

The Lira Crisis in Turkey:  
*Everyday life of the youth in Istanbul*

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## Introduction and Problem Area

Turkey has since 2018 been going through a financial and economic crisis that has put the inflation rate at record-high numbers and the lira-currency plunging in value in relation to the US dollar. The inflation hit the highest it has in 20 years with 54,4 percent in February 2022 (Erkoyun & Kucukgocmen, 2022), with the cost of food increasing by 55,61 percent in January 2022 compared to the same month of the previous year (trading economics, 2022). Furthermore, the Turkish lira had its worst year under the current president as it lost 44 percent of its value against the US Dollar in 2021 (Toksabay & Gumrukcu, 2021). Together with the youth employment rate currently at 21,6 percent – also important to note that it has not been under 15 percent since 2004 and comparing it to the general unemployment rate of 11,4 percent, the youth is one of the demographic groups that are hit the hardest. With all this in mind, one could say that Turkey is currently in a deep and concerning economic crisis – the worst it has ever been.

Politically, the country has been under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule with Recep Tayyip Erdogan as the prime minister in 2002 and the president since 2017. Between 2002 and 2008 Turkey went through a big economic growth and increase in GDP, which was largely due to the AKP government and Erdogan. Many people in the country got lifted out of poverty and there was an improved standard of living across the board (Cagaptay, 2018: 5). This has made Erdogan widely popular amongst the Turkish population, which has made him stay in power for the past 20 years (ibid.). Despite economic growth and increased living standards, there is a deep societal polarization when it comes to the supporters of Erdogan and those who want change and a new government. This polarization has been going on for the past 10 years, especially since the 2013 demonstrations towards Gezi Park and the 2016 failed coup attempt by the Gülen movement (Cagaptay, 2018). The demonstrations and civil unrest during the Gezi Park protests started as being mainly about the environment and urban development plan for Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park, but it quickly became a countrywide protest against the rising authoritarianism of Erdogan, violations of democratic and human rights, media censorship and a plethora of other issues regarding policies and civil rights (The Guardian 2013; VICE, 2013; Hurriyet, 2013). There has been reported that approximately 3,5 million people had taken part in almost five thousand protests across Turkey during the Gezi Park demonstrations (de Bellaigue, 2017). Adding the failed coup attempt in 2016 (Aljazeera, 2017) and the political aftermath and consequences, Turkey has gone through massive changes in the last five years. Erdogan initiated a purge after the coup to get out all “*the enemies of the state*

*and people of Turkey*” which resulted in over 94.000 arrests, 3.003 schools, dormitories, and universities shutting down, and 319 journalists being arrested (turkeypurge.com) (Aljazeera, 2017). However, in 2019 the opposition party The Republican People’s Party (CHP) won Istanbul’s mayoral election (even after a revote after corruption accusations from AKP) (Sariyuce & Kottasová, 2019). This has been seen as a big blow to Erdogan, as he was a mayor of Istanbul before he became president, thus this was not only a big political win but also a symbolic one. This was reiterated by the CHP candidate, Ekrem Imamoglu, who won the election and is the current mayor, who stated: “*the whole Turkey won the election, not a group or a party*” (ibid.).

What this project investigates within the context given above is how the population in Turkey navigates their daily lives during the current economic and political crisis and turmoil. The country is currently in its worst shape economically it has ever been, and continuously gets worse each day. The research focuses on the city of Istanbul as it has been the central point in demonstrations and civil unrest, and it is also the city the largest city with the biggest population. The city has a diverse group of people living there and is ever expanding its infrastructure. Demographically the research focuses on the urban population in Istanbul - specifically the young generation (age: 25-30). The reasoning for this choice is that the youth has been the most outspoken against the government and its current economic crisis, the youth unemployment rate is currently over 20 percent and has been high for the last two decades (Bee & Kaya, 2017), and they are the segment of the population that has only known to live under the current AKP administration. Additionally, the youth are the future of Turkey, and they are the ones who must face the future economic and political consequences of the current government. Furthermore, the focus is on the secular segment of the population, since this is the segment that is currently in political conflict with the regime. With all this in mind I ask the following research question:

*How does the youth in Turkey navigate their everyday lives during the current economic and political crisis?*

## Context

In this section, a brief history of the Erdogan and AKP's rise to power in 2002 will be presented together with an overview of what transpired from 2002 until 2022. This will include the coup attempt in 2016 and the aftermath and implications this has had on politics in Turkey.

The AKP was formed in 2001 by former Islamic activists who had been part of political Islamic parties in the 1980s and 1990s, but after failing to come to power and not being able to get past the strict secular and militaristic barrier of Turkish politics they decided to form a new political party that focused on 'conservative democracy' (van Veen & Yüksel, 2018: 6). The party also showed that Islamist parties could become democratic (Lord, 2018: 242). This attracted Islamist, right-wing, and liberal voters and created one political umbrella that could include a wide range of voters across the political spectrum. The AKP started their first term with economic policy reforms that increased the economic growth in the country - pandering to the poor rural segment of the population – and took serious steps to positively fix the 'Kurdish question' in the country. There was a strong democratization process and the relationship between Turkey and the West (the EU and the US) flourished during the first term (2002-2007) (van Veen & Yüksel, 2018). However, after the next two elections in 2007 and 2015 the AKP government started to push further away from its Western partners, its democratization policies that defined the first term were starting to wear off, and a hostility towards the 'Kurdish Question' was starting to develop, and the party started to go towards a new direction focusing on 'Muslim Brotherhood-oriented Sunni sectarianism (van Veen & Yüksel, 2018: 8). In the 2007 election the party won 46,5 percent of the votes and started to push for ideological hegemony. After 2007, winning the majority of seats in the parliament, the AKP started to push for a more nationalist-conservative discourse, and with the power it had now gained, the government historically reduced the influence of the Turkish military's ability to supervise and intervene in the country's policies (van Veen & Yüksel, 2018: 10).

After the 2015 general election, the AKP lost 9 percent of the votes and the majority of the Parliament. The loss of voters went to the left-wing pro-Kurdish party, the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*), and to the right-wing ultra-nationalist MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*). The AKP choose to support the MHP and started to go towards a strict and anti-Kurdish discourse, which resulted in armed fights escalating in Turkish-Kurdish cities and arresting of HDP politicians on charges of inciting terrorism (van Veen & Yüksel, 2018: 14-15).

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 Turkey faced its most violent coup attempt in its history when a fraction of the Turkish military tried to take over the government from Erdogan. Soldiers and tanks were on the streets and soldiers invaded the headquarters of the AKP. When the news came out thousands of civilians went out to the streets influenced by a video message from Erdogan urging them to do so. During the violent clashes between two factions of the military and the civilians at least 251 people were killed and more than 2200 were injured (Ibrahim, 2022).

To this day it is still a mystery of the reasons of the coup, however, the official statement from the government blames the Gülen movement (Lord, 2018: 275). The Gülen movement is a pro-Islamic movement that has since the 1980s had a large influence on the population with its social, financial, media and educational networks across the country (van Veen & Yüksel, 2018: 11). The coup attempt was coined as a 'gift from God' by Erdogan. During the post-coup period, the government cracked down on all opposition including my leftists, Kurds, Alevis, and other non-Gülenist opposition organizations, including media and politicians. Freedom of information, assembly and association was the target on these crackdowns. This was all done by declaring State of Emergency – which the government has continued to renew for two years (Lord, 2018: 276-77).

## Theoretical framework

This project investigates how a segment of the Turkish population navigates their daily lives during the current economic crisis in the country. As a country Turkey has had an eventful political history with several military coups (especially in the 1980s), strict secular policies and harsh discourse towards Islamism, the Kurdish issue, and an on/off relationship with the West and the US. Since 2002 the AKP, with Erdogan as the leader, has been in power and has consistently for several elections had at least 42% of the parliamentary seats, which has created a re-emergence of a traditionalist authoritarian regime that rests on a mixture of traditional Turkish values and Political Islamism. Staying true to the inductive methods, this project is guided by its data collection through the author's fieldwork in Istanbul between the 4<sup>th</sup> of April and the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 in the Kadiköy area in Istanbul. The data consists of five semi-structured narrative interviews from a segment of the urban population: young professionals in the age range 25-30 that lives in Istanbul and how they navigate their daily lives within a terrain of an emerged traditionalist authoritarian regime during an economic and political crisis. From the interviews reoccurring and consisting of themes are apparent; the dissatisfaction of the interviewees' current predicament, and the blame being put on the current regime. An overall 'conflict' between this segment and the government can be seen as a form of power inequality between two contrasting ideologies.

To understand this conflict this paper will use critical discourse theory and methods and take the tools and concepts to investigate the use of language in context to social problems that affect an individual's life. Specifically, this paper will use *Critical Discourse Theory* (CDA) by Norman Fairclough to shed light on language as a social practice, power inequality, and to understand conflicts arising between different discourses (ideologies). Borrowing concepts like 'antagonism', 'hegemony', and 'nodal points' from *Discourse Theory* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the theoretical framework and methods will thus consist mainly of the two approaches to discourse analysis. *Social Identity* by Richard Jenkins will provide the necessary theory to understand individual and collective identification and how discourses can affect identifications. Finally, the concept of *social navigation* by Henrik Vigh provides a concept to understand how people navigate and the strategies they employ to do so.

The main data will consist of quotes from the interviews conducted during the fieldwork, they will be analyzed in relation to the discursive and ideological conflicts between the hegemonic discourse from the Turkish government and the young professional leftist segment of Istanbul.

## Discourse Theory

In the words of Norman Fairclough, the objective of CDA is “[...] *to develop ways of analysing language which address its involvement in the workings of contemporary capitalist societies. The focus on capitalist societies is not only because capitalism is the dominant economic system internationally [...] but also because the character of the economic system affects all aspects of social life.*” (Fairclough, 2010: 1). The interplay between language and society, and how this affects all aspects of social life is the core of what this project investigates. CDA is a *relational* form of research due to its focus on social relations. These relations are *dialectical*, meaning that discourse both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices. Thus, with language-as-discourse we contribute to our understanding of the world around us, but at the same time also affected by everything around us, be it economically, socially, culturally, or politically. Within these dialectical relationships, the power relations are not always equal, and it is the discursive practices that both create and reproduce unequal power relations between social groups. Lastly, it is a *transdisciplinary* form of analysis. Fairclough stresses the importance of including social analysis, that there exists something outside of discourse analysis which is why you use theory on the social in your research. Additionally, discourse also contributes to the construction of: social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning. Fairclough applies the concept of *discourse* in three ways: As mentioned above discourse/language is used as a social practice. It is ‘the kind of language used within a specific field’, and lastly, ‘a way of speaking which gives meaning to experience from a particular perspective’ (Fairclough, 2010: 3-5) (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 62-64;66-68).

### Power, ideology, hegemony, and antagonism

In this section, I will draw mainly from Fairclough on the concepts of *power*, *ideology*, and *hegemony*. Laclau & Mouffe’s discourse theory and their definition of the concept of *hegemony* will be used as a supplement to Fairclough’s argument, while the concept of *antagonism* will be taken completely from Laclau & Mouffe.

Regarding the focus of CDA Fairclough writes:



“A primary focus of is on the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs, and in particular on discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities: on dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements. This includes questions of *ideology*, understanding ideologies to be ‘meaning in the service of power’ (Thompson 1984): ways of representing aspects of the world, which may be operationalised in ways of acting and interacting and in ‘ways of being’ or identities, that contribute to establishing or sustaining unequal relations of power” (Fairclough, 2010: 8)

I want to include Fairclough’s discussion on *ideology* and its decline in social research due to its focus on social class. Ideology and hegemony are based on a plethora of Marxist thinkers, which Fairclough also refers to, such as Gramsci (his focus on hegemony and the whole idea of *consent* and *coercion*) and Althusser (his contribution to ideology), whom both, as most early scholars in early Marxism, argues that class relations should be the focus of analysis when it comes to ideology and hegemony. However, as Fairclough (2010: 26) also argues, I argue that power relations in today’s society and world are more complex, it includes relations such as ethnicity, culture, and gender, just to name a few. As Fairclough states: “*Power differences and inequalities arise from all of these relations and others, and from complex combinations of these relations, and ideologies are significant for these various power relations, not just for social class relations*” (Fairclough, 2010: 26).

With this in mind, we can move on to how to locate ideology in discourse. Ideology is both a property of structures and events. It is located in structures, texts, and discursive events. However, Fairclough stresses that both the options of structure and discourse in locating ideology have the limitation of being localized and particular. Ideologies transcend these boundaries (Fairclough, 2010: 57-58).

How and where to find ideology in texts is the key to finding the antagonism and conflicts that occur in unequal power relations. ‘Texts’ in the context of this paper refers to the five interviews - the transcribing and translation from Turkish to English. Ideology occurs first when texts are produced and interpreted, and how they are articulated together in orders of discourse (Fairclough, 2010: 60). In the case of the interviews, it can be said that ideology occurs when the interviewee speaks about their struggles in their daily lives and the cause of

these struggles, also the questions and the way the interview is set up also contributes to this, and how the transcriber and translator interprets the data from the conducted interviews. Secondly, in the ways that they are articulated, and orders of discourse rearticulated in discursual events (ibid.). When it comes to language there are different ways that one can find ideology in text. When doing discourse analysis, we search for *meanings* to analyze and understand the context of the text. First, we look at the ‘content’ which is mainly lexical meanings including presuppositions, implicatures, metaphors, and coherence. Secondly, the ‘form’, the way that the content is presented, e.g. newspaper articles, interviews et cetera. Thirdly, the ‘style’, can be the style of writing or visualizing to construct a specific type of image that one wants to show (Fairclough, 2010: 60-61). This paper will mainly focus on the ‘content’ part since the search for meaning and interpretation will mainly happen within the confines of the conducted interviews. Since I am analyzing quotes from the interviews, it is the ‘content’ that is most important. When analyzing the content some words and concepts are more important than others. To determine these words and concepts I will use Laclau & Mouffe’s concept of *nodal point*. Nodal points are defined as “*a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point.*” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 27). An example of this can be in political discourse with ‘democracy’ being the nodal point, where signs such as ‘voting’ and ‘freedom’ gain their meaning by being related to ‘democracy’ in particular ways. They are the privileged signs in which a discourse is organized. Nodal points themselves are empty and only acquire their meaning when inserted in a particular discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 28). When the nodal point is chosen one looks for how it is assigned meaning by locating how the nodal point is connected to other concepts and ideas. This is called *chain of equivalent* because the nodal point is made equivalent to all the concepts in the chain (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). I am also translating the quotes from Turkish to English, so some words, phrases, and meanings may get lost in translation. Thus, I have a certain ‘power’ of how to interpret when doing the translation since I pick and choose what is important.

There exists a plethora of definitions of *hegemony*, usually, it is ascribed to leadership, domination, authority, and the power of a state or group over another. It integrates economy, politics, and ideology and creates a space where the overall focus is on politics and power (Fairclough, 2010: 61). The concept of hegemony is largely influenced by Gramsci and his concept of ‘common sense’ and ‘coercion’. Where Gramsci’s main argument on hegemony is

focused largely on class, Laclau & Mouffe reject this notion and develop another perspective though still similar to Gramsci's main arguments. Laclau & Mouffe argues that the hegemonic force relies on the construction of a discursive formation that shapes the demands, view, and attitudes of the hegemonic force. The construction of a hegemonic discourse is the result of articulation. Within a hegemonic discourse exists a conflictual terrain of power and resistance, thus a discourse can never be totally fixed and will therefore always include an element of force and repression (Torfing, 1999: 101). This resistance is what Laclau and Mouffe call *antagonism*, which in terms of CDA could also mean an ideological struggle since Fairclough believes that people can be drawn to different and competing ideologies which can lead to conflict, or 'ideological effects' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 76).

Laclau & Mouffe (1985) starts their definition of *antagonism* by going into a theoretical discussion of the distinction between real opposition and logical contradiction. Their verdict is that antagonism cannot be a 'real' opposition, meaning that there is nothing antagonistic in a clash between two vehicles – it is a material fact and relates to physical law (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 123). Thus, to understand antagonism one needs to go further than opposition and contradiction. As Laclau & Mouffe argues "*We all participate in a number of mutually contradictory belief systems, and yet no antagonism emerges from these contradictions. Contradiction does not, therefore, necessarily imply an antagonistic relation*". Contradiction can happen in a plethora of ways, A is not B because A is A and B is B, this contradiction is not antagonistic since neither A nor B is colliding with each other's identities. But Laclau & Mouffe shows how antagonism differs by stating that "the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself" (1985: 125). The 'Other', as I interpret it, can also be understood as not only an individual but also a group or society as a whole. If the presence of the 'Other' prevents you from being your true self, one can assume that there exists a certain power dynamic between the 'Other' and 'You' – where the 'Other' exerts its power over 'You'. Thus, antagonism is the struggle and conflict that occurs when different identities mutually exclude each other. This happens when different discourses collide when trying to create meaning. However, a person can have different identities without any of them creating conflict between each other, it is only when the identities make contrasting demands that conflict appears (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 47-48).

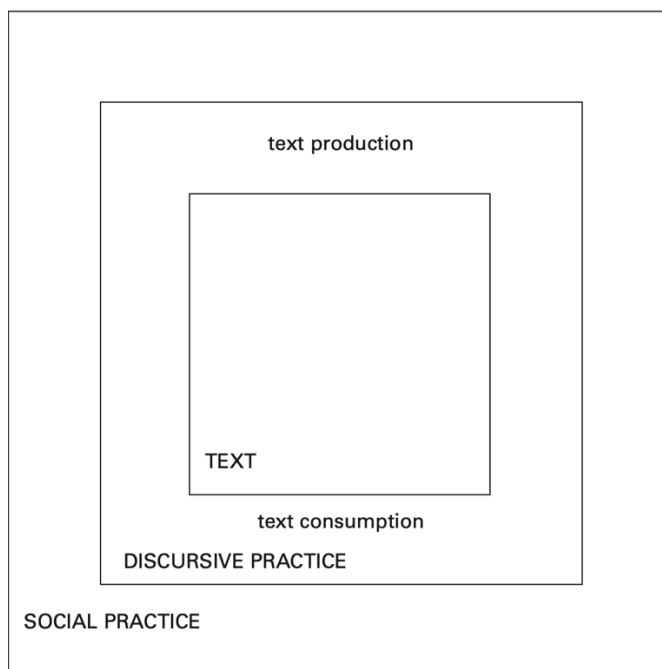
## The three-dimensional model of CDA

This model will be used both as an addition to the theoretical framework and also as an analytical tool to implement the whole theoretical framework when analyzing my data.

In any analysis there are two dimensions of discourse: firstly, *the communicative event* which is defined as any kind of language use – in this paper the communicative event is the interviews. Secondly, *the order of discourse*, which is all the ‘discourse types’ used in within a social institution or field. Discourse types consist of discourse and genres. So, language use is a communicative event consisting of three dimensions:

- “it is a *text* (speech, writing, visual image, or a combination of these);
- it is a *discursive practice* which involves the production and consumption of texts;  
and
- it is a *social practice*.” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 68)

Fairclough provides a three-dimensional model to use as an analytical framework for empirical research on communication and society:



Using this model and how the analysis should be conducted, Jørgensen & Phillips (2002: 68) write that, “*the analysis should focus, then, on (1) the linguistic features of the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice); and (3)*

*the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice)*". The linguistic feature (text) gives itself and explained above in the section about ideology and how to find it in texts. The discursive practice focuses on how the interviewees draw on already existing discourses and genres. Technically discursive practice is about how authors create a text and how the receivers interpret the texts – both include applying existing discourses and genres, i.e. *ideologies* in each process. The discursive practice also mediates between text and social practice, it is through discursive practice that texts shape and are shaped by social practice. Social practice includes both discursive and non-discursive elements thus a social theory is necessary in addition to discourse analysis discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 68-71). In the context of this paper the social practice includes the theory of *Social Identity* and *Social Navigation*.

## Identity and identification

Doing narrative-style interviews and talking with my interviewees about their daily lives some of the conversations were about limitations, struggles, and hopes that each individual encounter in their daily lives during an economically and politically challenging period in Turkey. What I found out when listening to my recordings and transcripts was that I needed a theory to understand how each individual described themselves in relation to their daily lives and towards/against the hegemonic discourse of the current government. Identity became a focal point in this matter. With much literature written on identity, I have chosen to focus on Richard Jenkin's 'Social Identity' to grasp the meaning of identity on both an individual and collective level.

With this in mind, I will borrow a quote from Jenkins as a starting point to understand what identity is: "As a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities" (Jenkins, 2008: 5). Thus, language and interactions with others play a part in determining one's identity and seeing how language plays a big part of this paper, it becomes a point of interest in the analysis when looking at the process of identification. Identification, as Jenkins argues, is "a process – identification – not a 'thing'. It is not something that one has, or not; it is something that one does". It becomes clear then

that this process plays a part in how humans determine themselves. One way of doing this is by similarities and differences, how we differentiate each other individually and collectively, and in contrast how we are drawn to groups and people through mutual similarities. The difference between individual and collective identification is that the former focuses on difference and the latter on similarity, however, both emerges out of the interplay between similarity and difference (Jenkins, 2008: 38). Furthermore, since both individual and collective identifications can only happen within interaction, one must put equal focus on both in the theorization of identification.

One thing that Jenkins argues is that the question of *human-ness* is taken for granted when it comes to individual identification. When a child is born into this world issues of identification already begin. Gender, ethnicity (depending on local context), and kinship comes into play already in the beginning. A child's identity is mostly concerned with these, but also the identities of the parent matter, as well as the cultural and religious rituals that may occur after birth such as baptism or circumcision or other practices (Jenkins, 2008: 74). These are all collective identities that the child is located within after birth. The *human-ness*, as Jenkins coins it, is questioned and defined as soon as the child is born into the world, and the questions of human-ness are enormously consequential and have implications on the identification of the individual. The question of human-ness differs usually within local contexts, however, some attributes can also be universal. It is based on explicit or implicit collectively defined criteria, and one can wonder who defines these criteria, as with most of the things in society the question of power comes to mind. Thus, it is the 'others' who categorize individuals when it comes to the nature of their human-ness (2008: 75). Now that we have accepted that human-ness matters when it comes to individual identification. I want to get back to the question of *gender* and *ethnicity* when it comes to human-ness and collective identification because both gender and ethnicity are collective identifications according to Jenkins.

Collective identifications, as mentioned, may compromise human-ness in the eyes of others, and "*human-ness is the primary identity of external definition*" (2008: 75). When it comes to gender, Jenkins argues, "*it is a 'categorical' collective identification before it is a principle of 'group' formation*" (2008: 82). It is both individual and collective in equal degree, however as a category gender is always massively externally defined by others. The categorization of gender is one of the most pervasive classificatory principles and has "*massive consequences for the life-chances and experiences of a whole categories of people*" (82). Being equally for both individual and collective gender is a binary classificatory scheme, and therefore there is

an equal balance of difference and similarity. Even though gender is massively externally defined and can potentially have consequences, it can also allow gender to be a principle of group formation – such as in women’s march and feminism. Collective gender differentiation differs depending on the local context and conceptions of human-ness, and what is considered ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. Within a local context, some “*behaviour that is locally gender-inappropriate may be identified by others as ‘un-natural’ and the individual may perceive herself to be ‘un-natural’ too, or must struggle not to do*” (2008: 83). Thus, gender is one of the most persistent and important identifications that an individual has, it is equally external and internal, and depending on the local context it can have a massive influence on the individual’s own perception of their human-ness. Gendered identity in this paper will take the focus from the female point of view, and how individual and collective identifications related to gender affects the female interviewees in their everyday life.

Another primary identification is *ethnicity*. Whether ethnicity is a primary identification is always a local question and is not a ‘universal’ primary identity. As a collective identity, ethnicity, can have a massive presence in the experience of individuals and can be an important and early dimension of self-identification (2008: 87). It is in early childhood that individuals classify themselves according to ethnicity or race. Jenkins states that “*ethnicity may involve emotions and affect, suggesting that it can become significantly entailed in selfhood*” (87). Ethnicity then has an impact on the individual’s self-identification, and “*when it matters to people, it ‘really’ matters*”. Both gender and ethnicity are part of selfhood and individual identification, and at the same time are also collective identities (103).

When it comes to collective identity there are two types: groups and categories. Group identity is based on similarities between individuals, and the members of a group know who and what they are – *collective internal definition* - whereas with categories members may not be aware that they are members of a category since its existence is constituted by the observers – *collective external definition* (104-105). When we identify others through categorization it allows us to have the illusion that we may know what to expect of them. This is part of everyday practice and how we make sense of the world and people around us, and when we are met with unfamiliar individuals, we tend to categorize them and put them in boxes. Categorization is not necessarily a positive or negative thing; however, it can have a massive impact on the categorized individuals, who may or may not know that they are being categorized. Where categorization can become problematic and impactful for the categorized is in the production of disciplinary power. Drawing on Foucault and disciplinary power, Jenkins states, “*the*

*categorization of individuals and population...is one way which humans are constituted as objects of government and subjects of the state, via census and the like”* (2008: 107). The government always categorizes its population in statistics, this can be positive categorization when it comes to mortality rates or studies on mental health but can also be negative categorization when based on correlations between ethnicity and crime. Arguably this all depends on if one is the categorizer or the categorized, but Jenkins makes it clear that “*categorizing people is always potentially an intervention in their lives, and often more*” (2008: 108).

## Social Navigation

The concept of social navigation is concerned with how people move in uncertain circumstances and focuses on “*the way agents act in difficult situations, move under the influence of multiple forces or seek to escape confining structures*” (Vigh, 2009: 419). In other words, the way people move in a moving environment. It highlights how we move in social environments consisting of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along. What social navigation contributes to the theoretical framework is the ability to see the intersection between the way social formations move and change over time and the way agents move within social formations – Vigh calls this *interactivity* (2009: 420). This paper does not necessarily go into the detail of how change happens, but how the agents (interviewees) navigate within the changes happening in the world around them, and what strategies they use in their everyday life. As Vigh states “*people invest a great deal of time in making sense of and predicting the movement of their social environment, in clarifying how they are able to adapt to and move in relation to oncoming change*” (420). The social environment within the context of this paper comes in multiple levels: Nationally, Turkey as a country – how discourse, policies, and politics affect the social environment and the changes that come from it – and locally, how living their everyday life in Istanbul, where they are face to face with the social environment, institutions, and other actors in their social environment. Our social environment is in motion and part of our everyday life, thus “*we act, adjust and attune our strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces*” (2009: 420). This is empirically what this paper is investigating when it comes to the strategies the interviewees use to navigate their everyday lives in Istanbul.



## Methodology

In this section, I will go through the research strategy including my methodological choices and reflections regarding my fieldwork in Istanbul and the interviews conducted.

This paper follows the inductive method where the data guides the researcher to the theory. I started of my research with my problem area and made a decision early on to do interviews. My plan was to do the interviews first, transcribe the data, and from the data find the theories that could help me answer the research question. However, early on I had an idea about doing discourse analysis and using discourse analytical tools, which means I also did deductive reasoning. Before I could figure out which discourse theory I should use, however, I first had to know my data. The same can be said about the context chapter. Thus, everything in my paper is based on the data and information I got from my fieldwork and interviews. It can be said that the more precise method I used was abductive, but mostly I tried to follow the inductive method and let my data guide me to the tools I needed to answer my research question.

## Fieldwork

My fieldwork started when I traveled to Istanbul on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 and ended when I flew back to Copenhagen on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April. In total, I stayed ten days in Istanbul. During my stay, I lived in Kadiköy/Moda area, which is widely considered as the most secular and affluent areas in Istanbul. It can be described as ‘Europeanized’, which is ironic since the area is situated in the Asian part of the city. Thus, it was no coincidence that I choose this area: transportation wise it was the easiest area, the segment of people I wanted to interview either lived in the area or frequent it a lot, and I personally like the area the most for its lack of tourists compared to other areas such as Taksim. Many people in Istanbul have started to move to this area due to it being more secular – especially because the country is becoming more conservative and religious – and because of the massive influx of tourists from Arabic-speaking countries. There is a sentiment that the country is being sold to “the Arabs”, which is something I have heard from family, friends, and strangers who all live in Istanbul.

My trip started with me getting a feeling of the area I was going to live in for ten days. The area was not unfamiliar to me as I stayed there twice in September and November 2021, when I was doing my internship at the Danish Cultural Institute. The ten days I spend in Kadiköy was during the Ramadan month, where fasting is part of the religious ritual, and it is not allowed

to eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. However, in Kadiköy nobody seemed to care about this, and everything was business as usual, thus there was no pressure to fast or participate, so for me personally I did not feel that it was Ramadan. The area is also home to many artists, actors, and generally the creative segment of Turkey. Therefore, many students and young professionals live and frequent this area. Historically, as mentioned above, it is a very secular area. Walking around in the evenings and nighttime, the drinking culture and nightlife were still very much alive even during the holy month of Ramadan. Turkey is technically a secular country from the constitution, but from the increased religious sentiment from the government since the AKP administration came to power in 2002 it has been a big debate, and when you come from a foreign country it can seem like it is more religious, at least for me personally.

In the next section I will go through my interview guide including what type of interview conducted, my own position as a researcher, the interviewees, and ethical considerations.

## Interviewees

Before my travel to Istanbul, I started to contact people in my network with ties to Turkey and Istanbul. I was in contact with a former acquaintance from my internship two months before my departure, she had promised me multiple people I could interview, and I planned my travels accordingly. However, due to unforeseen circumstances this did not become a reality, and once I was in Istanbul, I got in contact with two acquaintances that each gave me contact info on two individuals who were interested. This became a snowball sampling since I interviewed the first person, who then guided me to some of her acquaintances and so on. Thus, my sampling became of people in my age group, and I did not have much control over who I was going to interview since the field was not as easy to access, and using the snowball sampling my access to the field was based on mutual acquaintances whom I shared similar values, such as political ideologies and secularism. My pool of interviewees can therefore be defined as: left-leaning on the political spectrum, non-religious, politically aligned with secularism, educated (university), and in their mid-to-late-20s.

In total five interviews were conducted with a range of different variables such as gender, occupation, place of birth, and ethnic background. Besides gender, all the other variables were not predetermined criteria as I did not have the luxury of picking and choosing my interviewees but rather were on the mercy of snowball sampling. However, my goal was to interview the

youth in Istanbul, which I argue with the sample of interviewees became possible. I will not introduce the information from the categorization/variables

Name	Age	Place of birth	Gender	Occupation
Dilara*	26	Ankara	Female	Lawyer
Zara*	27	Istanbul	Female	Engineer
Gamze*	27	Istanbul	Female	Art Manager
Badefra*	27	Agri	Male	Lawyer
Eren*	27	Istanbul	Male	Engineer

As one can see, there are three women and two men amongst the five interviewees, and thus an equal representation of men and women. The age group arguably fits within the youth segment that I was striving for, and all five of them are university graduates as one can see on their occupation.

### Interview technique

The interview style that this paper use is semi-structured life-world interview where the purpose of the interviews are to obtain descriptions of the life world and everyday life of the interviewees with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 2007: 8). *Doing Interviews* by Steiner Kvale was used to give me the necessary tools and guide me through the process. Kvale states that “*the interview is a conversation that has a structure and purpose determined by one party – the interviewer* (2007: 7). The structure that I went for was having a few predetermined questions and themes ready before the interviews that would spark up a conversation, and from there I would ask probing questions for what I found relevant and interesting during the conversation. I had already some context beforehand, thus the themes I was going for was based on the economic and political aspect of everyday life. My aim was to give the interviewees some free reign to speak about what they found relevant, and when needed I would ask specific questions guiding towards the themes that I wanted to cover. This resulted in, which also meant that some interviews would cover some areas more than others.

An example of this is obvious when it comes to gendered identity, since it was mostly the women who spoke about how gender plays a role in their everyday life, whereas the men did not mention this at all. When doing interviews it is important to consider the power balance in the conversation since the conversation is not equal in the sense that it is a professional conversation and not a conversation between two equals like it would be in conversation between two friends. Kvale mentions this in his book where he states “*the research interview is a specific professional conversation with a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject*” (2007: 14). This comes into play both during and after the interviews. During the interviews the research already sets the stage for this asymmetry when recording the conversation and asking the subjects to share their life stories which might involve sensitive information. After the interviews during the transcribing phase there is another level of power imbalance since it is the researcher who is interpreting the recorded conversation. In the case of this paper the transcribed data had to be translated from Turkish to English which might get some context lost in translation due to the fact that there is a remarkable difference between the two languages, especially in Turkish where ‘figure of speech’ is very common and can be more formal than English. Furthermore, I am not completely fluent in Turkish and not a professional translator, which also puts another limitation when it comes to the translation.

Lastly, I want to go through some ethical considerations. In every interview I started of with a briefing: introducing myself, my thesis and research question, and what I would use their interviews for. Confidentially was one of the first things I mentioned, no private information will be shared in this paper besides categorizing variables such as age, gender, place of birth, and occupation. All the interviewees names have been changed. Furthermore, I also gave the option to send my finished paper for them to read.

## Limitations

As with any other paper there were some limitations that occurred during the research and writing phases.

During the field work I was faced with limited time to do all the interviews during my ten days stay in Istanbul. I got my contacts while I was in the city, and I did not have the opportunity to plan out interviews beforehand due to different circumstances such as lack of subjects to interview. Through snowball sampling I got three interviews done in two days, however on my last two days I unfortunately lost my voice and could not complete my last two interviews I

had planned. The last two interviews were thus conducted through Skype. This did not limit the quality of the research, however I would argue that not being able to meet physically while I was in Istanbul did limit the interaction, since being in the field is different from doing it digitally. Staying in the context of interviews, another limitation to mention is the fact that I am not fully fluent in Turkish. Turkish is my second language passed on from my family, and I have spoken it my whole life, however, my vocabulary did sometimes lack which was not a problem while I did the interviews since the conversations did flow naturally and there were no problems speaking and understanding each other, however from my point of view as a researcher it did put some limitations in asking probing questions during the interviews. Furthermore, translating the transcribed data from Turkish to English did also prove difficult and some things might have been lost in translation.

## Analytical strategy

In this section, I will go through my analytical strategy including the choices made for the content of the analysis such as the division of the data, the analytical tool(s) used, the working questions, and finally what each part of the analysis consists of.

The analysis dives into two themes: *economy and social life*, and *politics*. These two themes were chosen inductively during the transcribing process and guided by the problem area and research question. Each theme will have working questions to guide the analysis. Furthermore, at the end of each thematic section, there will be a sub-conclusion drawn from the findings since many of the points may overlap across the chosen quotes. This will provide an overview of the main arguments. Additionally, some of the concepts, such as *hegemony* and *nodal points*, work best with an overview drawing on the main arguments from the presented quotes.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model will be used as the analytical tool where the quotes will be treated as the 'text', the interview in itself with the interviewer and interviewee, and the readers of this project will be treated as the discursive practice with regards to the production and consumption of texts, and *social identity* and *social navigation* as the theory to be used in the social practice part of the model.

The quotes have been picked according to their relevance to the problem area, research question, and working questions. Additionally, consideration has been given to representing

the interviewees as equal as possible, however, it is important to consider that some interviews had more content on different topics than others. Lastly, the working questions for each section:

Economic:

- *How do they navigate their daily lives during the high inflation and value-drop in the Turkish Lira (TL)?*
- *What are their strategies?*

Political:

- *How do they navigate the contested political field in Turkish society, in Istanbul?*
- *What conflicts arise, and how does it affect them?*

# Analysis

## Economic and social life – navigating in uncertain terrain

In this part, the interview questions focused on the interviewees' daily routines and everyday life, both their professional life and social life, and the different challenges that occur during the current economic crisis. One interesting finding is how the economic crisis has affected social life and how the interviewees come up with strategies to work around the high inflation when doing social activities:

[...] When I meet with my friends, we meet outside to have a cup of coffee or beer, we cannot go to concerts or participate in such activities as before. We are actually more cautious when we go out, we think three times before we do or buy something compared to our life before the pandemic. [...] it is quite bothersome, we don't have the same cheerful and pleasant conversations as we did before, because now we only talk about problems, and this is not only in my circle of friends but everybody is like this. Constant conversations about troubles, problems related to the economy and how expensive everything is, conversations come and go with these things all the time. So that is why I have a somewhat dull life at the moment.

(Zara, Appendix B)

What is apparent in what Zara mentions is that the social activities she has with her friends are narrowed down to only a cup of coffee or a beer, and activities such as concerts are not as possible as *before*. There is a constant comparison between how things are *now* and how things were *before*, indicating a longing for how things were *before*. When describing how her life is *now* and the conversations she is having with her friends, Zara uses mainly words with negative connotations such as *bothersome*, *problems*, *troubles*, and *dull*, whereas life *before* is described as *cheerful* and *pleasant*. This is all related to, as Zara states, the economy. The common denominator of Zara's attitude towards her current life, in this specific instance, becomes the economy. What is interesting is how it affects Zara and her friends when she states that they are more *cautious* when going out, and that they "*think three times before we do or buy something*", which arguably shows how they are adapting to the economic crisis. The use of

the word *cautious* (Turkish: *tedbirli*) catches my attention when Zara describes the mentality she has before she goes out, *cautious* in the dictionary is defined as “*someone who is cautious avoids risks*” and “*not acting quickly in order to avoid risks; careful*”<sup>1</sup>, which can be interpreted as ‘going out’ and being social with one’s friends can be risky due to the economic circumstances that she finds herself in. Hence, she has to be *careful* with her money when she goes out. Vigh (2009: 420) argues in his concept of social navigation, that “*navigation allows us to see the interaction between the way social formation move and change over time, and the way agents move within social formations*”. Zara and her friends, the agents in this case, instead of going to a café or bar, choose to drink *outside* – as in literally outside in a park or other public spaces. One of the strategies that Zara uses with her friends to cope and navigate within this *uncertain terrain*, is to either go *outside* or not go out at all. Some of the other interviewees have similar strategies:

[...] We think about the profit/loss balance of this, we say ‘sitting for an hour is not worth a 40 TL beer’, thus we decide not to go out, and we say, ‘let’s meet at home have a tea instead’. Therefore, going out as an activity has been reduced, as if going out and having a beer with your friend has become a special occasion, because of this you need to arrange yourself financially when you go out.”

(Dilara, Appendix A1)

In the past, I could go to concerts comfortably. I was receiving 2500 TL monthly from my scholarship when I was studying, I am receiving the same amount now also. Back then I could go to concerts, theater, bars, I could have fun and still make it to the end of the month. But right now I can’t do any of them [...]

(Badefra, Appendix E)

I mean, my drinking outside has definitely decreased, the activities I go to have decreased, my culture of going to bars has decreased a lot, I used to go to bars a lot, now it's 55 TL for a beer at the bar.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cautious>



Whereas ‘going out’ was a normal activity *before/back then*, it has now been reduced and become a ‘*special occasion*’. Something as simple as going out for a beer with some friends or colleagues has now become something rare. The past, i.e. ‘*back then*’, is described in positive terms such as *fun* and the social activities were more accessible financially. It seems then that the privilege of going out has decreased along with the positive effects of socializing. As Gamze mentions, going to bars has been part of her *culture*, which has now decreased, arguably affecting her identity as socializing in a group setting is part of a person’s identification since it is part of one’s group identity. As Jenkins (2008) argues, when it comes to determining a person’s identity interactions with others play a part in both the individual and the collective identity of a person. One strategy that is introduced is the calculation of time and money when mentioning the prices of beer: “*sitting for an hour is not worth a 40 TL beer*” and “*now it’s 55 TL for a beer at a bar*”. By calculating the cost benefit of whether to go out or not, the price of a single beer has become the price index as an informal way of measuring the cost-benefit of going out. An example of this is Dilara choosing to stay home and drink tea with her friends instead of going to a bar. Vigh (2009) states that our social environments are in motion which is part of our everyday life, “*we act, adjust and attune out strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces*” (2009: 422). Navigating within the economic reality of the increased inflation, beer has become the price index as an informal way of measuring the cost-benefit of going out - much like the Big Mac Index<sup>2</sup>. The four interviewees use the same strategy to navigate with the high prices when going out to places like bars and cafés, the strategy being either not going out too much or meeting somewhere outside of bars and cafés like their own homes or not going out at all. The influence of the economy is not only affecting each individual’s private economy but also their mental health as seen in the quote from Zara at the beginning of this section. Up until now, one can assume that one of the issues and limitations the interviewees have is the increased price of products such as beer and other beverages and other social activities, and an assumption can be made that the lack of money is also one of the issues. To give a different point of view to this, Eren states:

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Mac\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Mac_Index)

Every day the money I am spending loses its value daily. I am thinking right now, if I go out and order whatever without looking at the menu, and if they tell me that this beer is 150 TL, I will say ‘ok’ because I don’t know ... That is why I stopped living according to the prices ... So if I want to eat something I eat it, if I want to drink something I drink it. For a while I have been living like this, but I am also an exception you know, I make good money. I can say that the money I am earning now, a normal person in Turkey would not even earn this salary when they are fifty.

(Eren, Appendix D)

Eren also complains about the same issues as the other interviewees, that the price of beer changes all the time and that he cannot anticipate the prices anymore. As with Zara, this also affects Eren mentally, as he says that he does not want to live his life constantly thinking about the price of food and drinks when he goes out. The difference is, as Eren states, he makes enough money to not care about the changes in prices. Eren navigates around the issue of inflation by *not thinking about the price on the menu* when he goes out, this strategy, however, is only possible due to his wage being high enough for him to not care. This arguably indicates that income matters when it comes to social activities. This should not come as a surprise since having a good standard of living due to your economic status usually means you do not think about your economical circumstance as much in your everyday life. However, even though Eren states that he does not want to think about the money he is spending, there have been some instances during our interview where he talks about going to the market and paying 350 TL for “*some cheese, olives, yoghurt, and milk*” the price difference in New Balance sneakers, and the increase in utility bills, and how this has put him in disbelief (Eren – Appendix D). This is not to say that Eren is not bothered by the situation, or that he is not opposed to the economic crisis and how it affects the everyday life of people in Turkey, but given his circumstances, as he admits himself, his life circumstances differ from the majority of people in Turkey. It is still an important point to make, that social formation in the context of this paper being, amongst other things, the economy, still affects people across economic classes.

One example of a person navigating around price change without having the opportunity to ignore the prices is Badefra, who when talking about the massive increase in natural gas prices admitted taking a more *illegal* strategy:

[Badefra]: If I want to stay warm, I can't pay 1000 TL per month, so what do I do?  
I do it illegally

[Hakan]: So how do you do it?

[Badefra]: I have an acquaintance, we pay him 100 TL, he comes with a special tool that can interfere with the natural gas box in the house, and then you just get a monthly bill of 150 TL.

Badefra coming from a different background has different strategies that he uses to manage the massive increase in gas and electricity bills that Turkey has been facing for most of 2022. Badefra mentioned earlier in the interview that his income is 2500 TL and that he pays for the bills in the apartment he lives in with his brother (Badefra, Appendix E), thus paying 1000 TL would be 40% of his monthly salary going to the natural gas bill every month. With this trick of interfering with the natural gas box, he instead pays in total of 250 TL each month, saving him in total of 750 TL each month. He cannot be able to pay 1000 TL per month, so he is faced with two choices: either not pay the 1000 TL and freeze during the winter months or cheat the system and stay warm. From an outside point of view, it seems like both choices come with consequences, but the human need to stay warm during the cold winter months arguably gives no other choice but to find a solution to the money problem. During the interview when we talked about how he was able to get natural gas illegally, he glanced towards the phone recording our interview and laughed nervously indicating that he probably had to think twice if he wanted to say it or not. When he was telling me how he did it his tone of voice was more serious and calmer, which led me to believe that he was aware of the risk he was taking by not only the crime he has committed, but also by telling me, a stranger, recording the whole conversation. This goes to show how much the current economic situation can affect one person to commit a crime in order to stay warm and be able to pay his bills. As he mentions, he does not have a choice, for him to stay warm he needs to pay someone to mess with the natural gas box in his apartment. From the conversation, he justifies his actions by asking rhetorically “*I also need to stay warm, right?*”.

## Sub-conclusion

Concluding this section of the analysis I will go through the arguments presented above and apply the theoretical framework more explicitly.

The common denominator and theme in this section is the concept of ‘going out’. Using Laclau & Mouffe’s (1985) terms, it is the nodal point of most of the section, as it pertains to most of the context of the interviewee’s statements regarding the economic situation both how it affects them and how they navigate within the terrain. The interesting part is how the concept of ‘going out’ differs depending on when the interviewee’s talk about the past or the present. When they talk about ‘going out’ in the past it is described with more positive connotations with words like *joyful* and *cheerful* used when reminiscing about the past. It was more affordable and the conversations with friends when going out was more pleasant as one of the interviewees, Zara, described. Comparing to how ‘going out’ is described in the present it is the opposite, where negative connotations are used more. Words such as *bothersome* are used to describe the feelings the interviewees have when thinking about going out. The reasoning for this has been pointed to everything becoming more and more expensive, and when they finally do go out the conversations are more about the problems in the country rather than about life in general. The concept of ‘going out’ in the present day thus gains its meaning from how it is described in the present, which is mostly concerned with the expensive prices and the limitations this brings to this segment of young professionals, and the negative connotations attached to the concept itself. This does not mean that ‘going out’ is a negative activity or experience entirely, but that the compared to how it was described in the past and how it is presented in the present, shows that it is more of a struggle that can create further negative emotions and feelings in the interviewees.

Everything revolves around the price of different social activities, especially the prices of beer. Thus, different strategies have been presented by the interviewees when navigating around the issues regarding the economic situation. The common strategy is to measure the cost-benefit of going to drink a beer, where the question ‘is it worth it?’ is asked a lot. The outcome of these strategies is most of the time either to go out or stay home. However, the interviewees have worked around this by either going to parks to drink or go to each other’s houses instead. With the exception of one, Eren, who had the financial means to not think about the prices. This indicates that the economic status does to a degree play a role in the strategies presented by the interviewees. The concept of social navigation (Vigh, 2009) highlights motion within motion, as the economic situation changes constantly so does the interviewees’ strategies and

movements within the uncertain terrain created by the instability of the economic and political structures in society.

Jenkins (2008) in his theory of *social identity* states that identities is based on both individual and collective identification. Going out to bars, cafés, concerts, theatres et cetera. Are places that both produces and reproduces culture, it is part of the culture of the segment of youth interviewed in this paper. The findings in this section shows that being restricted to do these kinds of activities interferes with the interviewee's ability to perform their identities. Furthermore, talking more about problems and troubles caused by the economic crisis caused partly by the decisions made by the government, it creates further antagonism between this segment of the youth and the government. The government becomes the Other (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

## Political life – freedom and restrictions

In this section of the analysis the interviews focus more on the political aspect of the interviewees' everyday life. When asking questions regarding what else limits their daily life besides the economy, the interviewees touched on forced to be more political, the challenges of being a woman under the rule of an Islamic conservative political rule, and the challenges of being Kurdish. The general concept of this part of the analysis revolves around *freedom*, what it entails and how it affects the people. All this will be under the scope of social navigation, identification, and conflict analysis to understand how the interviewees navigate within the political fields, how it affects their identification and identity, and the possible conflicts that is created by the outcome of different discourses colliding.

### **Gendered identity and traditionalism – being a woman in Turkey**

Out of the five interviews conducted three of them were with women, which sparked a conversation about being a woman in Turkey, the struggles and limitations that might occur in their everyday lives, how it affects them, and how they navigate different terrains in Turkish society.

I was born under the AKP administration, my rights as a woman: my freedoms, my clothes, my rights were being restricted since the very beginning, the only changed conditions now is that we are in a difficult economic situation. These two things are now tied together, and you feel more suffocated. [...] For this reason, when I dress in the morning and let's say I wear a nice dress, I say to myself 'I am going to take the metrobus, it will be crowded, people will stare and comment' or let me give you another example, when I am with my partner on the metrobus I cannot comfortably hug and kiss him because we keep getting hearing news when two lovers hugs and kiss someone will intervene and say 'how can you do such a thing', and people support the person who intervenes because this is the reality of this country. We are the minority, and they are the majority, therefore we do not feel free and cannot act as we are.

(Dilara, Appendix A1)

Dilara states that the reason for her restricted freedom is because of the AKP administration. That the only thing that has changed is the economic situation. The restrictions Dilara is experiencing when it comes to her freedom stem from being a woman living under a government that produces conservative and religious discourse, which includes the clothes she is wearing, how many children she should bear, and when to get married. She says she feels '*suffocated*', which is the opposite of feeling 'free', indicating once again the concept of freedom. The blame that Dilara puts on her restricted freedom is on the current AKP government, especially when she states that '*they*' are now the majority, and '*we*' are the minority, and not being able to feel free and "*act we are*". With this, she makes a separation between two contrasting forces in the population: a minority and a majority. Usually, in society, the majority has more power than the minority, and the minority is usually the segment to be suppressed. When stating that we cannot act as we are, she arguably presents this in a way indicating that because of the majority (*they*) she cannot be her true self. Her gendered identity is questioned by the government and the majority when she cannot dress how she wants, and her rights as a woman, as she puts it herself, have been restricted since she was born. In the theory of social identity Jenkins (2008) argues that "*gender as a category is always massively externally defined*" (83), in this case, the government is defining the gendered identity of women in Turkey. The government categorized what it is to be a woman in Turkish society by putting labels on what is considered appropriate clothing. This is made evident when she explains how she navigates in public spaces such as transportation, where she is reluctant to wear anything too revealing in order not to get in conflict with the people she calls '*they*'. Categorization from the state always has a certain power, since "*categorizing people is always potentially an intervention in their lives, and often more*" (Jenkins, 2008: 108). By changing her outfit in order not to confront conflicts regarding her, one can argue that she feels pressure to consent to the expectations and norms of the majority of the population who agrees and sides with the traditionalist Islamic values of the AKP. Speaking on the same topic, in my interview with Zara and Gamze mentions something similar,

Let's say I'm going to meet a friend in the evening, we're in the summer, I'm done with work and ready to go out, I'm going to the bus, I'm wearing a skirt or a dress. People are looking at this, looking at it in a very disturbing way, as if by wearing a skirt I have done something very abnormal, or interfering with two people kissing, for example, as

if they are doing something godless and say, 'you can't kiss here, you are godless, what you are doing doesn't fit our culture'.

(Zara, Appendix B)

[...] women usually always take a second outfit with them, one outfit for when they leave the house and a second one when they arrive at their destination. I have suffered a lot of harassment in public transport. Countless.

(Gamze, Appendix C)

Zara and Gamze both mention the same as Dilara about wearing specific types of clothing as a woman and the reactions it creates from the public. The notion of clothing plays a significant part in the image that people create of themselves as it is what we present to others, and by restricting this freedom of self-expression, it arguably creates a conflict with the identification of the individual. Gender is one of the most consistent identificatory themes and as a category always massively externally defined (Jenkins, 2008: 83). By being externally defined the people getting defined by others from the outside essentially have no control over how they are defined. According to both Zara and Gamze what women choose to wear plays a significant role in if they will get harassed on public transport, where Zara describes it as '*disturbing*' looks when she decides to wear a skirt. She uses the words '*abnormal*' and '*godless*' to describe the way that the people describe her choice of clothing. The word '*godless*' (Allahsız) is used a lot in Turkey by the religious segment of the population who uses the phrase to describe something as un-Islamic and can also be used as an insult. Coupled together with the phrase '*not fitting our culture*' indicates that what is being done by the people (the harassers) does not only fit within *their* view of '*the culture*' but is also seen as something unholy. The culture and religion then become closely intertwined, since doing something that is out of the conservative Islamic view are seen as both unholy and culturally inappropriate according to the people. The definition of culture becomes a central point in what is appropriate and what is not, which arguably indicates that when Zara chooses to behave in a certain way that does not fit the culture of the majority her behavior is seen as un-natural and against the norms of the society. Jenkins (2008) argues that categorization has implications of identification and "*categorizing people is always potentially an intervention in their lives, and often more*" (108). Zara is being



categorized negatively for her behavior in a way that is considered not fitting the culture and is called *godless*. This has an impact on her choice of clothing and how she should behave in certain public spaces. This kind of narrative arguably creates a separation between different segments, or groups, of the population in Istanbul/Turkey, and the way that Zara describes it when she uses the word *people* can be interpreted as it is a big group of people, or the majority, who agrees with this conservative Islamic view on both culture and gender roles. When using the word *people*, it can be interpreted as everybody since using the word *people* usually indicates one entity. Jenkins states that when it comes to group identities "*Defining 'us' involves defining a range of 'thems' also. When we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves*" (Jenkins, 2008: 102). When Zara chooses to mention this example where the opposition is using words related to religion, what she is actually saying is that they are religious and conservative and at the same time putting herself in a position where what they are doing is negative whereas what she is doing is 'normal'. She shows that there is a conflict between her idea of what should be normal and what is considered normal by the majority. Where it can become a problem is when one group has more power over the other, which can create an unequal power balance. Which arguably happens in the instance that Zara mentions, where people are looking at her wearing a skirt as it is something 'abnormal' and questioning her, in Jenkins terms, 'human-ness'. Jenkins states "*collective gender differentiation may relate to local conceptions of human-ness [...] behaviour that is locally gender-inappropriate may be identified by others as 'un-natural', and the individual may perceive herself to be 'un-natural' too or must struggle not to do so*" (2008: 83). 'Un-natural' in the context of the quotes above I would argue that words like 'godless' and 'not fitting our culture' fits within the concept of 'un-natural', which would explain why Zara mentions that she is aware of the clothing she wears when taking public transport. Whereas Zara mentions she is getting looks, Gamze states that she has been harassed countless times, which indicates that pressure on their identity becomes more gendered, and the kind of pressure can come from different types of harassment. One strategy that Gamze mentions that women do is to have two different sets of clothes, one for when they leave the house and go to their destination, and one for when they are actually arriving at their destination. Using this kind of strategy arguably plays into the locally gender-inappropriate behavior mentioned above, where "*the individual may perceive herself to be 'un-natural' too, or must struggle not to do so*" (Jenkins, 2008: 83). By having two sets of clothes, she accepts the norms and customs of the majority in some public spaces but goes against it as soon as she arrives at her destination. Which public spaces

that one finds herself in can change her behavior, which is something that Dilara mentions when talking about how certain areas in Istanbul can trigger certain behaviors:

[...] where I live for example it's a more poor and Islamic area, so I can't do all of this there. My roommate is actually my boyfriend but everybody in the apartment complex thinks that we are married. I cannot tell them 'No we are not married' because for them they will put a label on me or judge me, maybe they will harass me, maybe they will bother me, I don't even want to suffer from their looks, so automatically I just lie, I have to act in a certain way that fits their world view. All this of course bothers me as a human being, besides the economic there is also ... this.

(Dilara, Appendix A1)

Dilara mentions here that her change in behavior does not only happen when she is out in the streets of Istanbul, on public transportation on her way to work and home, or when she is socializing with her friends. It also happens within the apartment complex where she lives with her boyfriend. She states that she cannot do what she wants because she lives in an Islamic area of Istanbul. Indicating that she is constantly faced with the Islamic and conservative norms and values from her neighbors and the area she lives in. She has to lie and act a certain way to fit their world view. In a way this is a strategy to have some peace of mind without being judged or harassed by her neighbors, but at the same time she also mentions that it bothers her as a human being. Arguably there is a conflict between her identity as a 'neighbor' and her gendered identity, and to a large degree also her political identity. She cannot perform her identity based on her gender and her political views including the norms and values that these entail, when she lives in that area. By changing her behavior to fit their world view, she consents to this worldview and by doing so, she creates a conflict within herself. One could say that her 'human-ness' comes into question, as Jenkins (2008: 75) states "*acceptable human-ness is attributed to individuals on the basis of explicit or implicit collective defined criteria [...] human-ness is the primary identity of external definition*". Lying about being married to her boyfriend in order not to be judged or harassed, shows how she is navigating around the pressures from the cultural norms imposed by external forces such as her neighbors. In the Islamic conservative and traditionalist segment of the Turkish population, it is out of the norm for a woman to live with her boyfriend without being married, there are certain *criteria* that

has to be met before a woman can move out and live with another man. Furthermore, from the way she speaks about it by using phrases such as ‘*maybe* they will bother me’ arguably shows that she is anticipating that all these negative reactions will present itself as soon as she does not act in a certain way. To the notion of anticipating just mentioned, the concept of social navigation states that “*we act and adjust our strategies in relation to the way we... anticipate the movement and influence of social forces*” (420). Coming back to the norm of a woman living with her boyfriend without getting married, I would argue that even in the more secular segment it is not necessarily accepted either. Speaking on this topic on social and cultural norms put on women, Zara says:

[...] no matter how left-wing you are, the family can still be traditional. For example, I have an older brother, my mother does not treat me like she treats my older brother. Because he is a man, he gets more freedom and I get restricted more. This annoys me a lot... Whether you are on the left or right, we have this traditionalist structure. And this traditionalist structure always oppresses and restricts women [...]

(Zara, Appendix B)

Coming from a secular left-wing family, Zara still faces challenges within the family structure as she is facing a different treatment than her older brother from her mother when it comes to her freedom. She states that because he is a man, he gets more freedom whereas because she is a woman, she is more restricted. This traditionalist structure is apparent and appears not only in the public sphere and in political and partisan discourses, but also within the family on the whole political spectrum. There could be an argument that maybe depending on where you are on the political spectrum the restrictions could be less severe, however, what Zara states here traditionalism is a bit different from politics. Traditionalism is more embedded and deeper in the culture and firmer than politics in this case.

### **Ethnicity matters – Being Kurdish in Turkey**

I came to Istanbul during the coup period, there was a coup happening in Turkey around that time, in 2016. Back then people were fired up. Well, at that time there were armed conflicts in the Kurdish cities [In Turkey] ... And when we came to the university for the first time, there was an even greater hatred towards us [Kurds]. They didn't like us ... They were trying to take over the universities, the racists in the university were trying to increase even more. What did we do? We closed in on ourselves, so that's how Kurds started hanging out together only.

(Badefra, Appendix E)

Badefra arrived in Istanbul at the political boiling point right after the attempted coup. Around these times the government was prosecuting, sending people to jail, and labelling some people as traitors to the republic of Turkey. Needless to say, the political climate in the aftermath of the attempted coup in 2016 was at its peak when he arrived in Istanbul to study at the university. He makes a clear distinction to us and them by using the phrase *us* when talking Kurds as a group and arguably makes a distinction between Kurds and Turks. He states, "*there was an even greater hatred towards us*", indicating that there has always been a hatred towards Kurds but at that point in time it was even greater. He puts the reasoning behind this on the armed conflicts happening around that time in the Kurdish cities. It is important to note that the cities that he mentioned in the interview are all based in Turkey and are normally not described as Kurdish cities by mainstream media or official government discourse. However, it is common knowledge in Turkey that most of the cities in the Eastern part are considered Kurdish due to the fact that most Kurds are from that part. Ethnicity becomes a focal point for Badefra's self-identification and to navigate his time at the university he had to group up with other Kurds. He goes more in depth regarding the differentiation between Kurds and Turks:

Everything is theirs, everything belongs to Turks, they have a state, they have everything, they have all the power, from the moment they enter this world they are not met with violence. But for example, when I was 18 years old ... there was a conflict in our area between the PKK and the police, my brother hugged my leg and asked, 'brother are they going to kill us?' I couldn't do anything about it ... I could only console my brother ... think, I'm only 18 years old, you come from conflict, your mental health is

broken, you're experiencing trauma ... everything [racism and discrimination] I've been through is trauma

(Badefra, Appendix E)

From Badefra's own life experience he has never felt like he had any power or rights as a Kurd in Turkey. According to him and his experiences, everything belongs to the Turks: they have a state, and they have power. For him, being Kurdish means that you experience trauma and are met with violence. As he explains being faced with this reality when an armed conflict happened between the PKK and the police in his hometown. During the conflict, he has to consult his younger brother who was scared that they would get killed because they are Kurdish. When it comes to ethnicity and its relation to identity, Jenkins (2008: 87) states that "*as a collective identity that may have a massive presence in the experiences of individuals, ethnicity... is often an important and early dimension of self-identification*". Badefra only 18 years old and faced with this kind of traumatic experience arguably shows how much ethnicity plays a role in his identity. When he mentions that everything, he has been through is trauma and that it has affected his mental health shows that ethnicity matters. According to Jenkins (2008), "*Ethnicity may involve emotion and affect, suggesting that it can become significantly entailed in selfhood*" (87). Furthermore, it arguably also shows how much it matters, not only to Badefra's own individual identity but also as a collective identity when Turks from the outside discriminate against him for being Kurdish. As Jenkins (2008: 87) mentions "*Ethnicity when it matters to people, really [emphasis] matters*". Badefra showcases the difference between being born Turkish and Kurdish, if you are Turkish you are born into a world that is made for you: the state is yours, everything is tailor-made for you, and you have the 'power'. Whereas being born a Kurd you are faced with violence and oppression, you experience trauma from your environment because of conflicts.

It is not only in physical spaces, from a gender or ethnic perspective that freedom is restricted for the interviewees, it also happens in other spaces such as social media:

[...] for example on social media, on Twitter, 99% of the country including myself is afraid to write something in a harsh language, because we know that something will

happen to us because something happened to everyone who wrote ... I don't think I have freedom on this issue at all

(Zara, Appendix B)

I cannot use social media as comfortably as a Turk... when a Turk tweets and if I tweet the same thing, it is worse... Because you are Kurdish. For the state you are a potential terrorist. The state always wants to suppress you. They want to turn you into a slave, 'either you're a Turk or you're not'

(Badefra, Appendix E)

I have a harder time spreading my own ideas to people ... because I don't have the space to do this. If I do it, I'm afraid that something will happen to me, I'm afraid of being arrested, being fired from my job or in any way being in the loop of the state.

(Dilara, Appendix A2)

What all three have in common is that they do not feel that they have the freedom to freely express their opinions, and they do not think that they have the space to do so. In Turkey after the attempted coup in 2016 many of the news media in the country that was opposing the government were shut down during the post-coup crackdown, according to a website monitoring the post-coup crackdown 189 media outlets were shut down and 319 journalists arrested (turkeypurge.com). Both civilians and famous celebrities have been investigated for criticizing the government and Erdogan. Restricting their political opinions and criticizing the state on social media arguably shows that some of the interviewees use these strategies to avoid being in the loop of the state. Vigh (2009: 420) states in his concept of social navigation that *"people invest a great deal of time in making sense of and predicting the movement of their social environment... to adapt to and move in relation to oncoming change"*. All three are predicting if they either post something on social media or spread their ideas out to people, something will happen such as being prosecuted or losing their jobs. This indicates that there is a great risk to be politically active against the current government. For Badefra, his ethnic identity of being Kurdish also plays a role in how he will be treated by the government. He

mentions that the state will always see him as a potential terrorist because of his ethnicity and suppress him. For the state being Kurdish includes the *possibility* of being a threat to the state. The state categorizes what it means to be a citizen. One has to be a ‘Turk’, it is both a vague and powerful category, and it can be interpreted as if identifying as Kurdish goes against the state discourse of what a true citizen is supposed to be. Jenkins states when it comes to human-ness “*it is a ‘categorical’ collective identification before it is a principle of ‘group’ formation*” (Jenkins, 2008: 82). This means that the ‘human-ness’ of Kurds is being questioned within the state discourse on citizenship. You are either a Turk or you are not – the meaning of what it means to be a Turk indicates a powerful categorization where part of the population is being left out. When Badefra mentions that he cannot use social media as comfortably as a Turk it shows how “*categorizing people is always potentially an intervention in their lives*” (Jenkins, 2008: 108). In this case, it arguably is not potentially an intervention, but definitely an intervention in Badefra’s life that he cannot express his opinions as freely because of his ethnicity. This shows that there is a conflict between the state and the interviewees in the sense that the interviewees do not feel like they have the freedom to express their opinions and criticize the state, and they are fearful of speaking their mind because the fear of something might happen to them if they do.

Speaking on how the government’s policies and imposing of conservative, Islamic and traditional values restrict some of their freedoms, Eren states:

Dormitories started separating. Between man and woman ... Why? Like, if a person is going to have sex with another person, let's say ... gender doesn't matter in these cases .... I mean, everybody has sex. ... Why will you separate them? Because they think that it's religiously incorrect. They mostly try to force to do things just because they're correct in a way that they think, like how they think religion works.

(Eren, Appendix D)

Something that has been talked about a lot in Turkey amongst the secular youth is the government’s involvement with the educational system. This is many levels, from introducing more religious curriculum and removing evolution<sup>3</sup>, and to what Eren exemplifies here with

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/23/turkish-schools-to-stop-teaching-evolution-official-says>

the separation of dormitories. As to why the government would do this, Eren states that it is because having men and women in the same dormitories is religiously incorrect. Indicating that it goes against the ideology of the state, and the way that Islam is interpreted by the mainstream conservative segment is that men and women should be separated, and when it comes to sex it should not happen before marriage. Additionally, Eren argues that the government is forcing these incentives on the population because it is the way *they* think religion works, showing here that the blame is put on *they*. Going back to Jenkins notion that when it comes to groups “*when we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves*” (2008: 103). When Eren says that for *them/they* it is religiously incorrect, he is at same time saying that for him/us it is normal to have sex, as he states *everybody has sex*. This segways into the final part of this section which is concerned with who is *us* and who is *them*, as this has been something brought up many times during the interviews. When asked specifically who *us* is, this is the answer I got:

Basically everybody who are against the government ... Kurds, Alevis<sup>4</sup>, leftists, non-believers, animal activists, vegans, everybody is involved in ‘us’, because the other side is against everybody. If you are a vegan, they call you a terrorist, if you are a Kurd they call you a terrorist, even if you are a dancer they look at you with a terrified look. There is a hatred towards everything and everybody, there is a hostile environment, therefore everyone who is against them is ‘us’ for me

(Dilara, Appendix A2)

In defining *us*, Dilara makes a clear distinction: everybody who is against the government is considers *us*. She goes on to give examples of groups that are part of *us*: Kurds, Alevis, leftists, non-believers, animal activists, and vegans.

Kurds are the biggest ethnic group besides Turks in Turkey. It is interesting how she brings in a whole ethnic group to be considered as *us* and goes to show that she believes that the government is against the Kurds. She did not give a specific reasoning for why Kurds or what *type* of Kurds she was including, because it is important to note that not all Kurds are against the government, actually there is a significant amount who has also voted for Erdogan the past

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<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alevism>



20 years. But she does mention that “*if you are a Kurd, they call you a terrorist*”, so one can assume that as a general rule of thumb from her point of view Kurds are against the government because the government is against the Kurds; Alevis makes up approximately 20% of the population in Turkey and has historically been in conflict with Sunnism. Alevism is a branch of Islamic tradition. This arguably already creates a conflict towards the government since Erdogan and the AKP are following Sunnism as the majority of the Turkish population; Leftists is an interesting group to include since there are no left-wing party in the Parliament besides the pro-Kurdish party HDP; vegans and animal activists can be considered in one group as they are arguably closely related.

Having this many different groups, who all share the same value which is being against the current government is an interesting entry point to understand the complex definition of who *us* is. Using the concept of social identity (Jenkins 2008), one can argue that all these groups coupled together create a form of *collectivity*, and according to Jenkins (2008: Chapter 9) collectivity includes two types: groups and categories. Arguably each of the ‘people’ that Dilara mentions here can be considered groups within their own rights. She states that vegans and Kurds are being called terrorists, and the opposition has a hatred towards everything. Looking at this with the theory of *social identity* and the notion of categorization and the powers it potentially has over groups and individuals, Jenkins (2008: 108) states that “*categorizing people is always potentially an intervention in their lives ... that they have been categorized is always at least immanently consequential for a category’s members*”. What can be seen here is that Dilara is both the categorizer and the categorized, she categorizes the opposition, or the ‘others’, as *hating everybody* and *being hostile*, and at the same time she is categorized because the government and the opposition is doing the same to her.

### Sub-conclusion

In this section, the everyday life of the interviewees was analyzed in relation to their political life and the strategies they employ to deal with the consequences of both the discourse produced by the government and its constituencies and from their own behaviors going against this discourse.

One concept that is inherent and mentioned throughout this section is: *freedom*. In discourse theory terms it is the *nodal point*, where all other words and concepts gain their meaning and vice versa. The concept of freedom is mentioned in several different ways and relates to each

of the interviewees in different ways depending on a plethora of factors such as gender and ethnicity. How freedom relates to gender and ethnicity shows how freedom can be both similar and different at the same time depending on the context.

‘Freedom’ when it comes to gender, specifically being a woman, bodily autonomy is the first thing that the female interviewees mentioned during the interviews. The clothes they wear play a big part in how they are perceived by the public, wearing skirts and ‘revealing’ clothes would trigger certain responses from the public, which the interviewees refer to as *harassment*. The type of harassment usually happens in public transportation such as metros and busses and ranges from *uncomfortable looks* to direct confrontations with strangers. All this is what Jenkins calls categorization in this theory of social identity. Categorization has an impact on the individual’s identification and also potentially impacts one’s behavior. This can be seen when the female interviewees change what kind of clothes they are wearing when they go out in public spaces – especially conservative spaces, it comes to play when Dilara mentions that she lies to her neighbors about being married to her boyfriend whom she lives with, and when Gamze mentions that women usually bring two sets of clothes when they go out. Categorization thus has an impact on how these women navigate in their everyday life to avoid the influences of the hegemonic discourse that is (re)produced by the government and its constituencies. However, as Laclau & Mouffe (1985; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Torfing, 1999) argue, discourse can never be totally fixed and there will always be conflict when different discourses collide, and there will always be force and repression within this conflict. The antagonism that we see is the conflict between contrasting ideologies, the ideology of the secular young professionals interviewed in this paper, and the state and people who vote for them. However, as Zara mentioned in her interview, even in left-wing secular families there are traditional structures that still oppress women and categorized them in a similar fashion, thus being a woman in Turkey means constantly struggling with repressing structures in society: politically, socially, culturally, and within the family.

The concept of freedom also comes to play when it comes to ethnicity in Turkey. One of the interviewees, Badefra, spoke about his experience as a Kurd and how it has affected him. Concepts that are attached to *freedom* when it comes to ethnicity, especially to being Kurdish, is the freedom to speak Kurdish without being restricted by outside forces and to say that you

are Kurdish without being negatively categorized. However, the reality that Badefra shows is that when speaking Kurdish, you are being met with violence, and being born Kurdish means being faced with violence and trauma. This has affected Badefra to a point where he openly distinguishes between Turks and Kurds. The antagonism that comes to play here is the conflict between the discourse of being Kurdish and the discourse of being Turkish. The discourse of being Turkish comes from the government and the nationalist sentiment of Turkishness that is historically embedded in the state discourse, which occurs in institutions such as education – Badefra specifically mentions universities, and the social and political – the armed conflicts between the military and police against the PKK.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that antagonism happens when the ‘Other’ interferes and prevents you to be yourself, and when the interviewees is defining *us* and *them*, which has been the theme throughout this whole section, there is an onus on conservative and religious values that is defining *them*. Whereas, when it comes to *us* it is mostly liberal values such as being vegan and animal activists. Interestingly, when asked specifically one interviewee mentions that everyone against the current government is considered *us*. Taking that at face value, then the biggest category that defines *us* is if you are against the current government. Which has been the sentiment of the interviewees throughout this section. This shows how the ideological struggle is between the government and everybody else who are against the government.

## Conclusion

This project attempts to answer the research question *How does the youth in Turkey navigate their everyday lives during the current economic and political crisis?*

The concept of ‘going out’ and ‘freedom’ has been integral in how the interviewees have described their everyday life throughout the analysis. The concept of freedom is something that has affected the interviewees most of their lives. From their statements, one can see that the women have since the start of the AKP administration felt their freedoms restricted. This comes mainly from imposed ideology from the state and its constituencies, which is where the women in this paper place the blame. However, it is not only the state that creates antagonism, but also traditionalist structures within the family, thus being a woman in Turkey is in constant conflict with conservative and Islamic ideological structures from the government, the societal expectations and norms of being a woman, and traditionalist structures within the family. The same can be said when it comes to ethnicity, where the focus is more on what it is to be Turkish, which includes the powerful categorization of Kurdish ethnicity. The struggle to be Kurdish stems from these categorizations where trauma and emotional affect create an internal antagonism within the individual’s struggle to maintain his/her ethnic identity in a contested political field stemming from the clashes between the state’s discourse on Kurdish-ness. In conclusion, gendered identity and ethnic identity are in constant struggle with the state’s dominant discourse on both identity formations, which results in the interviewees not being able to be who they are because of the Other. Thus, throughout the analysis, there was an onus on us and them and the antagonistic relationship between the two.

In conclusion, the findings gave the paper different perspectives on what freedom means for each interviewee and how the focus differs from subject to subject. While some struggle with their gendered identity, others struggle with their ethnic identity, but what brings them all together is that the blame is put on the AKP government and Erdogan. It showed how categorization from the government and the hegemonic discourse creates an antagonistic relationship between the interviewees and the government discourse. What all the interviewees have in common is the struggle with economic freedom and opportunities, the lack of economic freedom put further pressure and distress on their politicized identities. Before their social life was not restricted and there was economic freedom to pursue cultural interests and social life, whereas now it has been restricted in a major way. All this together coupled together has

created one big struggle where the political life heavily relies on the social and economic life. The constant antagonistic relationship between the interviewees and the government makes it hard for most of the interviewees to navigate their everyday life while at the same. However, one of the interviewees, Eren, struggled with neither his political identity nor his economic freedom. He stated that he earns enough to not care about the price inflations and can most of the time cope with it. He did mention frustrations over the government including religious sentiment on new policies, however, the findings indicate that this does not directly affect his self-identification as severely as the other interviewees struggle with gender and ethnicity. This shows that the variables that determine one's ability to navigate within the government's conservative Islamic discourse and the uncertain social terrain created by the economy depend on one's financial situation, gender, and to a degree ethnicity. Lastly, no matter what the interviewees did to navigate around certain structures and discourses in society, it showed that when it came to the female interviewees, their strategies were mostly about conforming to the norms pushed by the state discourse. There is a constant confrontation with the discourse produced by the government, and this discourse keeps trying to become the hegemonic discourse but is always in conflict with other discourses produced by this segment of interviewees. Even when some of the interviewees conform to the discourse, they only reluctantly do so to navigate their everyday lives, and even then, they keep going against it in some type of way.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss and interpret my findings from the analysis and conclusion. I will relate my findings to the last part of each of my interviews concerning the hopes and dreams for the future of each interviewee, and the implications of the economy and political freedom has if they want to stay in the country or leave. Finally, I will go through what implications my findings can have for further research and how it is relevant within the field.

At the end of each interview, I asked the question: *what are your hopes and dreams for the future, for yourself, and for the country?* The answers I got were all depending on if the interviewee wanted to stay in the country or not (refer to Appendix A-E for transcripts). The interesting point I want to make before going into this discussion is that I never specifically asked if they wanted to stay or leave, but this was something that each interviewee naturally started to talk about. From my point of view as the interviewer, it seemed like this choice was obvious and natural for the interviewees. The following table shows the answers:

Stay	Leave	Not sure
2 (Badefra and Dilara)	2 (Gamze and Zara)	1 (Eren)

As one can see there is an equal distribution amongst wanting to stay or leave, with one interviewee 'not sure'. Of those who want to stay in Turkey are Badefra and Dilara, interestingly enough the two lawyers who also would have the hardest time finding a job outside of Turkey since studying criminal law is usually restricted to the country/area you live in. The two interviewees were also the most politically vocal in the interviews, and both also happen to be the only Kurdish interviewees. When talking about why they wanted to stay the answers were because they love the country and that they hope the elections in 2023 will change the current government and someone else will come to power and stir the country in the direction they hope for. Badefra specifically mentioned that he does not want to leave because would not feel at home in other countries and that he would rather just visit than live and settle there. Whereas Gamze and Zara both actively try to leave the country for reasons that were analyzed in the analysis chapter of this paper: lack of political and personal freedom, and the bad economy. Especially Zara focused mostly on the economic aspect since she has worked for 2,5 years as a software engineer and does not have the means to move out from her mom's apartment. She stated she has no hope at all for the country, and that her situation will not

change even when she is 35 years old. She has dreams of traveling around the world, buying her own apartment and car, getting married, and having kids. These dreams she believes can only be possible if she finds a job in Europe or gets a salary paid in Euro or Dollars while she lives in Turkey. Whereas Gamze focused more on the lack of freedom as a woman and being her true self without being harassed by society. For Eren, he was still not sure whether he wanted to move and settle in another country. His brother already moved to the Netherlands earlier this year (2022), and he also has friends who live abroad. For him, his reasoning was that he does not feel ready mentally yet, and most of his network is still in Istanbul. However, he did mention that the 2023 elections will determine whether he will stay or not, which he mentioned was also the case for the rest of his friends living in Istanbul still.

As one can see from this, the 2023 elections play a major role in the hopes the interviewees have for the future, not only for themselves but also for the country as a whole. It all depends on who is in power. I would argue that the elections in 2023 will determine the future of Turkey and will have a massive impact not only politically but also economically. From the findings of this paper, it shows how the secular young professional segment of the population navigates their daily lives, and how they are waiting eagerly for the upcoming elections in 2023 to determine their futures. How half of the interviewees want to stay in Turkey in hopes of a better future politically and economically, whereas the other half have given up hope and want to leave the country to pursue their dreams and hope for a better life. What they all have in common is this: they want to be happy and have a good life.

If the current government stays with Erdogan as the sitting president, it will be interesting to see if the country will go more extreme in its Islamic conservative direction and if he loses what impact it will have one can only imagine. Politically the country has suppressed freedoms since the failed coup attempt in 2016, especially the minorities and women are targeted. What can be drawn from the findings of this paper is this: the youth is frustrated and desperate, and they want to change.

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