as possible in order to investigate whether there are family resemblance among the different uses of causal reasoning by the partisans and sympathizers of the AKP at the margins of Istanbul, that is, whether it is possible to detect certain patterns and repetitions that distinguish one form of causation from another. If we can tentatively describe certain differential characteristics pertaining to different forms of causal reasoning, fundamentalist and secular in my case, then we can ask how and when people employ different forms of causation as well as which questions and encounters prompt different forms of causal reasoning. Such an effort might be called a "political anthropology of causation," through which we can study different dispositions and efforts in building networks of causal relations in different spheres of life. In other words, a political anthropology of causation can illuminate how people build relations between processes, entities, and events, through explanations or practical engagements, in living their lives, making arguments, and intervening in the affairs of other people.

A symmetrical approach to the question of causality as a part of the program of political anthropology takes into account both the ways we explain the causal relations in the world and the ways the world is materially constituted in relation to our explanations. In doing so, it is potentially capable of displaying imbrications and interactions between practices and discourses of lay people and the material transformations in the world. In other words, we can investigate how people construct causal relations in relation to the world within which they operate. Thus technological novelties, like cellphones, internet, or credit cards, and economic practices, like taxation policies, "financial deepening," or subcontracting, are active agents in constituting causal networks through which people can act. When people use certain forms of reasoning and causal explanations in certain settings, these imbrications, or what I call "dispositional alignments," become conspicuous. It is this theoretical gesture that guides me to understand the

"reality" of the statements and reasoning like Erdogan's or Dilipak's. Such a project, however, cannot be convincing without being ethnographically situated. But let me articulate the basic moves of my argument to facilitate the reading before I delve into the backstreets of Istanbul.

After showing a few examples that illustrate how my interlocutors were aware of the question of causality, although without naming it as such, I will focus on certain ways of reasoning that they employed in dealing with problems in daily life. My fieldwork data suggests that political Islamists in Turkey frequently practice a form of causation that I call "fundamentalist" in that the reasoning prevents further investigations on the connections between concepts and entities by referring to immutable and clear laws of God. This practice of causation accuses "laics," "western," and "infidel" people of enforcing a way of thinking that delineates relations between entities and concepts in an infinite regress, that is, ideally investigable without limitation. My purpose, however, is far from displaying the peculiarities of Islam as a substantially fundamentalist religion. On the contrary, religion is only a specifically apt resource to employ fundamentalist reason to the extent that it has the potential to stop further inquiries. Similar dispositions can be detected in different settings, wherever a transcendent register is socially, reflexively, and explicitly produced through collective labor. Eichmann's case is paradigmatic in this sense. As Nazis were working towards making the Fuhrer's orders "originary causes"<sup>70</sup>, so the fundamentalist reason became predominant -that is, making it impossible to ask questions about the reasons of orders or their possible consequences (Arendt 2006, 148). Religion has definitely an advantage in making such claims, but is not different in terms of basic characteristics. It is important to me as long as people use religious rules, orders, or idioms as a resource for building causal networks in a fundamentalist manner. It is not important whether

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<sup>70</sup> The quote from Arendt uses different words to express, to my mind, the same idea; "the Fuhrer's words, his oral pronouncements, were the basic law of the land."

their interpretations of or claims about religion are "correct," since my approach necessitates that the "realities" or "truths" be socially and collectively built rather than simply uncovered.

Since causation is always performative and thus ontologically conditioned, fundamentalist causation is not a mental disorder, but a particular way of building causal networks in the world. This is my second major point. Religiously oriented explanations and practices about causation are enmeshed in the world, socially labored, and historically framed. In other words, fundamentalist reasoning is a practice that operates in the world, materially and symbolically. For a large part of the chapter, I will investigate the forms of such practices in order to ethnographically situate fundamentalist causation as essential in understanding how people make things happen through the very act of causal interpretation. To this end, I will refer to studies in the sociology of science, especially Actor-Network Theory, to trace the constitution of different causal networks around the AKP, wherein fundamentalist dispositions are most observable. I will argue that fundamentalism is effective by sealing black boxes, producing unquestionable facts, by means of which people can perform several tasks –discursively and practically. The most distinctive characteristic of such fundamentalist causations, I will show, is that they produce “obviousness” around which people can gather together against those who refuse to witness the miracles of such obvious things.

I will try to show through my ethnographic data, that fundamentalism and its causal explanations have been acquiring a particular potentiality for acting in Turkey where neoliberal transformations are significantly destructive. However, I am not claiming that "market fundamentalism" and its neoliberal practices are producing the "fundamentalist causation" of political Islamists. There are countless varieties of political Islam which do not share the AKP's interests and projects; be they growth rates, economic performance, infrastructural projects, the

increasing state capacity, or social and economic networks among the urban poor. It is not that market fundamentalism creates fundamentalist dispositions among political Islamists, but fundamentalist dispositions and attitudes become more efficacious in terms of explaining the relations in the world of market fundamentalism and acting in it.

My third point is that the dispositional conjuncture of market fundamentalism and political fundamentalism is located in the historical shift in political economic constellations, which can best be summarized as "the colonization of efficiency by efficacy." I will try to show that despite the massive literature on efficiency and its significance in neoliberal times, the neoliberal market fundamentalism has a certain tendency to dismantle formal structures and rules that regulate productivity (the model of Fordist organization) in order to increase the capacity to attain "management goals" and "quotas" through "flexible organizational model." At its very core, the drive towards "outcomes" and "results" degrades the questions concerning "hows" and promotes "whats," subjugating the concerns of efficiency (the continuous search to achieve the ends through shorter causal networks) to the directives of efficacy (achieving the ends within definite parameters without being much concerned with the means).

## **II. The Question Concerning Causation: Lay Metaphysicians?**

Do people really think about causation at all? The subject matter sounding so philosophically laden, one expects to find people pondering about such problems only on university campuses. However, causation, if largely defined, is a matter of common practices, ranging from economics (Hoover 2001) to psychology (Waldman 2017), from the law (Hart and Honore 1959) to physics (Cartwright 1983). Davidson, for example, approaches the question from the angle of rationalization in his seminal essay: "What is the relation between a reason and an action when the reason explains the action by giving the agent's reason for doing what he did? We may call

such explanations rationalizations, and say that the reason rationalizes the action" (2002, 3). Davidson defends the ancient position that "rationalization is a species of causal explanation" and in this sense, my approach is a little bit different, closer to Science Technology Studies, which emphasizes how agents build causal networks. However, Davidson's approach, although more cognitively slanted, makes it clear that whenever we explain something, we make a causal assertion. Many daily conversations are part of such investigations, assertions, and interventions. Let's look at a conversation at Eskam, Esenler Career Center –a place that I spent months following the unemployed and the AKP members who worked in that center, trying to find jobs for unskilled workers.

Suleyman was one of those who frequently visited the "career center," socialized with local people, officers, party members, and, occasionally, strangers like me. Suat, a prominent "job consult<sup>71</sup>" and a district leader of the AKP, had found him several jobs. However, for some reason, Suleyman was unable to hold any of them. He was still insisting on getting a cleaning job in the airport, one of the best jobs for the unqualified, a job he once had got thanks to Suat. Unfortunately, he was fired after one blissful year, as he recalled, when the employers had realized that he was illiterate. Complaining to Suat and me about the "mentality" of employers, he said, "I then went to a literacy course that the municipality opened because that was the reason they fired me. But now, I reapplied for the same job and the company said they couldn't employ someone they had once fired!" Neither Suat nor the human resources manager of the company was able to explain to him why they could not hire him back. After all, the reason for which he was fired was finally eliminated. But the company had a policy, i.e. if someone gets fired, s/he cannot be employed again. And that was it. Suleyman tried to connect points, understand relations between events and reasons, and then attempted to act –in his case, going to

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<sup>71</sup> For a definition of "job consultancy" in the party and municipality buildings, see Chapter 2.

a course to learn how to read- in accord with the picture he deemed accurate. But he failed. The company refused to hire him back. He wanted to work in that job because the workload was not heavy, people were kind to him (in comparison to his previous experiences), and he was less concerned with his future since it was a well-established, reliable company.

He thought that privatization was the reason; the disappearance of state-owned companies had resulted in this precariousness. “This is no good. Not at all. Some people take advantage of *kimsesiz* [those who have no one, orphans]. These are big men. They play with us like a toy, because we are unqualified [*vasifsiz*]. But before that [privatization], this was not the case. My father retired from Topkapi Sisecam [once a state-owned glassware company]. He always says ‘they held my arm and pushed me inside. 21 years later, I got out.’ His relatives hold his arm... 21 years! Now he has a four-storied building, his own car, and a retirement pension. But he can't hear or see. Through attending machines and looking at glasses for cracks, he lost both his eyes and ears. Now we don't have those kinds of jobs anymore.” Although he was well aware of the destructive effects of manual labor in mass factories, as many other unemployed people in Turkey also knew too well, he was longing for stability and a well-paid job –the things that his father had the chance to enjoy before the 1980s. His father was also an unskilled laborer, who had no specialization but relied purely on labor power. But then, being unskilled was not a burden but a resource. This was a source of confusion for him. Turning to me, he complained, “Now things have changed. But it is not possible to understand how things work [*islerin nasil yurudugunu anlamak mumkun degil ki?*].” For a second I thought to reply in a secular way: communication technologies, subcontracting techniques, increase in energy prices, export-oriented growth... But then, as Evans-Pritchard points out about causation, such explanatory frameworks would not explain why this particular event happened to him at that moment (1963,

69). Accordingly, my connecting causal relations between entities and events would need to incorporate Suleyman's personal trajectory and temporality. Even then, it was doubtful that I could explain why the company refused to hire someone who they had once fired for being illiterate, even though he worked hard to fix his lack of literacy. But Suat intervened, "the world has changed, brother Suleyman. But don't worry, I am here to help you."

Although Suat's causal reasoning was not particularly illustrative of the fundamentalist reason, this example is important to show that people contest causal explanations that are directly related to action. Suleyman was trying to build a causal network by learning to read and write so the company that he wanted to work for would hire him again, for the cause of his dismissal would finally be eliminated. It didn't turn out to be the case. Suat reassured Suleyman that there were ways to do things, such as finding a better job, if Suleyman put his faith in Suat and followed his lead without asking many questions. There is a causal texture of the world, but it is not necessarily explainable in its details. The AKP and party members insist that they are successful in changing the material conditions of the country, but the explanation of the success is not necessarily articulable in terms of plans, blueprints, or schemas. Such formal pictures belong to the old Turkey, where the bureaucratic mentality was predominant. Those formal structures were stabilizing jobs and positions, as Suleyman's father had enjoyed for 21 years, but they were also the reasons for the failures of the previous period. "The world has changed" as Suat pointed out, but for the better. Suat explained to us that those jobs were also the sources of idleness since people with job guarantees were not doing their jobs, relying on trade unions and permanent staff memberships [*kadrolarina*]. The result was an immense gap between those who managed to get jobs with securities and those who could not. In this way, Suat was building causal connections among entities, events, and situations, claiming that the change in the way

things work was beneficial for the masses of which Suleyman was a part. However, Suleyman should act in accordance with the new ways. Suat thus asserted that there were (at least) two worlds in which things and causes operate in different ways, but one of them had lost its relevance and power. The new one might be more conducive to Suleyman's life, if he followed Suat's directives since Suat knew how to survive, endure, and thrive in this new world.

Although it was unusual, during my fieldwork, I encountered a few sophisticated accounts of causal structures articulated by my interlocutors. And again, such accounts were far from being passive interpretations of the structure of the world and of the relations that regulate entities, events, and actions. Instead, those accounts were certain ways of acting in the world and convincing other people in acting in a concerted fashion -in a way coopting others into a causal interpretation. I had the chance to listen to one such explicit account in an AKP party building in Kucukcekmece. Nurettin was working in the party building, cleaning the place and serving tea for visitors and party members. He was a fervent supporter of the party and a devout partisan who was "ready to die for the cause (*dava*)," as he was frequently claiming. For him, the success of the AKP was a sign that Allah rewards his pious subjects and prepares them for the upcoming battle against the so-called Jewish invasion of the holy lands. Despite his immense knowledge about Islam, he was not a prominent member of the party, for his behaviors were erratic, to say the least. Not having any formal education after middle school, he became a remarkable autodidact, who could read Arabic and quote from hundreds of books with few or no mistakes. However, he frequently got too excited when speaking, reminding people of the caricatures of geniuses in American movies, who speak too fast as if having a hard time keeping up with his own thinking. During our long conversations, my listening to him carefully and recording and noting down his statements was giving him an additional incentive to explain how the people



around the AKP understand the success of the movement. One day, while speaking about the increasing political strife in Turkey after Gezi Events, he got annoyed by my method of investigating why "laic" and "western-oriented" people felt excluded and thought themselves in danger. For him, the questions of "why" might be destructive as much as productive according to one's orientation towards his ends.

There are natural principles and social principles, but we should separate them from each other. Now natural principles are like; today the sun rose, I got a headache. Is it ok? No. But social principles are determined by those who intervene in accord with their interests. For example, there are some economic problems, right? Everyone would say something different. The boss would say that he does not make money so he cannot give. On the other hand, the worker would say that the boss does not give his due. The other would say the AK party did wrong; another person would say the opposition does not allow the party to make things better. What is really important is to distinguish those who build from those who destroy.

Here what I mean by the performativeness of causation, its ontological dimension, is brilliantly articulated. Nurettin simply pointed out that people build causal relations through their interventions in the world -either to destroy, like those who criticize the AKP in order to damage the political movement, or to build, like some other political Islamists who believe that there are some wrongs being done by the AKP and that such mistakes jeopardize the future of the movement. However, his approach was not a simple categorization but a call for a metapragmatic awareness whereby people should think about how to use the question of "why." He warned me not to fall into the trap of secular rationality, as if investigating the details of a problem was a natural inclination of the human mind, a cognitive activity in mapping reality for human use. Whenever we ask questions, Nurettin underlined, we do something, either for good or bad. Many people, who are afflicted with the western models of life, use their reason for cunning, to confuse the believers [*nifak tohumlari ekmek*] and create dissensus and confusion [*fitne*]. He was using two words repetitively "*nifak*" and "*fitne*." *Nifak* means "entering one door

but exiting another," a way of describing hypocrisy in Islamic theology. It signifies discordance between the inner and outer realms, one's intentions and one's actions. *Nifak* thus signifies the threat of hypocrites who, albeit claiming to be Muslims, are working towards the aim of destroying Islam. "Sowing the seeds of *Nifak*" [*nifak tohumlari ekmek*] is a way of saying in Turkish "orchestrating the conditions within which people start to suspect each other and lose their faith in their good will." Similarly "*fitne*" is a word that designates "test," "trial," "sedition," "rebellion against the just," and "dissensus." Those who want to create a situation of *fitne* frequently resort to *nifak*. In other words, infidels use deception, the appearance of truth without substance, in order to incite a destructive rebellion. For Nurettin, asking questions might very well be used for such destructive purposes. Building causal networks with malicious intentions might be damaging if people would be allured by the appeal of reasoning, thus losing their faith and fighting with each other. Nurettin insisted that we had to trust each other through our piety and be cautious about the distinction between "who wants to build" and "who wants to destroy." I think fundamentalist reason emerges as a distinctive causal reasoning in such moments that "can" dictate the points further which people can ask no questions.

### **III. Fundamentalist Reason: Sealing Black Boxes**

Considering none of my interlocutor used, let alone identified themselves with, the term fundamentalism, it is a considerably hard task for an anthropologist to employ the concept. It is so laden with certain forms of academically invested hate speech that progressive scholars reasonably refrain from using the term (Ruthven 2004, 5). Notwithstanding the apparent dangers ahead, Judith Nagata urges anthropologists to trace the metaphorical expansion of the term into other domains than religion (2001). She defines fundamentalism as "an attachment to a set of irreducible beliefs or a theology that forestalls further questions" and invites any thinking

anthropologist into “attempting to understand, not only the substance and content of beliefs, but also their context, sources, and application.” (2001, 481). I follow her invitation with a slight twist so as to foreground the aspect of its application, approaching the question from a perspective informed by discussions in the sociology of science. I define fundamentalism as consistent and systematic insistence on "not questioning something further" in order to focus on how people forestall attempts to open black boxes that constitute causal networks in daily life. In contradistinction to fundamentalist causation and reasoning, I define secular causation and secular/critical reasoning as the absolute capacity to question any and every part of a network, including the groundlessness of its own performance, a gesture best captured by Marx in the formulation “ruthless criticism of everything existing” (1978, 13)<sup>72</sup>. In order to discuss what I call fundamentalist reason in a more grounded way, let me start with an example.

My fieldwork days comprised spending time with the people around the network of the AKP; those who work in the AKP municipalities, in humanitarian organizations helping the local poor, in the party buildings, traveling with neighborhood leaders and partisans in their political and social works, and engaging countless other mundane activities. Amid such intense engagements and encounters, sometimes we used to have lunch in neighborhood restaurants predominantly owned by party members, friends in *dawa* [*dava arkadasi*], or pious Muslims. One such place in Esenler was *Kardesler Sofrasi*, a place that people in Turkey call "*esnaf lokantasi*" where one could eat traditional home cooking. Bilal was both the cook and the owner of the place, wearing shalwar, cap, and gown, and attending the meetings of Ismailaga Community. His restaurant was a place that every shade of Islamist politics, from the AKP to religious orders, frequented. Since I had become known in the neighborhood as someone

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<sup>72</sup> The full quote is as follows: “I am speaking of a ruthless criticism of everything existing, ruthless in two senses: The criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be.”

hanging around party members and working on the "social problems of the poor neighborhoods in Istanbul," Bilal loved to use every opportunity to ask me questions and introduce me to his customers. On one such day, I had somehow found myself among some of his friends, vehemently discussing the relationships between politics, economics, and Islam. As per my usual attitude in the field, I was careful to give an appearance of deeply respectful piety with a modest degree of critical suspiciousness. My point during that discussion was that even though the orders of Quran are divine, something no one could have questioned in that setting, there are global realities that bind us and that we cannot change by ourselves as Muslims. This was a particularly widespread interpretation among the AKP members and sympathizers when defending their positions against stauncher Islamists. The others respecting him for being particularly competent about religious issues, Mustafa tried to convince me that my arguments are in fact dangerous for they rely on rational strategies of inference and deduction, and thereby undermining pious humility.

Firat: But I have to say that it is hard for me to understand this problem with interest [*faiz*].

Ok, Erdogan hasn't done anything about it, but is there any real way of prohibiting it?

Mustafa: Of course, just prohibit it.

Firat: Does it mean anything?

Mustafa: Why not?

Firat: Interest will still be used.

Mustafa: No, there are Islamic financial companies and banks.

Firat: Yes. But what do they do? Let's say when I want to buy a house...

Mustafa: Good.

Firat: I go to Albaraka Turk, and ask for their help. What would they do? They would go and buy the house and then sell it to me.

Mustafa: Yes, and it is totally halal.

Firat: Ok, but my problem is this: They will buy the house for 100, let's say. But sell it to me for 150 to be paid in installments.

Mustafa: I would go to Eminevim, but that is also ok. They have better prices.

Firat: How come they sell a house 50% more expensive than its original price? Is this just? Is this not interest?

Mustafa: No, what you are referring to is the question whether one good can have two prices. Many scholars agree that it is possible. So, one is for cash, one for installments. We

have a fair trade here. I say the price of this good today is 100, but if you are going to pay two years later, its price is 150. I might also ask you to pay with gold if there is inflation. There is justice if we agree on the terms.

Firat: Ok. But do you think that it is just a coincidence that Albaraka Turk uses exactly the same rate that those others use as interest rates?

Mustafa: I do not care.

Firat: How come? If the rates are the same, what you do is charging interest, nothing else.

Mustafa: No... I see, now you are talking like laicists [laikciler<sup>73</sup>].

Firat: Why, what is it to do with laicists?

Mustafa: Is he from the CHP (People's Republicans Party) [laughing]...

Bilal: He stayed in America too long [laughing]...

Mustafa: If it is not interest, it is not interest.

Firat: You just name it differently! At the end, there is no difference.

Mustafa: Maybe, but what is at the end is not up to you.

Firat: I am not sure. What is the purpose of banning interest? You do not make money out of money. You do not make money out of nothing. Work honestly and reap what your right is.

Mustafa: No. It is just prohibited. You are trying to find reasons behind Allah's orders.

Why? Do you need to understand in order to worship?

Firat: Of course not. But it is also known that Islam is the religion of reason.

Mustafa: No, that is a kind of confusion. Who are you? Are you capable of ascertaining the reasons behind Allah's orders? Such things are good if they enhance your faith, but you cannot make statements like "Allah prohibited this because of that" so "this means that, so you cannot do that." No. Orders are clear; they are beyond your cognition [*idrak*]. Who are you? Nobody! You cannot compare yourself to Allah and say, "oh Allah means this, Allah means that." Who are you? This would go to Sirk. No.

Mustafa's intervention in my reasoning has the peculiar characteristic that scholars associate with fundamentalist movements under the names of "literalism" (Crapanzano 2000; Ruthven 2017), "inerrancy" (Barr 1978), and "antihermeneutic" (Martry and Appleby 1992). Claiming to clarify the obviousness of the divine rule, Mustafa asked me to stop looking for hidden connections, more primordial causes, among Allah's verses and invited me to partake in the collective understanding of the obvious -an entity that requires no investigation for its truth effect. In her influential book, Roxanne Euben calls this discursive and practical gesture "denial" and argues, "the denial that an interpretation is an interpretation is a crucial characteristic of what

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<sup>73</sup> "Laicist" is a derogatory term used by political Islamists to make a distinction between laicism as a neutral attitude towards religions and laicism as a modern religion inimical to Islam. Accordingly, those who are laicists are the people who hate Islam and use the jargon of laicism to spread their worshipping for modern values as if their attitude is not religious in essence.

it means to be a 'fundamentalist.'" (1999, 88). In a similar vein, Crapanzano shows that the rhetorical force of literalism can only be effective through the denial of its own rhetorical character in religious fundamentalism or political fundamentalisms the originalist interpretations of the Constitution in the USA (2000). The literature cannot be exhausted here, but one thing is clear: there is a social and political force in sealing statements, whether they are claimed to be coming from God or inherited from the Founding Fathers of the American Constitution. There are some attempts in explaining what it is that is so effective in fundamentalist suspension of further inquiries, but they rather focus on larger and abstract conceptual presumptions like the lack of meaning in modern life, the disenchantment of the world, and profound alienation resulting from communication technologies (Beck 2006; Giddens 1990; Lash 2010). However, to my knowledge, these analyses are based on assumptions and abstractions rather than concrete ethnographic data, thus jumping from one side of the question (the rise of fundamentalist movements) to the other side (problems of modern life) without specifically showing what are those problems, what are the fundamentalist solutions, and how the connections between these two regions are being built, sustained, and enhanced. I have no problem with constructing such causal networks that would explain the relationships between fundamentalist ideologies and the lived-world of fundamentalists. However, I believe that we should take this step not as an end but a beginning to investigate how people build causal networks that connect discontents about modernity to fundamentalist "literalism" or "inerrancy." I will show that Mustafa was doing something concrete in that restaurant, but before explaining it, I would like to give another example, whose relationship to causation is not as direct as my conversation with Mustafa.

Safak was a veteran political Islamist in Bagcilar, whose works for political Islamist parties during the 1990s had gained him a reputation as "the master of politics" [*siyasetin ustasi*]. In a

teahouse meeting, a close interlocutor of mine, Rasim, was trying to impress me with Safak's stories, believing that I would understand better how the movement built its grassroots support in the 1990s through the immense labor of unselfish Muslims like Safak.

Safak: They appointed me as the head of district organization, but I did not know how to do politics in the field at the time. So, I went to the mosque for an afternoon prayer. I saw a guy that I knew from my village in Giresun. He was a solid supporter of the People's Republican Party [CHP]. After the prayer we got out, I took this guy and brought him to the teahouse in the mosque. I asked, "where did we just come from?" He answered, "from prayer." I told him not to pray. He asked why, I said, "your prayer would not be accepted." Rasim: [proding me] This is politics, my brother, [laughing].

Safak: Anyway, he asked why I said so. I said, "brother, the person for whom you vote is against Allah. He is against headscarf. He is against religion." I said, "you go to prayers and serve Ebu Cehil [Abu Jahl<sup>74</sup>] at the same time. How come? Either you stop going to prayers, or you quit your party. It is not possible to have them both." He asked what we were going to do. I took off a membership application; I said "you will sign here. If you are a Muslim, you will serve Allah, you will serve the prophet. Is there any other party? No!" He said, "they [political Islamists] are no good, they pretend to be Muslim." I asked, "How can you know the heart of a man. Does he pray? Yes. Do you see it? Yes, you see. Does he fast? Yes, he does. Does he recite *bismillah*? Yes. What do you want more? You cannot know his heart." I told him to come to the party in the district; I said, "come to the district, let's work together. If there is any cheating, we will be their greatest enemy." We started to work together. Within a year, we registered 2200 new members.

Together with Mustafa's intervention, this account perfectly exemplifies how fundamentalist reason and its causation work in the lives of political Islamists, although in a distinctively diverse manner. Mustafa stopped me going further in my questioning the reasons behind Allah's verse, and thus concentrating all the efforts of the group on how to accommodate divine orders in our daily lives. For him, the "orders are clear." However, we should not think that this is something that enslaves us. We are free to deal with it in a literal sense of the term "freedom:" you can lend money at exactly the same rate that a financial institution uses for its credits. Circumventing a divine order is not a problem, as long as you act as if that order is a stable register. Secular reasoning, as derogatory term, "laicists," imply in Turkish, is a damaging

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<sup>74</sup> A Polytheist Qurayshi leader generally considered as the archenemy of Muhammad. The word designates staunch enemies of Islam in daily usage.

activity that undermines everything with the wrong-headed hope of finding the truth, relying on its own power and nothing else. The infinite regress of secular reason, insisting on the absolute right to ask further questions, is a product of human hubris -an attitude that would lead us to *Nifak* (hypocrisy) and *Fitne* (destruction and rebellion). Mustafa was trying to show me that such impressive intellectual engagements would result in inflating one's ego and selfishness, leading the person to Shirk<sup>75</sup>, the greatest sin of all. Therefore Mustafa was performing something: he was inviting me to accept the clarity of divine orders and to think myself not superior to him or his friends. In a sense, he was doing what political Islamists commonly call "*teblig*," meaning "announcement," "delivery of the message." As a person who knew well the language he was using, I stopped challenging his interpretation after he warned me that my approach might lead to Shirk -something very hard to contend against. After that, I solemnly nodded my head, as if I saw his point and the awaiting danger ahead. Pleased with my not challenging him any further and accepting his "authority," which was based on reminding us of something "obvious," he offered me his help in finding the poor of the neighborhood and the NGOs working with them. His offer was a token of recognition that we shared "the obviousness" of the rules legislated by the divine authority and thus could trust each other thenceforth. Our understanding of causal relations, based on a fundamentalist insistence on the transparency of Allah's orders, brought us in to a social alignment that would change our movements in the future: I would visit him in his workplace; he would introduce me to his friends doing Islamic charity in the neighborhood; I would probably comply with statements invoking obvious rules; he would tell me their political activities in all their details, and so on. Many of our future moves were sealed in that conversation when we decided on *after which point we could not ask questions* -the moment when we sealed the black box of "interest".

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<sup>75</sup> Worshipping gods other than Allah, including oneself: idolatry, polytheism.



Safak did the same thing to his friend. The choice was obvious: either work for Ebu Cehil, meaning eternal damnation, or work for the men of dawa. His friend, of course, could reject Safak's interpretation that denied its character of interpretation, and even remain as his friend. But the terms of their relationship were bound to change after Safak's fundamentalist causation related the CHP to the obviousness of infidelity and thereby stopped his friend from asking further questions about the real intentions of political Islamists. Such an alignment could be overlooked for sure. However, once the alignments of this sort are built, each party knows very well that they can be recalled. Fundamentalist political positions generally produce a certain level of social distance between their members and their opponents, since their causal explanations are based on points that are explicitly and publicly sealed in a manner that cannot be questioned. When Safak sealed the black box of "the Muslim" by stating that what really matters is what a person does as the signs of piety, further questions related to his intentionality could not in any way be asked. He relied on "the obviousness" of the case, based on an interpretation that cannot be challenged, except by enemies.

In a strange twist of the fate, Safak and Mustafa did something analogous to how scientists produce facts through their scientific networks in Latour's *Science in Action*. Latour suggests that we approach the question of scientific factuality by shifting our understanding of what reality means. Instead of conceiving reality through "objects," *gegenstände*, that which stands out, he offers an alternative term "things" as was used in the ancient times to explain how modern reality asserts itself. The etymology of the word "thing" comes from the meaning of an archaic assembly, a gathering of sorts, a social existence (Latour 2005, 22; cf. Latour 2002, 21). For Latour, modern science produces assemblies, networks of causal relations, in single units that appear as black boxes (1987, 131). Every black box is a social assembly—a product of

collective labor that includes scientists, workers, and nonhuman actants. Their strength does not come from their unchanging qualities but the social character of the network that human and nonhuman actants participate in producing, the ways they complement each other's weaknesses.

Thus from a Latourian perspective, an LCD television is a seamless black box that appears as a single unit until it fails to work. Latour claims that this unity can be deconstructed if we are ready to spend time and resources to trace the component actants. Electronic parts, software codes, and mechanic components of an LCD television can all be questioned, if someone would cover the immense cost to go to laboratories and test the validity of all small black boxes constituting the black box of the LCD television. In this specific sense, black boxes in every aspect of life can be opened but we don't generally take such actions because it is a costly affair. This is partially because Latour argues that a strong network, a network that carries a message unchanged, is only possible through combining allies, creating networks whose participants are complex enough to prevent people from opening black boxes.

Safak's and Mustafa's cases show that Latour is not right about how to build strong causal networks, or harder facts when we venture beyond the laboratories of scientists. Latour assumes that soft facts that abound in daily life have great advantages in spreading their networks due to their having "a margin of negotiation." However, such margins make these networks weak and incapable of attacking other networks as scientists do when they try to disprove each other or consolidate their positions by conscripting other texts and research. Latour believes that a mother's assertion, for example, "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" cannot have the force of scientists' "proof races" that lead many brilliant scientists to "write more technical articles, to build bigger laboratories, or to align many helping hands." (1987, 152). Scientists build back boxes, align their interests with other scientists and engineers, coordinate their efforts with non-

human actants, in order to build strong networks of causations that have authoritative effects on other entities. Latour cannot imagine the miraculous capacity of Islamist partisans in Istanbul in building black boxes: just seal it! Admittedly, religion has a certain advantage in those practices of causation. By indexing a transcendent register, religious fundamentalism has a specific capacity in constructing facts (by turning the claims into black boxes) and sealing them for their followers.

However, Safak and Mustafa built their causal networks towards seemingly different ends. While talking to me, Mustafa was adamantly defiant in terms of consequences of his reasoning. What would happen if we "just prohibit it [interest]"? The question of the efficacy of his reasoning seemed to be absent -as if he was not concerned with the material constitution of the world, as if he couldn't care less if the heavens fall, as long as interest is prohibited. Nevertheless, a closer look might give us a different picture. He was interested less in what would happen to the Turkish economy than in making me agree with "the obviousness" of the case he put forward. In Safak's story, this performative dimension and its relation to the question of efficacy are more apparent. As Rasim intervened to underline for me that "this is politics," meaning that Safak's story is a perfect example of how to do politics, Safak achieved marvelous results with his political activities through reminding local people that there was only one party in line with the orders of Allah. He managed to register 2200 members in a year –a surprisingly number high in the context of the 1990s. Fundamentalist reason and the causal relations that it builds, what Latour calls in a radically different setting "the whole set of mechanisms for attributing shape and distributing causalities" (2004: 118), is not a matter of pristine ideals and faith, but a way of engaging in the world, intervening in life, and making things happen. Let me explain this constitutive dimension of efficacy in fundamentalist reason in a more detailed

fashion.

#### **IV. The Efficacy of Fundamentalist Reason: Success, Failure, and Small Miracles**

First things first: fundamentalist reason and its causal explanations were not originated in the economic realm. Political Islam, the foremost example of fundamentalism in Turkey, has had a controversial and uneasy relationship with economic actors in the country. Having said that, this should not lead us to conclude that fundamentalist reasoning is a purely symbolic system or a cultural framework that exists outside of the material world. As I have started to show through my ethnographic data, fundamentalist practices build causal relations between entities through sealing black boxes. We don't have any reason to believe that such practices are exclusively limited to the socio-political networks like invitation, coordination, or cooptation.

Fundamentalist reason is enmeshed in the world and thus being enhanced, facilitated, debilitated, or disrupted by a variety of networks and regions. For example, in the regional ontology of medicine, fundamentalist reason is still marginally operative, and my interlocutors were inclined to follow the causal reasoning of the medical doctors -despite the growing discontent in the face of medical failures (in cancer treatments, surgical mistakes, and other unsuccessful interventions)<sup>76</sup>. However, during my fieldwork, I realized that people around the networks of the AKP are eager to show the efficacy of fundamentalist causation in economics.

In fact, since the rise of political Islam in Turkey, religiously oriented practices and economic affairs have been bleeding into each other. From the early 1990s, when political Islam emerged as a popular force in the country, the names of their parties generally incorporated an economic aspect: National Wellbeing Party (Milli Selamet Partisi), National Order Party (Milli

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<sup>76</sup> Here it should be noted that there is a growing tendency among the Turkish poor that they accuse doctors for mistreatment for medical problems and deaths, resulting in widespread practices of beating doctors and killing them. "Doctor murders" across the country has thus recently become a hot topic and been discussed in several venues.

Nizam Partisi), Welfare Party, Virtue Party, Bliss Party, and finally the Justice and Development Party. Those who call themselves progressive, laic, and western-oriented generally ridiculed this collocation and argued that it was as a result of religious blindness and ignorance that the political Islamists could not see the autonomy of the economy, implying that secular reason is the only way to organize economic relations. One of the most important progressive, social-democratic humor magazine [*mizah dergisi*], *Girgir*, transformed a piece of news about then the leader of Islamists movement Erbakan into a farcical story about how Islamists understand the relation between economy and religion<sup>77</sup>.



Figure 30: Hoca declared after Friday prayer: “Resources will rain from the sky”

**RESOURCE PRAYER:** Trying to find resources for the wage increases for civil servants, widows, and orphans, Refahyol party cadres are working day and night to collect the fruits of their *foreign-exchange convertible investment prayers*. Citizens cannot help but think, “when will Allah punish us?” (emphasis added).

As the example above displays in a farcical manner, the "secular" people in Turkey were, and have still been, making the claim that crassness and simplicity of political Islamist

<sup>77</sup> *Girgir*, 1996, Issue: 1247.

movements, their fundamentalist reasoning, could not lead to anything but economic failures and stagnation since the causal relations they build are far too primitive in a world full of foreign-exchanges, convertible accounts, and foreign direct investments. However, as I have pointed out throughout my dissertation, the partisans and sympathizers of political Islamist movements do not share this vision, and they have in fact a counter-claim asserting that it is the practices of political Islamists that have achieved marvelous material transformations and growth rates in the country. Their explanations do not display a possible continuum in the chains of causation, i.e., the infinite regress, so they might not be able to explain how the Turkish Lira is gaining value through political support, how an unskilled worker can be a manager of a large company, how the piety of the party members can be translated into the largest and most high-tech airport in Europe. However, their explanations are based on exactly the denial that such explanations are effective. As I argued in the previous chapter, many of my interlocutors stated that the infinite connections that abstractions can produce are the means of social distinctions that would lead to inaction. The party motto "Others Talk, the AK Party Does!" was a condensed statement that captured this inefficacy of secular reason. Following the distinction between saying and doing, the empty talk and the efficacious act, the party members and sympathizers claim that doing itself is what really matters, rather than explaining how to do those things. In this sense, "sealing black boxes," practices of fundamentalist causation, is the way to be efficacious in that people can focus on employing those sealed black boxes rather than opening them for discussion and investigation –an endless task that would result in no material change, as the history of Turkey attests, according to my informants.

One example of the efficacy of fundamentalist causation was Sedat's story, a young party member at his mid-20s. Sedat was working as an unskilled laborer in a soup kitchen operated by

Kucukcekmece Municipality, held by the AKP, helping the cooks to prepare daily meals for the indigent. Coming from a poor family of six, he had a hard time finding a job after his military duty. In one of our group conversations, he narrated his story as follows.

-Brother, when I came back from military service, I did not have a job or anything. But *sukur* [gratitude, thank God]; I am telling you this in relation to religion. *Sukur* is very important. I came here. I found a job in Nisantasi<sup>78</sup> for 800 TL. 300 TL for the monthly commute. So I had 500 TL. 400 TL was for home, 100 TL was for me for a month! If I were picky about jobs, would I pick that job? I had a commute of one and a half hours. If I wanted to have a job like that, I could have found it here. But this job came to me. If you are picky about jobs, you cannot find one. This is the case in my [social] circle; you can find a job if you are looking for a job, you cannot find any if you are looking for money. Now I worked at that place for 3 months and I thanked Allah. I worked really hard for 3 months. How did I get my job here? I got this job with the help of Allah. It happened in a moment, suddenly. I didn't even have such a thing in my mind. If it [the job] is in your fate, it will find you eventually.

Although social interactions cannot be easily translated into semantic modalities without distorting their content and context, I would like to dissect Sedat's story according to the causal model it builds so as to display the moves that he performed in connecting several points in his fundamentalist explanation.

1. Fate [*kader*] is that which human reason cannot comprehend and manipulate.
2. A pious person negates his selfish hubris by recognizing the limited and limiting capacity of reason, which can be best performed by "*Sukur*"
3. Since these two qualities cannot be questioned, the statement "you cannot look for the ideal job" is sealed as a black box about which no one can ask further questions.
4. The outcome is to take the first decent (if religiously not offensive) job without hesitation.
5. The efficacy of fundamentalist reason is in (a) making people do things (taking a job), (b) enduring hardship (*sukur*), and (c) making things happen miraculously (a new job) -"in a moment, suddenly;" "I didn't even have such a thing in my mind."

Sedat's description of the events have also another, a deeper claim: secular reason, which tries to plan and calculate every step, results in inaction and failures, as he openly stated that those who try to control things generally fail in finding good jobs. In a sense, he asserted that jobs do not go

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<sup>78</sup> Nisantasi is one of the richest and oldest districts in Istanbul, where Orhan Pamuk grew up.

to them - "this job came to me." However, Sedat did several things at once by building such fundamentalist causal networks in explaining how to make a living in precarious working conditions. First, he showed that he was a pious Muslim as exemplified by way of his thinking. Second, he showed to people (in this specific instance to me and his friends in the soup kitchen) that pious ways of doing things in the world are efficacious, and such acts can achieve material transformation. Through such a strong claim, he received recognition from people around the AKP that his faith was strong and he could do things with that faith. Finally, he foreclosed any further inquiries into how he attained the job thanks to the black box that he sealed with the divine orders of Allah. After all, he was a leader of the youth wing of the AKP in his neighborhood, the municipality was in complete control of the party, and his family was one of the oldest supporters of the Islamist movements in the district. Nevertheless, these points were all too weak before the transcendent registers that Sedat invoked. Challenging his story might easily mean to fight against the "obviousness" of religious efficacy.

Sedat was an adept person in the movement and knew how to substantiate his causes. He didn't take the path of prophet Job, who suffered silently and sought refuge in God's mercy despite all the adversities, but the path of scientists in Latour's books: trying hard to build causal networks, bringing allies in order to produce black boxes, hiding the weak agents among the strong ones, and trying to subdue enemies (in Sedat's case, laicist modernists). However, there is still a significant difference: while Latour thinks that it is necessary to conscribe non-human actants through laboratories and technical equipment in order to build strong networks, Sedat could build strong networks just by sealing black boxes around the networks of political Islamist mobilization. For Latour, people are unlikely to challenge black boxes if opening black boxes is too costly. In order to challenge a theorem, one might need to conduct all the experiments



sustaining that black box, and thus traverse different disciplines, laboratories, and networks, just to see whether a component of that black box is valid. This is the source of strength for black boxes according to Actor Network Theory. Latour dismisses the possibility that fundamentalist reason can seal black boxes by referring to a transcendent register: God orders, Founding Fathers say, or the Furrher demands. For Latour, it is unimaginable that people can performatively seal black boxes by openly stating that the boxes are sealed, and that is all.

The black boxes that fundamentalist explanations produce have a peculiar tendency, though. Since the constitutive gesture of fundamentalism is to stop the infinite regress of analysis by sealing black boxes with transcendent registers, which are claimed to be unquestionable, the causal connections between entities and moments are not continuous: the question of “how” might be sidelined. Think of Mustafa's intervention: the imperative "just prohibit interest" appeared as a cut, an emergence, a substance that we had to deal with without knowing how. Thus, it became possible to come up with different practices that were not named “interest” [*faiz*] but functioned as interest rates. Safak's case is also illustrative. His resort to the black box of "who are Muslims?" convinced those who identified themselves as Muslim but how this conviction took place was something indefinite. Sedat's story is the clearest example: how can one attain a decent job if s/he follows the imperative "take the job your fate [*kader*] brings before you."? The story necessitated a miracle: "How did I get my job here? I got this job with the help of Allah. It happened in a moment, suddenly. I didn't even have such a thing in my mind. If it [the job] is in your fate, it will find you eventually." Since fundamentalist reason is performative in the daily life, its efficaciousness takes the form of miracles, although that of small ones. The structural conditions of such small miracles are made uninvestigable thanks to the black boxes sealed by divine orders. Therefore, asking questions related to Safak's political activities and his

family background was foreclosed in group conversations, limited to the sphere of "gossip" and circles of close friends.

Howsoever popular fundamentalist explanations are, it is always possible to see that they fail -although not as frequently as "laic" segments of the society would like to believe. I have encountered an especially interesting case in which the person in question did not have such acumen as Safak in substantiating his causes. Salim, who was living in a dilapidated shack, asked the party's help for the debt he ran up. One of the party members, Kasim, and I went to see his conditions and tried to determine whether his claims had any validity. He was retired, but he was unable to receive his pension due to a bank credit he took. His story shows the ways in which fundamentalist causation works in daily life while relating how his attempts to act through fundamentalist causation did not come to fruition.

Salim: The guy at the bank deceived me. I got 7000 TL, but they ask 26000<sup>79</sup>. I needed money for my son's marriage, and they left me in this shack. They told me that they would take me to their house, but they also cheated me. They used my retirement pension, and they left me in this situation. That person at the bank, he also used me. I was unable to read the small writings. I don't have good eyesight. He used my illness.

Kasim: ... [remaining silent, acting as if he was looking for words]

Salim: Now there is no money left for me. I don't have any money.

Kasim: ...

Salim: In fact, the state might do something, if we talk to the people from the party. Can't they do something?

Kasim: Uncle, you are the one who took the money, who got into debt. No one can do anything.

Salim: But I didn't do it for myself.

Kasim: Again, uncle, it doesn't matter. It is not possible.

Salim: If our people [from the party] talk to the bank, they might cancel the interest.

Kasim: It is not possible, uncle.

Salim: It is possible. Everything is possible! Especially today... it is possible.

Salim failed to understand that although everything is possible, it is not for everyone and every time. While Sedat was building his causal networks in a careful manner that would hold

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<sup>79</sup> In fact, according to the papers he showed us, he received 13000 TL, and he had to pay 20000 TL including interest.

his black box sealed, Salim got lost in the world of miracles without knowing how to proceed. Remember how Sedat arrived at the conclusion that pious unselfishness facilitates small miracles. He first sealed the black boxes of *Sukur* [gratitude] and *Kader* [destiny] in their powerful obviousness. Then he related them to his taking the first job he encountered as a sign of his devotion, the strength of his faith, and unselfishness. In the neighborhood and around the party networks, before getting his job in the municipality, he had most probably talked about his fundamentalist causes many times just as he was relating the story to me and his friends in the soup kitchen. This is mostly because the obviousness of fundamental causes that he invoked allowed him to talk about himself without being accused of selfishness and arrogance, the sins of human hubris.

Accordingly, Sedat was talking about himself, his sacrifices, and his successes, as if they were not his sacrifices, since everything belongs to Allah, as if they were not his own successes since Allah brought the job to him. Thus he opened a space of agency without the concept of agency that the Western philosophy assumes: Sedat was free to talk about himself as long as he claimed that he was not talking about himself but about the obviousness of Allah's orders and miracles. His getting a relatively comfortable job in a soup kitchen was a small "miracle" that took place in a context of continuous social relations with the party members. Sedat was not lying when saying, "It happened in a moment, suddenly. I didn't even have such a thing in my mind." After all, in the absence of formal application processes, he couldn't anticipate such a possibility for certainty. But this was the strategy of miracles: by continuously talking about the sealed black boxes, partaking in the circulation of the obviousness that such black boxes produce, and taking actions through such fundamentalist causations, Sedat was slowly building his networks that would, although not certainly, enhance his capacity to attain a job, a position in

the party, or a role in a social or political event. Rather than building a CV on paper, he was participating in political meetings, using his Facebook account for distributing propaganda materials, writing or posting religiously sentimental poems, taking pictures that display his *biat* [submission] to Erdogan and the *dawa*, and many other forms of activities around the networks of the AKP. In a world wherein fundamentalist causation is most efficacious, one can build one's causes around sealed black boxes, distribute them in the social space (Bourdieu 1996), and keep them vibrant by irregular but continuous reiterations.

From a certain perspective, Sedat's strategy and fundamentalist reasoning were completely intelligible. Sedat was living in a world of flexibility in which rights and entitlements are continuously being dismantled if remained at all. He knew very well that he couldn't make claims for "rights" to have a job. Instead, he set a trap, or built a milieu à la Foucault, waited for the flexible market to bring an opportune moment, a small miracle, that would give him the thing that he had been waiting for.

Salim failed to thrive through fundamentalist practices although his black box was also sealed. His declaration "I didn't do it for myself" aimed to invoke unselfishness as an obviousness of a transcendent register. He referred to his devotion to his family (his debt was due to a credit taken for his son's wedding), his old age (he was unable to receive his retirement pension), his faltering health ("I was unable to read the small writing, I don't have good eye sight. He used my illness."), and anti-interest discourse ("If our people [from the party] talk to the bank, they might cancel the interest."). However, he did not spread them through time. We did not know much about him before he applied to the party. His black boxes were sealed, and Kasim would not attack them. But Salim brought all those boxes at once, without using time strategically to expand his networks. As a result, the causal networks that Salim was trying to

build were not enough against the gigantic network that the bank was able to rise: Salim had signed the document, he gave the right to the bank to demand the interest.

Salim was right about his emphatic assertion that "everything is possible." Many Islamist businessmen got away with their formally signed bank credit. The AKP helped their members in several instances where there was seemingly nothing to be done. I personally witnessed one incident in which a party member was able to get paid for the damages his car suffered during a winter storm, although he had failed to register his car for insurance. Miracles happen, and fundamentalist reason is efficacious, but only for those who can produce sealed black boxes, multiply them, and spread their causes through certain networks. It is in a sense not only about how to substantiate your causes, but how to share them with others.

#### **V. The Gift of the Obvious: How to Substantiate One's Causes Through Political Networks**

A few weeks after we visited Salim, Kasim insisted that I attend a "home talk," [*ev sohbeti*] in his neighborhood. "Home talks" and "home visits" were common political practices in Istanbul's poor neighborhoods, especially around Islamist movements, bringing people together living in the same building or street, introducing sympathizers into the AKP's work in detail, and trying to register non-members as members<sup>80</sup>. Not infrequently, a prominent person in the party, a MP, for example, or a religious scholar [*hoca*] would join the group and give a speech that aims to educate the participants about religious values, rules, and personalities. Although I had attended many other talks in the district, Kasim was insistent that Seyfullah Hoca is an orator to behold, whose stories and knowledge had changed many people's lives. That day, Seyfullah Hoca wanted to talk about Israel's atrocities and the global forces conspiring against the soldiers of Islam, the

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<sup>80</sup> Registering new members to the party is a sign of one's capacity to establish and extent political networks in Istanbul, thus meaning a stronger potential for future political assignments. This is especially true for the poor and uneducated members of the party, whose reputation can mostly be build on what is called in Turkish "*teskilatcilik*," meaning "the man of organization, organization builder."

AKP people. In explaining why the Jews are hopeless infidels, he began to narrate one of the popular stories in religious meetings, the "real" story of the prophet Jesus [Isa].

Hz. Meryem [Mary] knocked the tree, and dates fell. She ate the dates, and Allah told her "you are now pregnant." She camped under the tree, just eating its dates, and gave birth to Isa Alleyhisselam (Jesus). Allah told Meryem to take the boy and go back to her folk [kavim]. Those wild [azgin], bad-mannered, calumniator [iftiraci] Jews. Meryem was thinking, "when I am back, they will accuse me of indecency." But Allah said, "Meryem, don't have doubt in your heart. Know that Allah is on your side." When she was back, the wild Jews began to attack her, slander her. Meryem retorted, "my chastity is unblemished. This baby is the witness!" The wild Jews ridiculed her, asking "how can a baby be a witness? You are a liar. You know that a baby cannot speak!" And at that moment great Allah made a miracle, Isa Alleyhisselam started to talk: "I am a miracle of Allah! I was born without a father. Witness the miracle! Allah the great has sent me to you as a prophet, sent me to deliver you a book [Bible]." Now think about such a scene. There is such a miracle before your eyes. Allah the great said "be," Isa *Aleyhisselam* came to the world without a father; [Allah] said "talk," the infant started to talk. But do you know what those Jews did? They refused to believe! They denied Allah and his prophet despite such a miracle! [some listeners start to cry]. They accused Meryem of adultery, "you are a bad woman! That child is a bastard! You are a magician! These are magic tricks!" I ask you, can a magician make a baby talk? How can you not see this? But they refused to see!

The intensity of religious sentiments reaching new heights, I was observing the collective attunement that emerges through the story. People were crying, nodding their heads, partaking in a common understanding that the Jews are recalcitrantly corrupt, and attesting the miracle that Allah made a baby talk. The story slowly built an "obvious" by closely knitting black boxes: Allah made Meryem pregnant, the Jews have been incorrigible infidels, and the baby Isa miraculously talked. Those black boxes revolved around one unacceptable thing: the Jews refused to see the miracle! At that moment, party members saw Allah's miracle because the statement "How can you not see this?" created an "obviousness," -an obvious fact that people in the room were capable of attesting its truth while the Jews were adamant in their denial. People were sharing the obvious produced in the room and partook in the community of believers, thanks to the gift of the obvious -the impossible refusal of such a miracle. Since the black boxes

were sealed, that is, it was impossible to ask questions such as "did the Jews really see the baby talking," a miracle emerged before the eyes of the audience and a collective truth was substantiated. Seyfullah Hoca was not only giving a talk, but also producing an entity, through the sharing of which a community of believers was to emerge, be enhanced, and sustained.

This is one of the most significant achievements of sealing black boxes. They can create a constellation out of which a shared obviousness emerge and through which a community of people can gather. Of course, not all people who listen to such stories based on black boxes would partake in such communities. I was merely observing the effects of the obvious without subscribing to it. But the fundamentalist causation works in this way: by connecting unquestionable points, i.e., sealed black boxes, that cannot be challenged. You may, in fact, question those black boxes, but not in the way Latour describes. Opening them is explicitly foreclosed. In this case, if I were to ask Seyfullah Hoca whether the Quranic verses he used might be interpreted as speeches of figure, a metaphorical lesson that dictates the use of reason rather than blind obedience to tradition in order to explain the Jewish refusal, I would have been accused of obfuscating the obvious since the verses are "clear."<sup>81</sup> However, the certainty of such ferocious responses should not lead us to think that the demand for accepting the obvious is only a dominating, suppressing gesture. It is also a gift—something that can make a person a part of a community—a community which shares the truth and efficacy, claims for right and might, and thus being capable of changing the misfortune of the believers against the Westerners [*batililar*]. In cases of such challenges, one does not only threaten an interpretation but the existence of a community itself. The obvious is a gift, rejection of which means only war, and nothing less

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<sup>81</sup> In such cases, my observations show, invariably, that the only way to challenge an interpretation is not to make a claim about the interpretive depth of the verses, as a hermeneutic gesture, but to resort to pushing literalism forward by showing off one's knowledge of Quranic Arabic, stating something like "the real meaning of the word is not what you think..." In this sense, literalism cannot be challenged by interpretation but by more literalism.

(Mauss 2002, 17).

Because of the nature of my fieldwork, I rarely challenged my interlocutors when they tried to seal black boxes and produce “the obvious.” I witnessed several interpretational conflicts among the partisans, but rarely did I have the chance to participate in different forms of reasoning and their conflicting punctuations. One experience that I had was with Mustafa on the question of interest [*faiz*]. The other was with Recep, an eccentric local intellectual in Sefakoy, a neighborhood in Kucukcekmece. He was trying to convince me that the reasons for poverty are related to the Western influences that dictate excessive luxurious consumption and slothful indulgence. He was insistent that Turkey could become rich if people want, but despite the political and religious revival of the recent years, the situation was far from being such a case.

Recep: Look, is poverty something that we are destined to? No, there should be no poor normally. A person becomes poor by himself, but he can make himself rich if he wants.

Firat: What if he was born into a poor family?

Recep: If he was born poor, he can still make himself rich.

Firat: Can everybody make it?

Recep: Everyone can be rich. He can be, there is no reason for otherwise. It is so easy to be rich.

Firat: How?

Recep: Take off your notebook... and your pencil.

Firat: Ok,

Recep: A family of two, how can they be rich, right? Now, the man is working; he receives the minimum wage, 1000 TL. Now, he smokes a package of cigarette per day. How much? 200 TL. He spends 5 TL for coffeehouse every day: 150. Now, when he comes back home and asks his wife to make 100 sandwiches, he can sell those sandwiches within one hour, right?

Firat: But there is a problem: it would be the case if he could sell every sandwich every day, like the demand is infinite<sup>82</sup>, but is it possible to sell sandwiches as much as you make?

Recep: I give you this example because I saw it.

Firat: 100?

Recep: It can also be 300, I gave you the number I saw.

Firat: 100 within one hour?

Recep: He gets in a coffeehouse, he knows 10 people, he sells 10 sandwiches, 10

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<sup>82</sup> This statement was an unfortunate mistake on my part. It sounded unnecessarily arrogant in the context. I was simply carried away with my own reasoning.



coffeehouses, 100 sandwiches. I saw it. His profit is 1 TL per sandwich, let's say, although it is more. How much does he make?

Firat: 100 in a day.

Recep: 3000 TL for a month. Add cigarettes and coffee expenditures.

Firat: 3350.

Recep: Add his wage.

Firat: 4400.

Recep: This is what we say: we spend money for luxury, we do not like to work.

Firat: Ok, but I have a question. If the man can make 3000 TL by working one hour a day, why does he work 8 hours a day for 6 days a week and make 1000 TL?

Recep: ....[confused and a little bit annoyed by my asking such questions]... Now... he gets social security for his job.

Firat: But he can easily pay his pensions if he makes this much.

Recep: [Apparently angry] I gave you an example, you multiply this. You come up with new examples. You are smarter than me.

Firat: *Estagfurullah* [not at all].

Recep: So, man can become rich.

Firat: According to this calculation, yes, he can.

Although oriented by religious concerns (how to overcome the poverty that the Western civilization imposed on Muslims), our conversation was not directly related to religious matters, and Recep didn't resort to sealing black boxes. However, he was still using the tactics of the fundamentalist reason against my secular suspicion: Can one sell all sandwiches every day? What about fluctuations in the market? Why does the person continue working in his job although he would not need to spend his time in such an unproductive way? Because he "saw it;" because this was the minimum amount a person could do; because this was a modest example. My mistake was to think that Recep's story was a model like a plan that we can dissect as much as we want, focus on different parts, or compare with other data. I acted as if I could ask questions as far as I could so as to clarify his proposal. However, the story did not aim to be a formal structure that we can apply everywhere. His sentence "everyone can do it" did not mean that his causal explanation had a model, but it was an invitation extended to me to agree with him that we could change the conditions of our lives and the world we live in. This was a gift from Recep, a generous gift that placed me in a higher position: "I gave you an example, you

multiply this. You come up with new examples. You are smarter than me." Recep was not simply imposing on me some sealed black boxes or an obvious that I had to concede to. He was trying to mobilize me, politically coopt into his cause, and make me an ally so I could help him in his war against the underdevelopment of the country.

The causal explanations of fundamentalist reason, just like in this case, reminiscent of Latour's discussion about scientific institutions, focus on building networks that can make things happen through aligning people, mobilizing them for various causes, and making political entities emerge. These are political entities in a very unusual way. Following poststructuralist approach, we can define politics as an ontologically constitutive antagonism that cleaves the social realm into opposing constituents: enemies and friends (Mouffe, 2005: 9). What is peculiar about the political entities emerged through fundamentalist causation is their quality of being obvious but nonetheless contentious. My agreement with Recep's proposal, the event of talking baby Jesus, the fact that interest [*faiz*] as such is prohibited, or the sufficiency of seeing someone worshipping as a sign of his piety are all "obvious" but contentious in that there are incorrigible infidels denying their obviousness. In this sense, the efficacy of fundamentalist reason resides in this capacity to politically mobilize people through sealed black boxes and producing obviousness against those who reject this obviousness. The gift of the obvious is thus political, achieving something that no scientific networks can ever achieve. Employing sealed black boxes, people can assuredly act as long as they recognize that their "fundamentals" are inimical to some other people. One can substantiate one's causes with certainty as long as it is shared by some and contested by others. And about substantiating one's cause with the gift of the obvious, Saban was one of the most competent persons that I met in the field.

Saban was an old guy who came from a traditional and religious background. Although

most of his family had been voting for religious parties during his youth, in the 1970s, he became a member of a far-right nationalist organization, i.e., a fascist, and involved in many adventures that he related to me. After the 1980 coup d'etat, Saban quit that irreligious past, as he recalled, and began to be interested in political Islam. His involvement gradually got deeper, and he became an important figure in the district Esenler. During this time, he engaged in social works as a part of his political activities, and at the beginning of the 2000s, he and his friends wanted to establish a local humanitarian organization dealing with the poor in the neighborhood. Valide (the mother) Humanitarian Foundation was thus established. They provided food, cloth, furniture and, in some cases, in-cash assistance to indigents through home visits, observations, and references. Although the organization was really small in its operations and scale, they wanted to be recognized as a "public benefit organization." In Turkey, there are approximately 300 organizations of this kind. This title is a massive step for any NGOs since the donations to such organizations are tax-exempt and many businessmen can easily be convinced to donate large sums of money. He and his friends applied for the status, but they had waited for a long time. Then one day, president Erdogan's mother passed away.

We thought that the name sounded warm. It gives people a sense of warmth, compassion, and prompts people to think of their mothers and the caring they received from their mothers. We went to the funeral of Mr. Tayyip [Erdogan]'s mother. We met him there. He had been coming to Esenler frequently; he knew that we are an NGO [STK]. We had already applied for the title of public benefit organization. We said, "we are expecting your help." Of course, it was not something to tell in a funeral but you know, we got the chance to talk to him. We told him the name of our organization. He said, "Can one forget *valide* (mother)? You came here today, and we got the chance to talk. So this cannot be a coincidence." A few days later, we called his secretary. He helped us a lot; they remembered our conversation. [...] The first signature of Mr. Tayyip as president was the decision that declared our organization public benefit organization.

The significance of the story would have eluded me if I were not surprised by his narration about how the organization passed the inspections conducted to determine whether the

organization's capacity and assets were suitable for the title. While he was talking about the details of accounting, he began to complain about the new regulations required for public benefit organization.

Before this, we were coming together one night, collecting bills, and then sending them to the Bureau of Organizations. It was the way we were doing things before. Now, it is too complicated. You have to register everything on a daily basis. They also inspect the inspectors that inspect us [laughing]. Too much bureaucracy! But we were lucky at the beginning. These inspectors were to write a report about our organization, for this public benefit thing. We went there, in Ankara, a bunch of men with beards and these cloths. You know like what laicists call us; reactionaries [*gerici*<sup>83</sup>]. But this is Allah's job, listen: The inspector carefully looked at us and said, "I believe in you, you look sincere/intimate (*samimi*)."<sup>83</sup> You know, he looked at us like this [a careful stare]. He said, "you are sincere/intimate. But you do not have any asset. In order to operate as a public benefit organization, you need assets and property. But I believe your sincerity/intimacy. I will submit a positive view about your application." What we did was... it was to tell them what we do here. Humbly, without exaggeration... We were not promoting ourselves. The inspector said, "you are right." I mean, they gave a positive review. We were working as much as we could, and we still do as much as we can.

Saban's story explicitly reveals how "to be" in the new world of small miracles, where fundamentalist causation is most operable. People make investments, a form of substantiation, in order to achieve uncertain ends. There is no sure connection between one's actions and the desirable consequences that "might" follow; but there are certain models, methods, and experiments. Sedat, the young member of the party, frequently talked about his pious self-negation and thus increased the possibility of a small miracle, i.e., finding a stable job. An alternative and critical reasoning about this small miracle was foreclosed by the few black boxes that he conscripted to forestall any question about his family's connections to the municipality and the party. Salim, the naïf, was unable to understand how to substantiate his causes in

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<sup>83</sup> The word *gerici* literally means "those who are in favor of backwardness," in the sense that they are a kind of people who want to return to a previous epoch and life style, thus being anti-modern. In 2006, the major secularist newspaper *Cumhuriyet* placed an advertisement articulating the secular critique of the AKP and Erdogan. On a black background with green theme, the ad comprised only a single sentence "Are you aware of the danger?" (*tehlikenin farkında misiniz?*), but written in reverse "A erawa uoy eht fo regnad?" thus underlining the danger of reactionary forces in Turkey.

conjuring a miracle. He was dazzled by the continuous stories of miracles without being able to make sense of their “how”s. Saban was a kind of expert in fundamentalist reason. He and his friends did not mean to impress Erdogan with the name of the organization, but neither did they miss the opportune moment. He was genuine in his conviction that the organization passed the inspections due to their spiritual qualities (sincerity/intimacy and piety) that are materialized by their beards and cloths. He never mentioned his prior encounter with Erdogan when he talked about the inspections as if temporal continuum in causation was exclusive to secular causation.

Thus, two miracles were distinct from each other; they were separately substantiated by the immaterial qualities of good Muslims. There was no need to coordinate them. Time flowed not homogenously, but differentially, not abstractly but substantially. Time, in this sense, did not formally connect different entities and events in causal chains but rather coalesced around the causes substantiated by the agents. The obviousness of “this is Allah’s job” articulated the contingency of informal decision and power relations into independent qualities like intimacy, sincerity, or piety. The brute fact of a political decision was translated into a miracle that could not be questioned. Accordingly, “ends” emerge as “means” disappear; “whats” populate, while “hows” become obsolete. This fundamentalist reasoning distributes causes in such a way that a critique can only be possible through a total rejection, a denial of the gift of the obvious, which would put the contender into a position of the absolute enemy.

## **VI. Conclusion: Colonization through Causation, or the Empire of Efficacy**

Throughout the chapter, I have tried to display some observable characteristics that would distinguish one way of reasoning, especially when attributing causes, from another. My point of departure was to take seriously the language of political Islam, the idioms and narratives that political Islamists use, and the practices that people around the networks of the AKP perform

through such expressions and models. The frequent employment of religiously invested themes, concepts, and narratives, as I observed, have a peculiar potentiality to make things happen, to explain causal relations, and to act in the world. I observed and tried to display that there was a certain tendency among my interlocutors towards an open, explicit disregard for how people achieve the ends that they value. This was especially pertinent for the popular fundamentalist reasoning in which explanations in detail were being rejected and dismissed. Common examples abound in the public sphere in Turkey, showing that the claims for questioning social, economic, and political facts have been subjected to a test of binary reasoning invested in successes and failures, and nothing else.

While those who identify themselves as seculars, and thus in opposition to the hegemonic party AKP, argued that the growth in the period of political Islamists is based on short-term hot money, partisans and sympathizers frequently retorted, "why were the previous governments unable to do the same then?" When secular critiques argued that hospitals, public institutions, and infrastructures are faster and more accessible because of the recent developments in information technologies, partisans and sympathizers ask why the previous governments were unable to use computers in the 1990s. How we achieve certain ends seemed to be under attack about whether we achieve those ends. As long as one makes things happen, causes them to be, the question of "how" recedes further and further into the distance.

I believe it is not a coincidence that fundamentalist reasoning and its adamant rejection of secular/critical stances attained widespread currency in a time when market fundamentalism is wreaking havoc in Turkey. However, rather than being an inactive symptom of changing economic and material conditions, as in the form of a desperate reactionary desire to return to a pristine past, fundamentalist reason shares a deeper commitment with market fundamentalism,

which relates these two modalities of reasoning and acting to each other, creating a vicious circle, feeding a loop towards an ambiguous, but ominous historical end. I think this shared commitment is a historical gesture that welds the notion of efficacy to that of efficiency, thereby colonizing the concerns for how to do things better, quicker, and more efficiently, through a blind obsession with whether we do things at all. I believe the massive literature on neoliberalism has already given us the cues for this transformation from “how” to “what,” from means to ends.

It would not be an exaggeration to assert that the contemporary studies on the nature and origin of neoliberalism immensely benefitted from Foucault’s influential lectures in 1978/1979, titled *the Birth of Biopolitics*. In this founding text, Foucault observes that there was a certain shift in the form of the relationship between markets and states after World War 2<sup>84</sup>. Although displaying significant divergences according to the country in which neoliberalism emerged, the shift can be described as from a state under the supervision of the market to a market supervised by the state, from exchange to competition. Foucault underlines that competition is a new phenomenon with distinctive consequences for governmental reason. Competition is substantially different from exchange in that it is a principle of formalization (2004, 120). In this specific sense of the term, Foucault claims that competition has an internal logic and structure that regulates behavior according to the terms of the game of supply and demand, efficiency, and cost-reduction (246). The primary consequence of such a formalistic inner logic is the attempt to “decipher traditionally non-economic social behavior in economic terms” and thus making the man as an enterprise (*homo œconomicus*) instead of the man of exchange, an enterprise society instead of a supermarket society.

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<sup>84</sup> According to Foucault, Soviet socialism, National Socialism, and Keynesian interventionist policies were all different responses to the crisis of liberalism, and not capitalism (2004, 69-70). For the sake of brevity and simplicity, I will not discuss the Keynesian economics and welfare policies in Foucault’s thinking and argumentation here.

In the sociology of science, Nancy Cartwright warns against the very real danger that physics become the paradigmatic form of explanation for every domain of existence, thus perpetuating a form of fundamentalism that insists on the possibility of precision from psychology to economics, from history to chemistry (1983; 1999). I think we can call this process “colonization by physics” wherein different disciplines were subjected to the inner logic of a single region of investigation. In a similar fashion, Foucault draws a picture in which the formalization processes based on the principle of efficiency and competition starts to invade and colonize other regions of life by making the subject “the entrepreneur of itself” (2004, 225). Not surprisingly, this formula has recently become famous in explaining various social and economic problems of the contemporary world.

To put it in a simplified manner, the formulation that X is colonizing Y is pertinent in explaining the inexorable march of the global capitalist domination vis-à-vis the retreat of political hopes that the progressive movements around the world have been cherishing for centuries. Such a formulation designates the fact that we are losing something while something that we are fighting against is gaining new grounds on a daily basis. But does this mean that we are talking about “neoliberalism’s “economization” of political life and of other heretofore noneconomic spheres and activities,” as Wendy Brown’s recent book emphatically posits (2015, 9)? I have serious doubts about the theory of “economization.” First, the definition of the concept is vague. Rational theory, consumerist dispositions, individualism, or market valuation emerge as common tropes to explain what this new economy is without systematic investigations into the concrete networks that carry high theory (rational expectation) to the grassroots (when real people make decisions in different contexts). Secondly, the recent scholarly focus has been shifted to the processes that actively construct economic phenomena, i.e., the performativity of



economic relations (Caliskan and Callon 2009), investigating a wide variety of performative instances ranging from derivative markets (MacKenzie 2006) to “the economy” itself (Mitchell 2002). If we are to accede to the relevance of such works, and my theoretical orientation requires me to take them seriously, then we have a conundrum: while all economic phenomena, from prices to future markets, require immense social labor to be constructed and sustained, processes that we can observe to their minutest details, how can we talk about neoliberal rationality that arranges everything but cannot be observed directly? Neoliberalism as a set of macroeconomic policies is well known: liberalization of financial markets, dismantlement of welfare states, or destruction of trade unions. But, it is difficult to categorize dating applications as a part of neoliberal reason, merely relating it to, again unobservable, the need to be rated and to increase one’s portfolio value (Brown 2015, 33, also see Feher 2009).

But since we observe that a certain form of life is ebbing away, while another one is imposing itself all the more fiercely, can we find certain dispositions that would explain the shift—even partially and in limited ways. In other words, are there some registers that are relevant in different spheres of life due to their being effective in different regions? Can we talk about a possibility that fundamentalist reason and its causation is becoming more powerful both in the economy and social life, facilitating both neoliberal macroeconomics and authoritarian politics? My argument is that by suspending economic plans, bureaucratic regulations, and formal procedures in order to increase the efficiency of markets, neoliberal economic policies are reshaping the material reality in such ways that the practices of efficiency are being displaced by a brutal interest in efficacy. The rise of fundamentalist reason is a part of the general shift through which efficacy colonizes efficiency.

However, before I recapitulate my ethnographic data around this argument, I would like to

clarify how I define these two concepts. Jacques Bertin's definition of efficiency is a good place to start. Even though his concern is to investigate the rules of graphic systems, he provides a succinct definition that we can extrapolate easily: "EFFICIENCY is defined by the following proposition: If, in order to obtain a correct and complete answer to a given question, all other things being equal, one construction requires a shorter period of perception than another construction, we can say that it is more efficient for this question" (1983, 9). In this sense, efficiency is about the systematic investigation of the means through which we can achieve ends. It is closely related to the notion of causation in that causes and effects are variously organized and mapped in different processes (Alexander 2008, 10). In its contemporary usage, the term designates "an intellectual construction designed to bring machines, systems, or processes under material control" (2009, 1008). It is a systematic way of causing things to happen according to human will, taking the form of plans regulating the distribution of causes and relating them to each other in the shortest way.

What is so interesting about the concept of efficiency is the historical transformation of its meaning during industrialization. The ancient and medieval uses of the term coincide with what we may call efficacy. In fact, until the eighteenth century, efficiency and efficacy were used in the sense of "efficient causes," indicating a non-quantifiable capacity to make things happen, without paying much attention to the question of how. In the 18th and 19th century, starting in engineering and physics and then being appropriated by economics, the idea of efficiency divested from the meaning of efficacy (Mitcham 1994, 225). Efficiency became a quantifiable measure of output/input relationship, an increasingly formalized approach to systems, machines or processes, aiming to increase human control over the world (Alexander 2009, 1008). Fredrick Taylor is the most famous figure in this history. He applied the newly ascending model of

efficiency to economic activities, initiating "the efficiency movement" in the early twentieth century USA -the movement commonly known as Taylorism (Witzel 2002). Therefore efficiency attained an autonomous zone of signification and was divested from the non-quantifiable sense of its original usage. In the meantime, efficacy, or what many scholar call effectiveness, was reframed in different disciplines and thus became especially popular in political sciences. In 1954, the concept "political efficacy" was defined for the first time as the "feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, that is, that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties." (Campbell et al. 1954, 187). While efficiency turned into a concept to be used in analyzing the relations between components of a system in order to increase output/input ratios, focusing on the "hows," efficacy started to incorporate notions such as beliefs, feelings, trust, and communities, increasingly concerned with the question of "what," sidelining the "technical" dimension of "how" those ends are attained.

I have strong reasons to believe that economic policies in the late twenty-century have resulted in a tectonic shift in discourses and practices concerning the couple efficiency/efficacy. Scholars have repeatedly shown that neoliberalism, if the concept shares any overarching semantic content, is closely aligned with the critique of planning in order to eliminate structural inefficiencies and to foster market efficiencies (Davis 2014; Peck 2010; Stiglitz 2010). The basic logic behind this reasoning is that the world is infinitely more complex than can be mapped by any plans and thus the most effective form of action is to delegate the responsibility of achieving ends to actors themselves: corporations, families, and persons (Hayek 1989; Mirowski 2002). Notorious Chicago economist Gary Becker gives us a perfect example of this reasoning: "a progressive income tax system not only reduces efficiency by discouraging investment but may also widen the equilibrium inequality in disposable incomes. By contrast, policies that improve

access of poor families to the capital market to finance their investments in human capital reduce inequality while raising efficiency” (1993, 222). This logic is what Foucault calls "competition [as] a principle of formalization" which has "an internal logic, its own structure" (2004, 120). In line with Foucault's arguments, neoliberal policies thus dictate that economic processes cannot be regulated as imagined in the Welfare States. It is the society that government should intervene in so as to ensure "competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society" (2004, 145).

But I think something is missing in this picture. The shift from "formalization through planning" to "formalization of competition and its efficiency in homo economicus" is also a shift in the meaning of efficiency to a definition reminiscent of a previous period. Although economics developed extraordinarily complex analyses of how the formalization of competition works at the level of individual (through microfoundational analysis, rational choice theory, game theory, and stochastic analysis), it relocates an essential component of the concept "efficiency," that is, control, from formal structures like planning to substantive qualities like independent preferences of consumers. In other words, control and decision become non-contingent and apolitical dimensions, acquiring qualities similar to that of natural sciences (Ekelund and Hébert 1999; Mirowski 1989). This shift led to an increasing interest in the question of "what" instead of the question of "how." The nearly complete abandonment of development economics and a general lack of interest in growth theories in macroeconomics are symptoms that economists abandoned the idea that governments can actively engage in the formation of markets and espoused the neoliberal dictum that the only possible way of intervention is to ensure that microfoundations (individuals, families, or companies) can realize their promises of efficiency by themselves.

Rather than planning the networks of actions in achieving an end, market fundamentalism thus posits that the most efficient way of achieving those ends is to force agents to undertake actions (and responsibilities) in whatever way they find the most effective. This is the core of the neoliberal formation, which orthodox economists conflate with "freedom." However, what I am trying to draw attention to is that the shift itself is a negation of the very idea of efficiency, allowing agents to take action as long as their actions are efficacious –resulting in the outcomes that agents are trying to achieve without being interested in the total cost of achieving those ends. In this sense, neoliberalism is a project that materially transforms the world in a way that quantitative efficiencies of macrostructures are replaced by the efficaciousness of microfoundations. What I call "the colonization of efficiency by efficacy" is a generalized disposition that people see the formal delineation of activities (in the form of bureaucracy, plans, regulations, and rules) as less conducive and valuable whereas crass efficaciousness becomes a predominant directive. From this perspective, fundamentalist reason and its causation are not regressions, preposterous aberrations, or desperate attempts to protect tradition against modernity. Fundamentalist reasoning is enmeshed in the contemporary world to such an extent that social, political, and economic relations intensify the modalities of fundamentalism as much as the varieties of fundamentalism participate in the reproduction, intensification, and expansion of certain dimensions of those social, economic, and political relations. Thus market fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism do not haphazardly concur, but they have certain elective affinities through which they address similar problems, prescribe similar modalities of action, and prognosticate similar trajectories. Let me give you one last example from my fieldwork.

I have mentioned Saban, the expert in performing fundamentalist reasoning in his struggle

to get the title “public benefit organization” for Valide Humanitarian Foundation. He considered me as a kind of intern focusing on Turkey, trying to figure out what had changed in the country through the stories of local people. While I was trying to give the impression of a politically neutral investigator, who was trying to understand social, political, and economic changes, from both positive and negative perspectives, he was trying to explain to me how the political Islamists achieved marvels in Turkey.

Saban: My son, we did not have brands before, men were producing commodities [...] in the old times, we had to pay so much money for low-quality goods, like shoes. Thanks to Allah, now we have brands. In old times, there was not even a price tag. How much is this? 100. Or if he doesn't like you, 200. Today, you look at this product, or that product, you like this or that, you compare, I mean there is competition right now. In old times, they were cheating us. In old times, there was nothing, but today we can export our own products. Before our party, the total export of the country was 10 billion dollars. Today, it is 200 billion. We were closed to the world, now we are open.

Firat: How did we achieve this?

Saban: Do you know Boydak Holding, they are from our people [i.e., Islamists].

Firat: Of course,

Saban: Istikbal is their brand for furniture, and also Mondi Furniture. When IKEA came to Turkey, they were against that furniture company, they told Erdogan “you brought them here! how can we compete with them? We will bankrupt, our factories will be shut down.” Then Erdogan told them, “make your products better, compete with them, you go to their country and open a shop there.” Now they opened a shop in Sweden. There were no such initiatives before, my son. We were closed to the world.

Saban's story is a perfect example of the conflation of market fundamentalism and Islamist fundamentalist in Turkey. As was framed in Recep's narrative, the market and its forces are beyond human cognition, reminding us of Adam Smith's "invisible hand of God," or Hayek's cognitive challenge that no single person can process the information being produced by the society through market relations (Caldwell 2005; Hayek 1958; Mirowski 2017). When Turkey was closed to the world, plans and regulations ended up producing low-quality goods and unfair prices for common people. Those low-quality products kept Turkey underdeveloped, resulting in the total export of 10 billion dollars. On the other hand, the new Turkey unleashed the power of

people, achieving twenty times higher export revenues. This achievement was not possible during the time of the closed economy, wherein regulations failed without competition. Only competition, Recep insisted, could put social forces into productive activities.

Accordingly, Saban navigated the relations of production in the global capitalist world order as he was using fundamentalist reasoning in the political and social sphere. The necessity to export for a country to get developed becomes a black box, without the possibility of investigating its historical and contingent trajectory, as if export-oriented growth could be compared to import-substitution industrialization. Competition replaces development plans as if producing high-quality products could not be possible in the developmentalist period. Around these black boxes, a miracle occurred, “thanks to Allah,” thanks to the devotion and faithfulness of Islamist cadres. Making high-quality products, achieving an enormous amount of export, having brand names, and being able to open shops in foreign countries, Recep insists that “whole world talks about Turkey’s miracle!” But how? The answer could not be given in a formal analysis. Neither Erdogan nor the economists of the time would be able to tell the Boydaks how to compete with IKEA.

It is because the development of the country was not a theoretical problem in the first place—a matter of formalization, a question of how. It was a practical problem, a question of efficacy, a question of “what.” When the Boydaks asked Erdogan, “how can we compete with them [IKEA]?” rather than explaining how to compete, Erdogan told the family what to do: “make your products better! Compete with them!” Asking questions about “how” thus becomes redundant, and even dangerous. The case was similar to Sedat’s, who created an appropriate conjecture for the miracle of finding a relatively stable job in the world of flexible employment. Sedat similarly insisted that those who try to get the job that they want would not get it, since

making plans for one's future, without acceding to the divine will of the creator and the impossibility of controlling one's fate, is futile. Salim, the naïve, tried to elicit a similar miracle, although without expanding his networks and causes through time, and thus eventually failing to achieve his ends. However, Salim was still possessed by the idea that everything is possible, that there are ways to do anything through political networks. He didn't know how to achieve those ends, but he knew that miracles abound.

All their stories and practices attest to the growing popular conviction that the complexities of the world far surpass attempts in framing the world, mapping the causal networks in it, and acting according to the plans based on those blueprints. This popular knowledge is not misrecognition in the epistemological sense of the world, but an ontological interpretation located in a world that has been transformed by the massive struggle among various strong networks –communication technologies, service industries, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the European Union, the IMF, and many others. What is important to remember is that they are all practical entanglements that are in continuous tension with political and social networks –constructing some, dismantling others, empowering some, disabling others. The rise of fundamentalism is not a functional consequence of their conjectural combination but a sign of a potentiality that has been augmented by such a conjunction. What the alternative modalities of being, acting, and engaging with others is thus a question that can only be answered on the grassroots level through experiments, engagements, and organizational politics.



## **Conclusion: Towards an Anthropology of Alter-Power?**

This dissertation was an attempt to think the recent resurgence of political movements from a perspective that would not reduce such a complex phenomenon to linguistic analyses, economic explanations, or institutional arrangements. To this end, I have tried to unfold the several folds that constitute a specific example of political mobilization, the Islamist AKP in Turkey, on the level of grassroots organization. I focused on entanglements and intersectionalities of materialities, technological changes, social networks, economic relations, and lived histories –a conjuncture within which the impoverished masses claim to regain a certain form of agency and efficaciousness that cannot be conceived through the predominant social scientific paradigms nor through the recent attempts in foregrounding discursive traditions, which are supposed to endow the subjects with alternative modalities of being and capacities of acting. Against these two strands of thinking, I tried to espouse a position that locates contingency at the very center of its investigation: novel ways of being and acting can emerge at any time and any historical conjecture.

Accordingly, the masses can be reasonably convinced of their agencies in determining the value of the national currencies through their political actions. New forms of labor relations might harbor new forms of agency, which index a possibility to translate the fluctuations of market relations into social and political registers around a political project. New forms of making the self can be impending, the forms that enhance the capacities of action through sacrificing and negating the self itself. Formalities, rules, and regulations, the very basis of the modern power that Weber saw as in an inexorable advance, might be sidelined by the increasing capacity of new political forces in shaping the material world. And finally, new forms of fundamentalist reasoning, religious or not, can erupt as alternatives to the tradition of

enlightenment, whose legacy has already been under fierce attack for a long time, for good, and bad reasons.

And all these can take place not as resistance but as novel power configurations. Current studies conceptualize the question of novelty either as creative resistance or as the continuation of the governmental juggernaut. In other words, if there is an altered state of affairs in a given context, it is either a result of the struggle that is related to the emancipatory powers of human beings, or a development in the logic of power that expands its already existing networks into other domains. By taking into account the question of contingency, I tried not to subscribe to these options and rather to look for emerging material, social, and political constellations and their concatenation –new networks with new power relations. In a sense, I wanted to investigate the possibilities of alter-power, a force that is neither power nor counter-power, neither supporting an already existing set of power relations nor trying to disempower the powerful by the powerless. I am talking about a configuration of power that attacks another configuration, say Islamism against Capitalism, but without being emancipatory.

In fact, this is supposedly a very well known topic. Many studies discuss the reactionary powers and social forces that can best be considered as regressive formations of power relations. Although for political reasons I also use similar denominations to describe such phenomena, I think that a unificatory theory of power locates non-hegemonic power projects into a temporal diversion, as a hegemonic project that has no place. Foucault's fascination with the Iranian Revolution is partially because of this certain metaphysics of power that imagines "one" formation of power that rules over all the others. The remaining parts are to be categorized either as resistance or aberration, i.e., regression.

This is the very reason that I continuously return to the sociology of science in order to phenomenologically investigate the emergence of multifarious power configurations, which wage wars against each other without achieving an absolute domination. Although situated always in a world that has historically been shaped by the existing networks of power, the ontological centrality of “contingency” might allow us to think folds of political configurations as that which cannot be reduced to an ontotheology of power, that is to say, a final ontology of the political that would define all the other political formations.

However, there is a certain tragedy that such a phenomenological approach brings. Even though it can demarcate vast regions of hegemonic dispositions, as I tried to do in Chapter 6 in arguing that there is an ontological crisis in capitalism in welding efficacy to efficiency and thus resulting in efficacy’s colonization of efficiency, such efforts are always bound to be contingent in context and minimal in observation. In other words, even when it generalizes tendencies, it focuses on momentary flashes as Benjamin describes; even when it exemplifies, it isolates the slightest gestures in daily life. What kind of an emancipatory politics can emerge from such a perspective, if ever possible, thus remains to be answered.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The point that I make here is not in fact in contradiction to Talal Asad's notion of "a discursive tradition," although not entirely contiguous with it. In his famous article "the Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," Asad takes a stand against what we may call "essentialist" interpretations of Islamic, which, he claims, disregards "instituted practices [...] oriented to a conception of the past" (2009. 21). He endorses a position which is analogous to that of Bourdieu in that phenomenology and structuralism are combined in an uneasy way. He states, "It is misleading because such a contention ignores the centrality of the notion of "the correct model" to which an instituted practice -including ritual- ought to conform, a model conveyed in authoritative formulas, in Islamic traditions as in others. And I refer here primarily not to the programmatic discourses of "modernist" and "fundamentalist" Islamic movements, but to the established practices of unlettered Muslims. A practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims -whether by an alim, a khatib, a Sufi shaykh, or an untutored parent." I try to unsettle his conceptualization by a phenomenological turn, asking whether there cannot be certain "fundamentalist" practices of (unlettered) Muslim.

My fieldwork explicitly shows that there are practices and discourses, whose legitimacy is based on not a "correct model" of moral self-comportment but on a certain metaphysics that claims a validity beyond the hereafter, covering *hic et nun*. In other words, "the correct model," the conceptual apparatus that connects power and knowledge for Asad, can be both ontological and political. It can be ontological in that it claims to be efficacious in the world in transforming its material dimensions through immaterial/spiritual mediations. It can be political in that there is a constitutive antagonism in defining "the correct model," which needs to posit enemies of the correct model. These two dimensions are interestingly absent in Talal Asad's and his students works (Mahmoud 2012; Hirschkind 2006). Saba Mahmood's exclusive focus on the cultivation of self and sensibilities is just a symptom arising from the erasure, if not the repression, of the paradigmatic quality of the political: the antagonism. The question of morality and virtue ethics thus emerge as alternative forms of life within which isolated selves cultivate a collectivity without the distinction of enemy and friend. Accordingly, both Hirschkind and Mahmood understands "dawa movement" as primarily oriented towards peaceful self-cultivation and non-liberal sensitivities. Although Hirschkind insists that his focus is inherently related to the question of the political, he argues that "the themes of martyrdom and violent struggle are marginal to today's da'wa movement and the khutaba' who now articulate its goals and ideological directions. For these thinkers, death is first and foremost a concern for ethics of how one lives." (178).

Their position is understandably a defensive one against the liberal accusation of fundamentalist violence among Islamists. However, the problem that there is fundamentalism and it has an originary violence in its ontological constitution is in no way saying that liberal project, or even the project of enlightenment, has a character that is a-political, non-antagonistic, or even non-violent. But the imbrication of a certain political project, ontological conditions within which it is located, and the forms of enemy-friend distinctions it enacts cannot be sidelined as corollaries of a virtue ethic, but the very coordinates through which ordinary people partake in that political project. Following Kant, we should argue that if ontology without ethics is blind, then ethics without ontology is empty.

<sup>1</sup> Among countless studies on the subject, I see that there are some clusters that organize ways of discussing the self from a methodological perspective:

The first one is to read the emergences and retreats of the self through literary and philosophical texts and thus making a case regarding the self as being an essential part of the way we do philosophy and literature. There are necessarily connected arguments that imply but cannot display the relation between theoretical works and the phenomenological dimension of life -as if theoretical arguments reflect, somehow, the reality of the world outside, unconnected, or not directly connected to the realm of thought.

Secondly, we can discuss the self as something we define and then find its traces in the phenomenal realm. A certain strain of anthropology does this: "a personal or individual identity that is here called the self" (Sökefeld 1999, 418), one of the recent articles declares, and then tries to find some data that fits into this description. The problem with this method is that the data does not directly (in itself) make such a claim, and thus it is necessary to refer back to the initial definition posed at the beginning in order to substantiate it. This is a reflexive act that substantiates an entity (an argument, the name who makes that argument, the circulation of that argument, citational records of that argument and so on) in a definite region we call academia. Sometimes an academic concept might extend its sphere of influence outside the academia (orientalism, reification, autonomy etc.), but this is not always the case.

The last one is what I want to undertake here: the self as it is being engaged in its production and destruction in the social and political life. For such a task, we have to find the moments of explicit references to the

self. Thus while there are some recent studies focusing on how the self as a universal capacity mediates different and sometimes contradictory identities (Sökefeld 1999), I prefer to use the term for the practices that appropriate or abandon different identities, representations and practices for oneself. In this sense, self-negation is not a lack of self but undoing certain combinations that constitutes a particular model of the self. To put it in another word, the self-negation is the practice of negating particular forms (interest seeking, privacy oriented, calculative, distantly socializing, -embodied in the popular figure of Turkish secular elite) in the name of a “we” (people, *ummet*, party). Methodologically, I had the chance to observe it as an emic category since “the self” was explicitly problematized by the local people and the practices of self-negation, although without explicitly being named, are presented as a counter position. Certainly, most of these practices and discourses can be conceptualized as accumulation of symbolic capital for oneself. In this sense, they are “selfish” practices, the practices oriented toward a certain form of self. People ostentatiously and publicly engage in self-negating practices and discourses. However, this does not change the simple fact that there is a certain compulsion for *showing that one is not thinking of oneself*. I am interested in that compulsion, the forms it takes and the meanings people attribute to those forms.

<sup>1</sup> The literature on the document and documentation is vast and cannot be exhausted here. But I am more interested in the connection between abstraction and representation, since this connection might help us to understand (i) how a representation represents entities in the world (Hall 1997; for political representation of people, see Pitkin 1967), (ii) how the same representation allows us to see more than they represent through abstraction (Bertin 2011; Latour 1986), (iii) how the same representation obscures and erases some aspects that they might be crucial for the purposes of representation. Let me translate these formulas to my concrete concerns. (i) How can the problems of the poor in Istanbul be represented in the bureaucratic documentation? Muhtars’ “Certificates of Indigence” that I have given as an example at the very beginning are among such examples. They state, “according to best of my knowledge, the person is indigent.” But they are not enough. The document from Social Security Institution (SGK) is also necessary to prove that the person is unemployed, although it is far from enough considering the fact that in Istanbul 20% of the workers are informally employed. Thus, another document from Land Registry Cadastre (Tapu Kadastro) should also attest that the person does not have any property in his or her name, apart from the house that s/he lives. (ii) However, these documents do not only represent material realities, the realities about the resources one has under his command, but also their combinations and relations –qualities that can only appear on the paper. A rich relative might appear as a possible source of resource on the paper if you bring documents on the plane of “semiotic homogeneity.” Ahmet does not have anything, but one of his brothers, Sedat, whose name appear in a Certificate of Identity Register (Vukuatli Nufus Kayit Ornegi), have some lands in an expensive neighborhood. Thus according to the political concerns of the social worker, or to his or her personal characteristics, Ahmet might be asked whether he is getting any help from that brother and, if not, he might need to explain his reasons. Their familial relations may have come to an end before decades, but abstraction brings them together and projects countless possibilities over them. (iii) However, and this is something mostly unexamined in the literature, as far as I know, representations of documents can frequently be posited as sources of error, lack of knowledge, and destruction. Here I am not talking about the documents and their representations when they fail, a theme that has constantly been studied (Hull 2012; Keane 1997). Rather I am trying to bring into focus the documents that are claimed to hinder people’s taking actions, more in line with and furthering the discussion Michael Herzfeld started in his study of “popular reactions to bureaucracy –in the ways in which ordinary people actually manage and conceptualize bureaucratic relations” (1992, 8). Accordingly, for example, a medical report might state that Ayse’s disability degree is 20% and she may have the title deed for the apartment that they live, but a home visit, what many of my informants in social services in the party or municipalities call “touching people,” might very well reveal that because of her burned face, the reason for 20% disability, employers refuse to give a job to her. Thus abstracted relations that project a life over the poor might obscure many other details that cannot be captured in documents. What Bertin calls “semiotic homogeneity,” or Ivens’ concept “optical consistency,” or Latour’s “immutable mobiles,” brilliantly analyze the phenomenological constitution of technical capacities of flattening entities down in modernity. They show us the minute details of building impressive networks that effect massive changes in the world thanks to their incessant efforts in coordinating entities with each other. However, the violence of abstraction is treated as insignificant, as if the remains of semiotic homogenization, rationalization of sight, or “the acceleration of displacement without transformation” vanish and leave nothing behind. However, my fieldwork, certainly in tandem with my theoretical orientation, shows that this is not the case.

<sup>1</sup> Her story, regardless of the “real” efficacy of her actions, depicts a picture within which I can start my investigation of the rise of political reason against a background of a public understanding of bureaucracy and its

history. To remind the reader once more, I am not making any argument claiming that what my interlocutors said about bureaucracy was "real" apart from my encounter with them -which is, from a phenomenological perspective, an impossible thing to prove. In a parallel fashion, I am also not saying that politics has "really" replaced bureaucracy.

1. There is something called politics, involving a set of practices and discursive frameworks whose relationships to each other can best be characterized as family resemblance.

2. This "politics," both as practice (when my interlocutors act in accordance with their statements) and discourse (when they tell me some stories), relate itself to something called bureaucracy, involving a set of practices and discursive frameworks whose relationships to each other can best be characterized as family resemblance, which I have examined in the first section.

3. This politics is both a means of acting in the world and a register to make sense of others' actions in the world. Hundreds of thousands of people in the poor districts of Istanbul act by reference to politics, claim that they are doing politics -explicitly, openly and assertively. They also interpret many of the development happening in Turkey in accord with this thing they call politics.

What I am doing is analyzing the meaning and scope of the concept politics, in practice and discourse, with a specific focus on its inner dynamic, referring to bureaucracy as a means of demarcating its boundaries and constituting itself as a distinct form of action. Maybe nothing has changed: what they call politics might be what they think they had experienced as bureaucracy before. Or, what they call bureaucracy might itself be what they call politics from the very beginning. These are completely insignificant possibilities for my analytical concerns here.

Thus what I am doing is an attempt to understand how a large section of the population in Istanbul understand and use the term "politics" and "bureaucracy" in relation to each other -between 2013-2015. I have solid reasons to believe that this distinction became conspicuous and effective after the AKP came to power, in 2002, and is still effective and significant today. Nonetheless, I am just investigating a set of possible uses of these terms, their discursive and practical consequences, and their relationships with each other as I had encountered people using them in certain ways that I describe here between 2013-2015. After this brief respite, let me return to my investigation of the uses of politics against the uses of bureaucracy, as two opposite forces fighting each other, so as to see what conceptual clusters they harbor under their titular constellations and to see what stories, practices, and memories they invoke on the way.

<sup>1</sup> From employment agencies in the party municipalities, to which Chapter 2 attended in an ethnographically detailed way, to home visits, the poor do not only find material means of subsistence across the networks of the AKP but also a possibility to have a social life, although it entirely coincides with the political life. When Aynur was insisting that paying visits to the homes of local people is better than doing nothing, she was also complaining about the isolation of apartment life for women of poor households. Most of them came from squatter houses, the architecture of which had the form of single-detached units that allowed them to partially continue a village life sociality in the middle of Istanbul. The social life of the squatter districts is something many women in the poor neighborhoods in Istanbul still remember dearly and yearn for its lost vibrancy. Nearly all those isolated units were replaced with the multi-storey apartments during the late 1990s, under the rule of municipalities run by political Islamists, and the social life of squatter districts had drastically changed. I have never heard of anyone making a comparison between the past squatter districts' social life and the life that is being sustained around the political networks of the AKP, but I believe we can argue that the life through political mobilization for women is a possibility that fills the gap opened by the destruction of the social life of the 1990s. For men, the party activities provide similar density for their social life, though their lamentation for the squatter life is much rare a thing to hear. Party buildings, social activities, religious seminars, or political meetings, are all essential components of social life at the margins of Istanbul, without which people would not be able to spend their time in such socially dense contexts.

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