Contemporary Turkish Youth as Subjects of State, Family, & Self:
The Particular Case of University Students in Istanbul

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Introduction

As for the commonly held belief that the Turkish youth are apolitical and do not have any interest in politics, there is some truth to this. Only 5 percent of the youth take part in any political activity. Most see politics as a dangerous path. Most say they would prefer to concentrate on their education, graduate with a good degree and get a solid, well-paying job. Their expectations from the universities are not reflective of what a university should be. Training a new generation for a better Turkey and a better world by bringing out their creative talents and teaching them to...take responsibility; these are not the priorities of most of Turkey's university students. A college degree and a guaranteed job are the criteria of a university education for many.¹

İbrahim Kalın

The minimal involvement of Turkish youth in politics is one of many characteristics exhibited by contemporary youth in Turkey. University students are placing their entire focus on the direct payoffs of higher education because education seems to be the only source of hope and personal security. With an Islamist-rooted party currently in power and the contradictory reforms of the 1980 military coup still in place, who can blame them? The 1980 coup banned all forms of political expression in the university setting. From this moment on politics became an issue of controversy and Turkish students were robbed of their public, political voice.

This situation is rather different when we observe it within the setting of liberal arts institutions in the United States. Political expression among youth is certainly not unique to the U.S. and is more or less a part of the civil liberties democratic peoples are afforded around the globe. Why is it then that university students in Turkey have been silenced when it comes to politics and the mere mentioning of the topic gives rise to discomfort? Activism is a defining characteristic of today’s generation worldwide, and repressing these modes of activism in institutions of higher education speaks clearly to the nature of control in the Turkish setting. If

youth in Turkey aren’t being molded into active agents of change, then what exactly are they being molded into?

*Today’s Zaman* columnist, İbrahim Kalın, paints an eerily vague picture of where Turkish youth stand today: in a cloud of uncertainty filled with dreams and aspirations not only for themselves but also for their nation. The question then becomes: what are these dreams and aspirations, how do they come about, and how do they affect these youth’s multiple roles as they transition into adulthood? These questions are essential not only in describing the liminal roles of youth in 21st-century Turkey, a Turkey situated at the margins of the “global center,” but also in describing how these multiple roles and identities are formed and reformed over time.

My interest in Turkish youth identity formation was the end result of another interest that evolved over time—one that I learned was complexly intertwined with forces much larger than itself. Initially, I was interested in the Turkish higher education system and university admissions process, how the system was limiting and indirectly favored certain demographics. I was also interested in how university students’ academic lifestyle emphasized competition over camaraderie. I hadn’t fully understood why this was the case until I stumbled across an eye-opening statistic: Of the 1,593,831 students in 2003 who were candidates for entrance into higher education, only 506,397 students (a mere 31.8%) were actually placed (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2007, 88). I couldn’t help but question the methods for university placement. There had to be some deeper meaning behind why only a select few

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2 My thesis advisor, Kathy Ewing, used this term in one of our sessions to describe the perceived “center” of the world: the developed and democratic ideological “West.” I use the term “global center” both in this sense and more specifically as a marker of where Turkey ultimately wants to be. “Global center” congeals the notion of the “West” and legitimizes Turkey’s ongoing efforts to become fully modernized and incorporated within the European Union. Being placed at the margins of this “global center” is therefore the very antithesis of the nation’s ultimate goal; since the founding of the modern Republic, the global center is where Turkey has aspired to be.
(what I’d like to think of as the privileged few) are granted access to tertiary education each year.

The friends I made during my study abroad experience in Istanbul gave me insight into the challenges they face both prior to and during their undergraduate careers. Oftentimes, the topic of conversation was school. I remember the first time I encountered the issue of university schooling was when my suitemate told me about the university selection process. She explained that it was an extremely competitive process that rewarded the highest achievers by placing them in the best universities in Turkey. The highest achievers consisted of students scoring within the top 10th percentile in the country. The ÖSS (Ögrenci Seçme Sınavı) is the national entry examination, an assessment test much like the SAT, and is a significant determining factor in university admissions. Students often devote months or years to exam preparation because it counts for over 75% of the student’s cumulative score, which in turn determines university placement. From what I understood, if you don’t do well on the exam, your chances of entering a two or four-year institution are rather low or in some cases, non-existent. This, of course, lowered one’s job prospects for the future.

Preparation for the ÖSS is marked by the dershane, or cram school. Students who are truly committed to doing well on the exam (and are able to finance these practice courses) devote the entirety of their weekends (and often weeknights) to studying. Enrolling in a dershane often meant sacrificing one’s social life, involvement in extracurricular activities, and regular curriculum. Since the university admissions process in Turkey is very systematic and calculated, doing anything outside of enhancing one’s level of preparedness for entrance into higher education was meaningless. The method was rather simple: go to dershane, score highly on the ÖSS, attend a top-notch university, get a top-notch degree, and enter a career that guaranteed benefits and promised financial stability.
It isn’t so much that I was fascinated by the system itself but rather how the system was normalized and accepted in Turkish society. Every education system in the world is subject to criticism for one reason or another but Turkey, a fairly modernized nation on the brink of EU accession, treated the majority of its youth as if they were not worthy of a higher education. Even the privileged few that made it were limited in the realm of career choice and fields of study. We all assume the primary or secondary school to be the site for social reproduction, where nations breed children into citizens, but even institutions of higher education continue this process and this is pronounced in the case of Turkey. By affording some the opportunity and limiting those of others, the Turkish higher education system not only fails to produce educated youth evenly across the board but also fails to produce youth who feel a sense of purpose, a sense of agency.

The present university system is mandated by the Higher Education Council (YÖK)—a nongovernmental, nonpartisan organization independent from the Ministry of National Education (MONE). YÖK was established in 1981 under a military regime. In the historical context of the 1970s, YÖK, as my informants describe, was the appropriate response to a decade of political turmoil and religious uprising in the university setting. The Higher Education Council was formed with 22 board members, none having political or governmental affiliation, who were given the collective task of supervising all universities, both public and private, in Turkey. Over twenty years later, the Higher Education Council still reigns as it maintains the centralized structure of Turkey’s higher education system. The problem, however, does not lie in YÖK’s ineffectiveness, for it is incredibly effective in maintaining order as was its purpose from the very beginning. Rather, the issue at hand is the constricting nature of YÖK even at a time when political expression is already suppressed. It was at this point I began to examine the roles of
various institutions and envisioned a complex web of power relations that went beyond just education. The higher education system wasn’t the only thing that influenced the development of Turkish youth, and Turkish youth certainly didn’t think of themselves solely positioned within that context. It became more and more important for me to see the bigger picture.

Rather than narrowly focus on the higher education system in Turkey, I am choosing to focus on the more comprehensive topic of youth identity formation. As Erik Erikson states, “…the adolescent mind becomes a more explicitly ideological one…one searching for some inspiring unification of tradition or anticipated techniques, ideas, and ideals” (1968, 130). How we think of ourselves and our identity is always interesting, mainly because it is subjective, but it is especially interesting for youth because we constantly struggle within this ambiguous space, experiencing an in-betweenness, so to speak. Undergoing a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, adolescents experience a development heavily influenced by their social surroundings. This transition is most apparently marked by a change in roles and responsibilities, and youth go through a gradual process of defining and redefining who they are. The way youth think about who they are, however, is not separate from how others perceive them to be—“…it is the ideological potential of a society which speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by peers, to be confirmed by teachers, and to be inspired by worth-while ‘ways of life’” (Erikson 1968, 130).

In forming their identities, youth subconsciously internalize the beliefs and practices of those around them. For Turkish youth, this internalization process becomes complicated because of the multiple cultural discourses impacting their everyday lives. As George H. Mead states:

We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is
responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience (1934, 142).

Through Mead’s example, we better understand the self as a product of social relations—an individual with multiple social relationships also has multiple selves. For this reason, the self is never truly independent of external influences and is always subconsciously viewed within the context of power relations.

**Foucault as Theoretical Base**

Michel Foucault places these ideas into more eloquent terms, what he calls technologies of power and technologies of the self.

“…Technologies of power…determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination… [whereas] technologies of the self…permit individuals to effect by their own means…a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Rabinow 2003, 147).

When we think of technologies of power, we think of the ways in which certain discourses are perceived as truths and are meant to establish rules of conduct, rules to be abided by within various social groups. When we think of technologies of the self, we think of the ways in which we go about aligning ourselves with or distancing ourselves from these perceived truths.

Technologies of power and technologies of self, therefore, do not function separately but instead merge to form Foucault’s notion of governmentality, “[the] encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self” (Rabinow 2003, 147).

Governmentality is not a concept limited to governmental institutions; it can be applied to all modes of governance in everyday life. In governmentality, power is not an object, nor is it something that is solely exerted upon subjects. Power only exists within the context of relationships and is most accurately perceived as a circulating force. Because power circulates,
there is always the possibility that agency lies within a non-dominating force. For example, although youth act under the authority of their parents, there is always the possibility that with age comes deterrence or, in extreme cases, rebellion. In such instances, power is transferred.

The notion of governmentality is essential in understanding youth identity formation in Turkey. I look at the particular case of university students because the idea of Turkish youth as subjects of *triple governmentality* is most visible through their situation. Turkish university students uniquely experience the combined pressures of:

1) faithfully serving in the interest of the state,
2) fulfilling family obligations, and
3) forming a self-identity, one that is experienced as independent of exterior influences but really only exists in relation to them.

These three projects each correlate with a source of identity, all of which ultimately contribute to the development of multiple senses of self. When I say triple governmentality, I am referring to Turkish university students’ three power relationships, or encounters between technologies of power and the self. These encounters are:

1) state and self,
2) family and self, and
3) global culture and self.

This idea of triple governmentality can be useful in explaining how Turkish youth form their identities. Essentially, technologies of power contribute to youth identity formation, and technologies of the self are the processes through which youth form their identities. Turkey’s history and current global positioning make these processes even more complex than they already are. The liminal positioning of Turkish youth exemplifies how they are torn between

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3 From this point on, youth (in the context of this research) is defined as university students ages 19-23.
opportunity and obligation, dreams and reality, striving for modernity while maintaining tradition. The problem for Turkish youth therefore lies within these unclear interstices of state, family, and global culture. It is through this notion of triple governmentality I explore identity formation among contemporary Turkish youth.

**Methods**

Because my research focuses on Turkish university students, most of my informants are personal contacts in Istanbul who I met during my study abroad experience. The Duke in Istanbul program is linked to Boğaziçi University. Students in the program, alongside Turkish students and other international students, were housed in the Superdorm. The Superdorm was where I expanded my friendship network—my suitmates would introduce me to their friends, and their friends to their friends, and so on. So, it should be no surprise that most of my informants know each other; in some cases, they are close friends.

Because of limited time and travel expenses, my pool of interviewees is not incredibly diverse. Although I use my study abroad experience as initial fieldwork, that in which I play the sole role of participant-observer (a foreign student within the system I am examining), most of my fieldwork took place during my second trip to Istanbul, when I conducted unstructured interviews with my Turkish peers. I spent a period of two weeks interviewing thirteen students at Boğaziçi University and one student from Bilgi University. Both are institutions that use English as a teaching medium. Before returning to Istanbul, I had conducted interviews with two Turkish international students at Duke University. In total, I interviewed sixteen university students.

An overwhelming majority of my informants are students at Boğaziçi. I should make it known that this already places great limitations on my research because these universities are considered to be “elite,” or top-rated, institutions in Turkey and attract either the brightest
students in the country or (as I was informed by my friends) the wealthiest—those who do not score as highly on the entrance exam still have the opportunity to attend a private institution for a much higher cost. At Boğaziçi, spaces for the entering class are allotted to less than 1% of ÖSS candidates granted entry into higher education each year. Also, many of my informants emphasized how dissimilar universities like Boğaziçi and Bilgi are from others in the country. Students at these universities are granted certain freedoms and opportunities that are not available nationwide, such as participation in student groups, organized athletics, or study abroad programs. Rather than their experiences be radically different, they are fairly similar and instead collectively different from other institutions that aren’t as highly regarded. Although Boğaziçi is public and Bilgi is private, I learned opportunities on both campuses are fairly similar.

Initially, I thought interviewing students from both public and private universities in Istanbul would be beneficial in providing contrasting perspectives because students’ circumstances of having entered their respective universities will differ as will their experiences as current attendees. Although both public and private institutions are overseen by the Higher Education Council, private universities, as the name suggests, are privately funded. As is the case with any institution that is privately funded, the purpose of their existence will in one way or another depend upon the interests of their donors. I also wanted to include both kinds of universities to examine their financial aid programs, or a system comparable to it. I was interested in comparing how these institutions determine which students to reward through scholarships and if there is a fair draw of students from various regions across the country. I thought this would be a good indicator of whether or not the university is truly a site for social reproduction and maintains the disparity of wealth in Turkish society by limiting the opportunities of youth from less fortunate backgrounds. What I learned rather quickly was that
tuition at private universities is at minimum 15 times higher than that at public universities. What surprised me, however, was that the most prestigious universities are public institutions, have far less expensive tuition, and are most selective when it comes to admissions. So the highest ÖSS scorers not only attend the best universities in Turkey but also pay less to do so. In many cases, high scorers are also granted admission into top private universities with full scholarships, except the number of scholarships available each year is severely limited.

While in Istanbul, I also interviewed a member of the Education Reform Initiative (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, or ERG), a project based in the Istanbul Policy Center at Sabancı University, a private institution. As stated on their website:

“[The ERG is] committed to the ideal of ‘quality education for all.’ [It] has defined its program areas in accordance with four major reform priorities: equal access to education, quality and effectiveness of education, governance and resources in education, and education policy culture and practices.”

In the realm of higher education, the ERG is especially committed to reversing the actions of the 1980 coup by pushing through the adoption of a new system encouraging university autonomy. This would not only decentralize the current higher education system but completely transform it by starting healthy competition among universities and instilling the idea that these institutions exist not to reinforce national ideologies but to focus on knowledge production and fostering individual growth among students. Although the ERG’s primary focus is early childhood education, the director of the Initiative recently stated that higher education reform is also a major concern because it is essential to preparing youth for active involvement in global society.

I chose Istanbul as the site for my research primarily because I was already familiar with the city and most of my informants reside there. Although one city’s population is in no way representative of the entire country’s population, I believe it is perhaps the best city to use for

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4 http://www.erg.Sabanciuniv.edu/
geographical diversity among my informants. Aside from being home to over 20 universities, Istanbul is a primary destination for many youth migrant workers. The city is perceived as a metropolis with unlimited opportunities in various job sectors as opposed to other cities or regions of Turkey with sub-economies based on very specific industries. Even though my informants are “Istanbulites” for the duration of the school year, they come from various regions of Turkey representing a total of six cities. This is particularly beneficial to my research because identity is largely influenced by geographical setting. Since environment is inseparable from development it is best to have a pool of informants from both urban and rural hometowns. For this reason, I consider my informants to have a balanced variety in upbringing and family values.

**Literature Review**

Aside from applying Foucault’s notion of governmentality to Turkish youth identity formation, I will also explore notions of the “state” and state-governance. Using Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat’s anthology, *States of Imagination*[^5], I will draw upon the works of various authors to demonstrate how means of state control and processes of state formation and reification can be applied to the case of modern Turkey. This of course requires an in-depth look at the history of the modern Republic. I will use Andrew Mango’s *The Turks Today* as my primary source for historical referencing because of the author’s “third-party” perspective, through which he neutrally depicts historical accounts; this is extremely important in the case of Turkey because accounts from any internal ethnic group (of the many that comprise the nation-state) can be skewed or misleading. This is best exemplified through the Turkish-Armenian conflict dating back to the Ottoman period that has persisted for several decades. While Armenians blame Turkey for the mass killing of its peoples, the Turks have denied such an event.

took place at the extreme with which it was labeled genocide. It wasn’t until last year Turkey and Armenia formally agreed to establish diplomatic ties.

From the 1923 founding of the modern Republic to today, Turkish society has attributed the nation’s greatness (and independent existence) to its founder Mustafa Kemal “Atatürk” (which literally means “Father Turk”). Atatürk envisioned a secular, modern, developmental Turkey and promised to set forth attainable goals through a series of reforms and the teaching of an ideology (Kemalism) that would transform the traditionalist mindset of Turkish society.

Atatürk was successful in igniting Turkish nationalism, however, in the process of producing his ideal nation-state, he simultaneously marginalized populations that refused secularization and assimilation. Through the formation of this “other” and the placement of its heroic founder on a pedestal (and more theoretically, above society), the Turkish state was initially reified and the average citizen became just that, a citizen, or subject of the state. As indicated in the title of this thesis, Turkish youth identity formation is in part attributed to youth’s roles as subjects of the state. Understanding how they perceive themselves within this context is firstly dependent upon how they perceive the “state” itself. This is why a large portion of my thesis will look closely at notions of the “state” and state-governance.

In The Captive State⁶, an article within States of Imagination, Oskar Verkaaik uses the example of political corruption in Pakistan and society’s indignation toward those practices to show how the “state,” institutionalized as a governing body, seems to exist apart from and above society. Verkaaik’s example of Pakistan is somewhat similar to how I would like to portray reification of the Turkish state. Pakistani society fails to perceive the state as something that exists at their discretion and labels the state as a corrupt entity because it uses Islam to legitimize its practices when, really, the state promotes un-Islamic tendencies by being dominated by a

single ethnic group. Claiming the state’s practices to be unjust and acknowledging that state authority is wholly placed in the hands of one ethnic group reifies the state. Rather than being something that is illusory or abstract, it becomes real.

Turkish state-governance has been strengthened through nationalism and a powerful military. Although I will not focus my analysis of state-governance on the rise of Turkish militarism, I would like to exemplify how it is pertinent to understanding Turkish nationalism. In The Myth of the Military-Nation, Ayşe Gül Altınay examines the simultaneous emergence of the Turkish “state” and mandatory military service among men. Much like the writing of the Turkish History Thesis (which was a means of institutionalizing state nationalism and rewriting historical accounts so that they all took place in the name of a collective Turkish people), military conscription defined Turkish nationalism. As mentioned before, the Turkish state did not emerge with only one ethnic group but instead combined several in the Anatolian region during the late 19th-century fall of the Ottoman Empire. Desperate to create a state of unity, Atatürk urged these Anatolian ethnic groups to act in the interest of a collective Muslim identity and protect this unified identity through a strong, defensive military. Hence, military service as tradition was born. Altınay describes the outlook on military service as experiencing a shift as a “necessity of the times to “invented tradition” (2004, 30).

During the War of Independence, military service was widely perceived as a death sentence or life sacrifice; soldiers had little understanding of the common cause for which they fought. Efforts to define Turkish nationalism did not begin until the mid-1920s (Altınay 2004, 19). In the 1930s, when the Turkish History Thesis was written and “Turkishness” was defined, military service was “naturalized”—this new “cultural interpretation” associated military service with privilege and duty as opposed to war and death (25). From this point on, one served in the
name of Turkish nationalism. Altınay’s book is incredibly useful in specifying state formation to the Turkish case. Not only will I use this source as a means for exemplifying state control but use it to show how the state is reified through “invented” nationalism. This portion of my thesis will also be attributed to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* to describe how nationalism is essentially pride in a false collective identity yet is incredibly effective in creating an illusory unity among diversified peoples.

Lastly, I will use Mary Bucholtz’s *Youth and Cultural Practice*, an annual review spotlighting the anthropology of youth, to display how “youth are as often the agents as the experiencers of cultural change” (2002, 530). Bucholtz emphasizes the main difference between adolescence and youth; adolescence is a developmental stage that marks the “prolonged search for identity” whereas youth is an identity itself, one that is fluid and “ever-changing” (532). She claims that youth identity is neither “anti-cultural” nor “a-cultural” but entirely cultural (533). This supports the idea that Turkish youth, and all human beings for that matter, cannot form their identities independent of exterior influences but instead form them within the context of power relations. So whether Turkish youth act in accordance with, defiant of, or neutral toward traditional or mainstream cultural values, they are always orienting themselves in relation to these values when working towards forming an identity of the self. The study of youth (much like this thesis) “emphasizes…the here-and-now of young people’s experience, the social and cultural practices through which they shape their worlds” (532). By using the example of contemporary Turkish youth, I am able to portray the liminality of such groups in a specified, detailed manner. As Bucholtz states:

“Global youth research is not so much cross-cultural—a paradigm that is usually quantitative and comparative rather than qualitative and ethnographic—as it is transcultural or ‘multi-cultural’… Anthropological scholarship in youth culture is…distinguished by its geographic range and its concern with the local, which
militates against the broad generalizations about youth that have emerged from other approaches… [The anthropology of youth is pressing] because youth cultural practices are becoming increasingly salient and central to the organization of all human societies” (2002, 543-4).

Observing youth cultures from the ethnographic perspective brings to light how youth and culture are not two separate entities but instead mutually shape one another. My personal goal is to combine theory with ethnographic data to show although Turkish youth (in this thesis) are largely portrayed as subjects of various state and social institutions, they also have agency within the institutions themselves.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I: Nation, State, and Nation-State: Defining Turkishness through the Republic’s Modern History and the Experiences of Today’s Youth

This chapter introduces the main contributing factor to youth identity formation, notions of the “state” and state-governance. The founding of the modern Republic simultaneously marked the initial reification of the Turkish state through a nationalistic ideology and series of reforms pushed forth by the Republic’s famed founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This chapter will examine the authoritarian role of Atatürk and his enduring presence, even after death, through pervasive symbolism in both public and private spheres; maintenance of an ideology that marginalizes certain portions of the population; and ways in which intermittent political instability wreaks havoc upon Turkish society. This chapter will reflect upon various historical accounts and the problems they pose for this generation of youth.

Chapter II: Youth and National Identity: The Significance of Education as Means for Producing Citizens and the Irrelevance of the System Today
This chapter will focus on the seemingly paternalistic nature of the Turkish “state” which is most apparent through the Republic’s centralized higher education system. The establishment of the Higher Education Council was a significant turning point in the history of higher education in Turkey and created an extremely competitive university admissions process that implicitly reproduces members of various socioeconomic groups by affording or limiting opportunities based on personal backgrounds. This chapter will also reflect upon the nationalistic curriculum of Turkey’s primary and secondary education system and the irrelevance of the state’s dissemination of ideals that are no longer conducive to the nation’s modernization goals.

Chapter III: Synthesizing Tradition and Modernity: Understanding the Role of Family, Faith, and Gender in the Lives of Contemporary Youth

Turkish youth in higher education esteem family values and various aspects of tradition regardless of their regional background. Tradition, in this thesis, is defined as collective customs or beliefs existing in Turkish society from the mid-15th century rise to early-20th century fall of the Ottoman Empire. Specifically, I will examine the role of Islam in both Ottoman history and present-day secular Turkey as well as traditional gender roles in comparison to the modern state’s conception of gender identity to show how youth identity is shaped through conformity or anti-conformity of these categories. I will also examine the intersection of tradition and modernity in these three categories to demonstrate how they are not separate but instead inextricably linked to one another.

Chapter IV: Turkish Youth as Subjects of Triple Governmentality: Analyzing the Power Relations between State, Family, and Illusory Self
The final chapter will culminate in a combined ethnographic and philosophical approach to understanding youth identity formation in Turkey. I will argue contemporary Turkish youth are subjects of triple governmentality. Turkish youth in higher education face the unique challenge of developing the self by faithfully serving the interests of an abstract state, fulfilling family obligations, and striving towards greater acceptance of global culture. In doing all of this, Turkish youth form personal interests they perceive as independent of external influence, however, these interests are actually desires formed within the context of each mode of governance. Such youth, at this particular stage in life, are torn between opportunity and obligation and this chapter will show how the problem for Turkish youth lies at these crossroads.
Chapter I

Nation, State, and Nation-State:
Defining Turkishness through the Republic’s Modern History & the Experiences of Today’s Youth

How do you define Turkish tradition? What does it mean to be Turkish? These were some of the questions I asked my informants in regard to how they perceive their culture. They all had difficulty answering, not because they didn’t have anything to say, but more so because they found the question to be too general. Some only needed a few seconds to collect their thoughts and choose their top three favorite aspects of tradition. One informant responded:

“...We are a very nationalistic country...it’s more like...it’s not really nationalism. We’re so proud of everything Turkish. So like for me, anything Turkish is like, oh yea, Turkish tradition this...Turkish coffee is awesome and like, you know...Yes, our Turkish poets from the past are amazing! So, I’m just proud of everything Turkish and I think most people feel that way so it’s kind of hard to describe Turkish tradition...I guess pride would be a way to explain it.”

Esma⁷ is a Turk from Istanbul in her fourth and final year at Duke. She was one of the few who mentioned this aspect of “being Turkish”—the nationalistic sentiments that seemed to be shared by the entire population. Most people responded with categories such as food, dress, holidays, family, and soccer. Some who were extremely cautious in responding to my questions said they couldn’t answer this one because being Turkish meant something different for each and every person who was. Although there are shared practices, the meaning behind these practices is totally subjective to the individual and his or her own personal experiences. Of my informants, no two people’s experiences were the same.

I can understand how difficult it can be for anyone to define tradition in terms of their own culture; you don’t really think about these things until someone asks you and for the most part you simply live it. Each time an informant would respond, “That’s so general!” I would give

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⁷ No pseudonyms have been used in this thesis. All informants have agreed to the use of their real first names.
them my reasoning for having asked the question. “I ask it this way because I want to see what people think of first. Of course now that I told you that, you’re going to think hard about what it is you want to say.” I gave away my secret each time I explained my reason. All in all I don’t think people changed the order of their responses based on my interest in hearing what they had to say first. Esma even responded, “Well, I’m going to think really hard anyway because for me, it’s just such a big package, you know?” Nationalism certainly isn’t the first thing she mentioned but for the sake of this chapter, I isolate this response to incorporate it into my overview of Turkish modern history and the formation of the nation-state. The dissemination of nationalistic values was an important mechanism in establishing the modern republic as newly governed territory born afresh from Ottoman remnants. Although the history of the Turkish state entails a great deal of Ottoman history, the point was to create a new history portraying Turkey as a strong, pre-existing state. Through pride in the new Republic, Turkish citizens would be rid of the hopelessness that came with the fall of the empire.

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**Part I: Understanding the Foundations of the Turkish Republic**

The deliberate manufacture of a public realm can be seen very clearly in Republican Turkey in the imposition of standards of entry into formal institutional life. These standards detailing the clothes one wore, to the language one used, to the organisation of the working day and week were informed by a notion of modernity and a rejection of the tradition which was thought responsible for having brought Turkey to a state of ruin in 1923. They were also a means for disassembling and reorganising individuals’ relations to state authority and political power. Many of the laws enacted in the spirit of Kemalism…appear to be the trivial products of a grander ideological commitment. Yet it is attention to trivia…which was ultimately to re-enforce the political power of a state created through force of arms⁸.

Andrew Finkel and Nükhet Sirman

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October 29, 1923, marked a monumental milestone for the Turkish Republic. Moving the capital from Istanbul to Ankara was the symbolic shift needed to make more visible the centrality of a government both newly established and ever so ready to hit the ground running with its new goals and ideology set in place. This date also marked the “birth” of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) as Turkey’s paternal figure, a leader whose spirit would live on for eternity and whose picture (synonymous with the Turkish flag) would forever hang in every home, school, and building throughout the country. Most importantly, October 29, 1923, marked the theoretical formation of a nation, a state, and its citizens through a shared ideology and seemingly collective identity.

By chance, my return to Istanbul last fall coincided with the Cumhuriyet Bayramı, the Republic’s 86th anniversary. Although my time was limited and did not allow me to witness any grand celebrations taking place, I did have the opportunity to walk the streets of Istanbul and take in some of the national pride that seemed to permeate the air, not to mention scale buildings. Families displayed bright red flags donning the white crescent and star outside of their homes as did banks, universities, and businesses of all sorts. It was unlike anything I’d ever seen. Banners wishing everyone a happy anniversary were hung all over the city. Even mall employees distributed handheld flags to every patron that walked through the doors. Throughout the day, television networks displayed in the corner of the screen a flying flag with Atatürk’s
profile in the forefront. And the evening culminated with a superb firework display near the colorfully lit Bosphorus Bridge. Even I felt a sense of belonging in the midst of this collective pride.

There was something else, however, that caught my attention throughout the first week of my two-week stay in Istanbul. I often had trouble falling asleep because I hadn’t been able to readjust my sleep schedule and found myself watching TV late at night on the one channel that played shows in English. During the commercial breaks, I’d see one particular commercial play each and every time, sometimes more than once. The commercial only had two frames and probably had a total running time of six seconds; it simply displayed words in white on a black background. It was a commercial funded by a center-left daily newspaper, Cumhuriyet, that is about as old as the Republic itself (which isn’t a surprise, cumhuriyet means “republic”). The message was: “Yukarıdan aşağıya. Neyi kutluyoruz?” There was an identical commercial displaying a slightly different message: “Soldan sağa. Neyi kutluyoruz?” Given the little Turkish I knew I was, surprisingly, able to decipher the message. The first translates into: “From up to down. For what are we celebrating?” The second had a similar message: “From left to right. For what are we celebrating?” These commercials resonated in my mind because there was clearly a political message being conveyed, and I couldn’t interpret it myself (without clouding it with assumptions). I asked a friend via Facebook chat if I had translated the messages correctly and if he could help me understand the significance behind the overall message. He said the translation was correct but he had no idea what the message was supposed to mean, especially because there was no real context and he hadn’t even seen it himself. So, I left it to my subjectivity.

I thought it was rather appropriate for that commercial to have come up at a time when I’m conducting this research. The commercial was a clear display of political dissidence; these
kinds of commercials come up all the time in all parts of the world. While one critiqued the declining state of the Republic, the other critiqued the gradual shift from relative liberalism to conservatism, a term many would use to describe the present dominant party of the governing body. It makes sense; *from up to down, from left to right.* I instantly associated this with all the prior reading I had done on Turkey’s political history and formation as a nation-state. As I mentioned before, Ayşe Gül Altınay examines the simultaneous emergence of the Turkish state and the country’s label as a military-nation. Atatürk impinged upon the lives of average male citizens by transforming military service into a duty to the state; an act to be performed in the name of a collective Turkish identity, an act that would promote solidarity among an incredibly diverse population. Even though nationalistic pride ran rampant around the country, especially on the day of the Republic’s anniversary, the question this commercial brought up for me was: is this pride really experienced by all portions of the population? Obviously it isn’t. The message being conveyed to me was how can a Republic contradictorily celebrate an anniversary in the name of a collective people when the population still suffers from severe fragmentation?

Ironically, the initial establishment of the Republic itself necessitated a marginalization of various ethnic groups. As indicated in a biography on Atatürk, “Mustafa Kemal, a westerner in origin and orientation, backed what Kurdish nationalists called later ‘the policy of denial’ (of the existence of a separate Kurdish people)... In December 1926, the ministry of education decreed that ethnic names such as Kurd, Laz, or Circassian should not be used, as they harmed Turkish unity” (Mango 2002, 428). In a sense, by celebrating the nation as it is, the Republic is saying it is content with the present, divided state of its society. It is through this example Philip Abrams’s definition of a state as a “unified symbol of an actual disunity” becomes most apparent (1977, 79). October 29th, the flag, and pictures of Atatürk are all symbols representing a Turkish
unity that isn’t wholly true. The Turkish process of state-formation was in no way different from others. Symbolism, ideology, marginalization, and everyday practices seemed to make real the illusion that a state actually existed.

My interchangeable use of the terms “nation” and “state” signifies a blurred distinction between the two. The difficulty I encountered in finding an accurate term for Turkey is representative of the larger debate surrounding its proper label. While one refers to a collective civic identity the other represents a geopolitical apparatus. Although the idea of a Turkish nation exists, Turkey comprises an ethnic heterogeneity that defeats the conceptual basis of nationhood. A Turkish nation ceased to exist prior to the founding of the Republic; it was the government that dictated who was to be included in this new Turkish identity that was no longer limited to ethnic Turks. Therefore, to simply label it a nation would be false. I decided to settle on the term “nation-state” because Turkey’s formation as a nation is inseparable from the modern Republic’s formation as a state. This is not to say the state-idea did not exist before the Republic, for it did throughout the nearly 500-year reign of the Ottoman Empire whose Sultan ruled from his throne in the old capital of Istanbul. It wasn’t until the Republic was founded, however, that the state was able to form a nation out of the ethnic remnants of Ottoman Anatolia. Hence, the nation-state was born.

My research necessitated an in-depth look into the origins of statehood and nationhood, separately. Using the terms interchangeably without questioning the validity of these labels was my subconscious response to uncertainty. In the initial proposals of this research I constantly referred to a “Turkish state” without taking into consideration how loaded of a term “state” actually is. Coming to the realization that “state” represents more than just a governing body and entails this long, complex discourse inextricably linked to history led me to devote an entire
chapter of my thesis to defining “state” and “nation” and demonstrating how the state-idea and nation-idea operate as mechanisms of governmentality.

**Turkey’s Birth as Nation-State**

I borrow the term *state-idea* from Phillip Abrams’s “The Difficulty of Studying the State” in order to reiterate his point that “social facts should not be treated as things;” to study *the state* is to give this abstraction a concrete, material existence (1977, 75). However, studying the *state-idea*, speaks to its illusory nature. Abrams also proposes the studying of a *state-system*—“a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centred in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society” (Abrams 1977, 82). When I continually referred to a “Turkish state” in the earlier stages of my research, the state-system is what I was unknowingly referring to. I took the term for granted and gave it a meaning it doesn’t actually possess. Even after this realization, I still used the term ambiguously during my interviews. I would ask my informants questions such as, “Do you feel controlled by ‘the Turkish state’? Do you think ‘the state’ encourages youth empowerment?” What surprised me was that no one (except for the two students studying political science who are more familiar with the theoretical backgrounds of statehood) seemed to question me. Based on their responses, not only was there a mutual understanding of what I meant by “the state,” there was also a general consensus that “the state” limited them in one way or another and that this kind of control was completely (and naturally) out of their hands. After this, tracing the origins of this pervasive state-idea became essential.

Abrams mentions, “The idea of the state was created and used for specific social

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9 Throughout this thesis, I will continue to use the term “state” to refer to the actual *state-system*. At points where the distinction needs to be made, I will explicitly refer to the *state-idea* to demonstrate how the state-system is legitimized through the *idea* its subjects have that a *state* placed apart from and above society exists. When I refer to the Turkish state, I am in no way implying that an ideological state, perceived by society as an independent power, actually exists. This is what I will refer to as the *state-idea*.  

Tsegaye
purposes in a specific historical setting—and that is the only reality it had” (1977, 80). He uses Perry Anderson’s *Lineages of the Absolutist State* to exemplify how, in the historical context of the sixteenth century, “the idea of the state as a ‘veil of illusion’ [was] perpetrated in the course of an entirely concrete institutional reconstruction of domination and subjection” (1979, 81). The Absolutist State was the first example of the state-idea in modern history. The rise of the Absolutist State, the first-known form of centralized governing, was marked by the decline of feudalism. What Perry Anderson points out, however, is that Absolutism was a paradoxical system that worked within the framework of feudalism itself (1979, 40). Rather than undergo a transformation from feudalism to Absolutism, Absolutism simply concealed its feudalist workings.

…It fundamentally represented an apparatus for the protection of aristocratic property and privileges, yet at the same time the means whereby this protection was promoted could simultaneously ensure the basic interests of the nascent mercantile and manufacturing classes. The Absolutist State increasingly centralized political power and worked towards more uniform legal systems...

(40).

Absolutism created the illusion that there was a mutual dependence on the upper and lower classes of society when really the aristocrats depended on this illusion to maintain the properties, privileges, and allegiances from the lower classes they previously had under feudal society. This is what Anderson called “the ambivalent mixture of contractual ‘reciprocity’ and dependent ‘subordination’” (409). By adopting Roman law, Absolutism enabled the sectors of civil law and public law—the former regulating economic transactions between citizens, the latter governing political relations between the State and its subjects—to effectively separate state from society (27). The state became *the state* “once the whole structure of sovereignty and legality [was] dissociated from the economy of a universal feudalism” (403). To this day, “its shadow paradoxically governs the world…” (403).
Although origins of the state can be traced back to Absolutism, nationalism (or ideology surrounding the nation) was more or less foreign to it (Anderson 1979, 38). Perry Anderson marks the contrasting point between the Absolutist State and the modern national state:

[For the (Absolutist) State,] the ultimate instance of legitimacy was the dynasty, not the territory. The State was conceived as the patrimony of the monarch, and therefore the title-deeds to it could be gained by a union of persons… (39).

Rather than legitimize the state through a demarcated territory, legitimacy fell upon the sovereign who inherited the territory. Loyalty to the state did not mean loyalty to the nation for the idea of the nation had yet to exist. Subjects remained loyal to the monarch, or the nobility from which he came, because their survival depended upon his will (much like how the sovereign’s power depended upon the strength of his domination over subjects). As Niccolò Machiavelli states in The Prince, “The nature of men is such that they find themselves obligated as much for the benefits they confer as for those they receive” (2005, 39). The benefits the common people conferred on the monarch were done in exchange for protection under the state, not for the sake of protecting a unified territory or peoples. This is the defining characteristic of nationhood which wouldn’t emerge until the Age of Enlightenment around the 18th century. The illusion of empowering the common people through a common ideology was enough to create what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community,” a synonym for the nation.

Nationalism came into being out of and against the cultural systems preceding it: the religious community and the dynastic realm (Anderson 1983, 12). As mentioned before, dynastic realms had porous borders whereas nations had demarcated territory (19). Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community” because it is this shared territory that gives those living within its borders a sense of sovereignty and legitimacy, and on a more individual basis, a sense of purpose. Those who consider themselves to be part of a nation carry
a sense of belonging through a common duty to protect the interests of the nation, which essentially means themselves and others with whom they share this duty. By considering that there are others out there within this shared space who have similar experiences, one becomes engrossed in this “imagined community.” Anderson explains:

…it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson 1983, 7).

When Anderson describes these imaginings as limited, he is talking about the finite boundaries of one nation having mirrored boundaries by another—beyond one nation lies others (Anderson 1983, 7). The imagined community can extend beyond the boundaries of a particular territory (as shown through the widespread presence of diasporic groups), so to perceive the state as a nation would be incorrect unless there were boundaries that created a distinction between the people within them and the people outside of them—the people within having somehow been placed under a collective identity or collective “ethnic” name (even if it is not truly applicable to all). This is where the line between the nation and the state becomes blurred. The nation doesn’t always entail a single ethnic group; for geopolitical reasons, it can comprise several. Once the nation is formed for the purpose of maintaining a specific territory (keeping in mind that borders are completely arbitrary), its label as a nation is expanded upon to form the nation-state. If a nation is expected to represent a collective identity among a heterogeneous population, the state apparatus is once again at work in generating the idea that society consists of a unified nation. However, as Ernest Gellner states, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations of self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (Anderson 1983, 6). The state-system uses nationalism to purvey the state-idea to its citizens/subjects.
The turn of the nineteenth century was the dawn of a new day for what was to become the Turkish Republic. Ayşe Neviye Çağlar writes about how this period was defined by the prevalence of currents of thought (ideologies and movements grouped as Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism, and Turkism) that “came into being to find a new foundation for the Empire’s political existence and cultural reconstruction” (1990, 82). From these three groups, Turkism was most aligned with (and influenced by) European movements revolving around the nation-idea and catered to the dire need to reform the weakened, partitioning Ottoman state. The goal was to salvage what was left of the Ottoman Empire by building a new foundation that retained some Ottoman values and used them constructively to form new ones that promised a more positive fate.

As Andrew Mango states, “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk did not start from scratch when he founded the Turkish republic in 1923. He had inherited the administrative structures and traditions of the Ottoman empire” (2004, 25). My confusion seems justified; properly labeling Turkey as either a nation or state continues to be a challenge because there, the nation was being constructed using elements of a pre-existing Ottoman state. Although the ideology surrounding the nation seemed new, the methods used to implement this nation-idea into the everyday lives of the people reflected those of the state. Because Turkey exhibits characteristics of both and its formation as a nation cannot be separated from its transformation as a state, I label the modern Republic a nation-state.

It was within this firm framework of a hierarchical state which was an amalgam of French Republicanism and Ottoman authoritarianism that the Muslim inhabitants of Turkey were moulded into a Turkish nation made up of citizens equal before the law, but manifestly unequal in wealth, educational attainment, lifestyle and access to power. Yet the ideal of equal citizenship, superimposed on the traditional concept of the equality of believers under the divine law, did find a place in the national psyche. As in revolutionary France, the rulers addressed the ruled as ‘citizens’ (vatandaş) even as they coerced them, as witness the
nationalist slogan ‘Citizen, speak Turkish’—and not Kurdish, Arabic, Circassian, Ladino or any other language they had used habitually until then (Mango 2004, 26).

The birth of the nation-state is associated with the widespread implementation of an ideology created by Atatürk focusing on a three-part modernization sequence: ‘unity-authority-equality’\(^\text{10}\) (Kili 1980, 384). This ideology, called Kemalism, laid out an ultimate goal for the nation-state: to reach modernity at the level of Western models. Atatürk believed this goal could only be attained if 1) a unified, secularized nation could exist, 2) the new central authority and mode of governing could be strengthened, and 3) political participation could be encouraged and collectively geared towards bringing about change in Turkey’s socioeconomic structure (384). Atatürk founded the Republican People’s Party [in Turkish, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP)] and made Kemalism the foundational ideology of this “civilian agency…[which was to be used] as an instrument of modernization…” (387).

Kemalism had six basic principles that were included in the CHP program and the 1924 version of the Turkish constitution: republicanism, nationalism, populism, étatism, secularism, and devrimcilik, or reformism-revolutionism (387). All six of these basic principles are significant to Turkey’s formation as a nation-state, a formation that also represents a specified process of governmentality. The Republic of Turkey, the nation-state’s formal title, is what I’d like to think of as the symbol that reified the modern Turkish state; it “best represent[ed] and realize[d] the ideal of national sovereignty” (Kili 1980, 387). Nationalism seemed to be an extension of this principle of Republicanism. This Kemalist version of nationalism claimed to be secular, anti-imperialist, and non-persecutory—the last being only somewhat true since the ideology contradicts the reality behind this established nationhood (keeping in mind certain

\(^\text{10}\) This analysis of Kemalism is borrowed from: Huntington, S. P. (1968) Political Order in Changing Societies. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.
ethnic groups were marginalized for the sake of “Turkish” unity). Kemalism prided itself on the principle that “one’s Turkishness is not determined by one’s race or religion but by the degree a person associates himself with the ideals and goals of the Turkish republic and through commitment to Turkey’s independence and modernization” (388). If we refer back to Huntington’s modernization sequence of unity-authority-equality, we see that through this nation-idea the sequence is not fulfilled and is instead partially reversed. Adopting Turkish as the official language of the Republic and Atatürk banning the mentioning by name of ethnic groups such as the Kurd, Laz, or Circassian, is more indicative of a disunity-authority-inequality sequence. Of the three components, only one was seriously put into action—authority.

Aside from Republicanism and Nationalism, the other four principles of Kemalism especially contributed to the formation of the Turkish state-idea, that the state is an independent power separated from society as opposed to an abstraction constructed within it. Declaring popular sovereignty and socioeconomic transformation as necessities in establishing the nation-state gave society the impression that they truly were the focus of and driving force behind the new nation-state when really they were subject to it (Kili 1980, 389). Étatism, or statism, strengthened Kemalist authority through centralization of the economy, the alternative approach to a failed liberal economic policy (390). “Through étatism the state acquired the right to interfere with, and to control the Turkish economy. However, the state emerged not only as the principal source of economic activity but also as the owner of the major industries of the country” (391). This principle most visibly isolated state from society and is still integrated into present-day workings of the Turkish state. Secularism, which for Kemalism “was a line of demarcation between traditionalism and reformism,” equally contributed to the state-idea (Kili 1980, 391). Even though Turkey’s population is roughly 99% Muslim, it is secular—a true
example of separation of state from society\(^{11}\) (392). Finally, there is the principle of *devrimcilik*.

Suna Kili states:

Kemalism is not an ideology of the status quo, but a radical liberal ideology capable of growth with the times. Its principle of devrimcilik is what gives it the needed flexibility and power of growth without sacrificing its basic tenets. In contemporary Turkey, to some devrimcilik means protection of Kemalist reforms and their possible modification along with the exigencies of each new age. To others it is a continuing commitment to cultural and social revolution aiming at complete modernization of Turkey (392).

This principle of reformism/revolutionism is essential in maintaining the state-idea. *Devrimcilik* not only allows the Turkish state to keep up with everything contemporary but also makes reform an ongoing, cyclical process. As a result, citizens are always faced with the challenge of achieving modernity no matter how much progress has already been made. Referring back to the Kemalist definition, one is considered a Turk based on the extent to which he or she associates himself or herself with the ideals and goals of the Republic and his or her level of commitment to Turkey’s modernization (Kili 1980, 388). Contributing to Turkey’s modernization is a duty inflicted upon each and every citizen by the state-system. If one does not work towards fulfilling this duty, then one is not a Turk. Turkishness is performative and is defined by duty. This duty is defined by the Turkish state. Essentially, one’s identity is dictated not by oneself but by one’s proximity to nation, one’s degree of Turkishness. Again, the state-idea is at work.

I go in depth with the principles of Kemalism to exemplify how this one ideology dominated the process of nation-state formation in Turkey. Turkish nationalism was the means by which the modern state-idea emerged; this is why I say the formation of one is inseparable from the other. Kemalism, as the name of the ideology makes obvious, is the more public,

\(^{11}\) This does not mean separation of church and state in the traditional Western sense. The Turkish state controls religious institutions. Instead, it is referring to the theoretical *state* once again being separated from society—secularism is obviously mandated by the state, as is religion, but government’s ability to do this solidifies citizens’ beliefs that the state is an entity existing on its own having power *over* people.
formalized representation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s ideals and goals for the Republic. That being said, how can one not associate the Republic and everything it stands for with Atatürk? One can’t, it is impossible. Atatürk stands for everything Turkish. Although this may seem outdated, the following excerpt from The Prince is applicable to Turkey’s heroic figure.

The common people…give their support to one man so as to be defended by his authority. He who attains the principality with the help of the nobility maintains it with more difficulty than he who becomes prince with the help of the common people, for he finds himself a prince amidst many who feel themselves to be his equals, and because of this he can neither govern nor manage them as he wishes. But he who attains the principality through popular favour finds himself alone, and has around him either no one or very few who are not ready to obey him (Machiavelli 2005, 35).

The civil principality is only attainable through the favor of the common people. Atatürk sparked favor among his fellow Turks through his nationalist ideology. However, no matter how much he addressed them as “fellow Turks” or “fellow countrymen,” his position as an authoritative figure contributed to the idea that state is separated from society. As indicated through interviews, many of my informants look up to Atatürk and his achievements for the nation. Think about this idolization; the fact that some of my informants look up to Atatürk can be seen as a symbolic representation of his placement above society. For some, Atatürk represents everything they stand for. Even though he is a part of the common people, his unmatched achievements give him a rank that will never be surpassed as long as the Republic lives. Reification of the Turkish state-idea can be attributed to Kemalism, the principal nationalist ideology behind the formation of Turkey as a nation-state.

There is a particular excerpt from Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish that has resonated within my mind from the very first time I read the book. He quotes J. M. Servan:

When you have thus formed the chain of ideas in the heads of your citizens, you will then be able to pride yourselves on guiding them and being their masters. A
stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician
binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas…” (1995, 102-3).

Although Foucault’s focus lies on penal institutions in the West, he uses the concept of “power-
knowledge relations” to show how “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (27).

There is no power relation that fails to produce knowledge and there is no knowledge that can be
taken outside of the context of a given power relation. The idea that power and knowledge
mutually reinforce one another is incredibly important to my argument in this chapter: it is
virtually impossible for Turkish youth to form their identities outside of their roles as citizens, or
subjects of the state. Although the relationship between the state and Turkish youth seems
asymmetrical in terms of power and knowledge-production, it is not. Youth, as do all citizens,
also give meaning to this state-idea. Rather than maintain the idea that the state is a governing
body above society that disseminates ideals and values among the people, it is important to
realize that the people, through the practice of these ideals and values, give meaning to the state-
idea. The state-idea is produced within the power-knowledge relation of Turkish state and
society; the state-idea would cease to exist if those who are subject to the state-system viewed it
as a body operating within society (not for the purpose of dominating but for the purpose of
maintaining law and order) rather than outside of it.

Lastly, I’d like to refer to Şerif Mardin’s “Center-Periphery Relations” to exemplify
how the formation of a center and periphery in Turkey further perpetuates the state-idea. Mardin
notes the center and periphery of the Ottoman Empire “were two very loosely-related worlds”
where the Sultan remained at a center untouched by the periphery (1973, 171). The periphery

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12 Again, in saying “state,” I am referring to the state-system.
13 Full title: “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?”
itself was incredibly fragmented and consisted of primordial groups\textsuperscript{14} with varying stances; the only thing they shared in common was “a negative view of officialdom” (Mardin 1973, 174). This single shared stance was what ignited the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The attempt to include the periphery within state processes failed during Ottoman modernization of the nineteenth century because the simultaneous inclusion of the notables (members of the upper-periphery who were closer in proximity to the Sultan) created a separate unity amongst themselves—this paradoxically increased the cleavage between center and periphery.

Mardin further discusses the perpetuation of this center-periphery paradigm in the modern Republic. Although the goals of the Republic revolved around strengthening the state and moving “toward the people,” very little of this was fulfilled (1973, 183). The fragmented periphery remained \textit{fragmented} and \textit{in the periphery} while the notables gravitated toward the center. The notables who were meant to represent the interests of the periphery failed to do so. As Mardin states, “Integration from the top down by imposing regulations had been the general approach behind Ottoman social engineering. The characteristic features of Kemalism show that this view of society was still preeminent” (183-4). Kemalism focused too much on modernization and the restructuring of the state-system instead of mobilizing the masses. This top-down approach to building the nation-state further marginalized those already placed at the margins because underneath the veil of national unity, the partitioned society that had existed during the fall of the Ottoman Empire remained. This was most evident through the multiple military coups Turkey experienced in the remainder of the twentieth century, once the multiparty system was formed. Atatürk’s reforms focused so much on modernizing the nation-state that rapid development in the metropolitan areas came at the expense of the periphery. Although this

\textsuperscript{14} Mardin borrows this term from Clifford Geertz’s “The Integrative Revolution.” Primordial groups are those that existed before the nation-idea emerged (meaning their ties revolved around kinship, blood, speech, etc. versus an imagined unity like the one that defines \textit{the nation}).
center-periphery paradigm is a theoretical way of thinking about power-relations, its consequences are very real.

Part II: Youth in Today’s Turkey

On October 20, 1927, Atatürk addressed the youth of Turkey in a speech given in the capital city of Ankara. Below is a version of the speech translated from Old Turkish to English:

Turkish Youth!
Your first duty is to preserve and to defend Turkish Independence and the Turkish Republic forever.
This is the very foundation of your existence and your future.
This foundation is your most precious treasure. In the future, too, there may be malevolent people at home and abroad, who will wish to deprive you of this treasure.
If some day you are compelled to defend your independence and your Republic, you must not hesitate to weigh the possibilities and circumstances of the situation before doing your duty!
These possibilities and circumstances may turn out to be extremely unfavourable.
The enemies conspiring against your independence and your Republic may have behind them a victory unprecedented in the annals of the world.
It may be that, by violence and trickery, all the fortresses of your beloved fatherland may be captured, all its shipyards occupied, all its armies dispersed and every corner of the country invaded.
And sadder and graver than all these circumstances, those who hold power within the country may be in error, misguided and may even be traitors.
Furthermore, they may identify personal interests with the political designs of the invaders. The country may be impoverished, ruined and exhausted.
Youth of Turkey's future!
Even in such circumstances it is your duty to save Turkish Independence and the Republic.
You will find the strength you need in your noble blood.15

Atatürk firmly believed in the power of youth. He viewed Turkish youth as the guardians of the Republic he built and instilled in them a sense of duty to remain loyal even at times the integrity of the Republic is being threatened. This was decades ago, yet the message remains strong. The only problem is that the youth of Turkey today live a different reality under the same message.

15 http://www.turkishlanguage.co.uk/hitap.htm#article_2
Since then, the nation-state has experienced ups and downs that not only challenged the foundational ideology of the Republic but created an ultimately factionalized society living under the umbrella of a perceived unity. This is not to say that today’s youth have lost pride, they’ve simply lost hope in the path that was laid before them over eighty years ago. As indicated by my informants, striving to better the Republic is unquestionably of primary importance to these young people; the only difference today is the route by which they choose to do this and the challenges they face in doing so. The process is in no way easy for them. Although it is their duty to protect the Turkish state, it is ironically the Turkish state that poses the most problems for its youth.

The power relation between the Turkish state and Turkish youth is one that can be best explained through Foucault’s notion of governmentality. Foucault mentions “in the art of government the task is to establish a continuity, in both an upward and downward direction” (Rabinow 2003, 233). This upward-downward continuity is the very basis of governmentality, and is best exemplified through (although not limited to) the state apparatus. Foucault distinguishes between the power relation of a sovereign ruler and his subjects versus government and its subjects. Whereas the sovereign relied on authoritarian rule to maintain order among his subjects, government relies on tactics that also use law but sometimes transcend it.

…With government it is a question not of imposing law on men but of disposing things: that is, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics—to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such-and-such ends may be achieved (237).

As mentioned before, the state-system uses nationalism to purvey the state-idea to its citizens/subjects. When specifically applied to Turkey, the idea of a unified Turkish nation gave citizens the illusion that each individual’s purpose as a member of the nation was to collectively serve in the interests of the nation—this was also an opportunity for the state-system to
reconstruct itself as a body that maintains order by governing over society versus its true position where it governs from within it. As Foucault states, “‘Government’ did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed…” (138). By instilling the idea that a Turk was only a Turk depending on how closely one aligned oneself with the goals and values of the Republic, the state-idea overshadowed the state-system. Government was perceived as an institution that dominated the people through laws when really, laws and the nation-idea were used as tactics for directing the conduct of citizens. By using the façade of national unity, government could “structure the possible field of action of others” or in this case, the action of its citizens (138). If one chose not to act in the interests of the nation, then one was marginalized—this is an example of those who choose to see the state-system for what it is as opposed to the abstraction most members of society make it out to be. In the process of protesting the Turkish state, these members of the “periphery” are trying to obtain recognition by the state as “others” who do not necessarily fit under the umbrella of national identity.

Political instability in Turkey has been marked by a number of military coups, the last and perhaps most important having taken place on September 12, 1980. The reoccurrence of such large-scale political turmoil is symbolic of the inherent problem in nationhood—there is no guarantee of peace and stability when the interests of even a slight portion of the population are ignored. As Hansen and Stepputat make clear, at the basis of state is violence, this is the state’s origin (Hansen 2001, 11). This modern nation-state system is representative of power relations “rooted in the whole network of the social;” although the state is only one form of the exercise of power, it is a form many others refer to (Rabinow 2003, 141). After all, “…power relations have been progressively governmentalized…elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of,
or under the auspices of, state institutions” (142). Although this thesis will focus on Turkish youth as subjects of triple governmentality, the other institutions through which youth form their identities are either linked to the state or follow its model of government.

These governmental apparatuses are inseparable from youth identity formation. The initial proposals for this research suggested the possibility of youth in Turkey forming an identity of the self that is independent of external influences. Early on I learned it is impossible to form an identity of the self without any external influence. Even when youth act in opposition to a particular force, they are still acting within that context. One of my informants, Yusuf, touched upon this subject. I asked him if he was involved in politics and if so where he stood in all of this. His immediate response was “I have no idea.” I thought he was going to evade the question but after delving a little deeper he responded:

“I know it’s uh…especially hard for me to put myself in this…these theories of political ideology. I always like to be… like, it has one dimension and I always wanted to see [it] in a 3-dimensional way and I always wanted to be on top and see all the view but I don’t think I did this, I don’t think I achieved my goal… Cause, I don’t know…I’m still in this culture, I’m still in this political atmosphere. It’s hard for me to get out of this box and think in another way. I think one should have some assumptions about life and how to see life. We have to have perspective, in advance, before you get on top and see all the view. But I don’t think I have my own perspective. I think it’s all constructed and I’m constructing it….I’m trying to construct it by myself but I have no idea when I ask myself if I can construct something, anything, by myself.”

Yusuf’s response was very different from the rest of my informants’ when I asked them about political involvement. Many of them simply answered no. Others would explain that it was a touchy subject because of the violence that ensued after the 1980 coup when political expression was discouraged. Yusuf is a student in his last year at Bilgi University in Istanbul. He is a European Union Studies major and is very knowledgeable about philosophy and political theory. He was persistent in making clear that his responses were only true based on his own personal
experiences. If he wanted to make a generalization, he would preface his statement with “I’m not sure” or “I guess…but I’m not sure.” Yusuf had a better understanding of where I was going with my research. He understood how the notion of governmentality went beyond the state institution and used his family as an example.

Yusuf is the son of a Kurdish father and an Alevi mother, both overlooked ethnic groups in Turkey. He described to me how his father’s past has played and continues to play a direct role in the development of his identity—how the ethnic composition of his family serves as a reference point to all his goals in life. This was all sparked by the question I had asked him regarding where he stood in the realm of Turkish politics.

“I think it hits again when I say I have good relations with my parents because they construct me. So, it’s getting harder for me to choose another way or constructing perspectives for me, just for me. Because I know if my father was someone else, maybe I wouldn’t even think about these issues. But…the need for looking for something else is also constructed by my parents. So, it’s getting harder for me…it’s one of the best and worst questions: ‘Where do you stand?’”

I was thoroughly surprised to have gotten such a response; it was almost as if Yusuf knew the exact kind of answer I sought. I then asked Yusuf if he thought it was possible to think of himself outside of this context of family, or any other setting for that matter. He responded:

“Again, you ask a question that I cannot have a precise answer for, like if it’s possible or not. I think it’s all about challenging the things that you have, you already assume, as your identity. I have this thing, my father is Kurdish and my mother is Alevi, it’s a branch of Shia…it’s a minority in Turkey. When I think about my identities, the process is like…when they are challenged, like being a Kurdish or Alevi, or a male/female, giving military service, talking to people, being in an interaction…I always construct myself. If anything that I like, even remotely, is challenged, they become my identities. So, it’s possible in a way as long as you keep the things you have somewhere else, if you keep them unchallenged by other people, maybe you can then construct a self without any external influence. But I don’t think it’s possible to….it’s not possible for me to do this…I always think that I’m always challenged by some things, like society, like the guy sitting over there [looks up and nods in the man’s direction skeptically]. He might challenge me anytime…he might give me a look that I wouldn’t like to be looked at that way. I will always be, again, I’m being
pessimistic... but I’ll always be challenged by some things, some ideas, some people. So I’ll probably construct myself if I can eventually by these people and the challenges they use against me... but it will not be fully, how can I say... it will never be, I guess, fully separate from the things going on around me.”

I agreed with Yusuf in that it is difficult to conceptualize a self in relation to just the self. In his case, his identity is always being challenged, an experience which leads him to reconfigure his identity, how he thinks about himself. Family is incredibly important to Yusuf because the experiences of his parents are what inadvertently dictate the direction his life is headed toward. Although he is granted the utmost freedom, his mind is constrained by the forces outside of it (i.e. family, nation, state, etc.). The basis of governmentality is freedom, “the relationship of the self to itself and the relationship to the other” (Rabinow 2003, 41). Because individuals within power relations are free individuals, there is always the possibility they may act or react outside of or against a state of domination. The challenge, however, is that “the freer people are with respect to each other, the more they want to control each other’s conduct” (41). The nation-idea, family, etc. are all efforts to control the conduct of other beings. Yusuf is a prime example of a person who is subject to all of these institutionalized forms of governance.

I chose university students as the primary subjects of my research because their experiences differ greatly from other social groups in Turkey. Although all Turkish citizens are subject to the state-system and all carry some sort of loyalty to the nation, Turkish youth have the extra duty of serving as the agents for change (usually meaning development and modernization) on behalf of the nation-state. When Atatürk addressed the youth of decades ago, he was also addressing those of the future. At the time, the two most important goals he urged youth to act upon was modernization toward the Western European standard and strengthening the nation-state (meaning both national unity and the centrality of the state-system). Today, the same goals are in place, however, the problems that were overshadowed by a blanket of
perceived unity have reemerged. Ethnic conflict remains a serious threat to the nation-idea. Similarly, modernization has halted as negotiations over EU admissions (an issue that is of primary importance to the state) have stagnated Turkey’s “progress.” This in turn places more challenges on youth of this century than those of the past. While the military still protects the territorial integrity of the nation-state, youth have started to think of it as an unnecessary obligation. Similarly, the university system is making entry more and more difficult—this plays back into the marginalization of those who are not accepted. Governmentality is not a concept that is unique to Turkey—it is, however, one that can be exemplified well through the Turkish model and more specifically, through Turkish youth. The next chapter will focus on education as a state institution and the incredibly important role it plays in the identity formation of Turkish youth.
Chapter II

Youth and National Identity:
The Significance of Education as Means for Producing Citizens and the Irrelevance of the System Today

[Education] should be more practical than theoretical, more creative than systematic, more influence on students trying to find what the student is all about, what would make them happy [rather] than trying to make everyone good at math and science and force them to go into engineering and medicine... I think it all starts with education... Like the minorities problem—everyone has an opinion about it, everyone has an opinion about the Kurdish conflicts, Armenian conflicts, and the minority conflicts in general but they don’t know where that opinion came from. They just accept it as it is. They don’t think about it. They don’t empathize for others... Someone has an opinion, which they heard from another one, and the others just accept their opinions. No one discusses it. Some things in Turkey, some really important things that should be discussed are not discussed. They’re just like ok, it’s bad. The Kurds shouldn’t ask for their rights, they’re still being treated very well. It’s like the main opinion of many Turks, even many Kurds, and it’s not a bad opinion but there are other opinions that should be considered. There isn’t just one solution or one aspect to something, there should be many. Then there should be a conclusion. If you have a strict opinion about something then you don’t want to hear anything else—it leads to no solution.

Zafer, a third-year civil engineering major at Boğaziçi University, had no difficulties expressing his opinions, something he believed was lacking in today’s Turkey. Although this silence seems to be normal, an almost inherent characteristic of the Turkish citizen, it is not. It has an historical background that has had lasting implications on not only what it means to be Turkish, but also how one becomes it. Like Zafer said, “Some things in Turkey, some really important things that should be discussed are not discussed.”

Ironically, an article was printed in the January 13th issue of Newsweek citing the street fighting that was taking place between Turks and Kurds as a result of the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP’s) decision to grant new rights to Kurds—rights that in some cases surpassed those experienced by other ethnic groups (Çağaptay 2010, 7). This, of course, was long overdue and came at a time that coincided with the EU’s request to reconsider Article 301
of the penal code making insulting “Turkishness” illegal. Aside from obvious upset, one could also assume the mob violence was the inevitable result of decades of silencing the population on issues that mattered the most. If one cannot openly express his or her opinion, what other options are left? When brewed together, feelings of anger, distrust, unfairness, and inequality can amount to a great deal of violence that will incessantly disturb Turkish society. As Soner Çağaptay suggests, this silencing must come to an end for the sake of peace and tranquility, and the beginning to this “end” lies in citizenship reform. “To fix things the AKP should expand rights for everyone, including freedom of expression. That would be good not just for the party but for Turkey as a whole” (Çağaptay 2010, 7).

Zafer’s mentioning of Turkish silences is especially relevant to this chapter on education and the ongoing need for reform. Much like how one is taught to be Turkish, one is taught to be silent. It is something many of my informants considered to be a hindrance to learning in the university, a space they believed should foster intellectual stimulation and not just compliance. Another one of my informants, Mine, who is also a student at Boğaziçi mentioned how the nonsensical busy work she always had to do prior to college was a mechanism for preoccupying the minds of energetic, enthusiastic young people.

You have to keep them busy. You have to give them stuff not to think, to prevent them from thinking. That’s the way things actually go. Like when you’re in physics, you don’t think “What happened?” or “What did the government do today?” Sometimes you are not even aware who is leading you...

As mentioned before, this has incredible historical relevance that will be addressed later in the chapter. What we must take away from Mine’s quote is the idea that these silences are not naturally occurring ones but instead silences that arise through use of strict disciplinary methods and the teaching of a history that, of course, was arbitrarily written. The education system is

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highly effective in not only teaching silences but in teaching intensities as well; so while one was taught to idolize Atatürk, he or she was also taught to never question the validity of the Republic’s history. Regarding her experience in the classroom, Mine stated, “You never judge history,” and it is this mindset she believes discourages critical thinking among students. Its effects are two-fold: it succeeds in establishing uniformity but defeats the very purpose of university schooling—to teach students to think for themselves, to become seemingly autonomous human beings. The dangers of such methods are the instability and violence that could arise from not being permitted to articulate a problem and as a result, not having one’s voice heard. This is certainly something Turkey has seen on a grand scale at least three times in the Republic’s history—each major sociopolitical uprising resulted in a coup d’état. It was the last military coup, however, that had the most impact on Turkey’s higher education system and more specifically, my group of informants who live in today’s post-coup system.

Zafer firmly believed in the power of finding a solution to Turkey’s everyday problems. He felt strongly about the need for education reform in Turkey and prioritizing equality in educational opportunities among the many members of society. In the introductory quote, he was referring directly to ethnic conflicts that have plagued the nation since the founding of the Republic, how most people feel a certain way toward a certain group simply because they were taught to do so. Zafer further mentioned how constricting the national education system can be. Part of the difficulties of obtaining a higher education in Turkey is not having certain educational freedoms that are characteristic of liberal Western institutions. Although Boğaziçi and many other universities in Istanbul serve as the exceptions, such freedoms are rarely experienced by all university students across the country. As many of my informants mentioned, the typical Turkish

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17 Mine’s critical thinking is not representative of her thought processes prior to university schooling. She mentions she didn’t actually begin questioning things until after she entered the university because during her younger years, she was in the system she critiques today.
university is deprived of what they consider to be the very essence of a university—space to develop one’s identity and interests as an individual, away from home and family. Instead, Zafer described the education system as one that “makes people lose their creativity, lose their passion about different things, [it] just makes them a bunch of sheep in a herd. Just everyone thinks the same, does the same thing.”

Although he disapproved of it, Zafer believed the national education system was highly effective in socializing the average Turkish citizen. There is a question, however, in this day and age, that seems to disclaim this idea. If so many youth are dissatisfied with methods of schooling and the curriculum itself, is the system actually effective in socializing the individual? If a student leaves school with unanswered questions and curiosity over what has and has not been said, or if a student is apprehensive about the future and begins to question his or her purpose and/or duty as a member of society or begins to question the foundation of society itself, has the education system been successful in socializing Turkish youth as the future (or as Atatürk envisioned, the guardians of the Republic)? The inherent problem of Turkey’s education system is the fact that it revolves around a nationalistic curriculum. Reflective of the country as a whole, students from various ethnic backgrounds will receive these teachings differently. The end result: a greater rift between students with different ethnic origins and reinforcement of the social inequalities a 21st-century education system should fix rather than perpetuate.

**Education and the Nation-Idea**

Zafer’s description of the education system isn’t surprising. Most nations, if not all, use their education system as the main mechanism for purveying the nation idea, or state-idea, to its population—a way to socialize individuals into citizens and instill patriotism, or loyalty to a common cause, in a diversified peoples. This was of incredible importance to Turkey, especially
since its birth as a republic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the nation—or imagined community as Benedict Anderson would call it—was arbitrarily formed to create a collective identity amongst an ethnically heterogeneous population. One was taught to become Turkish rather than simply be it. The goal of the Turkish Republic was to solidify nationhood by depicting it as a preexisting, historical reality. This, of course, was achieved through education.

All [politicians] regarded the highly centralized educational system as a power-neutral means to social and political ends; they equated national unity with cultural uniformity and, furthermore, believed that this equation can be achieved only through education. Key to this reasoning is treating Turkishness as an inviolable fact that reflects an a priori reality... [There was the idea] that the educational curricula should reflect, express, and generate systematic cognitive, behavioral, affective, and moral ideas that collectively distinguish the Turkish nation... This steadfast belief in the fixity and uniqueness of national identity elides internal differences among citizens precisely because...public figures anticipated surpassing the present experience of disunity (Kaplan 2006, 58).

Essential to educating the newly unified Turkish population was the need for a common reference point—a series of historical accounts that “accurately” depicted the birth of the nation as a natural occurrence and not the politically motivated one it really was.

The writing of the Turkish History Thesis was imperative to teaching citizens about their nation and the origins of modern Turks. In 1931, the Turkish Historical Society created in three months time the first articulation of the Turkish History Thesis: Tarih (translated as History in English), a four-volume textbook to be used that very same academic year (Altınay 2004, 21). A more thoroughly researched version of the Turkish History Thesis was published in 1936 alongside the Sun-Language Thesis, its linguistic counterpart (21). As Ayşe Gül Altınay points out, both theses emphasized three main issues:

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18 Even for ethnic Turks (who have always been the majority in Anatolia and today account for 70-75% of the national population [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html], Turkishness did not come naturally. Turkishness is unique to the nation-idea and did not exist prior to. One’s level of Turkishness is measured by one’s loyalty to the nation. Before the Republic, ethnic Turks and all other groups in modern Turkey were loyal to two things: Islam and the Ottoman Sultanate. While today we refer to all inhabitants of Anatolia as Turks, they were then referred to as Ottoman Muslims (Lewis 2002, 352). This contrast is important in noting the unnaturality of being Turkish.
...(1) development of an ethnic/racial understanding of ‘culture,’ (2) glorification of the Turkish ‘race’ as the basis of civilization and high culture in world history, and (3) formation of a ‘dual geographic framework’ whereby Central Asia is the ‘main’ homeland, while simultaneously the current location of Turkey (Anatolia) is claimed to have Turkish origins long before the Ottoman Empire (23).

Perhaps most important in Altınay’s analysis of the Turkish History Thesis is how all three issues failed to accurately address the “origins” of non-ethnic Turks. Similar to how Atatürk banned the mentioning by name of the Kurds, Laz, and Circassians for the sake of Turkish unity, the thesis was “used to develop arguments for the Turkic origins of all other Muslim populations in modern Turkey. [They] were no longer ‘sibling nations’ but Turks who had ‘forgotten’ their Turkishness or were in ‘denial’ of their Turkish origins” (Altınay 2004, 23). “For Atatürk, the Turkish identity was a question of location rather than ethnicity: Turks were those living within Turkey who called themselves Turks” (Rabasa 2008, 10). This “hegemonic Turkish nationalism” became the basis for Turkey’s history, a history that would be disseminated for years to come through a centralized national education system (Altınay 2004, 24). What is incredibly important to realize from this is the political influence that dominated the writing of the Turkish History Thesis. Going back to defining Turkishness as something that can only be acquired through education and other enculturation practices, it is somewhat easier to see why being Turkish is unnatural—the history is as well.

This realization is certainly not meant to disclaim the Turkish History Thesis but instead to point out the arbitrariness of history in general—after all, history is written. In The Uncertainties of Knowledge, Immanuel Wallerstein argues that objective truth is “through very intensive…dialogue, tempered by careful sifting of the evidence… To remember and to forget, to keep secrets or expose them to public glare, is to advocate and refute. It is a scientific,

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scholarly decision. It is a political decision. It is a moral decision” (Wallerstein 2004, 138). History is always subjective (and political) and what is to be included or excluded from history will always vary from one individual to another primarily because it is based on lived experience, and everyone’s experiences are different. No historical occurrence will be perceived the exact same way by every person or party involved and this is certainly something that Zafer touched on in the introductory quote of this chapter. While a Turk may feel the Kurd is not being robbed of his rights, the Kurd may feel otherwise since he was, in a sense, written out of history. Kurds and other ethnic minorities were marginalized when the Turkish History Thesis claimed these ethnic minorities were of Turkic “origin” and had simply forgotten or were in denial (Altınay 2004, 24). This inaccurate history is one of the reasons Turkish/Kurdish conflict has persisted for decades. And now that the government wishes to right such wrongs (as indicated in the Newsweek article), violence breaks out between average citizens. The irony in this violence is that those opposed to new Kurdish rights are fighting against the supposed inequality and unfairness of the situation—why should Kurds be afforded rights that are in some cases better than theirs? The issue is that Kurds were never granted equal rights from the very beginning; otherwise, tensions would have ceased to exist for as long as they have. Complications like these blur the lines of what it means to simply be in Turkey. Zafer’s anger, on the other hand, stems from the meaninglessness of bitter debates in the country: “It pisses me off—people being aggressive and very hurtful about the things that people invented, you know?”

When I asked Zafer what it meant to be Turkish, he answered very carefully because of the complexity of his family tree. His maternal grandmother was a Greek Orthodox from Crete who came to Turkey when she was six; this was around the time Atatürk sent invitations to Turkish families residing in Ottoman territory to return to Anatolia after the collapse of the
Empire. She learned Turkish around the age of 12, soon after Atatürk declared it the official language of the Republic, and converted to Islam at the age of 20 some time before her marriage to an Arab man. Zafer’s mother speaks Arabic, Turkish, and Greek—language proficiencies that are reflective of her ethnic background. He said his paternal grandparents define themselves as pure Turks—they are not mixed or descendants of other ethnicities. He then explained how all of this variation complicates his own racial identity.

So about me... I am very mixed. I can't define myself, like my race or ethnicity as something, you know? It wouldn't be right to say you're something if you're living in Turkey. All of my friends have stories like this so I don't think there really is a Turkish identity. I think there is a union. If we can only define ourselves in a group, we can say that we all speak Turkish, we all know Turkish history, in which case Turkish still doesn't mean anything... This soil has been home to many different civilizations for more than 7,000 years! It's not our right to say that we own this place. We're not the first ones to turn this place into our home...

As Zafer mentioned, his example is one of many. It’s interesting, however, how Zafer followed up on his previous statement. Although he was an advocate for non-nationalistic identities, especially in the case of Turkey, he proceeded by saying:

But still, I’m very proud of my heritage. It [what he deemed to be aggressive Turkish nationalism] doesn’t disable me from being fond of what my country is, what my history is because I’m at least proud of the process, not the whole process, but after the Republic was found. At least my mom and dad wouldn’t have met if the Ottoman Empire still existed... or if Atatürk didn’t invite people from Crete...

Zafer certainly isn’t an extreme nationalist, nor does he display such tendencies, but he still has pride in the Republic’s history and what it stands for despite his multi-ethnic background. This speaks to the education system’s inherent enculturation process, and this is in no way unique to Turkey. No matter what we choose to believe, nationality will always be a reference point because it is the world-system we currently live in. The only difference is to what extent our nationalities can facilitate, hinder, or completely stagnate our development. In the case of
Turkish youth, and specifically university students like my informants, nationalism and it being of primary importance in the education system even today makes their identity formation a complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory process.

The Turkish higher education system is the primary focus of this research because it is not only a site that brings to light the liminality of today’s youth but is also a site that is representative of the larger tensions experienced by the state-system as a whole. Those who are most affected by changed laws, social movements, geopolitical conflict, or a number of other issues are youth. Because youth are undergoing processes of identity formation, they have the power, or at least the option, to act in one way or another towards any given situation. It is precisely this agency that makes Turkish youth the most vulnerable and theoretically, the most empowered group in Turkish society. With proper governance, widespread nurturance, and greater freedom of choice, Turkish youth can promise the social mobility Turkey has always longed for. The first step is addressing the issue of education outside of an arbitrary political framework. In the next section, we will look at how political motives have shaped the education system and how actions of the past continue to influence youth of the present.

**Politicizing Education**

As I mentioned in the first chapter, national symbols, like the Turkish flag and portraits of Atatürk, were displayed everywhere on the Republic’s anniversary. Pictures of Atatürk, however, are always hung everywhere—after all, as the Republic’s famed founder, “he stands for the state, the nation, and the public” (Özyürek 2006, 158). This kind of pervasive imagery is symbolic of Atatürk’s authoritative life-after-death presence in Turkey—“Atatürk’s image emerged as the sacred symbol of new Turkishness” (Volkan 2000, 24). The strength of his “spiritual” presence speaks clearly to the power of education—Turks were taught to value the
courage and sacrifices of their “father” (remembering Atatürk translates directly into “Father Turk”). As Sam Kaplan mentions in The Pedagogical State:

National salvation…began only when Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) led the Turkish people to victory in the War of Liberation (1919-1923). Thus, from the moment children attend school, they are taught to be grateful to this illustrious leader, who not only successfully expelled foreign armies but also began the modernization of their country (2006, 177).

Everything Turkish can be attributed to Atatürk. During one of my group interviews, I asked my informants, Güliz and Selda, to define Turkishness. The conversation went as follows:

Güliz: I love being Turkish... because, you know... do you know Atatürk? Do you know what he did for this country?
Me: Well yea, he founded the Republic! And I know about his ideology—Kemalism. And I know that basically, Turkey is Turkey because of him...
Güliz: Yea. I think to feel Turkish... just having Atatürk in your history... it’s enough...
Selda: You’re attached... Yea, you’re attached.
Güliz: The one who is happiest says I’m a Turk. [Referring to one of Atatürk’s sayings, “How happy is he/she who calls himself a Turk.”]
Me: What is that? A motto?
Güliz: It’s a saying... I love being a Turk.
Selda: Yea, me too.
Güliz: But if you want me to define... I think having Atatürk in your history, and we have a lot of history, you know too probably, since the Ottoman Empire, but... it feels good.

Güliz and Selda both agreed that being Turkish is inseparable from Atatürk. This is certainly reflective of their early education in national history. It was hard for them to explain in detail what being Turkish actually meant for them aside from simple contentment in just being Turkish and being linked to Atatürk. This kind of speechlessness, and what I referred to earlier as intensities, can be interpreted multiple ways but I wish to leave it open for interpretation and instead refer to what Sam Kaplan notes is the structuring of political consciousness of children (Kaplan 2006, 179).
His research focused on the pedagogical practices of a small region, Yayla, in southwest Turkey bordering the Mediterranean Sea that is more or less reflective of the primary and secondary educational practices of the country as a whole. He writes:

None of the children whom I came to know questioned the cult of Atatürk. Over and over I heard them praise him as the greatest Turk who ever lived; a few were convinced that he was the world’s greatest man. All showed gratitude for what he had accomplished… (Kaplan 2006, 180).

He then uses the example of one of his students’ assignments on “The Turkish Person” (similar to how I questioned my informants on what it means to be Turkish), and a female student wrote (much like how Güliz and Selda spoke) about Atatürk with great reverence. The young girl finished off by stating, “The duty that falls on us is to advance on the road he took,” basically to aspire to the leader’s level of selflessness and success in the name of nation (180). Kaplan responded:

Her statement affirmed a sense of purpose and collective memory that confirmed membership in the nation all the while constraining the individual child to conformity. Her essay also revealed how much Atatürk’s military career and the War of Independence were neither incidental to nor illustrative of but rather central to the creation of a uniform national identity in the educational system (180).

Kaplan emphasizes the reiteration of Atatürk and the War of Independence in his student’s response and comments on the national curriculum’s dependence on these two incredibly important parts of Turkish history. Part of this chapter focuses on the writing of history as an absolute necessity behind educating citizens. Going back to Ayşe Gül Altınay’s argument, claiming the Turkic peoples were central to all the world’s civilizations and conceptualizing Turkish history as one of state-making gives us the idea that the Turkish nation has always existed (Altınay 2004, 24). She also refers to the official historiography’s re-conception of the War of Independence as the Turkish War of Independence, again silencing the other ethnic
groups of Anatolia who contributed to the national struggle (19). The strength of Kaplan’s student’s pride, Güliz and Selda’s pride, and all Turkish people’s pride lies in this very history.

It is important to note that both Güliz and Selda (as indicated through their responses), and all modern Turks for that matter, are products of an education system whose goals, among others, include that “every Turkish child acquires the basic knowledge, skills, behaviours, and habits to become a good citizen [and] is raised in line with the national moral concepts…” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2007, 30). These components of basic education are those that were initially laid forth by Atatürk and have been maintained since his time. This, however, does not mean the education system was not subject to change. Although the basic components remain, the education system has experienced drastic shifts with every new government and each time, the interests of the political party in power have been reflected in the national curriculum. This is a theme that had reemerged in many of my interviews, especially among my informants who were particularly bothered by the growing influence of Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic spiritual leader, and the increased role of religion in schooling.

Fethullah Gülen’s ties to the conservative party currently in power are somewhat consistent with his goals of restoring Islam nationwide since religion, he claims, has been fading with the growth of modernity in Turkey. My informants Merve and Ozan were particularly disturbed by Gülen’s influence and success in already having transformed hundreds of schools to be more aligned with his religious goals (for example, applying strict rules to dormitories of universities in Istanbul). During their group interview, Merve and Ozan commented on the detrimental effects of this kind of influence:

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20 As published by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in 2005.
Merve: Religion is a really dominant criteria for Turkish people. If you want to influence someone, and if you know he or she is a Muslim, you can do it easily. You can use religious words and if they believe you are a good Muslim, they can lead you easily. And families are really confident. If they know they are good people, they feel safe with you being in these universities.

Ozan: Actually, we are Muslims but I believe that [in] higher education, especially, religion should be a different issue for people, but in this situation it cannot be possible.

Merve: We are also Muslims but we don’t have to think about religious things in every area... dormitory, or politics... When we say conservatives in Turkey, it’s different from conservatives in America. They don’t think about religious things a lot, but we do. We say we are democratic, secular—but how?

Merve’s concluding point was particularly interesting. It speaks to the inherent contradictions of everyday Turkish life. If Turkey is expected to achieve the Western European standard of modernity and is to remain secular and democratic, how can leaders like Gülen impose religion in non-religious schools? The education system is easily transformed with the reign of a new political leader or group. The need for reform (which will inevitably bring stability) in the system is greater now more than ever, particularly because its structure today is one that was significantly shaped by the 1980 coup d’état, one whose initial purpose no longer applies and, if anything, hinders Turkey’s progress.

Remnants of the Coup

The 1980 military coup has had long-lasting implications on the Turkish education system, particularly in the realm of higher education. The coup was a response, more commonly perceived as an extreme intervention, to the political turmoil that wreaked havoc upon Turkish society for over a decade. The gradual politicization of Islam was the main cause behind extremist conflict of the 70s. The mid-1940s were marked by the establishment of a multiparty system that appealed widely to marginalized Muslims in Turkey. The 1961 constitution, following the Republic’s second coup a year before, “expanded the scope for associational
freedom, which led to the proliferation of autonomous groups, including religious [ones]” (Rabasa 2008, 36). As Rabasa and Larrabee state, “Religious organizations that had resurfaced in the 1960s mushroomed in the 1970s. Different…religious networks helped the poor cope with the problems of modernization and became clubs for dislocated groups seeking solidarity in a rapidly changing world21” (36).

The battle between left-wing nationalists/secularists and right-wing Islamists had a domino effect on Turkish society. Lacking effective leaders, economic stability, and everyday peace and tranquility, Turkish citizens had had enough and were prepared to react violently towards any individual who threatened their existence. Social cohesion was absolutely non-existent and uprisings were widespread. As stated by military leader General Kenan Evren who headed the intervention:

The State, with its main bodies has been rendered unable to function, the Constitutional institutions have assumed a contradictory and muted silence and the political parties have failed to bring about the unity and togetherness and to take the necessary measures which could have saved the State because of their sterile bickerings and unconciliatory attitudes. Accordingly, the subversive and secessionist forces have increased their activities to the utmost, endangering the security of life and property of the citizens. Instead of Kemalism, reactionary and other warped ideologies have been produced and promoted in a systematic manner and all the educational institutions from elementary schools to universities, the administrative system, judiciary organs, internal security organization, labour institutions, political parties and the citizens even in the most remote corners of the country have become the targets of attacks and suppression and pushed in to the threshold of a civil war and division. In short, the State has been incapacitated (General Secretariat… 1982, 221).

The coup was welcomed by most citizens, they found comfort in having old authoritarian government restored; this was favored in comparison to the fragmented politics that had persisted since the establishment of the multiparty system and resulted in the estimated 5,000 deaths during the 1970’s violence (Mango 2004, 80). The coup (according to my informants)

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was a necessity of the time. Had the military not intervened, the aftermath would have been
catastrophic. The severity of the military intervention was most visible through numbers:

“180,000 people were detained, 42,000 [were] sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 25
[were] found guilty of political murder and hanged” and hundreds of thousands of illegal arms
were confiscated (Mango 2004, 81). As Andrew Mango states in The Turks Today:

The country had been riven by ideological conflict. The military decided that the
remedy lay in confining politics to the inner councils of a few, preferably only
two, polite political parties, just as religion had been confined to the interior of
mosques under state control. Society was to be depoliticized. Trade unions,
voluntary organizations of all kinds, universities were forbidden to have anything
to do with politics (Mango 2004, 81).

It was this moment in history that forever changed the structure of the higher education system
and the nature of the discourses within. The 1980 coup was also a significant turning point for
the country in general. It was a period one of my informants, Ozan, mentioned as the
apoliticization of Turkey. It was a period experienced in real-time by the generation before my
informants; yet its larger cultural implications are still being experienced by my informants
themselves. Although it was not a reality they lived in, the not so distant memories of their
parents and grandparents are real enough to put them in a position of fear and complete
submission to state authority. This essentially meant refraining oneself from political expression.

Now, thirty years later, times have changed but the silences have not. Before beginning
my fieldwork, I seriously questioned the roots of these silences, of this lack of expression among
a group of young people I would consider to be politically active and open. When I got to the
bottom of it all, it was much easier to see that it wasn’t something these youth wanted for
themselves but rather something they were instructed to do for the mere sake of survival. The
conversation between Merve, Ozan, and I explained this in great clarity.
Ozan: After this event, parents decided not to [raise] their children with political ideas, strong political ideas. For example, before my father sent me to university he said, “You will never be involved in these actions and if I hear about it, I will keep you back [here].” The percentage of people who have ideas like my father is so high. That’s why younger people, especially university students, cannot think about the future of Turkey, [or] the political process... they just learn lessons.

Merve: My close friend’s father told us in the 80s, he was an activist also when he was in university, and the police, or soldiers, they killed one of his friends and he told us, “They killed my friend in front of me. Please, of course you will think about politics and you will have an idea, but don’t be involved in such actions, boycotts or protests or something...” These are like, forbidden for us, for our generation. They suffered from it and they don’t want us to be in the same situation.

Merve’s story was similar to the stories of a few of my other informants. Oftentimes they would tell me about their parents’ experiences and how it has shaped their development into passive, politically suppressed members of Turkish society, how they had to be silent for their own good, as much as they wanted to do otherwise. When I asked another informant, Mine, what others expect from her, she focused on her family’s expectations and their emphasis on political passivity.

My family...they just think of my own sake. They don’t think about all the society or something, none of that unrealistic stuff. They always say you should be useful to society, you should do something for your society, blah blah, but I know my mom never wants me to be a leader of something because always leaders are the ones who are punished. Another idiom here... “To live without touching anything,” it’s a very common expression. “Kendi yağımızda kavrulyoruz.” It means like, “You have to cook with your own oil.” They always say that, “You shouldn’t really need anyone for help.” But I know what that means... she just wants me to save my own ass. That’s all. That’s really all.

She goes on to describe how shying away from the issues that matter is problematic for all Turks, not just students. It’s largely a failure to respond actively to a government with loose checks and balances and strict governance over the people—characteristics of authoritarianism. I asked her
if her mother’s plea for her to not be a political activist was common among all Turkish parents.

She responded:

Yea. It’s common. A parent’s instinct maybe? Not really every parent can sacrifice his or her own son [or daughter] for the sake of society; that is really common. Maybe there are some people like that. I know lots of people who fight for their opinion. But at least when it comes to their family, they have to just take a step back because their family doesn’t want them to get killed or something. But it’s all because we don’t unify, because everything is like a burden on one person, because everyone takes a step back.

What is especially interesting about Mine’s comment is her thoughts on how a politically active leader is always punished because he/she is carrying the burden of many as opposed to it falling on an entire unified oppositional force. It is because everyone has, in one way or another, been taught to be silent that breaking this silence becomes a challenge almost no one is willing to pursue. Besides the occasional political martyr, this is almost always the case.

One of my friends, Ekin, is a student at a private university in Istanbul. I met her at Boğaziçi, in the Superdorm, where she managed a café in the basement. Although I did not formally interview Ekin for this research project, she was the very first person I talked to about my ideas (when the proposal was merely a thought in my head that had yet to be written on paper). We had long talks every now and then during my semester abroad in Istanbul. When I returned to conduct interviews, I called Ekin and asked her if she would like to join me for coffee and catch up. She agreed and the talk we had was quite memorable and most of the information to follow comes from notes I had written after our talk. Ekin has a very bright, optimistic personality. She also has a fairly progressive mindset and is always wishing for more, for better and not necessarily all of this for herself but rather for the greater good.

Ekin is always disturbed by acts of violence, particularly those within Turkey. She informed me about the beating of a university student in Istanbul, Guney Tuna, who challenged
the authority of Turkish police…or at least it was perceived that way by the police officers who beat him. Tuna was at a park with his friends drinking, playing his guitar, basically doing what youngsters do. Police approached the group and asked them to discard the alcohol and leave the park. The students obliged by throwing out the bottles but remained in the park. The police came back ten minutes later and asked why they were still there. The students thought the problem was the public drinking so they threw out their beverages—they weren’t being obnoxious or disturbing the peace and therefore didn’t think they had to leave the park. One student in particular, Tuna, stood up and asked why they had to leave if they weren’t doing anything wrong. He was pushed by a police officer and fell to the ground. He stood up and asked the police officer why he had to be this way. That ignited the fire. Tuna was attacked by multiple officers, punched, kicked, beaten with a stick. Basically, he came out of the attack with brain damage, a broken leg, and several other injuries…all for asking questions. Ekin told me something I haven’t heard through the media.

When Tuna was ultimately arrested and taken to prison, the police report was compiled and a physician okayed Tuna for release with no injuries. Tuna was picked up by his father and repeatedly mentioned various pains he felt throughout his body. Tuna’s father immediately took him to the hospital for treatment where all of these injuries were brought to light. The unfortunate part of this entire situation was that Tuna had no record of how he was brought to his present condition; the police report was obviously false, and challenging state authority without evidence of any wrongdoing is meaningless. Luckily for Tuna, there was evidence. Security cameras were rolling in the park at the time of the attack and everything had been documented. Tuna went to court and contested the unethical practices of the police department. Only one police officer was asked to resign. Ekin being good friends with Tuna recalled something he had
said to her. His lawyer told him he was lucky that even one officer was tried and released from his duties. Ekin said these weren’t uncommon occurrences in Turkey. Oftentimes when Prime Minister Erdoğan goes to universities for a visit, at least one student will criticize the administration’s ineffectiveness and will almost immediately be escorted out. After being removed from the auditorium with an officer’s hand covering his or her mouth, there is almost always some period of time behind bars awaiting them.

That Tuesday afternoon, as Ekin and I sat and talked over coffee, politics seemed to be the recurring topic of discussion. She told me about her father’s experience as a university student during the period of the early-80s military regime. She said her father and a few friends were discussing Marx and Lenin when they’d been overheard and as a result, imprisoned. They were physically abused during their imprisonment but even worse, two of her father’s friends were tortured to death. She kept using the phrase “sad times” to describe this era, mostly in reference to her father’s experiences. It’s experiences like these I learned more or less shaped Ekin’s personality into what it is—rather, who she is—today. Political involvement is scarce among youth not only because they deem activism to be ineffective and useless in the bigger picture of things, not to mention in a political system everyone seems to agree is thoroughly corrupt, but also because deeply embedded within the minds of these 21st century youth are moments of history not too far away from their time that re-instill fear—a fear one would think is unnecessary in the absence of a military regime, a time when there is no visible threat. That couldn’t be more untrue.

Although parents reinforce ideas of silence and “in-activism,” the education system does the same in a more subtle, implicit manner. As mentioned before, the entire system was restructured to match the newly written constitution and to fall into the overall restoration of
Atatürk’s principles—the goal was to instill order in a society that had grown incredibly divisive in a relatively short period of time. This would be achieved through full compliance and in the worst instances, military threat. Specific to education was General Evren’s message to the people that this would be the moving force behind the Kemalist restoration.

Measures will be immediately taken to spread Atatürk nationalism in education and training to the remotest corners of the country. Measures will be taken to prevent our youth, the [guarantors] of our future, from becoming anarchists as a result of being brought up with foreign ideologies instead of Atatürk’s principles. To this end our respectable teachers will not be allowed to split by means of memberships in various organizations under the name of associations and union. The principal objective of every student at all levels will be to wholeheartedly adopt Kemalist principles and nationalism and to get knowledge and skills oriented to production (General Secretariat… 1982, 232).

General Evren’s message on its own does an excellent job explaining the mindset of contemporary Turkish youth. Partaking in this restoration today, an entire three decades later, is completely irrelevant and untimely. These university students are the real guarantors of the future, the ones who are most likely to achieve the level of modernization and global participation Atatürk had envisioned. The constraint of the education system not only hinders this progress but it also contributes to growing dissatisfaction among youth. They’re left to deal with a national education system whose curriculum at the primary and secondary level still focuses on nationalism and seeks to complete the breeding of the Turkish citizen through a competitive “weed-out” process for admission into higher education.

**The System Today**

The national education system isn’t very different from that of Republic’s early years. The focus around nationalism never really faded over time, it was only a matter of priorities. The system was always centralized and has become increasingly so since the 1980s’ restoration of Kemalist principles. From the very beginning, Atatürk and his ideology, Kemalism,
“discouraged the development of autonomous groups outside the control of the state. Autonomous activity…was regarded by the state as a potential threat to its ability to carry out its modernization effort and consolidate its political control” (Rabasa 2008, 34). This certainly explains the chaos that ensued in the 60s once autonomous political groups were formed in favor of Islam. Although it is never safe to make assumptions, it could have been evident through Atatürk’s discouragement that conflict was inevitable in the face of non-authoritarian rule—after all, the population was never really one to begin with and peaceful solidarity in Turkey has yet to exist. State control was and still is the only thing holding the Republic together.

When describing the education system today, I’d like to place less emphasis on methods of primary and secondary education and more emphasis on the experiences of university students since they are the ones nearing the end of their enculturation process and have been able to perceive their experiences in a different light. For this reason I will describe processes of admission into higher education in depth using a variety of sources and use data solely collected from my informants to discuss their middle and high school experiences.

Based on responses to a survey I issued at the end of each interview (see Appendix), 63% of my informants believed the university admissions process indirectly favored certain demographics over others and 56% believed the process was unnecessarily difficult. Although I can only speak on behalf of what I’ve seen at Boğaziçi, most of the “elite” universities in Istanbul are home to a middle to upper class majority; of my informants, 81% came from urban hometowns (see figure to the left). This is also demonstrated through
the cause-effect analysis of attending dershane (or “cram schools” as mentioned in the introduction). If one’s family can afford to send their child to dershane in preparation for the university entrance exam a good year or two in advance, it increases their chances of scoring well on the ÖSS, which in turn increases their likelihood of being admitted into a top-tier university. Admission into a top-tier university guarantees an equally successful career. One of my informants, Bengisu, a Cultural Anthropology major here at Duke, described her educational experience as one that placed emphasis on exams from middle school onward.

Like the college system, we have a main exam and there’s always something new about it. This year there are now two sections. This year, blah, blah, blah. You never know what’s coming for you, but you might get really lucky and get something amazing or it might just be really messed up and typical and you might be like, “Shit.” [laughs]. I feel like, your main goal in life is to prepare for another exam. I don’t think that benefits anyone, because through middle school you’re trying to get into a good high school...well, actually, I think they have an exam like every year so it means you’re studying every year instead of only one year. Dershane is horrible and basically, your points tell you what kind of high school you can get into, and all throughout high school you’re trying to get into college through an exam. I just don’t agree with that “study for one exam only” kind of thing cause it’s not like that in real life... they have one exam and that decides everything, you know? It should be more like, I don’t know... test who you are as a person in general, not in a “complete with correct grammar, you only have 3 hours and that’s all” kind of [way]!

Another one of my informants, Elif, a third-year sociology major at Boğaziçi mentioned the stress factor in preparing for a single exam that seemed to control one’s fate. When I asked her to describe her experience, she responded:

Ooh... They were really difficult days. You have to study, you have to study hard for Boğaziçi University. Almost every student in Turkey wants to study in Boğaziçi University, and it’s a big challenge for you. And of course, you have to study a lot and this is about economic conditions too, your parents’ economic conditions. You know about dershane? Dershanes are different.. expensive ones, cheap ones. No matter if you are a great student, your grades are better than others at school, this is not important for ÖSS. You have to do an excellent job on that exam to be here, so it’s really stressing. Just one exam...and [then] your future.
Even in Turkey’s OECD Review for National Policies for Education, the difficulties of the admissions process are not ignored. The “University Examination, Selection and Placement” section opens with, “We were told everywhere that the current university entrance examination and placement process is perhaps the most significant barrier to improvement in secondary education in Turkey” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2007, 86). The process is not only difficult because it is incredibly selective but also because it takes away from students’ performance in high school. When enrolled in dershane, one is completely committed to preparing for the ÖSS and not getting good grades in school.

Although OECD states that three scores (standard scores from the verbal test, the quantitative test, and a scored based on high school GPA) are transformed into a composite score, most of my informants mentioned the irrelevance of high school performance in determining admissions to university (unless one was on a vocational track that began in high school) (87). However, the Higher Education Council (YÖK) plays a huge role in calculating students’ scores for high school GPAs—if a student chooses to stay on track with their high school course of study (i.e. science, teaching, languages, etc.) they are rewarded higher points and those not doing so have points deducted (88). This is something that forms an enormous barrier between students and their true career goals. Mine describes her experience as a unique one when entering ÖSS, primarily because she diverged from her high school track of science to get into the Management program at Boğaziçi.

*My story is a little bit strange because I was a science student in high school. It’s pretty much about the system. When I say I want to study law as a science student, there’s no way. It’s like your destiny. You have to do it. You have to study science forever and ever, but you just have to pick up a leakage in the system to study what you want. Management is the closest thing I can get after I escaped from science. It’s not like I don’t like science... it was getting boring. So in the end of high school I thought, there’s a way and I’m going to try it. The parts that I have to do, I solved them too, it was just another 30 questions to get into management.*
It worked out well, I was in the first 400 people... There are examples of that but you really have to get your potential out there and it's really hard. Because of your surroundings... It's really extreme examples, not anyone can do it. Because you're fighting against the wind. Your school doesn't help you maybe you don't get like a course because of your socioeconomic background... you're really fighting against the wind. You can do it, anyone can do what they want, but it's not realistic, let's say.

To make the process harder for people who wish to break the status quo and follow their interests is representative of the controlling nature and narrowed focus of YÖK—keeping in mind the Council was formed in 1981 to create uniform structure in a higher education system that lacked uniformity in admissions criteria and whose structure was completely dismantled after the political uprisings of the decade before. This fully autonomous council comprised of twenty-two politically and governmentally unaffiliated appointees plans, coordinates, and supervises all public and private institutions of higher education in Turkey. YÖK governs effectively to the extent it promises social reproduction by allotting certain vacancies in selected departments of various universities and filling these vacancies to reach the quota.

When one prefers a university after taking the ÖSS and ranking their top three choices, they are really applying directly to specific departments at specific universities. Of course, departments are ranked based on the university in which they're housed and students select departments whose rankings are most aligned with their own compared to the total number of ÖSS takers who beat the cutoff. The relationship between students' ÖSS scores and their university department placement is directly proportional. The higher one is ranked in the top percentile, the better the department one is placed in when entering university. Students even sacrifice a major they are genuinely interested in for one that is ranked higher because the benefits they will reap from having a degree in the higher ranked department are more worthwhile than the other’s. Also, there are never enough spots to have every ÖSS taker placed

http://www.yok.gov.tr/en/content/view/343/219/
in an institution of higher education. The extremely competitive process of university admissions is something that is made most visible through statistics. In 2005, out of the 1.8 million students who sat for the ÖSS, only 400,000 could actually be placed in various institutions of higher education (Aksit 2007, 131). That year, a mere 22% of the candidates for higher education were accepted into collegiate institutions; if we include those on the vocational school track, the rate slightly increases to 23.8% (131). This certainly isn’t enough, especially in comparison to Turkey’s general population of 76.8 million people, 20% of which live below the poverty line and close to 15% of which are unemployed.

This systematic approach to placing students into universities was something Batuhan, a representative from the Education Reform Initiative in Istanbul, touched on. He referred to it as the state’s “planning package,” which I thought was clever and fairly accurate.

So this big market approach and packaging are more or less planning packages of the state. You know, according to the state, and even today there are discussions... you know, “State-planning organization would like to know how many engineers will Turkey need in the next thirty years? How many doctors?”—and accordingly plan universities. That’s pretty much the communist ideology and the way of doing things. You know, everybody thought of Turkey as a capitalist country, but it was not a really good communist country in terms of the practice—the role of the state, the way it’s organized, vocational school systems, higher education—especially after 1980... after the coup. So you know, everything is state-driven, the state makes all the decisions, the kids don’t have much room to deliver... especially between then and the establishment of the private universities that are kind of breaking away from that, but not completely. So that’s the general framework [students] are actually finding themselves in...

Batuhan believed this framework was problematic because it discourages students from having active voices in deciding their own futures. Rather than choose a path based on one’s interest or passion, one chooses a field of study because it is most promising in terms of job security and income. The worst part about this is that once a student is enrolled in a certain department it is often extremely difficult or completely impossible to switch to another, even within the same

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faculty. Through the state’s lens, the ideal Turkish student will continue along the path of his or her high school subject area/specialty, will graduate from a university with a degree in that very same subject area, and will ultimately establish a career using the skills acquired from one’s education to produce and provide for society in general. The likeliness of this happening on a large scale is minute, particularly because the expectations placed on Turkish youth far surpass their capabilities.

These youth are undergoing sensitive phases of psychosocial development and really are in no way prepared to make decisions at the secondary school age that will impact the rest of their lives. Zafer describes the challenges students face in making such decisions.

*If you know it, it’s a great chance for you. If you’re 15 and you know you’re going to be a doctor, the system is ok, it’s suitable for you. But if you don’t really know, and too many people don’t, like majority... no one knows at that age! You don’t even know who you are! I don’t know. I didn’t really know it was such an important decision in my life...on all my friends’ lives. I was just a person, [having] graduated from high school, so happy to have gotten into a very good university and I didn’t really know that I had made a mistake by choosing engineering because it’s not me, it’s not my lifestyle, it’s not my way of thinking. Engineering is just the opposite of me. So, I’m just stuck with it and I don’t want to ruin the last few years, so I just want to finish it so I can get a degree and so that I can say I am a Boğaziçi University graduate and so that I can do different things with less difficulties. So that I won’t say, you know, that I quit Boğaziçi my third year to become a [film] director. People don’t respect that. Like, you have to be something for people to respect you—you have to have a title. It sucks. I know it sucks but in Turkey, it’s like that. In America it’s like that too. Like, nobody respects someone that tracks their passion and just goes with it until they reach a point that they don’t need that respect. But I do. I need that respect to continue either to another major or education or in business to improve myself in arts and cinema. Another thought of mine is if I quit my school right now and go with my passion, then I would be broke and I would be homeless. At least I will know that I can do something other than cinema if I don’t succeed in cinema. So I wont be hungry. Yea, I don’t want to be a starving artist. I would rather be like a rich engineer that wants to do arts in a home, a warm place where I can feed myself. Yea, so I’m not like that romantic, ambitious person. I can’t do that. I have to guarantee something so I don’t stop at that. I have to guarantee to myself that I can stand on my own feet—it means independence.*
Zafer makes a number of good points in the above quote. He mentioned how no one knows what they want at that young of an age—no one even knows who they are. It’s true and this certainly speaks to the topic of this research, identity formation among Turkish youth. University students like Zafer have undergone series and series of competitive, selective, weed-out processes to reach the point they are at today. Because they survived as the “fittest” of the youth population, they bear the torch in fulfilling the expectations society has laid before them. The unfortunate truth, however, is that these expectations are not only unrealistic but create more problems than those youth already seek to fix. Like my informant, Merve, said, young people are always told to do great things but no one tells them how to go about doing so. When I asked Batuhan what he thought some of the expectations for youth in Turkey were today he responded, “Well if you ask the state, they have a huge recipe for how Turkish youth should be. They want Superman… but that can’t happen.”

Addressing the Need for Reform

Although reworking the curriculum used in primary and secondary schools should be a primary task under Turkey’s education reform, restructuring the higher education system, and universities themselves, should not fall far behind. Part of alleviating the disparity of wealth in Turkey is ensuring equal educational opportunities for all. There is stark contrast between the eastern and western regions of the country—the two have taken completely opposite paths of development. In many cases, the claim can be made that the West modernized at the expense of the East. Even in terms of university schooling, the more prestigious, well-run universities are located in major urban cities of Turkey. Many of my informants classified those in the rural areas as useless or meaningless. They say new universities are constantly being built but cannot be put to proper use because they lack the human resources needed to have these universities operate at
the level of the well-established ones—all they really have is infrastructure. Simply opening new schools will not solve the problem of there not being enough places for eligible candidates. However, a bottom-up approach to education could (over a very long period of time) create incredible change among the Turkish population. As Batuhan mentioned, what the universities really need is autonomy, for the state to “create a regulatory framework, give capacity to the universities, and let the universities take care of themselves” whereas the main focus of education reform should be educating (and in some cases, reeducating) the masses at the primary and secondary levels.

Another important component of education reform in Turkey lies in remodeling the curriculum to ensure there is no “misuse of history” (Tarman 2008, 176). “History teaching must not be an instrument of ideological manipulation of propaganda or used for the promotion of intolerant and ultranationalistic, xenophobic, racist…ideas” (176). Teaching nationalism is no longer relevant in a globalized world—the nationalistic curriculum of Turkish education has been to blame for the country’s ethnic divide throughout the Republic’s existence. Many of my informants would agree that ignoring such pressing issues is exactly what needs to be targeted and changed. Batuhan of the ERI gave a thorough example of what it would take for this change to be effectively managed.

Well, it would require a political party that has the will to change but as importantly, the ability to manage the change. This government, they’re okay in terms of wanting to change but they suck at managing [it]. Take the Kurdish democratic explosion, take higher education reform, take the many issues that have been dragging on for years—they haven’t resolved any of them firstly because they’re bad, bad meaning they just can’t manage the process. I just keep saying the CHP (Republican People’s Party) is a major obstacle before more progressive education reform in Turkey, in terms of the content. Or because they just support Kemalism, that, this and so on. You have to somehow manage that. If you want bilingual education in schools, for example, you have to make sure that when you do that, nationalistic people in the West won’t run after the Kurds to lynch them as a reaction. So you need to build a nation of consensus, especially in
terms of the constitution. There is national consensus, in terms of demanding the change. Go around to anybody and they will say, “Yea, it should change.” But we as a nation are not able to do that because you don’t just prepare a constitution draft within the AKP government and then just present to everyone. No. You start to prepare that with everybody.

I’d like to emphasize Batuhan’s last statement on preparing a new constitution with everyone taking part in the process. This is a big deal and would be incredibly productive for Turkish society because it would finally resolve the issue that lies at the heart of the Republic’s foundation. History has been misused to portray a collective Turkish identity that doesn’t actually exist. Politics have always guided the enculturation process and it is precisely because this has been happening for over eight decades that it has turned into a circular chain of events that becomes more and more difficult to break.

Here’s a very micro example: we’re advocating for a more progressive and non-confessional curriculum for the Religious Culture and Moral Education class. What the government keeps doing is they write their own book and they interpret for example, Alevism and Christianity from their perspective. No. Have Christians, have Alevis, have Armenians, have Jewish people write their own parts in the book so that actually it’s a book that accepts everybody’s perspective. We don’t want you to give your perspective on what you understand about Christianity. Managing the change at the macro level is the same thing—include other people in the process. Include them in the process so that the product that comes out of this process at the end is acceptable to many... and implementable and sustainable. I mean, it requires governance. It’s simple. You have to have political will and good governance. It’s not rocket science.

I think this also goes back to what Zafer mentioned earlier in the chapter about extreme nationalists and the intensities they defend, how people fail to remember they’re fighting over something people themselves invented. Similarly, we oftentimes forget the arbitrariness of written history and fail to see the world through multiple perspectives. Revising the curriculum, even something as grand as the Turkish History Thesis, could pave the way for astonishing societal change. As Batuhan suggests, a multicultural approach to learning would be best.
This, however, is something Merve and Ozan indicated wasn’t as welcomed by a majority of the population. Although they, as university students, are more prone to being open-minded, it doesn’t mean others are as well.

Merve:  *My father says that if you read more, if you learn lots of things about politics, economics, about the world, you can decide and you can know what to do, do the right thing. If you do the right thing for you, it can be good for Turkey and for the world. It starts with you. If this political system disturbs me and I really want to change it, ok, you can go to university, you can read, you can talk to politics professors or you can do anything you want and you can change it. If you find people like you, it will create a great power and you can change it.*

Ozan:  *But I want to say some different things. There are so few parents like Merve’s that say that it would be better if you read more. For example, last year, I had traveled by bus and I was reading a novel. I opened my light and the man near me, he was disturbed by the light and said to me, “You can’t save the world. Read no more. If you read more, you will be confused.”*

Merve:  *In Turkey, we say if somebody talks a lot about a subject, “Felsefe yapma—Don’t make philosophy.”*

I thought this brief conversation was particularly interesting because it really reflected the thoughts of average Turkish citizens. Discouraging young people from reading because they can’t save the world, or discouraging them from reading too much because they can’t “create philosophy” or produce their own knowledge is disheartening. No wonder so few of my informants felt *empowered*. They have to face the everyday pessimism of the generations before them—generations who were never taught to think critically as my informants do at their exceptional universities. The goal here is to have all universities operating at such a level that this type of dialogue can be exchanged regularly among the “educated elite” with no fears or worries of being judged or disclaimed. This type of dialogue may or may not filter down to previous generations who are stern in their beliefs but it certainly has the potential to be passed on to future generations and the future is the only thing this generation needs to be focused on.
Breaking silences is like making a clean break from the past and this is something that has been difficult to do because so much of Turkish “identity” is constructed from elements of the past and this is completely understandable. It’s not to say one should let go of rich Ottoman history or Atatürk’s revolution—these are things that should instead be re-conceptualized.

Batuhan made clear that the key to education reform isn’t just about changing the curriculum. Also laid before us is the task of retraining teachers so that they teach critically and encourage critical reception on behalf of the students as well. The problem in this, however, is that these teachers were not taught how to teach critically themselves. This is exactly what Mine was talking about when she told me of her experiences in middle and high school doing busy work, as not to ask the teacher questions. Again, this goes back to the silences so many members of Turkish society fail to address. As Batuhan stated,

*We were not taught explicit critical thinking because critical thinkers actually do question things. From this ideology we have parents, we have teachers, we have faculty, we have soldiers, we have police, we have everybody.*

When I asked Batuhan if people were just too afraid to be critical, he disagreed:

*No, it’s because they’re used to the status quo. They’re fat from the status quo right now and let’s be frank, we’re not like a Latin American country. The biggest demonstration in Chile, since Allende’s time, happened a couple of years ago when the secondary school students went out into the street to protest the secondary school system. You won’t have that here because the children are not really that much self-aware, they’re not empowered but second, the state will just break it. You know, you’re still talking about a very totalitarian regime here. I mean, it’s comparable, but it’s not like Cuba, North Korea or Syria or Iran, but for a liberal country, a democratic country, it’s pretty severe. If you see Turkey as an OECD country, I mean, it’s probably a huge shame that actually there’s so much lack of freedom in education among other things in society. And unless you break that cycle, you move out of the state’s indoctrination, I don’t think there will be much room for the youth to really grow.*

Along the lines of thinking critically and fostering emotional growth and increased self-awareness among Turkish youth is something Zafer mentioned to me about his educational
experiences. He hated the asymmetrical approach to teaching and believed real learning only takes place when there is equal exchange of information, questions, or ideas. A lot of what Zafer said really resonated because it was extremely symbolic of what I thought of the higher education system. It is because it’s so systematic, so mechanical, and less nurturing that it creates rifts in society. The rifts that already existed are worsened and the ones that didn’t exist before emerge. What some may believe are practices of enculturation can be practices of acculturation for those who never felt part of the whole. This is why complete social cohesion seems so impossible in Turkey, even today. The education system must focus more on nurturing the individual—only once the individual finds comfort in him/herself can the focus be more on the collective. Not only will this be more aligned with Western ideology (fitting into the Republic’s modernization goals), but it will also ease the anxieties of youth like Zafer.

You should be forced to think more…but the Turkish education system does the opposite. They don’t give you space to think, they give you everything. They give you a piece of paper and they say, “Memorize it. Don’t think anything else. Just memorize it. There are things that you should know, there are things you should not know, and don’t ever go out of this box. These are the things that you have to learn. If you find something better, a better idea or an idea that exists and is not acceptable to you, then shut your mind off. You won’t change anything. It’s not up to you and you don’t have a decision to make about it.”… It makes no sense and it kills you. It kills you. It makes you become this robot that doesn’t think for itself.
Chapter III

Synthesizing Tradition and Modernity:
Understanding the Role of Family, Faith, and Gender
in the Lives of Contemporary Youth

Going back to the theme of triple governmentality and having already examined the power relations between the Turkish state and Turkish youth, we now begin to examine the power relations between youth and family. Turkish “tradition,” as most of my informants concurred, emphasizes family solidarity. For many of them, family is a priority whose importance persists throughout the life course. Families inform youth on decisions that will not only affect their short-term goals but long-term ones as well. As a result, youth form lasting attachments and often base their successes on the type of impact their actions have on their families. Many of my informants associated failures with family disapproval, detachment, or distance. Also, to lose the approval of one’s family is to essentially isolate oneself from a support system that gives meaning to the individual him/herself. This, of course, becomes problematic for contemporary youth who constantly find themselves at a divide between family and everything else—a divide that is somewhat symbolic of a tradition/modernity dichotomy.

This chapter will explore the role of family in the lives of contemporary Turkish youth and carefully examine two other major components of Turkish “tradition”: religion and gender. In this chapter, I do not seek to establish a clear break from modernity and simply label these categories as “traditional” ones but instead bring to light the intersection of tradition versus modernity discourses as exemplified through the lived experiences of Turkish youth. Similar to the two previous chapters on the notion of the nation-state and reification of this idea through the education system, this chapter will also highlight the complexity behind youth identity formation through the specific case of university students who strive for modernity yet equally strive for maintenance of traditional values, especially those disseminated by the family.
Family Defining Self

For all of my informants, family is a defining characteristic, an aspect of the self that is inseparable from it. Although most of my informants agreed in having strong feelings of attachment to their families, the roles their families played in their lives varied from person to person. While family was simply a source of guidance for some, it was a complete definition of the self for others. For someone like Yusuf, it was difficult to detach one’s outlook on life from the experiences of his family, specifically his parents.

I think it hits again when I say I have good relations with my parents because they construct me. So, it’s getting harder for me to choose another way or constructing perspectives for me, just for me. Because I know if my father was someone else, maybe I wouldn’t even think about these issues. But...the need for looking for something else is also constructed by my parents. So, it’s getting harder for me... I think as I speak, it gets more confusing for me to choose something else. So, it’s one of the best and worst questions: Where do you stand?

This is a continuation of Yusuf’s response to a question I had asked in the first chapter about political ideology and his positioning in the realm of politics. If we recall, Yusuf responded it was difficult for him to place himself within any of the existing ideologies because he is constantly reconstructing his identity within various contexts and each time, it becomes difficult for him to dissociate himself from the beliefs and values of his mother and father who are both minorities in Turkey. While his mother is Alevi, a small religious minority in Turkey, his father is a Kurd, part of the largest minority group in the country (an estimated 18% of the entire population). This certainly had an impact on Yusuf’s upbringing.

Yusuf understands his identity is largely formed as the product of his parents’ identities and acknowledges them as the source of his aspirations—his parents’ experiences (and maybe even some of his own) of being marginalized or being victims of ethnic or religious discrimination shape who he is and what he wants to achieve in life. This was indicated through

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Yusuf’s response to a question I asked about his ultimate goal in life or what he thought his purpose was. Whereas most of my informants immediately thought of their careers or more tangible goals, Yusuf dug a little deeper and spoke of an emotional, perhaps spiritual fulfillment.

*I don’t know about my purpose but I just told you I’m looking for peace in some place. It can be in me, it can be in a peaceful moment just before I die. Yea, I can say my purpose is finding this peace or finding this thing that cannot even be peace, because peace is again a thing that I construct and when I say it, you hear it and you construct something called peace. I don’t know, I’m looking for something...my purpose is finding this thing I am looking for. [Pause] I’m waiting for something to happen, actually. I don’t know what this something is... Probably something small. It helps me but not all the people. But I don’t know... So, my purpose is this thing that I’m waiting for. We can call it peace, happiness, or something else. I’m waiting for this to happen.*

Yusuf’s vision of being at peace in his future is perhaps symbolic of an ideal end to any hardships he or his family may have faced in the past (or continue to face today). So much of what his parents have endured have become a part of Yusuf himself. Yusuf’s deconstruction of his own identity entails a deeper understanding of his parents’ experiences.

*But it’s all about...my parents’ experiences because they had some really bad times. They were all by themselves. They learned something that is not being [taught] at the universities and at schools. But the thing is they learned some...both of them have learned different things. But eventually they found something...found out that you have different types of learning some things. More like, [living] your life and putting those things into your life to be more happy, or something like...inner...uh...inner-satisfaction.*

This explained Yusuf’s previous response about his purpose or goal in life. His desire to be at peace directly reflects upon the teachings of his parents who always emphasized emotional growth, finding oneself, and like Yusuf said, inner-satisfaction. Yusuf’s upbringing is somewhat reflective of the growth and developmental process one would undergo in a university setting (through the Western lens). The idea that Yusuf went through such phases at an earlier stage in life and then was permitted to expand upon this growth at Bilgi University, his home institution, says a lot about how his experiences differ from those of my other informants. When I asked
Yusuf about Bilgi, he said it was different from a lot of the other universities in Istanbul in that it wasn’t as restrictive, had many more resources through its private funding, and really allowed the students to explore themselves as they saw best fit. Yusuf’s ability to go beyond the surface of his learning experiences in the classroom certainly fostered this in-depth understanding of his personal identity formation, something he showed sincere gratitude toward his parents for.

The experiences of Yusuf’s parents have also contributed to the creation of stronger bonds within the family. What I described in the previous chapter as silences or unanswered questions directly affect families like that of Yusuf’s who continue to be “othered” in Turkish society. In one way, this otherness has contributed to a strengthening of family solidarity. Yusuf explained to me the uniqueness of how tight-knit his family is, how these silences are addressed within this safe space. When I asked him about academics, he told me he always had the support of his parents when it came to choosing his own educational and career paths. I asked him if he thought this was the case for most university students in Turkey and he disagreed. Yusuf believed this kind of encouragement was uncommon, mainly because so many people in Turkey are so fixed on achieving tangible goals. Specific to university students, he didn’t believe the values most of them shared with their families equated to those he shared with his.

I don’t know actually, about the other families. But... Actually, I have some ideas about them. I feel like we are a real family that has some uh, real values and uh, more solid values than other families. I think most of them have vague values like uh...some rules. Most of the families in Turkey have some rules like, you have to be at home on time and you aren’t allowed to smoke or you’re not to say anything about politics or anything about your life.

Yusuf’s closeness to his family is something he described as meaningful and uncommon which brings me to question whether this idea of uniqueness of family ties is culturally shared. Although I would say most of my informants felt this way, I can understand Yusuf’s perspective because the degree of attachment he had to his family was slightly different from others’. There
was great contrast between private affairs and public affairs; this was exemplified through how Yusuf described his everyday life back when he was in high school. I asked him about the preparation period for the university entrance exam and he described it as a time that wasn’t out of the ordinary, not very difficult at all. He remembered his days were very routine and filled but he would still go home excited, not drained and exhausted. He looked forward to going home and conversing with his family, especially his father. Yusuf has a very strong relationship with his father and admires him for surviving the hardships he did. Yusuf’s father’s experience in the military was a traumatic experience, something he doesn’t like to talk about. As Yusuf said,

You know, we have some…uh…some…some bad times in Turkish history, especially [for] my father. It was harder [for him] than [for] me. Uh, he experienced a coup and he was arrested because he was Kurdish, so it was hard times for him. He doesn’t like to talk about his youth and his days in the military and his days in jail.

In a sense, Yusuf is reliving his father’s youth in a more positive light. He takes in the experiences of his father as an opportunity to make up for what was lost long ago—an opportunity to consciously reevaluate the effects of trauma. Likewise, Yusuf’s father encourages his son to pursue his dreams and live a life of fulfillment in doing whatever pleases him because it was an opportunity he wasn’t afforded. There is a freedom Yusuf is given by his family that a lot of my other informants weren’t given. Yusuf recited a phrase his father always says to him (translated into English as best as possible), “The diploma will help you to do some things, but you’ll be alone and by yourself at the end…As long as you study something and you learn about life and you’re happy with it, that’s fine by me.” This kind of parental guidance was a rarity among my informants.

I agree with Yusuf in that family encouragement of self-guidance among children is rare (as will be exemplified later in this chapter through the experiences of my other informants).
There is a uniqueness to Yusuf’s family that sets him apart from the rest of my informants. It is not to say Yusuf’s family is the only tight-knit one of them all, however, the kind of attachment he talks about is one of intimacy, an intimacy that can only be achieved through complete harmony. Although all of my informants considered the family to be a site of safety, comfort, and collectivity, it was only Yusuf who was able to link family duty to self-realization—both he and his family believed in ultimate self-fulfillment and inner-satisfaction. As opposed to my other informants and their families, Yusuf’s goals and his family’s were completely aligned.

Contrary to Yusuf’s example, another one of my informants, Semih, considers his family to be both a site of attachment and aversion. Much of his family history has influenced his present state of being. Semih is the first in his family to attend a school of high caliber. This is something that was both supported and opposed by members of his family. His father is a small business owner/eyeglass vendor and owns a shop in Bahcelievler in Istanbul. Although his family is originally from Kayseri, his parents have resided in Istanbul for nearly 25 years. Semih has an intense family history that has caused him to go through much earlier phases of maturation than most of my informants. Although some members of his family are incredibly supportive of his academic achievements, some believe it was an inappropriate move in terms of helping his father with the business. When I asked Semih about how his family supported him, what their expectations were, and if they put pressure on him, he responded:

_Yea, if I were staying at home...I know they will pressure me, so I escaped from them. And my family is really complicated, so that’s why I live in the dorm. It’s very complicated... I mean by complicated, there are a lot of contradictions between family members, divorces, gambling, and I don’t know, killing people, and...I don’t know how to say it...commercial issues, debts..._

Semih went on to explain that most of the complications arise in the extended family network, not so much within the nuclear family. This, I believe, was the site of aversion. He reiterated
having to “escape” from them so the problems wouldn’t cloud his studies. Immediately after, he pointed to a picture on his wall singling out his mother, the person in his life he is most fond of and cares deeply about.

Semih’s situation differs from others’ mainly because he chose a path that in some sense deviated from the original one most of his family members followed. I thought this was a great achievement, a success story even, but when I asked Semih if he thought some of his younger family members admired him or looked up to his achievements and appreciated where he is at now in his life he responded, “I don’t think so, because nobody in my family thinks about staying in school (university). They will just have fun, they don’t think about these issues.” I dug a little deeper to better understand where he was coming from asking if he believed it was an extra challenge for him to do well in school or if he was in any way supported.

*No, because my nuclear family, my father and mother, support me actually, but the other guys in the family actually they don’t know my existence. Yea... I don’t know. My mother really supports me and my father tries to send me money, this is how he can support me. Before I came to university, my uncle, he was a bad guy, okay? He was really bad because he said why don’t I help my father in his shop for example instead of going to university. He said I waste my time, for example, in Taksim, with my friends... He said I should work. He was the only one who didn’t support university. But in general, people don’t mind. Yea... my family...*

There was a mutual discomfort that arose in hearing Semih say this, partly because he was a bit hesitant to go in depth with such a private matter. I couldn’t blame him, it is indeed difficult to talk about these kinds of issues in general, let alone with an outsider. When I told him not to be shy, to say something when he wants to say it, he laughed, “I know. You’re trying to make me talk!” Semih was always cognizant of my role as researcher—it was rather difficult to get him to speak freely in the beginning. Once he felt a little more comfortable, however, his instinct no longer hindered him from speaking about the issues in his life that really mattered. At one point, Semih said, “I’m not sure that my family stuff really interests your research.” When I asked him
why he thought this before going in depth with my explanation of how family is incredibly pertinent to my research, he began to understand and opened up a little more.

Semih began to see for himself how multiple sites, alongside family, intertwine to form the complex identity (or identities) he perceives himself to have. In Crafting Selves, Dorinne Kondo distinguishes between two types of family: *ie* and *uchi*. In Japanese families, the *ie* is “family as the weight of history and obligation” and *uchi* is “family as a center of emotional attachment” (Kondo 1990, 120). Although the concepts of *ie* and *uchi* work best in the example specific to Kondo’s research, it can also be applied less rigidly to other family models. I bring it up at this particular moment to apply it to Semih’s family situation, how his family is a site where the *ie* and *uchi* are not distinctly separate but instead combine to form a unique familial experience. Through the earlier example Semih used of the distance he felt from his extended family network, we can see a form of *ie* taking shape where his uncle’s ideas of following the paternal lineage of working in the family business was a significant symbol of maturation and transition into adulthood. This is, in one sense, a significant portion of defining oneself. In another sense, we can see a strong bond, similar to the *uchi* form of family, between Semih and his mother who supplies him with the emotional support he needs to pursue his own desires. In many ways, the support of his mother is insufficient to allow for fully positive growth and development, particularly throughout university when Semih also has worries at home to preoccupy his mind. While Semih’s *ie* and *uchi* combination is more of a clash, Yusuf’s displays how “personhood and mature self-fulfillment can be woven into the fabric of family duty and family continuity” (Kondo 1990, 120).

This clash was also exemplified by one of Kondo’s characters, Masao. She described Masao’s experiences as one that caused him anguish and produced tensions that were nearly
intolerable (Kondo 1990, 120-1). The same can be exemplified through Semih who was pressured to forgo a university education for the sake of helping his father run his business. Aside from this, there were the additional pressures of doing well in school, maintaining friendships in this setting, and envisioning a bright future with memories of his young past still in mind. Semih articulated the challenges these multiple roles have had on his life and the complications that continue to arise from them.

...I see lots of things, really... For example, in one occasion, more Islamic people, I can really talk to them and really connect with them. And next day, somehow, I spend time with my friends and there the whole context is different. I can really get accustomed to every place and every time in Turkey because I think for my age, 21, I saw lots of things. I saw deaths... I saw lots of commercial [experience] because of my father...I don’t know, how things work between them, between uneducated old guys. I see university, my same age [group]. Really, I see all those but I can’t put myself in just one of them. I really don’t like my family actually, but I am very interested in issues in family because of my mother. I love her very much and because of her, I am here. She always protected me from other stupid issues in the family. But I’ve seen lots of things...

Here we see a deeply intertwined web of various aspects of Semih’s life: family, friends, religion, memory, death, commercialism and so on. The complexity of identity formation for youth like Semih is thoroughly depicted through this example. Again, the problem of family—attachment and aversion—takes over as he describes the negative past experiences in contrast to the affection and nurturance his mother has always provided him with. As Kondo states, “Ie and uchi structure language, behavior, space and feeling. They are laden with profoundly felt emotional and moral values. They form a culturally approved arena of self-realization in which to forge an identity” (159).

Identity formation is the end-result of social positioning—like Semih said, he can transition between various contexts to identify with a particular group or setting and in turn, form a “self” in relation to that context. It is particularly important to understand the role of family in
the development of these youth because each of my informants constructs a self in either partial
or whole alignment with his/her family. None of my informants were detached from their
families, mainly because this is symbolic of failure. When youth resist their families’ wishes or
the paths laid before them, they are often distanced or isolated for breaking the bonds of family
duty.

The socialization practices which produce the deferential, loyal, compliant family
member rely on the maintenance of external control over the person. The child is
expected and encouraged to obey the parent. Adult relatives and other members of
the community also expect respect and obedience. These expectations of
obedience and dependence from the child, constant surveillance by adults in the
family and community, and expectations of loyalty and support from grown-up
offspring weigh heavily on the growing person. As is commonly observed in
collectivistic cultures, group (family) loyalties are often more important than an
individualistic conception of self-interest (Kağıtçibaşı 1992, 84).

This is somewhat reflective of Dorinne Kondo’s functioning of the ie where the “system’s
imperatives demand that individuals shape themselves to fit into this structure; [it] does not
expand to fit the individuals” (Kondo 1990, 127). Although this is less strictly applied to the
Turkish example, it is visible through some of my informants’ responses. Rather than face
complete detachment, however, Turkish youth are often burdened with the idea that with
autonomy comes family disappointment, the end-result of placing desire above duty.

A perfect example of this conflict is that pertaining to Zafer. Although Zafer is in his
third year of civil engineering, he is completely uninterested in his field and wishes to pursue a
career in cinema and the arts. The problem in this, however, is that Zafer’s father owns a
construction company, and he wishes his son to take over once he begins his career. Ironically,
on the day of the interview, Zafer’s father had come to visit, since he was in the city for business
affairs. Although there was a language barrier, with the aid of Zafer’s translations, I was able to
converse with him a little. It was easy to see how proud Zafer’s father was of his son, and the
bond between the two was quite strong. Zafer referred to his family with deep reverence. In this example, the family was definitely a site of attachment—both of his parents are incredibly supportive, and it showed. Zafer was always given freedom to choose his educational paths and doesn’t blame his parents for the decisions he made. He believed the education system and university entrance process was at fault because he wasn’t given proper guidance in high school and had not realized the impact a decision he made at the age of 17 would have on the rest of his life. He attended a prestigious science high school in Adana, Turkey, and as the system encourages, chose a related field to study in university.

Zafer chose to begin the interview in his father’s presence. As usual, I began with the question I asked all of my informants first: why did you choose to study within your particular field? Zafer explained how his options were limited to medicine or engineering (because he was graduating from a science high school) and because of lack of interest in medicine, chose engineering. He specifically chose civil engineering because his father is a construction manager and thought the relevance was appropriate. I followed up by asking Zafer if he planned to work for his father in the future since he chose a field relevant to his father’s career. He responded:

"You know, I’m so relieved because my dad, he doesn’t speak English... I don’t really want to. He really wants me to work with him, stick with him, and help him... My dad was really happy when I first knew I was accepted to Boğaziçi and into civil engineering... because he owns his own [company] and works for the British government, for the American government, NATO, and different stuff and he was so worried that after he passed away, he wouldn’t have anything for inheritance and he wouldn’t be able to pass on the work he had been developing. So when I chose civil engineering, he was very glad, very happy and since then he’s been very supportive about my education here. He thinks that I’m going to go work with him and help him because he’s 55 now and he can’t run like that, like when he was young... He was only 27 when he started and he was a math professor before he started in construction so, he’s not really educated in engineering or construction, it’s just like, something that he learned in the field. And he was always regretting that he didn’t learn English when he was a student and he always tried to make me and my brothers and sisters learn other"
languages so we would have a better opportunity to work with different countries and stuff.

Zafer’s father started the company in 1983 as an individual business endeavor. The company has remained strong over the years as indicated through the many contracts his father has acquired both in the country and abroad. It is obvious his father takes great pride in his accomplishments and wishes to keep the business in the family to not let go of the fruits of his labor. Zafer’s father never persuaded his children to work for the family business and even encouraged autonomy when it came to academic endeavors. Once Zafer chose civil engineering, however, this changed. From that moment on, there was almost an understood agreement that Zafer would follow in his father’s footsteps and head the company he worked hard to build. Now that Zafer wishes to take an alternate route, career-wise, concerns arise over how he will go about informing his father of this change.

Zafer is certain that his change of plans will not create a break in the family; however, his father will be disheartened at the idea of losing an inheritor. Because his family has always been supportive in every aspect of their children’s development, there is very little Zafer can do to upset his family. Zafer still hasn’t informed his father of his decision to pursue a career in the arts after graduation, and he spoke about how much of a challenge it will be to do so.

I’m not prepared. I’m just like, postponing it. I don’t know... I think like, when I graduate, if I can find a place that’s cool for cinema and I apply and I get accepted, then I will talk to my dad. I just don’t want to make the atmosphere very intense before anything is certain and I’m going to that place. I’m sure when the time comes and I’ve been accepted by a school and my dad sees how I want this, he will be respectful. He will respect my decision. He always does. He never once said choose engineering, choose civil engineering or go to a science high school. Those were all my choices. He will never interfere with them. He will always like them in the end. He’ll be like, “Oh, great!...That’s perfect!” So, it’s me that got him very excited about my future with him, and it’s going to be me who will disappoint him in the end. But it doesn’t matter; it’s my life. I don’t know, I have to upset him in some ways... Every child makes their parents sad, maybe in their
teenage years but I never did it. So I think it’s my time... I really try not to think about it...

Zafer’s fear in disappointing his father is a perfect example of how these youth envision failure. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, failure for Turkish youth is associated with disapproval, detachment, distance, and in Zafer’s case, disappointment from the family. Although Zafer has this fear of disappointing his father, he strongly believes in the strength of their relationship and therefore doesn’t feel his decision to pursue something other than engineering is significant enough to cause major damage—as he said, he can always count on his father ultimately supporting him in whatever endeavors he chooses to pursue. Zafer’s confidence and certainty in knowing his father will not react harshly toward his decision is the result of his positive upbringing. Based on the responses I received from most of my informants, I believe this is a commonality amongst them—“the Turkish family is characterized by strong emotional closeness, with great support for family members” (Erkman 2006, 253).

Ronald P. Rohner’s theory of parental acceptance-rejection is evidenced through the Turkish family. Rohner suggests parental acceptance leads to more positive child development, which in turn contributes to positive transition into adulthood (most likely lasting throughout the life course). On the other hand, “individuals who perceive themselves to be rejected by attachment figures—especially children who experience parental rejection—are likely to develop distorted mental representations of self, of significant others, and of the world around them” (Rohner 2004, 830). This does a great deal in explaining feelings of hopelessness in youth regarding their futures or even skepticisms they have about the people and things around them. Although none of my informants were completely hopeless or discouraged as a result of loosened family ties, some had slightly stronger feelings of detachment because they lacked this

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widespread emotional support.

Similarly, Koydemir-Özden and Demir point out the implications of family acceptance and rejection on the self-esteem of the child. Findings from their research specific to Turkish youth showed that parental involvement/acceptance was directly associated with high self-esteem whereas parental strictness/supervision tends to result in the child’s negative self-evaluation (Koydemir-Özden 2009, 176). The more autonomy the parent allows in the child and the more support they show in giving their children leeway, the likelier youth are to have positive self-images. Increasingly, with more modern families, this is becoming the case. Several of my informants were extremely confident young adults who often had the full support of their parents when it came to personal decision-making. An informant mentioned in the previous chapter, Mine, exuded this self-esteem.

Mine is the only informant whose university field of study did not correlate with her high school subject area. In terms of upbringing, she mentioned her mother a lot and how she would always allow her to have free realm over her life decisions (as long as she refrained from engaging in politics). Mine was also the only informant who has a job while attending university with a full course load. This experience is something she described as fostering her independence. One of the most interesting questions I asked my informants was whether they felt empowered in Turkish society. Mine’s response was somewhat unique.

*I feel that. But most of the people don’t because I’m a little self-confident because of my university... Like we talk about it in my office. They say, “Yea, of course you’ll be successful, you’ll be a graduate of Boğaziçi University. What about us?” I’ve heard this a thousand times. They can’t see the future brightly. It’s like a little bit...cloudy. I’m not even talking about the major, they can’t find a job really, any other job. So they’re like, they can go for anything for a good salary. I cannot blame them not to think about everyone... it’s enough if they say that. But like, people like us, a little bit maybe... I can say they’re looking at the world at an angle like 40 degrees, but I know we can see a pretty clear 100. So these people are going to save the future maybe, they’re going to think of others too.*
First they have to find something like a shelter as basis... and then after that they can think of the future maybe. But now at least it’s not being supported by or it’s like, I know I can at least make a good salary, but I know I’m gonna make a good salary because the university gives [me] that confidence. I know how people see Boğaziçi, I’ve seen this, so I know I can do some stuff... But most of the students cannot do this.

Although Mine attributes this confidence to the university, it is also a confidence that, in a sense, has been enabled by her upbringing. Because she was given some autonomy, she has been able to guide herself into domains reflecting self-interest. The confidence that she gains from this self-guidance then permits her to effectively contribute to society and not place as much importance on herself because she has already achieved partial self-fulfillment. Realizing these positive attributes in herself enables Mine to take action as opposed to simply pondering over the consequences of doing so.

Going back and looking at some of Mine’s responses, we can see how her confidence is reflected in her everyday life. Firstly, Mine is far more politically outspoken than any of my other friends or informants. I consider her to be a true agent for change in the sense that she understands actions taken at the micro level can and will have results at the macro level—this is the hopefulness she had that perhaps only two or three of my other informants did. Furthermore, Mine is a member of the Student Social Work Club at the university. On top of her busy school and work schedule she still makes time to teach biology to younger students during her free time—work that can easily earn a tutor 40-50 YTL an hour, she does for free. Perhaps most reflective of Mine’s confidence are her career aspirations. She says she doesn’t care about money when she works after graduation and that she just wants to feel like she’s contributing to someone else’s well being. She said she wants to put her degree to use in terms of management but she wants to work in Human Resources of whatever company she works for to make sure the people being hired are not only right for the job, but also passionate about their work. She says
there are too many people in Turkey who are dissatisfied with their jobs but cannot leave because it provides them with security. Her duty, in this sense, is to encourage others to guide themselves in directions they actually wish to go as opposed to those heavily influenced by external factors.

*Religion and the Family*

It is almost impossible to write this thesis on youth identity formation without taking into consideration the role of religion in the lives of Turkish youth. Although Turkey was founded on the basis of secularism and remains secularist today, one cannot ignore its 99.8% Muslim population\(^26\). Almost all of my informants identified as Muslims and believed it was a defining characteristic, a finding that is indicative of the larger Turkish population. Religion, especially after the 1980s, however, has fallen into the private domain making public expressions of Islam an increasingly regulated facet of everyday life. In *Taming Islam: Studying Religion in Secular Turkey*, Kim Shively defines Turkish secularism as a resemblance of French laicism more so than the American-styled separation of church and state.

The idea is that religion should not be in the hands of a powerful and independent cleric elite...that can rival government power, but should be brought under the control of the non-religious state, where it no longer poses a potential threat to government hegemony... As such, Turkish secularism—or laicism—does not make assumptions of religious neutrality or objectivity in the public sphere, but instead religion is tightly defined and legally subordinated to the political establishment (Shively 2008, 684).

The point of Turkish secularism is to maintain this founding principle of the nation-state to make the move toward modernity a less complicated process. This, however, becomes an increasingly difficult challenge because almost the entire Turkish population bases its collectivity in Muslim faith. The end-result: the military and judiciary struggling as they face a strengthening number of Islamists who believe religion has been pushed to the side long enough.

A few of my informants talked about the rise of Islamism, or political Islam, particularly over the past few years through the Fethullah Gülen Movement. Of course they didn’t see Islamism in a positive light because of its potential danger—the 1980 coup, after all, was the temporary end to the battle between Islamic fundamentalists and Turkish nationalists. Because these youth reside in urban parts of the country and identify with modernity without disregarding faith, they believe maintenance of religion as a private affair is necessary to be respective of the country’s secularity. This was something Merve and Ozan mentioned in the second chapter: the growing popularity of the Gülen Movement threatens the relative peace and stability of the past thirty years. Mine also talked about her fear that Turkey will one day face a religious coup and fall under the regime of an Islamic fundamentalist. It was interesting for Mine, Merve and Ozan to have this perspective because they, too, are Muslims; they simply did not agree with the growing conservatism of the current government in power.

All three of these informants brought up the threat being posed by the Fethullah Gülen Movement and the Justice and Development Party’s ties to it. They believed members of the movement had infiltrated government sectors to slowly free the state of its intensive secularism and bring Islam back into the public sphere. These beliefs were justified as I read another article in Newsweek this time speaking of the dangers the Gülen Movement poses. Soner Çağaptay brought to light the growing ties between The Justice and Development Party (AKP) and what he deemed Gülenist ultraconservatism. The article was written in response to a recent arrest of 49 military officers linked by the police to the planning of a false coup. Çağaptay states:

This is the beginning of the endgame for control of Turkey. In the 1990s the military purged Islamists from its ranks, after the 2002 election the Gülenists secured key posts in nearly every other secular institution. This recent pressure on the military is designed to crack the last secular bastion. The public battle for the country’s soul is hurting Turkey… The only way out of the mess is for the AKP
to call new elections. That would quiet the party’s critics, and put the power to
decide Turkey’s future where it belongs: with the voters (2010, 7).

Again, the issue arises of bringing the Islamist movements back into the private sphere as the
military struggles to maintain the nation-state’s secularism. The problem is with every push, the
state increases the likeliness that another movement will emerge from the ashes of the old.

“Islamism in Turkey is basically an urban movement empowered by a strong middle class and its
identity politics. In spite of its different forms, one can speak of a common desire among them
for a “reappraisal of Islam” and for a reconsideration of its role and place in public life” (Çinar
2008, 24). Islamism is essentially strengthened with the fall of every party or movement because
those who have been displaced seek a new group to identify with. In such instances, religion
becomes quite the unifying force.

Religion (particularly Islam) in Turkey is the midpoint of the intersection between this
tradition/modernity dichotomy that seems to permeate every aspect of Turkish life. It is the very
fact that this country with an overwhelming religious majority simultaneously seeks to maintain
its secularist foundation that the tradition/modernity dichotomy in Turkey persists. In Modernity,
Secularism and Islam: The Case of Turkey, E. Fuat Keyman cites Partha Chaterjee’s The Politics
of the Governed to exemplify why Turkish secularism constantly finds itself at a dilemma
crossroads between tradition and modernity.

…Even though secularism operates as one of the ‘constitutive grounds’ of
modernity, it involves fundamental contradictions in the way in which it functions
as a ‘political project’ by which the state governs its own society. These
contradictions arise when the politics of secularism is challenged by the politics
of communalism. Thus Chatterjee also suggests that ‘the conditions for a more
democratic politics of secularism cannot be created unless we grapple with these
contradictions’ (Keyman 2007, 228).

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27 N. Gole, “Islamic Visibilities and Public Sphere in Islam,” in Public: Turkey, Iran and Europe, ed. N. Gole and L.
Religion and secularism will remain a challenge for Turkish citizens to overcome as long as the state maintains its firm grip over religious public expressions.

What is particularly interesting about the new generation’s positioning in all of this is how they increasingly liberalize Islam and maintain their faith without engaging in the strict practices associated with it. While some of my informants dissociated themselves from Islam, others found it to be inseparable from who they are. These distinctions arise throughout the interviews when mentioning family. I’d like to isolate Zafer’s example to show how his family has influenced his decision to disengage from religious practice after thoroughly thinking through his personal beliefs—something that was encouraged by his parents through the freedom he was given throughout his upbringing.

_I think I’m lucky cause I have my family… I’ve always been taught by my family to think for myself, to take my own responsibility both in my ideas and my actions so I always question everything—from religion, to politics, to social stuff, like this education stuff, my lifestyle, like, everything. I had the chance to think for myself about matters that interfere with my life all the time. Like, I was raised as a Muslim, both my dad and my mom are Muslims but they never imposed on me anything about religion. There are just some words that are inherited from Muslim culture to Turkish so they were using these words like, “God forbid…” so they didn’t cross that line. I wasn’t questioning until I was 16 or 17, like what do I believe? I was praying sometimes if I was in trouble or if I wanted something. When I was a junior in high school, I guess, I started questioning religion. I was very curious about how this whole concept of religion came about and how people need something to believe in and something to believe that created them and [they can] pray to…how this whole process took form… So I was very curious and started asking questions to my family and my mom and dad said there’s no answer to that, even the first person started like you. Ok, did something really create me? After two or three years I decided I didn’t believe in God and I was very afraid to tell this to my family because both my mom and dad believe in God and don’t pray regularly, they’re not very strict people but they define themselves as Muslim Turkish people. But I was afraid. There was nothing to do. I just can’t believe in God. This stuff is made up… I did tell my parents and they took it very well. They weren’t dancing but they were like, ok it’s your choice. If you want to believe in something then you should, but if you don’t think it’s necessary for you, then you don’t have to. It’s between you and you. My mom was very sad because in her beliefs, if I don’t believe in God, I will go to hell and I told her since I don’t believe in hell, I wouldn’t be able to go to hell. It was a no-
end discussion, but religion is just an example. It’s just everything in life that I choose to do or not to do, I decide for myself. They’ve always given me a chance to think for myself and balance what I want or don’t want, think or don’t think.

For Zafer, religion is ultimately linked to family. His only fear in discovering he had no religious beliefs was having to tell his parents so. Although it disheartened his mother to learn her son was a non-believer, he was able to tell them and receive assurance that he was still accepted, loved, and respected for being able to articulate his beliefs, or the lack thereof. Reaching this discovery was also pertinent to Zafer’s development because he found new ways to express himself even at times his thoughts were in conflict with that of his family’s, or even others. He said, “I always had to write to express myself even when I disagree with my mom or my dad or my teachers because of the culture I had. I wasn’t a student that always obeyed the teacher or [did] not question the things they would teach me. I always stand up for myself.” Zafer went on to explain how he used his interests in film and the arts as his primary medium for expression. Again, we can see what happens when youth are given some autonomy in shaping themselves.

For two of my other informants, Elif and Elif (who I will refer to as Elif #1 and Elif #2 for the purpose of distinguishing between their responses)28, religion was not only tied to family but also tied to what they perceived to be “tradition.” Many times, dating, marriage and romantic relationships would be the topic of discussion they constantly referred back to. When I asked them if they ever considered living abroad, they both responded yes, but only for a short period of time. To them, the point of going abroad is to obtain a good education and acquire skills and work experience they can bring back to their home country. This was an idea that they both linked to family. It’s interesting to see the progression of the conversation that started with the initial question of whether or not they believed it was encouraged for them to leave Turkey.

28 Again, no pseudonyms have been used in this thesis.
E2: It’s probably encouraged because when you want to get a job afterwards in Turkey, most of the companies care a lot about your degrees and “Oh, she studied in America” they don’t care about which university, there’s America written so it must be good. So they just give priority to you when you’re applying for jobs.

E1: That’s what I was talking about.

E2: The parents are also encouraging their children to go and study abroad, for at least a master’s degree...

E1: But not living abroad.

E2: Not living abroad, just studying.

E1: Study and come back here. And marry.

E2: Yea, and have kids.

E1: I think they have a fear of losing their children. You know when you live there it’s really a small possibility to marry a man who is Turkish and Muslim. “Ok, if she’s going to live abroad, she’s going to find a man who is Christian and marry him and have Christian kids.”

E2: [To Elif #1] Do your parents really care if your husband would be Christian?

E1: My mom will really care. My dad is more open.

E2: It’s probably the opposite for me but I wouldn’t ask my dad. They would care to a certain extent but they wouldn’t say, “No, you can’t marry him because he’s Christian.” And if he said no, I don’t think I would really listen... But I don’t think I’m gonna get married.

E1: My mom is a religious woman. That’s the problem. And my dad isn’t.

E2: It’s usually the opposite.

E1: I think it’s because my dad studied at university and my mom didn’t. This is really relevant [to] education. My mother’s parents’ economic conditions were better than my father’s parents. But you know, education makes you different. This is why our parents really want us to graduate from good universities, find a good job, because they know what an education means, even if they go to college or not.

Me: You said you don’t think you’re gonna get married?
E2: For now, I don’t think I will because I don’t think I’m gonna live in a spot, one particular place. I think I’ll just travel around.

E1: I don’t think I’ll live in the same house with a man. This is my problem.

E2: And marriage today is just something where... what I see from the people that are getting married around me like recently, they’re having kids, a kid at least, and getting divorced after like 3 years. It makes me lose my belief in marriage and the possibility you’re gonna find a man that would be a man for the rest of your life is really tiny. I mean if you’re lucky you will, but if not...

E1: All couples I’ve seen in my family are not happy. They’re not happy.

E2: Even my parents, they’re not.

E1: Yea, even my parents. My uncle, my aunts, my grandparents... they don’t like each other. They just like the marriage idea. You know, “Ok we have the house, we have the furniture, we have the kids...”

E2: It’s like a life insurance. Not the idea of marriage, not like sharing a life at least.

E1: [To Elif #2] But you’re gonna get married one day, I believe this.

E2: If I’m gonna get married, I’m probably going to get married like 15 times. It’s not in my nature to commit to one person. [laughter] They’ll probably announce me as like the black cat. “Oh my god, look at her, she got married like 3 times!”

E1: My mom told me once, “Ok, Elif. Do whatever you want. But don’t get pregnant before you’re married.” I said, ok, that’s good for me!

Throughout their conversation religion reappears to be the connecting theme. The two would laugh over the “traditionalism” of their families and how everything and anything always related itself back to the idea or perception of a traditional Muslim family where patriarchy and gendered roles were prevalent. It was interesting to see how the two had fading beliefs in the authenticity of marriage and how their life decisions didn’t always correlate to Islam in the manner their parents would expect.
The Intersection of Religion, Family and Gender

For Elif and Elif, family played an important role in their lives but also somewhat restricted them from making decisions on their own. They referred to these restrictions as aspects of tradition or traditional values their families tried to firmly instill in them. The problem they had with these ideals, however, seemed to them outdated and unlike their modern selves.

Me: So what kind of role does family play in your life?

E1: I think we are more different from each other. They’re more traditional, I’m not traditional. They’re old, I’m not old. I want really different things from what they expect from me. I don’t know what I’m gonna do. I don’t know what we are gonna do about this. There’s this pressure on me.

E2: Well, I’m the only child and it’s sort of pressurizing sometimes but my dad is also a traditional man. When we were living in Dubai, he was living here so when I was growing up, I didn’t have a father authority over me and my mom is a very independent and successful woman, she’s very social. She’s not exactly my idol but I admire her and I give importance to her thoughts but I don’t make my moves according to what she says...

Me: Is your family supportive of everything you do?

E1: Not everything I do. They don’t know everything I do. I don’t let them know, because if they know exactly what I do here my mom will probably kill me. I’m serious. You know, the boyfriend thing, the nightlife thing, the social thing? It’s so problematic for my mother. I’m not the only one. If you’re a girl, you have to hide a lot of things from your family. Because we generally have traditional families.

E2: I also hide my boyfriends from my mom, I don’t talk to her about it. Like, my dad still says, “Oh, is there any guy bothering you in school?” I mean, last time he said that I was in second grade. So my dad is like living on a different planet, everything’s pink there, I’m still a little girl. But I talk to my mom about most of the stuff, most of the important decisions I make in my life. Most of the time she’s supportive because she also went through a lot of things when she was young. She was also an exchange student in high school and I think that changed her a lot, like her perspective at the time. She was an exchange student in 1975, she went to Minnesota or something. I don’t know, it just changed her perspective more than the people here. So, she’s most of the time supportive about the decisions that I make in school and I don’t know, she knows more [than] my dad at least.
While Elif #1 felt pressured by her family and the expectations they had for her, Elif #2 felt less pressured because she believed her mother’s experience has contributed to her partially autonomous life. Because her mother had traveled outside of Turkey and had led a fairly independent life, her upbringing has influenced her beliefs in how much control she has over the decisions she makes and how little her father, who wasn’t as present throughout her adolescence, influences them. Elif #1 on the other hand has always resided with her family in Bursa and before coming to university was under the strict surveillance of both parents, especially a religious mother she labeled as very traditional.

For both, tradition entailed not only religion but the gendered roles associated with it. When I asked Elif and Elif how they defined tradition, they responded:

**E2:** Oh. That’s a hard question.

**E1:** There’s a mom. There’s a dad that has more authority than the mom [over] the house or the kids or economic things. And the kids have to balance the family and their own social [life outside of the family]. And for me it’s really hard to balance them because they’re so, so different. In my family, I’m a good girl who studies her lessons, goes to school, sometimes goes to Taksim, but not at night. Boyfriends? Of course you have boyfriends!

**E2:** Yea, you’re supposed to have a lot of boyfriends...

**Both:** Buuut... [laughter]

**E1:** My mother thinks—I seriously believe this—that I have a boyfriend, she knows that, but we sometimes go to the cinema or...

**E2:** Hang out on the grass, talk about...

**E1:** ...the news... the cultural events. And when the time is 9 o’clock. Goodnight, kiss, take care... I love you... here’s our children’s’ names! [laughter] Because I built this. I made this for my mother because this is the only ways he feels comfortable about me. I’m a totally different girl when I’m going to Bursa or when I’m talking with them. But here? So, so different... It has to be this way.
E2: And I think the religion has a great influence on tradition. Like the idea of sex before marriage.

E1: Do not have sex before marriage.

E2: I can’t think of any other... but the religion affects tradition a lot.

E1: Because generally parents think if you have sex before marriage, no other guy wants to marry you.

E2: Like, in small villages when two people get married, they have like the first night when they sleep together and in the morning the girl is supposed to show the sheets like with blood, you know, for being a virgin. They killed a lot of girls because there was no blood. I mean, medically some people don’t have that virginity whatever and they don’t get to have blood but they say oh you weren’t a virgin...

E1: Now I have to kill you...

Elif #1 had unique progression of thoughts in defining tradition. She started with a description of the traditional Turkish household that was always hierarchical and patriarchal. While the parents maintained authority over the children, the father was always superior to the mother. Furthermore, leaving for university does not change Elif’s positioning as subjective daughter but instead leads her to reconfigure herself back and forth between household Elif and university Elif, where she is granted more freedoms simply because she is away from home and outside of the watchful gaze of her parents. She then begins to discuss with Elif #2 how religion and “tradition” inform sexuality. For women, sex before marriage is not only forbidden but a dangerous risk to take because honor killings are still prevalent in rural areas.

Traditional conceptions of femininity vary greatly from the state’s post-Republic construction of Turkish woman identity. Women’s emancipation was an inextricable component of Turkish nation-state building—Atatürk’s policies of Westernization included women’s enfranchisement from the very beginning. Women were granted the right to vote at the local level in 1930 and at the national level in 1934 (Kandiyoti 1987, 320). In fact, Turkey gave
women the vote before France—an interesting accomplishment considering how deeply Turkey sought to mirror French Republicanism yet surpassed it on such a monumental level. As Deniz Kandiyoti states, “These rights were not obtained through the activities of women’s movements, as in the case of Western women’s struggle for suffrage, but were granted by an enlightened governing elite committed to the goals of modernization and ‘Westernization’ (1987, 320). Women’s emancipation, as a state project, therefore came at the expense of strictly defined Muslim gender identities that had persisted for centuries under the guise of Ottoman tradition.

In reviewing this aspect of Turkish history, the sentiments and experiences of Turkish women today seem somewhat displaced. The establishment of the Republic created a break in Turkish woman identity, and this break is very visible in the lives of my female informants. There is a major distinction to be made between the urban university’s treatment of gender identity and that within my informants’ homes. Whereas the university is more symbolic of a modern, progressive institution, the average Turkish home (for my informants) is more symbolic of tradition deeply rooted in Islam and family value. As demonstrated above, there is a disconnection between one’s university sense of self and one’s household self. It is through such an example it becomes more visible how “the political project of the state can act as a major source of discontinuity in the experiences of women in Muslim countries” (Kandiyoti 1987, 323). Being among the earliest European countries advocating women’s suffrage does not signal Turkey’s full democratic achievement. If anything, it further exemplifies how dominating and pervasive state discourses can be. Although most of my female informants believed gender discrimination was non-existent in their university, their situation at home was incredibly different. For this reason, “different cultural modes of control of female sexuality create different

subjective experiences of femininity” (Kandiyoti 1987, 324).

Despite Turkey’s ideology of modernity and gender equality, the role of women in Turkey, as exemplified through Elif and Elif’s responses, is still limited to “traditional” conceptions of fulfilling household duties, family caretaking, and subordination to the men of the household. This is quite prevalent in many other parts of the world as well, it isn’t unique to Turkey, however, the impact it has on younger women who identify more with the modern world is, especially in terms of educational fulfillment.

Parents often discourage their daughters from acquiring higher education, lest they become unmarriageable. Degree of permissible education, of course, varies with social class. The middle classes want their daughters to finish secondary education (lise) but hesitate about university. If they do attend university, they are not encouraged to undertake graduate study… In rural areas, girls are ever discouraged from going to primary school, though increasingly less so. Such limitations are not placed on sons, who are encouraged to get as much education as possible. Thus, women are subjected to severe prejudice and discrimination even by their parents, who prevent them from developing their skills and intelligence. Nevertheless, many women are able to surmount this prejudice and obtain higher levels of education (Levine 1982, 338).

My female informants fall within this small percentage of women in the country who are able to break through gender barriers and go on to a higher education. Although the aforementioned source is outdated, many of my informants agree that gender stratification is still very real and very prevalent, mostly in rural areas of Turkey.

Two of my informants, Özge and Betül, felt strongly about the issue of gender disparity in Turkey because they come from a village in southeast Turkey where many of their female friends took alternate routes in their lives as opposed to attending university like them.

ÖZGE: *In some parts of Turkey, girls can never go to school because it’s not socially accepted. In some parts, yes, they are going with the advice of the teachers or schools or pressure of the law because primary education is compulsory for all in Turkey. So in order to not be a criminal, they are forced to send their girls to schools. But after completing primary*
education, people do not bother about girls going to school or not...
There’s a difference. The boys, yes, ok no problem.

Betül: Actually, they have so many children that they have to choose between
them. For example, the school is very far away and you don’t usually have
a bus or something to go there and you have nine children so you have to
choose between [them]. So the girls stay at home and you choose the boys
to study and usually they can’t study because of the inferior education, the
commuting system, or the school. For example, most of the schools are
just one room and in elementary, class 1-5, they study in the same room
and just one teacher so what do they expect from that education? They
can’t complete their education. For example, out of nine children, one of
them completes high school and finds a stable job.

Özge: There are institutional problems. There are not enough schools. If there
are schools, there are other problems because there are no busses or any
transportation. If they have transportation, their families cannot support...

Betül: Many children die on the roads in the winter because of bad
transportation.

Özge: Also children do not have the conscience, how do you expect them to go to
school? For example, they look around, “Yes, my friend is also a girl.
She’s not going to school, why am I going?” She does not need to question
her not going to school.

Betül: No one expects from you to go to school and a result other girls find no
reason to go to school.

Özge: [There’s] housework waiting for them... to look after their brothers or
sisters... helping their moms or fathers... so, big problems. There are not
equal opportunities for every student. The government should make
investments especially on education in some parts of Turkey.

Özge and Betül are firm believers in the benefits of education reform and hope the government
will make it a priority so the cycle can stop repeating itself.

Luckily, as Batuhan from the ERI has informed me, primary and secondary education is
at the forefront of the state’s education reform initiatives. Although primary education has been
compulsory for quite some time, Turkey has faced a relatively low enrollment rate among young
girls, particularly in the eastern and southeastern regions of the country. It is here the gender gap
is most visible and most enduring. Infrastructure is still underdeveloped and the ratio of schools to villages is extremely disproportional. Although the government is investing an estimated $3 billion a year, implementing compulsory education has proven to be a serious challenge\textsuperscript{30}. Classrooms are overcrowded and teachers are still in high demand. Many young girls in these regions, oftentimes, teenage girls, do not attend school for one or more of the following reasons:

1) Families prefer to send young boys to school because economic resources are extremely limited; as a result, girls’ education is sacrificed.

2) Young girls assume adult-like responsibilities that are tied to their cultural and traditional roles in the household.

3) Once young girls reach puberty, they often drop out of school then work in the home, marry early, and bear children. This becomes their life.

4) The combination of headscarves being banned from schools (a government policy) and families in the eastern regions being extremely pious and conservative leads to young girls not attending school simply because they are not permitted to wear headscarves.

Although girls’ school enrollment has drastically increased in the past couple of years, three fourths of the girls in school have irregular attendance. Turkey has realized that education reform is key in bringing the majority of its people out of poverty. Many agree that educating young girls is perhaps the best economic investment the state can make at this time.

Many of my informants agree with Turkey’s initiatives to better the education system for the sake of improving young girls’ lives and ultimately to produce gender equality in various institutions, starting with school. As Turkey aspires to be in the European Union, the Minister of National Education believes ensuring a proper education for all citizens is the first step to

\textsuperscript{30} Educating Yaprak. Produced by Television Trust for the Environment and directed by Di Tatham. 26 min. BBC Worldwide Ltd. and Bullfrog Films, 2005. Videodisc.
developing the nation to European standards. Simultaneously, Turkey’s efforts serve as a positive example in contributing to two UN Millennium Development Goals: universal education and gender equality. Although there is always more work to be done, these are excellent stepping stones in ensuring basic human rights.

I was having lunch with Güliz a few days before the interview when we began to talk about post-graduate opportunities. She studies Management (a combination of Business Management, Accounting, and Economics) at Boğaziçi, which houses the best Management department in the country. I asked her if she planned on getting an MBA anytime soon and recommended Fuqua, Duke’s business school, in the event she did. I told her I always admired women in business because it is still a field largely dominated by men. I encouraged her to pursue an MBA after completing her undergraduate studies. What she said after surprised me. “Why? It doesn’t matter. Men are always better than women.” I was rather shocked to hear this and asked her what led her to believe this was the case. She said, “They’re stronger. They’re smarter. They’re more brave. They’re just…better.” We then had a discussion about why I believed most of that to be untrue, why she insisted on calling herself “anti-feminist,” and me lecturing her on how such a mentality can be incredibly self-discouraging. She didn’t seem very convinced and knew one thing was certain: the disparities between men and women in Turkey simply are the way they are. To her, they are unchanging. Her response was less negative, however, in the interview as she described the benefits of attending a school like Boğaziçi—there, the opportunities were equal.

When I asked Selda and Güliz whether or not they believed there were equal opportunities for men and women in Turkey, they responded:

*Selda:* No they’re not. Because the families think that the girls don’t need to be educated. Especially in the east side. They should just learn how to cook,
how to clean up, how to farm, stuff like that, and that will be enough. But no, it’s not enough, of course. There are projects to send girls to school. You’ve probably heard of them.

Me: Yea, what’s one of them called? Kar---

Selda: Kardelen. It’s a flower that comes out from under the snow. That’s why. It’s beautiful, and it has a really short lifetime.

Güliz: You know what I think about men and women in this country…they are not equal. They are not given equal chances, especially in the East. She was right.

Selda: I mean, I’m studying mechanical engineering. When I go to the East they say, “What are you studying?” …Mechanical engineering… “Ok, has anyone never told you not to study it?” …Yea. I’m studying but so what?... They don’t want to get orders from a woman I guess. Yea, that’s the reason. And they don’t think that women can be successful in mechanical engineering but... it’s a lie of course.

Güliz: I don’t believe that we are even biologically equal but in this university, we are given equal chances. Yea, in this university it’s like that, but not in the whole [of] Turkey. I don’t believe that in any country men and women are equal. Maybe women are more dominant in some places, but there’s no way they can be equal.

Selda: We are not meant to be equal, but it’s only physical, I guess. Not by rights or stuff. You can learn...

Me: Do you think that women should be given the same opportunities?

Güliz: Of course.

Me: The university though...

Selda: Yea, no gender discrimination. I haven’t seen anyone doing this. It’s more like saying the woman’s a sex object in the country, most of them.

The importance in educating girls to equalize gendered society is something that comes through in Güliz and Selda’s interview. Women are narrowly perceived as submissive, domesticated, and sometimes sexualized objects. This, however, is not the case for my female informants who not only break the barriers of traditional gender roles but do so while tremendously exceeding
societal expectations.

For someone like Esma, an informant I had brought up in the first chapter, there is proof that educating the masses can provide for social mobility and this is something that is happening within this generation particularly. Esma is motivated by successful Turkish businesswomen and is a supporter of programs advocating the education of young girls in the East. Part of the conversation we had went as follows.

_Esma:_ I mean, you know, women are working more... I had a lot of internships in random [companies]...like KPMG, it’s a consulting firm, I had an internship in the Istanbul headquarters and I was pleasantly surprised to see how many young women, you know, were just working and trying to get promoted and, you know, half of them were like, “Yea, I’m thinking about getting married but right now I’m focusing on my career...” A lot of young people I think have a lot of promise, so, maybe it used to be like this, too, but I was just introduced to this phenomenon, I guess. So, I don’t know...I think we’re turning into a more career-oriented population which, in my opinion, wasn’t the case like in my parents’ generation so much.

_Me:_ Ok. I guess since you kind of brought that up...do you think that women are afforded the same opportunities in terms of, I guess, careers or education?

_Esma:_ I mean, I think it depends on the city you’re in, or the sector you’re working in. I mean, if you’re...maybe just a factory worker, maybe you’re not going to get...and this happens all around the globe, um, women factory workers...there is this phenomenon where they get paid less, you know, and they just have the sewing jobs or whatever just because guys can lift heavier stuff and thus, they get more money. But like, in a sector like banking or something, I really think that women are being given the same opportunities now and, you know, they are getting promoted so yea, I think it depends on the sector.

_Me:_ Ok. What about regionally, I guess? I feel like it’s just not the same if you’re from the eastern region as opposed to like, Istanbul...

_Esma:_ You’re completely right. Um, that definitely adds to it as well. Like, I’m sure in the East, it’s you know...more acceptable for the women to just stay at home and look after the kids and stuff. So yea, there is that aspect.

_Me:_ What do you think about that contrast though?
Esma: Again, I think it has to do with education. The government needs to put more money into developing the East, which, right now, it’s kind of hard to do cause we’re constantly at war with the Kurds and stuff. You know, it’s law to send your kid to school but they don’t send their kids to school because they don’t want them to learn Turkish. It’s just a lot of tension going on in the East so, yea…I mean, I wish it were more equal. I’ve been to the East and I think it’s a beautiful place but it is definitely like walking into a place that’s like, a century in the past.

Esma’s response comments upon the intersection of tradition and modernity. While the East is more closely associated with traditional gendered roles, urban areas of the country produce fine professional women who engage in the global market and truly make Turkey a competitor in the globalized world. Esma is an extremely confident, ambitious young woman who plans to have an executive position in her father’s company upon completion of her entire education. She is incredibly inspired by women in the business world, particularly Suzan Sabancı of Sabancı Holdings, one of the wealthiest and well-known families in Turkey. Esma spoke highly of Suzan, who is also a family friend. Esma remarked, “She just inspires me because she has kids and a husband and yet, she’s like this kickass business woman!”

Going back to the underlying theme of this chapter, family, we can see how the intersections of family, faith and gender play an incredibly important role in the development of Turkish youth. It is also somewhat easier to see how these categories are not distinctly separate from one another but instead combine, alongside other factors, to contribute to identity formation. Learning about the upbringing of these youth is informative for analyzing the effects of parental-child relations and the roles and responsibilities of these youth, not to mention how they think of themselves both in and out of the family context.

…A family culture of relatedness seems to continue in the face of social change. Nevertheless, much diversity and change is also seen. It may be concluded that the dynamic coexistence of continuity and change is the most important current characteristic of the Turkish family and society (Kağıtçıbaşı 1992, 86).
Chapter IV

Turkish Youth as Subjects of Triple Governmentality:
Analyzing the Power Relations between
State, Family, and Illusory Self

The shop of my father, it is in front of a hospital, eye hospital. Lots of customers should come because it’s right across the street. There are four shops near the hospital, but one of them actually made a secret pact with the hospital and they lead the customers only to that store. So, when I worked in my father’s shop this summer, it was really… I just didn’t feel very well because we are just neighbors, we see each other everyday, but they were really earning higher, better than us. And this summer I tried to do something about that because really, it is not fair. There are three opticians there. Whoever I talk to about the issue, they say, “No. You can’t do anything about that. It’s how the system works.” I think, not me, but most people here in Turkey are pacifists. They see life as natural. They see bad things but they say, “That’s how it’s meant to be, so just let it go.” I talked to my personal doctor and he told me a very unhappy story about the same issue—one person tries to fight against these pacts and they shot him. Even my father said, “No, you can’t do anything about this.” You know, my high school is very well-known in Turkey and people who graduate from Istanbul Lisesi, they are really powerful people and when I went to talk with them about this hospital issue even they said you can’t do anything about it. Or they just said, “You have to gain more power over them so you can force them to stop it, otherwise you can’t.” It’s just a small issue in Bahcelievler—small shop fighting against the neighbor. So when I think about the whole country...we’ve made lots of mistakes like the Kurdish problem, the Cyprus problem. When I think about it, they’re really hard.

I just gave you my perspective but think about all of the people. They are all facing issues but they don’t want to so people become apolitical—they don’t want to take part in politics because they can’t even solve their own problems. How can I solve the Kurdish problem? There are a lot of factors. Life is hard here.

Maybe some are political. We just go to the classroom and live in the dorm, but when you go to Kaşampaşa or Bayrampaşa, or some other place in Istanbul actually, they are really political because they need to be since they see the state, the government—[it’s] very visible. But here it stays invisible...so maybe we don’t recognize it. But these people, the Kurdish for example, they see it everyday; they experience it everyday.

Yea, I think we live in a more chaotic world. Everything causes something else and...let me say it another way... I think we can’t just say for a person that he is apolitical or political because maybe he is political in his terms. That’s why I am confused. You said life is so intertwined? So there is no beginning to being apolitical. I think there is just caring and not caring... really caring about issues.
The above quotes were extracted from Semih’s interview and although these thoughts are not strictly continuous, they do an excellent job at portraying a discontinuity in Semih’s being. While at one moment he uses a micro example of how Turkish society is flawed, he is also describing the effects it has on his development of “self.” Although there are moments in which Semih feels autonomous and wants to act upon such feelings, he is discouraged by those around him—family, friends, colleagues—which shows how Semih is never really free from these forces that seem to be shaping his thoughts and actions. At the same time, his awareness of the existence of such forces makes for an interesting conceptualization of how Semih views his immediate and distant surroundings. In a sense, Semih’s being is in constant conversation with these forces and these forces are not necessarily separate from one another.

Through Semih’s example, we can see how the idea of a whole, cohesive self cannot exist—Turkish youth are constantly being pulled in different directions forming, in turn, multiple selves correlating with each. These multiple selves, or what Katherine Ewing calls self-representations, are reflective of youth’s subjectivity to multiple governmentalities (of which I argue there are three). Each aspect of governmentality does a great deal in shaping the lives of these youth, however, they are not purely dominating forces disallowing flexibility. I use Foucault’s notion of governmentality as the theoretical basis of this thesis because it is precisely what he describes as “power relationships” that accurately depict the processes through which these youth form their identities. The essential idea to remember behind Foucault’s governmentality is that the notion is not unique to functions of governmental institutions but is instead a concept that can be used in other contexts as well, ones that equally demonstrate a circulation of power. Although Turkish youth are subjects of the power relations between themselves and the nation-state, they are also subject to a governmentality pertaining to family
and one concerning global culture. These three “sites,” although complexly intertwined, have varied influences on the lives of Turkish youth—even so, they are all still modes of governance, inseparable from each other and from the experiences of my informants.

Michel Foucault describes governmentality as an upward-downward continuity—it is this continuity that constitutes the very art of government (Rabinow 2003, 233). The “ascending line” of this continuity symbolizes a bottom-up pedagogy that, to the average human, seems like its inverse—top-bottom. If we recall from the first chapter, it is precisely because citizens gave meaning to the nation-state idea that “the state” was perceived as an entity existing on its own above society rather than as the product of it. The tool behind this separation was the state-system’s concern for the population, which in turn produced a nationally-active citizen base. When Atatürk and the founding party, CHP (constituting Turkey’s social elite of the time), disseminated the principles behind Kemalism, many viewed this as a strictly authoritarian approach. This could be true, however, many overlooked the fact the CHP was ultimately a part of the society it sought to rule. Oppositely, the “downward line” of this continuity “transmits to individual behavior” (233). Turks upheld Kemalist principles for the sake of collective unity—the performative nature of being Turkish is exemplified through everyday practice and belief of nationalistic values. As a result, Turks not only reinforce the authority of the Turkish state but also give meaning to the idea of being Turkish through this relationship.
The image on the left depicts the commonly perceived idea of power and how it is exerted upon subjects or citizens of a given territory. The second image, however, depicts a circulation of power through an upward-downward continuity—this is the essential idea behind Foucault’s notion of governmentality. Power is never held solely within the hands of an authoritative figure and does not exist on its own as an object. Power only exists within relationships because it can only be exerted over free individuals, those who are always capable of steering away from various modes of constraint.

Another important aspect of governmentality is its versatility in being applied to various forms of governance—governmentality is not limited to governmental institutions or state-systems but instead exists outside of this context as well. Governmentality can be used to describe all power relations or modes of governance in everyday life. Therefore, for Turkish youth (who I argue are subjects of triple governmentality), their power relationships between nation-state, family, and global culture all play an equally tremendous role in their development. No aspect of their identity formation is completely freed from these governmentalities. For this reason, youth form multiple selves, or self-representations, each correlating with these varied yet connected modes of governance.

The purpose of this final chapter is to bring together three points of reference in the lives of contemporary Turkish youth: nation-state, family, and global culture. I will carefully analyze how each aspect of youth’s development not only governs a part of their lives but also gives meaning to their desires, especially those contradicting their duties and responsibilities. As examples will be given later in the chapter, many of my informants describe governing bodies as objects of domination holding a great deal of power over them. What must be noted, however, is that “power itself [is] not to be regarded solely as an instrument of repression or domination, but
as an omnipresent force…” (Gunn 2006, 710). It is precisely because power is constantly circulating and has resistance as its corollary that knowledge production and, essentially, history is made possible. “For if there can be no resistance without power, without resistance there can be no history (710)” and without history, of course, the Turkish nation-state would cease to exist.

I will review the historical importance of Turkish nation-state formation, the role of families in the lives of youth, and the means by which they go about perceiving wholeness in their identities despite their fragmented experiences. Perhaps most important of them all is the third aspect of governmentality in the lives of Turkish youth: the power relationship between youth and global culture. As it has been reiterated throughout the previous chapters, the two most important goals of the Republic since its founding have been to create a collective Turkish identity for the sake of national unity and to develop the Republic to the standard of European modernity. These youth face the challenge of achieving both goals despite their contradictory foundations—Turkish nationalism perpetuates ethnic marginalization and hinders the country’s developmental progress and global inclusion. These two goals can never both be achieved because one necessitates the riddance of the other.

The most interesting part in all of this is that these youth are incredibly cognizant of the inherent problems of the Republic’s missions and are constantly seeking a break from this cycle, without necessarily letting go of all of its components. Youth therefore look towards global culture as both an alternative to and model for the nation-state within which they live. This, in turn, creates a third and final “self” which contributes to youth’s belief that a “true” self exists. Because they associate global culture with greater freedoms and wholeness rather than anxiety, this becomes the reality they find themselves longing to live in without having to forego their rich history or tradition. This merge between tradition and modernity, as well as youth’s dreams
and aspirations, give the illusion that within each individual is a whole, unfragmented self. For these youth, it is possible to achieve modernity through maintenance of tradition. The governmentality, or power relationship, between youth and global culture correlates with what I describe as the illusory self. This will be the culminating argument of this thesis.

**Nation and Self**

The establishment of the Republic, as described in chapter one, was the beginning of Turkish nation-state formation—an extensive project whose successes would be marked by widespread dissemination of an ideology that claimed total citizen inclusion but really embraced the ethnic origins of some while pushing others to the periphery. The idea of forming a collective identity was flawed from its inception (as is the nation-idea itself) and does a great deal in explaining the present, divided state of civil society in Turkey. Many of my informants see themselves as Turkish citizens and consequently abide by the rules and regulations set before them. They also use the nation-idea as a frame of reference in shaping their identity. The irony in this, however, is that many of my informants are also aware of the challenges nationalism brings to the larger population. Although they are generally cognizant of the dangers of separating state from society, they are forced to live within the system that currently governs them. As a result, a part of their identity is always formed and reformed in relation to this mode of governance.

As I conversed with Semih throughout his interview, we agreed on many things including powerlessness in seeking an alternative to the repetitious, production-oriented nature of students’ lives. Semih is a Political Science major at Boğaziçi University and like Yusuf, is more knowledgeable about political theory and concepts like nation formation and the abstract state. When I asked Semih if he could explain some of the ways he is being controlled by the idea of the nation-state, our conversation went as follows:
Semih: Yea. I’m being controlled now. Because I live in Turkey, I live in a nation-state actually, not Turkey.

Me: But what are some of the everyday ways it’s controlling you?

Semih: University. Not what I’m learning but how I learn it. For example, I’m was learning Marx in the last year but I didn’t become a revolutionist. I just entered the lecture and left it there, and that’s it. And when I finish university, probably I will continue in academics, so I think they are all programmed. Isn’t it?

Me: Are you asking me?

Semih: Yea.

Me: I mean, it is programmed in the sense that, you know, there are ways where it’s less programmed in some places than it is in others, but it’s always programmed. There’s always the idea that everyone should go to school and try and go to university, get a degree, and work. There’s that idea. That’s what some people live for. You go to school, you learn, you get degrees, you work...

Semih: You buy a car, buy a home...

Me: Buy a car, buy a home, have a family, and then you die. That’s it, so it’s like, what is your purpose, I guess? So I agree, there is a process and I think that we are controlled by the idea that there is this process, but at the same time, what I’m trying to do is see the ways in which we think we are being controlled by these processes or by these things—like the state—how is it the state is controlling us when we allow the state to exist? Because it’s in our minds that the state exists. The state, it’s not like, you know, an object, right? It’s an abstract notion. We allow it to exist because we are subjecting ourselves to these rules or regulations, right? Well, it’s like, what do we do if we don’t accept that? Well, we’ll probably get arrested or something like that, but basically still, we’re in that concept of the state.

Semih: There’s no escape.

Me: There’s no escape! You can know that this isn’t real, but what can you do? Nothing, because everyone else believes this still exists... I don’t know... it’s complicated.

Semih: Aristotle says, “Human is a political animal.” If you accept it, you must be political or live in the system, otherwise maybe we can go to an uncivilized area and live on our own without anybody [laughs].
Semih did fairly well in engaging me in conversation; even I began to talk about the processes within which I live. We discussed how we’re both subject to systems that guide our lives through models of what is and is not acceptable, as if we are programmed to do certain things without thinking twice about what exactly it is we are doing. Even if the university has taught us about political theory and consciousness, we cannot live in an alternate reality because living in any society requires cooperation and this of course warrants rules about how to live one’s life, a moral code of sorts every individual in a given society must follow. The further one distances him/herself from these codes, the further he/she is displaced from society’s core. These kinds of societal or cultural understandings emerge as “truths” whose existence is not a priori but instead is created for the purpose of distinguishing between the governing and the governed, or to give the illusion that these truths exist in nature and are not at the root of political schemes.

Establishing “truths” was essential to Turkish nation-state formation—nationalism, or pride in this imagined community, ironically thrived from the ethnic divide that is still visible in the country today. The Kurdish conflict and the Armenian conflict, like some of my informants said, are major obstacles standing in the way of Turkey’s accession into the EU. Most of the problems are interrelated. For example, nationalism is conveyed to students from an early age onward through the education system. These beliefs are then perpetuated for generations in both public and private spaces; the family is in no way separate from all of this and is also a site that encourages such beliefs. The problem, as Semih informed me, is that the greater population lives in a state of oblivion either completely ignoring the issues at the heart of social divide or just not knowing about them. This is one of the challenges behind reforming education: breaking the cycle of teaching an arbitrary curriculum that is no longer relevant for this generation and hinders the growth of the country altogether.
Actually the education system hides the others and the issue in one pact in the beginning of the Republic. Atatürk says, “There are no minorities and we are all Turkish people,” and we know nothing about the later happenings. Lots of people died and the education system doesn’t tell these things. So, showing only one part of the reality is actually making another reality. When you say something but not the whole thing, it means something very different to another person, right? It’s the issue today... I just know that I’m not an expert in this, for example, the Kurdish problem, because I don’t know lots of things that happened in the past so I just push it to the side...

As Semih makes clear, part of the reason people do not question the roots of ethnic marginalization is because to them, it does not exist. Since Turks were informed from the very beginning that there are no minorities, they find no reason to question the roots of such established “truths.” Those, however, that do not only protest the issue at hand but more theoretically, challenge these truths as the mechanisms of constraint they actually are. As Foucault states:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth—that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Rabinow 2003, 316).

The creation of truths is therefore a significant part of Turkish nation-state formation and maintenance of such truths is vital to the survival of the Republic. Part of the reason youth don’t react to the falsities in these “truths” is because challenging any aspect of the government has its consequences. Political silence among these youth isn’t merely respect for their families’ wishes but docility toward the governing body. Such truths can be seen as a medium of governmentality. As Jonathan Xavier Inda states in Anthropologies of Modernity, “…The activity of governing is possible only within particular epistemological regimes of intelligibility — that all government positively depends on the elaboration of specific languages that represent and analyze reality in a
manner that renders it amenable to political programming” (Inda 2005, 8). Governmentality and the circulation of power between youth and nation-state is made possible through the production and dissemination of such truths and youth’s thoughts surrounding the validity of such truths, for it is the possibilities of their freedom that threatens the stability of the governing body.

Another important aspect of governmentality exhibited through the power relationship between the state and its youth is the very idea of power being exercised over “free” subjects—“individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available” (Rabinow 2003, 139). Foucault emphasizes freedom as “the condition for the exercise of power…at the same time its pre-condition…and also its permanent support” (139). This is wholly applicable to the example of Turkey, all citizens are technically agents who are free to act whichever way—the only difference however is the degree of freedom among different members of the population; it varies tremendously. As Semih previously stated, under this mode of governance there isn’t one collective experience; since “truths” surrounding the foundation of the Republic are received differently, they tend to create different realities for different kinds of people. Nonetheless, it is the degree of one’s belief and practice that most associates him/her as a Turk and because this type of being is entirely performative, Turkishness reflects upon the extent to which one constrains, or allows the constraint of, his/her freedom.

As Katherine Pratt Ewing states in Consciousness of the state and the experience of the self, “For individuals who belong to communities that have been labeled ethnic minorities by law, specific government policies for dealing with ethnic communities play an analogous role in constituting identities and shaping consciousness or experience of self vis-à-vis law and authority (2002, 97). This certainly is in line with Yusuf’s earlier remarks, his parents experiences as
ethnic or religious minorities have not only shaped their identities and approach to life but his as well. Furthermore, as many of my informants indicated, it is the ignorance of the general population that allows the state to maintain some level of control over the freedom of its inhabitants. Even those who choose to pursue interests unaligned with the state’s priorities are brought back under this system of constraint, especially in the realm of education.

A friend of mine wanted to study minorities and how developing NGO movements actually serve their needs. She was advised not to do a study which had minorities in it. I mean, there are certain laws and explicit hindrance of academic freedoms of everybody. This lady from Yıldız University who was qualified enough to be appointed to a position was not appointed because she made a speech on TV about defending the veil—that students should be allowed to get into university with veils. Because she made a suggestion, she was denied a position she deserved or she actually earned.

Batuhan believes it is precisely these types of hindrances that stagnate Turkey’s move away from ideology, which in turn permeates into every aspect of its development. If the education system fails to foster growth in this realm, or at least fails to make its curriculum proper for this day and age, it is unlikely Turkey will achieve its goals of unity and modernization. Batuhan specifically addresses the biggest concerns.

Well I mean, first of all we have to design a new system beginning with the law, the famous higher education law. Most of the governments have focused on working with that law and modifying it, and modification most of the time nurtured their own interests and concerns that isn’t that of the system—of the students, of the faculty, of the administrators. There are a lot of good reports out there right now offering solid proposals but what is important is the will of the state to create autonomous universities... There has to be political will to make a new beginning. The priority should be in the interest of the university as an institution—autonomy, freedom, flexibility. Then of course, there needs to be a lot of capacity support provided to the universities that would not fall into the first tier of universities who can actually break their relations with the state now and move on, become autonomous.

Batuhan made a lot of interesting points above. He made clear that progress of any sort will require change at the educational level, it will target the issue at its very foundation, stopping the
dissemination of “truths” that have the power to differentiate the lived realities of its subjects.

One of the strengths of governmentality is its ability to ensure the survival of the state by reinforcing the mutual need between state and society, yet simultaneously separating the two. The power of ideology should never be underestimated, especially when trying to understand theoretical placement of “the state” above society.

It is possible to suppose that if the state is what it is today, this is so precisely thanks to this governmentality, which is at once internal and external to the state—since it is the tactics of government that make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on. Thus, the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality (Rabinow 2003, 245).

Through the example of Kemalism and Turkish nationalism, ideology reinforces state authority through belief that challenging any aspect of it is the equivalent of defying Atatürk. The idolization of Atatürk himself is a prominent part of this ideology. The inherent problem in such ideologies, however, is that it is no longer wholly relevant in society and is becoming even greater of a detriment as the years go by.

Turkish nationalism perpetuates ethnic marginalization, socioeconomic stratification of society, as well as underdevelopment in the eastern region. In reference to the transfer of ideology, two of my informants, Özge and Betül, discuss ideal society as having a break from the transmission of these supposed truths.

Özge: As an ideal society? Education should be free. I think there should not be such thing as an economic crisis or unemployment.

Betül: She’s living in utopia.

Özge: It’s not too much I think to live in a society where you can find jobs in which you can be happy. I think economically, we should solve the problem first. We should find money without owing [it] or taking [it]. And then we should use this money toward education, healthcare—there shouldn’t be any costs for education and healthcare. Then we should solve
the problem of unemployment and students should feel secure in choosing whatever they want and after graduation they can find a job in their specific area. I think it can be, but I don’t think it’s utopian.

Betül: I think it’s ideological. For example, if we as a country spend half of the money we spend on guns toward education it would be much better. We spend most of our money on military expenses. Even if education could be better they could employ so many people in jobs. There are too many young people and they can’t afford to employ them in job areas so they say sorry, you couldn’t [get an] education and you couldn’t graduate from a nice university so we can’t employ you...

Özge: It’s difficult, it takes time and the responsibility is [on] all of us, but we should change from somewhere.

Me: Who should the responsibilities fall on?

Özge: On everyone, I think. From the parents. Individuals, parents, community, all the country, the nation... I think it’s global—not the nation, all nations should solve this problem for a peaceful world. People have the right to live in a peaceful world.

Me: And your roles and responsibilities?

Özge: We should take an active role politically. Because we [get an] education, we see our problems, we research and study and have the chance to compare with the other countries. Maybe we can [be] politically engaged to solve this problem.

Betül: That’s not [very] easy.

Özge: [No], it’s not [very] easy. Nothing is easy.

Betül: Certain people have certain jobs. For example, in governmental positions, certain people following ideologies have certain jobs and they never change their positions and they stick to it. So, even if you take part in politics actively and you are chosen, you have to follow certain ideological codes and [make] certain decisions so that we don’t have such crises.

What was most interesting about this excerpt from Özge and Betül’s interview is Betül’s final comment, “…You have to follow certain ideological codes and [make] certain decisions so that we don’t have such crises.” The dilemma of autonomy lies in the possibility of crises emerging.
As indicated through the three largest outbreaks of revolution in Turkey in which each was followed by a military intervention on a national scale, the more autonomy individuals are given, the likelier they are to engage in violent acts and disrupt societal peace. The irony in demanding more leeway is that every time it is granted, it proves to be unsuccessful and leads to unmanageable chaos necessitating military force.

As Batuhan informed me, Turkey has yet to achieve democracy on a widespread scale, governmental practices still resemble a totalitarian regime. This remains somewhat effective in maintaining control over the general population, however, it prohibits Turkey from achieving social mobility and greater prominence on a global scale—this is in direct conflict with the Republic’s original goals of achieving national unity and European modernity simultaneously, two goals contradicting one another. In *Globalization, alternative modernities and the political economy of Turkey*, Keyman and Koyuncu state:

Turkish modernization, since the beginning of the Republic, has been characterized by and has given rise to the “strong-state tradition”31. This tradition means, first, that the state has assumed the capacity of acting almost completely independent from civil society, and second, that the state rather than the government, has constituted “the primary context of politics.”32 The strong-state tradition has functioned as the organizing “internal variable” of Turkish politics up until the 1980s. However, since the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, the emergence of new actors, new mentalities and the new language of modernization, as well as democracy as a global point of reference in politics, has made culture and cultural factors an important variable in understanding political activities. It has become apparent that in the 1990s the strong state faced a serious difficulty to respond to the new societal problems and demands, especially those articulated of identity-terms and asking for the protection of social and political rights, as well as the recognition of the ethnic and religious differences. The strong state turned out to be too strong in its attempt to impose itself on society, and too weak in governing its society effectively3 (2005, 109).

Abstraction of the state and emphasis on its detachment from society has been successful in instilling in its citizens the illusion of a strong governing body. This, however, has actually

contributed to its weakness, which has trickled down to a visible level of political instability and civil unrest. Referring back to Çağaptay’s Newsweek article on street fights occurring in the country over granting rights to Kurds that were long overdue, society’s realization and decision to act on feelings of unfairness in the distribution of rights that were never equal from the beginning shows how the falsity of a “strong-state tradition” from its inception continues to contribute to social fragmentation. The question that remains thoroughly unanswered is what can Turkey do to change this and is complete cultural restructuring—a fresh start—feasible when so many have already lost hope and many others have simply chosen to ignore the problems? As one of my informants said, “…It’s not a fair world, and I’m not the one who’s going to make it fair.” Social cohesion becomes such a challenge, many can not look past their personal interests to achieve it.

Aside from ethnic marginalization being the primary cause for Turkey’s fragmented society, the notion of governmentality itself has as its opposite resistance, which means within any given power relation is the ability of one agent to act against the constraint of the other. In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault speaks of resistance not as a reaction but instead as an inherent component of governmentality.

Resistances do not derive from a few heterogeneous principles; but neither are they a lure or a promise that is of necessity betrayed. They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite. Hence they too are distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior… But more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them p and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them… Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities (1978, 96).
One of the fears Batuhan expressed at the very end of the interview is the danger among members of marginalized society having increased realization of the highly uneven distribution of wealth and the illegitimacy of ethnic exclusion. Challenging this mode of governance, and making true Foucault’s belief that governmentality thrives off of the possibility of individuals acting upon their freedom, youth have the potential to bring about change—it is just unclear whether or not this change will come at the expense of peace and the grave cost of violence.

I tell you, the biggest thing that Turkey is facing today, and I hope that will never come true, especially in Istanbul, is all those unemployed people living in the outskirts—unemployed, uneducated, no home—decide to take over the city. Because when they’re in such a position, when you see the youth spending hundreds of dollars a night here, that level of social inequality, disparity, is a recipe for disaster. Like the one you see in Paris, in the Paris ghetto…you’ve seen it and there are many examples. I’m not saying we should prevent the rich from spending, I’m saying we should be aware of the disparities and make sure those who are on the bottom [have] hope, if not anything else.

**Family and Self**

The power relationship between youth and family isn’t completely different from that between youth and nation, in many ways the family is the micro site for the continual dissemination of nationalistic values. At the same time, however, the family serves as a point of reference in some youth’s lives as the source behind seeking a new alternative to a fixed life, like that many of their parents led. Since within each family lies the possibility of parents encouraging their children to want the best for themselves, even if their goals do not coincide with that of the Turkish state, I use this power relationship as my second example of governmentality guiding the lives of Turkish youth.

As Lisa Wexler states in *The Importance of Identity, History, and Culture in the Wellbeing of Indigenous Youth*: 
Cultural identification includes recognizing one’s cultural attributes—beliefs, values, practices, norms, traditions, and heritage—along with understanding how they are (and are not) reflected in one’s self. These cultural attributes are both internally and externally defined, as they come from personal choices as well as ascriptions of others… They are constrained by ideas of the past and the present—those found in their traditional culture as well as those embedded in the dominant society (2009, 269).

The transmission of culture is a defining phase in the lives of youth. Not only are they taught about values, morals, and ways to live one’s life in school but these lessons are reiterated at home as well. Since children are undergoing the most sensitive phases of psychological and neurological development in the early years, by the time they reach adolescence, these lessons have been well-absorbed and are being acted upon. Putting lessons into practice becomes most evident during youth’s transition into adulthood because it is at this stage they find themselves choosing paths that will determine the rest of their lives. Therefore, how they make these decisions is a direct reflection of the balances and imbalances of this aspect of governmentality.

Similar to how being Turkish is the result of how closely one associates him/herself with the goals of the Republic, another version of youth’s being is the result of how they successfully acquire values disseminated by the family and how they go about selecting which values to maintain throughout their lives. Overall, my informants agreed that their closeness to family makes a large portion of who they are. When asking Bengisu, my second informant from Duke, whether she thinks of herself as independent or dependent, she responded:

*I am independent in that I can study abroad, and I don’t feel restrained or anything, and like you know, if I’m gonna do something, I can do it. But at the same time, my parents are my number one priority still. I mean, for a while, I didn’t realize that in a way and then I grew up and I was like, yea, I think they’re my priority! Even if I’m away from them, they’re still on my mind, and I care what they think and if they support me or not, so they’re a really important part of my life. I think for most people, even if you’re independent, or doing your own thing, you never take your parents out of your life, you know? You never imagine saying, “No, Mom! I’m gonna do this! You can suck it up,” or something like that. I don’t think most people would do that or would want to do that. I guess, it’s just, you*
want your family in your life. And I don’t know, I guess that’s part of my culture, you know? Your family’s really important.

... I would say that probably my biggest influences are my parents just because whenever I have something on my mind, I’m like, oh I want to tell my parents about it. You know? I’ll email them or I’ll talk to them and... I know kind of how independent they were when they were young, cause like, I think they were the first people in their families to go to college and my mom was the first girl in the village to go to college or something... you know? So it’s more common now, but I mean, they built their whole lives by themselves in a way, just you know...they went to college in Ankara which is a big city...and they started a whole new life in Istanbul and like, that takes courage...

Bengisu certainly uses family as a point of reference in her everyday life. As indicated above, her parents are her role models and positively influence the decisions she makes in life. Also, her parents’ experiences indirectly shape hers because Bengisu allows it to. Her relationship with her parents seemed to be the least restrictive of all of my informants’. Her parents’ support and her childhood upbringing has led to Bengisu’s beliefs that she is afforded freedoms she doesn’t believe her Turkish peers back home are—in many ways, this support has contributed to high self-esteem and ultimately, greater feelings of independence.

Bengisu’s description of the role her parents play in her life varied greatly from most of my other informants in that she never felt pressured or was always given leeway in deciding what career to pursue. Most of my informants said their parents always stressed making career goals that were financially promising and ensured security in the future. For Bengisu, however, money isn’t the important matter, educational achievement and pursuing one’s interests are, and this is something her parents always reiterated. Somewhat similar to Yusuf’s parents’ teaching of self-fulfillment, Bengisu’s parents do the same.

Like, mainly I’ve seen from my parents that just trying to earn money doesn’t really do much for you in the long-run and right now actually, my mom’s like, “I should’ve stayed in school” like a graduate school and she really regrets not doing that. And my dad is like “I really wish I let you stay in graduate school” so, I mean... I’m like, if my parents regret it and they support me in what I want to
do, you know, I might as well do it. Cause I mean, I guess most families in Turkey, and all around the world, they’re like, well you should earn money and secure yourself financially but my parents were like, “As soon as you do something you like, you’ll find money, somehow. I don’t know...we’ll pay, we’ll find something.” So, I mean, just something I like, that’s my main goal right now.

Bengisu’s experiences could also be different because she is attending university abroad as opposed to attending in Turkey. She didn’t have to place into departments based on her examination score, so she truly chose a department based on her interests and used the encouragement of her parents as confirmation that she was doing the right thing. For Bengisu, there seems to be more continuity between her multiple selves because her parents have given her a great deal of autonomy and their interests align with Bengisu’s, rather than interfere.

For most of my other informants, however, the discontinuity between their multiple selves, or self-representations, is more prominent. Their ability to fluctuate between these multiple self-representations, however, gives the illusion that a whole, cohesive self exists. A lot of my informants’ success in being versatile stems from their ability to detach themselves from one realm of being for the purpose of acting upon another—they are able to effectively manage their movement between their multiple selves. Although this is true for most, some of my informants’ inability to manage such movement produces anxieties. For example, Elif #1 expressed a huge disconnect between her family’s traditionalism versus her more liberal life at the university. She described her parents as conservative and informed me of a certain duality she experiences when she is away from home. While at school she grants herself more freedoms, particularly with dating and other social activities, when she talks to her parents, she allows them to believe she is disengaged from Istanbul’s nightlife and is fulfilling the image they have of her as an innocent, obedient daughter. This is not to say she is disobedient, however, her inability to
share with her parents certain aspects of her university life is a more visible representation of the discontinuity I mentioned earlier.

Elif and I conversed about the purpose of university. For her, the university differed between her definition and that of her parents (and the country’s in general). The discomfort that arises from her inability to fluctuate between her multiple selves becomes evident below.

**Me:** What is the purpose of university? In Turkey and in general if they are not the same thing.

**Elif:** I think these are not the same thing. In Turkey, the purpose of the university is you know, go to the university, make sure it’s the good one, and when you finish the university, get a job, make sure this is the good one, you can get money. This is the purpose, getting money. Not anything else. Not intellectual [stimulation], not social activities… I think the university should be much more different from this. Boğaziçi is the exception in Turkey, or Sabancı University or Koç, just a few. Mmm.. that’s all I guess.

**Me:** So what is the purpose of the university in general?

**Elif:** The real purpose? Raising the individual fully. Awareness. The awareness is important but in Turkey, generally at universities, people don’t care about awareness about [their] environment. I mean environment, whole things, political things, social things, what’s going around. In Turkey, this is not important. Just go to university, finish in time, and get a job. That’s all. When you get a job, your partners, your friends do not care about anything but the job you’re doing. This is depressing too. So most of the people are unhappy with their jobs

**Me:** Why do you think it’s that way?

**Elif:** Why?... Maybe it’s because of the economic situation. This sounds more logical. You know in Turkey, the gap between the rich and poor is very wide, among other things, so people want to be rich. People want to be rich. That’s the single aim for going to university. But I don’t understand, too. First it becomes so complicated and they want you to focus on one single thing later and this is so hard. Difficult. Again, unfair.

Even though Elif experiences a disconnect between her family and herself in defining university, her ability to still make the best of her experiences at Boğaziçi and maintain her closeness with
her family despite their differences is an example of how she is actually able to maneuver between these disconnects. “This strategy is a source of power, an intimation of an ability to shape worlds and others to one’s own desires by retaining another frame of reference apart from the one that appears to be the immediately, socially agreed-upon reality” (Ewing 2002, 108). Elif has mastered her ability to keep these two worlds separate at times they need not be merged. Therefore, although this power relationship seems to be dominated by Elif’s parents, Elif also displays a certain level of power over them in strategically choosing information to disclose so they will not grow aware of her “other” ways of being. As mentioned before, governmentality functions precisely through this upward/downward continuity—it is never just a game of domination and works through a circulation of power.

**Youth and Global Culture: Producing an Illusory Self**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, youth are subject to a third governmentality that is reflective of their power relationship with global culture. One of the questions I asked my informants was how they perceive ideal Turkish society and whether or not they believe this has either already been achieved or is en route to being achieved. Most of them agreed that stagnation among Turkey’s developmental goals prohibits the country from achieving factors they believed constituted *ideal* society: freedom of speech, social solidarity, and closing the gap between the rich and the poor. The most visible marker of this developmental process is Turkey’s positioning in terms of joining the European Union. Negotiations over its accession into the Union have been underway for over a decade now and these youth are losing support for the possibility of EU membership. As Mine stated:

*I think it’s some kind of toy the government gave us and we’re playing with it, but we don’t know the real effects. It shouldn’t be so easy. They say we’re going to be like Norway—they [declined] the European Union. I don’t think we’re going to be like that. We are not a self-sufficient country. We cannot just turn our backs to the*
USA, EU, IMF... Turkey is very dependent in economical terms. Turkey wouldn’t be able to afford anything they want... They [government leaders] are just giving us a hope that we’re going to do everything. We are getting worse but they are giving us these thoughts so we would think about it. I see the people who just see the future brightly as a little bit unrealistic, because I don’t think that’s gonna be the case. We are not trying for anything. The situation is getting worse. How can the system fix itself? There’s no such thing... So it’s just to keep us busy. All this European stuff, or any other stuff, any kind of positivist stuff, for me now, is a toy to keep us busy.

For Mine, not only is EU accession unlikely to occur, but she perceives the positive attitude among some members of society as unrealistic. Mine’s beliefs directly contrast those the governing body wishes to instill in its citizens. Hope in something she perceives to be unrealistic is a way of concealing the existing problems in society. For her, if the root problems are not addressed, there is no reason to jump straight to the ultimate goal.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, Turkey has always aspired to be at the global center, away from its current positioning at the margins. Today, the ruling party, AKP, has made EU accession its number one priority because Western Europe marks this center. Contrary to the belief of the AKP, many of my informants believe membership in the European Union, especially at this moment in time, would not signify complete achievement of Atatürk’s goals because EU accession comes at the risk of cultural loss and economic dependency. They believe internal development and reconfiguration of Turkish identity should be priorities at this time because it is ethnic conflict and the disparity of wealth contributing most to the country’s developmental stagnation. These youth, therefore, envision their illusory selves for the purpose of achieving these goals. It is through this alternative the current generation becomes hopeful in fulfilling their destiny as Turkey’s future.

In The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self and the Experience of Inconsistency, Katherine Ewing describes individuals’ feelings of wholeness and continuity as the result of their
ability to make “rapid, contextually appropriate shifts in orientation” (1990, 273). While at one moment youth perceive themselves as national citizens, they may see themselves as sons or daughters the next. Similarly, they may switch to prioritizing personal desire over national or family duty. Amidst this fluctuation, youth still perceive themselves as whole individuals whose lives are void of discontinuity—“the individual constructs an illusory sense of wholeness and personal continuity out of what are actually inconsistent self-experiences” (Ewing 1990, 266). The “illusion of wholeness” for Turkish youth therefore emerges within this intersection of their multiple selves, or what Ewing refers to as self-representations. It is precisely youth’s versatility in moving between these multiple self-representations that allows them to believe in the existence of a whole self, or single identity.

Also contributing to the idea of a whole self is youth’s ability to be realistically optimistic about the future despite the many issues they are forced to confront in their everyday lives. Although their experiences are fragmented, they are not completely disjointed—in many ways these experiences overlap and when they do not, youth selectively build upon those they believe to have the most impact. As Ewing states, “…memory is an important component of the experience of wholeness and continuity… In order to establish a sense of continuity, we do not have to recall all of our experiences of an hour ago or a year ago; we need only command a few representative memories… These memories are analogous to a curriculum vitae for particular self-representation…” (1990, 267). Although the illusory self is constructed from selective memory, I add another component that contributes to this idea of wholeness: youth’s subjectivity to a governmentality involving global culture.

The power relationship between youth and global culture is one that truly resembles an upward-downward continuity. While youth look toward global culture as a model for their own,
they also use this model as a means for reaching the modernity standard of the developed, globalized world. Interestingly, most of my informants had no aspiration to join the EU, however (like the Republic’s ultimate goal), they aspired to be at the global center. Surpassing nationalistic pride, echoes of a lost empire reemerge. Similar to Ottoman reign, Turks’ move toward the center would symbolize predominance once again, reviving a rich, historical past constituting a major part of Turkish nationalism. My informants believed aside from economic interdependency, increased travel freedoms, and the opening of a job market to its youth population, the European Union would not bring any added benefits to Turkey. In some cases they believed accession into the EU would be detrimental to the country’s development.

I would like that development to occur in Turkey, but I wouldn’t really be happy being a part of the European Union because the European Union wouldn’t mean anything by the time Turkey would enter. I think Turkey would be the last country in Europe to enter because of the religion conflict, women’s rights, and minority stuff... it would affect a lot. And of course, the main reason is the religious matter... So I thought yea, it won’t really mean anything whether we are in the European Union or not if we develop ourselves. I don’t think it’s a good idea for us to go in if they accept us right now. We have to develop ourselves. Because if we were to get accepted now, people would be under the assumption that everything is fine. But it’s not. There are still many things to take care of.

Zafer makes an extremely good point in stating that EU membership at this moment in time would be futile when the country has yet to achieve its developmental goals. Along the lines of what Mine said earlier, trying to achieve the ultimate goal before getting to the roots of Turkey’s problems makes it nearly impossible to produce positive outcomes.

From a somewhat different perspective is Esma’s belief that EU membership would be mutually beneficial for Europe’s aging population and Turkish youth—the European job market could use the labor force of Turkey’s youth population and Turkish youth could certainly benefit from the abundance of opportunities for employment. Similar to Zafer, however, she believes membership should not come at the expense of cultural loss. Despite the nation’s secularist
foundation, Turkish culture is deeply rooted in Islam. Esma, like many other informants, believes religion is the factor causing a delay in negotiations. She makes the sound argument that many other Eastern European countries were admitted into the EU despite their status as developing nations—their level of development, however, is comparable to that of Turkey’s eastern region. She argues the EU’s delay in admitting Turkey on the basis that it is severely underdeveloped is unjust—there must be some other reason and this reason, to her and many of my informants, is Turkey’s label as a Muslim country. She also believes other factors contribute to this delay. “It’s religion, it’s population, it’s the fact that the Turkish army is one of the strongest in the whole world… I don’t know. There are a lot of reasons.” Although most of these youth believe accession into the European Union has its perks, it shouldn’t be deemed a necessity, particularly because the developmental goals laid before Turkey should be achieved not for the sake of joining the EU but for the sake of strengthening Turkish society. Once these goals are achieved, the European Union (for these youth) will no longer be relevant.

Aside from the want to achieve major development goals, Turkish youth also firmly believe a move toward Western modernization could place greater emphasis on youth’s “autonomous” development. This, too, contributes to the illusory self in that the idea of wholeness in one’s identity is experienced through even minimal levels of autonomy. It is this autonomy that gives youth the illusion that a “true” self exists. It is the illusion of this true self, however, that also enables youth to be optimistic and reasonable about their future. Global culture influences the development of this illusory self primarily because of the greater emphasis it places on individualization and self-guidance. This is different in Turkish society because one is still using the nation, versus the world, as a central point of reference. Caring for oneself is inextricably linked to caring for one’s nation and it is through pedagogy this idea persists for
generations. Ironically, this generation of youth (particularly my group of informants) is realizing the new possibilities that emerge from reversing the order of care for oneself and care for one’s nation—it is once one has achieved self-fulfillment and adequately cares for oneself that he/she can successfully contribute to the nation.

Yusuf reiterates the problematic nature of being for Turkish youth—feelings of disempowerment emerge as a result of being subject to various systems of constraint. When I asked if he believed youth in general in Turkey are empowered or restricted, he responded:

_Yea, they are restricted in some aspects and they are facing so much things that probably we wouldn’t think of facing... Like, we identify ourselves as people, young people, again, I’ll use the same [examples]: European, Middle Eastern, Asian, or think conservative or rightist... we try to find some camp to join but the restriction is that we usually think that there are camps we need to and we have to join... The restriction is the whole thing, it’s both in our minds and again, this whole vague thing going around changing us, controlling all of us. You might say it’s culture, it’s tradition, it’s our values... Yea, the restriction is probably both on those things, those vague concepts and again, in our minds. It’s all about the continuum and again, cutting the things that are embedded in your roots. It’s hard to choose something and build an identity so some things, those vague concepts I told you, we think of them in various ways and I think most of us restrict ourselves, like in our minds, in our hearts..._

It becomes clearer through Yusuf’s awareness how practices of the self are “not something invented by the individual himself” but instead “are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group” (Rabinow 2003, 34). Rules of conduct are disseminated through school and family—these rules of conduct are absorbed and practiced throughout life and then passed down to the next generation, giving rise to what we believe to be cultural norms. Identity formation, in this sense, is rooted in the social. While these cultural norms define a collective identity, the individual’s social identity, or relation to groups like the nation or family, further solidifies the culture of the collective. “Thus, it is useful to make a further distinction between social identity as
identification with a collective and collective identity as the norms, values, and ideologies that such an identification entails” (Brewer 2001, 119). Since the social identity of Turkish youth is inseparable from collective Turkish culture, the need to reconfigure this identity becomes the basis behind the emergence of one’s “true” self. Turkish youth are not trying to rid themselves of their cultural foundation but instead are trying to address 21st century concerns on both a national and global scale by fixing the problems at the heart of social divide—this means adopting a non-nationalistic curriculum and being more open-minded about ethnic diversity and global culture. As an informant Merve said, “We are a closed society and we aren’t influenced by others… For me, ideal [society] is being sensitive towards everything… Empathy.”

As indicated through a survey I distributed to all student informants after completing each interview, many of them agreed their university is adequately preparing them for the future and for their careers. They also agreed the Higher Education Council (YÖK) has not been productive since its establishment in 1981 and the university admissions process is unnecessarily difficult while it favors certain demographics. Most of them believed Turkey’s chances of achieving its developmental goals are low as long as the state fails to address the need for wide-scale education reform. In many ways, these university students are already achieving some of Turkey’s goals for modernization—their institutions are different from the rest in that they foster personal growth and development as opposed to simple social reproduction. These universities, although few in number, are representative of what Turkey wants to and has always wanted to achieve. The challenge not only lies in mass-producing these institutions but also in going about this change through a bottom-up approach. This is something these youth understand and for such reasons, make for a promising adult generation to bring about Turkey’s much-needed change in the future. This change starts by re-educating the masses with the same level of will
and determination the Turkish state had when it first chose the school as its main mechanism for dissemination of nationalistic values. As Batuhan from the Education Reform Initiative states:

*There are students who protest the establishment of YÖK, still, after many years. It is unbelievable that this one system that is created by the military government is a state apparatus to indoctrinate people. And we’re still using the same law after 1983, you know, 26 years. And we’re asking why did Spain or Greece become so democratic after their transition to democracy but we have not? Because…we’re still living under the same legislative framework that was created by the military government, including the constitution. I mean, nobody honestly can question that unless we change that first. I’m not even talking about judging or trialing, or taking generals to court. I’m talking about erasing or deleting every single legislative mark that the coup has left on Turkey…a lot of the education legislation has been adapted during post-military governments…our first real civil education reform didn’t come until the 2000s. All military attention [is on] education… Why? Because they say education is a very important tool, and it is a very important tool.*
Conclusion

Reflecting on the origins of this research project, a focus on Turkey’s higher education system, the research question has not only evolved tremendously but has been fragmented to entail multiple aspects of Turkish youth identity formation. This, of course, brings to light the inherent issues of nationalism, the power of education as means for transmitting culture, and the implications this sort of complex development has on the future of both Turkish youth and the Republic. Although this research revolves around the question of identity, there is no clear-cut way to describe how these youth think of themselves as whole individuals when their multiple identities are shifting back and forth within various contexts.

This wasn’t something I had thoroughly thought of until I had created a poster board to present at a conference hosted by the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke. A guest read through the poster and asked, “Well, what do these youth identify with/as?” It was amazing how after eight months of research I was still unsure of how to answer this question. After collecting my thoughts I responded, “Well, that’s the problem. They don’t identify as just one thing. Although they choose to identify as Turks, some of them question the meaning behind this.” I explained to the guest that my research doesn’t seek to answer that question but instead seeks to explain how one could come to such a question. When observing the multitude of components that form these identities, it becomes easier to answer how these youth think of themselves within each individual context. There is no overarching identity that could thoroughly explain the sentiments and experiences of these youth—there is only a social identity, which serves as one of many points of reference in their lives.

My organizing theme of triple governmentality was at first a concept I came up with using Foucault’s notion of governmentality as a base to build upon. I must admit, my
interpretation was initially underdeveloped and evolved over time with the writing of each chapter. I used this notion of governmentality to explain how Turkish youth form their identities in connection to three reference points, or sites: state, family, and global culture. While each has its own discourse and each forms its own power relation with youth, they are not mutually exclusive. In observing and analyzing the experiences of the university students I interviewed, each power relation forms an “identity” which in turn legitimizes the power relation itself—governmentality is therefore not just about domination and subjection but how the two ends reinforce one another. Therefore, the problem behind Turkish youth identity formation is not the need for youth to become more autonomous human beings (since autonomy is virtually impossible when the self is always being constructed in relation to something else) but to be more freed in one realm for the sake of bringing others to the surface. In the case of Turkish university students, the prominence of one identity over others becomes problematic because youth inhabit multiple selves. The identity I speak of is that of the “self” formed in relation to the Turkish state.

The triple governmentality of youth creates multiple selves so intertwined they give the illusion of a single identity. As mentioned before, Katherine Ewing suggests there are no “selves” but rather self-representations—the ability to reconfigure “self” in any given situation gives the illusion of continuity and boundedness (Ewing 1990, 273). It is, in fact, this versatility in ways of representing the self that dismisses discontinuity and reifies the idea of a whole self. Turkish university students, as mentioned before, constantly find themselves at a crossroads between faithfully serving the interests of an abstract state, fulfilling family obligations, and striving for a level of modernity that would make Turkey a major competitor in an increasingly globalized world. The interesting thing about the particular case of university students I worked
with is that their anxieties about life, school, family and careers are reflective of the clash between their roles and responsibilities from each aspect of their development. Rather than create the illusion of a whole self, Turkish university students directly reflect the discontinuity of their multiple self-representations.

This, of course, does not mean there is absolutely no continuity in these various self-representations—although I count family and the global center as separate aspects of governmentality, they are inextricably linked to the Turkish state-system. Family obligations and obligations to the state to bring Turkey closer to the global center both fall under the auspices of the Turkish state-system. The state, the family, and the global center are all sites of attachment for university students who are the most capable of achieving Turkey’s long-term goals. In the midst of all this, however, Turkish university students lose their sense of empowerment because they are constantly placing duty above desire (Kondo 1990, 132). Another purpose of this research was to examine the roots of this widespread disempowerment among youth and to observe how my informants handle the imbalance of duty and desire in their everyday lives.

During my interviews, I was frequently asked by my informants what I would be doing with my research findings or in a more comparative sense, how the Turkish education system differs from the one in the U.S. I had to reassure them that my research wasn’t really going to result in some sort of policy solution or suggestion for improvement, especially because my research already entails current policy solutions underway as informed by a representative from the Education Reform Initiative in Istanbul. The purpose of this research is not to compare the Turkish higher education system to that of the U.S. or any other country or region in the world, or speak to the system’s successes or failures through the lenses of my personal experiences. After all, cultural relativism is the golden rule in anthropology. What I sought to understand and
perhaps purvey to others by the end of this thesis was how the experiences of Turkish university students place them at an interesting crossroads between two of Ataturk’s main ambitions from the early 20th century that continue to require agency from youth today: national unity and European modernity. I simply wished to articulate the challenges these youth face as a result of their positioning and how they deal with these challenges in ever-evolving contexts.

Although my writing subtly implies the Western education system to be the “gold standard” or model system, this is not the case. Laying down the workings of the present Turkish education system and writing about what it aspires to be requires a bit of comparison between the Turkish system and that of the Western world. Of course, I am most certainly a product of my environment and have preconceived notions of what a higher education should entail, especially after having undergone four years of growth and development within the university setting myself. In this research, however, I do not compare the experiences of my Turkish peers to my own but instead compare them to what they could and (as Ataturk wished) should be. This is not to say I wholeheartedly believe the American or European education system is flawless and works to the advantage of every student but instead, it is the system the Turkish state sees as ideal (as did many of my informants) and wishes to become in the near future for the sake of social mobility and ultimately, European integration.

Similarly, when I go in-depth to explain Turkish nationalism and the degree to which citizens display this pride, I do not wish to isolate Turkey as the sole example but instead treat this as a case study in which Turkey’s example serves as one of many. As previously mentioned, the current global order comprises close to 200 “states” recognized by the United Nations—many of them falling into the category of nation-state, like Turkey. Even in countries that are seemingly ethnically homogenous, the “nation” is never composed of people from one ethnic
background and is always the end result of arbitrary political scheming—the point to remember is that everyone comes from somewhere else, the nation is an imagined community. Because all national populations are ethnically heterogeneous, there will always be groups that are marginalized and cannot be fully represented—every nation will have its majority ethnic group. Take the United States as an example: close to 80% of its population is white, around 13% black, 4% Asian and so on. In fact, it was only a mere fifty years ago the Civil Rights Movement took place and ensured the rights of blacks in the United States. The Kurdish issue, which is slowly beginning to be resolved, is a similar example. If conditions improve for Kurds in Turkey, one could also label this a civil rights movement of sorts. Again, the point is not to see the Turkish example as unique but instead to see it as one example of many, and more importantly as a product of the global order within which we live.

One of the difficulties of writing this thesis was making sure I did not present information in a manner that displayed my biases or judgment. This, of course, is something I am sure I did not fully achieve. My self-positioning as researcher in the field to writer out of it changed. Throughout the interview process, I felt inspired and connected to the young people I call my friends and informants. As I reviewed the conversations, I noticed how much I advocated for these youth who for the most part felt oppressed by an education system that seemed too technical in its methods or too narrowly focused on a select few goals. These feelings most certainly resonated and appear throughout this thesis, however, my role as a writer made me look at my data from a slightly different perspective. While at first I came into this research project with a “fight for your rights” type attitude, I notice I am leaving it somewhat open-ended as a result of the ambiguity and complexity of the roles and responsibilities of these youth as their multiple selves—multiple identities—intertwine.

There were many ethical concerns that arose throughout the writing process, moments where I was unsure of what to include in my thesis for the purpose of achieving my research goals and what to exclude for the sake of my informants’ privacy. It was at these moments my role as friend and my role as researcher became blurred and difficult to distinguish when deciding which data to present and which data to withhold. Although I received full consent from all of my informants to include any and every part of their interviews, there was a certain discomfort that arose within me when using data that really applied and supported the argument but did so at the expense of exposing some private issues of my informants. Anytime I felt this discomfort, I would remove the data and approach the analysis in a different way. I kept in consideration the fact that most of my Turkish friends are friends with one another and in many instances, my friends would express to me the comfort they felt in speaking to me about certain issues they didn’t think would be understood as well from an insider point of view. My role as an outsider to the culture also gave my informants the security they needed to speak freely about issues they otherwise kept to themselves. With these things in mind, I have presented my research findings to the best of my abilities and personal discretion.

If given the opportunity to expand on this research, I would like to entail more varied samples of Turkish youth. As mentioned throughout this thesis, my informants are a part of a very unique youth group in Turkey. Their ideas about the future are directly influenced by their experiences as top university students generally revered by larger Turkish society. My informants at Bogazici are among the top 0.2% of university students in Turkey. It would be interesting to compare their experiences to those of students attending universities my informants would deem “less prestigious,” students attending vocational schools, or even students who did not pass the entrance exam with enough points to be admitted into either. As opposed to being
the experiencers of the many issues they brought up, my informants were simply knowledgeable about them. Including youth from other kinds of institutions would provide for a balanced critique of the Turkish education system. This also brings me to another group whose experiences I know would differ greatly and would be more representative of the Turkish youth population as a whole: youth migrant workers.

This thesis focused largely on education—namely its effects on youth development and the endless possibilities widespread reform could bring. Migrant workers, however, are perceived to be those who were not “qualified” enough to attend a higher education institution. As one of my informants mentioned, only a certain portion of the youth population is meant to hold an executive position in their careers; the rest must work as laborers because this is where Turkey’s economy thrives and the labor force is most needed, in the agricultural and manufacturing industries. What was interesting to me, however, was my informant’s reduction of these youth as destined laborers and nothing else. Youth migrant workers are also subject to the same governmentalities I used to describe the everyday lives of my informants. The only difference is somewhere along this group’s developmental timeline, there is a break in education which causes one mode of governance to surpass the prevalence of another. Analyzing these differences would be more comprehensive in describing the experiences of Turkish “youth” and not just university students. It is for this reason youth migrant workers would be a fascinating group to entail for further research.

Lastly, I would like to draw upon Mary Bucholtz’s *Youth and Cultural Practice* where she emphasizes, “…It is important to bear in mind that youth are as often the agents as the experiencers of cultural change” (2002, 530). This statement couldn’t be more applicable to the case of Turkish youth. The anxieties and challenges experienced by these youth is a reflection of
those experienced by the Turkish state and Turkish society in general. Much like how these youth are undergoing a transitory phase in their development, so is the Republic. Although Turkish nation-state formation was successful in bringing hope to the inhabitants of a falling empire, its very existence depended on ethnic marginalization. As Volkan and Itzkowitz state, “As the [Westernized Turkish revolutionary elites] tried to formulate a new Turkish identity, externalization and projection of unwanted elements were necessary for the cohesion of the new identity” (2000, 241). It is this process that has come to haunt the social cohesion of the Republic today, and even decades before. This internal imperfection hinders Turkey’s outward approach to the 21st century globalized world it desperately seeks to be at the center of.

These problems trickle down from being the state’s problem to society’s, and of course fall heavily on the shoulders of youth who are burdened with the task of achieving the Republic’s newfound status as a fully modernized, democratized country. Even though these youth are more cognizant of the impossibility of maintaining strong nationalism in the face of modern globalization, they do not let go of Ataturk’s dream. It is within this context anxieties arise. It is in this sense that youths’ socially transgressive actions may be understood not simply as culture-specific manifestations of psychological distress but more importantly as critical cultural practices through which young people display agency… The tension between the tantalizing promises of modernity and the expectations of tradition-minded adults may be thought to create resentment among young people caught in the middle… the phenomenon is neither so wholeheartedly rebellious nor so intimately connected to modernity as this imagined scenario suggests (Bucholtz 2002, 531).

For this reason, Turkish youth cannot be simply perceived as a “subculture” within larger Turkish culture but instead, as active agents of change who contribute to a new Turkey in ways many people cannot see. Their thoughts alone and ideas about the future display a process of idea formation not limited through the lens of nationalistic values. This is quite a stepping-stone for the Republic. At the micro level, these youth are already achieving goals previous
generations left untouched. Rather than look outward for models to modernize by, Turkish society should look *within*—particularly at this small group of youth who have contributed greatly to my research and, although not recognized for it, to their nation.
Appendix

Figure 1.
Results from a survey issued at the end of each student interview

Post-Interview Survey

If I was given the option to work in Turkey or Western Europe, I would pick Turkey.

Sometimes I feel my opportunities are limited even though I am a university student.

The Higher Education Council has been productive since its establishment in 1981.

I believe the university selection process is unfair and favors certain demographics.

I believe the university entrance examination is unnecessarily difficult.

I believe the competitive university selection process is necessary in Turkey.

I agree with the current university admissions process.

I believe my studies are relevant to my career goals.

I believe my university has prepared me well for my career.

I believe my university has prepared me well for the future.

[# of Informants]

- Unsure
- No
- Yes
Works Cited


Tsegaye


