

BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT:
UN(DER)EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES
WORKING AT CHAIN STORES IN TURKEY

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UN(DER)EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES
WORKING AT CHAIN STORES IN TURKEY**

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ABSTRACT

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In Turkey, the rapid massification of higher education over the past fifteen years has made university education accessible to a significant portion of the population while relativizing the advantage of education in terms of finding a job. The university education, which is regarded by large portions of society as a means of securing a “white-collar” job and, therefore, “upward mobility,” has largely lost its function. In Turkey, the country with the youngest population in Europe, where one out of every ten people is enrolled in a higher education institution, youth unemployment, especially among university graduates, is one of the country’s most pressing issues. The academy’s “interest” in this rapidly growing problem is also increasing. There has been a growing body of research on the topic of white-collar unemployment in recent years, complementing the numerous macroeconomic studies. While previous research has focused on the white-collar unemployed, this study challenges the restriction of unemployment study to those “outside employment” by analyzing the experiences of university graduates working in store chains. Based on in-depth interviews with twenty two workers in store chains in Ankara and İstanbul who graduated from at least two-year university programs, this study considers this experience, which has been largely

ignored under the label “underemployment,” to be a liminal experience between employment and unemployment. Therefore, while viewing the unemployment phenomenon through the eyes of university graduate chain store workers who are formally involved in employment, the study also emphasizes working relations, unionization, precariousness, and other aspects of this experience.

Keywords: unemployment, underemployment, store chains, higher education

ÖZ

İSTİHDAM İLE İŞSİZLİK ARASINDA: ZİNCİR MARKETLERDE ÇALIŞAN ÜNİVERSİTE MEZUNLARININ İŞ(SİZLİK) DENEYİMİ

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Türkiye’de geçtiğimiz on beş yılda yükseköğretimin hızla kitleselleşmesi üniversite eğitimini nüfusun önemli bir bölümü için olanaklı hale getirirken eğitimin iş bulmada sağladığı avantajı ise göreceleştirdi. Toplumun geniş kesimlerince “beyaz yaka” bir iş sahibi olmanın ve böylece “sınıf atlamanın” bir aracı olarak görülen üniversite, bugün bu işlevini büyük ölçüde yitirmiş durumda. 2022 yılı verilerine göre her on kişiden birinin bir yükseköğretim kurumuna öğrenci olarak kayıtlı olduğu Avrupa’nın en genç nüfusuna sahip ülkesi Türkiye’de, başta üniversite mezunları olmak üzere gençlerin işsizliği ülkenin en önemli sorunlarından biri olarak gösteriliyor. Hızla büyüyen bu soruna akademinin “ilgisi” de giderek büyüyor. Makroekonomik incelemelerin yanı sıra, beyaz yakalıların işsizlik deneyimlerine odaklanan çalışmaların sayısı her geçen gün artıyor. Beyaz yakalı işsizlerin deneyimlerine odaklanan söz konusu literatürün izinden giden bu çalışma, işsizlik araştırmalarının “istihdamın dışındakilerle” sınırlandırılmasına dönük bir itirazla, zincir marketlerde çalışan üniversite mezunlarının iş(sizlik) deneyimlerini inceliyor. Ankara ve İstanbul’daki zincir marketlerde çalışan, üniversitelerin en az iki yıllık bölümlerinden mezun olmuş yirmi iki çalışan ile gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanan çalışma, “eksik

istihdam” başlığı altında ele alınarak büyük ölçüde görmezden gelinen bu deneyimi, “istihdamın kıyısında” denebilecek eşikte bir deneyim olarak ele alıyor. Böylece, işsizlik olgusuna teknik olarak istihdamın içerisinde yer alan üniversite mezunu zincir market çalışanlarının gözünden bakarken, aynı zamanda buradaki çalışma ilişkilerini, sendikalaşmayı, güvencesizleştirmeyi ve bu deneyimin muhtelif boyutlarını vurguluyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: işsizlik, eksik istihdam, zincir marketler, yükseköğretim

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1.The Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the working experiences of recent university graduates employed in store chains in Ankara and İstanbul. Therefore, it intends to address the unremarked issue of underemployment among educated youth, which should be regarded as a component of Turkey's rapidly rising unemployment among university graduates. The transformation experienced with the spread of precarization together with the increasing educated young workforce in Turkey makes the problem of underemployment a part of the problem of unemployment of the educated youth. In this respect, the study examines how this transformation impacts recent graduates who will be entering the job market for the first time, as seen through the eyes of recent graduate young chain store workers. Based on the fact that university graduates working in chain stores perceive their own underemployment as a form of unemployment, the study views the experience in question as a position between employment and unemployment, with the concept of *un(der)employment*.

While the massification of higher education has made it easier for large numbers of people around the world to gain access to higher education since the 1960s, the assumption that simply having a university diploma guarantees easy entry into the job market is no longer entirely correct. Despite the increase in education levels, skills mismatch is still cited as one of the leading causes of unemployment, especially among young people around the world, notably in the Global South. In this regard, there is a hegemonic discourse that educational institutions are insufficient to meet the needs of the labor market and that unemployment occurs as a result of "skills mismatch" (ILO,

2019). Poor education and a lack of highly skilled graduates are often presented as fact despite a lack of empirical evidence linking them to high unemployment rates. However, this discourse fails to analyze current labor force dynamics and economic development barriers, and instead blames youth, educators, and local culture for economic restructuring failures (Adely, Mitra, Mohamed, & Shaham, 2021).

In addition to being a global issue, youth unemployment (particularly among those with a university degree) has been one of the most contentious issues in Turkey in recent years. In the last 15 years, the number of universities in Turkey has almost tripled. According to Turkey's Higher Education Council's (YÖK) statistics, there were 8,240,997 university students (including all degrees from upper secondary, undergraduate, and graduate)¹ in Turkey in the 2020-2021 academic year (YÖK, 2022). At the time, the population of Turkey was around 83.5 million. This indicates that more than 95 of a thousand individuals were university students in Turkey, meaning that nearly 1 in 10 people in the country were actively enrolled in a higher education institution. According to the 2019 data of the European Union Statistical Office (EUROSTAT), this number is 74 in Greece, 57 in Cyprus, 54 in Norway, 53 in Finland, 53 in Denmark and 51 in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the average of European Union (EU) countries is 38 (euronews, 2021). Put another way, Turkey has by far the highest number of university students among the EU countries.

While on the one hand, the number of citizens in Turkey studying at university is higher than ever before, on the other hand, it has been bringing the issue of unemployment of university graduates on the agenda of Turkish politics for a while. As the number of university graduates increases, the number of unemployed graduates increases too. Even more importantly, the number of university graduates who do not search for work because they have no hope of finding one has risen from 22,000 in 2005 to 272,000 in 2021. This means that besides the rapidly increasing number of “jobless graduates,” there is also a growing number of “hopeless graduates” in Turkey

¹ It should be noted that this number includes open education faculties. Turkey currently has three open education faculties as of 2022. In the 2021-2022 academic year, Eskişehir Anadolu University reported that a total of 3,538,594 students, including 1,172,938 active students, were enrolled in the open education faculty. On the other hand, Erzurum Atatürk University's open education faculty had 491,339 students enrolled, while İstanbul University's open education faculty had 189,961 students.

(BirGün, 2021). Last but not least, in the past six years, there has been a 97 percent increase in the number of university graduates working in positions that do not require expertise (BirGün, 2021). Employers, on the other hand, claim that there is not a problem of employment, but young people “do not fancy the existing jobs” (Milliyet, 2014).

It is clear from these numbers that a large proportion of the Turkish population with access to higher education has risen to levels never seen before in the country’s history. The “one university for every city” policy implemented since the 1980s reached its zenith with the rapid increase in the number of private and public universities in the second half of the 2000s, resulting in severe “academic inflation” (Yalçıntaş & Akkaya, 2019). Given that a larger percentage of the population now has the opportunity to pursue a university education, one might argue that this trend toward greater enrollment exemplifies a “democratization” of higher education. However, as will be discussed more in detail below, this “democratization” of higher education was only a so-called democratization of the opportunity for large sections of the population to still be poor but with a university degree.

Because widespread efforts to make higher education more affordable have made it possible for more people to realize their “dream” of attending, a university education is now no longer just a pipe dream for many. The fact that working families, in particular, continue to believe that “the way to a good future (a high-income profession and status, dignity, quality of life, etc.) is through the education of the child in a quality school” demonstrates that “education is still regarded as a means of advancement” (İnal, 2008). However, this massification and so-called democratization has been proving itself to be a failure with other transformations in the structuring of higher education in Turkey for a while. In the neoliberal era, education has been commodified by being de-legitimized as a fundamental right. The massification that is based on the (false) ideology that more education will produce more equal opportunities and better jobs (Collins, 2019, p. XI) has lost much of its function, as these institutions have assumed a structure that offers some of the privileges promised in previous years at a cost. Similar to the inequalities in the rest of the society, this has led to the emergence

of severe inequality and stratification within the realm of education (Bağımsız Sosyal Bilimciler, 2008, pp. 205-221).

A growing number of academic and non-academic studies examine this issue of unemployment among educated, resulting the abovementioned massification of higher education, which is being studied under a wide range of different headings related to young people: graduate unemployment, youth unemployment, youth neither in education nor in employment or NEET, white-collar unemployment, etc. Based on the YÖK data, Kaya-Erdoğan (2020, p. 17) reports that the master's and doctoral theses in the last ten years on unemployment or the unemployed accounts for sixty percent of all theses written on the topic since 1964 for both academic degrees. Furthermore, beside academia, one could argue that debates on unemployment are some of the topics that both traditional and new media deal with most often, with a particular emphasis on the young and educated unemployed. In addition, we are aware that numerous international institutions, non-governmental organizations, and states have a particular interest in and concern for this issue.

Although studies on unemployment in Turkey go back to the 1960s (see Türkay, 1968; Dirimtekin, 1965), the emergence of studies on youth unemployment and especially educated unemployment coincides largely with the 2000s. Even though there were few studies on young people and employment in the first half of the 2000s (see Taşçı & Tansel, 2005; Dursun & Aytaç, 2009), this topic gained more attention in the latter part of the decade, and in the 2010s, there was an unprecedented uptick in research on white-collar unemployment and insecurity (see Okur, 2014; Etcı & Kağnıcıoğlu, 2019; Şentürk, 2019). It is fair to say that the rapid rise in the number of studies on white-collar workers is at least in part due to the worldwide wave of unemployment caused by the impact of the 2008 crisis, as well as the high rates of educated unemployment that has accompanied the rapidly increasing number of universities since the second half of the 2000s. While the rapidly growing educated population created a large “white-collar” sector, resulting in a picture of many people working in precarious conditions, hundreds of thousands of educated young people whose dreams of working in such a job were dashed came to be a “reserve army” of the unemployed, reinforcing the insecurity in these jobs.

It is possible to argue that studies on white-collar labor or white-collar unemployment in Turkey are heavily influenced by the literature on “insecurity” and “precarity.” Many studies on the position of university graduates in the labor market, particularly over the past decade, are fed from this literature, including those on the insecurity problems of white-collar workers (see Vatansever, 2013), the devaluation of white-collar labor (see Nuroi, 2014), and others. Studies on unemployment during this time period largely focused on the profound social, psychological, and political effects of the crisis, in addition to the high unemployment rates caused by the crisis worldwide. In this regard, unemployment studies limited to economics, labor economics, and econometrics have partially gone beyond “statistical” research and have become the focus of studies in fields such as psychology, social psychology, sociology, and social services, in addition to the said disciplines (see Harma, Sümer, & Solak, 2013).

However, only a small portion of these studies focus on how unemployment is experienced. Bora et al.’s (2017) “*Boşuna mı Okuduk?*”, first published in 2011, is one of these studies that attempts to emphasize the lived experience of joblessness in contrast to the “statisticalization of unemployment.” This study examines the social experience of unemployment through the eyes of 57 “white-collar unemployed” and 10 graduating university seniors through in-depth interviews. The study, which includes a thematic analysis of the interviews, examines white-collar unemployment in various settings, such as discrimination, employment and subsistence strategies, the role of the family, as well as the theoretical contributions to the literature on new capitalism, new unemployment, and white-collar work in Turkey. On the other hand, although it does not specifically address “educated unemployment,” the doctoral dissertation of Kezban Çelik (2006) and her subsequent studies (Çelik, 2008) are also notable examples of research that emphasizes how unemployment is experienced. Through case studies in Ankara and Şanlıurfa, Çelik reveals the ways in which young people experience unemployment, the factors that influence this experience, strategies for coping with unemployment, and the potential consequences of youth unemployment in her doctoral dissertation. Following the footsteps of the literature on “youth transitions,” Çelik’s study focuses on the role of work in the transition from youth to adulthood, with a particular emphasis on the role of the family in this

transition. A recent doctoral dissertation by Esra Kaya-Erdoğan (2020) also examines the causes and consequences of graduate-level unemployment in Turkey. The place and role of actors and positions such as family, age, and gender in the life world of the unemployed are discussed in this comprehensive study based on in-depth interviews with unemployed university graduates. Kaya-Erdoğan, in her study, also focuses on underemployed university graduates who work in what she refers to as “unstable jobs.”²

All these studies on youth unemployment in general, and white-collar unemployment in particular, almost exclusively focus on people who are not currently employed (as may be expected). In other words, while these studies do bring attention to the “experience” aspect of the problem, they have approached the issue of unemployment from the standard and conventional perspective of “not working” or “joblessness.” Considering the negativity (*unemployment*) implied by the concept, it is partially understandable that unemployment debates are based on those who are *not in employment*. However, particularly when it comes to young people entering the labor market for the first time, this approach is far from understanding how unemployment is actually experienced because those who must work in temporary jobs, who work in part-time jobs, or who work in a job that does not match their qualifications may experience a form of unemployment in the middle of their working lives. This unique experience is disregarded when we limit the unemployment studies to those who are *not in employment*. Studying unemployment solely from this perspective of joblessness falls short on two counts: it cannot illuminate the struggles of the unemployed in today’s complex labor market, and it fails to clarify the blurring lines between employment and unemployment. In other words, traditional definitions of unemployment do not apply to today’s capitalism, which creates new conditions for the labor market. Today, as the number of jobless increases, people become more resigned to the idea that they could be laid off at any time, and they also become more willing to accept working conditions that increasingly favor their employer. But more importantly, the way employees make sense of their jobs changes. Indeed, the

² The study of Kaya-Erdoğan has been published into a book later. I used both works of the author in this study. For the book see (Kaya-Erdoğan, "Bayağı Kalabalığımız": Üniversiteli İşsizliği, 2021).

“impoverishment” caused by insecure and flexible work also leads to “the impoverishment of work expectations itself” (Öğünç, 2021).

Given these factors, this study can be interpreted as an effort, albeit a small one, to shift the emphasis of unemployment research to the study of work itself. In this context, the working experience of chain store employees who graduated from a university is discussed as part of their unemployment experience in this study. The lines between employment and unemployment rapidly blur as the nature of work becomes more fluid and precarious. It is remarkable that diploma-holders working in chain stores at this juncture have a story to tell about being unemployed smack in the middle of their working lives. The issue of underemployment, which is particularly prevalent among young people and unfortunately does not even have a significant statistical record in Turkey, is largely overshadowed, relatively less researched, and specifically for this reason, it is not included in policy-making processes. Focusing on the chain stores, the number of which has increased rapidly in Turkey over the past fifteen years, the study hopes to shed light on the employment and working conditions, unionization, and basic organizational structures of these stores which have not been studied enough.

Since the 1990s, the proliferation of shopping malls and large supermarkets has had a significant impact on Turkey’s economic and cultural life. In conjunction with their exponential growth, a large proportion of workers employed in the sector on the labor market is also expanding rapidly. Numerous studies have been conducted on the role of shopping malls, supermarket chains, and consumption culture in our daily lives. However, the nature of the work, working conditions, and the situation of the workers in this industry have not received the same level of attention. Consequently, we know very little about the employees working in these places, whose services have become indispensable for our daily lives. Moreover, it is clear that there has been a noticeable increase in the education level of the workers working here in recent years.

There are two noteworthy studies that need to be mentioned in terms of retail stores in Turkey. The first is Derya Koptekin’s 2010 master’s thesis, which will be referred to frequently in this study. Koptekin (2010) examines the class experiences of store workers by focusing on their encounters with customers and managers in her study,

which she conducts through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 37 workers working in various food retail stores in Ankara having direct contact with customers. Considering the fact that as an inevitable result of the interactive service sector, the people working here encounter a large number of people from various social and class backgrounds throughout the day, Koptekin demonstrates how class distinctions are constantly reconstructed in everyday life through work and consumption habits. However, the study is more concerned with the class position of workers than with their educational capital. For this reason, all of the employees interviewed within the scope of the study consist of people who have been educated at high school or below. We also have reason to think that this is not simply a choice, but that in the 12 years since Koptekin's work was published, much more higher-educated youth have started working in these stores. In this respect, unlike Koptekin's study, this study differs in terms of examining how higher-educated employees experience their current jobs through their educational qualifications.

Another recent study that should be highlighted here is the book on labor relations in shopping malls by Özkaplan et al. (2020), even though it does not specifically address store chains. The study provides a thorough analysis of the intersection of class, gender, and age by conducting extensive field research on the daily experiences of store employees in 10 shopping malls in İstanbul, collecting data through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The study sheds light on the mall employees' flexible and precarious labor relations, which include body and labor control, emotional and aesthetic labor control, entrepreneurial subjectivities, and fluid gender performances.

1.2. Research Question

Against this background, the main research question of this study is posed as follows:

“Given the high levels of unemployment in general and skilled labor unemployment and underemployment in particular, as well as the overall precarization of the labor market, how do university graduate store chain workers experience their employment status based on their educational qualifications?”

In this context, this study focuses on the un(der)employment experiences of university graduate store chain employees, taking into account the blurring distinction between being employed and unemployed under precarization of the labor market, which will be discussed later. In this regard, while the study examines the chain stores through the eyes of university graduates who work there, it also focuses on how university graduates themselves experience working relations there in terms of their employment processes. In other words, the study is not meant to be regarded solely as a study on the unemployed; rather, it seeks to understand the issue of unemployment in light of those who, formally speaking, do have jobs. Therefore, in addition to highlighting the complexity of the phenomenon of unemployment and proposing that its definition be expanded to include underemployed, temporary, and precarious workers, the study focuses on the working conditions in chain stores, the organization of employees, and their interactions with customers and managers with regards to their educational capital.

Expressed as “underemployment” in the literature, this “liminal position,” which is frequently excluded from even the statistics, in this study, is regarded as a function of delaying the inclusion of graduates in the workforce, in most cases acts as an impediment to them establishing their own lives, and lengthens the period of transition from youth to adulthood, and is associated with employment. In this context, the selection of chain stores is based on the fact that, due to the radical transformation of the retail sector over the past 15 years, these markets have become increasingly prevalent, have been the subject of almost no research, and are also bread and butter for an increasing number of university graduates.

1.3. Research Method

As previously stated, while there has been a limited increase in the literature on the experiences of unemployed and precarious workers, studies in the field remain primarily macroeconomic and statistical in nature. Qualitative research, in this respect, has a lot of potential for revealing how macro-structural problems in the labor market affect people’s lives and how people shape macro processes in turn. Based on this, within the scope of this study, which examines the *un(der)employment* experiences of the university graduates working in chain stores in Turkey, semi-structured in-depth

interviews were conducted with 22 employees (10 women and 12 men)³ working in store chains in Ankara and İstanbul. The ages of these employees, most of whom are recent graduates, range from 23 to 33. The interviews were held in March, April and May 2022.

The participants were working in the five largest national store chains and one regional chain in Turkey, also known as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) retailers. These five large store chains were chosen because they are the fastest growing chains in the retail sector and employ a large number of young people, as we will discuss further below. However, the interviews were not limited to national chains. In order to account for differences in labor relations and local dynamics, three employees from a regional chain market were interviewed in the Ankara leg of the interviews. Although there were no significant differences in the experience of the employees interview, it was deemed necessary to make the distinctions within the industry clear. It should be noted that the five largest store chains are not completely homogenous either, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. For example, two of these five chains are supermarkets with an authorized labor union, while the other three are discount stores without such a union. In addition, as will be emphasized, two of these chains, which are organized as supermarkets, focus on providing primarily to middle class customers, while the customer profile of the discount stores is dominated by poor people with relatively low purchasing power. The interviewees were selected from these five large retail chains to highlight these distinctions as well.

The interviews were limited to Ankara and İstanbul due to logistical constraints as well as the fact that these two cities are Turkey's two largest. The question of whether the experiences of chain workers in these two cities differ from one another is not central to this research. Small differences, such as higher rents in İstanbul, longer travel times, that occasionally appeared were noted when relevant. On the other hand, if the research scope is expanded to include smaller cities, the final result is likely to change, at least in part. In other words, there is likely to be a slight difference if the scope of the study

³ The interviewees' names used throughout the study are not their real names. Each employee has been assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity. Furthermore, details that could be used to identify them have been altered.

is expanded to include employees of chain stores in smaller cities. Consequently, it should be noted as a limitation of this study that such experiences could not be addressed, as the research was limited to only these two cities.

With a few exceptions, the majority of the interviews were conducted in person. Remote interviews were conducted with five people, three women and two men, who could not meet face to face, and video call programs were used in these meetings. One of these remote interviews was never used in this study, and the other two were conducted as extra interviews to allow for comparison with examples out of the sample. In addition to in-person and online interviews, some of the stores where the chain market employees were interviewed were visited. With the opportunities provided by the authorized union representative, it was possible to spend time in various parts of the store during some of these visits. In this respect, it can be said that this study employs a field research and even an ethnographic method somehow, of which the researcher is itself a part.

It should be noted that because of its very nature, field research often includes experiences that cannot be recorded by the “recording device” between the researcher and the interviewee. Observing the affective, physical, and human reflexes of the interviewee seated across from the researcher, as well as the changes in the interviewee’s tone of voice, and sometimes even more than what he or she says, is part of the research. As Goffman (1989) points out:

[Participant observation] is one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever. (...) I feel that the way this is done is not to, of course, just listen to what they talk about, but to pick up on their minor grunts and groans as they respond to their situation (p. 125).

Some challenges also arose during the research that any researcher conducting this kind of study would face. Getting in touch with employees of chain stores to conduct interviews is one of these. The main “object of the study” of this research was not *store chain workers* in general, but those who are *university graduates* working in chain stores. In this regard, the fact that the sample was a very specific group made things

very difficult. In unionized stores, it was possible to conduct the majority of the interviews through the labor union. The union's assistance in establishing the initial contacts made it somewhat easier to make a connection with other employees. Although such connections have worked in unionized workplaces, it has not been as simple to establish a connection in non-unionized stores. In such cases, there was no choice but to visit individual stores in person, explain the research to employees, and persuade those with university degrees to participate in an interview.

It is abundantly clear that the findings of this study, based on interviews with a small number of participants and at least two-year university graduates employed in a small number of chain stores in the two largest cities in Turkey, cannot be generalized to represent the experience of all university graduates employed in chain stores in Turkey. This is not only due to the limited number of interviewees, and stores where these individuals work. In addition, as we will discuss in greater detail in the following chapters, there are no clear statistics regarding the number of university graduates employed in store chains in Turkey, or even the general profile of their employees. This limitation on the data on the general structure of employment and working relations in the sector has been reflected in the limited number of studies we have mentioned above is also particularly emphasized. Although many different non-governmental organizations, institutions, and associations publish surveys and statistics to help investors with their investments on various parts of the retail sector, the vast majority of these focus on consumption and customer profile of the sector rather than on labor relations. In this sense, this study can be considered a modest but significant contribution to our understanding of the general structure, working conditions, and unique experiences of university graduates employed in Turkey's store chains.

Since the number of studies on both chain stores and their employees in Turkey is extremely limited, in addition to employee interviews, a number of non-traditional methods were employed for this study. It is worth noting that statements written on this topic in social media, particularly by store employees, and those written in social media groups (particularly on Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram) created by chain store employees are also important sources for this study, despite there is not direct

references to them. Throughout this research, I joined Facebook and Telegram groups created by chain store workers. In fact, it was through these groups that I met and interviewed some of my interviewees. In addition, the conversations I had with representatives of various unions, particularly TEZ-KOOP-İŞ, which organizes the workers in this industry, were among the essential sources that guided this work. Similarly, the columns and news in conventional media, as well as some reports on the sector (as is evident from the aforementioned references), form the basis for this study.

The interviewees were basically asked questions under four main headings in the interviews conducted using the semi-structured in-depth interview technique. The first were personal/biographical questions.⁴ Personal/biographical questions, which may be considered to be the most “standard” of the questions asked the interviewees, were designed to elicit basic personal data such as age, marital status, hometown, and number of siblings. The second major axis in the interviews was questions about the interviewees’ school lives. Although there were some talks about their time in high school and even elementary school in a few cases, the focus of the conversations was on their time spent getting ready for university and their time spent there. They are asked about their school life, such as what kind of expectations they had when they went to university, whether they were satisfied with the major they studied, how they made a living as a student, and whether they used a student loan or not. Questions pertaining to the interviewees’ jobs and working lives made up the bulk of the interviews. The participants were asked a variety of questions under this heading, including how long they have been working at the market, how they were recruited, what they do, how much they are paid, their interactions with the union, and their experiences in the store. Last but not least, interviewees were asked about their future goals and expectations as well as their current search efforts. One can classify inquiries like whether they are actively seeking a job and what they hope and plan for their professional and personal future.

⁴ A sample of the interviews I conducted can be found in Appendix C.

1.4. Outline of the Study

The remainder of the thesis is divided into three chapters. The theoretical framework of the study, as well as a review of the relevant literature, are presented in the following chapter. Discussions on unemployment, and more specifically on the educated unemployed, make up a significant portion of the conceptual and theoretical discussions in the thesis. In this light, the Chapter 2 will engage in a conceptual and theoretical discussion of unemployment. It will conclude with a brief discussion of the massification of education, precarization, and neoliberal transformation in Turkey, as well as a general discussion of youth unemployment, NEET, and underemployment.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to provide a general overview of the chain stores on which this study focuses. The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the state of the industry as a whole by providing an overview of working conditions, employment structure, and unionization based on interviews, the scant number of reports on the sector, personal observations, and interviews with some union representatives currently active in the industry. In this regard, this chapter seeks to understand the working relationships of employees with their own statements, as well as how they perceive working here, beyond sectoral analysis and reports.

In Chapter 4, the un(der)employment experiences of university graduates will be explored. In this context, the experiences of the employees will be examined in relation to a variety of topics, including their encounters at the market, their political affiliations, their expectations for the future, their search for a good job and life, and their family relations. In other words, employees' experience will not be limited to business relations alone.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Regarding that the experiences of university graduates working in store chains are considered as an experience between employment and unemployment in this thesis, in this chapter, the first conceptual discussion will be on unemployment. In this respect, how the phenomenon of unemployment emerged as a “problem” historically, what kind of transformations the concept has undergone, and its relationship with (educated) youth will be discussed. Insofar as the study ultimately focuses on the unemployment of educated, university-graduate youth, the second axis I will discuss here is the meaning of education in general and the higher education in particular. As such, the division of mental/manual labor will be the focus. Finally, in this study, a third axis that cuts all the discussions horizontally is the neoliberal transformation experienced since the 1970s and the debates on the precarity and flexibility created by this transformation. This discussion will be combined with the other two axes and placed within the context of Turkey.

2.1. Unemployment: History and Theory

In addition to the common meaning of being without a job, to be unemployed can also mean to be at leisure or to be unused or idle. Although the term “unemployment” was included in the *New English Dictionary* for the first time in the year 1888, it was not until the 1890s that the word became commonly used in the English language. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “unemployment” first appeared in print around 1895. Unemployment in both French (*chômeur*) and German (*Arbeitslosigkeit*) is a relatively recent concept, having been coined in the 1870s and 1890s, respectively. Prior to 1850, there were few references to the unemployed in the

United States, and the term did not become common until the 1870s (Garraty, 1978, p. 4). Despite the words “unemployed” and “unemployment” had been in use for at least a half-century, the belief that a new problem and new terminology had appeared only in the 1880s indicated a level of anxiety not previously experienced. As Bunett (1994) reports, between 1880 and 1893, at least 22 to 104 articles per year were published in leading periodicals and *The Times* editorials on the “Labor Problem.”⁵ Parallel to this, the number of articles has also increased, reaching 920 in fourteen years. This anxiety about unemployment stemmed from Britain’s severe economic crisis in the third quarter of this century. The British economy, which had grown rapidly throughout the 1870s, collapsed in 1874, ushering in a period of deflation and recession (Burnett, 1994, p. 149). In other words, unemployment was not invented; it was always there whether society was aware of it or not (Perry, 2000, p. 2). On the other hand, it emerged as a “category” with the transition from a pre-industrial society to an industrial society, or put another way, with the deepening of capitalist production relations. The rise of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century changed the face of poverty, transforming it from vagrancy, landlessness, and underemployment to unemployment (Perry, 2000, p. 11).

As Card (2011) noted, the 1880 census in the US was the first attempt to measure unemployment nationwide, and it asked all those aged ten or older who reported a “profession, occupation, or trade” how many weeks they had been unemployed during the census year (from June 1, 1879, to May 31, 1880). The questionnaire implicitly defined the labor force as individuals with “gainful occupations.” The census instructed its enumerators only to consider the experiences of gainful workers, defined as people who regularly engaged in an activity that generated wages or business

⁵ On the other hand, E. P. Thompson (1966), somewhere in his book *The Making of the English Working Class*, makes the following footnote on this subject: “There is a legend abroad that ‘unemployment’ was outside the semantic frame of the 1820s. Perhaps it stems from an unwise statement in G. M. Young, *Victorian England* ... that “unemployment was beyond the scope of any idea which Early Victorian reformers had at their command largely because they had no word for it”: to which is added the authority of a footnote: “I have not observed it earlier than the sixties.” In fact (as is often the case with these semantic ‘datings’) the statement is wrong. (Cuckoos generally arrive in these islands some weeks before they are announced in *The Times*.) ‘Unemployed’, ‘the unemployed’, and (less frequently) ‘unemployment’ are all to be found trade union and Radical or Owenite writing of the 1820s and 1830s: the inhibitions of ‘Early Victorian reformers’ must be explained in some other way” (Thompson, 1966, p. 776).

income or who assisted in the production of tradable goods and to ignore the information provided by those who did not fit this description. Although enumerators were instructed to differentiate between those still pursuing a profession and those who had retired, it is debatable whether the disabled and retired were coded as having a gainful occupation. The question about gainful work was expanded in the 1910 census to include information on industry and “class” (i.e., paid worker or self-employed). Although, on the other hand, the 1920 census was conducted during a severe economic downturn in the United States, it omitted any questions about unemployment (Card, 2011, p. 552).

It is possible to say that the true “discovery” of unemployment was accompanied by the Great Depression, which was characterized by unemployment on a scale never experienced before. The mass unemployment caused by the Depression led both societies and states to focus their attention on unemployment. In the United States, for example, the recruitment of young and talented statisticians to help modernize the national statistical infrastructure and administer emergency relief programs was one of the Great Depression’s long-term “benefits” (Card, 2011, pp. 552-553). In the 1930 census query, for the first time, those who were not working filled out additional questions on ability to work, job search, and duration and reason for unemployment. Accordingly, the definition of unemployment was separated into two categories: Those who were “out of work, able to work, and searching for a job” labeled as *Class A*, and those who were “laid off, though not yet searching a new job” labeled as *Class B*. After the arguments that the 1930 unemployment surveys did not provide sufficient data on “under-employment” which was then defined as “those who want to work part-time but willing to work more,” special attention was paid to this in the 1937 unemployment survey (Card, 2011, p. 554).

In 1939, the reason for not looking for a job started to be asked, and those who were sick and those who said that there was no suitable jobs for them were counted as unemployed. However, the surveys conducted since 1945 stopped asking the “reason for not looking for a job,” and thus, discouraged workers were excluded from these counts. Underemployment data, which was given particular importance in 1937, were no longer measured at this time. In this respect, unemployment statistics focus on

actively looking for a job, excluding a large segment, especially those underemployed and discouraged (Card, 2011, pp. 553-555). The mass unemployment caused by the Great Depression of 1929 also paved the way for studies that shed light on unemployment's social, cultural and psychological dimensions, apart from its economic aspect. Starting from these years, many researchers have revealed that unemployment cannot be limited to economic data and statistics but also has deep social, cultural, and psychological effects (see, for example, Bakke, 1933; Jahoda, 1979).

Societies are shaped by the power and knowledge embodied in and disseminated through categories and categorization. In the final analysis, the governments decide who is unemployed and who is not. This process of reducing unemployment to statistics, and the statistics -and thus, the definition of unemployment- to the "active job search" criteria, which started in the second half of the 1940s, has continued in different forms until today. In 1954, the International Labour Organization defined unemployment as the state of *being without job, being available for work, and seeking a job* (ILO, 1954, p. 44). Modern welfare regimes, on the other hand, emphasize the "active" aspect of seeking, and modern welfare payments are limited to registered "job-seekers" (Husmanns, n.d., p. 1). While some forms of assistance, such as pensions and disability payments and single-parent and family income supplements, are guaranteed to recipients regardless of their ability to work, others are subject to means testing and necessitate active job search, effectively rendering the "working poor" functionally unemployed. Meanwhile, unemployment has been reclassified as job-seeking accompanied by contractualization, monitoring, interventions, and sanctions threats to ensure continuous and consistent "labor market activity" (Boland & Griffin, 2015, s. 30).

Unemployment has always been regarded as a statistical measurement rather than a theoretical concept. All of the definitions above and measurement efforts emphasize functionality and measurability rather than relying on a comprehensive theory. Although the term was primarily used in radical or trade union literature in the early 19th century, it was only after the economic depression of the 1880s that it became a major category. Denning (2010) attributes this relatively late discovery of the concept

to the involvement of this phenomenon in “the object of the state knowledge production,” and according to him, “a more recent biopolitical history suggests that the emerging social state invented unemployment in the process of normalizing and regulating the market in labour” (p. 82).

As stated previously, there is an “experience of unemployment” tradition within the scope of unemployment research that dates back to the 1930s. In light of the fact that unemployment cannot be viewed solely as an economic measurement tool, several studies also examine its social, cultural, and psychological dimensions, identify a number of factors that influence how unemployment is experienced. In accordance with the classifications made by Sen (1997, pp. 160-163) based on a review of the pertinent literature, the effects of unemployment on the individual, as well as on society, can be listed as follows: i) *Loss of current output and fiscal burden*. Unemployment affects the entire economy, not just the unemployed. Reduced aggregate production must fund unemployment and families; ii) *Loss of freedom and social exclusion*. Unemployed people are deprived of freedom beyond the loss of income, and they have limited decision-making freedom, even with social insurance; iii) *Skill loss and long-run damage*. People “unlearn” by being unemployed and out of practice, just as they “learn” by doing. Unemployment may also lead to a decline in cognitive abilities due to loss of confidence and control; iv) *Psychological harm*. Unemployment can cause havoc and mental distress; v) *Ill health and mortality*. Unemployment can cause clinical diseases and increased mortality. This can be caused by loss of income and resources, but persistent unemployment can also cause depression, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation; vi) *Motivational loss and future work*. Due to demoralization, long-term unemployed may lose motivation and become passive; vii) *Loss of human relations and family life*. Unemployment disrupts social relationships. It can erode family harmony and cohesion. The loss of a structured working life can be a severe deprivation in and of itself; viii) *Racial and gender inequality*. Unemployment can exacerbate ethnic and gender tensions. Minorities, especially immigrant communities, are hardest hit by joblessness; ix) *Loss of social values and responsibility*. Widespread unemployment erodes social values, too. Long-term unemployed people can develop cynicism and dependence on others; x)

Organizational inflexibility and technical conservatism. In times of widespread unemployment, when job loss can lead to long-term unemployment, opposition to economic reorganization involving job loss can be strong.

At this point, it should be noted that sociological studies on unemployment may unintentionally lead to the “glorification of work.” I must say that “working” is not unquestionably accepted in this research. In other words, working is not a natural or normal course of action, and the unemployed are not deviants. The main reason why unemployment appears as an “issue” in this context is that we live in a society where work is central. In this regard, it is important to remember that unemployment is first and foremost a matter of wage labor. To the extent that this is the case, unemployment is essentially a problem of capitalism. Because capitalist society is primarily a “work society” (Weeks, 2011, pp. 5-7), unemployment becomes an “issue” to the extent that our world of meaning is determined by such a sociality. Working, from this perspective, is more than just an economic activity. The idea that everyone should work “is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity” (Weeks, 2011, pp. 7-8). Nonetheless, one should remember that work is also “an essential human activity that could be a source of creative fulfilment and self-actualization,” (Spencer, 2009, p. 47) but under capitalism, the inability of workers to exercise control over the product and process of their labor effectively denied them the opportunity to work creatively and freely. Instead of being the foundation of human development, work had become a simple source of income associated with endless toil and drudgery (Spencer, 2009, pp. 48-52). It is necessary to say that the effects of unemployment on the individual and society that we have listed above are directly related to the determination of the meaning of work in such a sociality.

2.2. Youth Unemployment, Underemployment, NEET and its Critique

Despite the long history of debates on youth participation to employment, the issue of youth unemployment, which has steadily increased and reached twice the overall unemployment rate, has gained increasing prominence on the agendas of many countries over the past three decades. One of the most important dimensions of the neoliberal transformation in the labor market during the 1980s has been the youth, especially the educated youth. Many countries’ youth labor markets have collapsed

during these years, and employment opportunities have been restructured within a policy framework that ensures increased education, ‘flexibility,’ and a reduction in relative labor costs, all of which contribute to the growing emphasis on youth employment (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 36).

There has been a general trend toward casualization in the workplace since the 1980s, and all young adults, including university graduates, now face precarious employment as part of entering the workforce. Biographies of relatively stable employment, which were once said to characterize adulthood, are now difficult to understand for large sections of the population. This has led some to question the relevance of the term “transition,” at least the “linear model of transition” (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001, p. 187). As Furlong and Cartmel (2007, p. 34) emphasized, youth transitions have become increasingly protracted and, it appears, more complex over the last few decades. Previously linear and predictable routes between school and work have been replaced by a series of less predictable movements that involve frequent breaks, backtracking, and the blending of statuses.

During the 1980s, particularly in countries with high unemployment rates, governments attempted to combat rising youth unemployment rates by providing various educational programs for students who left school at a certain age. While these programs took a variety of approaches, they tended to be based on explicit models that associated unemployment with the supposed personal failings of affected individuals who lacked education or fundamental skills. The general trend of the 1980s was to devalue benefits, exclude certain groups from eligibility, and introduce a “sense of responsibility” (such as social funding and genuine job-seeking clause) among claimants (Bagguley, 1994, p. 87). These fundamental policy changes affecting the unemployed and their benefits during the 1980s were coherent with the increasingly dominant neoliberal theory in these years that “conveniently holds that unemployment is always voluntary” (Harvey, 2005, p. 53). These government-implemented programs tied social assistance eligibility requirements to specific criteria. The condition for receiving welfare payments was linked to a willingness to work, spreading the US-style workfare program to Europe and all the world. Thus, states now offer their young

unemployed various ‘options,’ including ‘workfare,’ ‘learnfare,’ and ‘trainfare’ (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 42).

Furthermore, these programs have radically altered approaches to youth unemployment. With a growing number of young people attending higher education, the ‘slowing’ youth transitions have also required a new measurement method. As a result of this increase in educational attainment, only a small percentage of people are able to make the ‘fast-track’ transition to the workforce, independent living, and parenting. Therefore, the employment status of young people, particularly in the last two decades, has begun to be measured by a new concept known as NEET: *youth not in education, employment, or training*. NEET expands the definition of unemployment to include early school leaving and labor market withdrawal. In this respect, it can be said to have several advantages in that NEET rates has the potential to address a wide range of vulnerabilities among young people, unlike unemployment. For example, young mothers traditionally labeled as ‘inactive’ and excluded from the workforce are also included in this measure, as are those discouraged ones.

Following Furlong and Cartmel (2007, pp. 43-44), we can say that there are three major problems with NEET policy thinking. The first is the failure of the NEET categorization to recognize the *heterogeneity* of young people under this label. For instance, a young person may not be looking for work because they are caring for a sick or disabled family member and therefore may fall under the NEET category. Others may face a similar problem as a result of their drug addiction. Someone else, however, may be enjoying the gap year after finishing high school but would still be counted as a NEET. These many different ‘sub-categories’ make it harder to develop effective policy based on NEET measurements. Another issue with NEET is that youth policies often view NEET-ness *with* young people. Hence, it is assumed that there are no apparent barriers to the labor force participation of the majority of this population included in the NEET statistics; however, structural factors such as poor job opportunities are not considered. Third and last, NEET’s static policy categories fail to capture the dynamism and flow of youth transitions, which have become less linear and stable in recent years. Because in fact, those who are most likely to become NEET

are also most likely to experience insecure, ‘chaotic’ transitions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, pp. 41-45; MacDonald, 2011, s. 431-432).

While the focus on NEET broadens the traditional definition of unemployment to include a large segment that is labeled as ‘inactive’ and is even excluded from most statistics, the primary issue with this NEET measure is that it encourages us to believe that those young people who are employed somehow no longer require any assistance. That is to say, given the rise of non-standard employment, underemployment, and insecurity and precarity, there is a risk that young people in precarious positions will be overlooked if the issue is treated as “employability” *per se*. In reality, the underemployed youth who are working in jobs that do not match their qualifications have more in common with the unemployed youth than with the youth who are in adequate jobs (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011, s. 963). Put another way, a new or, at least, largely unnoticed problem now confronts young people: the problem of underemployment. NEET policy has been failed to take into account the long-term instability of low-wage, low-skilled work for disadvantaged young people from the working class. Many people believe that policies that encourage students to stay in school for longer periods of time ignore the current problems of graduate unemployment and underemployment that are now affecting young people from middle-class families.

The measurement of underemployment is especially important in developing nations, particularly for agricultural activities. Due to the prevalence of self-employment, the limited coverage of workers by unemployment insurance or social security systems, and other factors, especially in the developing countries, the unemployment rate is consistently measured wrongly. This is due to the fact that few people can afford to be unemployed for an extended period of time, whereas the majority of the population must engage in some form of economic activity in order to survive, regardless of how meager or inadequate it may be. Under such conditions, since unemployment data alone cannot adequately describe the employment situation, the measurement of underemployment added to the statistics. According to the 16th International Conference on Labor Studies (ICLS), underemployment is defined as an underutilization of the productive capacity of the employed population, which includes

underutilization that results from a weak economic system. It refers to an alternative employment situation in which people are willing and able to participate. The recommendations of the 16th ICLS for measuring underemployment are limited to time-related underemployment. The resolution adopted by the 16th ICLS does not include a concept of underemployment based on theoretical models of the potential capacities and desires for work of the population of working age (Husmanns, n.d., pp. 17-18).

In the context of underemployment, particularly youth underemployment, one of the greatest challenges faced today is that educated youth are forced to work in jobs that do not match their qualifications, as a result of rapidly increasing insecurity and the spread of non-standard working styles alongside flexible working. As a result of the rapid deindustrialization that has occurred in the countries of the Global South since the 1970s, this is an issue that affects them. In these societies, where the educational level has risen dramatically over the past three decades, there have been significant difficulties in creating new jobs for the educated population. In fact, this is the reason why the ILO has been reporting data on “decent work,” as well as data on unemployment for a long time now (see, for instance, ILO, 2021).

On the other hand, in addition to the discussions mentioned above about unemployment (who will be considered unemployed, how to determine unemployment, etc.), another issue raised by these studies on “youth unemployment” was to determine who is “young,” how “youth” will be defined, and thus who will be included in the “young unemployed” category. Although there are a variety of definitions of youth in youth studies, it can be said that the approach that defines youth as a biologically based age group between childhood and adulthood and regard it as a period of transition predominates the studies in this field. The United Nations, for example, defines youth “for statistical purposes, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States” (UN, 2022).

However, in disciplines such as political science and sociology, defining youth, which the United Nations prefers to do in biological terms “for statistical purposes,” becomes much more complicated. One of the most critical issues facing the field of youth

studies is how to consider such biological definitions and social processes together. In this respect, it should be emphasized that youth is much more than biological age, it is historically and socially determined by several factors, and in this sense, it is not a universal concept. For example, based on these arguments, Wyn and White (1997, pp. 8-25) emphasize that youth is a relational category, and as such, it is a part and extension of power relations. Pierre Bourdieu (1993), similarly, argues that youth is “an evolving concept” that has evolved over the centuries into a social construct. According to Bourdieu, who states that youth and age are socially constructed rather than being self-evident data, it is the struggle between young and old where this distinction is formed, and this distinction “always means imposing limits and producing an *order* to which each person must keep, keeping himself in his place” (1993, pp. 41-42).

2.3. “White Collar” Unemployment: Class and Educated Un(der)employed

Regarding youth employment, education is one of the most important factors. In addition to the practices of modern welfare regimes, such as youth-oriented on-the-job training programs, which attribute unemployment to a lack of certain skills, the relationship between formal education and employment is also noteworthy. In the early 20th century, schooling, which originated with the emergence of modern national states and national education, became increasingly widespread. Today, while almost every country in the world implements compulsory education at various levels, we are now observing a massive increase in enrollment in higher education.

Nonetheless, this increasing enrollment in higher education is not a brand new topic. For example, Randall Collins’ *The Credential Society*, a classic in the field of sociology of education, was published for the first time in 1979. In his book, Collins deals with the increase in the number of educational institutions (including universities) and graduates in the United States, assessing this as “credential inflation.” With this work, Collins made, among others, two significant contributions. First, he demonstrates how the job value of degrees in the United States has increased over the 19th and 20th centuries. Such that, he states, in 1979, that the high school diplomas are now nearly ubiquitous, and undergraduate education has been replaced by graduate education and, for profitable specializations, postdoctoral training (Collins, 2019, p.

122). This book's second significant contribution is its critique of the then-widely accepted theory of the massification of education, namely the technological-functional theory of education. According to this, modern jobs are becoming more complex and technical, necessitating a higher level of education for employment in this industry. He reveals that high-tech organizations of the time (i.e. the 1960s) had lower training requirements than low-tech organizations based on data collected from a variety of organizations regarding their recruiting training requirements and technological sophistication (Collins, 2019, pp. 15-56).

Collins' debate in the context of the United States has its roots in Europe even much earlier. Bourdieu in the 1960s (and later) emphasized that the "diploma inflation" created by a sudden massification in higher education creates "a disparity between the aspirations that the educational system produces and the opportunities it really offers" (1984, pp. 143-144). According to him, this created a "disillusionment" for the generations whose access to such educational opportunities is delayed, which he refers to as "the cheating of a generation." For example, according to him, newcomers to secondary education, when they reach this place, hope for what secondary education provided others when they were deprived. However, these expectations, which are entirely realistic for another group at another time because they overlap with objective possibilities, are often denied sooner or later by the scholastic market or the labor market. According to him, the "collective disillusionment" that results from this structural mismatch between aspirations and objective probabilities, between the social identity that the school system appears to promise or that it offers temporarily, and the social identity that the labor market actually provides, is the source of disaffection towards work, that refusal of social finitude that generates all of the adolescents counter-refusals culture's and negations (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 144). Bourdieu even attributes the crisis that sparked the 1968 student revolts to this "collective disillusionment" among the youth of the time (Bourdieu, 1989, pp. 162-180).

So, what causes this collective disillusionment that Bourdieu mentions? In other words, what did higher education (or schooling, in general) promise to the masses? We have stated earlier that education for the large masses is meaningful in the first

place because it promises upward mobility. This upward mobility promised by the school can be thought of in conjunction with the mental/manual labor division. The school's primary, if not the only, function in a capitalist society is to reproduce the division between mental labor and manual labor, which lies at the core of the capitalist relations (Browne, 1981, p. 447). The school reproduces the mental/manual labor division within itself because, by definition, it is situated in an overall context characterized by a division between mental and manual labor; the reproduction of the educational system as an apparatus is also functionally determined by that division. This is a division that goes beyond education and provides it with its function: the separation of the school from production is directly related to the separation and expropriation of the producer from the means of production (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 31; Browne, 1981, pp. 452-458). Upward mobility through education, thus, is essentially a wish to become a mental laborer rather than a manual laborer by having a "white-collar" job.

The socialization of the meritocracy ideal, on the other hand, one of the most important promises of liberal capitalism after World War II, contributed to this reproduction of the division of mental/manual labor at this time.⁶ This phenomenon is attributed to an increase in the number of individuals pursuing advanced degrees and employing rigorous scientific principles in the admissions process for colleges and universities, as well as hiring managers in the private sector and government. The assumption of meritocracy is that talent and intelligence are innate. In a meritocratic system, in addition to these innate qualities, individuals have the opportunity to create a space for themselves through effort and labor. As part of the meritocratic promise, objective exams, difficult questions, and intelligence tests are implemented. Those who succeed by utilizing their "natural" intelligence are thus distinguished from those who fail. The concept of meritocracy, on the other hand, legitimized new forms of social stratification. It gave legitimacy to new kinds of elite formation based on scholastic and technical accomplishments and credentials. Furthermore, the neoliberal worldview of the last half of the twentieth century was a perfect fit for the idea that

⁶ Michael Young coined the term meritocracy in his satirical essay *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, which was first published in 1958. Young, in his essay, describes how the British class system evolved from an aristocracy to a meritocracy between 1870 and 2033 in his fictional report.

individuals are ultimately responsible for their own careers through their abilities and efforts.

In a capitalist society, the hierarchical structure between mental and manual labor is in favor of mental labor, which is why the “upward” mobility is from manual to mental. This division, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to “those who work with their hands” and “those who work with their minds.” Instead, it marks agents’ position in ideological and political relationships. Thinking in terms of a “brain vs. hand” dichotomy hinders our understanding of workers’ positions in different sectors. In addition, such a division conceals the fact that all work involves a kind of “mental activity” (Poulantzas, 1978, pp. 251-253). This hierarchical distinction between mental labor and manual labor in favor of mental labor stems from another distinction in the capitalist production process. As Browne (1981) states:

What characterizes the capitalist mode of production is the division that opens up within the production process itself, with the knowledge necessary to the organization and continuation of production being expropriated from the direct producer by the non-producer, i.e. the capitalist class. This appropriation of the knowledge necessary to production by the capitalist class is precisely what characterizes and gives rise to the division and hierarchical separation of mental and manual labour (p. 448).

In other words, the division between mental labor and manual labor can also be expressed as the division between the *conception of a production process* and the *execution of a production process*. Therefore, the mental/manual labor division is essentially a division related to the separation of the working class from the means of production (Browne, 1981, pp. 449-450).

However, this division cannot be reduced to the production process by itself. According to Poulantzas, it is related to political and ideological relations, as well as the type of division mentioned above in the organization of the production process. For him, the “white-collar” jobs, which he lists as accounting, banking, insurance, various “services,” “office work,” and the majority of the civil service, are primarily interpreted through the devaluation of manual labor:

Their differentiation from the working class in the sense of the mental/manual labour division, is essentially based on political and ideological relations; their work is legitimized on the basis of the knowledge that it is intrinsically deemed

to possess (mental labour), and is hence valued more highly than the work of the working class, whose actual knowledge shares in the general devaluation of manual labour (1978, p. 255).

The division of mental and manual labor on the ideological scene is expressed through specific symbols and rituals. This hierarchical division manifests itself in daily life through the disqualification of manual labor, by “not belonging to the working class.”⁷ The mental laborer, who is characterized by having a type of “secrecy of knowledge,” distinguishes himself from manual labor or the working class, by learning to write in a certain way, speak in a certain way, or having his own ways of knowing (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 258). In other words, as Skeggs put it, “class operated in a dialogic manner”:

[I]n every judgement of themselves a measurement was made against others. In this process the designated ‘other’ (based on representations and imaginings of the respectable and judgemental middle class) was constructed as the standard to/from which they measured themselves. The classifying of themselves depended upon the classifying systems of others (1997, p. 74).

To better comprehend the ideological/cultural manifestations of the “white-collar” labor, one can use Bourdieu’s writings on capital, as well as Poulantzas’ theory on social classes. Previously discussed on the axis of the production process, the division of mental and manual labor is performed in the ideological field through a series of practices and symbols. Class-individuals seek “distinction” and social difference from “lower” classes and class fractions in a variety of ways, primarily through a series of symbolic practices. At this point, Bourdieu explains the class relations that forms the social positions of individuals via three distinct forms of capital:

Depending on the field in which it functions, at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (1986, p. 243).

⁷ In a similar vein, Sennett wrote: “Class in America tends to be interpreted as an issue of personal character. And so when 80 percent of a group of bakers say, ‘I am middle-class,’ the real question being answered is not how rich are you or how powerful are you but how do you estimate yourself. The answer is, I am good enough” (1998, pp. 64-65).

By combining Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital with the mental/manual labor division made by Browne and Poulantzas based on the organization of the production process, we can say that the function of education in general, and higher education in particular, is to reproduce the aforementioned distinction resulting from capitalist production relations as an institutional mechanism. However, it also manifests itself in everyday relationships as an indicator of status. In this regard, it is evident that the promise of the university extends far beyond the right to hold a professional position or the ability to perform a specific job. Diploma, above all, functions as a "patent of nobility," as described by Bourdieu (1984, p. 142). Thus, on the other hand, to say today that a university degree does not provide opportunities that correspond to the 'qualification' that it represents, according to Poulantzas (1978, p. 268), is not strictly correct, because this degree is not primarily intended to guarantee this or that specialist knowledge, but rather to locate its bearer in the camp of mental labor in general and its specific hierarchy, i.e. to reproduce the mental/manual labor division.

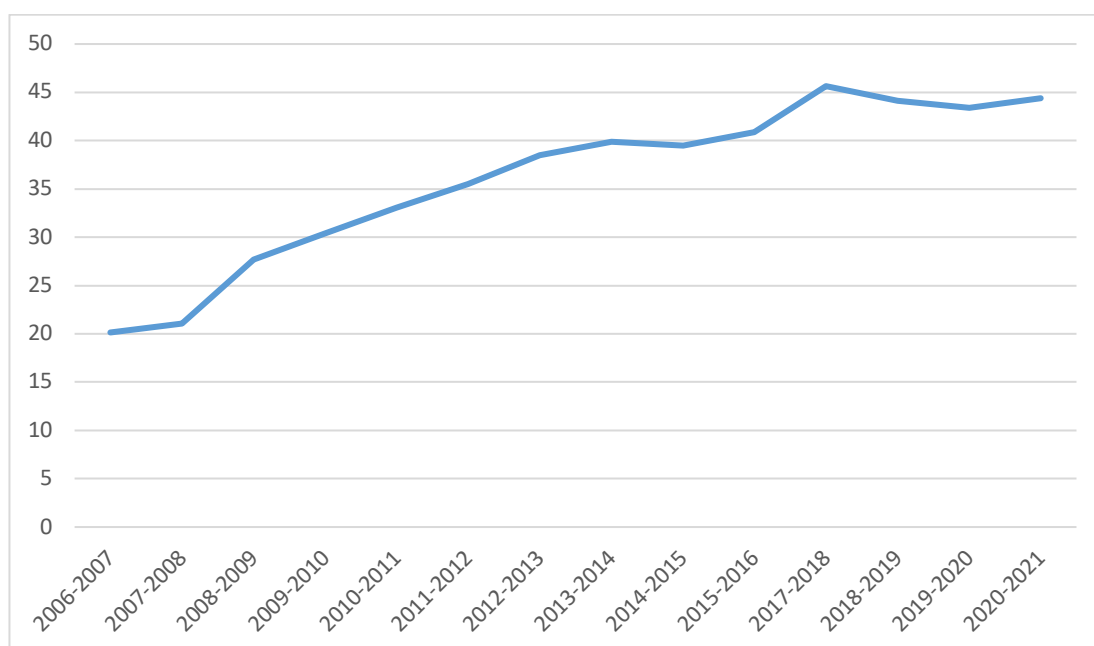
2.4. Diploma Inflation, Precarization, and the "White-Collar" Un(der)employment in Turkey

Turkey is currently experiencing the aforementioned diploma inflation as a result of the rapid expansion of higher education institutions that began in the 1990s. This problem and its consequences can be addressed along two major axes. The first is the neoliberal transformation and commodification of educational institutions, which occurred concurrently with higher education massification. Higher education in Turkey has become commodified at the same rate as it has become massive, and thus stratified, in this regard. As a result, it has become a means of reproducing existing inequalities within itself. In this respect, the second issue to be taken into account is the precarization and flexibilization experienced in Turkey since the 90s, again in parallel with the massification of universities. In this section, I will discuss the emergence of unemployment among university graduates by taking the massification and commodification of universities together. Then, I will discuss the unemployment of educated youth in Turkey through the policies of precarization and flexibilization in Turkey.

2.4.1. Massification and Commodification of Higher Education

Turkey has been experiencing a rapid massification of higher education particularly over the past fifteen years. According to Turkey’s Higher Education Council (YÖK), the number of universities, which was 77 in 2006, reached 208 in 2022. Parallel to this, access to higher education and net enrollment rates at the higher education level increased rapidly. As shown in the graph below, the schooling rate in higher education was just under 45 percent in 2021, while it was only 20% in 2006.

Table 1: Higher education schooling rate by years in Turkey (%)



Source: YÖK (2022)

Behind this rapid increase in the number of universities in Turkey over the past few years is a well-known but not official plan of “opening at least one university in every city.” This plan, which the ruling AKP implements effectively, is not a brand new policy. The establishment of Karadeniz Technical University in Trabzon and Ege University in İzmir in 1955 marked the beginning of establishing universities outside of İstanbul and Ankara in Turkey. Following this date, new universities were established in almost every election period. The goal of “opening at least one university in every province” can be traced back to the Islamist National Salvation

Party's (MSP) election manifesto of 1977 as a political promise.⁸ The promise was included in the Declaration under the section titled "What to do for civil peace, brotherhood, state-nation cohesion, and the prevention of anarchy?" Similar promises were made in the 1991 election manifesto by the Welfare Party (RP), which was established to replace the MSP, which was closed after the September 12 military coup.⁹

While the Islamist MSP in the 1970s, and its successor RP in the 1990s, advocated the policy of opening a university in every city in the name of "internal peace, brotherhood, and preventing anarchy," AKP, the representative of the same political tradition in the 2000s, became an effective implementer of this policy in their ruling years. The fact that political parties from the Islamist political tradition have advocated for opening a university from the beginning suggests that the project is ideologically or politically motivated. MSP and RP aimed to open "moral sciences universities" to achieve the abovementioned goals. In line with this model, the ruling AKP placed particular emphasis on religious education schools in dozens of universities (particularly outside of Ankara and İstanbul) established during the 2000s. At the same time that the number of İmam Hatip schools has exploded in secondary education, which aims to raise imams, a religious government officers, as well as the mushrooming of the Islamic Science Faculties across the country at the university level. Considering the role universities and university students have played in Turkey's political and social history, it is entirely plausible to assert that the Islamic movement's intention to seize "cultural power" was the impetus behind this project.

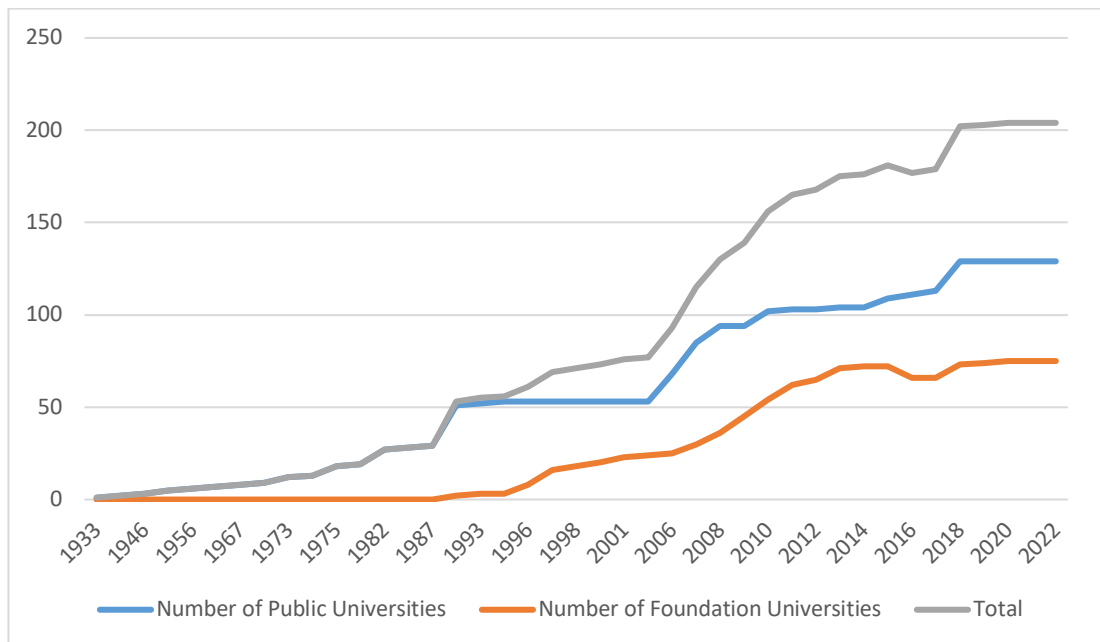
In addition to this ideological motivation, it is evident that there is an economic-political motivation behind the massification of universities in Turkey. Universities opened to the provinces are viewed as a "regional investment tool" due to the belief

⁸ The following statements are included in the election manifesto: "Targeting the establishment of a faculty or college in each city by universities of moral sciences, technical universities" (Millî Selamet Partisi, 1977).

⁹ The following statements are included in the election manifesto: "Each province will have its own university. The idle capacity in universities and the existing private tutoring facilities will be used to provide higher education opportunities to the young people lining up at university entrances" (Refah Partisi, 1991).

that universities to be established in cities other than Ankara and İstanbul will significantly impact the economic, political, and social life of the cities where they will be found. Tekeli (2010, pp. 302-307) describes how local politicians played an active role in the universities planned to be opened in the 1990s and states that religious communities emerged in many universities due to the active local relationship networks. In this regard, we can say that regional development objectives and ideological objectives are intertwined. Therefore, beginning in the 1990s and accelerating in the second half of the 2000s, the number of universities increased dramatically, as can be seen in the graph below.

Table 2 Number of universities by years in Turkey



Source: YÖK (2022)

As universities opened in nearly every province of Turkey, higher education has become more accessible to almost everyone. At least partially, a significant portion of the population can now access the university education. In this respect, this rapid massification of higher education in Turkey over the past fifteen years and the corresponding rise in net enrollment rates may appear, at least at first glance, to be a “democratization.” However, this massification, which coincides with the second half of the 2000s, has occurred during a robust neoliberal transformation in Turkey, and

educational institutions (notably higher education) have borne the brunt of this transformation. Thus, this rapid wave of massification, which seemed to be a form of “democratization,” was swiftly followed by privatization, commercialization, and a type of stratification. Privatization does not simply imply the marketization of education through the establishment of schools under the name of “foundation universities.” What this means is that universities start acting more like corporations and will eventually become indistinguishable from them. The private universities, which emerged as a significant part of the privatization of higher education, are, therefore, not the only “private” institutions in the field. Even though they remained state owned, substantially tax supported, and avowedly public in their mission, public universities became, as Johnstone et al. noted, “more ‘private’ than the stereotype of ‘public’” as a result of neoliberal economic policies (as cited in Önal, 2012, p. 127).

Private universities in Turkey play a significant role in the privatization and commercialization of higher education. However, private universities, like public universities, should be differentiated among themselves because, as shown in the table above, the history of private universities established in Turkey under the name of foundation universities dates back to the 1980s, whereas the rapid increase in the number of these universities corresponds primarily to the 2000s. According to Birler (2012), there are two generations of private universities in Turkey in this regard. The first generation, which existed between 1984 and 1999, exhibited only minor changes in the commercialization of research and teaching facilities, but laid a solid foundation for the next generation. Under AKP rule, the second generation of founding universities finalized their integration into global markets by establishing research funds, accreditation systems, rankings, and a global for-profit higher education corporation. In this regard, it is undeniable that the AKP regime has bolstered the role of private universities in the neoliberalization of higher education (Birler, 2012, pp. 142-150).

With the implementation of neoliberal policies, the commercialization of every stage of education has led to an increase in regional, resource and equipment, and gender disparities between schools. Children from families who are unable to pay the money collected under the names of registration fees and dues have had their access to

education denied, and those who can choose a school must do so based on their class standing and financial means. The inability of vocational high school graduates to find a job, the fact that those who do find a job do not earn significantly more than general high school graduates, and the extremely limited opportunity for this group to achieve a university education cause vocational high schools to be attended by low-income students who cannot afford to study at university or have no chance of earning a university education. Furthermore, the same polarization has continued at the university level. The fact that the entire education system is focused on university education and that the probability of studying at a university is determined at the primary education level based on the financial capacity of the families reproduced the inequalities in the education system at the higher education level.

In this regard, it is important to note that the central university exam in Turkey is a significant contributor to abovesaid stratification. Because the only way to gain a “good job” and therefore a “good future” is to enroll “good universities,” and the only way to enter “good universities” is to receive a high score on the central university exam, this exam itself has become a sector. This is most evident in the vast number of private colleges and preparatory programs for the national university entrance exam. Prior to 2015, *dershanes* (private teaching institutions) in Turkey were one of the most effective institutions for preparing for the university entrance exam. In consequence, the number of *dershanes* rose from 2,568 in 2003 to 3,579 in 2013. Similarly, the number of students attending private teaching institutions doubled from 668,673 in 2003 to 1,220,435 in 2013 (Anadolu Ajansı, 2014). Private schools, on the other hand, have largely replaced *dershanes* in recent years, while educational privatization, including primary and secondary education, has accelerated. According to Eđitim-Sen (2021, p. 2), there are 15,194,504 (84 percent of total) students in public schools and 1,310,605 students in private schools (7.25 percent of total). Although their numbers are increasing rapidly, these private schools continue to attract a very small portion of the population, and only the children of those with a certain level of purchasing power have the opportunity to attend “good universities” and thus improve their quality of life.

In this respect, in a university report written for TÜSİAD in 1994, former YÖK President Kemal Gürüz and other authors proposed to divide higher education into three categories before he became president of YÖK. According to this report, there was going to be a small number of “elite universities” in the first class. These universities would specialize in research, and masters and doctoral degrees. On the other hand, in the second class, universities that provide mass education would train a workforce that can use the knowledge produced to create value; and lastly, in the third class, vocational schools would train a workforce with technical qualifications. As Bağımsız Sosyal Bilimciler stated, this tripartite system substantially corresponds with the class structure of social stratification as upper-middle-lower (2008, p. 211). This project, proposed by Kemal Gürüz in 1994, is currently being partially implemented under the name of *Research Universities Support Program* by YÖK and the Turkish Presidency of Strategy and Budget. Twenty-three universities, including three private ones, met the criteria for “research capacities” and were designated “research universities.” In light of their annual performance, YÖK will allocate additional resources to these universities for their scientific research projects (YÖK, 2022).

Such massification and commodification of an entire educational apparatus, from primary to higher education, has also transformed the relationship between educational capital and economic capital. The educational apparatus, which could “smooth” class differences a little until the 1980s, soon lost this feature to a large extent. While the lower classes have witnessed their dreams of upclassing through education shattered, the middle classes have been trying to save their children from the danger of downclassing (i.e., proletarianization) by making huge “investments” in their education (Erdoğan, 2012). Therefore, while education has primarily lost its promise of upward class mobility for the lower classes, it has formed an essential part of the “upper and middle classes” strategies to distinct themselves from the lower classes at the expense of high costs. The middle classes who can afford private schools, private lessons, language courses, education abroad, expensive private teaching institutions, and other tools may have a chance to escape downclassing. Therefore, the commodification of education creates a stratification of mental labor, with devalued mental labor experiencing precarization similar to that of the working poor.

On the other hand, a child from a working-class family does not have a “competitive chance” against these individuals and typically continues their life as a worker with a diploma. After a long educational career that frequently requires significant sacrifice, these disadvantaged groups graduate with a degree that is discredited. In other words, children from the most culturally and economically disadvantaged families can gain access the school system, particularly the upper levels, only after the economic and symbolic value of degrees is drastically altered. For this reason, according to Bourdieu (2000), the school system, for both these parents and students, “increasingly seems like a mirage, the source of an immense, collective disappointment, a promised land which, like the horizon, recedes as one moves toward it” (p. 423).

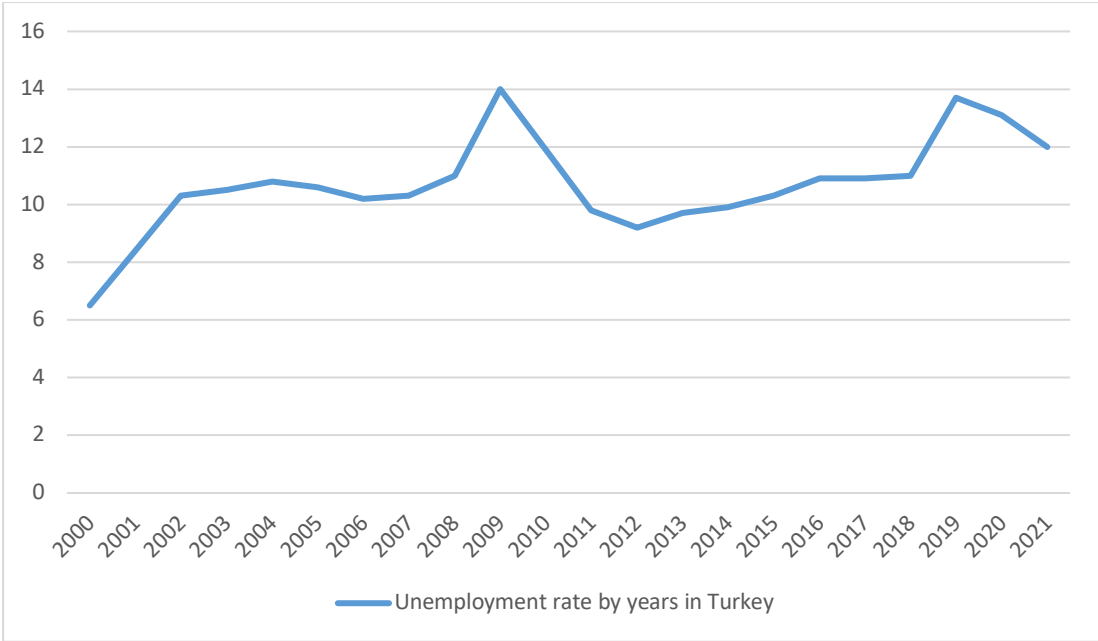
2.4.2. Neoliberal Transformation and Precarization

The stratification of educational apparatus has occurred as part of a larger plan involving multiple transformations. In this context, precarization and flexibilization policies have been at the forefront. While control over labor in the 1980s and early 1990s was established in the distribution field primarily through policies aimed at lowering wages, to justify these policies, a discourse highlighting the budgetary constraints imposed by structural adjustment programs subjecting not just the economy at large, but also the entire social and institutional system (Yalman, 2009). On the other hand, from the late 1990s onwards, precarious employment has become widespread in Turkey, and these policies were legitimized by the discourse of “increasing global competitiveness” (Ercan & Oğuz, 2006). Following the 2008 crisis, since unemployment has become a central issue in almost all countries where there have been greater expectations for a solution to the unemployment issue, the policies of flexibilization and precarization implemented as a requirement of the market economy have been publicly raised by the rhetoric of “solving the unemployment problem” (Özgün & Müftüoğlu, 2010).

In line with this approach, Turkey’s employment policy changed, and the Turkish labor market has undergone a significant transformation with legal and institutional interventions. This neoliberal strategy emphasized the interdependence between employment and macroeconomic priorities from a supply-side perspective, and it seek to enhance the private sector’s role and competitiveness, and active labor market

policies based on concepts like “employability” and “flexibility of employment” (Bayırbağ, Göksel, & Çelik, 2018; Oğuz, 2020, pp. 21-23). In essence, the brash neoclassical economists advocated systematically increasing employee insecurity as a necessary price for retaining investment and jobs. Each economic setback was blamed, fairly or unfairly, on a lack of flexibility and a lack of “structural reform” of labor markets (Standing, 2011, p. 6). Important steps have been taken in this process to expand precarious and flexible employment in both the private and public sectors. The changes to the Labor Law were one of the most significant ones for private sector. The changes legalized temporary employment relationships through private employment offices and subcontracting, flexible and insecure working forms by employing part-time, temporary, contracted workers for seasonal agricultural work. Besides, another consequence of this change is that it legalizes the flexibility provided by the informal sector. In this respect, it transforms informal relations into formal ones. Although the goal of this arrangement was to increase employment by spreading flexible working conditions, it created “a trade-off between employment promotion and levels of protection” (Süral, 2005). While nonstandard forms of employment became standard over time, unemployment rates did not decrease permanently as shown in the graph below.

Table 3 Unemployment rate by years in Turkey



Source: TURKSTAT (2022)

Precarious employment has become widespread in the public sector as well as in the private sector, and limited contracts have become the norm rather than an exception in this process. TEKEL workers' opposition to Article 4/C of Civil Service Law No 657, which eliminated their job security and cut their wages by half following the closure of their workplace, brought topics such as contracted employment and precarious employment in the public sector to the national agenda (Özgün & Müftüoğlu, 2010; Oğuz, 2011). In addition to the 4/C article, which came to the fore with the resistance of TEKEL workers, and amendments made in the Labor Law, another important change related to the labor market and changing employment forms in Turkey was Social Security Reform in 2008, which led the exclusion of poor from the scope of social security, narrowing the social risks covered, reducing the level of protection and reducing the level of benefiting (Erdoğan, 2006).

As I have said earlier, this transformation based on precarization and flexibilization is not unique to Turkey. In fact, it was Bourdieu who used the concept of *précarité* as early as 1963 to emphasize the distinction between the living conditions of workers in regular and irregular jobs in his research on working conditions in Algeria. Again, in 1998, in an article on the actions of the unemployed in France, Bourdieu (1998) explained how the experience of precariousness affects the unemployed as well as the workers:

The movement of the French unemployed is also a call to all the unemployed and all the casualized workers of the whole of Europe: a new subversive idea has appeared on the scene, and it can become an instrument of struggle available to every national movement. The unemployed are reminding all workers that their interests are bound up with those of the unemployed; that the unemployed whose existence weighs so heavily on them and on their working conditions are the product of a policy; that a mobilization capable of overcoming the frontiers that exist, in every country, between workers and non-workers and the frontiers between all the workers and non-workers of one country and the workers and non-workers of every other country could counter the policy which can mean that the nonworkers can force silence and resignation on those who have the dubious 'privilege' of a more or less precarious employment (p. 90).

According to Bourdieu (1998, pp. 81-87), precariousness, like unemployment, had common characteristics that affected even those who appeared to be immune to its effects. As a result, *précarité* emerged as one of the facets of a dominated social condition, close to unemployment and exclusion, and such circumstances were the result of a new “mode of domination” supported by a generalized state of insecurity.

Bourdieu’s emphasis on the common fate of workers and the unemployed through the actions of the unemployed in France has gained prominence in the context of Turkey, along with numerous actions against precarity, particularly the TEKEL resistance. In an article on the TEKEL resistance, for instance, Özuğurlu (2010) emphasizes that the experience of precariousness is shared by the working class, stating that “the new working class is the one whose destinies converge while their lives fall apart” (p. 46). In this sense, precariousness can be seen as “not only oppressive, but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics” (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3). This is the reason why, according to Guy Standing, those who work in constantly changing jobs in a highly flexible employment regime in a temporary status, call center workers, academics, recent graduates, interns, and, most importantly, young people comprise the “precariat,” which he refers to as the “new dangerous class” (Standing, 2011).¹⁰

On the other hand, precariousness cannot be reduced to legal regulations or macroeconomic indicators. It is not simply a condition at the antipode of what has been known as the “standard form of employment.” Because considering precarity alone as “non-standard forms of employment” gives rise to an opinion that there is a “standard form of employment,” and precarity is an exception. It may lead to seeing the Keynesian welfare regime’s relatively stable and secure employment conditions as the “norm” and precarity as a deviation. Thus, the struggle against precarity means nothing but an aspiration for a period known as the “golden age of capitalism.” However, “under capitalism, for the working classes precarious existence is the norm rather than the exception” (Mahmud, 2015). Nonetheless, this does not mean that nothing has changed since the 1970s. On the contrary, the phenomenon of precariousness, which

¹⁰ For a critique of Standing’s approach, see (Wright, 2016).

stands out as the common experience of the working classes, has determined a new line of struggle for both white-collar and blue-collar workers. As a matter of fact, the literature of the precariat has largely been formed with reference to the anti-precarious movements that have risen since the 90s (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1998).

ChainWorkers CreW, which was founded in Milan in 1999-2000, is noteworthy in this respect, as it is also a movement of chain market employees, which is also the subject of this study. The chain workers movement, a political movement based on the concept of the precariat, aimed to bring together two types of workers on the basis of precarity and to establish a solidarity network between them: *chain workers* (workers in malls, shopping centers, hypermarkets, and in the myriad of jobs of logistics and selling in the metropolis) and *brainworkers* (cognitive laborers; programmers; freelancers who possess individual value on the labor market but do not yet have a collective force or a subjectivity with social rights—that is, they might make above-standard wages but if they lose their job they are thrown into poverty). The movement combined the art of cultural resistance based on parodies of corporate and political advertisements, called subvertising, as an organizing tool, with traditional forms of anarcho-syndicalism—direct actions such as blocking trucks transporting to fast-food chains, distributing leaflets to customers (Oğuz, 2011, pp. 12-13; see also, Oudenampsen & Sullivan, 2004).

The concept of precariousness, which I have said particularly came to the fore with the TEKEL resistance in Turkey, is a problem for white-collar workers as well as blue-collar. In this respect, as mentioned in the introduction of this study, the precarity of white-collar workers (more generally, university graduates) as well as unemployment is studied, albeit in limited numbers. For example, the study titled “*Ne Ders Olsa Veririz*” prepared by Vatansever and Gezici-Yalçın is a good example of such an interest. This study, which focuses on the “foundation universities” dimension of the massification and commodification of universities that I have summarized above, tells the story of how academics have turned into unskilled workers with the precarity brought about by this process (Vatansever & Gezici-Yalçın, 2015). Gamze Yücesan-Özdemir’s work on call center employees, published under the title *İnatçı Köstebek*, is another remarkable study on the labor processes of white-collar workers working in

the call centers in Turkey. The following lines by Yücesan-Özdemir (2014), who proposed the concept of the “21st century proletariat” against the concept of precariat, are worth noting in terms of this study as well:

It seems possible to describe the young people working in the call center as follows: Young people who are exposed to the threat of unemployment from the very beginning of their lives. Young people who are still unemployed, even though they have graduated from university and received certificates and diplomas. Young people who are working insecure and uninsured jobs, if they find one. Non-unionized and unorganized youth. Young people whose voices and words have been taken away from them. Therefore, young people churning between unemployment and employment, insecurity and futurelessness (p. 60).

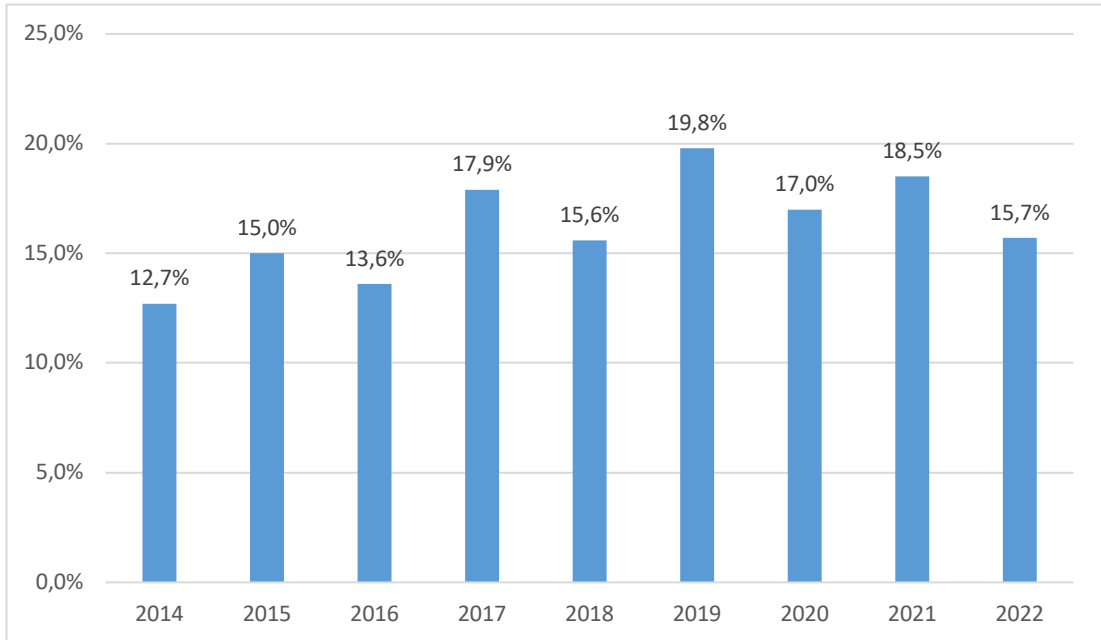
As stated above, although it emerged with the discourse of “reducing unemployment,” policies of precarization and flexibilization targeting the entire workforce did not prevent unemployment, but deepened it even more. So much so that the reason for the increasingly unclear distinction between working in a job and unemployment is precisely these precarious conditions, as Yücesan-Özdemir also noted. As Özüğurlu (2020) already emphasized, “unemployment and employment are not two distinct worlds in 21st-century capitalism. Unemployment has become a moment of employment, and employment has become a moment of unemployment.”

When we remember that unemployment is not only the inactivity of a production resource that can be used, but also the exclusion of those who have labor power from the society, it can be understood that unemployment is an important dimension of precarity. Because, in addition to the exclusion of the unemployed, unemployment also reflects on employees as long working hours, informal/unregistered and flexible employment conditions. In this respect, unemployment should be broadly considered as those who work below their abilities in terms of wages and qualifications (underemployment), those who give up looking for a job after a long unemployment duration (the hidden unemployed) and those who are still looking for a job. White-collar unemployment, which is also the subject of this study, can be understood as a manifestation of precarity that permeates all aspects of life.

In this respect, it is possible to consider two significant data that will enable us to think about white collar unemployment and precarity together in Turkey. The first of these is the unemployment levels among university graduates, as well as the general

unemployment levels shared above. As can be seen in the table below prepared based on the report of the *Genç İşsizler Platformu* (Platform for Unemployed Youth), as of 2022, one out of six university graduates is unemployed.

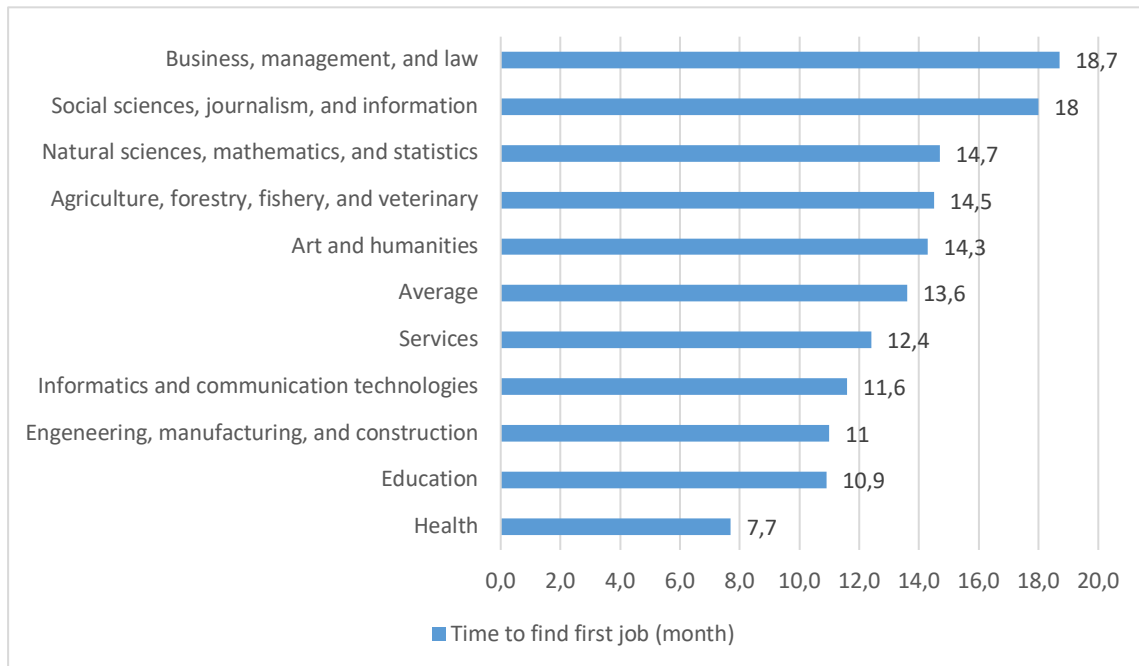
Table 4 Unemployment rate for university graduates aged 15-34 by year in Turkey



Source: Genç İşsizler Platformu (2022)

Second the data to be taken into account is the average time to find first job after graduation. Although the increase in the number of universities not only affected unemployment rates but also employment rates, and over the years, a growing number of university graduates have entered the workforce in Turkey, as shown in the table below, the average job search among the graduates lasts longer than one year.

Table 5 Time to find first job after university graduation by study of field (month)



Source: TURKSTAT (2022)

Another issue is that even if a job is found, it may not be a good fit after a lengthy search process. A large number of university graduates who do not have the option of being unemployed for an extended period of time are forced to work in temporary and insecure jobs that do not match their qualifications. As I stated earlier that the number of university graduates working in non-skilled jobs has increased by 97 percent in the last six years (BirGün, 2021). Many graduates who cannot find work in their field of study work in jobs such as cashier, private security officer, waiter, sales representative, and call centers, which are frequently covered by various news sites. For example, the internet broadcasting channel +90's video series "Those who cannot find a job in their field of study" features interviews with 38 graduates from various fields from economics to journalism, mechanical engineering to mathematics. Because they could not find a "good job," graduates in this series work as waitresses, clowns, construction masters, modeling, ferryboat musicians, busboys, and bartenders (+90, 2022).

The fact that there are not enough jobs for university graduates on the labor market is one of the primary causes of unemployment among educated youth in Turkey. In fact,

this is highlighted in the Ministry of Labor and Social Security's National Youth Employment Strategy and Action Plan:

On the Turkish labor market, unemployment is a significant issue, particularly for the educated population. In the year 2020, the unemployment rate for university graduate youth was 35.8 percent. High unemployment rates among the educated indicate a mismatch between the skills acquired as a result of education and the skills required by the labor market. Another factor contributing to the high unemployment rate is *the inability to create new positions for university graduates and the scarcity of available jobs* (ÇSGB, 2022, emphasis added).

In July 2022, İŞKUR received 154,619 job opening notices from employers. From January to July of 2022, 1,329,398 openings were posted. 98.5% of the vacant positions were filled by private sector employees. The manufacturing industry sector has the highest number of job openings (547,088) relative to other industries. The positions with the most significant number of openings are “Sales consultant/expert, tourism hotel staff, and garment worker.” As of July, 3,538,276 unemployed people were registered with İŞKUR, and 36.1% of them were between the ages of 15 and 24 (İŞKUR, 2022). Even though these figures are only for July 2022, they are significant because they provide an overview of the Turkish labor market. The relevant reports published by İŞKUR over the past few years reveal that, despite minor changes, most vacant positions are privately owned and require unqualified service workers.

Unemployment rates, which are so high among university graduates in Turkey, become more understandable when considered with the precarity experienced in a broader context. Because a large “reserve army,” which is no longer limited to the lowest levels of competence and technical qualification due to an overproduction of graduates, causes to give all those in work the feeling that they are not irreplaceable and that their work, their jobs, are in some way a privilege, but a fragile, threatened one. Moreover, as a result of the rapidly increasing precarization in the public sector as well as in the private sector, which we mentioned above, temporary, part-time or casual positions are rapidly becoming widespread. As Bourdieu (1998) said, job insecurity is now everywhere, and its consequences are “particularly visible in the extreme case of the unemployed”:

[T]he destructuring of existence, which is deprived among other things of its temporal structures, and the ensuing deterioration of the whole relationship to the world, time and space. Casualization profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable (p. 82).

As Erdoğan (2017) stated, this creates a feeling of “castration” in the unemployed person. As studies shown, long-term unemployment can result in serious problems such as a significant loss of social hierarchy level, separation from acquired social areas, and exclusion. For instance, DİSK (2021) reports that as a result of their inability to find employment, unemployed youth face severe psychological, social, and economic difficulties. For this reason, they tend to pursue informal, low-paying, and insecure jobs. During long periods of unemployment, university graduates work in a variety of occupations, such as waitressing and courier work, particularly in the chain stores that are the focus of this study. It should be noted that expecting to find a “job in their field of study” becomes much more luxurious for young people from working-class families who do not have the opportunity to “endure” such prolonged periods of unemployment after university graduation, have low “risk-taking” capacity, and have relatively low social capital. “A child of privilege can afford strategic confusion,” as Sennett said, however, “a child of the masses cannot” (2007, p. 80). As a result, those forced to work in “blue-collar” jobs as a result of prolonged unemployment are overwhelmingly the children of “blue-collar” families.

University students in Turkey are first exposed to precarious labor conditions during their time as full-time students. The rapid increase in the number of university students, among other things, provides the market with an abundant supply of cheap “student labor.” Koçak (2022, p. 214), for instance, notes that this has become more apparent in Eskişehir, known as the “city of students,” due to the density of students in the city.¹¹ The number of university students, which we say corresponds to ten percent of the country’s population, provides employers with an insecure and cheap labor supply.

¹¹ Koçak conveys this observation about Eskişehir based on the interviews he made for *Genç Emek* magazine, which is published by TEZ-KOOP-İŞ, a labor union operating in the retail sector. All issues of the magazine can be accessed here: <http://www.tezkoopis.org/contents/yayinlar/75>

Therefore, “the city of students” quickly became “the city of student workers.” Restaurants, cafes, bars, call centers, store chains, and shopping malls provide the most opportunities for students to work during their studies. When university students face long periods of unemployment after graduation, they tend to apply for such jobs to avoid unemployment. For example, some of the chain store employees I interviewed said that they previously held this position during their student years and preferred to return to it after becoming unemployed are the examples of this. Similar findings have also been reported in related research studies (see, for instance, Özkaplan, Öztan, & Ruben, 2020).

While all this is happening in the field of labor, in line with neoliberalism’s goal of “putting an end to class-based politics” (Yalman, 2009, p. 308), organized labor has weakened significantly during this time. Parallel to the opposition crisis in Turkey (Özüğurlu, 2009), the union movement has cut, and the number of employees covered by collective agreements has steadily decreased. According to data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, as of July 2022, only 14.26%, or 2.2 million out of approximately 16 million workers, are union members (ÇSGB, 2022). However, according to DİSK-AR (2022), when informal workers are included in these figures, the rate of unionized workers drops to 13%. Moreover, only 5.5% of workers in the private sector are covered by collective agreements. The following conclusion made by Özüğurlu is still applicable today:

Organized labor experiences the benefits of having relatively high wages, social security, and union representation opportunities, with the possibility of losing them at any time. There is an aristocratic position that can be enslaved. Significant resistances are displayed when confronted with a threat but these resistances cannot be generalized beyond workplace boundaries (2009, p. 349).

2.5. Concluding Remarks

Due to the limited availability of jobs on the labor market and the fact that these jobs are predominantly unskilled, the gap between the number of jobs suitable for qualified (graduate) workers and the number of qualified workers has gradually increased. As discussed previously, Turkey’s economy requires a limited number of qualified workers by its very nature. In light of the fact that the number of university graduates is growing faster than the number of suitable positions, competition for these positions

will increase. Therefore, it is possible to say that this gap will widen further in the future.

On the other hand, due to the stratification in higher education discussed above, it can be predicted that the upper-middle classes studying at “top universities” will retain their advantages for these jobs, whereas the lower-middle classes studying at “mass universities” will be forced to primarily pursue ‘blue collar’ jobs. Therefore, considering the overall increase in education level, it is evident that a large number of so-called unskilled jobs will be filled by “skilled” university graduates who are unable to find suitable positions. Consequently, as the expected level of education rises, these positions will typically become “graduate jobs.” Moreover, despite its rapid massification, the university continues to exclude a certain segment and retains a “premium” in this regard. Hence, current university students and recent graduates hope to benefit from this premium. However, because they are unable to take advantage of this benefit for various reasons, they either become unemployed or are forced to accept jobs that do not match their qualifications. Due to the aforementioned factors, university graduates who “cannot work in jobs compatible with their qualifications” will become an increasingly common in the coming years. This is why it is of particular importance to examine their experiences.

All of this is happening in the midst of a wave of precarization and resilience. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the service sector, which accounts for a growing share of Turkey’s economy, is one of the industries where precarious and flexible work is most common. Part-time and precarious employment is common in cafes, bars, tourism businesses, restaurants, and food retailers. Precarization, and particularly the conditions created by precarious employment, is well known to reduce employees’ commitment to work and make them vulnerable to managers. When the unemployment wave caused by labor market precarization is considered alongside the universities that have rapidly expanded in number over the last 15 years, the educational dimension of youth unemployment becomes clearer. These long-term structural changes in Turkey’s labor market have resulted in higher graduate unemployment and lower graduate premiums.

CHAPTER 3

STORE CHAINS IN TURKEY: MAIN ACTORS, WORKING CONDITIONS, AND UNIONIZATION

This chapter examines the general structure of the store chains in Turkey. I will first present the retail industry's general outlook in Turkey using relevant literature, reports, news about the industry, and other publicly available sources. Then, I will briefly explain the historical development of retailing. This chapter will also discuss working conditions in chain stores, the general structure of employment, and unionization.

3.1. An Overview of the Retail Sector in Turkey

Retailing emerged in the world in the second half of the 19th century. In Turkey, the first retailing in the modern sense dates back to the 1950s with the establishment of Migros and Gima. It began to grow rapidly with foreign capital retailers such as Carrefoursa and Metro that entered the market in the 1990s. After observing the success of discount stores in Europe, discount stores in Turkey began opening in the 1990s and grew rapidly in the 2000s. This had a significant impact on the retail sector as it spread across the nation.

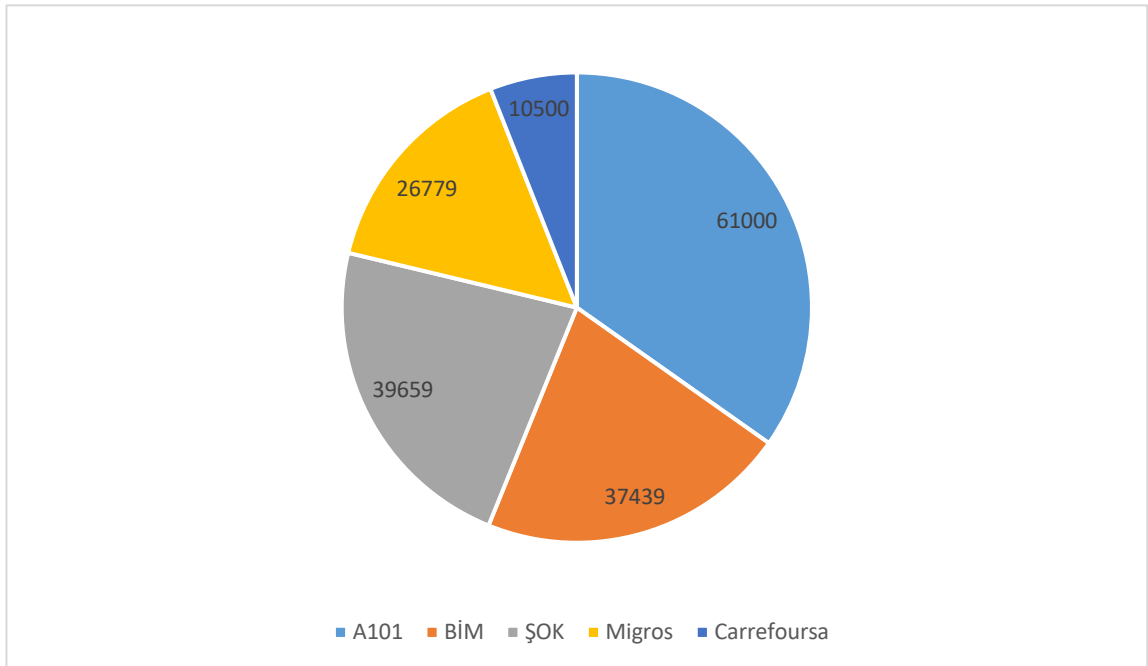
According to a report by TUSIAD (2021), with a turnover of 1.4 trillion Turkish Liras and an annual average growth rate of 17 percent over the past five years, the retail sector is one of the “locomotives” of the Turkish economy, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product in 2021. In 2020, organized retail would account for roughly 10 percent of total employment, employing around 2.5 million people. In addition to its numerical significance, this industry is notable for having the highest employment rates for women and young people. Although we lack detailed data on the sector's employment structure, a recent report

indicates that the majority of workers in this sector are under 30 years old. According to this, “the retail sector stands out as the industry with the highest proportion of women and young workers” (TÜSİAD, 2021, pp. 28-36).

3.1.1. Organized Retailing in Turkey: Discounters vs. Supermarkets

Based on their dominant operational format, organized retailers of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) in Turkey can be broadly divided into *discount markets* and *supermarkets*. The size of the stores, the number of products available, the organization of the aisles, and the number of employees are some factors that differentiate these two formats from one another. Nonetheless, different operational formats can coexist in a chain; hence, these chains are referred to as “multi-format.” Aldi in Germany, in 1962, laid the foundation for the modern discount market by selling a small number of individual product categories directly from the product boxes, having a smaller store size than supermarkets, and offering products at relatively lower prices. Having seen the success of this format, another German company, Lidl, opened its first store in 1973. Throughout the years, discount markets have spread to many other countries and established themselves in organized retail as an alternative to supermarkets. BİM opened Turkey’s first discount store in 1995. Following that, with ŞOK, DiaSA, and A101, the development of discount markets in organized FMCG retailing in Turkey proceeded (Rekabet Kurumu, 2021).

Table 6 Number of Employees in Five Largest FMCG Chain in Turkey (July, 2022)



Source: Websites of the chains

The store size, the number of stock-keeping units (SKU), the number of employees, and the percentage of private-label products distinguish discounters from supermarkets. With sales areas of less than 400 square meters, discount markets, which can easily find places within neighborhoods, differentiate themselves from other retail formats by carrying a more significant number of private label products. Unlike supermarkets, discount stores offer fewer choices, a more substantial proportion of private-label products, a smaller store size, a more straightforward shelf design, and minimal customer service. Discount stores typically offer 750-1,500 varieties of products, while supermarkets carry 5,000-17,000. Discount stores have a policy that offers lower prices than supermarkets. This price-oriented policy requires minimizing the costs, resulting in the number of SKUs below a certain level in these stores. Product portfolios consist of private-label products with a high stock turnover ratio and can be procured at a lower cost compared to branded products. Discount stores keep personnel and operating costs to a minimum since it provides minimum service with a limited number of employees, a smaller sales area, and a simple shelf design. These features cause the product portfolio, and thus the sales, of the discount markets to be dominated by basic consumer products. Discount marketing is generally categorized into two

types: *hard discounters* and *soft discounters*. Soft discount retailers can be categorized between supermarkets and hard discounters based on pricing, product portfolio, store size, service, and private-label product ratios. Soft discounters carry a more comprehensive range of branded products than hard discounters, but hard discounters have lower prices. Soft discounters also sell fresh or open products (Gürman, 2006, pp. 23-29).

Table 7 Store numbers of the five largest chains in Turkey, July 2022



Source: Websites of the chains

BİM remains the market leader in Turkey, operating exclusively in the discount format. In addition to preserving the discount format, the company introduced its new brand FILE in 2005, which serves predominantly as a supermarket chain in terms of product range and size. A101, which established its first store in 2008, has more than 10,000 stores in 2022, surpassing players in the market in terms of store number. Ülker Group, which began FMCG retailing with Bizim Toptan in a wholesale format, first purchased ŞOK from Migros in 2011, then DiaSA in 2013, becoming a competitor in discount marketing to BİM and A101. According to the Turkish Competition Authority’s report, BİM, A101, and ŞOK are Turkey’s three largest discount marketing companies (Rekabet Kurumu, 2021).

Even though Migros and Carrefoursa have essentially pulled out of the discount format by releasing ŞOK and DiaSA, they continue to operate on a national scale through supermarkets and hypermarkets. Migros purchased Tesco's Turkey operation, Kipa, after acquiring Tansaş, the industry's leading company, in 2005. Tansaş was one of the market's largest companies. Carrefoursa, whose ownership was acquired by Sabancı Holding in 2013, purchased Kiler in 2015 and bought 55 stores from İsmar and 1e1 as part of its market development strategy. Migros also purchased many Makro stores in 2018 (Rekabet Kurumu, 2021).

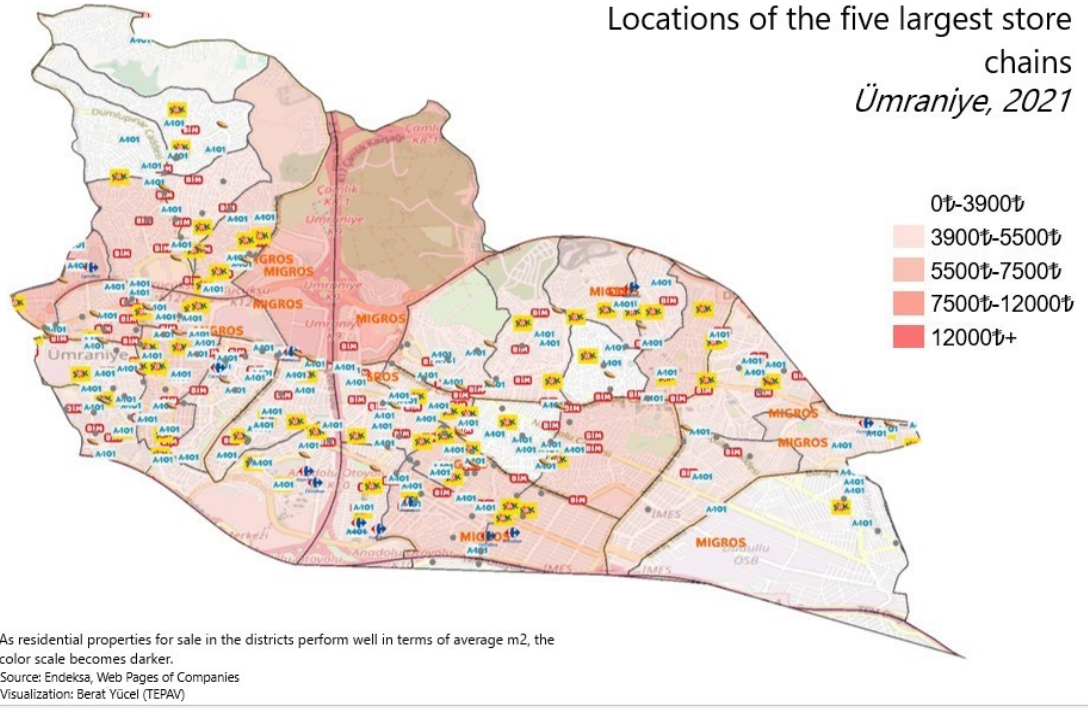
Beginning in 2019, discount retailing overtook the supermarket format as the dominant market channel in Turkey's FMCG retailing (Rekabet Kurumu, 2021). Before 2019, the supermarket format held the market leadership. The supermarket format is comprised of multi-format national retailers with stores of various sizes, such as Migros and Carrefoursa, in addition to a vast number of regional and local chains, such as Yunus, Onur, Çağrı, and Çağdaş. Two types of retailers fall under the category of regional or local: regional store chains and independent stores. These stores are located within a particular city or region. Depending on the kind of businesses located close to them, regional and local retailers focusing exclusively on the supermarket marketing strategy may still compete with national FMCG retail chains, local chains, and discount chains.

The operational distinctions of Turkey's store chains, discussed in detail above, correspond to a difference in the customer profile. Discount stores, as opposed to supermarkets, aim to serve customers who are price sensitive and have low incomes. Furthermore, these stores produce private-label products at a lower cost than other brands and sell them in their stores, encouraging low-income groups to shop there more frequently. The stores' compact sizes also allow them to attract a diverse range of customers by setting up stores virtually anywhere, including the sidewalks. There is no sufficient research on the customer profile of chain markets in Turkey.

Nonetheless, the visualization in Table 3 can give us an idea of the “typical” customer profile for these markets.¹² Table 3 is a visualization created with the help of a computer program showing the locations of the five largest chain stores in Ümraniye, İstanbul. In the image, the income level of a region is calculated using the Endeksa website’s housing price per m2. Areas with darker colors indicate higher property prices than in other regions. The map below demonstrates that while supermarkets such as Migros and Carrefoursa are in the relatively affluent parts of the city, the number of discount stores (A101, ŞOK, BİM) and their density increase as we move toward the periphery. Based on this, we can conclude that, while discount markets have a marketing strategy aimed at relatively poor customers with high price sensitivity, the dominant customer profile of supermarkets such as Migros and Carrefoursa mainly serve large stores in city shopping areas, is middle-upper classes. Although a more in-depth discussion is required, the map below supports this assumption. This “class” distinction in customer profile should be kept in mind as you read some of the in-store encounters later in this study.

¹² Visualized by Berat Yücel for TEPAV, this map is based entirely on open sources. All addresses can be accessed from the websites of the companies, and price per square meter information is available from endeksa.com. I thank Berat Yücel for sharing the visualization with me and allowing me to use it.

Table 7 Locations of the five largest store chains in Ümraniye, İstanbul



Source: Endeksa, Websites of the Companies, visualized by Berat Yücel (TEPAV)

When discussing organized FMCG retailing in Turkey, besides this sectoral division and the customer profile based on their wealth, it is vital to highlight the capital ownership structure of Turkey's five largest store chains, despite not being the focus of this study. These store chains, which we previously classified as discounters and supermarkets, are frequently labeled as “conservative/Islamic capital” and “secular capital,” respectively. This distinction has not yet been studied scholarly. However, according to this distinction, Migros and Carrefoursa, which operate in the field of supermarkets and whose majority Anadolu Group and Sabancı Group hold shares in Turkey, respectively, are the stores of the “secular capital” represented in TÜSİAD. A101, ŞOK, and BİM, on the other hand, whose majority shares are held by Turgut Aydın Holding, Ülker Group, and Merkez Bereket Gıda ve Ticaret Inc. are the stores of “Islamic capital” represented in MÜSİAD. This view is also influenced by the absence of alcohol sales in discount markets and the fact that the owners of these markets pursue more open relationships with the government. This distinction regarding capital ownership in the FMCG retailing industry and whether this

distinction influences the consumer profiles of the chains are the subject of a separate study. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there is a “cultural” distinction here, which roughly corresponds to the “class” distinction we made previously.

3.2. Employment and Working Conditions in the Stores

The participants interviewed for this study are the workers of Turkey’s five largest store chains and one regional chain. This study, which analyzes the experiences of the university graduates working in chain markets in Turkey, examines the employment structure and working conditions in these markets as one of its primary focuses. Many factors affect the working conditions of chain store workers, including the size of the store, its location, the existence or absence of a trade union, and the number of employees working in a particular store. In this section, which focuses on the working conditions of the chain store workers, I will examine the working conditions in the industry under a range of criteria, including the employees’ workload, working hours, wages, employment types, and job security. I will also address the distinctions between discount stores and supermarkets, which I noted briefly above as one of the most significant distinctions within the store chains.

The store size is essential in defining working conditions in store chains. As the size of the store grows, so does the need for division of labor. As a result, employees working in larger stores that provide services are less likely to conduct work that is outside of their scope of responsibilities. This is especially true of multi-format national stores operating in the supermarket and hypermarket format, wherein several departments, such as electronics, bakeries, charcuterie, and patisseries, necessitate specialized knowledge and abilities in addition to food. For example, workers in charcuterie may have a butchery certificate, while workers in electronics may be required to have expertise in technological devices. As a result of this distinction, a sharper, if not absolute, difference emerges in terms of employee roles and responsibilities.

We have mentioned above that discounters’ product portfolio, and sales are mainly basic consumption goods. The working order in these stores, whose primary business logic is serving in a smaller store area, more straightforward shelf layout, and

minimum service delivery, brings the “less staff, more work” system. In discount stores, no separate cash register staff or aisle array staff are employed; instead, a small number of employees perform all these jobs. The following observations of Caner, who worked in more than one store of a chain serving in the field of discount retailing, are an indication of this:

How many people work in your store?

We have such a problem. You can ask the same problem everywhere in any store you go. I don't know the exact situation in other chains, but there is always a missing staff. If you ask the managers, they say they can't find anybody to work with because no one comes to work. But it's a lie. They don't employ enough staff. Why? More work with fewer workers. If it hurts you, they will take care of it somehow. This is the rationale behind this. Four staff are working in our store right now after I last fought with the regional manager. (Caner)¹³

Companies do not share information about the average number of store employees. The store's turnover usually determines the number of employees in a store. Keeping in mind that each employee in a discount store, where an average of three or four employees¹⁴ are employed (which can sometimes fall below these numbers), is legally required to have one day off per week, they work almost every day of the week with one less employee than the usual.

In addition to the excessive workload, a result of working with personnel shortage is long and flexible working hours. One of the biggest problems that chain store employees (especially those who work in discount stores) voiced during the interviews was the lack of staff and longer working hours. In these stores, where the workload is

¹³ *Kaç kişi çalışıyor sizin mağazada?*

Öyle bir sıkıntımız da var. Gittiğin her mağazada sorabilirsin, diğer marketlerde durum nedir bilmiyorum ama, hep bir eksik çalışma vardır. Sorsan, eleman bulamıyorlar, gelen yok. Ama kesinlikle yalan, almıyorlar. Niye? Az eleman, çok iş. Canımı dişine takarsa, yırtırsa, halleder bir şekilde. Bu kafa...

Sizin mağazada kaç kişi çalışıyor?

Şu an... Ben geçen kavga yaptım bölge müdürüyle, 4 oldu. (Caner)

¹⁴ The figures presented here are based on information provided by interviewees and personal observations. Furthermore, the total number of stores and employees shared by companies on their websites provides an idea of this average. Among my interviewees who worked in discount stores, there were those who worked in stores that had recently opened and had a very low turnover, as well as those who worked in stores that had been in operation for many years and had the highest turnover within the company. Only 7 people worked at a discount store with one of the highest turnover rates among company stores. Furthermore, during the interview, two of the employees was on leave because they are sick, and another stated that he was leaving his job.

very high since they are operated with a small number of employees, if one of the existing employees is sick or on leave, or if an employee leaves the job, the whole working order can be upside down. Moreover, as I mentioned before, the fact that it is an industry where personnel mobility is relatively high makes the problem of working with personnel shortage even more of a problem. Ayşe notes that they frequently “had to work a over-time” (*full çekmek* they call in Turkish) since the company employs only three people in a recently opened discount store in İstanbul, where “at least seven people are normally required to work”:

Normally, at least seven people must be working in this store so that you can take one day off a week, take your holidays or something. I mean, at least. It never happens there. Because those who start working here leaves the job in a short time. Now, we are again three people working. It was four, we have been four people for like two weeks. They take one employee here and send him to another store. They say, “We need a staff here.” After the man goes there, we have to work full-day. (Ayşe)¹⁵

Although it varies depending on the store size, the region in which it is located, or the policy of the relevant company, store chains generally operate between 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. While workers working in the morning are called “morning workers,” others working after them are called “evening workers.” Employees whose work starts in the morning and who are at the opening of the store leave after completing their work and leave their places to the evening workers. However, all-day shifts, called “*full çekmek*” in discount marketing, are also quite common. For the store to open at 9 a.m., the staff must arrive at 8 a.m. Sometimes, when they have to work all day, they leave the store at 10 a.m. This equates to more than 12 hours per day of labor.

Chain store workers forced to work overtime constantly due to personnel shortages are paid in time rather than money. These extra hours are recorded in the “score book,” and the personnel is expected to take leave in exchange, but they cannot use these leaves in most cases. For example, Caner, who works in one of these discount stores,

¹⁵ Normalde en az 7 kişilik bir mağaza orası. Haftada 1 gün izin yapabilmem, tatillerini falan yapabilmem için. En az diyorum yani. Orda hiçbir zaman olmuyor. Gelen gidiyor çünkü. Yine 3 kişiye düştüler. Bir 4 kişiye çıktık, iki haftadır falan 4 kişiyiz ama şöyle bir sıkıntı var. Benim elemanı alıyor başka mağazaya veriyor. “Orda sıkışıklık var” diyor, adam oraya gittikten sonra işte full çektikten sonra geliyor izin istiyor, kim çekicek burayı da ben çekiyorum, arkadaşım çekiyor, o çekiyor bu çekiyor yani. (Ayşe)

claims that he has not been able to use the hours he has accrued over the last four years and that the total compensation for his overtime work is 25,000 Turkish Liras. He demands the money from his employer because he is about to leave the job to join the military, but his employer refuses to pay for this in cash. But Caner says that he will sue the company if necessary:

When you work overtime, they must pay you your due by law—either paying the money or extra time. For example, my daily working time is 8.5 hours. Let's say I worked 11 hours; I was supposed to leave at 5 but stayed until 9 in the evening. I stayed on other days like this out of necessity. Let's say there was a lot of work, and your friend who stays in the store will have a hard time. You stay to work extra time, no more trouble with it. But he has to give the money you work extra. Now I have not received any of my rights for four years. Now I'm going to the army. I say to them, "Look, I'm going to the army, give me my money." He doesn't want to pay. He doesn't give it money anyway, and he gives it as hours. When the regional manager came, he said, "I will sue you, take you to court. You're unfair." I argued a lot. (Caner)¹⁶

Ayşe, who works at another discount store, says that if she could get paid for her overtime hours, "she should get three more salaries":

We got to work, and the constantly extended shift was getting longer. They [the bosses] told me that if you work for one hour or two hours extra, you will arrive late the next day. How can I come late? There is no staff. Do I have such an opportunity? How? If you let the staff go, you can't pick it up the next day. You have to go regularly.

Does your shifts extended frequently?

Of course, I work overtime almost always. I wasn't working full-day all the time, but... Let me put it this way: if they give me my overtime or my regular shift, they must give me three more salaries from them. (Ayşe)¹⁷

¹⁶ Fazla mesai yaptığında, sana kanunen hakkını vermek zorunda. Ya para olarak ya fazla çalışma saati olarak. Mesela günlük çalışma saatim 8,5 saat. Diyelim ki 11 saat çalıştım; 5'te çıkmam gerekirken akşam 9'a kadar kaldım. Bunun gibi başka günler de kaldım, mecburiyetten. İş çoktur, mağazada kalan arkadaşın zora düşecektir... Sebebi olur, kalırsın; bundan yana sıkıntı yok. Ama bunu sana vermek zorunda. Şimdi ben dört senedir hiçbir hakkımı alamadım. Şimdi askere gideceğim, diyorum ki bunlara, "bakın ben askere gideceğim, benim denkleştirme haklarımı verin." Bunlar oyalayıp duruyor beni. Ödemek istemiyor. Para olarak vermiyor zaten, saat olarak veriyor. Çalışmıyorsunuz, parasını yatırıyor... Diretip duruyorlar. Geçen bölge müdürü gelince "sizi şikâyet edeceğim, mahkemeye vereceğim; benim hakkımı yiyorsunuz" dedim, bir sürü tartıştım. (Caner)

¹⁷ Girdik işe, sürekli uzayan mesai, sürekli uzuyor. Bana demişlerdi ki, 1 saat 2 saat mesela mesain uzarsa, ertesi gün geç gelirsin. Nasıl geç geleyim? Eleman yok. Öyle bir şansım var mı benim? Marketi boş ver... Bir gün boş versen ertesi gün toparlayamıyorsun zaten. Düzenli gitmek zorundasın.

Çok sık full çekiyor muydun?

Çok full çektim, tabi. Sürekli full çekmiyordum ama... Şöyle söyleyeyim, benim mesaimi verseler, normal mesaimi verseler, üç maaş daha almam lazım onlardan. (Ayşe)

The staff shortage problem is not unique to discount stores. The workers working at the regional and national supermarket chains face similar issues. Although the division of labor is implemented more strictly in these markets than in discount stores, there are not enough staff to fill the relevant positions in most cases. Simge, who works as a cashier in a relatively small store of a regional supermarket, categorizes this situation as “human exploitation”:

Since the store I work at is small, I am the only one who works as cashier. They do not open the second cashbox because this is their system. Two cashiers are required to run two cashier, but in Turkey, they assume that why open another when one employee can handle everything? One cashier works from morning till night, sitting there all day. Managers assume that if this store can function with just one employee, why should they hire another and pay them? This is called human exploitation. Additionally, there are not enough store clerks in our store as well. (Simge)¹⁸

Following the increase in the minimum wage in the last two years, chain stores that employ a large portion of their employees for wages close to the minimum wage have begun to hire “half staff” (*buçuk eleman*), reducing the already insufficient number of employees. For example, Zeynep, who works in a discount store with one of the highest daily turnovers among the company’s stores, explains how the number of employees has decreased from 7 to “5.5 people”:

The store's turnover determines the number of personnel employed, right?
Yes, it was. Now, the person we have to work with is 5.5 people. When the minimum wage was raised, they aimed to cut it down from somewhere.
What does “5.5 people” mean? Is one of the staff working part-time?
A staff will work here for three days, and work for the other store for three days, etc. He will come here for three days, go there for three days... This is a torture for the staff. (Zeynep)¹⁹

¹⁸ Kendi mağazam küçük bir mağaza olduğu için, tek kasiyerim. İki kasa var ama açmıyorlar yani, böyle bir sistem çünkü. Türkiye’de iki kasa çalıştırmak için iki kasiyer çalıştırması lazım ama tek elemana bütün işi yükleyebilecekken niye açsın! İki kasa var ama biri hiçbir zaman açılmaz, bütün gün bir tane kasiyer oturur, sabahtan akşama kadar ilgilenir. Bir eleman ile idare edebiliyor bu mağaza, başka bir insan daha alıp niye ona para yedirelim ki mantığı... İnsan sömürüsü yani. Reyoncu da eksik bizim mağazada. (Simge)

¹⁹ Sizde de personel sayısı ciroya göre belirleniyor sanırım?
Evet, öyleymiş. Artık bizim çalışmamız gereken kişi 5,5 kişi. Asgari ücrete zam gelince bir yerden kısmayı amaçladılar.
5,5 ne oluyor? Biri yarı zamanlı mı?
Bir eleman üç gün burada çalışacak, üç gün gidip aşağı mağazada çalışacak, gibi. O da personele eziyet. Üç gün buraya gelecek, üç gün oraya gidecek... (Zeynep)

The “half-staff” system implemented at the discount store where Zeynep works can be defined as a system in which one employee works for more than one store. In addition, the “half-staff” system, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in discount stores, can be implemented by employing part-time workers instead of full-time. Savaş, an employee of a different discount store, describes the “half-staff” system implemented in the store he is working as follows:

Since the stores are small, they usually have 4 or 5 employees depending on their turnover. In fact, after the New Year, they reduced the number of workers to 3.5 people in some stores. Three people work full-time, and one person works part-time.

Has this affected your store as well?

In the store where I work, four people were working before. One person was fired, and a part-time employee came to replace the person who left. It will probably continue this way. (Savaş)²⁰

Employees at discount stores say working with less staff increases their workload and creates security problems. One of the most frequently mentioned difficulties is the opening and closing of stores by one person, which usually requires two staff. This creates several security problems, as the workers I interviewed told me. The fact that at least two people are present at the opening and closing of the store, which is opened very early in the morning and closed late at night, is the expectation of the companies from the employees. Most chains require at least one store manager to be present during opening and closing. However, this is not possible in most cases due to the staff shortage. Savaş summarizes the security issues caused by this frequent occurrence as follows:

There were times when I opened and closed the store by myself. It is typically forbidden to open and close a store alone. At least two people have to be there while closing the store. You close it at night; there may be theft or something else... For example, our store is located in a field where no one lives. I’m a

²⁰ Mağazalar zaten biraz daha küçük marketler olunca, genelde cirosuna göre 4 ya da 5 çalışanı oluyor. Hatta yılbaşından sonrasında bazı marketlere 3,5 kişiye düşürdüler. 3 kişi tam çalışıyor, 1 kişi part-time çalışıyor.

Sizin mağazayı da etkiledi mi bu süreç?

Benim çalıştığım mağazada önceden 4 kişi çalışıyordu, bir kişi çıkmıştı işten, çıkan kişinin yerine hemen part-time bir eleman geldi. Bu şekilde de devam edecek muhtemelen. (Savaş)

man, but it is hard for a lady. A dog can chase, a pervert who knows she's the only staff there may bother her. (Savaş)²¹

The security issues caused by a lack of personnel are not limited to this. The “less staff, more work” system implemented in these discounters resulted in the death of a young worker at a store in June 2022. Muhammet Ali Yaşar, a 26-year-old employee of a discount store in Esenler, İstanbul, died in a fire in a store. In the statement released after his death, the company argued that Yaşar “had fallen asleep” and could not escape the fire. Nevertheless, according to Mağaza Market-Sen, a labor union of chain store workers, Yaşar was forced to open the store alone despite being prohibited. Due to this, he had to enter the store's warehouse alone, and when a fire broke out, he could not escape because there was no fire exit; he died as a result of being trapped inside. The union's post-event statement attributed this situation to the “more work with fewer workers” system implemented in these stores (Cumhuriyet, 2022).

During my interviews, I also observed such omissions by the chains that endanger employee health. When Zeynep, who works at a discount store, began coughing and wiping her nose frequently during our interview, I thought she was exhausted. When I intended to conclude the interview, I received the following response:

You are tired; we can stop here if you want. Thank you very much for your time.

I'm not tired at all; I'm just recovering from the flu. My throat hurts a little because our air conditioners don't work.

Really?

They have not come to check the air conditioner, nor do they make it work. We let them know about two months ago, but they did not show up. Even though I never wear gloves, now I wear one when I work in the store. (Zeynep)²²

²¹ Mağazayı tek açıp kapadığım zamanlar oldu. Normalde yasaktır bir mağazayı tek başına açıp kapatmak. En az iki kişi kapatmak zorunda. Gece vakti çıkıyorsun; hırsızlık olabilir, başka bir şey olabilir... Bizim mağazanın bulunduğu yerde her yer tarla. Hadi ben erkeğim, bayanı köpek kovalayabilir, bir sapığa denk gelebilir, tek kapattığını bilen bir sapık sıkıştırabilir... (Savaş)

²² *Epey yordum seni, çok teşekkürler vakit ayırdığın için.*

Yorulmadım da, ben daha yeni yeni grip atlatıyorum. Boğazım biraz kötü. Klimalarımız çalışmıyor, bunu da söyleyeyim...

Öyle mi?

Ne klima çalışıyor ne bakmaya geliyorlar... Çağrı açtık ta 2 ay önce, gelmediler. Eldiven asla giymeyen ben, mağazada yarım eldiven ile çalışıyorum. (Zeynep)

Workers in the chain stores are generally paid around the minimum wage. Although it differs from company to company, almost all employees are paid the minimum wage plus a travel and meal allowance. When travel and food expenses are deducted, the wages that correspond to the minimum wage can even fall below the minimum wage, especially during periods of rapid inflation, because the allowance paid for travel and food cannot keep up with the rising cost of living. According to the stores' turnover, some chains may also pay monthly bonuses to the employee accounts. Depending on the employee's position, this amount can range from 200 to 300 Turkish Liras. In the chains where the union has signed a Collective Bargaining Agreement with the employer, there are rights such as fuel assistance, and a quarterly bonus.

Moreover, most supermarkets serving larger stores have dining halls where employees can eat. But since there is no such opportunity in discount stores, where there is no such Agreement between the employer and the labor union, the workers here must make do with the monthly money they receive. When I conducted this study in the first half of 2022, the meal allowance provided to a worker at a discount store was 369 Turkish Lira, or approximately 13 Turkish Lira per day. Keeping in mind that chicken doner, one of the cheapest fast-food meals in Turkey at the time, cost over 20 Turkish Lira, it is easy to comprehend how modest this sum was. Moreover, this money loaded onto employee cards was only spent in a limited number of restaurants outside the store where they work. Due to low wages and insufficient food allowance, Zeynep explains that they tried to “fill their stomachs by using the toaster in a small kitchen behind the store illegally”:

Do they give you a meal card?

Yes, they do. I can only shop with the card in the stores I work, and I cannot use it anywhere else. They load 369 liras on it, means 13 lira per day.

How do you fill your stomach with this money?

We have a kitchen in the back of the store, but everything is forbidden. Using a tube, the pan, and the pot is prohibited.

So, what do you do?

We use the toaster. We have not yet received a warning not to use it. And a Kettle.

What do you eat if everything is prohibited?

According to them, nothing. We make toast all the time. We sell *gözleme* in our stores. We buy it and toast it like that. We do what we can do in a toaster. (Zeynep)²³

Workers in chain stores, who must complete a substantial amount of work with a limited staff, are also held accountable for unfinished tasks. In these stores, for instance, even though it is primarily the store managers' responsibility to change the price tags, the entire staff collaborates on this. Employees are expected to pay the price difference at the cash register when the price tags are not updated or the necessary controls are not provided due to the workload. Employees are even suspected of stealing products, according to Ayşe, when items are missing from the inventory count:

There are too many price tags, so you must adjust them. You are responsible for updating all of them even if you are unable to. If the customer claims a mismatch between the price tag and the amount paid, they expect you to cover the difference. You give money from your pocket. "You're in charge," the employer asserts. It makes no difference that you have too much work or anything else. They request everything from you. If a product is missing from the inventory, he may inquire you, "Why is this missing?" How can I know why it is missing? For instance, he asks, "Have you taken it?" What am I able to do with your cracker? It's a peculiar expression. We told them to look at the camera to determine who took the product. Will we also be watching it? It is a very awkward situation. (Ayşe)²⁴

Employees are frequently under pressure to sell products nearing the end of their shelf life, paying for products missing from the inventory count or price differences resulting from unchecked price tags. According to the unions, such incidents, also reported in the press, resulted from the employer's attempts to dismiss employees

²³ *Yemek kartı veriyorlar mı size?*

Veriyor ama onunla da sadece buradan alışveriş yapabiliyorum, hiçbir yerde yapamıyorum.

O senin yemek paran mı oluyor?

Evet. Ona da yatırmışlar 369 lira. Yani benim günlük 13 lira yemek param.

Nasıl yapıyorsunuz yemek işini?

Arkada bir yerimiz var ama her şey yasak. Tüp yasak, tava yasak, tencere yasak...

Ee, ne yapıyorsunuz?

Tost makinesini kaçak göçek kullanıyoruz. Şu anda bize bir şey demiyorlar ama. Sadece Kettle.

Her şey yasaksa ne yiyeceksiniz?

Onlara göre hiçbir şey. Tost yapıyoruz sürekli. Gözleme geliyor, gözlemeye basıyoruz. Öyle. Tost makinesinde yapabileceğimiz şeyleri yapıyoruz. (Zeynep)

²⁴ Etiket çok fazla yani, o etiketleri değiştirmek senin görevin. Yetiştin yetiştin, yetişemedin müşteri geliyor etiket farkı var diyor, etiketteki fiyattan istiyor. Sen de cebinden veriyorsun. "Sen sorumlusun," diyor mağaza. Eleman eksikmiş, şeymiş... Her şeyi senden soruyor. Atıyorum, sayımda eksik çıktı, "bu niye eksik?" Ya ben ne bileyim niye eksik? Siz mi aldınız diyor mesela. Ya ben napayım senin krakerini bilmem neyini yani. Acayip bir şey ya. "Kameraya bakın" diyoruz, bakın kim almış görün. Onu da mı biz izleyeceğiz. Çok abes bir durum. (Ayşe)

without paying them a dismissal pay (Cumhuriyet, 2022). According to the reason for termination of the employment contract known as Code46, “the employee cannot engage in acts that do not comply with accuracy and loyalty, such as abusing the employer’s trust, stealing, or revealing the employer’s professional secrets” (Tes-İş, 2022). An employee who terminated an employment contract due to such an accusation is not entitled to severance under labor law. Regarding these instances, which have also been reported in the media, a discount store employee confirms to Ayşe:

The product could be stolen or missing from the warehouse during the day. The expense of the discrepancy in the warehouse must come out of our own pockets. They still want us to pay for the item even if we are unable to show video evidence of the theft (BirGün, 2022).

Savaş, who works in one of these stores, described how he witnessed a store manager who purchased expired products and then threw them away because he was afraid of “the pressures above”:

Although I’ve never seen this happen to store employees, I’ve heard of an assistant manager who spends his own money to buy expired goods but then throws them away. In some companies, employees are required to sell the goods that the expiration date is coming to customers, but I haven’t seen this in action. “The product’s expiration date is approaching; you must buy it; if you can’t sell it, you must buy the rest,” or something similar has never been said to me. But I know a store manager and assistant who buys items that have passed their expiration dates out of his pocket because he fears losing his job or even because of the above pressures. (Savaş).²⁵

While it is generally true that as store size grows, a more strict division of labor is implemented, this does not imply that in chains where supermarket formats predominate, the division of labor is entirely fair. It is common for supermarkets to hire a minimal number of people, which means that each worker has to do more work. In these stores, too, employees are required to perform tasks that are not their responsibilities or duties. When there are a lot of customers in the store, other

²⁵ Duydum, ben de duydum. Hatta kendi cebinden, kendi parasından tarihi geçecek olan ürünleri geçip çöpe atan mağaza sorumlusu yardımcısı da duydum ama ben personel olarak herhangi bir personele o şekilde aldırıldığını görmedim. Bana da yapılmadı bu şekilde. Ama satmaya zorlama durumu var, müşteriye satma. Ama kimse bana şu ana kadar “şu ürünün tarihi yaklaşıyor, bunu sen al, satamazsan kalanı sen alırsın” demedi, böyle bir şey olmadı daha. Ama yukarıdaki baskılardan dolayı, hatta işinden olma korkusundan dolayı biraz diyeyim, işten atılma korkusuyla, kendi cebinden o tarihi geçen ürünleri satın alıp çöpe atan mağaza sorumlusu ve yardımcısı biliyorum, diyeyim. (Savaş)

employees come to the cash register to help the cashier. When fewer customers are in the store, the cashier organizes the shelves. For instance, when asked about his job description, Utku, a worker at a supermarket, responds as follows:

For instance, you asked me if I had a job description. Honestly, it's a question I ponder myself from time to time. When I ask, it leads to problems. The relationship between you and your manager is deteriorating. "You're doing it because you want to," he responds. I don't know how to put it. When the store is exceptionally crowded, you go to the cash register. Whenever necessary, you'll shift to security. (Utku)²⁶

Because the store's job description is so unclear, employees frequently complain about having to do other people's work. But this can also be seen as an example of solidarity among the workers. In fact, among my interviewees, numerous employees stated that they voluntarily help their friends in the store, even though it is not their responsibility. For instance, Sevil says that the employees support one another and do each other's work even when it is not their responsibility because they are in solidarity with one another:

If the store doesn't have an attendant on duty, if someone is ill and unable to come, I would then do their job. I'm doing this of my own free will when I'm free. I say like "There is a missing price tag. Let me change it. Let me do this or that." Ali is a store attendant. You can ask him. I helped him many times. Ali also helps us. If I have a job downstairs, if the cash register is busy in the morning, he says, "I'm looking at the jet, you relax. I'm handling it," he says. (Sevil)²⁷

A similar instance of "solidarity" among workers is described by Emre, who works as an assistant store manager at a discount store:

How is the division of labor in the store?

Everyone does everything. But there are also extra jobs that the store manager and assistant manager do.

Like what?

²⁶ Sen mesela dedin ya görev tanımın yok mu diye... Bunu ben de bazen sorguluyorum. Sorguladığım zaman sorun oluyor. Şefinle aran bozuluyor direkt. Sen bunu isteyerek yapıyorsun, diyor. Nasıl diyeyim sana, mağaza sıkıştığı zaman, çok yoğun olduğu zaman kasaya da geçiyorsun. Güvenliğe de geçiyorsun, güvenlik eksikliği olduğu zaman. (Utku)

²⁷ Atıyorum tezgâhtar olmaz mağazada, biri covidli olur, gelemez, ben yardımcı olurum. Bunu ben kendim isteyerek yapıyorum boşken. "Hadi buranın etiketi yok, bunu çıkarayım, şunu yapayım" diye. Ali mesela tezgâhtar, Ali'e sorabilirsiniz. Birçok kez yardımcı da oluyorum. Ali de bize yardımcı olur mesela her zaman. Aşağıda bir işim olur, sabah kasa yoğun olur, "ben jete bakıyorum, sen rahat ol" der. "Ben hallediyorum" der. (Sevil)

For example, I don't have to clean the floor, but there is solidarity. I help others, and the others help me with my different jobs. Usually, I'm responsible for putting the price tags, but when I tell the staff "put it on," they put them on. There is solidarity. We help each other.

You are doing their job, and they are doing your job.

Yes. We thus lighten the workload. (Emre)²⁸

While both Emre and Sevil describe their coworkers' assistance as an act of "solidarity" or "helpfulness," it is essential to note that how workers assist one another often changes without the employees' knowledge or approval. The "solidarity" activities that Emre describes as "lightening the workload" are primarily the result of deficiencies in labor division and job descriptions in these markets. Through such acts of cooperation and solidarity, employees attempt to deal with the uncertainties in their job descriptions and the excessive workload.

There is no "job description" in discount stores, as I already stated; instead, there are three basic positions categorized as "staff," "assistant store manager," (also called *master*) and "store manager." However, all employees are responsible for nearly every task, from operating the cash register to putting the shelves in order, transporting products to the warehouse, cleaning, and even delivering online orders to customers' homes. On the other hand, store managers and assistant managers are supposed to perform additional duties in this respect. Some responsibilities, such as checking the accuracy of the price tags, counting the products and keeping track of them, and protecting the key of the cashbox, fall under the scope of the store manager and the assistants. Nevertheless, almost all of these duties and responsibilities are shared among the staff, and the duties and responsibilities associated with store managers remain on paper in most cases.

When I asked the employees of discount stores about their roles and responsibilities in the store, nearly all of them responded, "everyone does everything here." This

²⁸ *İş bölümü nasıl mağazada?*

Herkes her işi yapıyor. Ama mağaza müdürü ve müdür yardımcısının yaptığı ekstra işler de var.

Ne gibi?

Ben şimdi mesela paspas atmak zorunda değilim, ama bi dayanışma var. Ben ona yardım ediyorum o da benim farklı işlerime yardım ediyor. Etiketleri ben takmakla yükümlüyüm normal şartlarda ama personele "tak bunu" dediğimde, takıyor. Bi dayanışma var, yardımlaşma var.

Sen onun işini yapıyorsun, o senin işini yapıyor...

Evet. İş yükünü hafifletmiş oluyoruz. (Emre)

sentence, which is a clear and precise expression of the lack of labor division in the discount stores, also indicates that “doing every job” in discount stores also means “not being clear about what you do,” as Zeynep, an employee of a discount store, explains:

Bread, newspapers, and other necessities are set out in the morning. If the shipment arrives, we carry the products to the warehouse. As soon as the store is uncrowded, we open the product, tidy up the store, and clean the floor. What you are doing in this store is unclear. In the absence of the manager, you are in charge of closing the store. The manager also wants us to do the computer things. There is always new bullshits. (Zeynep)²⁹

Zeynep’s response to my question, “How is a typical day at the store?” demonstrates that the division of labor in such stores more closely resembles a “*bakkal*,” relatively small and non-corporate groceries that used to be in almost every neighborhood in Turkey, than a “corporate store.” In this sense, it is even fair to call these discounters *bakkal chains*.

The information presented up to this point suggests that the working conditions in chain stores in Turkey are challenging and demanding. In addition, the form of employment prevalent in these stores presents many challenges. Working part-time in chain markets is a widespread form of employment. This is evident from the phrase “half-staff” employment I mentioned above. A significant number of people who work part-time are employed in both discount stores and supermarkets. This kind of employment helps meet the companies’ demand for personnel, particularly during times of the year when there is a higher demand for retail services, such as on New Year’s Eve, special days, and holidays. As a result of claims made by industry representatives that this “will also be a solution to youth unemployment” and their demand for appropriate legal regulations for this kind of work, it is anticipated that flexible employment and hourly wage will become more prevalent in the sector. A sector representative, whose opinions are included in the report titled by TÜSİAD, the primary association for employers in Turkey, asserts that organized retail should be

²⁹ Sabah ekmek, gazete vesaire diziyoruz. Sevkiyat gelirse onu yapıyoruz... Boşken ürün de açıyoruz, mal da açıyoruz, mağazayı da topluyoruz, temizlik de yapıyoruz... Belli olmuyor ya, burada ne iş yaptığın belli değil. Müdür yoksa müdürün yerine mağaza da kapatıyorsun. Bilgisayar işlerini de yaptırıyor. Her gün ayrı bir tantana. (Zeynep)

supported in this regard, while also boasting that it is “the sector that offers the most employment opportunities for women and youth”:

Organized retail must be supported in the following areas: Flexible hours and part-time work. If part-time work were permitted in Turkey in the same manner as it is in other countries, the industry would be much more flexible and efficient. Policymakers are concerned that the employee's benefits or safety will be damaged if the working time divided by the hour. In contrast, the total cost is subtracted in this system and then divided into units. It does not lose any of its social rights when it is divided into units and paid on an hourly basis. The retail sector provides the most employment opportunities for women and youth, which is an essential social characteristic (TÜSİAD, 2021).

Current high unemployment rates in Turkey cause insecurity and fear of job loss among store workers. Workers who believe their employer “doesn’t need them” fear they could be fired anytime due to the abundance of jobseekers who could fill their positions. For example, Mehmet, who works in a supermarket’s e-commerce department, describes his fear as follows:

They don’t need me, so they can let me go and find someone else to fill in. They should anticipate at least twenty daily applications if they are seeking new employees. Daily, between twenty and thirty individuals submit their resumes here. They are aware that when they fire you, they will bring in various staff members to take your place.

Don’t you have any job security?

There are currently no guarantees available. They draft a contract for the first three months that states, “If we don’t like you, we’ll terminate your employment.” After three months, an additional three months are added to your contract. Three plus three, six-month trial period. This was not the case previously. (Mehmet)³⁰

According to Mehmet, the imposition of lengthy trial periods on employees appears to be an additional issue, especially during the pandemic when it is illegal to terminate workers. The trial periods, which according to the Labor Law, should not exceed two months, were applied in this pandemic era as “3 + 3 months” and even extended

³⁰ Bana muhtaç değiller, beni gönderebilirler ve yerime yeni personel alırlar. Şu anda bir personel alımı yapsalar, günde en az 20 kişi başvurabilir. Her gün başvuru gelir buraya, 20-30 kişi. Biliyor çünkü, seni gönderdiği zaman yerine her türlü eleman gelecek.

Herhangi bir güvencen yok mu?

Herhangi bir güvencemiz yok şu an. İlk üç ay sözleşmeli yaparlar, üç ay boyunca “seni beğenmezsek çıkarırız” derler. Üç ay bittikten sonra da bir üç ay daha eklerler sana. Üç artı üç, altı ay, deneme süresi. Önceden bu kadar değildi. (Mehmet)

periods. Therefore, the employer has the right to fire the employee at any time without warning, and the employees have no right to organize a union during this trial period.

In chain markets, job applications and recruitment are handled through various channels. In addition to company websites and in-person applications, direct application to the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) is the most common recruitment method. Almost everyone I spoke with got their job through İŞKUR. Regardless of how candidates apply, the company directs them to İŞKUR, and the hiring process is completed in this manner. When an employee is hired through the İŞKUR, the state pays the first three months' salary, and the employee is tax-exempt, reducing the employer's "financial burden."

The industry's employment structure makes it extremely difficult to consider working in the market a "profession" in any meaningful sense. Indeed, for a sizable proportion of the graduates I interviewed, the job on the market is not a "real job" or a "profession"; instead, it is a transitional period during which they will leave as soon as a better job becomes available. This is true for the vast majority of graduates. For example, Emre, a 23-year-old discount store employee, expresses this approach as follows:

Working in the market, in my opinion, does not qualify as a profession. You can see both our pay and our working conditions. I am considered young because of my age. It's possible that as you age, it'll become harder. After a certain period, people are unable to lift certain things. When the regional manager arrives, I'll be able to laugh at his jokes, but some of my seniors here are in their 30s. When the manager tells them the same joke, they don't find it funny at all. It's because of my age. (Emre)³¹

Emre believes that "being a market worker is not a profession" but attributes his presence here to his age and the fact that he is still "young." He emphasizes that the fact that he is still "young" allows him to handle the rigors of this job. When I asked Emre who would work in the job, he smiled and pointed to his profile, saying, "Those who are single and young. Just like me." These words of Emre explain why organized

³¹ Marketçilik, meslek değil benim gözümde. Aldığım ücret belli, çalıştığım şartlar belli... Şu anda gencim, yaşım küçük. İlerleyen yaşlarda daha da sorun olabilir. Belli bir yaştan sonra bazı şeyleri insan kaldırmıyor. Bölge sorumlusu geldiğinde ben yaptığı şakayı kaldırıyorum ama benim büyüklerim var burada 30-32 yaşlarında. Aynı şakayı ona yaptığında o kaldırmıyor. Yaşımdan kaynaklı. (Emre)

retail, whose representatives boast that their industry is “the industry with the highest proportion of youth and women employment,” employs such a high proportion of young people and women.

As they do not consider working in a chain store to be a “real job” or “a job for a university graduate,” they plan to leave the market as soon as possible. Almost all of my interviewees, with a few notable exceptions, report that they strongly consider quitting their ongoing job soon, or at the very least harboring secret hopes of doing so. In fact, according to Caner, the vast majority of recent graduates already hold temporary positions in this industry:

In this industry, the average length of time an employee works at our store is one year. Nobody works for more than a year or a half at a time. Who is employed? If he has a high school diploma, he must work because there are no jobs available for these people. If a man has achieved some level of success, such as becoming a store manager, he will work... This is the place where that person waits to be retired. There are such individuals I know. What will happen if this man leaves the market? If he leaves, he will simply enter another market, and the situation will remain unchanged. However, recent college graduates do not stay long because they seek better employment opportunities. The majority of them enter these markets in search of short-term work. (Caner)³²

However, recent graduates are not the only individuals who work in this industry without considering it a “real job”, which is the general trend. We have previously stated that staff mobility in this industry is relatively high. The President of the Turkish Retailers Foundation, Erol Düzgün, has also issued a statement expressing his displeasure with the situation:

The store staff's perception of employment as a profession has a direct correlation with the quality of employment. Many of our store employees in our country do not consider their position to be a profession and work in the store occasionally. Store employees prefer employment that allows them to take vacations on the same day as their family members. With a high turnover rate and low productivity, it is difficult for our industries to provide a good working environment (Mall & Motto, 2020).

³² Zaten ortalama, bu markette, yani ... için söyleyeyim, çalışma süresi bir sene. Kimse de bir seneden, bir buçuk olsun hadi, fazla çalışmaz. Kim çalışır? Lise mezunudur, ki zaten lisenin altında almıyorlar artık, yapabileceği bir iş yoktur; belli bir seviyeye gelmiştir, mağaza müdürü olmuştur... Bu adam artık buradan emekli olmak için durur. Var benim böyle tanıdıklarım. Bu adam ...'tan çıksa ne yapacak? ...'tan çıksa ...'e girecek, çok değişmeyecek. Ama üniversite mezunları çok durmuyor, daha iyi iş bulduğunda gidiyor. Geçici bir süreliğine giriyor zaten çoğu. (Caner)

3.3. Unionization and the Attitude of the Employees towards the Union

Unionization is a central subject of discussion in Turkey's store chains. This is because a substantial number of workers in the industry, which employs hundreds of thousands of people, are not unionized. Even though there have been a few attempts by unions to organize the employees of discount markets, which employ the most significant number of people in the industry, there is no authorized union in these stores. A Collective Bargaining Agreement (TİS) is negotiated between the employer and TEZ KOOP-İŞ affiliated TÜRK-İŞ at Carrefoursa and Migros, both of which are primarily supermarkets. Because union membership is a requirement for receiving TİS benefits, the fact that these two companies have an authorized union contributes to the relatively high union membership rate among their employees.

Almost all of my interviews were conducted with the assistance of an authorized labor organization in retail stores that already had a union organization. The union's Ankara and İstanbul offices contacted some of the union's members. During the interviews I conducted, I observed that the workers' relationships with their respective unions were not particularly strong, despite the fact that I had contacted unionized employees at stores in both cities. The participation of workers in labor union activities was meager. Most employees only interacted with the union to exercise the TİS-guaranteed rights. For example, the response I received when I asked Mehmet, whom I met through the authorized union in İstanbul, about his affiliation with the union was as follows:

I am a member of the union. You won't get a bonus every three months if you don't join the union. To get that, you have to be a union member. You must enter the union if you want any assistance, including fuel assistance. But we don't go to union meetings. A small number of union managers represent us. They participate in the discussion, make a decision with the managers, and then send it to us. (Mehmet)³³

I made a few observations regarding the union's role in the industry while conducting fieldwork. During meetings with workers in Ankara and İstanbul, I utilized the union as a mediator, as I said above. With the authorized labor union's representative, we

³³ Sendikaya üyeyim. Sonuçta sendikaya üye olmazsan üç ayda bir ikramiye alamazsın. Bunun için sendikaya üye olman lazım, zorunlu bir şey bu. Veya herhangi bir hak, yakacak hakkını almak istiyorsan sen sendikaya üye olacaksın. Ama biz sendika toplantılarına gitmiyoruz. Sendikanın yöneticileri var bir yerde, bizi temsil eden birkaç kişi. Bunlar kendileri katılıyor, kendileri konuşuyor, bir karar alıyorlar yöneticilerle falan, bize ulaştırıyorlar. (Mehmet)

visited two enormous stores. We spent a few hours together at one of these stores, located within a shopping mall. During our visit to a large store's warehouse, I observed the union representative's conversations with employees and managers. As we walked through the warehouse and store, the union representative discussed market working conditions, wages, and union rights with me. During my field research in İstanbul, the DGD-SEN strike for wage increases by Esenyurt Migros warehouse workers was still ongoing. The union representative brought up the topic of worker action during our visit to the stores. As a result of the workers' actions being carried out by a subcontractor company, "They are discrediting Migros," said the representative. "The three to five people working there are not even Migros employees." This is what he exactly stated. In addition, I was close enough to hear what they were saying to each other. The union official continued to use offensive language despite this. It struck me as odd at the time, but I lacked time to discuss it with the representative.

Except for workers like Meral and Havva, who are actively involved in a political movement, there is hardly any opposition to the authorized union among the employees. It is impossible for employees to feel they belong to the union because their relationship with the labor union is limited to financial rights, and they do not actively participate in union activities. As stated previously, this prevents employees from developing a sense of union membership. When the union fails to exert sufficient effort in this regard, there will be no active union activity for the workers. However, some showed opposition to the labor union during the interviews, even though I reached them via the union. Utku, as an example, is one of the individuals who refer to his union as a "yellow union":

There is a union, but it is known as the Yellow Union; have you heard of it? Our unions are predominantly yellow. If the staff made a mistake, such as using the customer's point, this is already a crime. It is treated as if it were theft. The disciplinary committee and the union both visit the store. Managers arrive. They listen to that person who is in charge. They listen to the union representative as well. After the meeting, they board the union district manager's car and depart. I mean, this is the yellow union, a union on the side of the employer. It's not a worker's union, you understand? It's not on the workers' side, and it's not a DİSK. Or not a Metal-İş. It is not a union that is on the worker's side. That is my personal view. So, for example, there is a

Facebook group for the union. If you criticize the union there, you will be kicked out of that group right away. (Utku)³⁴

The high mobility of personnel in the sector contributes significantly to the weak ties between chain store employees, the union, and the powerful union bureaucracy. Because temporary work is so prevalent in this industry, employees cannot form solid organizational ties with their workplace and, as a result, with the union.

However, in discount markets where there is no authorized union, employee attitudes toward unionization are significantly more complex. According to Turkish trade union organization law, one percent of the relevant industry's workers and more than half of the company's workers must be union members for a union to be recognized. It is exceedingly difficult for any union to organize and gain authority in these stores, given that each chain employs tens of thousands of individuals across 81 provinces and every neighborhood in Turkey. Because they are so geographically dispersed, it is nearly impossible for a union to gain authorization and grant access. A union that wishes to organize in these stores must be able to employ thousands of professional organizers, which is nearly impossible in Turkey. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the fact that personnel mobility is very high in these markets, the employee profile is very young, and it is possible to quit at any time makes things even more challenging for unions. In spite of the fact that independent unions such as Mağaza Market-Sen, Bağımsız Emek Sendikası, Birlik-Sen, and Sosyal-İş are attempting to organize in these stores, their influence is limited.

3.4. Concluding Remarks

Based on the discussion above, it can be said that the retail sector in general, and store chains in particular, is one of the sectors where insecure and flexible working is the most common. One of the major issues is the lack of personnel in most chain stores,

³⁴ Sendika var ama sarı sendika diyorlar, bilmiyorum duydun mu hiç? Bizim sendikalar daha çok sarı sendika. Nasıl diyeyim sana, örnek veriyorum, personel bir hata yapmıştır, müşteri tarafında bir puan kullanmıştır personel. Bu suçtur zaten. Hırsızlık gibi muamele görür. Disiplin kurulu gelir, işte sendika gelir. Müdürler gelir. Onu dinlerler. Sendikayı dinlerler. Toplantı bittikten sonra sendika bölge müdürünün arabasına biner giderler. Demek istediğim sana, sarı sendika, yani işveren tarafındaki bir sendika bu. Uzman bir sendika değil, hani böyle işçi tarafında değil, bir DİSK değil yani anladın mı? Ya da bir Metal-İş değil. İşçinin yanında olan bir sendika değil. Benim şahsi görüşüm o. Yani mesela, internet gruplarından falan, Facebook'tan falan şey grubu var, sendikanın grubu var. Eğer sendikayı oradan eleştirirsen o gruptan hemen atarlar seni. (Utku)

particularly discount stores. Working longer hours is the most serious consequences of a labor shortage. Due to a lack of personnel, employees must work overtime almost every day of the week. In addition to long working hours, working with an inadequate number of employees causes an increase in the employees' workload. Employees in discount stores with no specific job description must do all the work and work longer than they should.

In the interviews, it was seen that university graduates working in chain stores do define their job as a temporary, and do not perceive it as a "real job." It is a widespread perception of the employees in the sector, as can be seen from the statements of the sector representatives, that the workers working in chain stores do not regard their work as a "profession." However, university graduate employees who distinct themselves from other employees through their educational capital often emphasize the temporary nature of this job for them.

The vast majority of workers in large chain stores (supermarkets) where collective bargaining agreements are negotiated are union members. However, a significant relationship between the union and the workers cannot be established. Even though I have met the majority of the employees in these stores through the union, the fact that few of them are aware of the union and its union rights is evidence of this. Contrarily, there are relatively few unionized workers in discount stores. In the interviews conducted as part of this study, none of the employees working in these stores stated to be union members. Almost all of them, in a variety of ways, expressed their concern that they would be fired if they joined a union. The fact that university graduate market chain employees do not perceive this job as a long-term position and have a perception that they are employed for a temporary period also prevents them from actively engaging in union activities. Although this is not indicated in almost any of the interviews, it would not be incorrect to say that the employees' poor relationship with their workplaces prevents them from forming strong union ties. As we will see in the context of political affiliation, the attitudes of university graduate market employees toward collective action are characterized by apathy. The attitude towards the union also displays a similar disposition.

CHAPTER 4

UN(DER)EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF THE UNIVERSITY GRADUATES WORKING IN CHAIN STORES

In this chapter, the un(der)employment experiences of university graduates working in chain stores will be discussed under five main categories. The first of these will be employees' encounters within the stores. The primary reason focusing on this is that these encounters reveal to a large extent the working relations in chain stores, which are part of the interactive service sector. Relationships between and among the "manager-customer-worker" trio, also known as the service triangle, constitute the central axis of employment relations in this context. Due to the inability to collect sufficient data on the relationships between employees, this study will only focus on the relationships between employees and their managers and customers. To that end, in every interaction, both the store workers' experience as workers and their perspectives as university graduates will be highlighted. In other words, the focus will be on how university graduates experience their current working relationships through their diplomas in the context of their encounters.

Secondly, the un(der)employment experiences of employees based on their political affiliations and attitudes toward collective action will be analyzed. As discussed in chapter two, given that neoliberalism destroys all collective structures and identities in favor of individual interests and disorganization, both unemployment and precarity are, among other things, characterized by a lack of collective will to act. Under conditions of subjective insecurity resulting from objective insecurity, workers distance themselves from collective action. From this perspective, it will be discussed to what extent the political identity and attitudes toward collective action of university

graduate chain store employees who have a job but do not consider it as a “real job” and are rebuked to precarious working conditions reflect their situation. In this regard, I will also emphasize the distinctive aspects of the educational capital of the employees in focus.

As has been emphasized since the beginning, one of the most important characteristics of university graduates working in chains is the disparity between their expectations and their actual lives. In this context, thirdly, I will discuss how they perceive this disparity; how they make sense of their current circumstances; and how they plan for their future. In this respect, I will investigate how the aforementioned “collective disillusionment” affects university graduate store employees. The search for a “good job” by university graduate market employees is an additional topic related to the third one that I will discuss here. This discussion can be said to have two types of significance. The first is to expose the expectations of a good job among university graduates seeking professional careers. On the other hand, secondly, the search for a good job by university graduates who work in chain stores also points to another experience when it is seen as what they cannot find in their current job.

Lastly, under this title, I will examine the family relations of chain store employees and their pursuit of independence. As discussed previously, having a job is an important part of the transition into adulthood. This is the reason why unemployment is treated as a postponement of adulthood, and it is emphasized that youth unemployment deprives them of certain adult characteristics, in the literature on youth transition. The most important of these is that individuals are not dependent on anyone, including their own family members, and are able to live independently. On the other hand, it can be argued that this debate about the unemployed can be applied to young people who work in chain stores, as it does to a large number of jobs with low wages and insecure conditions. In this regard, in this final subsection, which focuses on the relationships between employees and their families, I will discuss how they perceive the independence that their jobs cannot provide.

However, before discussing the experiences of university graduate chain store employees from these different dimensions, a linguistic discussion of the interviews

will be conducted. While this may seem like a methodological discussion, it should be considered mainly as a discussion of the way interviewees express their class identities, which we discussed in Chapter 2. This discussion of language can also be read as a reflection in language of the disparity between the expectations of the interviewees and their reality mentioned above. In this respect, the “troubled language” (Erdoğan, 2017), which can be thought of as unique to white-collar workers, will also be discussed before the section in which the experiences of the employees will be examined, since it has an aspect that cuts horizontally through all the interviews.

4.1. Talking to the “White-Collar” Un(der)employed: “Class Language” of the Graduate Chain Store Workers

As discussed in Chapter 2, although the division of mental/manual labor corresponds to a division within the capitalist production process, it finds expression in everyday relations. According to Poulantzas, the mental laborer, who is characterized by having a type of “secrecy of knowledge,” distinguishes themselves from manual labor or the working class by learning to write in a certain way, speak in a certain way, or having their own ways of knowing (1978, p. 258). On the other hand, Bourdieu (1991, p. 64) argues that agents’ linguistic strategies are inextricably linked to their position in the structure of linguistic capital distribution; this can be said to depend on the structure of class relations via the structure of access to the education system. In this regard, it is reasonable to assume that, like other dimensions of cultural capital, linguistic competence as measured by academic criteria is related to the level of education and thus educational capital, and therefore has a “class” character:

Knowing that ‘manner’ is a symbolic manifestation whose meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the producer, one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of ‘class’ and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction, that is, as Proust put it, ‘the infinitely varied art of marking distances’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 66).

Based on this, I will argue in the following section that the un(der)employment narratives of graduate chain store workers constitute a “class language,” and that this language is a “coping mechanism” and a strategy for distinguishing graduate chain store employees from other employees.

One of the most challenging aspects of the interviews I conducted was collecting “opinions” rather than merely subjective responses to my questions. Most interviewees preferred to explain themselves from the perspective of the researcher (me) rather than the interviewee (themselves). They avoided describing how their circumstances affected them. Put another way, the person talking to me was what I would call a “knowing subject”: if the condition requires analysis, this person will examine it on their own behalf. Respondents often chose to “explain” rather than “tell” me about their issues in my interviews. This preference proves that the interviewees are part of a linguistic habitus developed due to their formal education. So much so that, in most cases, when people answer my questions, they do so by depersonalizing the narrative and objectifying their own position as if they were not the subject of the conversation. Necmi Erdoğan (2017), who employs a similar approach to analyze the narratives of white-collar unemployed individuals, states:

This differentiation between the speaking subject and the subject of the narrative comes into play, especially in “sensitive” contexts, such as those in which feelings about unemployment are expressed or in which it is thought that judgment can be made about the perpetrator of the actions or decisions mentioned in the narrative, which is to say in contexts in which the speaking subject’s self is likely to be “on the table” (p. 82).

We can say that this “sensitive” context, which Erdoğan defines as “the context in which feelings about unemployment are expressed,” corresponds to the affective moments that remind graduate chain store workers of the significant gap between their current position and the potential they have. Savaş, who had worked as a civil engineer in the past but is now employed in a discount store after experiencing a period of unemployment, shared his thoughts on the matter during our conversation:

I mean, *I tried* and made a lot of effort. *I wanted* to learn more about my field, earn a master’s degree, and advance my career. I dedicated seven years of my life to undergraduate education. I worked in the market after that. It’s a difficult situation. This isn’t just a case of not being rewarded for their efforts; it’s not like you’re a university graduate giving orders to a high school graduate, which I also passed. *You had a dream, you had a hope*, but it did not come true for a variety of reasons. It makes *people* feel awful. (Savaş)³⁵

³⁵ Yani baya bir çaba sarf ettim, uğraşım. Kendi alanımla ilgili daha çok bilgi öğrenmek, yüksek lisans yapıp yükselmek istedim. 7 yılımı verdim lisans eğitimi için. Sonrasında olmadı, markette çalıştım. Gurur kırıcı bir durum oluyor. Sadece emeklerinin karşılığını alamamak gibi bir durum değil bu;

As seen in the passage just presented, Savaş begins his statement by referring to himself in the first person singular, as if he were speaking on his own behalf. However, when he begins to discuss the affective aspect of his work experience, he abruptly shifts to the second person pronoun. The speaker avoids confronting the feelings that the situation he is in is causing him by shifting the focus of the sentence away from himself. In doing so, he objectifies his emotions along with himself to deal with a feeling that he perceives as “insulting” to him. A comparable illustration can be found in Hande’s expressions after she decided to “give up” and go back to work following a period of unemployment that lasted for two years:

I felt overwhelmed, and it was very heartbreaking. People beat themselves up to the point where I believe they should see a psychologist. Self-confidence grows, you stay at home all the time, don't want to go out, or see your friends. In short, you can't leave your house. (Her eyes start to well up with tears.) (Hande)³⁶

In this dialogue, Hande also begins to speak in the first-person singular, speaking on her behalf. However, when it comes to her “self-confidence” and “psychological problems,” she also abruptly switches to the second person pronoun, and the conversation moves into an abstract setting. Hande, not I, is depressed enough to see a psychologist, lacks confidence, and does not really want to leave the house in this narrative. However, she employs the second person singular pronoun because she is attempting to cope with these thoughts and emotions by objectifying her own experiences. In point of fact, Hande frequently shows signs of hesitation and worry at this point in the conversation. When she finally speaks, her eyes start to well up with tears. Caner, when discussing the “depressed” process he went through during the period of joblessness and the injustices he experienced, also prefers to distance the subject of the sentence from himself by using a similar linguistic strategy:

You are a university graduate looking for a better job, but none are available. My university was not a good one, but if you are not a graduate of a high-quality university and your field of study is not very good, you will be unable

üniversite okuyup, lise mezunundan emir almak da değil, onu da geçtim hadi. Bir *umudun* var, bir şeyler *hayal etmişsin* ama çeşitli sebeplerden ötürü olmamış. Çok kötü bir duyguya getiriyor bu *insanı*. (Savaş)

³⁶ Bunaldım, çok bunaltıcı oldu... Yani, düşünüyorum, psikoloğa gidecek kadar *insan* kendini şey yapıyor... Özgüvensizlik oluşuyor, sürekli *evdesin*, dışarı çıkmak *istemiyorsun*, arkadaşlarıyla görüşmek *istemiyorsun*... Kısacası eve tıklıp *kalıyorsunuz*. (Burada gözleri doluyor.) (Hande)

to find work. You are wholly burned out if you don't have someone to refer you and guide you. If you are not an extremely successful person, I mean if you cannot take KPSS and get a score of 90-95, *you are not successful*, in my opinion. A job can be found for those who score in the 75-85 range or higher, depending on their luck or the strength of their network. But if you don't work hard enough to get over 90, *you lose hope*. (Caner)³⁷

The following statements by Caner about his managers can also be considered in the same context:

Taking orders from trashy people, whether they're university graduates or not, is always difficult for me. *You observe* the qualifications of the man in front of you; he is *your supervisor, your manager*; I don't care how he got promoted; but *you know* that this man is worthless. You are better compared, or *you recognize* that he does not deserve to be in that position. It will be difficult *for you* if he scolds you. (Caner)³⁸

Caner, who feels that his managers are “not good enough,” has stated that taking orders from such people makes him uneasy. On the other hand, he expresses his feelings by saying that “*You are aware* that these individuals do not have the right to be in this position. Should he say anything, it will make things difficult *for you*.” instead of saying “*I am uncomfortable with this, I think they don't deserve to be there, and it is difficult for me*.” These expressions, typical of moving the subject of the sentence away from himself, also include the kind of analysis I mentioned earlier in the sentence. In this account, the speaker is not “*Caner, who received his degree in economics department from a four-year university, and is working in a store,*” but rather “*a university graduate who works in a store.*” He conveys his own feelings and thoughts by saying things like, “everyone in my situation already thinks and feels like this.” In this respect, the “class language” of graduate workers at chain stores functioned for another purpose, namely, as a “coping mechanism.”

³⁷ Üniversite mezunusun, insan daha iyi bir iş istiyor ama öyle bir iş yok. Çok kaliteli bir üniversiteden mezun değilsen, hatta kaliteli üniversiteyi geçtim, bölümün de çok iyi değilse iş bulamıyorsun. Sana referans olacak, yönlendirecek birileri de yoksa tamamen yandın. Öyle aşırı çok başarılı biri değilsen, zaten... Başarıdan kastım, KPSS'ye girip 90-95 üstü alamıyorsan, başarılı değilsin benim gözümde. O 75-85 alanlar da işte tanıdık falan, ya da şanslı yaver giderse, bir şekilde giriyor; ama 90 üstü alacak kadar çalışkan, başarılı değilsen yitiriyorsun umudunu. (Caner)

³⁸ Benim her zaman zoruma giden şeydir, üniversite mezunu olup olmamasından da ziyade beş para etmez insanlardan emir almak benim çok zoruma gider. Karşıdaki adamın vafına bakıyorsun, senin amirindir, müdüründür, nasıl yükseldiği beni ilgilendirmez ama bilirsin, o adam beş para etmez. Sen daha iyisindir ya da onun o konumda olmayı hak etmeyeceğini bilirsin. Gelip sana laf söylemesi, senin zoruna gider. (Caner)

While expressing her dissatisfaction with the circumstance, Sevil, much like Caner, prefers to depersonalize the conversation and make herself an object. For instance, the following is how she responds when I ask if her salary is adequate:

Is there a better opportunity elsewhere? At some point, *we reach* this mentality. *We all say, "We will work for a while, then we will leave."* But, no! *We are unable* to cope with the current state of affairs in our country. *We ask ourselves, "What can we do?"* (Sevil)³⁹

When Sevil said, “We all say we will work for a while, then we will leave,” rather than, “I thought I would work for a while, then I would leave,” she was speaking on behalf of all university graduate chain store workers. Instead of expressing how she feels about her condition, she much prefers to “analyze” it.

These kinds of analyses seemed to appear much more evident to the extent that the “expertise” of the person intersected with the researcher’s interests in the topic. For instance, Onur, who holds a bachelor’s degree in Labor Economics, responds to a question I directly posed to him by providing what he calls a “sectoral analysis.” The following is his answer:

The fact that university graduates or people preparing for university prefer to work in the market is most likely due to the fact that markets have more job opportunities. The job here can be learned in a shorter period of time. A quick hiring process. Especially with these other chain markets, whether it’s A101, BİM or ŞOK, there can be 2-3 stores next to each other even on the same street. These also create an employment bubble. People are only here for three or four months. This reduce unemployment statistically, but they are only short-term workers. There is a financial concern regarding saving the day. (Onur)⁴⁰

Like Onur, Caner, who has an economics degree, analyzes the circumstances before answering a question about himself. A discussion he “reads somewhere” inspires him to begin exploring the pressure he is under from his managers:

³⁹ Başka yerde daha iyi bir şart mı var? Bu kafa yapısına *erişiyoruz* bir saatten sonra. Gिरerken *hepimiz* “Çalışırız, sonra çıkarız gideriz.” Ama yok yani! Ülkenin *bizi* getirdiği durum çok umutsuzluğa itiyor. “Ne yapabiliriz ki?” *diyoruz*. (Sevil)

⁴⁰ Üniversite mezunlarının veya üniversiteye hazırlanan insanların markete yönelmelerinin sebebi de marketlerin daha kolay iş almasından kaynaklanıyor olsa gerek. Daha kısa sürede öğrenilebiliyor. Hızlı işçi alımı oluyor. Özellikle bu diğer zincir marketler, A101 olsun, BİM olsun, ŞOK olsun, aynı cadde üzerinde bile yan yana 2-3 dükkan olabiliyor. Bunlar da bir balon istihdam oluşturuyor. Burada geçici süreli insanlar çalışıyor, 3 ay, 4 ay. İstatistiksel olarak işsizliği düşürüyor bunlar ama kısa süreli çalışmaları. Günü kurtarma anlamında bir ekonomik kaygı söz konusu. (Onur)

They complain about the thing. For instance, I read the following somewhere, but I cannot recall where: If a manager is irritated by his employees' beards and type of clothing, he has an insufficiency that he attempts to conceal by interfering with others. Once, a regional manager approached and inquired, "Why do you have a beard?" Then I asked, "Is my beard the only thing that remains? Do your duty first. The cashbox of this store is broken, but you do not come to fix it; the ceiling is leaking, and every day I must fill the tank with water, but you do not come to fix it; I'm closing the store by myself, and I can't get my balance... I intend to sue you." Numerous things! (Caner)⁴¹

These observations about graduate chain store workers' language are worth considering regarding the emotional and symbolic violence of working in a job that does not match their qualifications (but, more importantly, a job that *they* do not believe is worthy of them) is articulated. Such a linguistic discussion should undoubtedly be considered by a study focusing on people with relatively high educational capital. A researcher should be aware of such strategies in the interviewees' language because the tendency of depersonalization, externalization, and abstraction in these narratives demonstrates self-esteem, depression, future anxiety, mental abuse, and so on. As Necmi Erdoğan puts it, "such an analysis must first and foremost be an analysis of resistance to be analyzed" (2017, p. 89).⁴²

4.2. Un(der)employment experience of the graduate workers at store chains

Although graduate workers of chain stores differentiate themselves from other employees through their educational capital, while attempting to escape the symbolic violence of unemployment, they are entrapped in the symbolic violence of working in a position they do not consider genuinely worthy. In various ways, numerous interviewees express their discomfort with working in jobs that do not match their qualifications. They believe there is a substantial disparity between their credentials

⁴¹ Şeye takıyorlar... Mesela, bunu bir yerde okumuştum da ben, nerde okuduğumu hatırlamıyorum: Bir yönetici, bir insanın sakalına ve kıyafetine takıyorsa, mutlaka kendinde eksik vardır, kapatmak için altındaki insanların sakalına ve kıyafetine karışır. Geldi, "niye sakalın uzun?" [diye sordu.] Ben de dedim "her şey bitti, bir tek benim sakalım mı kaldı? İlk önce üzerinize düşeni halledin. Bu mağazanın kasası bozuk, yapmaya gelmiyorsunuz; tavanı akıtıyor, her gün su çekiyorum depodan, yapmaya gelmiyorsunuz; mağazayı tek kapatıyorum, denkleştirmemi alamıyorum... Sizi şikâyet edeceğim." Bir dünya atıştık. (Caner)

⁴² The observations here can be criticized in that the interviews conducted within the scope of the study are limited to university graduates only and therefore need comparison. Although there is no extensive discussion in the relevant literature regarding the linguistic strategies of people with different class identities, for a comparison on this subject see (Erdoğan, 2002; Erdoğan, 2017).

and their work. As we shall see, this places them between “glad to have a job at all” and “ashamed of their job.”

4.2.1. Encounters

Unlike unemployment, the experience I refer to in this context is experienced in the workplace (in our example, the chain store) through relationships, encounters, and attitudes toward the work itself. Because, in contrast to those who are “unemployed,” graduates who work in chain stores are “technically” employed. In this regard, it can be said that, while the experience of university graduate chain store employees is similar in some ways to that of all store chain employees, there are also distinguishing characteristics since they are university graduates. In the following section, I will first discuss this topic concerning interactions with managers.

4.2.1.1. Encounters with the Managers

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most important factors regulating the encounters/relationships in the store is the different dominant operational formats implemented by the chains and the network these formats create. In discount stores and “mini” stores of other chains, where “small store” and “as few employees as possible” are essential, relationships with “managers” and other employees may inevitably take on a more casual tone. However, depending on the location, the number of employees in super/hyper stores can reach hundreds. As the size of the store grows, the relationships become more formal and divergent. In small stores with an average of three to four employees, the hierarchical structure is just a word, with one employee referred to as “store manager,” another as “assistant store manager,” and the remaining employees as “staff” (see Chapter 2 for details). In stores where “everyone does everything,” store managers frequently delegate duties and responsibilities to other employees. In contrast, the role of store managers in relatively large stores, where there are many more employees and a more significant division of labor, is distinct from that of store managers in smaller stores. Not only is the store’s size a substantial determinant of how frequently you will encounter the manager, but it also results in a downward distribution of authority within the store. When managing a large store, a hierarchical structure with separate cashiers and a separate chief/manager of the line

staff is implemented. To “manage” the employees more effectively, hierarchical relationships, authority, and responsibilities are distributed from top to bottom.

Jobs in the interactive service industry are distinct due to the nature of the interactions between employees and customers, and the efforts made by employers to control these interactions. This makes them especially worthy of consideration. Arlie Hochschild’s (1983) theory of emotional labor places a primary emphasis on interactions of this kind, particularly those in the service industry. According to Hochschild’s classic work, employers utilize “organizational feeling rules” to control both their employees’ internal emotions and their outward appearance. It makes it harder for workers to answer fundamental questions about who they are and how they feel. This in turn creates new forms of exploitation (Lopez, 2006, p. 135).

Although the cash register is the location in the stores with the highest frequency of such “organizational feeling rules,” similar rules can be imposed on employees working in other parts of the store, such as the butcher, the greengrocer, and other departments where customer contact is relatively infrequent. Instructions such as sales pressure for “cash-front products” (Zeynep), marketing products to the customer that are unlikely to be sold in the grocery section (Emre), showing a smiling face to the customer (Savaş), and not engaging in an argument with anyone in accordance with the “customer is always right” principle (Havva). These are all the managers’ efforts to regulate employee-customer relations and often has an “emotive” side. For employees of small stores where their duties are unclear and who are expected both to the cash register, organize the aisles, and unload shipments, such encounters are an additional “emotional burden” in the midst of their current workload. Because he is “not a talkative person,” Savaş, who works in such a small store, describes his desperation in the face of sales pressure from managers:

To be honest, I’m not qualified so much to sell something in a close contact. And also, I’m not pertinent to establish a face-to-face dialogue with a customer to push them in order to sell something. I cannot get in touch with customers too much in order to push them. I’m not a chatty person or a fast talker. Because of such things, I had difficulties. Especially when they asked me to sell in this way and in the case that I had no such talents, I had a rough time and we disputed. It was not a violent discussion, they didn’t tell me ‘If you cannot sell, we’ll kick you out’ but the district representative came and talked with me

every other day and warned me by telling ‘Make more effort, behave in a friendly manner to customers, push a little hard, propose them a product, ask them ‘Do you want to buy this or that?’ or if you cannot do none of them, just ask them ‘Do you want to buy nylon bag?’. They were not quarrels, but I always warned by the district representative who is the top of the store manager due to my lack of such skills. (Savaş)⁴³

As will be discussed in greater detail in the section on customer encounters, the cash register is the place where customers express their discomfort during shopping; it is a breaking point and resembles a “therapy session for the customer” (Havva). The instruction to “smile” that Savaş’s manager gave him is often a source of torment for cashiers, as it requires them to “pretend” throughout the workday. The following lines, written jokingly by a worker in the workers’ Barkod Magazine, are a good expression of this idea: “We play the role of a good cashier with a smile, and we should even win an Oscar” (Barkod Dergisi, 2021, p. 6). Savaş’s words demonstrate that this type of “organizational feeling rules,” which also aims to discipline employees, aims to regulate not only the internal world of workers, but also their external appearance. Utilizing “organizational feeling rules” can be viewed as achieving this objective. Caner, who also works in a discount store, recalls an argument he had with the regional manager regarding the latter's light beard:

They’re all about... For example, -I read it somewhere but I cannot remember where I read it- if a manager picks away at the beard or appearance of an employee, it is definitely related to a lack of himself and in order to suppress it, he meddles in the beard or appearance of his juniors. He came and asked me, ‘Why your beard is that long?’ I said, ‘everything is okay and is only problem the length of my beard?’ At first, do your part. The checkout counter of this store is broken, and you don’t come to repair it. Additionally, the ceiling of this store is leaking, I draw water every day, and you don’t come to fix it, I

⁴³ Açıkçası benim sıcak satış yeteneğim falan pek yok. Müşteriyle bire bir diyalog kurup bir şeyleri satmaya zorlama gibi şeyim de çok yok. Çok fazla öyle müşterilerle ilişki kurup bir şeyleri satmaya zorlayamam. Çok konuşkan biri değilim, ağzı laf yapan birisi değilim. Onlardan dolayı biraz ben de sıkıntı yaşadım. Özellikle onlar bu şekilde satış yapmamı isterken, bende bu tip beceriler yokken, baya bir sıkıntı yaşadım; tartışmalarımız oldu. Çok şiddetli bir tartışma, “seni işten çıkarırım satamazsan” gibi bir şey değildi ama iki güne bir bölge sorumlusu gelip benimle konuşuyordu. “Biraz daha uğraş, müşteriye güler yüz göster, çaba sarf et, herhangi bir şey öner, ‘şunu alır mısın, bunu alır mısın’ de, hiçbir şey yapamıyorsan ‘poşet alır mısın?’ diye sor” diye sürekli uyarılar aldım. Tartışma sayılmaz ama sürekli mağaza sorumlusunun da üstünde olan bölge sorumlusundan böyle uyarılar aldım, bu tip becerilerimin olmamasından dolayı. (Savaş)

put up the shutters alone and also, I cannot take the money I should receive. I'll report you.' We squabbled a lot. (Caner)⁴⁴

In addition to these pressures to which nearly all market workers are subjected, graduate chain store workers are also subjected to this process through their diplomas. In many instances, the fact that they have a higher level of education than their store managers can be perceived as an uncomfortable situation, leading to insults and the perception that they are unsuccessful. For example, Esra describes being humiliated and insulted by her store manager "because she was a university graduate":

Our former manager was reviling at us implicitly through needling whenever he wants. He was needling us implicitly by saying "You had rather not do it if you do it in this way, if you don't do your job properly, don't work then", etc. When he found a mistake, he was immediately saying, "Leave it, okay, don't do it again, don't touch that", etc. His wording was... He couldn't choose the rights phrases. I had another university graduate friend that work in the store, the manager took a dig at us by saying, "You are a university graduate, and you perform this job in this way, you're supposedly university graduates."

What's his degree about?

He's not educated. Because of this, he didn't want us to have education. He thinks in the way that 'What will the education supposed to do? Never mind, find a rich husband', etc. Still when he saw me, he says, "Never mind, don't mess around with poor people, what will you do after you'd education, find a rich husband." I said, "Well, I'll ask you when I come there after being a nurse." (Esra)⁴⁵

Managers remind university graduates of their diplomas in a variety of ways. It does not matter if they are unable to do something or if they perform exceptionally well;

⁴⁴ Şeye takıyorlar... Mesela, bunu bir yerde okumuştum da ben, nerde okuduğumu hatırlamıyorum: Bir yönetici, bir insanın sakalına ve kıyafetine takıyorsa, mutlaka kendinde eksik vardır, kapatmak için altındaki insanların sakalına ve kıyafetine karışır. Geldi, "niye sakalın uzun?" [diye sordu.] Ben de dedim "her şey bitti, bir tek benim sakalım mı kaldı? İlk önce üzerinize düşeni halledin. Bu mağazanın kasası bozuk, yapmaya gelmiyorsunuz; tavanı akıtıyor, her gün su çekiyorum depodan, yapmaya gelmiyorsunuz; mağazayı tek kapatıyorum, denkleştirmemi alamıyorum... Sizi şikâyet edeceğim." Bir dünya atıştık. (Caner)

⁴⁵ İstedığı zaman bize laf sokarak hakaret ediyordu (eski müdürümüz) alttan alta. "Böyle yaparsanız hiç çalışmayın, işini yapmayan yapmasın" gibi alttan alta laf sokuyordu. Bir şeyi yanlış gördüğü zaman direkt "bırak onu, tamam, bir daha yapma, eline alma onu" diyordu. Biraz üslup şeyi vardı, kelimelerini tam seçemiyordu. Üniversite mezunu olarak çalışan bir arkadaşım daha vardı, "Üniversite mezununuz da bu işi de böyle mi yapıyorsunuz, güya üniversite okudunuz" diye imada bulunuyordu bize.

Kendisi ne okumuş?

Kendisi okumamış. Okumadığı için de bizim de okumamızı istemiyordu hatta, "okuyup ne yaparsanız, boş verin, zengin koca bulun" kafasında olan bir insan. Hâlâ beni gördüğünde der yani "boş ver, fakirlerle uğraşma, okuyup ne yapacaksın, zengin koca bul" diye. Ben de dedim "okuyup hemşire olup geldiğimde görüşeceğiz." (Esra)

either way, word will get to their credential. For example, in the above example, Esra and her friend's diplomas came to light because they were "incompetent" at work. Simge, who graduated from METU's City and Regional Planning Department but chose to work in the store for a while because she did not want to run her own business, reminded her of her "capabilities." It is anticipated that:

Because I'm an METU graduate, people ask "you're a METU graduate, what are you doing in there?" even in the store. A METU graduate can work in a store, I don't see why not. Maybe s/he has different expectations from life. For example, I'm an example of this. The other day the store manager asked me "Did you settle down in the store?" I said, "Yes, I did." He said, "Do not settle down in, what are you doing here?" He was about to say, "Get out of here." As if I'm going to work in there forever! (Simge).⁴⁶

A diploma promises its holder not only a good job and financial security, but also respectability. A university graduate anticipates society's respect as a result of the acquired knowledge and abilities. While waiting for a comfortable life by working in a white-collar job and establishing a reputation in this manner, graduates working in a chain store object to this "unjustice" situation in their interactions with their managers because a large proportion of market sector managers are high school graduates who have been promoted here for many years due to their work. As Caner put it, "a diploma means nothing here":

No one, even the unit head does not get there through his degree. How do they get there? Some of them appeal to servility -I skip this over, it's widely used-some of them step up through his/her success, by establishing himself/herself and working a lot. But the degree definitely isn't in force in the store. (Caner)⁴⁷

Graduates who believe that their rights have been violated due to situations such as incompetence (Onur), nepotism (Caner), and favoritism (Sevil) during the job search process, and who must therefore work in the market, "have a hard time" when they experience similar incompetence in the store where they are employed:

⁴⁶ ODTÜ mezunuyum ya, beni markette bile şey yapıyorlar. "Ya sen ODTÜ mezunusun, burada ne işin var" gibi. ODTÜ mezunları da markette çalışabilir, niye olmasın. Hayattan beklentileri farklıdır, mesela ben. Geçen müdürüm "mağazaya alıştın mı?" dedi, "alıştım" dedim. "Alışma," dedi "senin burada işin yok." "Bırak git" demediği kaldı adamın bir tek. Ben de sonsuza kadar burada kalmayacağım ki zaten! (Simge)

⁴⁷ Şube müdürüne kadar hiç kimse öyle diplomasıyla bu yerlere gelmiş insanlar değil. Nasıl gelmişler? Kimisi yalakalık—onu es geçiyorum, o her yerde şey yapıyor—kimisi de başarısıyla, kendini ispatlaya ispatlaya, çok çalışa çalışa yükselmiş. Ama kesinlikle diplomanın bir hükmü yok markette. (Caner)

The thing that causes me to feel offended is to receive order from worthless people, independently of whether they're a university graduate or not. You see about the quality of the person, s/he is your director or manager, it's not my concern how s/he came into there, but you know that s/he's a worthless person. You're better or you know that s/he doesn't deserve to occupy this position. It offends you when he needles you. (Caner)⁴⁸

In conclusion, it is possible to assert that one of the primary axes constituting the un(der)employment experiences of graduate chain store employees is their interactions with store managers while working there. In addition, graduates who can differentiate themselves from other market workers, even to a limited extent, through their education frequently feel helpless in the presence of their managers, the majority of whom have a lower level of education than the graduates.

4.2.1.2. Encounters with Customers

In the service industry, relationships are not limited to the employer-employee relationship. In contrast to agriculture and industry, the customer is an active part of the relationship network in the service sector, which is one of the primary factors distinguishing it from other sectors, along with the employer-employee relationship that is at the heart of the business relationship. This sector does not produce equipment; instead, its employees facilitate the delivery of previously manufactured goods to customers. Interactive service workers do not produce tangible goods, rather, they trade in aesthetics and emotions—they sell attitude, personality, and voice or traits. In this regard, the service provided transcends mere economic activity, as employees' emotions, thoughts, personalities, and physical existence are constantly put to the test. In fact, this cannot simply be reduced to service workers since, as Harvey put it, "individuals enter the labor market as persons of character" (2005, p. 167). However, unlike other workers, workers in the interactive service sector must interact with both customers and employers, and these interactions constitute the majority of their jobs.

⁴⁸ Benim her zaman zoruma giden şeydir, üniversite mezunu olup olmamasından da ziyade beş para etmez insanlardan emir almak benim çok zoruma gider. Karşıdaki adamın vasfına bakıyorsun, senin amirindir, müdüründür, nasıl yükseldiği beni ilgilendirmez ama bilirsin, o adam beş para etmez. Sen daha iyisindir ya da onun o konumda olmayı hak etmeyeceğini bilirsin. Gelip sana laf söylemesi, senin zoruna gider. (Caner)

I will discuss the un(der)employment experiences of graduate market workers along the axis of their customer interactions in the following section.

Occasionally denigrated, humiliated, insulted, ignored, offended, harassed, and even subject to physical violence... All of the above are examples of the sorts of things that employees of chain grocery stores regularly have to deal with. These treatments, which were also observed in Koptekin's (2010) study, were frequently observed in this study as well. This study, on the other hand, is strikingly distinct from the others in that it focuses primarily on the experiences of university graduates who are currently employed in chain stores. In the following section, I will examine the distinguishing characteristics of graduate employees in their interactions with customers, keeping in mind and at times emphasizing the earlier-mentioned treatments in the context of customer interactions.

In order to compare and contrast the experiences of university graduates with those of other employees in the chains, I also interviewed a small number of non-graduates as part of the study. The interviewees included non-college-educated people like Havva, who also took part. Havva, now 40 and divorced, began working as a cashier in a major supermarket around ten years ago. She is raising two kids, and one of them has special requirements. She says she has fielded countless questions, comments, and complaints from customers. Knowing that I am conducting research on recent university graduates, she shares the following story about one of her college-aged friends with me:

You're conducting research on university graduates. We had a friend; she was a university student. She was working at the store in the evenings in order to receive her allowance due to the poor financial situation of her family. She was going to the university in the mornings and working in the store at certain days. She was a young university student. One day a woman is standing in front of her checkout counter, while she was scanning the barcode of the products, the woman gives advice to her daughter. "Look," she said her daughter, "if you don't go to school, you will be like her." Do you see how humiliating is this? It's so weird. "I'm a university students" the cashier answered, "I'm not a primary school graduate." They regard us as if we're ignorant people that don't go to school, that know nothing and can only be work in this job. (Havva)⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Siz üniversite mezunları üzerinden yapıyorsunuz ya bunu... Bir arkadaşımız vardı bizim, öğrenciydi, üniversite okuyordu. Ailesinin çok durumu olmadığı için bir yandan kendisine harçlık olsun diye akşamları çalışmaya geliyordu. Gündüz okula gidiyordu, akşamları belli günlerde de çalışmaya

A similar event happened to Simge, who, despite having graduated from METU, decided to work at a store for a while because she did not want to pursue her own profession, as Havva cited from her friend:

There were some people that tried to belittle me due to a simple calculation error. For example, a customer got in, bought something and it costed 22 Turkish liras or something. She gave me a different amount of money; I don't remember the exact amount now. I asked her, "Do you have additional two liras?" She said, "If I had additional two liras, I'd give you 22 liras." She tried to despise my calculation skills in her own way. I said, "I don't keep in mind the cost of your shopping. I looked at the amount that is written there, rounded the number up and thus asked for two additional liras." She pinched at my calculation skills for a while. And I said, "I'm a METU graduate, who do you think you are that you're pinching at me?" She said, "Hmm." (Simge)⁵⁰

The accounts of Havva and Simge, in addition to the examples cited from Koptekin's research, are indicative of the symbolic violence and humiliation directed at chain store workers in general. However, it is also possible to say that this humiliation reminds diploma-holding employees of their own "failures." Diploma-holding employees attempt to avoid interacting with familiar customers, particularly classmates and university professors. Graduates, who attempt to avoid such encounters as much as possible, wish to prevent a potential encounter by hiding, covering up, ignoring, or glossing over whenever they may encounter a familiar person. For example, Onur states that he wants to be given a place away from her network when determining the store in which he will work because he does not want his friends, university professors, or members of the community to shop with him; because it makes him feel uncomfortable to run into her professor at the university while he is working behind the charcuterie:

geliyordu. Üniversite öğrencisi genç bir kızdı. Kasasından bir müşteri geçiyor çocuğuyla beraber. Bu kız ürünleri geçerken annesi de kızına nasihatler veriyor. "Bak," diyor "sen okumazsan, çalışmazsan bu abla gibi olursun!" Aşağılamayı görebiliyor musunuz? Çok değişik bir şey. Kız da "Ben üniversite okuyorum," diyor "ilkokul mezunu değilim ki!" Bizi cahil olarak görüyorlar, hiçbir şey bilmeyen, okumayan, sadece bunu yapabilecek olan. (Havva).

⁵⁰ Beni küçümsemeye kalkan birkaç kişi oldu, basit bir matematik hatası yaptığım için. Bir tane müşteri geldi mesela, bir şey aldı, 22 lira gibi bir şey tuttu ücreti. Değişik bir rakam verdi bana, ne kadardı bilmiyorum şimdi. Ben de "2 liranız daha var mıydı?" dedim. O da "2 liram daha olsaydı ben zaten sana 22 lira verirdim" dedi; benim matematiğimi küçümsemeye çalışıyor aklınca. Ben de "senin aldığın şeyin hesabını aklımda tutmuyorum ki, burada yazan sayıya baktım, onu kafamda tumbledim, ona göre 2 lira istedim" dedim. Orada biraz benim matematiğime laf etti. Ben de dedim yani, "Ben ODTÜ mezunu insanım, sen mi benim matematiğimi yargılayacaksın?" O da "Hııı" falan yaptı böyle. (Simge)

During the period that I worked there, when they asked me “There are such-and-such stores, which one do you want to work?” I always wanted to choose the stores that are away from my network. Because it was more possible to be seen by my schoolmates or professors that I took lessons as long as I work in a nearer place. I would be at their doorstep in that case. To be honest, I was getting annoyed of this thought. After you had an undergraduate education, working in a store after you became unemployed made me feel bad. (Onur)⁵¹

Onur, who claims to hide behind a bench whenever a university professor he knows enters the store where he works, also claims that if he is unable to hide and must engage in conversation with the professor, he says very little or nothing:

I had a professor that lives near the store that I worked. When she saw me, she always waves a greeting and tries to talk but I tried to send her away by giving short answers. Seeing her reminds me of my failure in a sense. Seeing my schoolmates or professors reminds me of my failure. I was feeling bad because there is the effort that you made for 4 years, and after all, working in the store hurts your pride. (Onur)⁵²

Erol, a 25-year-old graduate who works at a supermarket, shared a story that was remarkably similar to Onur’s. One day, a university professor of his comes to the store where Erol works, regardless of whether or not he is aware that Erol is employed there. Erol immediately hides behind the desk upon spotting his professor. “I didn't want him to see me there,” he said when I ask him why he did it.

As stated previously, neoliberal theory regard unemployment as a result of the choices and errors of the unemployed, as a choice made voluntarily. According to this, unemployment is a fault, and to the extent that the individual is responsible for being unemployed, this situation is experienced by the unemployed as a constant sense of failure and self-blame. The individual who attributes his failure to himself makes it a

⁵¹ Orada çalıştığım süre zarfında “şu şu şubeler var, hangisine gitmek istiyorsun?” denildiğinde, benim networkümün en uzak olduğu şubeleri seçmek istiyordum. Çünkü okuluma ne kadar yakın bir şubede olursam öğrenci arkadaşlarımdan tutun da dersini aldığım hocalara kadar herkesin ayak altında olduğu, gördüğü, ettiği vesaire... İnsanların dibinde olacaktım. İşin açıkçası bundan rahatsız oluyordum ben. Belli bir lisans formasyonu aldıktan sonra, onun sonucuna işsiz kalıp da markette çalışmak bana kötü hissettiriyordu. (Onur)

⁵² Çalıştığım o şubenin civarında oturan bir hocam vardı. O beni gördüğünde filan baya selam verirdi, konuşmaya çalışırdı ama ben ona kısa cevaplar vererek başımdan savmaya çalışırdım. Onu görmek, benim başarısızlığımı bana hatırlatıyordu bir anlamda. Okuldan arkadaşlarımı, okuldan hocalarımı gördüğüm zaman bana başarısızlığımı hatırlatıyordu. O zamanlar kendimi kötü hissediyordum. Çünkü ortada bir lisans, 4 seneni verdiğin bir emek var, o emeğin çıktısı olarak orada çalışmak insana koyuyor. (Onur)

matter of self-respect. For the very reason, the unemployed, and insecure workers is invisible, isolated, and silenced; in short, she is nonexistent (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 89). While university graduates who work in chain stores avoid the “stigma” of unemployment,⁵³ they are caught in the humiliation of feeling unworthy of their employment. To protect their self-respect, they develop a type of avoidance response, withdrawing and hiding.

During the interviews, I was also interested in determining how employees interacted with different types of customers and how they relate to those customers. The “wealthy” customer who shopped at the store was one of these types of customers. Despite the fact that Ali works as a department sales assistant in a large store, he must interact with a large number of customers throughout the course of his work. Therefore, he must be able to deal with a variety of situations. When discussing “wealthy customers” at one point, he recalled an incident that occurred in the supermarket:

The other day, one gypsy pulled an Arab tourist up and brought her to the store to shop for her. She pulled and brought her in. The store was about to closing within half an hour. She filled the shopping cart but you’ve to see what she bought... Butter, oil, etc. They came to the checkout counter, it cost 2 hundred Turkish liras, just think! The tourist woman didn’t say anything, she just paid and left the store. 2 hundred Turkish liras amount to the half of our salary. We work for a month, and one gypsy gains it at one time. (Ali)⁵⁴

The store where Ali works is located in a central and somewhat touristy neighborhood of İstanbul. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a significant number of international tourists visit the store during a day. This level of spending, which represents a significant portion of their pay for employees earning close to the

⁵³ “How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out, I cast down my eyes because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can’t be compared with an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger. I instinctively avoid meeting any-one. Former acquaintances and friends of better times are no longer so cordial. They greet me indifferently when we meet. They no longer offer me a cigarette and their eyes seem to say, ‘You are not worth it, you don’t work’” (Goffman, 1986, p. 27).

⁵⁴ Geçen bir tane çingenenin biri, yoldan geçen Arap bir turisti çevirmiş, kendine alışveriş yaptıracak buna... Çevirdi, getirdi mağazaya. O zaman da kapanacak mağaza, yarım saat falan var. Alışveriş sepetini doldurdu. Ama aldığı şeyleri göreceksin. Tereyağıdır, yağdır... Kasaya geldi, 2 bin lira tuttu, düşün. Kadın hiçbir şey demedi, ödedi gitti. Yani 2 bin lira dediğin, bizim yarım maaşımız. Biz bir ay çalışıyoruz, adam bir seferlik alışverişte topluyor. (Ali)

minimum wage, is also fairly typical in stores of this type. However, this story that Ali tells through the “Arab tourist” is fundamentally a narrative of the contact between market workers and the rich, and in most cases it is “flattering,” much like Ali's story:

There was a movie of Kemal Sunal that mentions the line, “You’re a foreigner in your hometown.” A person that visits Turkey with 100 dollars have 1300 Turkish liras. S/he gallivants there in comfort. For example, maybe the minimum wage of that country amounts to 1500 dollars. S/he can have a holiday in there easily with this salary. When you visit your hometown, for example when you go to Antalya, it costs 10 thousand Turkish liras. You should work for two months in order to have a one-week holiday. We’re trying to make a life for ourselves under these conditions. It makes you feel degraded. (Ali)⁵⁵

Caner’s testimonies while working at a discount store in Konutkent, where the majority of Ankara's upper-middle-classes reside, provide a second instance of meeting a wealthy, respected, and high-ranking customer and defining his own position through him:

Let me tell you about Konutkent specifically. The inmate of this area is mostly retirees. They are retired from this bank, or the retired general director of that place, or a veteran, etc. They’re retired from high level occupations and wealthy; they’re accustomed to giving directions. Yaşamkent is also the same, maybe they’re a little younger but they’re also wealthy. If they get in the store, that will cost you! They’re possessing you. It’s a tough situation. They possessed you, you are dead! They make you feel that way until they left the store. (Caner)⁵⁶

It is very common for this type of customer to make employees feel “bought,” especially among chain store employees who interact with customers more frequently:

There are egoist people too much and I can’t stand the sight of them. When they walk in the store, they act as if s/he owns the store, as if s/he is your possessor. In the checkout counter, to request coins from customer is needed.

⁵⁵ Kemal Sunal’ın bir filmi vardı, “kendi ülkende yabancı olmuşsun” diye. Adam geliyor, 100 dolar ile burada, şimdi baktığında 1300 lira para yapıyor. Gelip burada rahat rahat geziyor, tozuyor... Örnek veriyorum, asgari ücret belki orada 1500 dolar. Gelip burada rahat rahat bir ay tatil yapabiliyor o parayla. Sen burada kendi memleketine, Antalya’ya 1 hafta git, 10 bin lira. 2 ay çalışman lazım ki bir hafta tatil yapasın. Bu şartlarda hayat kurmaya çalışıyoruz. İnsanın gururuna dokunuyor. (Ali)

⁵⁶ Özellikle Konutkent’ten bahsedeyim... Orası genelde emekli kesimi; bilmem ne bankanın müdürlüğünü yapmış, Albay, bilmem ne yerin genel müdürlüğünü yapmış... Yüksek derecede emekli, varlıklı insanlar, emir vermeye alışmış insanlar. Yaşamkent de aynı şekilde, biraz daha gençtir ama varlıklıdır. Bunlar markete girdiğinde, yandın! Seni satın alıyorlar. Gerçekten çok zor. Seni satın aldı, bittin. Çıkana kadar sana onu hissettiriyor. (Caner)

When you receive banknotes all the time, it doesn't work. I have to ask all customers. For example, someone buys just a thing and gives you 200 Turkish liras in return. You have to ask whether they have coins. Recently, I asked someone, a woman. She said, "You ask the same question every time, am I a bank?" So what? I'm not a bank too, of course I have to ask. I didn't say something for sure. Sometimes problems stir up during the billing process. (Simge)⁵⁷

Even though they are subjected to the customer's humiliations, insults, and sometimes psychological violence, employees with diplomas make sense of the situation they are in by pointing to the invalidity of their diplomas. Hande, a university graduate and cashier, begins her speech by describing the customer's humiliation:

I am already stressed. I am a university graduate and working as a cashier. On top of it, being overpeered by people, some customers' conduct as if they bought you make one feel offended. One day, when I was at the helpdesk in the store a woman came to me. Due to the thief of the shopping carts, the central office ordered from us to lock all the carts in a manner that they are unlocked through the use of coins. We also provide the customers with coins that are placed in the helpdesk. A woman came and said, "Why did you organize the shopping carts in this way? It's so ridiculous. This store is the silliest XX store in this area." I pull no punches and say, "We act up to our customers, we were obliged to develop such a system due to the thief of our shopping carts." She said, "How do you mean? Are you calling me ridiculous?" So what? You're also calling me ridiculous; you're calling the employees as ridiculous. (Hande)⁵⁸

To summarize this point, we are able to assert that one of the most important aspects of the interactions within the stores of the graduate chain store workers is the direct interactions with the customers. This is one of the most significant aspects of the

⁵⁷ Ya böyle çok ego sahibi insanlar var, onlara sinir oluyorum. Markete girince sanki market onunmuş gibi, senin sahibinmiş gibi davranıyor. Kasada müşteriden bozuk para istemek gerekiyor. Sürekli tüm para tüm para alınca olmuyor. Ben her gelene sormak zorundayım. Adam mesela bir tane bir şey alıyor, 200 lira veriyor... Bozuk yok mu, diye sormak gerekiyor. Geçen birine sordum mesela, bir kadını. "Sen de her defasında bunu soruyorsun, ben banka mıyım?" E ben de banka değilim yani, tabii ki bunu soracağım. Çok bir şey demedim tabii de. Fatura verirken bazen problem çıkıyor. (Simge)

⁵⁸ *Zaten stresliyim, üniversite mezunuyum, kasiyer olarak çalışıyorum... Bir de böyle insanların ezik gibi bakması, bazı müşterilerin seni de satın almış gibi davranması insanın biraz zoruna gidiyor açıkçası. Bir gün yine mesela, marketteyiz, ben danışmadayım, bir hanımefendi geldi. Bizim market arabaları çalındığı için merkezden mail geldi yani, "arabaları kilitleyin, bozuk parayla açılınsın, müşteriler bozuk para alıp öyle alsın arabayı" diye ki bozuk parayı da danışmaya koyuyoruz. Sonra hanımefendi geldi, "bunu niye böyle yaptınız, çok saçma oldu. Bu bölgede en saçma Çağdaş sizsiniz" dedi. Ben de durur muyum tabii, "Hanımefendi, biz de müşterilerimize göre davranıyoruz, arabalarımız çalındığı için öyle bir sistem getirmek zorunda kaldık" dedim. "Ne demek, sen bana saçma mı diyorsun" dedi... E sen de bana saçma diyorsun, çalışanlara saçma diyorsun... (Hande).*

interactions that take place within the stores. In contrast to the experiences of other employees, these interactions are frequently understood in light of the individuals' degrees, educational capital, and unmet expectations, which is a stark contrast to the experiences of other employees. They are reminded of their own “failures” in certain situations by the fact that they are graduates of a university that they attended in the hopes of landing a white-collar job, but that they are now working as a cashier or a desk clerk in a chain store instead of landing a white-collar job after graduation. Nevertheless, as we have seen, they employ a variety of coping mechanisms.

4.2.2. Political Identity and the Attitudes toward Collective Action

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the relevant literature, it is discussed in various dimensions that both unemployment and precarization deprive the individual of the will for collective action, organization, and the capacity to object. As Bourdieu (1998) stated, having suffered a blow to their ability to project themselves into the future, which is a prerequisite for all so-called rational conducts, beginning with economic calculation or, in an entirely different realm, political organization, the unemployed and casualized workers are hardly capable of mobilization. In this context, one of the research topics of this study was to what extent the university graduate chain store employees' attitudes towards political identity and collective action were compatible with the aforementioned literature. On the other hand, to what extent the focus group's relatively high educational capital, namely university diplomas, would change this situation was another question sought to be answered in this study. Thus, this study examined whether the situation of graduate chain store employees influences their political affiliation, how they describe themselves politically, the degree to which they develop solidarity relations with other employees, and their attitude toward collective action. It is possible to divide the argument along multiple dimensions. To begin with, one can infer their views on political participation and group action from how they approach union organizing as wage workers. Due to the extensive coverage of this topic in the preceding chapter, I will instead focus on the political affiliation of the employees, based on the questions of who they perceive to be responsible for the situation they are in and to what extent they make individual and social sense of the process they experience.

I attempted to engage the interviewees in brief conversations about their political views. All interviewees, including those who said they supported the current government, expressed dissatisfaction with Turkey's political stance, most likely as a result of the country's economic decline over the past two years (devaluation of the Turkish Lira, rapid increase in energy prices, price inflation, and decline in real wages...). However, whenever the topic of daily politics was brought up, they all refrained from expressing their own political views. Without a doubt, their lack of familiarity with me contributed to their precarity. In addition, it is understandable that they would attempt to conceal their political views given that they were being recorded word for word. At one point in the conversation, for instance, I asked about Mehmet's political identity. While staring at a tape recorder and expressing surprise at my presence, he said, "Can we talk about politics? No problem?" The primary question that needs to be answered in light of the economic, social, and political crisis that the country has been going through for the past two years is why this general discontent does not in any way reflect an organized political influence, but rather has a distant appearance towards it. Keeping in mind that this question, which cannot be answered here, has a lengthy history that cannot be simply condensed into the last few years, we will only discuss the market sector's reflection of this paradox and the perspectives of graduate market workers on this issue.

New capitalism, as Sennett (1998) argued, is characterized, among other things, by the gradual disappearance of collective identities, most notably class membership. It is widely assumed that, as traditional political institutions such as labor unions and political parties declined, political participation became more individualized during this period. It is reasonable to expect that this circumstance will have an impact on young people's political socialization processes. Nonetheless, despite the dissolution of the collective foundations of social life, it is reasonable to assert that these institutions have a significant impact on our social lives. For the very reason, Furlong and Cartmel (2007, p. 138) argued that, despite the dissolution of social life's collective foundations, these institutions continue to provide strong frameworks that limit young people's experiences and life opportunities, and that late modernity revolves around a "epistemological fallacy." Even though there are signs that the

younger generation's loyalty to traditional politics is waning, they believe it is too soon to declare that the youth's political orientation is individualized. Despite the fact that young people appear to be seeking individual solutions to problems that are primarily a function of their socioeconomic status, their concerns are collective in nature (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 137).

My interviews have revealed that it is reasonable to make a similar observation about university graduates who work at chain stores. Except for the few interviewees whose political identity I was already aware of, the employees with whom I spoke had a very detached attitude toward traditional politics and its institutions (political parties, unions, ideology). Young workers, who expressed in various ways that the era of ideology is over (Erol), that no ideology can be adopted in its entirety (Ayşe), that grouping is bad (Ufuk), and that we must defend our rights individually (Caner), also refused to disclose it. Erol and Ayşe agree that no ideology can be embraced in its entirety. When I asked Erol to describe himself ideologically, despite the fact that he frequently expresses his discontent with the current government, he did not specify the political ideology to which he adhered:

In terms of ideologies, I can say that... The era of ideology is over. We're living in the 21st century, the world is going towards a period of digitalization in an extreme manner. In the simplest term... Either within the conservative right or left ideologies, I regard the ones that have an ideology as narrow minded because it is not possible to survive. If it would be survived, a strong state model would come our way. There is no such a model in the world. (Erol)⁵⁹

Ayşe, who describes herself as "morally liberal," addressed ideologies in a similar manner:

I never be a person that completely interiorize an ideology. I read. Sometimes someone says something but in practice it wouldn't happen that way, there

⁵⁹ İdeoloji olarak şunu diyebilirim... İdeoloji devri artık bitti, 21. yüzyılda yaşıyoruz, dünya aşırı şekilde dijitalleşmeye gitti. En basitinden şöyle diyeyim... Gerek muhafazakâr sağ içerisinde olsun gerek sol ideolojiler içerisinde olsun, ideoloji güdenlere ben hâlâ eski kafalı olarak bakıyorum çünkü tutunma ihtimali yok. Tutunmuş olsa bile şu anda önümüzde sağlam bir yapısı olan bir devlet modeli karşımıza çıkardı. Dünyada bu yok. (Erol)

would be challenges... I always interpret. But in moralistic sense, I am definitely a liberal. It doesn't change in terms of morality. (Ayşe)⁶⁰

Immediately after stating, "I would like to see Mansur Yavaş as president," in response to a question about her political identity, Sevil attempted to distance herself from an ideological position by describing her political stance as "neither right-wing nor left-wing":

I don't have an attitude towards being a leftist or a rightist. I always think that a person should assert his/her rights. Begging your pardon, but I never do something in order to make the director happy. You should assert your rights. It's not my thing. I should deserve it when I give a good account of my job, it's not right if I deserve it when I do something as an extra. The contrary situation would be like, 'You're of use to me, and I reward you in return'. I discuss it a lot with everyone. (Sevil)⁶¹

Ufuk, who said that he got along well with the right-wingers but was a left-winger at the university, said that "grouping is always bad" in the following words:

Everyone can be a partisan. I don't like grouping. I never liked it from a child because in fact this grouping thing is quite bad, you know. Both in high school and university... Because you know it, in high school, the hardworking student in the class is regarded as nerd. I didn't like such things; I went up to this person and talked with him/her. In short, I think grouping is always a bad thing. (Ufuk)⁶²

The participants consistently framed their political allegiance as a "standing with the right one" rather than an "ideological standpoint" in these interviews. However, Erol, who says that "the age of ideology is over," stated when I visited him again the following day that he sympathized with the DEVA Party and Ali Babacan and would likely vote for him. Despite claiming to be a "leftist," Ufuk refrained from categorizing

⁶⁰ Ben açıkçası hiçbir ideolojiyi %100 benimseyebilen bir insan olmadım. Okuyorum. Bazen hani bu böyle diyor ama işte pratikte böyle olabilir, sıkıntı çıkabilir... Ve sürekli yorumlarım. Ama ahlaki anlamda kesinlikle ben liberalim yani. Ahlaki anlamda değişmiyor. (Ayşe)

⁶¹ Hiç solcuyum, sağcıyım gibi bir şeyim yok. Ben her zaman diyorum ki birey kendi hakkını savunmalı. Ben müdürüm mutlu olsun diye bir şey yapmam abi, kimse kusura bakmasın. Kendi hakkını savunacaksın. Benim görevim o mu? Ben bunu layığıyla yaptığımda onu hak etmeliyim, ekstradan bir şey yapıp onu hak edeceksem olmaz. "Sen benim çıkarıma iyi geliyorsun, ben de seni ödüllendiriyorum" demek olur aksi durumda. Çok da tartışıyorum bu konuyla ilgili herkesle. (Sevil)

⁶² Herkes kendi partisini tutabilir. O şeyi sevmiyorum, gruplaşmayı filan. Onu küçüklükten beri hiç sevmezdim. Çünkü o grup şeyi çok kötü aslında, biliyon mu? Üniversitede olsun, lisede olsun... Çünkü lisede, sen de lisedeyken görmüşsündür, sınıfın çalışkanı ezik, inek muamelesi görür. Ben sevmezdim. Gidip konuşurum gene. Yani gruplaşma her zaman kötü ya bence. (Ufuk)

himself or taking a position on a particular ideology. Sevil was a supporter of Mansur Yavaş, but she was neither a CHP supporter nor a “nationalist.” When we consider all of these instances, we must conclude that “ideology” continues to function in all of these discourses. This is due to the fact that ideology initially presents itself as “non-ideological.” In light of this, it is plausible to assert that the university graduate chain store workers with whom we spoke are still “within the ideological realm.” In contrast, the most notable aspect of their narratives is how they present a “non-ideological” stance.

A striking element in terms of the political attitudes of the employees interviewed, reminding us of the discussion we made in the language discussion above, is that almost all of them expressed their own political attitudes with a certain competence. In other words, even those who were the most distant from ideological attitudes felt the need to explain their current position, and they spoke with a narrative that could be called “an ideological attitude against ideologies” for various reasons. In this respect, as we mentioned above, this highly ideological attitude should also be read as an “educated language,” because the attitude towards ideologies is not simply “indifference” under almost any circumstance. On the contrary, it is the attitude of a conscious subject who is aware of various positions and yet prefers to remain neutral. For example, he is aware of the need for a union but does not want to be a part of it, he is aware that something is not right, but he still does not see himself as a responsible person. It could also be thought of as a kind of “enlightened false consciousness,” as Eagleton (1991) puts it, “which lives by false values but is ironically aware of doing so, and so which can hardly be said to be mystified in the traditional sense of the term” (p. 42).

As mentioned previously, almost all of the employees I interviewed, including those who support the AKP, expressed discomfort with the current government (and even that the government is going to “fail” in the upcoming elections). On the other hand, will be discussed further below, they frequently avoided directly blaming the political power for their predicament. Similarly, Yavuz, whom I asked to describe himself politically shortly after he expressed his discontent with the current government, expressed his disbelief in a change despite what was occurring: “Everyone is the same,

everything is the same. Everything. Those who arrive will complete the task, as will those who depart.” Widespread worker dissatisfaction with the AKP government was coupled with skepticism regarding the development of a viable alternative. On the one hand, they complain about the situation in the country, but on the other hand, their lack of a collective desire to change the situation appears to be the primary cause of the paradox in which they find themselves. This situation, which is exemplified by the presence of diploma-holding market workers, can be interpreted as a reflection of a dominant contradiction that has crystallized in Turkish society, particularly over the past few years. As Necmi Erdoğan (2017) puts it, this is what characterizes the Turkish society today: Popular dissatisfaction with the AKP regime and disbelief in the possibility of another life, fear of dictatorship or the threat of war, and opposition to the forms of politics or militancy required to eliminate them, a position of detachment, between recognizing the collective nature of the social problems to which the reaction is felt and avoiding political practice.

Politically expressed anger among the employees I interviewed, in the majority of cases, becomes an individual attitude tied to an election agenda, accompanied by a sense of “no exit”:

To be honest, I won't support any of them. I'm so angry at them. But my hands are tied. There is this saying, 'Put there a toilet slipper and I'll poll for it'. I'm at that point right now. I never think in this way before but there is no way out. I'm at that point right now. (Ayşe)⁶³

Another axis that reveals political affiliation and attitude toward collective action is the perception of who is responsible for this situation by the employees, who all express discomfort with their current situation. The “distance from ideological attitudes” mentioned previously is manifested to a significant degree here as well. In many instances, these young people assign blame for their situation to an unidentified subject: society, education system, authorities, poor decisions, lack of planning; everyone or everything is to blame. For instance, Savaş, a Civil Engineering graduate, stated that neither he nor his family were at fault, and he explained that “not a single

⁶³ Aslında hiçbirini desteklemeyeceğim ben de... O kadar sinirliyim onlara. Ama mecbur... Şey var ya, 'şuraya tuvalet terliği koy, ben buna basacağım' derler ya, ben o noktadayım. O noktadayım yani. Önceden hiç düşünmezdim ama yok, bunun bir çıkışı yok. Yani şu an o noktadayım. (Ayşe)

person” could be held accountable for his unemployment; rather, “everyone” was responsible:

Neither me nor my family is responsible. Everyone has the right to enroll in the department s/he likes, to receive education, and then profess it. It is not related to my family; everyone should perform her/his profession. The responsibility that is related to me is that maybe I choose the wrong department and didn’t foresee the future, but I also don’t regard myself as faulty. I should do it at that time. Is it right to lay the whole burden on just one person? I don’t know whether it is rightful to claim that it is because of him/her or the government. Actually, it is because of the mixture of lots of things... The economic downturn, the rise in the number of universities, the overpopulation of the civil engineer graduates, etc. The lack of accurate regulations that are in the direction of protecting the civil engineers over against the contractors... The accumulation of all of them resulted in this way. (Savaş)⁶⁴

Throughout the course of the conversation, Ali frequently voiced his frustration with the current political situation, and at some point I asked him, “Who do you think is to blame for this?” I persisted in asking him for more information, and his response was simply, “Everyone!” This included individuals who had graduated from colleges and universities, as well as voters, business owners, potential employees, and job seekers:

The condition of Turkey is worsening, the universities are worsening... No one questions why that much university is established, why that much student is enrolled to this department. Everyone is responsible. Both the students, the voters, the ones that don’t vote, the ones that hire, the ones that don’t hire, the ones that apply... We’re also responsible. I had to find a job, I necessitated a job that I can easily start, and I came there. What could I do? Maybe I could sit around the home some more, I could study English, I could develop myself... I had to work there because I needed. The half of the responsibility belongs to the society, and the other half belongs to us. No one is entirely responsible. (Ali)⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ailemde ya da kendimde herhangi bir suçlu yok kesinlikle. Herkesin hakkıdır istediği bölüme gidip, onu okuyup, o mesleği icra etmek. Ailemle ilgili zaten bir şey yok ama herkes işini yapabilmeli. Orada kendimle ilgili, yanlış bölüm seçmiş olabilirim. Daha ilerisini görememiş olabilirim ama kendimi de suçlu olarak görmüyorum. Onu o zaman yapabilmeliydim. Bunun sorumluluğunu tek bir kişiye yüklemek doğru mu? Şu kişiden, ya da hükümetten dolayı demek ne kadar doğru, onu da bilmiyorum. Birçok şeyin birleşimi gibi aslında. Ekonominin bozulması, çok fazla üniversite olması, çok fazla inşaat mühendisliği mezunu verilmesi... Müteahhitlerle, yönetmeliklerle ilgili inşaat mühendislerini koruyacak şekilde doğru düzenlemelerin yapılamaması... Hepsini birleşimi bu sonucu doğurdu, diyebilirim. (Savaş)

⁶⁵ Ülke şartları kötüye gidiyor, üniversiteler kötüye gidiyor... Kimse demiyor ama neden bu kadar çok üniversite açılıyor, bu bölüme niye bu kadar öğrenci alınıyor... Okuyanı da, oy vereni de, vermeyeni de, işe alan da, iş vermeyeni de, başvuran da... Herkes sorumlu! Biz de sorumluyuz. Bir işe girmem gerekiyordu, kolayca girebileceğim bir iş lazımdı, buraya girdim. Ne yapabiliyordum? Belki biraz daha evde durabiliyordum, İngilizceye çalışabiliyordum, kendimi geliştirebiliyordum... İhtiyacım olduğu için buraya

Graduate employees of chain stores often blame “everyone and everything” for their predicament, as Ayşe does. What’s remarkable, though, is that this is accompanied by a “state of rebellion,” as is evident from her comments. This revolt of the graduates is still an untargeted rage to the extent that it coexists with some form of intimidation and burnout. As evidenced by the preceding examples, the political attitudes of graduate market employees are highly individualistic and distant from the institutions and methods of conventional politics. Their description of themselves as “beyond ideological positions” is indicative of this.

What could be the reason why the political reaction, which sometimes manifests itself with anger (Caner, Ayşe) and sometimes with acceptance (Ali, Ufuk), almost always turns into an ambiguous complaint and refrains from naming those responsible?

Aksu Bora (2017), on the other hand, who conducted a similar investigation through the white-collar unemployed, attributed this to “not a non-subject, but an over-subject position with a great deal of will and emotional and physical control.” Bora claims that the white-collar unemployed are able to triumph over life’s challenges because they “know,” “understand,” and “absorb” the meaning of those challenges (2017, pp. 133-134). We can make a similar observation if we adapt her discussion of the white-collar unemployed to the un(der)employed chain store workers in this study. Because, as we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a white-collar un(der)employed who is equipped with his educational capital first and foremost acts as a “knowing subject.” They “analyze” their predicament by imagining themselves in the role of the researcher and coming up with solutions. There is a similar “knowing” reflected in the way people are reacting to this situation in terms of their sense of political belonging and their desire to take collective action. As seen in Ali, Caner, Ayşe, and numerous other instances, for example, when I ask, “Who is responsible for so many young people’s unemployment?” they answer the question with structural analyses, political evaluations, and observations on the condition of universities. In subsequent instances, however, an ideological distance and a political stance that almost can be said “apolitical” emerge. In other words, their entire state of political “inconsistency” does

girmek zorunda kaldım. Ne yapıyorsak %50’si bizim, %50’si toplumun kabahati... Kimsenin tek başına değil. (Ali)

not indicate the existence of a “non-subject,” but rather, as Bora puts it, an “over-subjection.”

4.2.3. Vicious Cycle of Necessity: Expectations for the Future

We have previously discussed the disparity between the potential and current state of graduates who attend university with the goal of obtaining a white-collar job but are working in the chain stores for a variety of reasons. Disappointment over this disparity and their hopes for the future were topics I broached during the interviews. We can obtain important data for their understanding of their work and unemployment processes by looking at their dreams, disappointments, and future expectations. In this regard, how the aforementioned “collective disillusionment” is experienced in the context of university graduate chain market employees can be revealed. Therefore, I will discuss the life goals of the graduates working in the stores, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to secure a successful career and fulfilling personal life.

As I previously stated, graduate chain store workers frequently refer to their current situation as a “temporary period.” Even though not unique to them, it is much more noticeable among graduate workers that they tend to leave the store as soon as find a job. Several statements from my interviewees confirm this: the market is not the end of their careers (Caner), they will eventually find a better job (Emre), and their efforts will be rewarded one day (Erol). However, another common theme emerged during interviews, with many participants expressing the opinion that “If you can’t find a better job, stay there and get promotion.” How can we explain this apparent contradiction between their inclination to view the market as a “temporary job” and their desire to pursue a “career” here?

Obviously, there is no single answer to this question, but the graduates’ disappointments, concerns about the future, and economic impasse lead them to consider “promotion in the store” as “the best of the worst” options. An approach like this was on full display during my first meeting with Güzel, a Dietetics major from one of Turkey’s top universities. Güzel was a student who wanted to study dentistry, and she had a chance to study in the field if she scored slightly better. When she was

unable to achieve the desired score, she chose to study Dietetics rather than prepare for the exam a second time. “I wanted to work in a hospital,” she says, explaining why she chose this program over dentistry. However, the scene she saw in the hospital during her internship in her final two years of undergraduate education convinced her that she could not work there as a dietitian “attached to ethical values.” This initial disappointment she experienced at the hospital, which she described as having “nothing to do with what I saw in school,” continued after she graduated:

There are lots of disappointing things that I experienced. For example, even during the KPSS period, there were lots of things like training period, seminars, etc. in the last year. And we also wrote an undergraduate thesis. We were up to our neck in the school tasks that it was not possible to concern with another thing. But in another universities, students don't undergo training in the last year, they don't grapple with this-and-that, they can get permission, etc. and they study for the KPSS exam, they go to the private preparation courses... They got 95 points, and while appointing someone, they consider nothing but this score. For example, even though someone is not educated, he is appointed but you cannot. It was a disappointment. No one is interested about how you're practicing your profession. Is it moral or not? There is no such consideration. These kinds of things shattered my hopes. (Güzel)⁶⁶

Without exception, every interviewee expressed disappointments similar to those expressed by Güzel. Due to a variety of circumstances, including favoritism, nepotism, and other injustices encountered during their job search, they questioned whether they were “studied for nothing”:

There are lots of unemployed university graduate in recent years. The young people ask that “Is our education in vain?”, “Why can't we find a job after graduated?” I also lived through it. One thinks that “Our educational status is too bad; we are educated but it is in vain. Have we studied for nothing?” Such a thought is imposed to them. If you ask them, they all answer in this way. (Hande)⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Çok fazla hayal kırıklığı yaşadığım şeyler var. Atıyorum KPSS sürecinde bile, son sene stajıydı, lisans tezi yazdık biz son sene, semineriydi şuydu buydu... Okuldan başka kafamızı kaldırabileceğimiz hiçbir şey yoktu. Ama başka üniversitelerde işte insanlar son sene staja gitmiyor, şunu yapmıyor, bunu yapmıyor, izin alabiliyorlar falan... KPSS çalışıyorlar, dershaneye gidiyorlar... Onlar 95 puan alıyor, KPSS'de de atama yapılırken başka hiçbir şeye bakılmıyor zaten, KPSS puanına bakılıyor. Atıyorum adam gidiyor eğitim görmemiş, o atanıyor ama sen atanamıyorsun. Bu da bir hayal kırıklığıydı. Kimse mesleğini nasıl yaptığına bakmıyor. Etik mi, değil mi... Buna dönük bir değerlendirme yok. Bu tarz şeyler biraz hayal kırıklığına uğrattı beni. (Güzel)

⁶⁷ Son zamanlarda bir sürü üniversite mezunu var, işsiz. Gençler şunu sorun ediyorlar: biz okuyoruz, boşuna mı okuyoruz? Üniversite mezunu olduktan sonra niye iş bulamıyoruz, diye. Bunu ben de yaşadım çünkü. İnsanın aklına şöyle şeyler geliyor: Eğitim durumumuz çok kötü; okuyoruz ama boşuna okuyoruz. Öyle bir düşünce empoze ediyorlar beyinlerine. Şu an sorsanız hepsi öyle söyler. (Hande)

The complaint expressed in Hande's sentences is also an expression of a feeling that has become increasingly prevalent among young people in Turkey, particularly in recent years. According a report published by TEDMEM in 2022 while the rate of those who believe that education will provide them with a good job in Turkey as a whole is 14%, this rate is only 8% among young adults aged 18-24. This demonstrates that the notion of "studying for nothing" is rapidly spreading among young people. According to the same report, the fact that 45% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 believe it is acceptable to use the money to start a business instead of attending university is indicative of a decline in young people's interest in higher education (TEDMEM, 2022, p. 153).

In the same way as Güzel, Savaş has been unhappy with his professional path. After three years as a civil engineer, he was terminated due to the company's difficulties. Despite his insistence that he cannot work in his job at the store forever, after he has become disillusioned with his own profession, his current plans are on the store he is working:

The supermarket sector doesn't seem like an acceptable, permanent job right now. Most of the people that start working in this sector think that "Let's get over this year, this winter, this bad condition and then find a good job." They start to work by thinking in this way.

Did you start to work in a chain store with a similar intention?

To be honest, I also started to work in that way. When I got this job, I had similar thoughts, but I am thinking to continue to work in this sector because the situation of the marketplace is apparent, and it had been three years since I quit the sector. It's like taking a dislike to the sector. (Savaş)⁶⁸

The store has become a new career opportunity for Savaş, who has "cooled off" from his former job as a civil engineer:

To be honest, I see no future right now, I salvage not only the day but also the years. I don't know what time will show or how it will show. If you ask me that whether I have any plan within this sector, I work routinely right now.

⁶⁸ Market sektörü çok da kabul edilebilir, sürekli yapılacak bir iş gibi görünmüyor. İşe girenlerin birçoğu da öyle giriyor "şu seneyi atlatayım, bu kışı bir atlatayım, şu kötü durumu bir atlatayım, sonrasında iyi bir iş bulayım..." gibi başlıyorlar.

Sen de mi öyle başladın markete?

Açıkçası ben de o şekilde başladım. İlk işe girdiğimde bu şekilde başladım, ama artık bu sektöre devam ederim, diye düşünüyorum. Çünkü piyasaların durumu belli. Çalışmalı da zaten üç yıl olmuş, sektörden çıkmalı. Artık soğuma gibi bir durum oldu yani. (Savaş)

There is no trajectory about what will happen, a future plan or a dream for now. (Savaş)⁶⁹

At this point, it should be emphasized that both Güzel and Savaş graduated from two major universities in Turkey. Because neither of them graduated from universities that were established during massification over the past 15 years, which we discussed in Chapter 2. On the contrary, the university they both study at has a considerable place among the universities in Turkey. Moreover, this is not the case only for Güzel and Savaş. A significant part of the chain store employees interviewed within the scope of this study graduated from Turkey'd relatively "rooted" universities. One of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from this is that the massification of universities harms not only the universities opened in the last 15 years, but the entire university system in Turkey. There are still some universities in Turkey that continue to offer a certain premium to their graduates, albeit in limited numbers. However, it is clear that this rapid massification of universities creates a loss of value in the overall.

Güzel and Savaş say they will return to their respective fields of study if job opportunities become available. However, once you get a job, the "cost" of leaving that job can be even greater than if you were unemployed from the beginning. When I asked Güzel "if she wanted to leave here and do her own profession," she said:

If I continue to work there, my aim is taking off from being a cashier and rising in a position that is suitable for a university graduate. But I go round in circles now. Okey, there is this KPSS exam but if I study for this exam at home, at a certain point to go to a private preparation center will be required and I need money to cover its expenses. I need to quit work to prepare the exam, but I necessitate money to cover the expenses of preparation center and this time it is necessary to work. (Güzel)⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Açıkçası şu anda bir gelecek de çok göremiyorum ama günü kurtarmak şeyi artık bende biraz yıllara vurdu. Nasıl gider, nasıl olur, hiç bilmiyorum. Ha, bu sektörde bir planın var mı diyorsan, şu anda sadece normal olarak çalışıyoruz. Ne olacak, ne bitecek, ya da gelecek bir plan, hayal yok yani şu an için. (Savaş)

⁷⁰ Benim amacım şey, eğer devam edeceksem burada, hani kasiyerlikten çıkıp daha üniversite mezununun olması gereken yerde olabilmek... Ama şu anda bir kısır döngü oldu zaten. Tamam, önümüzde KPSS var, oturup evde çalışsam da bir yere kadar. Bir yerde dersane desteği gerekiyor. Dersane desteği için para gerekiyor. Onun için de işten çıkmam lazım ama dersane için de para gerekiyor, bu defa da iş gerekecek. (Güzel)

Güzel must achieve a high KPSS score to leave the market and pursue her own profession. To obtain the desired KPSS score, she must take classes in a private exam preparation course, but she must first earn money to attend these courses. She makes money from her current job in the store but must resign to register for the exam preparation course. There is no money without a job, no “better job” without money, and no preparation course without money. This vicious cycle of necessities, was prevalent among most employees I interviewed. As a result of this cycle, at least some graduate chain store workers viewed the market as a “career gate.” Güzel, who entered the store as a cashier, now aspires to “get out of the cashier position and be where a university graduate should be in this chain store” because “out there,” she has no better opportunity.

Güzel, Hande, and Savaş are not the only examples of such a circle, a sort of vicious cycle that accompanies disappointment. Mehmet, age 28, gives the following reasons for why he has been stuck in the market, where he entered to find temporary work, for the past 1.5 years:

When I found this job, I thought that I’ll work two or three months there, I’ll find a job that is suited for me within that period and after that I’ll quit.

So, what happened?

It’s been 1.5 years and I’m still working there; I couldn’t quit.

Why?

There is no job. If I quit this job at that moment, I have to be out of a job at least for two months. And also, I am in debt.

What kind of a debt is it?

It’s credit debt, credit cards, etc. All of the university graduates are in debt. And also, there’s this education loan debt. (Mehmet)⁷¹

Mehmet, who had to take out multiple loans to make ends meet while unemployed, had to restructure his debts, which he could not pay due to his extended

⁷¹ Ben bu işe girerken 2-3 ay çalışırım, çıkarım; o süre zarfında artı bir iş bulurum kendime göre ve çıkarım diye düşünmüştüm.

Ne oldu?

1,5 sene geçti, hâlâ çalışıyoruz. Çıkamadık.

Niye çıkamadın?

İş yok. Ben şu anda çıkmaya kalksam en az 2 ay boyunca bir boшта durmam lazım. Bizim de bir borcumuz var.

Ne borcu?

Kredi borcu. Kredi kartları falan. Üniversite mezunu zaten insanların hepsinin borcu var ki... KYK da var. (Mehmet)

unemployment, and then take out new loans, even though he initially borrowed small amounts. After factoring in his undergraduate student loan debt, he was in severe financial trouble. His family supported him while he was unemployed, but he says that “after a certain age, you cannot ask for money from your family” and that he now pays half of his earnings in debts. Furthermore, Mehmet’s financial obligations prevent him from leaving his current job: “It will take me at least two months to find a new job if I decide to quit. If so, payments will be late. If I miss one payment, it’s game over because I won’t be able to make the other. Nobody thinks about quitting when a job is available.”

Savaş, Hande, and Mehmet are in the same condition as Güzel in that they began working for the market temporarily but are now unable to leave. Instead, they will be required to continue working here for an unspecified period and possibly plan their future career plans here. Caner, who began working at the market temporarily in the same manner as Mehmet to pay off his debts, has been employed here for four years. Because an accident at Caner’s previous job caused him to lose his teeth, he was required to have dental implants placed throughout his entire mouth. For this purpose, he borrowed money from his sibling. “Let me work for a little while to pay off this debt,” he said as he began working at the store, but “still there”:

I had a work accident towards to end of my university education. A solar panel threw up to my face. I was working in a solar panel project in Afyon at that time. The panel threw up to my face, it broke my front teeth. And also, my back teeth were not intact, I also had them pulled. I had no tooth after I had all of them pulled. I replaced implants in the place of them. Luckily, my brother became a sergeant, he received loan for me, and he paid the debt. It is a 2.5-3-year long process. I thought that I’ll continue to work in ŞOK until I complete the implant replacement process, after that I’ll go into the service and then I’ll go my own gait. I thought that it is better to work in a chain store instead of sitting around at home. It was a depressive period. One of my friends recommended me and I started to work there. (Caner)⁷²

⁷² Ben bir iş kazası yapmışım, üniversitenin sonuna doğru. Yüzüme güneş paneli çarptı. O ara Afyon’da bir güneş paneli işinde çalışıyordum. Suratıma panel çarptı, ön dişlerimi döktü. Arkalar da çok sağlam değildi, kalamı da ben çekirdim. Sıfır diş kaldı ağızımda, hepsini çektirince. Ben de komple implant yaptırdım. Şansıma kardeşim astsubay oldu, bana kredi çekti, borcu ödedi. 2,5 – 3 yıllık bir süreç tabii bu. Ben de dedim ki dişleri yaptırana kadar ŞOK’ta durayım; sonra da askere giderim, önüme bakarım. Evde oturacağıma gideyim bir markette çalışayım, dedim. O süreç zaten bunalımlı bir süreç. Arkadaş da tavsiye etti, ŞOK’a girdim. Giriş o giriş. (Caner)

Like Caner, Sevil started working in the market toward the end of a “depressed” period and planned to work there for a brief time. Despite the challenges she faces on the job, she stays put because of the “regular salary that is never delayed” and the “highly paid insurance”:

I thought that I continue to work in this place until the country gets better because I receive my salary regularly, my insurance is high paid. One of my friends that works in Social Security Institution said to me that even her insurance is not that high paid. It is a plus point. The salary is paid on a regular basis. I thought that I continue to work there. And also, I regard it as a guaranteed job because I became unemployed, and I know what being unemployed means, so I continue to work there, I put up with this job. (Sevil)⁷³

Sevil’s example shows that the store can be bearable for graduates who “know what unemployment means,” who have seen worse, and who are aware of the existence of those out there who are in worse conditions. While Ali, a graduate of International Relations, continues his job search, he has one eye on the institution’s upcoming promotion exams: “I am currently awaiting the assistant manager exam. My goal is to go as far as I possibly can, and I’ll leave it at that. Things are looking bleak in the country.” Graduates who want to continue their “career” in the store have to “wait” and “be patient” until better opportunities arise due to a lack of available jobs of sufficient quality:

When you wait and endure a little, they’ll get you somewhere in CarrefourSa. The company will get you in a position in its own structure. I think in this way, I’ll see.

Do you struggle for this?

I think of it, there is no alternative. The work that I find after quitting this one should provide me with an alternative. It should propose me a better salary that I can quit this job. Or I can switch to another chain store through the title of directorate. (Utku)⁷⁴

⁷³ Yani diyorsun ki “ben biraz burada devam edeyim, bu ülke düzeline kadar çünkü günü gününe maaşın yatıyor, sigortan en yüksek tutardan ödeniyor –ki bunu da benim SGK’da çalışan bir arkadaşım var, bu işlere bakıyor, o söylemişti. “Bizim bile bu kadar yüksekte ödenmiyor” demişti. Baktığım bu artısı var. Günü gününe yatıyor... Burada kalayım, diyorsun. Bir de işsiz kaldığın için, işsizliğin ne demek olduğunu bildiğin için garanti olarak görüyorsun ve devam ediyorsun, bir süre daha katlanıyorsun. (Sevil)

⁷⁴ Beklediğin zaman, biraz sabrettiğin zaman CarrefourSa’da bir yere getiriyorlar seni. Şirket bir yerlere yerleştiriyor seni kendi içinde. Ben öyle düşünüyorum, bakalım. *Onun için mi uğraşıyorsun şu an?*

As evidenced by the preceding examples, university graduates working in chain stores are considering working for at least a while “in the absence of a better job.” What is even more remarkable is that they are unable to predict how long this period will last because they are stuck in a cycle I call the vicious cycle of necessities. This type of prolonged underemployment inevitably results in lowered “career expectations.” Even if they will not work here for the rest of their lives, the time they spend working here will have a significant impact on their “professional career,” and they may never be able to obtain a position related to their field of study. And this is more than just a prophecy.

In fact, habituation to underemployment and a consequent lowering of life’s aspirations are both possible outcomes, and related studies in the literature also support such findings. Similar psychological adjustments are made by long-term unemployed workers. A research by Luhmann and Eid (2009), for example, discovers that recurrent unemployment lead to a decline in life satisfaction over time, indicating a desensitization to unemployment. This is evident in recent graduates underemployed in stopgap rather than career-type jobs, who displayed lower levels of psychological well-being and achievement motivation (Cassidy & Wright, 2008), as well as overskilled workers who lacked confidence in their ability to find more suitable positions (McGuinness & Wooden, 2009). In this regard, it should be noted that insofar as insecure and flexible working conditions make “temporarization/casualization” (see Bourdieu, 1998, s. 81-82) widespread, this creates a form of “permanence in temporariness” for underemployed university graduates working in the store chains. As a result of the previously mentioned vicious cycle, graduates obtain permanent employment in their temporary positions. This casualization stifles the aspirations of un(der)employed graduates. At this point, the disparity between potential and reality is compounded by the loss of a rational anticipation. Un(der)employed individuals trapped in the vicious cycle of necessity lose hope for the future.

Onu düşünüyorum, başka bir alternatif yok yani. Zaten buradan çıkınca gideceğim yerin bana bir alternatif sağlaması lazım. Aldığım maaştan daha fazla bir maaş teklif etmesi lazım ki ben burayı bırakayım. Ya da yöneticilik vasfıyla başka bir markete geçerim... (Utku)

4.2.4. The Search for a “Good Job” and a “Good Life”

As already discussed above, almost every interviewee described their current job as a “temporary solution in the absence of a better job” during the interviews. So, what does “a good job” mean for graduates who work in a chain store? I asked each of the interviewees who had described their position in this way what they thought was a “good job,” and they all gave me different answers. The following is a list of some responses, for which I will provide additional explanations: “A job with better working hours” (Güzel), “a job in an office” (Zeynep), “a job that does not tire the body” (Caner), “a job related to my field of study” (Ali), and “a job where I can work until I retire” (Savaş). Although there are numerous examples, almost all interviewees repeated these statements in various forms. For example, the phrase “a job relevant to my field of study,” which I cited only from Ali earlier, was mentioned by almost everyone I interviewed. Although they did so in various ways, certain expectations were expressed, such as office work, regular working hours, and secure work.

Considering that one of the most disturbing aspects of unemployment is being a burden to others, the fact that university graduate chain store workers who are not technically unemployed, are still searching for a “good job” is another indicator of how similar their experiences are to those of the unemployed. Moreover, this similarity in their descriptions of a “good job” provides numerous hints regarding the characteristics of a “white-collar job” in Turkey. A job that does not “tire the body” or “an office work” is ultimately the result of university graduate market employees’ efforts to distance themselves from “manual labor,” or “working class membership.”

Taking this into account, one could argue that what employees with university degrees who work in chain stores consider a “good job” is, when interpreted in reverse, an expression of what these employees cannot find in chain stores. Considering the previous chapter’s discussion on the working conditions in chain stores (see Chapter 3), the employees’ narratives about having a “good job” contain a veiled complaint. For example, in response to Hande’s statement, “I plan to work in the market until I find a good job,” I asked, “What do you mean by ‘a good job’?” Here’s what I got in response:

To reach your dreams. One becomes happy when s/he work for the job s/he loves eventually. To be honest, I want to make a day of working in a job that I love and go happily instead of working boredly. The ‘good job’ seems like to reach your dreams to a certain extent. But a dream shouldn’t be that simple. However, under such conditions you imagine this.

Under what conditions?

Under the conditions of Turkey. (Hande)⁷⁵

We have stated that un(der)employment cannot be regarded solely as an economic problem, and that being un(der)employed in a “work society” imposes social, psychological, and cultural burdens on the un(der)employed individual. In the case of Hande, the situations of “lowering expectations” or “gradual erosion of belief and hope for a better future” that we discussed above in the context of the vicious cycle of necessity imply that a “good job” entails specific working hours, weekend leave, and an absence of mobbing. As a result, the phrase “biggest dream” is often used to refer to one’s desired career.

Simge, another employee, responded to the same question with nearly identical phrases to those used by Hande:

It shouldn’t be a job that I will say when I get up from bed, “Ah, am I going to this place again?” You know that you study for certain courses willingly but studying some of them make you feel tortured in school. Something like that. I want a job that I will work willingly, or I can be helpful. But I expect of more solid things, how to put it, I want to carry on businesses that I will make something and in turn, I will testify to its consequences. (Simge)⁷⁶

The graduates who believe that they cannot utilize their potential because they work in a store and who are aware that they can “do better things” describe this as a “feeling of uselessness”:

⁷⁵ Hayallerine ulaşmak. İnsan sevdiği işi yaparken mutlu oluyor sonuçta. Ben her gün işe sıkılarak değil de mutlu mutlu gidip sevdiğim işi yaparak günümü geçirmek isterim açıkçası. Ya bir tık hayaline ulaşmak gibi bir şey bu “iyi bir iş”. Hayal de bu kadar basit olmamalı ama... Bu şartlar altında insan bunu düşünüyor.

Hangi şartlar?

Türkiye şartları altında. (Hande)

⁷⁶ Sabah yataktan kalktığımda “üff, yine mi oraya gidiyorum” diyeceğim bir iş olmamalı. Okulda da mesela, bazı dersleri çok severek çalışırsın, bazıları işkence gibi gelir ya... Öyle yani. Severek yapacağım bir şey olsun isterim. Ya da böyle insanlara daha faydalı olabileceğim... Ama daha somut bir şey görmek istiyorum, nasıl diyeyim, bir şey yapacağım ve karşılığındaki o sonucu görebileceğim meslekler yapmak istiyorum.” (Simge)

Sometimes I feel I am of no use. You know, there is this word, ‘useless’, I feel just like this. Sometimes this thought enters my head, a thought that fades away after five minutes but ruins the whole day...

In which moments do you feel ‘useless’?

Mostly in the mornings. We wake up when it is dark, I feel useless too much when I wake up and it is dark because I turn back to home at 23:00-00:00 the night before and I go to work in the morning, it is the same darkness. I go out of the house at 6:30-7:00 to go to work.

What kind of a job do you want to be of service? In what kind of a situation don’t you feel useless?

I know that I can do better things, my potential is not limited to the square meter of this place. (Erol)⁷⁷

Sennett, who stated that the elimination of the opposition between the *mass* and the *mental* was one of the greatest achievements of modern society, associated this with the provision of literacy and certain educational standards for all due to the increasing massification of educational institutions (Sennett, 2007, p. 85). According to him, the idea that most people could one day realize their dream of becoming a doctor or a lawyer, which was once considered an impossible aspiration, has evolved into an expectation that can be realized. He also explained that many call center workers in India have two years or more of university education but that these workers are paid “abominably low wages.” On the other hand, he pointed to the labor market’s “search for cheap talent” as the explanation for this phenomenon (Sennett, 2007, pp. 83-92). In a manner analogous to what Sennett describes, the separation between *mass* and *mental* has been eliminated in Turkey, as I have already discussed. This has resulted in the educated young workers in Turkey waking up every morning to a “specter of uselessness,” as demonstrated by the case of Erol.

The pursuit of a “good job” and a “good life” are closely linked for the employees. As we have seen in the case of Hande, “the biggest dream is to find a good job” in the majority of cases. Marriage, having children, the purchase of a house or car, a short

⁷⁷ Bazen kendimi işlevsiz hissediyorum. “Useless” terimi vardır ya, öyle hissediyorum kendimi. O da bazı anlarda oluyor, insana gelir, 5 dakika vurur gider ama tüm günü mahvetmemize yarayan o düşünce tipi vardır ya...

Nasıl anlarda geliyor bu “useless” hissiyatı?

Sabah çok geliyor bana. Sabah o karanlıkta kalkıyoruz ya, o karanlıkta kalktığımda işte çok geliyor çünkü ondan önceki gece ben mesela 11-12’de dönüyorum, sabah işe gidiyorum, aynı karanlıkta gidiyorum. Saat 6.30 – 7’de ben evden çıkmış vaziyette işe gidiyorum.

Nasıl bir işe yaramak isterdin? Ne olsa böyle hissetmezsin?

Daha iyi şeyler yapabileceğimi biliyorum, benim potansiyelim buranın metrekaresine yetmiyor. (Erol)

vacation, and any other indicator of the good life are all closely related to having a good job. For instance, I had the following conversation with Savaş during the interview when I asked him if he was married:

Are you married?

I am single. How should I put it?

You hesitated... Do you have any marriage plan?

I wish I have but I couldn't undertake such a thing. To a certain extent, because of being a chain store personnel, I couldn't. In fact, it was expected from me to have better things, to reach a certain position, etc. It didn't happen in the way it is expected partly because of the familial reasons. (Savaş)⁷⁸

A similar statement from Caner:

I am thinking about marrying but I am limited to thinking, it is hard in these hard times. You think, "At first, I'll pay my debt and then save up a little." Housing is also important. First of all, I should set up a home, in turn, I can marry. In any case, all of them takes five or six years. I am already 28 years old. After all these years, I will be in my thirties. (Caner)

The university graduates working in chain stores regard their current positions as a temporary phase on the way to a better job and a better future. Due to this "transitory" nature of their work for them, they can endure a number of difficulties. Insofar as they describe a decent job and a decent future as the exact opposite of what exists today, they also face a significant self-respect problem. I asked Onur, for example, "What do you intend to do after leaving this job?" He replied:

I always hope that God forbid me to work in a chain store over again. (Laughing) But that's the way life is... It is hard to predict what life will get for us, what we will live under what kind of conditions, etc. I may be forced to work in ŞOK or BİM again if I become compelled. But if I can be a white-collar staff in future, however, I won't want that people know about this transitory period, to be honest. I won't add this information to my CV. This is a temporary job. I am not deserving of this job; I deserve a better one. What make me feel partially well is to know that it is temporary. (Onur)⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Evli misin?*

Bekârim. Nasıl diyeyim... (Bir süre bekliyor)

Bir düşündün, yakında bir evlilik planı mı var?

Keşke olsa ama, hiç o şeye giremedim yani. Biraz da market çalışanı olmanın şeyiyle sanırım bu. Açıkçası benden de biraz iyi bir şeyler, iyi bir yerlere gelmem vesaire bekleniyordu... Biraz da ailevi sebeplerden, şeylerden dolayı, olmadı yani. (Savaş)

⁷⁹ Allah bir daha beni markete düşürmesin diye düşünüyorum. (Gülüyor) Ama hayat bu, neyin ne getireceğini, hangi koşullar altında neler yaşayacağımı kestirmek güç. Yine çok mecbur kalırsam, ŞOK olur, BİM olur, çalışmak mecburiyetinde kalabilirim. Ama olur da ileride beyaz yakalı bir işte çalışırsam, benim için bu geçici dönemlerin çok bilinmesini, duyulmasını da istemem doğrusu. CV'me

The meaning of work, as well as the meaning of the type of work, is heavily influenced by culture. Work is not only a means of acquiring financial resources; it is also a means of self-actualization. As a result, university graduates working in chain stores, in addition to not being able to realize themselves, also experience the discomfort of not working in a socially “respected” job. This lack of self-confidence and social value they experience is not unique to them; it is a defining work experience of precarious workers, or even the precariat, according to some.⁸⁰ However, given the social meanings of work, this is perceived as an added burden by university graduates who worry about the uselessness of the labor they have to do in their temporary, unwanted jobs.

4.2.5. Family Relations, and Search for an Independent Life

Family members are essential to the intergenerational transmission of social and cultural capital such as skills, social networks, aspirations, values, and material wealth. Numerous factors, such as cultural tradition, the presence of a more or less religious solid belief, opportunities for economic growth, welfare policies, the education system, and the organization of the market for goods and services, can affect the significant decisions young people make as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Among these factors, the family and the welfare system are two of the most important. The distribution of responsibilities among different institutional domains (the family, the market, and the government), as well as the goals that each sector strives to achieve in terms of providing for children and dependents in general, determine the course of events for future generations. Due to Turkey’s weak social state and the limited number of high-quality jobs available in the labor market, the family has been one of the most influential institutions in the lives of unemployed young people (Çelik, 2008).

yazmam mesela. Bu geçici süre çalıştığım bir iş. Ben burayı hak etmiyorum, daha iyisini hak ediyorum. Bana kısmen de olsa iyi hissettiren bunun geçici bir iş olması. (Onur)

⁸⁰ There is a specific reason why I refer to “precariat” and Standing in this context. In his book *Precariat*, Standing tells the story an almost identical account of a young South Korean educated man named Lee Changshik. Similar to Onur, this young man who works on a crab boat in Standing's book states that he avoids discussing his job, does not tell his family and friends what he does, and refuses to include it on his resume (see Standing, 2011, p. 21).

Several factors, including the family's ties, the number of children, the level of education, the immigration status, the occupations of the parents, and whether or not the family owns a home, as well as the presence of other unemployed family members, have a significant impact on the position of un(der)employed youth within the family. A considerable number of young people entering the workforce for the first time are ineligible for unemployment insurance. In addition, there is no established service plan for unemployed youth, and the available benefits are primarily geared toward the needs of families. In Turkey, the limited employment opportunities, low wages, and sporadic nature of these jobs contribute to a greater emphasis on maintaining strong family ties. As a result, many young people are compelled to live with their families, as the assistance they receive from their families enables them to face the economic difficulties that directly result from their unemployment. Due to the impact of these factors, discussions about young people's employment or lack thereof frequently center on the family.

This significant impact of the family on the experience of unemployment also applies to a substantial degree to un(der)employed graduates who work in chain stores. Every single worker I spoke with was still living with their families. Not paying rent is the primary cause of this. Taking into account that the average rent prices in Ankara and İstanbul, where this study was conducted, are close to the minimum wage and that the salaries of the store workers we interviewed were also close to the minimum wage, living with one's parents appears to be more of a necessity than a choice in the majority of cases. A significant number of interviewees admitted that they would be unable to maintain their current standard of living if they had to pay rent:

If I don't live with my family, I cannot make a living. If I live alone or married, I cannot live on under this condition, I speak as a chain store personnel who knows well the price of the items in the store. I live with my family, I don't pay rent, that is why I can make a living. (Savaş)⁸¹

Since they are not required to pay rent and do not have a responsibility to provide for their families, the salary of graduate chain store employees who live with their families

⁸¹ Ailemle yaşamasam kazandığım para yetmez. Tek başıma yaşıyor olsam, evli olsam, bu şartlarda özellikle bir market çalışanı olarak marketteki ürünlerin ücretlerini iyi bilen bir insan olarak söylüyorum ki yetmez. Ailemle yaşıyorum, ev kirası yok, o nedenle yetirebiliyorum. (Savaş)

is sufficient to support them. On the other hand, they are well aware that the money they make is insufficient to build a life of their own. To the point where they are shocked by their coworkers who can “handle” this:

I can afford to live because I expend for my needs. I am single. I have no discharge. If I would be married, it is not possible to make a living, but some people succeed it. For example, the store manager has three children, and his wife doesn't work. I don't know how he succeeds to maintain a family. (Laughing) (Utku)⁸²

The function of the family for un(der)employed youth extends beyond sharing a home. During unemployment, the family works as a social and psychological support system. In addition, active participation in the job search process is a component of this system. This approach employs informal instruments, such as family, relatives, and friends, as well as formal ones (CV preparation, interviews, scanning job advertisements, etc.) in the job search process. Family members inform all their relatives, friends, and acquaintances about the child's job quest.

In addition to alleviating their children's rent burden by sharing their residences with them and helping their children's job search by utilizing their networks, family members also assist their children by paying their bills or providing direct financial assistance. For instance, Utku, age 31, argues that he could not have survived without the aid of his family:

I cannot afford to live by myself. Look, I don't pay rent, I live in my family's house. I am alone, my mother and father are in hometown, it is our own house. Despite this, we barely make both ends meet by borrowing from family members, friends, etc. Imagine as we are living by borrowing and paying back when getting the salary. We brought down to such situation. It is not possible to live on if I pay rent. I think I have to quit living in İstanbul in that scenario. (Utku)⁸³

⁸² Ben aldığım parayı kendime harcadığım için yetiyor. Bekâırım. Hiçbir yere ödemem yok. Evli olsam kesinlikle yetmez, ama yetiren de var. Mağaza müdürü, 3 tane çocuğu var, eşi çalışmıyor. Nasıl yetiriyor, bilmiyorum. (Gülüyor) (Utku)

⁸³ Tek başımayken yetmiyor, bak ben kira da vermiyorum, ailemin evinde oturuyorum. Ben tekim, annem babam memlekette, kendi evimiz... Ona rağmen zar zor, ondan bundan işte, ailemizden, arkadaşımızdan borç alarak geçiniyoruz yani. Borç alıyoruz, maaş gelince veriyoruz gibi düşün. O seviyelere indik yani. Kira da versem imkânı yok geçinmemin. Direkt İstanbul'u bırakıp gitmem gerekir. Bence yani. (Utku)

The role of the family, which is frequently emphasized in the researches on the unemployment experience, seems to be equally important for the university graduate chain market employees in this study. Because, as stated from the very beginning, working does not only make economic sense. On the contrary, working in a society where work is of central importance, above all, it means to take control of your own life. “Adulthood”, which the relevant literature also emphasizes, emerges precisely in such a state of independence. On the other hand, the situation of university graduate store workers who seem to be working “technically” does not seem much different than the unemployed. They can only make a living with the money they earn by living with their families and delay establishing their own independent lives. I am aware of the fact that this does not only apply to university graduates working in these stores, but all store workers suffer from the same problem. However, these young people who go to university with the dream of being “white-collar” and thus “upclassing” become “culturally white-collar” at the end of the day, while deprived of the opportunities that it supposedly provides. Thus, while they are imagining “upclassing”, they are experiencing a kind of “downclassing” in practice.

The part that family plays in the experience of being un(der)employed is about much more than just these positive aspects discussed above. During this process, the family also serves as an institution that is both explicitly and implicitly repressive. While the vast majority of those interviewed stated that they felt their families’ support, many also said explicitly or implicitly that their family members put pressure on them to “find a job.” Thus, they end up working in a job unrelated to their profession (their field of study) as a direct result of this pressure. For instance, Güzel’s family is the primary motivation for her decision to work in the store. After graduating from the university, it did not take Güzel very long to find work—approximately four to five months after she received her diploma, she began working in a store. She was a successful student who graduated from one of the best universities in Turkey, as stated previously. Surprisingly, she gave up looking for a job in such a short time and started working in the store. “Had you not given up on it quickly,” I asked her. She says that “family pressure” is the reason. Güzel, a woman getting ready to get married, was “sitting idly at home” and drew her relatives’ attention. Her own family forced her to

look for a job when her boyfriend's family met with hers because she says, "once the families met, it was obvious that we were going to marry, and I had to work." Güzel is one of the people whose graduation took place during the pandemic. She took her classes for the previous semester online and remotely. In the eyes of her family, the length of time she spent at home during her final semester of university and the decrease in her ties to school created the impression that she was "sitting at home idly":

I am involved with my boyfriend for three years. You know, when families meet, it continues. After they meet, it was clear that looking for work would be due. They started to say, "How about getting a job?", "How about looking for a job temporarily?", "You are sitting around at home, you at least build up savings." Two days are passing, they are asking, "Did you applied for a job? Just apply for a job..." It was not an expropriation but they said it three or four times, and my father doesn't say such things normally but he also said, "So what, take a chance, you find the job you want in future." After such conversations, you feel that you are obliged to seek work. (Güzel)⁸⁴

Esra, like Güzel, is among those who graduated from school at home during the pandemic. "The classes I took over the phone did not assist much," recalls Esra, who returned to her family after her school made the decision to transition to a distance education model because of the outbreak of the virus. Despite the fact that she pursues her education at a distance, she was unable to withstand the pressure from her family to "find a job" and consequently found one in the store:

Both my father and my family wanted me to work. He said, "Don't sit around, go to work and bring home the bread." Honestly, I think it wouldn't be a problem if I didn't work. I don't think that my father is on short commons. (Laughing) But he conditioned us to hardship from a child. He said, "Why are you sitting around at home? Go and work, at least you can prepare your trousseau or build up savings." After the expressions like 'She is graduated and sitting around at home' became on everyone's lips... (Esra)⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Erkek arkadaşıyla üç senedir beraberiz. Aileler tanışınca, bilirsiniz ki devamı gelir. Onlar da tanıştıktan sonra, bir iş arama süreci vs. olacağı belliydi. "Bir işe mi girsen?", "Geçici olarak bir iş mi baksan?", "Evde boş oturuyorsun, en azından kendine birikim yaparsın..." falan demeye başladılar. İki gün geçiyor, "başvurdun mu, başvursana..." Böyle azarlama gibi değil ama üç dört kere dile getirilmişti, babam söylemez böyle şeyleri ama o da söylemişti. "Git bir şansını dene, nolcak, sonra kendi işini bulursun" gibisinden. Böyle konuşmalar olunca insan biraz şey oluyor, mecbur bakmak zorunda kalıyorsunuz." (Güzel)

⁸⁵ Ailem de, babam da istiyordu çalışmamı. "Evde boş boş oturma, git de eve para gelsin" dedi. Aslında bence çalışsam da olurdu. Babamın parası olmadığını düşünmüyorum. (Gülüyor) Ama babam bize hep "yok yok" diye küçüklüğümüzden beri onu alıstırdı. "Evde niye boş oturuyorsun, git çalış en azından çeyizini yaparsın ya da birikim yaparsın" diyordu. "Kız okulunu bitirdi, artık evde, şöyle kız böyle kız" diye oradan buradan da laflar gelmeye başlayınca..." (Esra)

Family pressure, whether explicit or implicit, is not the only factor that compels interviewees to seek employment outside their specialty. In addition, many highlight the necessity of minimizing their financial ties to their families as a condition of adulthood. “After a certain age, you cannot ask your family for money,” said Caner. In fact, he opted to take out a loan from the bank rather than approach his family for money:

In the period that I was vacated, I got bored at home, I was stressed, then... My family didn't put the mouth on, but you feel under pressure unavoidably. You cannot be at ease because a 25-year-old person feels offended when s/he hits her/his father up for money. I feel offended at least, felt offended I mean. I tried hard to not to ask for money. My family backed me up, but you cannot ask for money after a certain age. Thus, I happened to get credit. (Caner)⁸⁶

Laboratory Techniques graduate Hande's family does not require her to work, just as Mehmet's family does not. They utilize their full network to obtain a job in their field; they make every effort possible. However, Hande, who no longer wishes to be a burden on her family, decides to work in the market by eventually giving up:

Thank to them, they never bear down on me. They also know the general situation in Turkey, the situation of the university graduates. My mother also tried so hard to find a job for me in a hospital. At last, I said that ‘It won't happen this way, I am not going to find a job in a hospital. Let me find a job in a chain store, I fill in at the very least.’ Well, you consider the situation of your family, they cannot put you through another undergraduate education, they cannot carry forward. I get tired of studying, books, etc. After a certain point, one does not want to be a burden to her/his family because the family members have their needs on their own way, I also have different needs. (Hande)⁸⁷

⁸⁶ İşsiz kaldığım dönemde ben evde artık bunaldım iyice, gerildim, o zaman... Ailem de bir şey demiyordu ama o baskıyı ister istemez hissediyorsun. Kendin rahat edemiyorsun çünkü 25 yaşındaki birinin babadan para alması zoruna gidiyor. Benim en azından gider, gidiyordu yani. İstememeye gayret ediyordum. Ailem destek oluyordu ama belli bir yaşa geldikten sonra da aileden para isteyemiyorsun. O şekilde kredi çekmiş bulundum. (Caner)

⁸⁷ Sağ olsunlar, çok üstüme gelmediler. Onlar da biliyorlar Türkiye'nin genel durumunu, üniversite mezunlarının durumunu... Annem de çok uğraştı bir hastane olsun diye. Ben dedim artık “anne böyle olmayacak, hastane olmayacak. Her yere başvuruyoruz olmuyor. Ben normal bir market işine gireyim, en azından çalışayım...” Hani ailenin durumunu görüyorsun, daha fazla okutamayacaklar, ilerletemeyecekler. Ben sıkılıyorum ders çalışmaktan, kitap görmekten... İnsan bir yerden sonra ailesine yük olmak istemiyor. Çünkü aile bireylerinin de kendine göre ihtiyaçları oluyor. Benim ayrı ihtiyaçlarım oluyor. (Hande)

Emre adds that he chooses to work in the market, even though his family does not require it, because he does not want to be a burden:

My family is no shortage of money. They also have enough money for me. They asked me not to work either, saying ‘Be vacated until you get a job’, but I don’t like idling. I don’t want to get money from my family. You can take it a day or two but how about the third day? I never want to be a burden to them. (Emre)⁸⁸

These are not the only detrimental effects of family on young people. The condition as mentioned above of “sharing the same residence” can also be a source of mental suffering for young people. Indeed, narratives such as young people who study for years and cannot find a job after graduating, or who have to work for low wages in jobs that do not match their qualifications and have to return to their families’ homes, “have to change” and “shrink” when they return to their family homes, are common (Alan, 2021).

As seen in the examples above, the influence of the family on the un(der)employed is twofold. On the one hand, the family plays a role that makes life easier for the un(der)employed, help enduring the economic difficulties, shares the house, and mobilizes its own network for their child to find a better job, on the other hand, there is an overt or implicit pressure for their child to work. In addition, the quest of university graduates to “establish an independent life” causes them to want to work as soon as possible in order not to be a burden to their own families, and causes them to work in jobs that do not match their qualifications “until they find a better job.” In this respect, the family also plays a negative role.

4.3. Concluding Remarks

This chapter explored the experiences of university graduate chain store workers in the context of their relationships both inside and outside of the workplace. I discussed the workplace experiences of the employees through their interactions with their managers and customers. In this regard, I attempted to demonstrate how the educational capital of the workers contributes to their encounters. In addition to the “distance between

⁸⁸ Ailemin paraya ihtiyacı yok. Bana da yetecek kadar paraları var. Çalışmamamı da istediler, iş bulana kadar boş dur diye ama ben boş durmayı sevmiyorum. Ailemden para almak istemiyorum. Bir gün alırsın, iki gün alırsın, üçüncü gün... Onlara yük olmak istemedim hiçbir zaman. (Emre)

expectations and reality” mentioned in the previous chapter is evident in each of these contacts, I emphasized the damage that this gap inflicts on the graduate chain store workers themselves. Furthermore, one of the issues I tried to show under this heading was how the graduate workers developed strategies to protect their self-esteem.

Although the experiences of recent graduates working in chain stores were considered as part of their unemployment narratives in this study, as we mentioned above, because they technically have a job, this experience is partly related to their employment, but also to their unemployment. In this respect, the experiences of employees as store employees, including their encounters with customers and managers, their perception of the workplace they work in are their experiences related to their work, is their experiences of underemployment. On the other hand, the fact that they do not perceive their work as a “real job”, that they cannot live a life independent of their families and other commitments, and that they are still in search of a “real job” are the factors that we can say that converge to those of the experience of the unemployed.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the experiences of the white-collar underemployed in Turkey through the working experiences of the store chain employees with university degrees. In this regard, it is argued that to better understand the experiences of the educated unemployed, the experiences of the white-collar underemployed workers who are working in the jobs that do not match their qualifications, who are insecure, and who work in temporary jobs should also be included in the studies on unemployment. In this respect, the study emphasized that the boundaries between employment and unemployment are becoming increasingly blurred and proposed to consider these two together.

The widespread belief that higher education will offer individuals a better future than their current position has weakened to a great extent due to the increase in the number of unemployed graduates in recent years, as well as the underemployed ones. This belief has become more problematic as insecurity and uncertainty have increased in the labor market. However, while the belief that higher education will offer a better future has weakened, this did not mean that demand for higher education ceased. In contrast, a significant part of the population, despite everything, have set up their future plans to receive a better and higher degree of education as can be seen from the rapidly increasing schooling rates. Except for the poorest, a very significant proportion of young people now have access to more opportunities for higher education and training, but it appears that preexisting social disadvantages have been maintained. Upper classes are determined to preserve social stratification through access to the so-called “top universities” and the most prestigious graduate jobs, even as the cultural and

economic power of a university degree decline. In other words, as a result of the commodification experienced at every level of the educational apparatus in Turkey, higher education has stratified, and as a result, it continues to fulfill its function of securing a better future only for certain segments of society.

Parallel to the massification of higher education, the transition of educated young people to the labor market is gradually changing, and as a result, underemployment among white-collar workers has become a growing problem alongside unemployment. In recent years, attempts have been made to broaden the definition of unemployment, but it is contended here that underemployment is largely ignored in both academic and nonacademic research. In addition, the increasingly insecure labor market as a result of precarization has blurred the distinction between having a job and being jobless. The purpose of this study, within this framework, was to understand how recent graduates experience un(der)employment, defined as a position between unemployment and employment based on educational capital, by examining the experiences of workers employed in a chain store despite having completed at least a two-year university program.

Based on the interviews we conducted, we can conclude that because it is difficult to find a permanent and “good job,” graduates who face financial difficulties after graduation are forced to work in jobs with flexible working conditions that are unsuitable for their qualifications and education. In this context, chain stores in Turkey stand out as a specific employment sector for educated unemployed people. These stores, where a large number of young workers are employed and a significant portion of the employee profile is young and female, deserve special consideration in terms of the previously mentioned underemployment of educated youth. This study focuses on the general structure and operation of chain stores in this regard. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the workers in these stores face extremely precarious working conditions, low wages, and labor mobility. However, for these very reasons, these stores appear to be suitable for educated young people who have been out of work for a while, “at least for a temporary period,” as stated in numerous interviews.

This study revealed that university graduates who work in chain stores do not consider their job a “real job.” As already stated, it is precarization that causes workers to lose

their occupational and work-based identities. In this respect, the interviews conducted for this study revealed that the unwillingness of employees to perceive their job as a “real job” and their emphasis on its “temporariness” is a result of precarization, as well as their educational qualifications. Although the interviewed employees said that they would leave the chain store they are working at as soon as they can, a substantial portion of them stated that they are considering continuing their job in the stores they are working for an indefinite period of time, and even moving to a higher position if possible. Based on this, it seems that habituation to underemployment and, as a result, a reduction in life aspirations are both possible outcomes. As highlighted above, this is evident in recent graduates who are underemployed in stopgap rather than career-type jobs and have lower levels of psychological well-being and achievement motivation, as well as overskilled workers who lack confidence in their ability to find more suitable positions. From this point of view, we can conclude, confirming the relevant literature, that the career expectation for the future of someone who remains underemployed for a long time decreases. The fact that university graduate chain store employees are thinking of quitting their job on the one hand, and planning a future here on the other, supports the thesis that the distinction between employment and unemployment is gradually fading, which is one of the main claims of this thesis.

As underlined above, while attempting to escape the symbolic violence of unemployment, the graduate store chain workers are entrapped in the symbolic violence of working in a position they do not consider genuinely worthy, with low wages and no security. In this regard, I should emphasize that widespread feelings of unworthiness exist among employees. While university graduates who work in chain stores avoid the “stigma” of unemployment, they are caught in the humiliation of feeling unworthy of their employment. However, it is incorrect to portray university graduate market employees solely as victims of their own circumstances. The interviews have revealed that employees are not simply individuals who accept the conditions imposed upon them; rather, they are agents who develop coping strategies, who constantly seek new ones, and, if necessary, avoid the responsibilities imposed on them to protect their self-respect. It was demonstrated in the context of the preceding discussion of language that such subjectivation can be detected, first and foremost, in

the manner in which interviewees express themselves. Furthermore, we revealed that recent graduate market workers developed a variety of strategies to avoid the aforementioned symbolic violence. Examples include Erol hiding when he sees a familiar customer, Onur stating that he will not tell anyone about such a job in the future, and Caner stating that he does not want to write his current job in the store on his CV as a work experience. Even their expectations of promotion for a higher position in the stores where they work demonstrate that they are not simply victims of current conditions. It reminds us that they are agents, but they are agents who advance on their own paths and devise strategies.

The definitions and questions posed to store chain employees about what constitutes a “good job” are indicative of how university graduates in Turkey perceive “white-collar” jobs. Although we expect definitions of “good job” to differ from “top universities” to “mass universities” due to the abovementioned stratification, statements about what a “good job” means in this study have revealed that “white-collar candidate” young people want to work in secure jobs where they do not fear being fired, where they can work for the rest of their lives, and where they can retire. In this regard, “stable” jobs, rather than “unstable” jobs, are in high demand. However, it can be argued that the emergence of such a result in the interviews conducted for this study is also related to the interviewees’ relative lack of social and economic capital. Because flexibility and insecurity imply a certain level of “risk-taking capacity.” Young people from working-class families, on the other hand, do not have the opportunity to “endure” such long periods of unemployment after graduating from university, have low “risk-taking” capacity, and have relatively low social capital. As Sennett emphasizes, “a child of privilege can afford strategic confusion,” but “a child of the masses cannot” (2007, p. 80).

It was not possible to conduct a systematic research on the field of studies and university affiliations of the interviewed market chain employees due to the small number of people interviewed within the scope of the study. However, as can be seen from the interviewee profiles in the Appendix, the fields of study of university graduates working in chain markets and the universities they attend are diverse. At this point, it is quite remarkable that almost none of the interviewed employees are enrolled

in one of the universities discussed in Chapter 2, which were established as a result of the recent massification of higher education. Although this may be considered a coincidence to some extent, it demonstrates that the problem of underemployment and unemployment is not limited to universities established during the wave of massification in the last fifteen years. Furthermore, the fact that the employees interviewed studied anything including civil engineering to graphics and design, nutrition and dietetics, and economics demonstrates how widespread the problem of un(der)employment is.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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14 MART 2022

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Necmi ERDOĞAN

Danışmanlığımı yürüttüğünüz Halil Can İNCE'nin" İstihdam ile işsizlik arasında diplomahlar: Üniversite mezunu market çalışanları üzerine bir araştırma" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **0170-ODTÜİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkan

B. PROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWEES / GÖRÜŞMECİLERİN PROFİLİ

Name	Sex	Age	Field of Study	Marital Status	Duration of work in chain store	Position
Güzel	F	23	Nutrition and Dietetics	Married	10 months	Cashier
Ufuk	M	27	Graphic Design	Single	6 months	Personnel
Simge	F	25	City and Regional Planning	Single	1 month	Cashier
Hande	F	23	Laboratory Techniques	Single	6 months	Cashier
Caner	M	27	Economics	Single	4 years	Personnel (Assistant Store Manager)
Zeynep	F	26	Medical Documentation and Secretarial	Single	3 years	Personnel
Emre	M	23	Electronics	Single	1.5 years	Personnel (Assistant Store Manager)
Erol	M	25	Media and Visual Arts	Single	5 years	Personnel
Delal	F	25	Public Relations and Advertising	Single	3 months	Personnel (e-commerce)
Yavuz	M	24	Graphic Design	Single	3 years	Store Attendant

Ali	M	27	International Relations	Single	1.5 years	Store Attendant
Sevil	F	23	Civil Technician	Single	2 years	Cashier
Mehmet	M	27	Business	Single	1,5 years	Personnel (e-commerce)
Adem	M	31	Food Engineering	Single	5 years	Personnel
Utku	M	31	Tourism and Hospitality Management	Single	3 years	Personnel
Ayşe	F	27	Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher	Single	3 months	Personnel
Meral	F	33	Economics	Single	6 years	Personnel (Fired from the job)
Havva	F	40	High School	Single	8 years	Cashier
Esra	F	23	Nursing of old persons	Single	7 months	Personnel
Onur	M	30	Journalism & Labor Economics	Single	2 years	Personnel (deli counter)
Savaş	M	31	Civil Engineering	Single	4 months	Personnel
Eralp	M	28	Hospital Administration	Married	2 years	Storehouse (not used)

C. A SAMPLE INTERVIEW / ÖRNEK GÖRÜŞME

Ne zamandır çalışıyorsun burada?

Benim 1,5 sene oldu. Geçti hatta.

E-ticarettesin?

Evet, sanaldayız.

Sizin siparişler planlı teslimat galiba, değil mi?

Aynen. Biz topluyoruz. Sayıyoruz, poşetlere koyuyoruz, hazır hale getiriyoruz. Onun belli bir kasası var, oraya koyuyoruz. Şoför gelip alıyor, adresine teslim ediyor. Bizim işimiz sadece mağaza içinden müşteri gibi siparişleri toplamak.

Üniversiteden ne zaman mezun oldun?

Üniversiteden 2018 yılında mezun oldum. ... Üniversitesinden, İşletme'den. Üniversiteden mezun olduktan sonra iş imkânı fazla yoktu. Askerliği de aradan çıkarmam gerekiyordu.

Gittin?

Evet, iki sene oldu askere gideli. Üniversiteden mezun olduktan sonra 1-2 sene farklı işlerde çalıştım.

Ne gibi işlerde?

Bankada çalıştım, evrak bölümünde. Sigortasız çalıştığım için onu fazla şey yapmıyorum da gerçi... Yine market sektöründe çalıştım, ... Market'te.

Öyle mi? Orada ne iş yapıyordun, personel?

Normal personel. İş olmadığı için oradan başladık.

Oradan niye ayrıldın?

Çünkü elemana değer vermiyorlar. Sürekli çalışıyorsun. Seni bir robot olarak görüyorlar. Hiçbir hakkın yok. Hiçbir yetkin yok. Kuru maaşla geçinmeye çalışıyorsun.

Hangi seneydi o? 2019?

2019'du evet.

Ne kadar çalıştın?

6 ay kadar. Sonra çıktım zaten kendi isteğimle. Oradan sonra bi 6-7 ay boşta bekledim. Sonra askere gittim. Asker dönüşü de, döndükten 1-2 ay sonra buraya başvurduğum, buraya girdim.

O boşlukta ne yaptın?

Baktım kendi bölümüme göre iş var mı diye de... Kendi bölümüme göre bir iş yok. İşletme Bölümü çok fazla mezun verdiği için önü de tıkalı. KPSS'den çok yüksek bir puan almam lazım ki devlet bankalarına, kamu sektörüne girebileyim. Özel sektör, bankalara falan onlara başvurduğum. Onların da şartları çok zor. Mesela sana iki senelik bir taahhüt veriyor. "İki sene boyunca bu işten çıkmayacağım, çıkarsam 30-40 bin tazminat ödeyeceğim" diyorsun. Özel sektör olduğu için de bu iki sene boyunca seni mobbing ile kullanıyorlar. Oradan da başarılı çıkabilecek misin, bilmiyorum. Birkaç arkadaşım girdi bu sektöre, 1-2 tanesi bıraktı.

Senin çalıştığın bankadaki evrak işi neydi? Bununla ilgili değil mi?

Yok. Biz evrakları düzenliyorduk dışarıdan bir şirket olarak. Arşivi.

Taşeron mu?

Evet, taşeron. Biz o bankayla anlaşılıyorduk, bankayı düzenliyorduk, 1-2 ay. İş düzene oturunca bitiyordu. O bankayla işimiz bitiyordu, başka bankayla anlaşma yapıyordu. Bunlar da genelde ...Bank zaten.

Evrak işini taşeronla vermişler yani?

Bu normalde fazla yok. İstanbul'da bir abimiz var, o yapıyor bu işi. Kendisi de ...Bank emeklisi. Onunla tanıştık, o yardımcı oldu.

Ben de ilk kez duydum böyle bir şeyi.

Fazla öne çıkan bir sektör değil. Yaptığımız işi normalde bankanın çalışanlarının yapması lazım, onların işi çünkü evrakları düzenlemek. Denetim geliyor... Evrakçı diye bir bölüm açmaları lazım ki oraya birini koyacaklar. Bunu yapmıyorlar, banka çalışanları da zor şartlar altında çalışıyor, sürekli çalıştığı için özel sektörde. Bununla uğraşamıyorlar. Evrakları alıyorlar, atıyorlar. Biz dağınık bir depoya giriyoruz, o evrakları tek tek bulup düzenleyip, hazır hale getiriyoruz. İşimiz bitiyor, çıkıyoruz. Normalde onların işi ama yapamadıkları için dışarıdan alıyor.

Mezun olduktan sonra girdiğin ilk iş bu muydu?

Yok, mezun olduktan sonra ilk ... Market'e başvurduğum. 6 ay orada çalıştıktan sonra oraya geçtim.

... Market'ten önce iş bakmadın mı?

Baktım ama uygun bir iş bulamadım. Muhasebecilik baktım genelde, ön muhasebe veya yanında çırak olarak. O şekilde baktım. Onlar da belli bir ücret veriyor zaten, çok az bir miktar. 500-600 lira, o zamanın parasına göre. Asgari ücretin yarısından da az

veriyordu. Diyor ki sana, “yetiřtirmek için alıyorum seni.” Az bir paraya, yetiřtirmek için, sürekli seni çalıştırıyor. Gereksiz bir şey.

Sen bu sırada İstanbul’dasın?

Evet, İstanbul’da.

Ailen mi burada?

Burada.

Onlarla mı yaşıyorsun?

Ailemle yaşıyorum. Üniversite için ...’ya gittim, 6 sene okudum.

Anne baban çalışıyor mu?

Babam çalışıyor, annem ev hanımı.

Ne iş yapıyor baban?

Öğretmen.

Ne öğretmeni?

Müdür yardımcısı.

Kardeşin var mı?

Kardeşim var bir tane, o da ... Market’te çalışıyor. O da İş Güvenliği ve Sağlığı okudu, 2 yıllık. Aslında onun bölümü de güzel ama o bölüm fazla alım yapmıyor.

E markette çalışıyorsa onunla da görüştür beni?

Görüştüreyim. (Gülüyor) O da aynı bizim gibi ama 2 yıllık okudu, bitirdi. Derece merece sınavları vardı, onları halletti. Özel bir firmaya girmesi, oradan başlaması lazım. Devlet almıyor.

Sen de kardeşin de üniversite mezununuz, markette çalışıyorsunuz. Üstelik senin ikinci çalıştığın market burası... Neden başka yer değil de market?

Market en son seçenek gibi bir şey... Hiçbir şey olmayınca markete giriyorsun.

Nasıl yani?

Markete sürekli bir alım vardır. Senin ne olduğuna bakmıyor. Sürekli alıyor, çıkarıyor. Bir sirkülasyon var orada. Birkaç sektörde var bu, hem markette hem garsonlukta... Bir de son zamanlarda kuryelik sektörü var. Ben iş başvurusu için kariyer’e veya herhangi bir yere giriyorum arada, sadece bu üçü var başvuru için. Başka bir firmalar falan almıyor.

Sen bu seçenekler arasında marketi niye seçtin? Garsonluk niye yapmadın?

Garsonluęu zamanında yaptım ama sevmedięim bir iş. Market de en son seçenek kaldı bende. Kuryelik için motor ehliyeti falan ile uğraşmam gerekiyordu. O zaman kuryelik o kadar revaçta değildi. Şeyi düşündüm, şoförlüęü. Dağıtım olarak.

Şimdi yaptığın işin dağıtan bölümü?

Aynen, onun için bir deneme yaptım. Onun da birkaç belgeleri falan uzun iş olduęu için yine buradayız. Ben bu işe girerken 2-3 ay çalışırım, çıkarım; o süre zarfında artı bir iş bulurum kendime göre ve çıkarım diye düşünmüştüm.

Ne oldu?

1,5 sene geçti, hâlâ çalışıyoruz. Çıkamadık.

Niye çıkamadın?

İş yok. Ben şu anda çıkmaya kalksam en az 2 ay boyunca bir boşta durmam lazım. Bizim de bir borcumuz var.

Ne borcu?

Kredi borcu. Kredi kartları falan. Zaten üniversite mezunu insanların hepsinin borcu var ki... KYK da var.

Senin de var mı?

Var. 14 bin lira ödeme yaptım geçen ay.

Tek seferde mi?

Tebliğat geldi, yapacak bir şey yok.

Yapılandıramadın mı?

Yapılandırdığım için öyle oldu zaten. Yapılandırdım, ödemedim. Öderim diye yapılandırdım ama ödeyemedim, diğer borçlardan dolayı.

Diğer borçlar nedir?

Zamanında bir kredi çekmişim, işsiz olduğum zamanlar, onun borçları vardı.

Geçinme amaçlı mı çektin?

Geçinme amaçlı, evet.

Ne zaman çektin?

Askerden geldikten sonra. Askerden önce bir çektim, askerden geldikten sonra bir daha çektim.

Ne kadar çektin?

İlk başta 5 bin lira çekmiştim, sonra 10 oldu, 15 oldu... Şimdi toplam olarak nereden baksan bi 40-50 vardır borcumuz. Burada çalıştığım parayla aldığımız maaşın bir kısmını asgari ödeme olarak veriyoruz oraya.

Ailen sana destek olmuyor muydu, niye kredi çektin?

Oluyordu ama belli bir yaşa geldikten sonra da aileden para isteyemiyorsun. O şekilde kredi çekmiş bulundum.

Ne kadar ödüyorsun ayda?

Gelen maaşın yarısını kredilere ödüyoruz.

Bu borçlar yüzünden mi işi bırakamıyorsun?

İş bıraksam en az 2 ay boyunca boşta kalacağım. Bu ödemeler aksayacak. Bir ödemeyi aksatmam demek benim bittiğim demektir çünkü diğer ödemeyi hiç ödeyemem. Hazırda bir iş varken kimse çıkmayı düşünmüyor.

Eviniz kendinize mi ait?

Kiradayız.

Sen destek olabiliyor musun ailene?

Elimizden geldiğince destek oluyoruz ama o kadar değil tabi...

İstanbul'da da kiralara çok pahalı.

Çok fena...

Siz ne kadar ödüyorsunuz?

Bizim 1500, bizim iyi. 2000'den aşağı şu anda ev bulamayız.

Nerde oturuyorsunuz?

Ümraniye'de. Bizim oradaki evlerin bir deprem sıkıntısı var, o yüzden biraz uygun. Yıkılacak binalar arasında geçiyor. Oraya da kentsel dönüşüm gelecek.

Yaşlı bir ev mi?

Aynen, temeli pek sağlam değil. O yüzden uygun. Yoksa o bölgede 2000-2500'den aşağı yok. Şu an Ümraniye tarafında imar vermiyorlar zaten hiçbir şekilde, çünkü kalabalık, imar verecek alan bile kalmadı doğru düzgün. Ev kiralari da bu nedenle artış sağladı.

Aslen nerelisiniz?

Sivaslıyız.

İstanbul'un yarısı gibi.

Aynen. (Gülüyoruz) 17 sene Sivas'ta yaşadık. Ben doğma büyüme oralıyım. 17-18 yaşına geldim, Bursa'ya gittik. 2 sene Bursa'da kaldık babamın işinden dolayı. Oradan sonra 5-6 yıldır da buradayım. Sabit olarak da 3 veya 4 yıldır buradayım, üniversiteden döndüm.

O zaman liseyi Sivas'ta okudun?

Yarısını Sivas'ta okudum, son sene Bursa'ya geçtim; orada bitirdim.

Üniversitede işletme okumaya nasıl karar verdin? “Puanım buna yetti” gibi mi düşündün?

Evet, biraz öyle oldu. 2012 yılında o zaman ben o bölüme girdiğimde yine o bölümün önü açıldı, bir alım vardı. Biz girdikten sonra, 2014-15 gibi önü kapandı.

“Buradan mezun oluna bir iş bulurum” diye düşünüyor muydun peki?

Tabii, üniversite mezunu biri o zaman boşta kalmazdı. Girdikten sonra işte... Çeşitli sebeplerden dolayı üniversite mezunları boşta geziyor.

Ne gibi sebepler?

Ekonomik sebepler, kriz, fazla üniversite açılması, fazla mezun vermeleri... İşverenin az olması.

Senin okuduğun üniversite bu yeni açılanlardan biri mi?

Yok, eski bir üniversiteydi orası.

Eğitimi nasıldı?

Çok iyi değildi. Puan ortalaması zaten düşüktü. Bir de o var tabii şimdi... Bizim okuldan mezun olan biriyle ODTÜ İşletme'den mezun olan biri bir değil yani. KPSS için de çok yüksek istiyor. ... Bankası 85 istiyordu en az mesela. O puanı almak için de dershaneye gitmen lazım 1-2 sene, kendini geliştirmen lazım. Çünkü üniversitede anlatılan şey boş yani, hiçbir şey anlamıyorsun. Sadece sınıfı geçmek için gidiyorsun. Bunlar için dershaneye gitmen, çalışman lazım. Ben de kendimi fazla sıkmadım, o da var... Kendimi biraz sıksam, çalışsam aslında, KPSS'den bir yerlere girebilirim.

Üniversiteden arkadaşlarıyla haberleşiyor musun, onlarda durum nasıl?

Haberleşiyorum. Onlardan bankalara girenler var, özel bankalara girip kendini yükseltenler. Ama çoğunluk polisliğe, bekçiliğe yönelmiş. Son zamanlarda fazla alım olduğu için orada. “Hiçbir şey olamazsan polis ol” derlerdi zamanında zaten. Hepsi oraya yönelmiş durumda.

Sen düşünmedin mi?

Düşündüm. Bir kere girdim de mülakata ama bir yerde takıldım. Onu geçemeyince bir daha da girmedim.

Hangi aşamada geçemedin?

Tekerlek aşaması vardı, tekerlekten geçiyorsun. Oradan geçerken ayakkabım takıldı. Ayakkabım çıkmıştı hatta. Öyle olunca dönmek zorunda kaldım tekerleğe. O zaman da baya bir süre kaybettim.

Bekçilik?

Onu hiç düşünmedim. Şöyle düşündüm: Dört yıl üniversite okumuşum, bekçilik de yapmayayım, dedim yani. Çünkü bekçilik için lise yetiyor.

Şimdi market de öyle...

Şimdi markette çalışıyorum işte. “Üniversite okuduysam bölümümle ilgili bir iş yapayım” dedim ama... Liseden mezun olduktan sonra direkt bekçi olabilirsin yani, sınavları çok basit. Bekçilik sınavları çok aşırı basit. “2 artı 2 eksi 3” gibi sorular geliyor, ben baktım. Lise mezunu olduğu için böyle sorular geliyor. Ben düşünmedim ama. Boşuna mı okudum üniversiteyi? Bekçi olmak için mi okudum? Üniversite okuduysam, buna dair bir şey yapayım. Bu da olmadı.

Ne yapmak isterdin?

Muhasebe, mali müşavirlikleri çok fazla denedim. O sektörden gitseydim, kendime bir muhasebe ofisi açabilirdim, öyle düşünüyordum ama o da olmadı.

O niye olmadı?

İş yoktu, alım yoktu. Birkaç sene de orada başkasının yanında çalışmam lazımdı.

Orada da zaten asgari ücretin yarısının altında veriyor, dedin...

Yarısının altında veriyor ki o beni kurtarmaz zaten. En son seçim artık market kalıyor. Burası da, şükür sonuçta. Çalışıyoruz, paramızı kazanıyoruz yani. Geçim kaynağı bizim için.

Ne kadar kazanıyorsunuz?

Asgari ücretin biraz üzerinde alıyoruz, 300 lira kadar üzerinde.

İkramiye var, değil mi?

Bizim markete özel, 3 ayda bir ikramiye verir.

Ne kadar?

Bir maaş. Mesela, mart ayında bir ikramiyemiz var. 4250 asgari ücret desek, 4250 de oradan, 8500. 500 de fazladan verdiğinde, 9 bin lira para yapar mart ayında. Ama bunun için iki yıl orada çalışmak gerekir. Ben 1,5 senedir çalışıyorum, bana 1500 – 1700 veriyor. İki seneyi doldurduğum zaman tam maaş verecek. Şimdi yarısını veriyor. Bu da güzel bir şey sonuçta. Diğer ...'a göre, ...'e göre falan, başka marketlere göre, mağazalara göre.

... Market'te böyle bir şey yoktu, değil mi?

Yok. Kuru maaş ile geçiniyordun.

... Market'e girmende de kredi borçları mı belirleyici olmuştu?

Evet. Boşta kaldım, ödemeler falan birikince girmem lazımdı, girdim. Buradan da aslında dediğim gibi, birkaç ay sonra çıkacaktım ama çıkamadım. Şu anda da ne zaman çıkacağımı bilmiyorum. İş bakıyoruz ama dışarıda iş yok.

Çalışma koşulları nasıl?

Çalışma koşulları güzel ama belli sıkıntılar var.

Ne gibi sıkıntılar?

Sonuçta sana muhtaç değiller, yöneticiler falan. Mobbing uyguluyorlar.

Muhtaçlar, niye değiller?

Bana muhtaç değiller, beni gönderebilirler ve yerime yeni personel alırlar. Şu anda bir personel alımı yapsalar, günde en az 20 kişi başvurabilir. Her gün başvuru gelir buraya, 20-30 kişi. Biliyor çünkü, seni gönderdiği zaman yerine her türlü eleman gelecek.

Herhangi bir güvencen yok mu?

Herhangi bir güvencemiz yok şu an. İlk üç ay sözleşmeli yaparlar, üç ay boyunca "seni beğenmezsek çıkartırız" derler. Üç ay bittikten sonra da bir üç ay daha eklerler sana. Üç artı üç, altı ay, deneme süresi. Önceden bu kadar değildi.

Yasal olarak da altı ay değil, yapamaması gerekir.

Evet, iki aydır normalde. Bunlar da iki ay yapıyordu ama korona çok şeyi değiştirdi orada. Korona olduğu o iki ayı üç aya çıkardılar. Yasal olarak yapıyorlar bu işi, anlaşıyorlar devletle. "İki ay değil, artık üç ay" diyorlar. Üç ay çalıştıracağız, beğenmezsek çıkaracağız, diyorlar. Korona zamanı eleman çıkarmak yasaktı bildiğiniz gibi. Eleman çıkarmak yasak olduğu için deneme süresini uzattı. Biz üç ay deneme süreci olarak girdik.

Sen de pandemi döneminde girdin...

İkinci COVID dalgasında girdim. Üç ay sonra çağırıp bizi kadroya geçirmeleri gerekiyordu mesela, onun yerine bir üç ay daha önerdiler. "Ya ikinci üç ay, ya da işten çıkarsın" dediler.

Nasıl yaptı onu?

Yeni bir sözleşme imzalıyorsun. "Üç artı üç" diye sözleşme imzalıyorsun.

Kanun aleyhine iş yapıyor yani...

Burada böyle. Altı ay seni sözleşmeli çalıştırıyor. Delal de mesela öyle, onun da üç artı üç. Altı ay bittikten sonra kadroluya bir kısmını alıyorlar, bir kısmını almıyorlar.

Sen aldın kadroyu?

Evet, ben kadrodayım.

Bir deęişim oldu mu?

Kovarsa tazminatımı ödemek zorunda. Onu da yapmıyorlar. Eylül, ekim gibi buradan kovulmalar vardı, tazminatlı kovulmalar. 20 kişiydik biz burada, 10 kişisi kovuldu. İşten çıkardılar. Çünkü sanal sektörü COVID’de canlandı, sürekli sipariş geldi. Yazın sonuna doğru sipariş gelmez, azalır. Millet memleketine gider, tatile gider. Siparişler azaldığı zaman elinde eleman fazla, sipariş az geliyor. Bu şekilde göndermeler başladı. Yaklaşık 10 kişiyi işten çıkardılar.

Sen?

Ben de çıkarılacaktım, ben de sırada vardım. Sırayla herkesi çıkarıyorlardı ikişer üçer. 20 yıllık şefi çıkardılar, 200 milyara yakın tazminat verdiler. Tazminatlı çıkarıyorlar. O adamın işine geliyor belki de. Sana “15 gün sonra seni çıkaracağım” diye bir şey söylemiyor. Ertesi gün işe gidiyorsun, diyor “seni kovduk.” Böyle olduğu zaman yaklaşık 5-6 bin lira para vermek zorunda sana. Çıkan arkadaşlar iyi bir tazminat aldılar yani. Çoğu da memnun. Kıdem tazminatı, ihbar tazminatı, şu bu...

Sen ayrıldığın ... Market’ten aldın mı tazminat?

Ben kendim çıktığım için hiçbir şey yok. Öyle market sektöründe çalışıyorsan kovulman gerekiyor. İşten çıkarılman gerekiyor. Bu şekilde baya bir insan tazminatını aldı. O zaman ben de bekliyordum çıkarılmayı. Kadroya geçmiştim ama kıdemim yoktu, bana 7-8 bin lira tazminat verecekti. Maaşla beraber 12 bin lira yapar. Ben de o şekilde bekledim, dedim “12 bin lira gelirse, 1-2 ay içinde bir iş bulabilirim” diye düşündüm.

Kovulmayı istedin yani?

İstedim valla, “12 bin lira gelse” dedim... (Gülüyor)

Sonra?

Sonunu düşünmüyorum, o yüzden kaybediyorum. Şu anda düşünüyorum iyi ki de kovulmamışım. Kovulsam ne yapacaktım? İş bulamayacaktım, başka bir markete girecektim. Şu an öyle bir sıkıntı yok, işler yoğun şu aralar. Büyük ihtimalle yaza doğru yeniden başlayacak kovulmalar. İşler azaldığı zaman sana para vermek istemiyor. Değişik sektörlerle geçiriyor, mağaza içine transfer ediyor seni. Arkadaşın biri, yenilerden, daha üç ay oldu gireli, sözleşmesi bittiği için çıkarılacaktı normalde.

“Ya kasaya geç ya da çıkarırız” demişler...

Normalde çıkarılacaktı. “Üç ayı bitti, bunu çıkarın. Yerine başkasını alırız, üç ay onu deneriz” diyorlar. Bu şekilde gideceklerdi. Üç ayı bitince kasada açık olduğu için yeni eleman almakla uğraşmadılar, bizim şef de yardımcı oldu büyük ihtimalle, kasaya verildi. Hiç değilse çalışsın, diye. O şekilde onu kasaya verdiler. Birkaç kişiyi farklı reyonlara vereceklerdi bizden çıkarıp. Sana seçenek sunuyor: Ya işten çıkarsın ya da burada çalışırsın diyor. Sen de mecburen ikinci seçeneği seçiyorsun.

Senin için de böyle bir ihtimal var mı? Tazminatını verip çıkarma ya da başka bir yere verme gibi?

Var tabii. Herkes için geçerli.

Her gün kovulma riskiyle çalışmak nasıl?

Bunu isteyen biri için hiç sorun değil. Kendini kovdurtmaya çalışır. Ama biz işimizi yapıyoruz. Gidiyoruz, neyse gereken onu topluyoruz, her şeyimizi bitiriyoruz, çıkıyoruz. Olur da çıkarsak benim için sorun yok, ben tazminatımı alacağım için. Ama büyük ihtimalle şu sıralar yeni gelenleri çıkarıyorlar, eskileri ellemiyorlar. Çok tazminat verdiler çünkü. Birkaç ay önce epey bir işçiyi çıkardıkları için baya bir tazminat ödediler, yeni gelen işçileri çıkarıp hiç para vermiyorlar. Deneme süresi sonuçta altı ay olunca, “deneme sürecindesin, ben senden memnun değilim, çık.” Yeni birini alıyor, altı ay sonra ona “ben memnun değilim” diyor, onu da çıkarıyor. İşle ilgili şöyle bir şey de var: Mesai çok yaparız biz. Şu aralar çok yapmıyoruz, kısıtlama falan olmadığı için aşırı sipariş gelmiyor, sınırda geliyor ama COVID zamanları karantina olduğu zaman, dışarı çıkmalar yasak olduğunda aşırı sipariş geliyordu. Çalışan kişi sayısı 20 kişiye eğer, çok fazla, toplayabileceğinden fazla sipariş geliyordu ve bunu engellemiyorlardı. Çünkü kazanmak istiyorlar, daha fazla kazanmak istiyorlar. Bu şekilde sen de mesai yapmak zorundasın.

Veriyor mu fazla mesainin parasını?

Parasını vermiyor, izin olarak veriyor. Mesela ben her gün ikişer saat mesai yaptım. Günlük 9 saat çalışacağıma 12-13 saat çalışıyordum. Nereden baksan 60 saat fazlam vardı, ilk işe girdiğim zaman.

Bunları kayıt altına alıyorlar?

Alıyorlar. Yoğunluk azaldığı zaman izin olarak veriyorlar. “Git,” diyor mesela “bir hafta izin yap.” Veya “iki saat geç gel, üç saat geç gel.” Bu tabii çalıştığım mağazaya da bağlı. İlk girdiğim mağazada 50-60 saat fazlam vardı.

Başka yerde daha mı çalıştın?

Tabii, üç tane mağaza değiştirdim ben. İlk çalıştığım mağazada nereden baksan 60 saat fazlam vardı.

Alabildin mi onları?

Alamadım.

Buraya devrettiler mi?

Devretmediler. Nerden baksan 10-12 gün falan bir iznim vardı fazla çalışmadan. Benim o zaman üç aylık sözleşmem bittiği için beni çağırdılar yukarıya, üç artı üçü imzaladık. Artık dedim kadroya geçeriz, kadroya geçmek yerine beni işten çıkarmışlardı.

Nasıl yani?

Genel müdürlükten direkt ismini çıkartıyorlar senin, kimseye sormuyorlar. Benim ilk girdiğim zamanlar çok karışıktı, şu an yine toparladılar, şefe soruyorlar “sen memnun musun, değil misin?” diye. İlk girdiğim zaman, ben ilk gelenlerdenim COVID zamanında, kimseye sormuyorlardı. Bir arkadaşımı direkt işten çıkardılar. Çocuk çalışıyordu, “sen yarın gelmiyorsun, seni kovduk” dediler, direkt gönderdiler. İki gün sonra benim sözleşmem bittiği için beni çağırdılar. O zaman yöneticimiz vardı bizim Emin Bey diye, Bölge Sorumlusu. Dedi ki “seni çıkarmışlar, genel müdürlükten ismini çizmişler. Seni ben çıkarmadım, tekrar aldım ama bu mağazada devam edemeyeceğiz, başka mağazaya almak zorundayız.”

Sen de mecbur kabul ettin...

Tabii. Bana da sordu, “istersen başka mağazaya geç, istersen dediklerini yapalım, seni çıkaralım.” Ben de mecbur kabul ettim. Başka mağazaya geçtim, üç ay orada çalıştım. Sonra o mağazayı kapattılar, buraya aldılar, herkesi buraya topladılar. Bu AVM’yi baya proje yaptılar. Büyük mağaza. Kapattıkları mağazaların mahallelerini buraya bağladılar. Buranın araç sayısını 15’e falan çıkardılar. Çalışan sayısını 30’a falan çıkardılar, çok yatırım yaptılar. Büyük bir depo yapmışlar, çoğu üründen vardır, soğuk ürünler hariç. Bu şekilde 2-3 mağaza yaptılar.

İyi kazanıyor o zaman bu işten...

Kazanıyor. Günlük nereden baksan 100 bin lira cirosu vardır bu mağazanın. Daha bugün 110 bin liraydı. Sadece sanal bölümünün yaptığı ciro. Yeri geliyor 40-50 oluyor, yeri geliyor 150’yi geçiyor.

Çalışan sayısı yetiyor mu? Yetiştirebiliyor musunuz işlere?

Son zamanlarda arkadaşları kasaya gönderdikleri için... Çalışan sayısı ciroyu karşılamadığı için... 20 kişi var burada, bu ciro yeterli değil. Bu şekilde gönderdiler. Ama şimdi tekrar siparişler çoğalmaya başlayınca daha kimseyi çıkarmıyorlar.

Aldığın para yetiyor mu sana?

Yetmiyor. Şu şekilde de yetmiyor zaten: Maaşlar yükselse de zamlardan dolayı bir ay önce 10 liraya aldıysan zaten şu an 20 lira. Herhangi bir sigara içen adam, iki ay önce kaç paraya sigara içiyordu şimdi kaç paraya sigara içiyor. %50’ye yakın bir artış var sigarada. Sadece buradan bile maaş gidiyor. İsterse maaşı 6 – 7 bin yapsın. Aldığın şeyler önemli, alım gücü. Alım gücü düştüğü için yetmiyor.

Sizinkilerden para istemek durumunda kaldığın oluyor mu?

Yok, olmaz. Kendimi ona göre ayarlıyorum. Tam yetirmeye çalışıyoruz ama şu anda bir kira versem, kendi bir evim olsa...

Var mı öyle planlar? Evlilik falan?

Var ama... Yapılmaz şu anda. İstanbul gibi bir yerde hiç yapılmaz. Bu devirde zor.

Kız arkadaşın çalışıyor mu?

O da çalışıyor.

Ne iş yapıyor?

O da mağaza sektöründe...

Ne kadar daha çalışacaksın burada?

Şu aralar iş bakıyorum. Birkaç görüşmem var.

Ne gibi işler bakıyorsun?

Pazarlama işi bakıyorum şu aralar.

Pazarlama derken?

Firmalara pazarlama işleri oluyor.

Görüştüğün bir firma mı var?

Bir abim var, o yardımcı olacak. Kendisi hammadde pazarlıyor. Motor yağı mesela, dezenfektan. Bunun gibi hammaddeleri yurtdışından getiriyor, burada pazarlamasını yapıyor büyük firmalara. Aracılık gibi. Güzel para kazanıyor. O yardımcı olacaktı bana, onunla konuşuyorum şimdi. Olursa oradan devam edeceğim. Mağaza sektörü, üniversite mezunu için geçici bir sektördür. Üniversite mezunu bir adam gelip de “ben mağazada yükselmek istiyorum” diyeceğini düşünmüyorum.

Senin niyetin olmadı mı hiç?

Yok, hiç olmadı. Ben 1,5 senedir buradayım, istesem kendimi yükseltebilirdim.

Nasıl bir yerde çalışmalı üniversite mezunları sence?

Hiç değilse okuduğu bölümle alakalı bir yere girmesi lazım. Masa başı iş olabilir. Okuduğu bölümü boşa okumadım demesi lazım. İnsan “boşuna okumadım” demeli.

Nasıl bir işte çalışsa böyle der?

Kendi bölümüme göre düşünürsem mesela, bankaya girebilirsin.

Ne vadediyor sana bu iş? Para mı, çalışma koşulları mı?

Kariyer vadetmesi lazım. Belli bir kariyer vadedecek ki bana, o sektörde yükseleceğimi düşünüyüm.

Market de yükselmeyi vadediyor?

Evet, ama böyle olacağını bilsem ben lise biten bitmez girerdim market sektörüne. Şu anda zaten yönetici olurum. Ben sanmıyorum hiçbir üniversite mezununun markette yükselmek isteyeceğini.

Var benim görüştüklerimden, yükselmeyi düşünen...

Mecburiyettendir onlar. Kendi isteğiyle yapmak isteyen yoktur. Üniversite bitirip de “ben şu ...’a, ...’a gireyim” diyeni hiç duymadım yani. (Gülüyor)

Siz müşteriye hiç görmüyorsunuz, değil mi?

Yok, bizim müşteriyle işimiz yok. En fazla eksik sipariş olursa telefonla arıyoruz.

Müdürünüzle, yöneticilerinizle ilişkileriniz nasıl?

Bir şefimiz var, kendisi de iş ortamını bilir, çok sıkmaz. Yeri geldi mi sıkar tabii işi bu ama yani... Çok baskı uygulamamaya çalışır.

Yöneticilerden öyle bir baskı yok yani?

Kendi bölümümüzde olanlardan yok ama yukarıya, daha üst yöneticilere baktığımız zaman onlar çalışana karşı mobbing uygulamak istiyor. Şeflere bile. Mobbing yapalım, işten çıksın diye. Seni işten çıkarıp, İŞKUR’dan eleman alacak. İŞKUR’dan aldığı zaman devlet verecek parasını. Üç ay boyunca İŞKUR’dan alacak, üç ay da kendisi sözleşmeli yapacak onu. Öyle olduğunda hiçbir yasal hakkı yok. Kartına para yatmaz mesela, yakacak paraları yatmaz, ikramiye alamazsın... Bu şekilde döndermeye çalışıyorlar.

Ben sana sendika üzerinden ulaştım mesela ama senin var mı bir bağın?

Sendikaya üyeyim. Sonuçta sendikaya üye olmazsan üç ayda bir ikramiye alamazsın. Bunun için sendikaya üye olman lazım, zorunlu bir şey bu. Veya herhangi bir hak, yakacak hakkını almak istiyorsan sen sendikaya üye olacaksın.

Toplantılarına gidiyor musun, herhangi başka bir şey?

Yok, biz gitmiyoruz. Sendikanın yöneticileri var bir yerde, bizi temsil eden birkaç kişi. Bunlar kendileri katılıyor, kendileri konuşuyor, bir karar alıyorlar yöneticilerle falan, bize ulaştırıyorlar.

Siz bu süreçlere dâhil olmuyor musunuz? Sizinle tartışıyorlar mı, konuşuyorlar mı taleplerinizi?

Sanala sendika fazla ilgilenmiyor, genelde mağaza ile ilgileniyor. Sendikaya gidip de şikâyetle bulunamıyoruz, çünkü icraat olmayacağı belli. Şu şekilde yapabilirler mesela buraya da, bir prim usülü yapabilirler. “Şu kadar sipariş hazırlarsan, şu kadar prim alabilirsin” gibi. Bu da yok şu anda. Bu da olmadığı için kimi insanlar çalışıyor, kimisi gereğinden fazla çalışıyor, kimi gereğinden fazla yatıyor, az çalışıyor. Sonra gidip aynı maaşı alacağım ay sonunda. Ben kendimi niye yorarım? Prim usülü yapmaları lazım. Bunu konuştuk, söyledik, anlattık ama hiçbir şey çıkmadı.

Politik olarak kendini nasıl tanımlarsın?

Siyaset konuşabiliriz, değil mi? Sıkıntı yok? (Gülüyor, önünde duran kayıt cihazına bakıyor)

Tabii, siyaset bilimciyim ben. (Gülüyoruz)

Bazı şeyleri söylemedim burada (Gülüyor). Siyaset... Tabii, ülkenin durumu vahim, gördüğünüz gibi. Ben böyle hiçbir şekilde bu hükümetin bir daha geleceğini düşünmüyorum.

Öyle mi diyorsun?

Tabii, gidiciler. Her türlü gidici. AK Parti'yi seven, genç nesilde yok böyle bir şey. Okul bitiren, üniversite mezunu adam hâlini görüyor. Sen üniversiteyi bitirmişsin, daha iş bulamıyorsun, sana dayatıyor "KYK borcun var, öde" diyor. Sen bunu beklet, işe girsin ondan sonra ödesin. İki sene erteliyor mesela. O bittikten sonra senden ödeme bekliyor. Ödeyemezsen seni vergi dairesine atıyor. Vergi dairesine atması da senin sürekli ödeme yapman demek. O zaman üzerine faiz geliyor. Benim şu anda bi 18 bin lira KYK var, 2 bin lira faiz ödeyecektim normalde, 20 bin lira; şu anda 23 bin lira.

Ben de 22 bin lira çektim, işsiz kalınca ertelemek zorunda kaldım, bir sene ertelemek için 27 bin lira yaptı borcu.

Sen o zaman bankadan erteleme yaptın?

Yok, o dönem faizler çok yüksekti. %25 faiz uyguladı bana, 22 bin lirayı 27 bin lira yaptı.

Of... Baya yapmış.

Ne olacak peki? Kim gelsin istiyorsun?

Gelen gideni aratmaz inşallah.

Sen kim gelsin istiyorsun?

İYİ Parti tarafındayım, Meral Akşener tarafında. Oraya daha yakın görüyorum kendimi. İdeoloji olarak olsun...

Milliyetçisin yani?

Yarım milliyetçiyim. (Gülüyor) Önceden tam milliyetçiydim, şimdi yarım milliyetçiye döndüm.

MHP'den İYİ Parti'ye döndün yani...

Evet. (Gülüyoruz) Dönünce yarıya dönüyor. MHP çok milliyetçi takılır ama tek bildiği de odur, başka bir şey yok.

Üniversitede falan da ülkücü müydün?

Tabii, Ocak'ta falandım. Başkanlık da yapmıştık kendi aramızda da...

İYİ Parti'ye geçmene sebep olan ne oldu?

Son zamanlardaki yakınlaşmaları işte AK Partiyle.

Ülkücülük aileden mi geliyor?

Yok, ailede yok. Bizim ailede çok nadir vardır. Ortamdan başladık biz bu işe, ülkücülük işine. Şu an hiç alakam yok. Üniversitede bıraktım.

İYİ Parti'ye üye misin peki?

Yok, değilim. Şu devirde üye olmuyorum, riskli. Olur da bir kamu sektörüne girersek...

Ama onları destekliyorum, diyorsun.

Tabii, desteklerim. Bu başımızdaki hariç herhangi biri olsun, kim olursa olsun desteklerim ben onu. Önceden diyorlardı mesela, "bu giderse kim gelecek?" Artık bu devir de bitti. Kim gelirse ona vereceğiz oyumuzu.

İktidara kızgınsın yani?

Tabii, kızgınım. İktidar dediğin zaten halkını koruması lazım. Her yere bir üniversite açıp, fazlasıyla üniversite mezunu verip... Şu anda bildiğim kadarıyla puanları düşürdüler...

Barajı kaldırdılar...

Barajı kaldırdılar. Daha kötü. Sen bu barajı artır, üniversite öğrenci sayısını azalt ki iş bulsun adamlar. Çok fazla mezun var. Sen barajı da kaldırıncı herkes üniversiteye gider. Normalde burası geleceğe yönelik bir adımdır yani, bir basamak. Eğitim sektörü çok kötü. Ondandır zaten çok kaybediyor. Ekonomik olarak da ülkenin hâli malûm zaten. Serbest piyasada zaten hiçbir şekilde müdahale de edemiyor, etmeye çalışıyor ama edemiyor, daha kötü oluyor.

"Serbest piyasaya da karşıyım" diyorsun...

Karşıyım abi, serbest piyasaya da karşıyız. (Gülüyoruz) En son yaptıkları kur koruma modelleri var. En son yaptığı dolara karşı şey mesela, saçmaladı...

E o da serbest piyasayı kısmen denetleyen bir mekanizma değil mi?

Evet, ama gereksiz; yapamıyorlar. Sen bunu devletin hazinesine bağlarsan eğer... Doların yükseleceği belli zaten bu devirde ki yükseliyor. Senin faiz düşürmen doları zaten yükseltecek. Sen faizi düşürürsen enflasyon artar, dolar artar zaten. Bunun önüne geçiyor şu şekilde: Ben hazineye vereceğim, diyor. Bu sefer de senin benim paramı veriyor. Benim verdiğim parayı bana geri veriyor. Ben ne anlarım bu işten. Zaten 3 alıyorsun, 2 vereceksin bana. 3 vergi alıyorsun, oradan 2 vereceksin. Gereksiz bir uygulama yani. Ki ona bakarsan ben işe arabayla gidip geliyorum...

Kendi araban mı var?

Özel arabamız var, babamın. Onunla gidip geliyorum ev ...'de olduğu için buraya iki otobüs gelmekle zorundayım, en az 1,5 saatim yolda gider. Arabayla geldiğim zaman 10 dakika sürüyor. Şöyle düşünürsem, 2 ay önce benzin 7 – 8 lirayken rahat ayı geçirebiliyorduk. Şu an 100 lira atsam, iki gün gidip geliyorum, bitiyor. Önceden 100

lira attığım zaman ben bir hafta gidip gelirdim. Benzine karşı da bir önlem... Benzine indirim geldiği zaman devlet kendine alıyor bu indirimi. Dolar düştüğü zaman benzin hiçbir şekilde inmedi ama dolar çıkmaya devam ettiği zaman benzin çıkıyor yine. Perşembe günü bir zam daha gelecekmiş mesela, 1 lira daha.

En son 15 lira mı ne oldu...

Tam da şey yapamıyorum artık. En kötü 100 lira atmak zorundasın. Sadece buradan baktığım zaman, benim aylık benzine verdiğim para 500 liraysa 1-2 önceden, şimdi 1000 lira. En basitinden... Benim burada zaten %100'e yakın bir zararım var, devletin bana verdiği maaş ne ki? Bu hâlden memnun olan yoktur herhalde konuştuğun kişiler arasında?

Tabii, memnun olan pek yok...

Kimse “memnunum, çok iyi, Allah devletimize zeval vermesin” falan demiyordur.

Arada bir iki kişi vardı ama...

At gözlüğü işte.

Evlenmeyi düşünüyor musun?

Düşünüyorum ama sadece düşünmekle kalıyoruz yani, bu devirde zor. Önce borçlarımı bitireyim, diyorsun. Sonra biraz biriktireyim. Ev de önemli... Önce kendime bir ev ayarlamam lazım ki sonra evleneyim. Bunlar nereden baksan, en az 5-6 yıl gider.

Şu anda da zaten 28 yaşındasın...

Onu da ekleyince 30'un üstü olacak.

Umutlu musun peki gelecekten? Hem kişisel anlamda soruyorum hem de memleket için...

Gelecekten umutlu... değilim. Şimdi öyle bir düzen yapıldı ki... Şu şekilde umutluyum: Gelecek nesil harbiden çok iyi geliyor, sağlam geliyor. Fakat öyle bir düzen oturtuldu ki 12-13, kaç yıldır var bunlar başımızda...

20 yıl oldu...

O kadar oldu mu yahu? Baya oldu... 20 yıldır bir düzen oturtmuş sonuçta. Başkası gelse, bu düzeni bozamayacak. Başkası gelse diyemez ki “ben bu sigaraya 1 lira indirim yapıyorum” ya da “bu alkole %20 indirim yapıyorum” diyemez. Oralara bağlanmış vergiler. Şu anda sigaraya 1 lira indirim yapmak, başka yerden zam çıkması demek bize. Başka bir yerden girmesi demek.

Kendi adına umutlu musun? Yakın vadede işleri yoluna koymak açısından soruyorum...

O yönden bir ümidim var yani. Başka işler araştırıyorum çünkü şu an. Son zamanlarda biraz fazla araştırmaya başladım.

Oradaki ümit nereden geliyor? Birileriyle görüşüyor olman mı?

Özel sektör, kişisel. Devletle hiçbir bağımız yok. Özel sektörden bildiklerimiz var. Devlete zaten girebilmem için, kamu sektörüne girebilmem için sağlam bir torpil olması lazım.

İnanır mısın, ben bu görüşmeleri yaparken gördüm ki marketlere girenler de tanıdık vesilesiyle girmişti...

Ben de torpille girdim buraya. (Gülüyor) Tanıdık vardı burada yöneticilerden, o şekilde girdim. Torpilsiz de giremiyorsun buraya. Daha geçenlerde, “yeni elemanları üniversite mezunu alacağız” diyorlardı.

Sizin birime?

Evet. O kadar çok başvuru var ki, yeni elemanları üniversite mezunu alacaklarmış, lise mezunu da değil. Ne başvuruya gelen insanlar gördüm ben buraya! İki tane üniversite bitiren mi dersin... Boş geziyor. O adamın emekleri heba olmuş. Bu adamdan sen daha ne beklersin? Oy mu beklersin, ne beklersin? Ki en basitinden şöyle bir şey söyleyeyim sana, bu elektrik zamlandı, biliyorsun. Aşırı fazla gelmeye başladı son zamanlarda.

Ne kadar geldi size?

500 falan gelmiş olması lazım.

Ne diyorsun ya?

Tabii. 4 kişi yaşıyor, sürekli elektrik açık. Bilgisayar, şudur, budur sürekli açık... Bu elektrik zamlarından dolayı baya bir kişi muzdarip oldu. Sen bunu görmüyorsun yani, yaptığın zammı biliyorsun ama olan şeyi görmüyorsun. Halkı görmüyorsun. Bunu dile getirenlere de sen “šov yapıyor” dersin, bu insanlar sana kin güder. Birisi bunu dile getiriyor, “bak,” diyor “millet ödeyemiyor” diyor. Kaç tane esnaf kapattı” diyor, belgelerle geliyor. Git bir bak sokağa. Çıkıp orada şov yapıyor, “öyle bir şey yok” diye. Kimi kandırıyorsun?

E “iş var, beğenmiyorlar” diyorlar...

Aynen. En son çıktığında ben bunu dinledim. “Benim bir arkadaşım var, eleman arıyorum ama bulamıyorum” diyor. Acaba ne elemanı arıyorlar? Bunu da bilmiyoruz yani. Ne elemanı arıyor da bulamıyor, ne kadar maaş veriyor, şartları ne? Sen bir adama “11 saat çalış, asgari ücret vereceğim” dersin bu adam çalışır mı? Veya haftada bir gün izni verir ya da vermez. Bu yasal haktır. Bazı işyerleri vermiyor. ... Market, en basitinden. ... Market’te şöyle bir sistem var: Haftada bir gün izin verir, ama bir gün izin verdiği için seni 11 saat çalıştırıyor bir günde. İkimiz aynı yerde çalışıyoruz mesela, sana izin verdi, senin iznin olduğu ben full çalışırım. Sabah açarım, akşam kapatırım. Senin yokluğunu ben kapatırım. Bana izin vereceği gün de sen çalışırsın.

... Market'te dinlediđim kiřilerden duydum benzer řeyler.

İzin vermese daha iyi. Sabah açacaksın, akřam kapatacaksın. Sen o arkadařın yokluđunu kapatacaksın, iki kiři çalıřacaksın. İnřallah düzelir diyeceđim de, benim hiçbir ümidim yok yani. Düzelecek bir durum deđil bu. Sistem oturdu çünkü artık.

Ađzına sađlık Mehmet, çok teřekkür ederim.

Yardımcı olabildiysek ne mutlu bize.

D. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Türkiye’de geçtiğimiz 15 yılda üniversitelerin sayısı üçe katlanırken üniversite öğrencilerinin ve mezunlarının sayısı da aynı ölçüde artmış, ancak buna karşılık diplomalı işsizlik ülkenin başlıca sorunlarından biri hâline gelmiştir. YÖK’ün paylaştığı verilere göre 2020-2021 akademik yılında Türkiye’de her on kişiden biri bir yükseköğretim kurumuna kayıtlıdır. Bu sayı, Türkiye’yi açık farkla AB ülkeleri arasında nüfusuna oranla en fazla sayıda üniversite öğrencisine sahip ülke yaparken üniversite öğrencilerinin ve mezunlarının sayısındaki bu artışı takip eden diplomalı işsizlik oranlarında da Türkiye en üst sıralarda yer almaktadır. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu’nun (TÜİK) 2022 yılı verilerine göre her beş üniversiteliden en az biri işsizdir. Diğer yandan, 2005 yılında 22 bin olan ‘iş bulma umudunu yitirmiş’ diplomalıların sayısı 2021 yılında 272 bine yükselmiştir—ki bu, ‘diplomalı işsizler’ sorununun giderek bir ‘diplomalı ümitsizler’ sorunu hâlini almaya başladığının bir işaretidir (BirGün, 2021). Buna paralel bir biçimde, kendi alanında iş bulamayan birçok üniversite mezununun ise kasiyerlik, özel güvenlik görevliliği, garsonluk, satış temsilciliği gibi işlere yöneldiği görülmektedir. Son altı yılda bir üniversite diploması sahibi olmasına karşın uzmanlık gerektirmeyen işlerde çalışan mezunların sayısında yüzde 97’lik bir artış yaşandığı bilinmektedir (BirGün, 2021). Yine de işverenler ve siyasetçiler, ülkede bir ‘işsizlik sorunu’ olmadığını, gençlerin ‘iş beğenmediğini’ iddia etmektedir (Milliyet, 2014).

Türkiye’deki yükseköğretim mezunları arasında hızla yükselen işsizlik oranları, giderek artan sayıda araştırmacının odağının da bu soruna yönelmesini de beraberinde getirmiştir. Diplomalı işsizliği, genç işsizliği, ne eğitimde ne istihdamda gençler (NEET) ya da beyaz yakalı işsizliği gibi çeşitli başlıklar altında gençlerin (özellikle eğitilmiş gençlerin) işsizliği çalışmaları konu edilmektedir. Ne var ki, makro iktisadi analizlerin baskın olduğu bu çalışmaların yalnızca küçük bir bölümü işsizliğin nasıl deneyimlendiğine odaklanmaktadır. Bora vd.’nin (2017) ifadesiyle, “işsizliğin

istatistikleştirilmesi”nin karşısında, ‘yaşanan işsizliği’ öne çıkaran çalışmaların sayısı son derece sınırlıdır (bu türden birkaç araştırma için bkz. Çelik, 2006; Bora vd., 2017; Kaya-Erdoğan, 2020). Öte yandan, işsizliğin nasıl deneyimlediği üzerine yapılan bu çalışmaların da hemen hepsi söz konusu deneyimi geleneksel tanımıyla ‘işsizleri’, başka bir ifadeyle, ‘bir işe sahip olmayan’ ya da ‘istihdamın dışında kalan’ kişileri odağına alarak incelemektedir. Halbuki özellikle emek piyasasına ilk kez giren gençler söz konusu olduğunda bu yaklaşım, işsizliğin gerçekte nasıl deneyimlendiğini anlamakta yetersizdir zira geçici işlerde çalışmak zorunda olanlar, yarı zamanlı işlerde çalışanlar ya da nitelikleriyle uyumlayan işler yapanlar (Kaya-Erdoğan’ın (2020) yerinde ifadesiyle, ‘sallantılı işler’de çalışanlar) gibi ‘istihdamın içinde’ görünmekle birlikte bu istihdam sürecini kendi işsizliklerinin bir parçası olarak deneyimleyen gençlerin özgün deneyimlerini göz ardı etmektedir. İşsizliğin geleneksel tanımları, günümüz kapitalizminin karmaşık emek piyasası içinde artık geçerliğini yitirmiştir. Özügürlü’nün (2021) ifadesiyle, bugün “işsizlik istihdamın bir ânına, istihdam ise işsizliğin bir ânına” dönüşmüş durumdadır.

On dokuzuncu yüzyılın son çeyreğine kadar pek nadir rastlanan bir kavram olan ‘işsizlik’ Britanya ekonomisinin bu yüzyılın son çeyreğinde karşı karşıya kaldığı deflasyon ve resesyon sonrası sıkça kullanılan bir kavram olarak tedavüle girmiştir (Burnett, 1994, s. 149). Bu bakımdan işsizlik, ancak sanayi toplumuna geçişle, ya da başka bir deyişle, kapitalist üretim ilişkilerinin derinleşmesiyle, bir kategori olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. On dokuzuncu yüzyılda endüstriyel kapitalizmin yükselişi, yoksulluğun çehresini değiştirmiş; böylece serserilik, başıboşluk, topraksızlık ve yetersiz istihdam artık işsizlik ekseninde ele alınır olmuştur (Perry, 2000, s. 2- 11). İşsizliğin gerçek ‘keşfi’ ise daha önce hiç yaşanmamış bir ölçekteki işsizliğin damgasını vurduğu Büyük Buhran’a denk düşer. Buhran’ın yol açtığı kitlesel işsizlik, hem toplumların hem de devletlerin dikkatlerini işsizliğe odaklamaya yöneltmiştir. Örneğin Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’nde, ulusal istatistik altyapısını modernize etmeye ve acil yardım programlarını yönetmeye yardımcı olmak için genç ve yetenekli istatistikçilerin işe alınması, Büyük Buhran’ın uzun vadeli ‘faydalarından’ biri olarak gösterilir (Card, 2011, s. 552-553). 1880 yılında ilk kez ölçülmeye başlanan işsizlik, 1930’lardan itibaren profesyonel bir istatistiksel veriye dönüştürülmüştür. Toplumlar;

kategoriler ve kategorizasyonlarda vücut bulan ve bunlar aracılığıyla yayılan bilgi ve iktidar tarafından şekillendirilir. Son tahlilde, kimin işsiz olduğuna karar veren devletlerdir. 1940'lı yılların ikinci yarısında başlayan, işsizliğin istatistiklere, istatistiklerin de 'aktif iş arama' kriterlerine indirgenmesi süreci, çeşitli biçimleriyle günümüze kadar sürmüştür. 1954 yılında Uluslararası Çalışma Örgütü işsizliği *bir işe sahip olmama, çalışmaya hazır olma ve aktif olarak iş arama* durumu olarak tanımlamıştır (ILO, 1954, s. 44). Modern refah rejimleri ise iş aramanın 'aktif' yönünü vurgularken işsizlik yardımları başta olmak üzere sosyal yardımları kayıtlı ve aktif 'iş arayanlarla' (*job-seeker*) sınırlandırmıştır (Husmanns, t.y., s. 1). Bu bakımdan işsizlik, teorik bir kavramdan ziyade istatistiksel bir ölçüm aracı olarak görülmüştür. Ona ilişkin tanımların ve ölçüm çabalarının geneli, kapsamlı bir teoriye dayanmaktan ziyade işlevsellik ve ölçülebilirliği vurgulamaktadır. Bunun sonucunda işsizlik büyük oranda istatistikleştirilmekte, işsizliğin nasıl deneyimlendiği ise göz ardı edilmektedir.

Bugün hemen hemen tüm dünyada genel işsizlik seviyelerinin ortalama iki katı düzeyinde seyreden genç işsizliği oranları, gençlerin istihdamının özel olarak ele alınmasını gerektirmektedir. Bu bakımdan eğitim, genç istihdamının önemli bir bileşeni olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Gençlere yönelik işbaşı eğitim programları gibi işsizliği belirli becerilerin eksikliğine bağlayan modern refah rejimlerinin uygulamalarına ek olarak, örgün eğitim ile istihdam arasındaki ilişki de bu bakımdan dikkate değerdir. Genel olarak eğitim ama özelde ise yükseköğretim, tarihsel olarak 'yukarı yönlü bir sınıfsal hareketlilik' vadeder. Okulun vadettiği bu yukarı yönlü hareketlilik, 'zihin emeği' ile 'kol emeği' arasındaki iş bölümü ile bağlantılı olarak anlaşılabilir. Okulun kapitalist bir toplumda tek değilse de birincil işlevi, kapitalist ilişkilerin merkezinde yer alan zihin emeği ile kol emeği arasındaki ayrımı yeniden üretmektir (Browne, 1981, s. 447). Okul, tanımı gereği zihin ve kol emeği arasındaki bir ayrımı karakterize edilen genel bir bağlamda konumlandığı için, zihin/kol emeği arasındaki işbölümünü kendi içinde de yeniden üretir; eğitim sisteminin bir aygıt olarak yeniden üretimi de işlevsel olarak bu bölünme tarafından belirlenir. Bu, eğitimin ötesine geçen ve ona işlevini sağlayan bir bölünmedir: Okulun üretimden ayrılması, üreticinin üretim araçlarından ayrılması ve mülksüzleştirilmesiyle doğrudan

ilişkilidir (Poulantzas, 1978, s. 31; Browne, 1981, s. 452-458). Bu nedenle, eğitim yoluyla yukarı yönlü sınıfsal hareketlilik, esasen ‘beyaz yakalı’ bir işe sahip olarak bir kol işçisinden ziyade bir zihin emekçisi olma arzusudur. Öte yandan, yukarıda sözünü ettiğimiz kitleselleşmenin de bir sonucu olarak yükskeöğretim başta olmak üzere eğitim sistemi bu vaadi gerçekleştirmekte artık güçlük çekmektedir. Okul sisteminin vaat ediyormuş gibi görüldüğü ya da geçici olarak sunduğu toplumsal kimlik ile işgücü piyasasının fiilen sağladığı toplumsal kimlik arasındaki bu yapısal uyumsuzluk, Bourdieu’nün (1984, s. 144) ifadeleriyle, bu uyumsuzluğu deneyimleyenler arasında bir ‘kollektif düş kırıklığı’ yaratır. Bugün Türkiye’de üniversite mezunu gençlerin karşı karşıya kaldığı işsizlik sorunu, tam da böylesi bir düş kırıklığının içerisinde düşünülebilir. Buradan arkaplandan hareketle, her ne kadar bu çalışmanın kalkış noktası diplomalıların ‘işsizliği’ olsa da çalışma, odağına teknik olarak ‘istihdamın içinde’ yer alanları almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, üniversitelerin en az iki yıllık bir bölümünden mezun olmasına karşın yukarıda sözü edilen ‘yukarı yönlü sınıfsal hareketliliği’ elde edememiş, bir zincir markette çalışan diplomalıların çalışma deneyimlerini onların istihdam ve işsizlik deneyimlerinin bir parçası olarak incelenmektedir.

Bu bakımdan, zincir marketlerin tercih edilmiş olmasının belirli bir nedeni vardır. 1990’lardan bu yana sayısı hızla artan alışveriş merkezleri ve büyük süpermarketlerin yanı sıra ‘ucuzluk marketleri’ adıyla bilinen zincir marketler, Türkiye’nin ekonomik ve kültürel hayatında önemli bir yere sahip olmalarına karşın buradaki çalışma ilişkileri ve emeğin durumu genellikle göz ardı edilmiştir. Alışveriş merkezlerinin ve market zincirlerinin yarattığı tüketim kültürünün günlük hayatımızdaki rolü üzerine çok sayıda araştırma yapıldığı söylenebilecek olsa da buradaki işin niteliğinin, çalışma koşullarının ve bu sektördeki işçilerin durumunun aynı düzeyde ilgi gördüğünü söylemek mümkün değildir. Sonuç olarak, hizmetleri günlük hayatımızın vazgeçilmez bir parçası haline gelen bu yerlerde çalışan işçiler hakkında çok az şey bildiğimiz açıktır. Buna ek olarak, burada çalışan işçilerin eğitim seviyelerinde son yıllarda gözle görülür bir artış olduğu da başka bir gerçekliktir. Giderek daha fazla sayıda eğitilmiş genç, kendi alanlarında iş bulamadıkları durumda zincir marketlerde çalışmaya yönelmektedir. Bugün on binlerce mağaza sayısı ile hizmet veren bu zincir marketlerin

yüzbinleri bulan çalışanlarının önemli bölümü kadın ve gençlerden oluşmaktadır—ki bu, sektör temsilcilerinin de ‘övuñç kaynağı’dır (TUSİAD, 2021, s. 28-36). Güvencesiz ve esnek çalışmanın yaygın olduđu bu marketlerde personel hareketliliđi çok yüksektir. Bu durum, söz konusu marketleri ‘geçici çalışma’ için elverişli kılmaktadır. Buradan hareketle, bu çalışma, zincir marketlerde çalışan üniversite mezunlarının deneyimlerini onların istihdam ve işsizlik süreçlerinin bir parçası olarak ele alırken aynı zamanda buradaki çalışma ilişkilerini, emeğin durumunu ve sendikal örgütlenmeyi de incelemektedir. Böylece istihdamın içinden işsizliğe bakarken, buradaki istihdam ilişkilerinin kendisini de incelemeyi hedeflemektedir.

Buradan hareketle çalışma, zincir marketlerde çalışan diplomalıların deneyimlerini beş ana başlık altında ele almaktadır: i) müşterilerle ve yöneticilerle karşılaşmaları, ii) siyasal aidiyetleri ve kolektif eyleme dönük tutumları, iii) geleceğe dönük beklentileri, iv) iyi bir iş arayışları, iv) aileleriyle ilişkileri ve bağımsız bir yaşam arzuları.

Ön saflardaki hizmet işleri, çalışanların müşterilerle etkileşimleri yönünden ayırt edici olduđu kadar işverenlerin bu etkileşimleri düzenleme çabaları bakımından da özel bir dikkati hak eder. Arlie Hochschild’in (1983) ortaya attığı duygusal emek teorisi de bilhassa hizmet sektöründe karşımıza çıkan bu gibi etkileşimlere mercek tutar. Hochschild’in klasikleşmiş analizine göre, işverenler, “örgütsel duygu talimatları” (organizational feeling rules) aracılığıyla çalışanların hem içsel duygularını hem de dış görünüşlerini düzenler. Market sektöründe bu türden ‘talimatlar’ ile karakterize olan ilişkilerin en sık yaşandığı yer kasa olmakla birlikte müşteriyle temasın görece daha az yaşandığı reyon, kasap, manav ve mağazanın başka yerlerinde de çalışanlara benzer kurallar dayatılabilir. “Kasa önü ürünler” için satış baskısı (Zeynep), manav reyonunda elde kalma ihtimali olan ürünlerin müşteriye pazarlanması (Emre), müşteriye güler yüz gösterilmesi (Savaş), “müşteri her zaman haklıdır” ilkesi uyarınca kimseyle tartışmaya girilmemesi (Havva) gibi talimatlar, çalışanların müşteriyle ilişkilerini düzenleme çabasının bir parçasıdır ve çođu durumda *emotive* bir yönü vardır. Bu çalışmada, söz konusu ilişkilerin, üniversite mezunu market çalışanları özelinde ‘diplomaları dolayısıyla’ da deneyimlendiği gözlemlenmiştir. Üniversite mezunlarına diplomaları yöneticileri tarafından çeşitli biçimlerde hatırlatılır. Bir şeyi düzgün yapamadıklarında da çok iyi yaptıklarında da söz bir şekilde onların diplomasına gelebilir. Söz gelimi,

bir işi ‘beceremediklerinde’ onlara ‘diplomalarına rağmen’ bu işi nasıl yapamadıkları sorulurken çok iyi yaptıklarında ise yine ‘diplomaları sayesinde’ bunu yapmışlardır ve bu becerileri sonucunda burada kalmamaları, ‘daha iyi bir yere’ gitmeleri telkin edilir. Üniversite diploması, iyi bir iş ve maddi refahın yanı sıra sahiplerine saygınlığı vadeder. Beyaz yaka bir işte çalışarak ‘rahat’ bir yaşam sürmeyi, bu yolla da bir saygınlık kazanmayı beklerken bir zincir markette çalışmak zorunda kalan diplomalıları, yöneticileriyle olan karşılaşmalarında en çok da bu ‘eşitsiz’ duruma itiraz etmektedir zira market sektöründeki yöneticilerin önemli bir bölümü lise düzeyinde bir eğitime sahiptir ve uzun yıllar burada çalışmalarının bir neticesi olarak yükselmişlerdir—bir çalışanın ifadesiyle, burada “diplomanın bir hükmü yoktur.”

Hizmet sektöründeki istihdamı diğerlerinden ayıran temel faktörlerden biri, buradaki ilişkilerin yalnızca işveren-işçi ilişkisi ile sınırlı olmamasıdır. Tarım ya da sanayiden farklı olarak hizmet sektörü, iş ilişkisinin özünde var olan işveren-işçi ilişkisinin yanı sıra müşterinin de bu ilişki ağının bir parçası olduğu, hatta en az işveren kadar etkin bir bileşeni olduğu bir sektördür. Bu sektörde çalışan işçiler maddi araç-gereç üretimi yapmazlar, üretimi çoktan gerçekleşmiş ürünlerin müşteriye ulaşmasına aracılık ederler. Bu bakımdan verilen hizmet, basitçe iktisadi bir faaliyet olmanın ötesine geçer, zira çalışanlar fiziksel varoluşlarının yanı sıra, duygularıyla, düşünceleriyle ve karakterleriyle sürekli olarak sınanırlar. Harvey’nin (2005, p. 167) de hatırlattığı üzere çalışanlar “emek piyasasına karakter sahibi kimseler olarak girer.” Bu bakımdan, çalışanların müşterilerle olan karşılaşmaları onların buradaki deneyimlerinin en önemli eksenlerinden biridir. Bu karşılaşmalara ilişkin anlatılarda en dikkate değer vurgulardan biri, müşterilerin market çalışanlarını ‘cahil’ veya aynı anlama gelmek üzere ‘okumamış’ olarak görmeleridir. Böylece üniversite mezunu çalışanlar bakımından işin önemli bir parçası, tam da diplomanın onlara vadettiği ancak bir türlü edinemedikleri ‘saygınlık’ için müşterilerle de mücadele etmek olmaktadır. Diplomalı çalışanlar, müşterinin türlü aşağılamalarına, hakaretlerine, yer yer psikolojik şiddete varan muamelelerine maruz kaldıkları durumlarda da içinde buldukları durumu kendi diplomalarının hükümsüzlükleri ile anlamlandırır. Bu bakımdan, söz konusu karşılaşmalar, çoğu durumda diğer çalışanlardan farklı olarak yine onların diplomaları, eğitimsel sermayeleri ve gerçekleşmeyen beklentileri üzerinden dile getirilir.

Geç kapitalizmin, başka şeylerin yanı sıra, sınıfsal aidiyet başta olmak üzere kolektif kimliklerin giderek yok olması ile karakterize olduğu; bu dönemde sendikalar ve siyasal partiler gibi geleneksel siyasete has kurumların zayıflamasıyla birlikte siyasal katılımın da önemli ölçüde bireyselleştiği yaygın dillendirilen bir kanıdır. Öte yandan, toplumsal yaşamın kolektif temellerindeki bu çözülmeye karşın söz konusu yapıların yaşamımızdaki etkilerinin halen oldukça güçlü olduğunu söylemek de mümkün. Nitekim Furlong ve Cartmel (2007, p. 138) de toplumsal yaşamın kolektif temellerindeki bu çözülmeye karşın söz konusu yapıların gençlerin deneyimlerini ve yaşam fırsatlarını kısıtlayan güçlü çerçeveler sunmaya halen devam ettiklerine işaret ederek geç modernitenin bir tür ‘epistemolojik yanılgı’ (epistemological fallacy) etrafında döndüğünü öne sürmüştü. Çalışma boyunca gerçekleştirilen görüşmeler, benzer bir tespiti marketlerde çalışan üniversite mezunu gençler için de yapmanın pekâlâ mümkün olduğunu gösteriyor. Görüştüğüm çalışanlar içerisinde –bir siyasal kimliğe sahip olduğunu önceden bilerek gittiğim az sayıdaki görüşmeci bir tarafa bırakılırsa- geleneksel siyasete ve kurumlarına (siyasal partilere, sendikalara, ideolojilere) dönük oldukça mesafeli bir tutum söz konusuydu. İdeoloji devrinin artık bittiğini (Erol), hiçbir ideolojinin %100 benimsenemeyeceğini (Ayşe), gruplaşmanın kötü bir şey olduğunu (Ufuk) ve haklarımızı bireysel olarak savunmamız gerektiğini (Caner) muhtelif biçimlerde ifade eden genç çalışanlar, siyasal kimliklerini (en azından ilk anda) doğrudan açık etmekten de imtina ediyorlardı. Bu durumun bir ölçüde onların ‘eğitsel sermayeleri’ ile ilişkili olduğunu iddia etmek de pekâlâ mümkündür zira –aşağıda dil tartışmasında da göreceğimiz üzere- diplomalı çalışanlar kendi siyasal tavır (ve ‘tavırsızlık’larını) her defasında geniş açıklamalarla, kendi ‘biriciklikleri’ ile, ‘temsil edilemezlikleri’ ile izah etmekteydi. Benzer bir biçimde, diplomalı market çalışanlarının ‘içinde buldukları durumun sorumlusu olarak kimi gördükleri’ sorusuna verdikleri yanıtlar da benzer bir hedefsizlik, siyasal olarak belirsizlik içermekteydi. Her ne kadar kestirme bir çıkarım gibi görülebilecek olsa da bunu, bir ölçüde, bu ‘öfkenin’ yönelebileceği bir siyasal söylemi kuracak politik iradenin yokluğu ile açıklamak da mümkündür.

Her ne kadar arzu ettikleri ‘yukarı yönlü sınıfsal hareketlilik’ gerçekleştirilmemiş olsa da diplomalı market çalışanları, sahip oldukları eğitsel sermaye yoluyla diğer

çalışanlardan ayırır. Bu ayrışmanın açık ifadesini bulduğu yerlerden biri de dildir. Mülakatlar esnasında görüşmecilerin kendi sorunlarını –kasten ya da farkında olmadan- “anlatmaktan” ziyade “açıklamayı” tercih etmeleri, Bourdieu’nün kavramlarıyla, eğitim yoluyla edinilen bir dilsel habitusun parçası olmalarının işareti olarak okunabilir. Görüşmeler boyunca yaşadığım en büyük güçlüklerden biri, sorduğum sorulara aldığım yanıtların, görüşmecilere sorduğum soruların subjektif birer yanıtı olmaktan çok birer “kanaat” şeklinde ifade edilmesiydi. Görüşmeciler çoğu durumda içerisinde buldukları koşulların onlara nasıl hissettirdiğini *anlatmak* yerine, kendilerini araştırmacının yerine (yani benim yerime) koyarak bana *açıklamayı* tercih ettiler. Başka bir deyişle, karşımda bir “bilen özne” konuşuyordu: İçinde bulunduğu koşulların farkında, analize muhtaç bir durum varsa bu analizi de yine kendi adına, kendisinin yaptığı bir özne. Öyle ki çoğu durumda konuşmanın öznesi sanki kendisi değilmişçesine sorularımı kendi konumunu nesneleştirerek, anlatıyı gayri şahsileştirerek yanıtlıyor; kendi kendisini bir analiz nesnesine dönüştürüyordu. Diplomalı market çalışanlarının diliyle ilgili bu noktalar, onların nitelikleriyle uyuşmayan (ama daha da önemlisi, *kendilerine layık bulmadıkları*) bir işte çalışmanın yarattığı duygusal ve sembolik şiddetin dillendirilme biçimleri bakımından hesaba katılmaya değerdir. Bu anlatıların dilindeki gayri şahsileştirme, dışsallaştırma ve soyutlama eğilimi özsayı, endişe, gelecek kaygısı, duygusal şiddet vb. üzerinden yapılacak bir analizi hayli zorlaştırır. Necmi Erdoğan’ın (2017, s 89) da belirttiği üzere “böyle bir analiz her şeyden önce analize direnmenin analizi” olmak durumundadır.

Diplomalı market çalışanları, sahip oldukları eğitsel sermaye yoluyla kendilerini diğer çalışanlardan ayırdıkları ölçüde, *işsizliğin sembolik şiddetinden kaçarken kendilerine layık bulmadıkları bir işte çalışmanın sembolik şiddetine yakalanırlar*. Nitelikleriyle uyuşmayan, onlara “layık olmayan” bir işte çalışıyor olmanın verdiği rahatsızlık pek çok görüşmecide muhtelif biçimde dile gelen bir hissiyattır. Açıkça veya örtük bir biçimde, kendi nitelikleri/potansiyelleri ile yaptıkları işin niteliği arasında büyük bir boşluk olduğu görüşündedirler. Bu da onları “en azından bir işe sahip olduklarına sevinmek” ile “yaptığı işten utanmak” arasında bir salınım içine sokar. Ne var ki, üniversite mezunu market çalışanlarını yalnızca kendi koşullarının kurbanı olarak göstermek de yanlışır. Yapılan görüşmeler, çalışanların sadece kendilerine dayatılan

koşulları kabul eden bireyler olmadığını; daha ziyade, baş etme stratejileri geliştiren, sürekli yenilerini arayan ve gerektiğinde kendilerine yüklenen sorumlulukların arkasından dolanarak öz saygılarını korumaya çalışan failer olduğunu göstermektedir. Erol'un tanıdık bir müşteri gördüğünde tezgahın arkasına saklanması ya da o kişiyi görmezden gelmesi, Onur'un gelecekte böyle bir işte çalıştığından kimseye bahsetmeyeceğini söylemesi, Caner'in mağazadaki mevcut işini bir iş tecrübesi olarak CV'sine yazmak istemediğini belirtmesi bunlara birer örnektir. Çalıştıkları mağazalarda bir üst pozisyona yükselme beklentileri de sadece mevcut koşulların kurbanı olmadıklarını, kendi yollarını arayan birer fail olduklarını bize göstermektedir.

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