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## **“Serbest meslek sahibi”: Neoliberal subjectivity among Istanbul’s popular sectors**

**Cihan Tuğal**

### **Abstract**

Some of the literature on neoliberal subjectivity tends to attribute omnipotence and impeccable consistency to neoliberalism. Other recent literature, by contrast, has emphasized how actually existing neoliberal subjectivity combines liberal and non-liberal elements, some of the latter emanating from local culture. However, even this revisionist scholarship holds that the non-liberal elements only lead to a smoother functioning of neoliberalism. A focus on informal workers and small merchants in a squatter district in İstanbul reveals that neoliberal subjectivity harbors contradictory orientations that might actually undermine some aspects of neoliberalism. The mixture of self-reliance, individual responsibility (condensed in an emphasis on hard work and pious patience), and entrepreneurial spirit with extra-market survival techniques, as well as non-liberal orientations toward legal property, land and money, and desire of redistribution (as well as state protection against big capital) all exhibit how marketization is restricted, twisted, and perhaps endangered, even within the process of neoliberalization.

*Keywords: Neoliberalism, subjectivity, Islam, entrepreneurialism, workers*

How is neoliberalism experienced on the ground? This paper will discuss how sub-proletarians<sup>1</sup> in a squatter district develop an ambiguous, partially neoliberal subjectivity. At the beginning of the 2000s, I worked

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Cihan Tuğal, University of California, Berkeley, Department of Sociology, CA 94720, USA, ctugal@berkeley.edu.

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<sup>1</sup> A sub-proletarian is defined as a worker with irregular wages and precarious employment, most likely

as a teacher at a primary public school in Sultanbeyli, a district on the eastern border of İstanbul. On one of my first days as a novice teacher, I distributed a survey in my class about demographic characteristics. I was surprised to see that nearly all the students had put down "*serbest meslek sahibi*" (roughly, "free-lancer") for their father's occupation. I was teaching in one of the poorer schools of a district populated by construction workers, textile workers, unemployed men, and peddlers, where being a worker in the public sector or a factory was considered a privilege. Why had the students not written "construction worker"? Why had they used the category of *serbest meslek sahibi*?

Students used a different language in their autobiographies when talking about their fathers' jobs. Only a couple of them mentioned the phrase *serbest meslek sahibi*. One of them said: "Since my father's occupation is construction, there is no work. We hardly get by. This makes me really sad. I would contribute if I could."<sup>2</sup> There were similar accounts, such as: "My father is a construction worker, my mother is a housewife [...] Sometimes, my father can't find work." Most of the accounts focused on the current and continued health problems of family members, work accidents, deaths at a young age, struggling with education amidst poverty, and sustaining family honor under these conditions. I will propose that *serbest meslek sahibi* is a category deployed under certain circumstances, as part of honor-sustaining strategies among sub-proletarians. But it is also a category that one can understand only in the general context of the aspirations and dispositions shared by the sub-proletarian and other residents of this district.

*Serbest meslek* is an equivalent of the English term "free-lancer," but with very different local connotations. In official statistics, the term refers to self-employed people: around a third of the labor force consists of those who formally are neither workers nor civil servants. The local usage saves face among the unemployed and the sub-proletariat and hides illegal business; among professionals (and everybody else too), it avoids intrusion by survey researchers, since it serves as a standard answer. In Sultanbeyli, it was also indicative of frequent shifts between multiple jobs, such as taxi-driver, construction, and peddling. I will argue that the term *serbest meslek sahibi* is indicative of the way in which neoliberalism is experienced as an articulated set of practices and beliefs at the local level. These practices and beliefs are mostly based on small producer subjectivity (with roots in the Ottoman past), now boosted by micro-credit ideology and application.

2 Children indeed contributed, but this was minimally acknowledged, and usually making one's chil-

The idea of articulation advanced here builds on Laclau's insight that actually experienced discourses are composed of many elements, only a few of which are necessary to the integrity of that discourse (and on which its difference from other discourses is based), and others that can potentially be disarticulated from this discursive composite and articulated to competing discourses.<sup>3</sup> As Wendy Brown has argued, subjectivity is a necessary component of lived neoliberalism.<sup>4</sup> But neoliberal subjectivity is not completely manufactured in the Western academy (as in Brown's argument). It can find local roots where it goes. Yet, these introduce certain stumbling blocks in the way of a full internalization of the free-market logic. Neoliberalism (outside the West, at least) might be bound to live with such frictions and imperfections.

The analysis below will draw on my fieldwork in a squatter district of İstanbul. The first phase of this fieldwork was completed between 2000 and 2002. I will show in the following that there are some aspects of neoliberalism that resonated with popular ideology in 2000-2002. Foremost among these were the ideas of the producer's initiative and autonomy. Some aspects of popular ideology were in the middle and could be articulated to not only neoliberal, but competing ideologies as well. The responsible and self-esteeming citizen constitutes an example. Sultanbeyli's common sense also included some aspects that could be constructed as opposed to the market logic, such as expectations of protection, mutual aid and extra-market self-sufficiency. The significance of the post-2001 transformation was aligning popular ideology more tightly with neoliberal subjectivity. I was able to observe the realignment when I returned to the district in 2006, for a revisit of six months.

Secondarily, the analyses offered will speak to the Muslim Calvinism debate. My earlier research treads a politics- and conjuncture-based approach to this debate, against both those who have argued that Islam is necessarily non- or anti-capitalist, and against those who have argued that under modern conditions Islam tends to become Calvinistic.<sup>5</sup> I have built my arguments in an earlier book on a two-phase design, where I show the predominantly welfare-capitalist tendencies of practicing Muslims in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, and their conversion, under political influence, to neoliberal capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Here, my goal is more de-

3 Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977).

4 Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Chapter 3.

5 Cihan Tuğal, "Islamism in Turkey: Beyond Instrument and Meaning," *Economy and Society* 31, no. 1 (2002).

6 *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press,

scriptive than explanatory, but it furthers the parallel goal of demonstrating that around 2000—before the rise of the AKP,<sup>7</sup> and the global ramifications of 9/11—the experience of Islam among the popular sectors had both neoliberal and non-liberal aspects. At the end of the analysis, in order to dramatize the indeterminacy of Islamic economic orientations in this pre-9/11, pre-AKP era, I explore the economic subjectivity of the *most* neoliberal construction worker I encountered in an urban poor district. I show that even his orientations displayed many economically non-liberal aspects. I conclude with a note on my follow-up study in 2006, where I observed that the AKP had indeed removed many of these non-liberal aspects, and a call to further research on ongoing civic and political attempts to purify and liberalize the Muslim subject.

### Cultural specificity and contradictions of the neoliberal experience

Most political economists and economic sociologists focus on the macro aspects of neoliberalism, an economic policy package that seeks to cut welfare spending, weaken unions, privatize public assets, and deregulate trade, production and finance.<sup>8</sup> More recently, some among them have drawn attention to broad variations in the way in which this package has been implemented.<sup>9</sup> However, Foucauldians, and especially the anthropologists and political theorists among them, have pointed out that neoliberalism involves a strong micro dimension: a quite complicated set of technologies of the self that seek to implement the entrepreneurial logic in non-economic as well as economic areas of life.<sup>10</sup>

The exploding interest in neoliberal subjectivity has been slowly turning from the search for neoliberal universals to an attention to cultural detail and process. So far, scholars have defined the neoliberal subject based on self-governing, self-sufficiency and initiative,<sup>11</sup> autonomy

7 The *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) has been the ruling party in Turkey since 2002. It is a broad coalition of ex-Islamists, conservatives, Islamists, right-wing nationalists and liberals under ex-Islamist leadership.

8 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

9 Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas and Sarah Babb, "The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed: Paths to Neoliberalism in Four Countries," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 9 (2002).

10 This article will adhere to the Foucauldian definition of neoliberalism, although I will discuss elsewhere why posing these two definitions of neoliberalism (macro-economic vs. micro-technological) as alternatives to each other is quite counter-productive. For a discussion along these lines, see Loïc Wacquant, "Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism," *Social Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2012).

11 Peter Brand, "Green Subjection: The Politics of Neoliberal Urban Environmental Management," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31, no. 3 (2007); Jesook Song, "A Room of One's Own": The Meaning of Spatial Autonomy for Unmarried Women in Neoliberal South Korea," *Gender,*

and difference,<sup>12</sup> responsibility, individuality and self-esteem,<sup>13</sup> apolitical volunteerism,<sup>14</sup> and being subject to indeterminacy, uncertainty and vigilance.<sup>15</sup> Most of these attributes, even if they have roots in local culture, can actually be extrapolated from the quasi-philosophical writings of the Ordo-liberals, the heroes (or maybe villains) of Brown's analysis. That is to say, they do not introduce complexity and friction to the neoliberal package imported from the (Western) departments of economics; they only add local color to it.

Other scholars have justifiably protested against this tendency.<sup>16</sup> They have underlined that neoliberalism does not emerge as a universal package, which then has local variations. Instead, it is a set of techniques that are made and remade in each particular geography.<sup>17</sup> However, this more locally-oriented literature reproduces one tendency of the established literature on neoliberal subjectivity: an insufficient analysis of the frictions within experienced neoliberalism. Even though these scholars focus on the articulation of many non-neoliberal elements to the neoliberal amalgam, they do not study how neoliberalism might be transformed, altered, or disturbed in the end.

Aihwa Ong, the major influence behind much of this scholarship,<sup>18</sup>

12 Christopher J. Fries, "Governing the Health of the Hybrid Self: Integrative Medicine, Neoliberalism, and the Shifting Biopolitics of Subjectivity," *Health Sociology Review* 17, no. 4 (2008); Tomas Matza, "Moscow's Echo: Technologies of the Self, Publics, and Politics on the Russian Talk Show," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (2009); Lois McNay, "Self as Enterprise: Dilemmas of Control and Resistance in Foucault's the Birth of Biopolitics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009).

13 Matza, "Moscow's Echo."; Ann Phoenix, "Neoliberalism and Masculinity: Racialization and the Contradictions of Schooling for 11- to 14-Year-Olds," *Youth & Society* 36, no. 2 (2004).

14 Yasemin İpek Can, "Türkiye'de Sivil Toplumunu Yeniden Düşünmek: Neo-Liberal Dönüşümler ve Gönüllülük," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 108 (2007).

15 Noelle J. Mole, "Precarious Subjects: Anticipating Neoliberalism in Northern Italy's Workplace," *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 1 (2010); Bonnie Urciuoli, "Skills and Selves in the New Workplace," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 2 (2008).

16 Peter S. Cahn, "Consuming Class: Multilevel Marketers in Neoliberal Mexico," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008); Rudnyckij Daromir, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Carla Freeman, "The 'Reputation' of Neoliberalism," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 2 (2007); Ahmed Kanna, "Flexible Citizenship in Dubai: Neoliberal Subjectivity in the Emerging 'City-Corporation'," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2010); Öykü Potoğlu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter: Belly Dancing and Neoliberal Gentrification in Istanbul," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (2006); Aradhana Sharma, "Crossbreeding Institutions, Breeding Struggle: Women's Empowerment, Neoliberal Governmentality, and State (Re)Formation in India," *Cultural Anthropology* (2006).

17 See also Neil Brenner *et al.* for a parallel argument in political economic discussions of neoliberalism: "Variegated Neoliberalization: Geographies, Modalities, Pathways," *Global Networks*, no. 10 (2010).

18 In their analysis of neoliberalism, both Ong and Brown have actually been influenced by Foucault's recently translated lectures: Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008 [1978-1979]). Even though the literatures they have inspired construct their arguments as an alternative against Marxist analysis of neoliberalism *à la* see

has developed a fundamentally important insight, that neoliberalism is practiced through an articulation with non-neoliberal elements, such as exclusion, impediments to mobility, and so on:

*Neoliberalism* as used here applies to two kinds of optimized technologies. *Technologies of subjectivity* [...] induce self-animation and self-government so that citizens can optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions. [...] *Technologies of subjection* inform political strategies that differently regulate populations for optimal productivity [...] Such regulations include the fortressization of urban space, the control of travel, and the recruitment of certain kinds of actors to growth hubs.<sup>19</sup>

Here, I will thoroughly draw on this insight. However, Ong's articulations come out too neat. Exceptions to neoliberalism—for example, the denial of citizenship to certain categories of people—too smoothly reinforce the logic of neoliberalism (free markets and marketization of society). Below, I will point out that in the making of everyday subjectivity, elements that can be ultimately destructive for neoliberalism are articulated to free-market practice. Even if not destructive for neoliberalism in its totality, some elements might also block the “optimal productivity” that Ong believes to be the goal of subjecting regulations.

Another scholar has revised Ong's claims in light of the Middle Eastern experience. Ahmed Kanna has argued that, unlike in Ong's Singapore,

Dubai's flexible citizens do not replace “traditional” conceptions of selfhood with neoliberal ones, but attempt to align non-neoliberal social expectations, such as those pertaining to gender, with neoliberal notions of selfhood. [...] A]daptation of neoliberal conceptions of the self entail not a rejection of traditional patriarchal structures but a reinterpretation of them, substituting the ruling-family state for the patriarchal family as orientation and source of symbolic order in the new, neoliberal Dubai context.<sup>20</sup>

Brown, *Edgework*, 41, 45; Daromir, *Spiritual Economies*; Lisa Hoffman et al., “Notes on the Anthropology of Neoliberalism,” *Anthropology News* 47, no. 6 [2006]: 9; Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations of Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 12), especially of the variety of Harvey and Davis, more discussion is needed regarding whether there might be some compatible elements in the analyses of these competing camps: Harvey, *A Brief History*; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

19 Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 6, emphases in original.

20 Kanna, “Flexible Citizenship,” 104.

In the Turkish context, too, one can see many non-liberal cultural elements deployed to sustain or even boost neoliberalism. It seems from Kanna's discussion that in the case of Dubai, cultural elements oblique to the economic order (such as gender roles within the family) get articulated to neoliberalism. What is even more worthy of noting in Sultanbeyli is that one can observe the hybridization of neoliberalism and non-liberalism *within* the economic realm itself—for instance, in the practices of buying and selling land. In sum, while accepting Ong's and others' emphasis on the fragmentary and contradictory nature of neoliberalism, this article takes one step further: it points out the quite different significance of *some* non-liberal elements that are not simply articulated to neoliberalism to boost its efficiency, as in Ong, but can clash with the core tenets of neoliberalism and threaten its survival, or at least its vigor.

While drawing on the local turn in the study of neoliberal subjectivity,<sup>21</sup> I will also build on a more restricted literature that has underlined how local mores can conflict with neoliberalism (even within the process of neoliberalization), or how neoliberalism is self-contradictory.<sup>22</sup> For instance, Chilean workers use the space created by neoliberalism to resist the logic of the market and advance their own agenda, while at the same time producing some aspects of neoliberalism in the process.<sup>23</sup> Also, the ideas of autonomy and self-sufficiency, taken as ingredients of neoliberal logic by some of the scholars mentioned above, can actually hamper full neoliberalization, as among the fishermen of New England.<sup>24</sup> Some fisheries in New England have a community-oriented logic of the economy, upholding the livelihood of the fishermen and their families rather than focusing on profit and wages. I will demonstrate below that a similar community logic was also widespread in Turkey (before the last surge of neoliberalization), although not sharply at odds with the market as in the case of the New England fishermen.

21 Although this requires further debate, I should note in passing that this local turn can sometimes exaggerate the local-ness of some neoliberal articulations. For instance, the combination of pro-family, pro-religion, anti-prostitution, anti-drug, anti-alcohol discourse with extreme free-market orientations, which Kanna attributes to the Dubai context, can be widely observed in the United States among Evangelical circles: *ibid.*, 118. Evangelical and other religiously conservative forms of neoliberal subjectivity are understudied in the literature (except for Elisha), resulting in too totalizing and simplistic a contrast between Western and non-Western neoliberalism: Omri Elisha, “Moral Ambitions of Grace: The Paradox of Compassion and Accountability in Evangelical Faith-Based Activism,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (2008).

22 Lisa Blackman, “Self-Help, Media Cultures and the Production of Female Psychopathology,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2004).

23 Yun-Joo Park and Patricia Richards, “Negotiating Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Mapuche Workers in the Chilean State,” *Social Forces* 85, no. 3 (2007).

24 Kevin St Martin, “The Difference That Class Makes: Neoliberalization and Non-Capitalism in the Fishing Industry of New England,” *Antipode* 39, no. 3 (2007).

### Survival strategies (or, material conditions of subjectivity)

I will begin by briefly talking about survival strategies. The point here is not to document all the strategies that enable subsistence, but to show how they might conform to or conflict with strict market logic. The first basic question is: how do people survive with irregular wages and employment in a marketizing context?

Sultanbeyli houses mostly construction, textile and other informal sector workers, although there is a restricted population of formal workers, professionals, and small merchants. It is among the poorest of İstanbul's working class districts, with the better-off of these districts including a larger body of formal proletariat, even though the sub-proletariat is expanding throughout these regions, too. A sharper distinction accompanies this difference in degree: most of Sultanbeyli's land has a dubious legal status, due to the district's unique origins in İstanbul's real estate boom of the 1980s.<sup>25</sup> Sultanbeyli has also been known as an Islamist stronghold: it was the first district in İstanbul where the (Islamist) Welfare Party was elected into municipal office in 1989, before sweeping into office throughout the city in 1994. Even though I conducted fifty interviews between 2000 and 2002, most of the material presented here comes from my participant observation in Sultanbeyli's schools, teahouses, street protests, and mosques, as well as my interactions with my neighbors.

During the summer, most of the children work, many of them in the textile industry. Getting a textile-industry job is prestigious. At my school, children who were textile workers bragged about it. The others do less prestigious activities, such as selling shoes and Kleenex packages (some Turks in the district say that the "ignorant" Kurds make their children sell Kleenex packages on the street). I encountered two of my students who worked in these street jobs; one of them bowed his head and pretended that he did not see me, while the other sent his greetings through his friends rather than talking to me. Some children work in neighborhood bazaars, not only earning a day's wage but also bringing home cheap food. Those who cannot find textile jobs and do not want to be dishonored by street jobs work on the fields in their home villages during the summer.

When there is no work in construction, men go into temporary peddling jobs, such as selling phone cards. When wages, income from peddling, and children's contribution are not enough, families depend on

25 Oğuz Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk: Gecekondulaşma ve Kent Yoksulları - Sultanbeyli Örneği* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001); Tuğal, *Passive Revolution*.

crops from their villages (also, many families do not buy, but make their own bread). Keyder has noted that the non-feudal and non-monopoly capital structure of most Turkish villages (as well as workers' ongoing ties to and support from their villages of origin) has ensured a quiet and apolitical labor force, as people did not always have to fight for higher wages.<sup>26</sup> This generalization certainly applies to the Black Sea immigrants in the district, if less so to the Kurds. One can add to this the communal culture that cuts across this ethnic difference the support from relatives and co-villagers,<sup>27</sup> which not only brings goods, but also a communally shared and reproduced knowledge of survival strategies. What one needs to pay attention to regarding these survival strategies is not only the techniques, but the actual lived experience through which they are reproduced.

The following conversation between three construction workers exemplifies such communally shared and reproduced survival techniques. In one of the coldest winters of the last decades, workers gathered in a teahouse to discuss how they were maintaining their stoves for heating. One of them had not used a stove (or any other heating device) at all for the whole week, as he could not afford it. Upon seeing my surprise, the others commented with bravado: "This cold weather actually does not affect us. We would not even *have* stoves, if we did not have children." Resisting the cold was a test of masculinity. One of them opened a discussion about whether switching to natural gas made any sense, given that it was physically easier to maintain, although it was more costly. The others objected: it was not only because of the expenses, but they were used to "fire" (burning coal or wood) and therefore would not enjoy gas. Then they went on informing each other about ways to fuel stoves. For instance, one of them used hazelnuts from his family's fields in his village of origin and hence circumvented buying heating material from the market. The others had not been aware of such a source of heat. The others, also Black Sea men with non-market access to hazelnut, could also have used this type of fuel. Such mutual (technical and psychological) support, as well as the sharing and reproduction of experiences (stories of hardship and so on) and techniques, are certainly not a political threat to neoliberalism, but perpetuate non-marketized relations. To

26 On the historical roots of quiescence in the relationship between peasants (small landholders), protectionist imperial center, and rotating bureaucrats, see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987).

27 Sema Erder, *Kentsel Gerilim* (Ankara: Urmag, 1997); "Where Do You Hail From? Localism and Networks in İstanbul," in *İstanbul: Between the Local and the Global*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

clarify this point further, such interactions and communal knowledge introduce some non-market relations within an overall context of marketizing relations, although these are not in open friction with neoliberal logic, unlike some of the relations and discourses that will be covered further below.

Ties to village and neighborhood community knowledge are reproduced daily through such encounters and conversations. Elders teach how to circumvent the market. Hence, an irony emerges: non-market relations prevent every experience and action from being marketized (as in theories attributing omnipotence to neoliberalism), but at the same time enable subjects to survive under harsh market conditions without resorting to political action or social movements against neoliberalism.

Land is another source of non-marketized relations. Partially as a legacy of the above-mentioned land structure, where use value predominates over exchange value, property codes are not completely liberalized in the district and are sometimes based on use value and principles of mutual aid. On a day when I was socializing with my neighbors in front of the building where the room I had rented was located, I observed in what ways they were helping each other. If one of the shopkeepers had to carry anything, people ran to help. Others helped the local headman (*muhtar*) to package the coal he sold. Those without cars used the cars of others. But there was also a problem between the headman and one of the construction workers of the neighborhood. It had first started as a joke. The headman told him that his brother had stolen a bag of wood from him. The worker asked him where the bag was; the neighbors supported the worker and said that, if the bag was lying outside the selling area (that is, outside the headman's property), then he could take the bag. He could even take it if it was within the property, but within an arm's distance. As the headman continued to bring up the subject, the worker became infuriated and said that he did not believe that his brother would do such a thing. The headman suggested that they should ask his brother and see who was right. The worker replied that his brother was "*şerefsiz*" (without honor) if he indeed had done such a thing. After the quarrel was over, the headman softly told the others that he had taken a piece of wood that was lying in front of his door. The neighbors once again said that he could take that piece of wood: it was not different from taking a piece of wood lying in the street. (The following day, I brought up the subject when having breakfast with the neighbors. One of them said that he was surprised that such a thing had happened, since the two parties knew each other well and had been partners for twelve years).

On other occasions, too, I observed that there is significant solidarity in the neighborhood, but sometimes conflicts arise and remain unresolved because of the lack of a persistently enforced legal framework. Therefore, even basic property issues become points of conflict, and residents try to come up with their own formulations. These formulations are oral and have no legal force. The sanctions are communal. No one has to abide by them, in a legal sense. And since local property codes are different from capitalist ones (use is more important than title), the community codes will never have the force of legal codes. If and when title deeds are issued by the municipality in the future and if the neighborhood becomes totally legalized, the communal property codes will probably lose the restricted relevance they now have.

The land market is again one of the central nodes where non-commercial criteria apply. In the initial rush to the district in the mid-1980s, the Sunni Turks did not sell land and housing to Kurds and Alevis (heterodox Anatolian Muslims) in the center of the district, which is still a predominantly Sunni Turkish area. Now real-estate dealers, homeowners and landowners disagree about how much of the land outside the center may be sold to these groups. While some want to apply market logic (and thus desire ethnic blindness), others resist, as the following anecdote shows.

A Sunni conservative real-estate dealer was conversing with his friends in one of their offices. He had run into a few problems when trying to sell land to an Alevi. A construction worker reacted to his story: "Well, you won't trade with Alevis after this. Why are you selling land to the [curse word] Alevis?! [...] They started to occupy important positions in the bureaucracy. They are going to cut all of us." The real-estate dealer defended the Alevis:

They are steady fellows. They aren't like us. They are anchored somewhere. Our anchors are loose [...] I was in their neighborhood today. If they wanted to, they could harass me, but they did nothing. [...] We have to pull them into society. When I was working in Saudi Arabia, I told some Alevis to come and pray with us. One of them tried and told me later that *namaz* [the Sunni way of praying, or *salat*] was indeed a beautiful thing and he felt very good about himself. This is how we should approach them.

The construction worker shook his head in disbelief. The owner of the office, also a real-estate dealer, expressed suspicion, too: "These Alevis... That is as Islamic as they are going to get." He implied that their alle-

giance to Islam would not go beyond performing *namaz* now and then. In this exchange between several prominent Islamic figures of the district, one can see the power and limits of the market. The first real-estate dealer believed in the dissolving capacities of money and thought that over time they could assimilate the Alevis if only they were insistent enough. The other two, by contrast, doubted how "Islamic" (meaning orthodox) Alevis could become. One of them did his best to dissuade the real-estate dealer from engaging in market relations that would damage the cultural purity of the district center. He associated land with identity (sacred ground that should be protected from a dangerous enemy) rather than cash.

#### "Anti-capitalism" married to free-market and small-producer ideology

Many of the same workers, teachers, and shopkeepers were against big business, but mainly because its profits are based on rent, bank interest and corruption (*yolsuzluk*). The state should treat everybody equally, they held, but it privileged big business. What they essentially meant by treating everybody equally was protecting small merchants and producers. Fridays sermons and religion lessons, offered free of charge on Sundays and several other days, abounded with attacks on luxury and the love of money and property. The sermons were not necessarily *against* property, but they emphasized that strict observation of ritual must come before trade activity. This religious influence is partially behind the reproduction of the "anti-capitalist" discourse in the district, and so deserves a closer look.

In one of the central mosques of the district, a Friday sermon focused on people's love of money. The imam angrily attacked those who over-value money. He told the following story to make his point:

Hallac-ı Mansur<sup>28</sup> repeatedly said to the people around him: "Your Allah is under my feet." People were furious and amazed; they said: "How can the Allah of Islam, whom we worship, be under the feet of this man?" When Mansur died, they dug the ground under his feet and found a bag of gold.

The story implied that some Muslims had started to worship money as their God. He followed this by another story:

When I was shopping one day, the afternoon call to prayer was recited. I was thinking to myself that I would perform the prayer after I am done shopping, but the merchant said, "Excuse me, the most important thing for me is the prayer [*namaz*]. I will order a cup of tea for you while you are waiting for me." Now, I am asking myself, and not you, oh community (*ey cemaat*). If I had a shop, could I do this? Could I interrupt a bountiful trade in order to pray on time? Maybe not. Now, you ask the same question to yourself.

The reception of the sermon among the mosque-goers was quite positive that day.

Another Friday sermon in 2001 focused on the richest man of Mecca, "the Sabancı of his day," as the imam called him<sup>29</sup> who had converted to Islam. His story went as follows: During the *Hijra*, this man took as many of his possessions as he could and headed to Madina. The Meccans blocked his way and told him to return, but he said: "Take all of my possessions, but let me go." The imam interpreted the story: "Look how self-sacrificial were the Muslims of those days. Money and property, all of that was worthless next to faith. Are today's Muslims like that? If I had as much property as Sabancı, would I be willing to give up that money for my faith? How did we turn out like this?" Then he complained about how important money had come to be in Muslims' lives. Other elements also invaded his world:

If you see a piece of tin on the street, you lift it to see if it is gold. When you understand it is tin, you do not put it in your pocket, but you throw it away. You care for your pocket this much, why don't you show the same care to your heart and brain? Love other than the love of God fills your heart, and unnecessary knowledge fills your heads.

A man in the crowd loudly but softly commented after the sermon was over: "He gave a very good speech. He touched important subjects."

Likewise, many conversations among the small merchants of the district revolved around their undue love of money and how it corrupted them, how they should correct themselves and those around them and rein in this love of money. One of the more radical Islamist small merchants told me: "In the 1980s, [practicing] Muslims entered the economy thanks to liberalism and Özal. But money made us degenerate. What

28 Hallac-ı Mansur, or Mansur al-Hallaj, is a Sufi saint of Persian origin who was executed in the tenth century due to his reinterpretation of theology.

29 Sabancı is one of the wealthiest families of republican Turkey. Here, the reference is to Sakıp Sabancı,

happened to the leftists also happened to us. The movement is finished." Thus, the same people who had benefited from the market and generally had good things to say about the market economy complained about the cultural results of marketization.

The economic demands of the "tradesmen protests" of 2001, which shook the nation and drew a large crowd in Sultanbeyli, also exhibited the same seemingly self-contradictory amalgam. These protests had followed the major financial melt-down of the Turkish economy in 2001. As a response to the melt-down, the coalition government (which consisted of the nationalist left, the nationalist right and the center-right) followed the IMF rulebook and deregulated the Turkish currency, which quickly lost its value. Millions were impoverished overnight. As a response, hundreds of thousands across the nation took to the streets, and the country witnessed the biggest urban clashes with the police after the 1980 coup. Thousands demonstrated in Sultanbeyli.

The small merchants and artisans who led the protests demanded the privatization of state assets, tax reduction, a "technocratic government," more credit to small businesses, and protection of small businesses against big business. The most frequent slogans targeted not only the coalition government, but also the IMF, even as the demonstrators embraced a part of the IMF package (privatization and depoliticization of politics), while rejecting some of its implications, such as leaving small property to the whims of the market. It is crucial to note that, although these demonstrations were dubbed "tradesmen protests" by the media, most of their participants were sub-proletarian, even if the leaders were small merchants and artisans. These latter sectors shaped not only the market orientations but also the political stance and demands of the sub-proletarians, as I observed in Sultanbeyli and as became clear throughout the nation during the protests. The combination of free market and protectionist orientations had spilled on to the streets.

Other signs of "anti-capitalism" abounded. For instance, the teachers and small merchants of the district tried to convince each other that the attack against the twin towers was an attack against capitalism. If the Islamist organizations wanted to attack Christianity, they would have attacked the Vatican or some churches, but instead they had chosen the symbols of capitalism. One of the Islamist intellectuals of the district told his circle of followers that Americans did not fight against capitalism because they "lacked a book," in the sense of an unchanging book composed of the literal word of God, which could serve as an anchor in the struggle against capitalism.

All of these positions with respect to capitalism do not constitute one consistent whole. Common sense, after all, is a hodge-podge, as Gramsci has noted.<sup>30</sup> But the main orientations are clear. Most residents constructed themselves as "free" small producers against big business and, as will be shown later, the proletariat. Sub-proletarians, who see themselves as *serbest meslek sahibi* are under the influence of this mainly small merchant and clerically produced orientation, due to (1) political ties with these sectors; (2) hometown and kin ties with these sectors; (3) the neighborhood support structures emanating from these; and (4) the fluidity of boundaries between the classes.

Even the poorest of the sub-proletarians did not perceive themselves primarily as workers, but as people who happened to be working in construction or peddling jobs only temporarily, until the day when they would have enough money to start their own small business. Some of them actually had attempted small trade, but failed and returned to day labor. Nevertheless, many of the small shopkeepers of the district had spent their youth in construction and similar trades, reproducing the perception that a way out of the sub-proletariat is possible. Consequently, most people perceived themselves as entrepreneurs rather than workers. This is why my students had referred to their fathers' jobs as "*serbest meslek*" rather than "construction worker." However, we can ask whether such orientations are really restricted to sub-proletarians and small merchants. Might the anti-capitalism of even some workers and civil servants display similar characteristics, due to specificities of the Turkish class structure and the Ottoman past? Are there traces of small-producer ideology even among the proletariat?

The classical Ottoman system's political economic backbone was the sultan's responsibility to protect the small peasant within a "circle of justice." In other words, the stability of rule (and the subordination of peasants to the tax collectors) depended on the central authority's ability to perpetuate small landholdings, prevent confiscation by potential feudal lords, and thereby halt the rise of institutionalized serfdom. In this process, the peasantry was not a passive reservoir of legitimacy, but protected its interests through active recourse to the discourse of justice. While tax collectors and other dominant sectors could claim larger shares of the surplus (and even control larger plots of land) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their relative concentration of wealth still did not lead to the destruction of the small peasantry.<sup>31</sup>

30 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).



While Turkey's rural population has declined throughout the process of modernization, the small peasantry's core expectation—that is, the protection of small property—has been transposed to constitute the kernel of the urban subordinate sectors' economic orientations. For instance, until recently formal employees retired quite early, sometimes in their 40s, and consequently some saw their formal jobs as temporary—a station in their road to the real destination: small trade or small production. Life really started after retirement, upon which they set up (or hoped to set up) a small shop or other small business.<sup>32</sup> The neoliberal reforms of the last decades have slowly pulled the retirement age up, making this transition more difficult.

As Sultanbeyli is predominantly composed of small merchants and sub-proletarians, my sample is not big enough to reach meaningful conclusions about the formal proletariat. Based on the few workers with whom I have interacted in the district, I suggest that formal sector workers were least influenced by small-producer ideology. They focused much more on collective demands, such as insurance and unionization, when compared to other sectors (including professionals, a small but influential population in the district). But even they wanted to go into small business after retirement, and a couple of retired formal sector workers actually did. More research is needed to ascertain whether aspirations to small business persist among the proletariat despite changing conditions and, if they do, how this influences their relations to capitalism.

In sum, being a *serbest meslek sahibi* implies a small-producer orientation, mixed with an entrepreneurial spirit and a deep suspicion of big property. The small-producer orientation is not simply inherited from the Ottoman peasantry, but “transposed,” as with a melody reproduced in a different key. The most significant change with respect to the Ottoman peasant's orientations is the element of *meslek* (career or profession), which implies an expectation of perpetual self-improvement.

### “Bir yere gelmek”: Self-reliance and entrepreneurialism

There were also some elements in the orientations of sub-proletarians and small merchants more divorced from anti-capitalist rhetoric and expectations, and more in line with neoliberalism. However, these were either concentrated in certain compartments of their lives, or (if more solidly

permeating all of one's life) restricted to certain individuals. From among these, I want to focus on another phrase commonly used in the district, “*bir yere gelmek*,” as it is indicative of the emphasis on self-reliance and entrepreneurialism and therefore strongly resonating with *serbest meslek sahibi*. These orientations partially had roots in the material balances, especially the fluidity of boundaries between small merchants and sub-proletarians.

Housing was one element where self-reliance and entrepreneurialism were salient already in 2001, even if these elements co-existed with a non-formalized and incompletely marketized land structure. Especially outside the more established district center, Sultanbeyli was populated with half-finished, unplastered, unpainted buildings. The inhabitants had built these structures themselves, using unpaid, intense family labor. Whenever they have the chance, the residents build more stories before painting their buildings, and even before taking proper care of the family's nutritional needs. The aim is to rent these out in the future, but many of these flats remain empty. In neoliberalizing Turkey, public discourse pushes people to strive for wealth, but especially the sub-proletarians of the district lack the material basis for such endeavors. A few of them succeed, while the majority takes up adventures that upset their already shaky household economy. As this has become widespread behavior, those who do not engage in these risky activities are considered by their neighbors to be lazy, cowardly, or even dumb. Even when there is no significant increase in wealth, the wealth that is displayed (especially through extra stories) increases. At the same time, these entrepreneurial activities are never admitted in discourse to be what they are, due to the anti-money rhetoric predominant in the district.

Those who cannot afford this real estate entrepreneurialism and remain tenants (a sizeable population, as Işık and Pınarcıoğlu have shown) or stick with one- or two-story homes are classified not only as lazy, but also as “not really rooted here.”<sup>33</sup> Such classifications have additional resonance when applied to ethnic and religious minorities, such as Kurds, Alevi, and Bulgarian immigrants. However, tenants and owners cannot be easily distinguished on the basis of ethnicity and class, as even some of the poorest Kurds get access to land and housing materials through political and religious connections and, like the better-off of the district, some of them race to build extra stories even before procuring basic necessities. Hence, the orientations of a *serbest meslek sahibi* do not remain restricted to one's relation to work, but extend to housing: one's place of residence becomes a site of entrepreneurial activity.

(Istanbul: İletişim, 2010), 88-99.

32 For the persistent economic and ideological significance of small property in pre-1980 Turkish capitalist development, see Keyder, *State and Class*, 149-150, 161, 203. However, Keyder's account has also pointed to the increasing difficulty of sustaining small property over the decades (pp. 175-176) and

The internal decoration and appliances are also acquired through networks, bartering and bargaining. Here, I will narrate an example where an appliance changed a few hands. In 2001, I spent an hour with a security worker in his 20s, one of my neighbors, watching him trying to buy a *şofben* (a cheap water heater which works with gas or electricity) from a young construction worker. The latter, a resident of the same neighborhood, was trying to sell the item for about a hundred million liras. The former was trying to buy as cheap as possible. The seller had received the item from a woman on the European side of İstanbul for whom he was working. She had bought a *termosifon* (a higher-quality storage water heater) instead. So he had received it for free. We went to the young construction worker's house, which was on the street one block up from the security worker's street. He took the item from his garage, the haven for his Renault. I was surprised to see that this worker, who always wore very poor clothes, had a nice car. On other occasions I again saw that people here obtain an important portion of their appliances and furniture second-hand, not from second-hand stores or online shopping, but mostly through construction-worker-dominated networks, where goods travel from the richer districts of İstanbul to the workers, and from there to the poorer workers. The whole process involves a great amount of bargaining. More prosperous workers earn a certain amount from these informal transactions. As a result, most people have some basic necessities of life, as well as electronic goods, and some even have cars, acquired not through the generosity of the wages, but through side activities and petty trade. But the use of the latter two categories (cars and electronics) is very limited—for example, after having spent two years in the district, I left without ever having witnessed this construction worker taking his car out of the garage! They are status symbols more than items purchased because of their use value. These entrepreneurial activities corode the boundaries between sub-proletarians (or at least some of them) and small merchants, melding all in a huge sea of free-lancers (*serbest meslek sahipleri*).

"*Bir yere gelmek*" was one of the oft-used idiomatic phrases to account for the motivation behind these activities. The phrase literally means "coming (or arriving) somewhere" and is a rough equivalent of "making it." One of the things I was keen to understand was how people perceived their stories of making it or their failure to make it. While most residents accused the very wealthy of acquiring their riches through corruption, feelings about medium-sized and small businesses were different. Those workers who had not been able to become small businessmen mostly blamed their own lack of education and laziness, or even stu-

pidity and inability to seize opportunities. Those who shared provincial origins, and even partially their beginnings in wage-labor, also had the same interpretation. I asked one small merchant from the Eastern Black Sea region why he had made it, while others from his home village had not. For him, it was a combination of factors. Most important of all, he was very *patient* and made the right decisions after quitting wage labor. He had not been like this in the beginning, but with experience he had learned how to patiently wait while every day saying "*Allah bereket versin*" ("May God give blessed prosperity"). Others opened small shops and did not attend to their shops properly. They over-invested and relied on payment by installments (*taksit*). But these, he said, were not the really interesting differences. The real differences were between them and the formal sector workers. His co-locals could make ends meet after all, but formal workers and civil servants did not even try to *make it*. He had recently been to Fatih (a district on İstanbul's historic peninsula) and noticed that the inner neighborhoods were run-down:

There are a lot of workers and civil servants (*memur*) there. They buy refrigerators while they are tenants. Those who come from Anatolia [the provincial periphery] are not like that. Our people are rugged (*bizim oranın insanı cefakardır*). They come here and they survive without paying rent [and buying appliances]: they build their own houses before they buy a refrigerator!

Note again that the construction workers of the district are not called workers, but free-lancers, *serbest meslek sahibi*—although when small merchants want to look down upon them, they call them "*amele*," a derogatory word for worker. In this classification of the world, Anatolians are entrepreneurial, self-reliant and businessmen by nature, even if they happen to be wage-earners at the moment, while urbanites are dependent and proletarian. As in Ibn Khaldun's account, urban dwellers are feminine and non-urban people more masculine (they are tough and can survive without a refrigerator). Ibn Khaldun, favorably referred to among Sultanbeyli's intellectuals, held that urban dwellers are inclined to plunge into luxury and lose their male stamina, while tribal people retain their masculine vigor as they struggle to survive under unfavorable circumstances. Moreover, in this small merchant's self-portrait, patience and prayer are central market practices. I will show that this understanding of patience and prayer was not restricted to small businessmen, but shared by *some* informal workers in 2000-2002. Its spread to a larger number of sub-proletarians had to wait for post-2002 developments.

### Patience, prayer, hard work

The above account brings me to a closer focus on patience (*sabır*), a word which came up frequently in daily conversations among workers and small merchants. In many contexts, patience came up as an integral part of religion. Many sermons in mosques focused on cultivating patience. But more than that, specialized lessons geared toward the more pious and given by underground religious orders or *tarikats* (rather than the state's official religious apparatus) also cultivated patience. Methods varied, but they were not restricted to the eulogy of an abstract value. For instance, the orders taught their members to say certain sentences thousands of times to cultivate the disposition. Although these varied, the three standard sentences were the ones that Sunni Muslims usually repeat 33 times after their daily prayers, usually by counting rosary beads: *subhanallah* (I absolve God from every evil), *elhamdülillah* (All praise is due to God), *allahuekber* (God is greatest). Some orders differentiated themselves by varying the sentences or increasing the required number. In many other conversations, patience was not only emphasized as a pious attribute, but directly tied to economic performance. Such conversations were infrequent among construction workers between 2000 and 2002, yet they happened.

Mahmut's case demonstrates how patience, religion, hard work and self-control are presented as a way out of the financial crisis that shook Turkey in 2001. Yet, even in such cases, I underline the slippages and certain emphases that could indicate non-neoliberal orientations. On a day in April, two months after the crisis had emerged, Mahmut was listening to television news about the economy with three other workers. They were discussing how the country and they could overcome these bad times. When the call to the afternoon prayer was read, the other workers left immediately, but Mahmut kept on listening to the news. We talked about the economy and other issues for another hour and a half, at the end of which he said: "Let's go. Why would you stay here?" As we left the teahouse, he asked:

Aren't you going to the mosque? We are about to miss the time for the afternoon prayer. [...] Let's sink with the economy if we are going to sink (*ekonomide batarsak batalım*). Prayer, prayer, prayer! If we are going to suffer, we are going to suffer. If we are going to see [the light of day], we are going to see it (*Çekeceksek çekecez, göreceksek görecez*)!

After the prayer, we returned to the teahouse and sat with another construction worker. Mahmut went on talking about faith and the economy

before introducing us: "We always talk about the economy these days. It is good to follow the dollar, but we have to think about ourselves too [*biraz da kendimizi düşünmek lazım*]." The "self" here was constructed as beyond economic calculations, as a soul in direct relation with God, unhampered by economic worries. This non-economic understanding of the self was a barrier to the uncertainty and harshness of the material world, but also reproduced the subject in a less painful manner under the existing material conditions.

If it were not for the non-liberal approach to the economy, as encountered above, one could interpret the focus on the self here as yet another neoliberal move. Nikolas Rose has pointed out that neoliberalism is based on an "active" understanding of the self in all areas of life: individuals are expected to "enterprise themselves" and "maximize" their quality of life within a variety of communities.<sup>34</sup> The mosque community could be seen as just one of these contexts and Mahmut's regulation of his own spiritual conduct another calculated maximization. However, Mahmut's orientation in the above passage is pointedly non-liberal, for prayer was constructed as a refuge from an economic life, failure in which falls (at least partially) outside the individual's realm of responsibility of, as implied by his words "*Çekeceksek çekecez, göreceksek görecez*." Unlike in neoliberal faith, Mahmut still believed that the individual cannot calculate everything and maximize his benefits. Nevertheless, this partially non-neoliberal understanding of the self evaporated as Mahmut introduced me to another worker and we started to talk about my research topic.

Ahmet was an older worker, from a town close to Mahmut's town of origin. He had first moved to Ankara in the 1970s. He then worked in Saudi Arabia for five years in the 1980s. As I was talking to him about his motivations behind coming to İstanbul, Mahmut intervened: "Why else would he come, he came to be rich! There is no fertile land in the village." I asked them why some construction workers who travelled to Saudi Arabia "made it" after they came back, while others remained poor. The conversation took an unexpected turn, as Mahmut started by assuming they were poor, yet Ahmet changed the tone and pictured both of them as winners, while Mahmut slowly slid to this position:

Mahmut: Those who remain poor go there with debt. Whatever they make, they give back to the creditors, their children, and to rent. Only those who go with some savings improve their conditions.

34 Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (London: HGI Press, 2006), 26-57.

Ahmet: No, it's not like that. The solution is being thrifty (*tutumlu*). Those who live loose (*gevşek*) here live even looser there. There are many who pay 3 riyals for a cigarette. I quit smoking as soon as I went there.

Mahmut: Those who are overcome by their *nefs* cannot do anything there either. If you like dirty things (*pis işler*), you can do more abroad. You can resolve everything by hard work (*çalışkanlık*). We can even overcome the crisis. If people join their underpillow savings, they can both put their money to good use and offer employment.

By underpillow savings, Mahmut was referring to the small savings of pious Muslims who did not put money in the bank, in order to avoid interest. Especially after the 1970s, many religious companies were established by mobilizing this financial potential. Mahmut was insinuating that, despite many new banks that allegedly avoided interest in favor of a "profit-sharing" model, some pious people still distrusted the banking system and kept their money or gold at home. Mahmut's dream was to come together with other workers like himself and start a company someday. In other words, even though he was in practice a sub-proletarian, as he earned his living from irregular wages and precarious employment, in aspiration he was a small businessman. In other terms, he was a *serbest meslek sahibi* who perceived no sharp class distinction between his current situation and life chances and those of a small businessman.

This conversation exemplifies several tendencies I observed during many other conversations. Depending on the tone of the conversation and the audience, the same individual could shift his position and construct himself as "poor" or better off. This rarely happened during the same conversation, but, as it happened in the above instance, occasionally people changed their self-presentation after getting certain feedback from others, as Mahmut had done after Ahmet's intervention. As I will show below, in many conversations Mahmut differentiated himself from the wealthy, including the pious Muslim bourgeoisie, and pictured himself as poor; in others, he was superior to other workers in the district and better off, as a result of his patience, piety, and hard work. These two workers would be classified as poor by many non-sub-proletarians due to their shabby clothes, living conditions, unhealthy appearance (especially of their teeth), and premature aging. Yet they differentiated themselves from other sub-proletarians based on other readily visible signs such as smoking. That day, Ahmet pointed to other construction workers on two different occasions and said "that beard is *sunna* [modeled on the Prophet Muhammad's way of life], then what is that ciga-

rette?" indicating the impiety of intoxication. He emphasized that some of those who appeared to be Muslims were indeed "fake Muslims" (*sahte Müslüman*) and that this was at the root of the current situation (referring to the financial crisis). This interpretation of intoxication was based on a Nakshibandi community's reinterpretation of the Qur'anic ban on wine. The *Menzil* community holds that the verses that mention wine actually apply to all intoxicating behavior, including all types of alcohol (an established orthodox position) and smoking (a ban specific to this community and a restricted number of conservative circles).

The two excerpts below show that Mahmut's slippages were not restricted to one conversation, but spread throughout his self-understanding. On another day, when workers were talking about the advantages and disadvantages of the village, he provided several reasons why they had fled the village. Mahmut remarked that there was no real happiness in the village: all villagers wished that their children could benefit from good education and "make it" (*bir yere gelmek*). This was not possible in the countryside: since only one teacher was assigned to their village, all classes and grades were combined. There was a lot of beating, too. The teacher even locked up the kids, without really providing much education:

We just sat around all day without doing anything. The class was big and the teacher could not deal with everybody. So we escaped and went swimming. And others wrote down the names of the escapees and handed them to the teacher. Then the teacher would slam our heads against the blackboard.

Under these modern circumstances of new expectations and the state's intensifying interventions in their lives, hanging on to their rural small property was no longer satisfactory; they were ready to convert from peasant to *serbest meslek sahibi*. Now all of Mahmut's co-villagers had become construction workers in Sultanbeyli. They had their own houses, some even had cars. Their lives were not very good, but they were content since their children received an education and thus could "make it."

However, I want to complicate this narrative of what might seem like a complete integration into market society by underlining the frictions and internal contradictions. Mahmut's discourse, which shifted frequently over the days and even within single conversations, demonstrates the complexity of the entrepreneurial sub-proletarian consciousness. Mahmut apparently embraced the free market, but also incited rebellion against the rich and wanted to force them to share their money!

After one noon prayer in June 2001, I encountered Mahmut, and we went to the teahouse. Right behind us, a Kurdish construction worker I frequently interacted with, Cezmi, entered the teahouse. Instead of coming to our table right away, he went around the whole place twice, hesitated, and then joined us. I was surprised and asked why he had not come immediately. Mahmut raised his eyebrows and said, in a somewhat despising manner: "What business do you have with *him*?" I told him that we frequently talked about my research topic. Mahmut reacted strongly: "What can *this* [guy] tell you? Unemployment, hunger, that's what he's gonna say. And everybody knows that anyway. [After a moment of reflection:] Everyone here is a constructionist (*inşaatçı*). They will all tell the same things."

In time, I was going to learn that Mahmut and Cezmi infrequently worked in the same construction jobs, sometimes at the same level, sometimes as subordinate and superordinate. Mahmut began the conversation by distinguishing himself from Cezmi, but in less than a minute equalized himself with him and everybody else in the teahouse as unemployed and hungry "constructionists"—rather than either "construction workers," or the vaguer and more flattering *serbest meslek sahibi*. What made him occasionally feel superior, despite their identical line of work, political party affiliation and religious belonging, was his ethnicity and slightly better market position. Mahmut then changed his tone somewhat and turned his aggression away from Cezmi, toward the wealthy:

Nothing will change by talking here like this. We have to march together to Ankara.

Cezmi: What happened after all our marches to this day?

Mahmut: No, not separately, we have to march together. Then they will have to listen.

I asked him who would lead the march, as there was no party or association who had the clout or courage to do this, as parties and formal associations had recently avoided participating formally in the "tradesmen protests." He had a quick answer:

One person will be at the head of the marchers from his hometown. For example, from here, [laughing sardonically] I will take the people to the highway and herd them like sheep (*koyun gibi sürüyeceğim*). Then all hometowns will come together.

Cezmi: The rich would not participate in something like this. Then there will be separation.

Mahmut: In that case, you will pull them by their collars and bring them. You will take their wallets and redistribute their money. Then you will see whether they are coming or not.

Mahmut combined two discursive elements that do not easily occur side by side in the high culture of newspapers and books: a belief in the right to legitimate rebellion, and a belief in the sheepish character of his people. While the sheep metaphor is common-place in Turkey, people who breed a desire to rebel are more likely to be those like Mahmut who have been engaged in parties and movements outside the mainstream—in his case, the Islamist Welfare Party or *Refah Partisi* of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Mahmut then indulged in a monologue about how the rich got richer through bank interest and lived comfortably without doing anything. While the poor suffered from hunger, the rich went to the United States for their vacations and then spent time in their villas on the Turkish Mediterranean. "Why *would* he deal with me and you?! If he invests [in the real sector instead of finance], he will have to deal with us. But if they invested, we would not be hungry, and they would have put their money to good use." He added that "the free market" had to be supported so that there would be more investments.

These exchanges and the monologue displayed an amazing amalgam of redistributive desires (and confiscation threats) and deep belief in a free market. However, even the "free market" is defined in heterodox terms, as a system where the rich could be incited (or maybe forced) to invest in the real sector. For Mahmut, moreover, inequality in consumption was the big problem, and he had no problem with inequality within the productive process. Wealth is illegitimate to the degree that it is based on bank interest and presumably just when it is based on wage transactions. Mahmut did not embrace neoliberalism (or the free market economy) as defined in economy textbooks, but gave it a redistributive and solidaristic bent.

### Conclusion

I will conclude by noting some continuities and changes I observed in the same district in 2006. First, the most visible change was the decrease in the rhetorical attack against capitalism. Big business was no longer the main villain. Second, I had mentioned in the analysis section that Mahmut, with his more distinct neoliberal tendencies, was in the minority, and that most of the workers had predominantly non-liberal orientations toward the market. These workers still voted based on religious

precepts, although they did not expect much of politics, but now they had become more hard-working and economically hopeful. Furthermore, the rhetorical acceptance of the free market system had spread more widely among the construction workers, although it had not spread to all of them. Finally, the expectation of protection from the state had declined, and now many workers had started to believe that they could “make it” on their own, without much support from the state. Nevertheless, this was a less complete transformation when compared to the first two items. However, there also were important continuities, especially regarding orientations toward the land market. Moreover, market and non-market routes were combined in striving for survival, and hence exchange value has not completely replaced use value in everyday life.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps another non-liberal discursive and practical node that persists today is the threat of confiscation, which was intermixed with neoliberal discursive elements back in 2000. Despite his stringent Islamism, Mahmut’s desire to expropriate the rich was not restricted to secular business. Today’s Islamic discourse, by contrast, mostly targets secular big business as possible victims of confiscation. One can therefore suggest that neoliberalism has been synthesized with Khaldunian logic. Rather than leaving the circulation of elites to the vagaries of the market, the current ideological climate allows one sector of the population to see itself entitled to forcibly take over the possessions and status of the other. As Ibn Khaldun would predict, the latter has much less *’asabiyya* (group solidarity and collective will)<sup>36</sup> than the former, making it easy prey. Hence, even at the height of its neoliberalism, it is difficult to say that Turkish culture has become exclusively neoliberal.

I will also suggest a point for future theoretical debate. The Islamism of the pre-AKP period in Turkey was rich with anti-big-capital discourse, but the elements related to such “anti-capitalism” had no ideological anchor. Mahmut’s evasive redistributionism could be articulated to a social democratic or even socialist ideology, but it could also be satisfied by a fascist or populist corporatism. Any of these paths would certainly damage the Islamist’s relations with the neoliberal Western world. What happened in the 2000s was rather innovative, giving rise to suspicions about, but not outright rejection of Turkey’s Islamic actors in Western

35 As I have provided a detailed analysis of Sultanbeyli’s everyday practices in 2006 elsewhere, I will not repeat these here: Tuğal, *Passive Revolution*.

36 On debates regarding how to translate *’asabiyya*, see Johann P. Arnason and Georg Stauth, “Civilization and State Formation in the Islamic Context: Re-Reading Ibn Khaldun,” *Thesis Eleven*, no. 76 (2004). I chose to employ both of the accepted alternatives, since the Islamic mobilization in Turkey and its actors clearly exhibit both characteristics (solidarity and will) as distinct from their secularist rivals.

elite circles. Islamic discourse was neither articulated to any of the non-neoliberal paths mentioned above, nor was it cleansed from desires of confiscation. Instead, Islamists seem to have followed Khaldunian logic by channeling redistributive desires in a non-transformative direction. Hence, the attack against the former elite continues, but without any questioning of the parameters of the neoliberal order that they have set up. What results is an unlikely combination of ever-present confiscation threats with an ever deepening market order. It remains to be seen whether a market economy can really function when a big chunk of the capitalist class lives under political threat, not from the left or the extreme (corporatist) right, but from fellow neoliberals.

While debates about subjectivity have always pointed out how subjectivization is an ongoing and always contradictory process, they have also assumed that the subject becomes ever more disciplined in the direction dictated by a certain discourse—for example, an orthodox Islamic one.<sup>37</sup> In the theorization of neoliberal subjectivity, this tendency has taken the form of an assumption about *processual consistency* in the way in which the neoliberal subject sustains the market order and its overall push for neoliberalization, even when the *logical consistency* of neoliberalization is thoroughly questioned.<sup>38</sup> The material presented in this article casts doubt on such tendencies by underlining the potentially self-destructive aspects of actually existing neoliberal subjectivity.

Now I can return to the category with which I have started the paper, *serbest meslek sahibi*. This category signifies expectations of ownership, career-orientation, entrepreneurialism, but also the expectation to be protected in the market place, a market place defined by production rather than consumption and financial gain. The AKP revolution’s significance among its own base is the attempt to remove the element of protection and warmth, or to displace it to the political sphere, as an anti-“secular elite” and anti-Alevi mobilization. Thus, I propose a hypothesis to be tested by future research: the AKP government and municipalities have removed much of the orientations standing in the way of a more developed neoliberal subjectivity: expectation of protection, unclear status of property, anti-big business rhetoric. As this is not a complete but an ongoing transformation, further research could explore to what degree these are being removed. Are there geographical or ethnic differences? Which non-liberal orientations turn out to be most resistant? Might AKP’s influence on sub-proletarians be one reason why

37 E.g., see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

38 On *Neoliberalism as Evacuation*

Turkish neoliberalism has led to higher rates of growth and lower rates of popular subversion?

Answering these questions would require more comparative analysis, especially of cases where the variable of subjectivity can be controlled, although this is methodologically difficult. The Turkish rates of growth from 2001 to the global financial crisis have been staggering. Even after the global crisis of 2008, Turkey has not been as influenced as many other countries. Analysts have so far looked for the reasons in macro policies. Further research could explore whether shifts in subjectivity have also played a role.

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