

UNDERSTANDING SELF IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS FROM HIGHER  
EDUCATION TO WORK

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EKİN BOZKURT

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---

Prof. Dr. Tlin Genz  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Prof. Dr. Sibel Kalaycıođlu  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatma Umut Beřpınar  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Prof. Dr. Kezban elik (TEDU,SOC) \_\_\_\_\_

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatma Umut Beřpınar (METU,SOC) \_\_\_\_\_

Prof. Dr. Sibel Kalaycıođlu (METU,SOC) \_\_\_\_\_



**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

Name, Last Name: Ekin Bozkurt

Signature :

## **ABSTRACT**

### **UNDERSTANDING SELF IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION TO WORK**

Bozkurt, Ekin

M.S. Department of Sociology

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatma Umut Beşpınar

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Transition from higher education to work is a critical period in the lives of individuals. The period becomes even more critical when it takes place in conditions of uncertainty and insecurity, and an education system that is expanding constantly. In these circumstances young people are assigned the responsibility to make their way into the labour market, a process that is more than a period of job applications, but also a process of self-formation. Based on in-depth interviews with young male and female social science and engineering graduates, this study aims to understand how self is constructed in the case of perceptions and experiences regarding higher education to work transition in Turkey. Based on a cross-section of a segment of youth in Turkey the study asks questions such as: How do young people perceive and experience transition to work? What is the relevance of degrees for the labour market? How do young people respond to the responsibility of self-investing they are assigned? These are the basic questions this study aims to answer. The study reveals that while all young people have common perceptions with regarding to the structural conditions and their position within them, there are variations in terms of responses based on field of study and gender. There is recognition of structural factors, yet young people tend to develop

individualised responses in the process of higher education to work transition. individualisation characterises higher education to work transition experiences of young people in 2010s Turkey.

**Keywords:** Youth, higher education to work transition, individualisation, gender differences, field of study

## ÖZ

### ÜNİVERSİTEDEN ÇALIŞMAYA GEÇİŞ SÜRECİNDE KENDİLİĞİ ANLAMAK

Bozkurt, Ekin

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Yüksek öğrenimden çalışma yaşamına geçiş, bireylerin yaşamında kritik bir dönemdir. Bu dönem, güvencesizlik ve belirsizliğin iş yaşamında ağır bastığı ve eğitim sisteminin genişlediği bir dönemde ise daha da önem kazanmaktadır. Gençlerden çalışma yaşamında kendilerine yer edinmek konusunda bireysel sorumluluk üstlenmeleri beklenmektedir, ancak bu süreç yalnızca bir iş başvurusu sürecinden fazlası olup bir kendilik oluşum sürecidir. Bu çalışma, kadın ve erkek sosyal bilim ve mühendislik mezunu gençler ile yapılan derinlemesine mülakatlar temelinde, yüksek öğrenimden çalışma yaşamına geçiş sürecindeki algı ve deneyimlerin ışığında benliğin oluşumunu incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Gençler çalışma yaşamına geçiş sürecini nasıl algılamaktadır ve deneyimlemektedirler? Bu süreçte diplomanın çalışma yaşamı bakımından anlamı nedir? Bireyler kendilerine yüklenen kendine yatırım yapan birey olma sorumluluğuna nasıl yanıt vermektedir? Çalışma, bu gibi soruları yanıtlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın neticesinde, görüşmecilerin bu süreçteki yapısal koşullara ve bu koşullar içindeki konumlarına dair benzeşen algı ve deneyimleri olmakla beraber, toplumsal cinsiyet ve eğitim alanı temelinde farklı tepkiler geliştirildiği gözlenmiştir. Gençler açısından yapısal faktörler tanınmakta ancak



bireysel tepkilere ağırlık verilmektedir. Bu bakımdan bireyselleşme, 2010’lu yılların Türkiye’inde üniversiteden çalışma yaşamına geçiş sürecini niteleyen bir kavram olarak görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gençlik, üniversiteden çalışmaya geçiş, bireyselleşme, toplumsal cinsiyet farklılıkları, eğitim alanı

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The original ideal to write a thesis about transition from higher education to work in Turkey emerged during a lecture on sociology of education I took as part of my Erasmus semester in Southampton, UK. The lecture was about the value attached to the extra-curricular activities of young people. For instance, the relative value of having a master degree as opposed to work experience or taking a gap year. Students in the classroom were all looking depressed and there were occasional jokes about the name of an article: “degree is not enough!”. Once the lecturer raised the question how do the students, in the classroom who were studying either anthropology or sociology planned to do after graduation, the air in the room became tense. The silence, which seemed to last like hours was broken by a hysterical laughter followed by other joining in. As the class dismissed, I was puzzled to find out that these young people who were constantly reminded of the reputation and prestige of their university by the posters on the walls representing marvellous success stories felt to be as nervous as I was upon thinking about the “big question”.

As such, my Erasmus experience became a continuous participant observation of how young people started to think about their so-called employability during their university years. Meanwhile I realised that there were unusual amounts of reminders of credentials and qualifications everywhere – unusual for a university student from METU in the year 2013. First of all, there were the leaflets by the career office, explaining to students how to best market their skills and experience starting from as early as high school. Students were told to make sure that they engage in various activities, curricular and extracurricular alike, in order to display and signal to the potential employers in the future how skilled they are in managing time. How

adaptable and flexible they are for the unexpected, and how creative they can be when it comes to combining multiple activities. The students were also encouraged to speak the language of skills and credentials which were represented even in the online course catalogue of the Sociology department. For instance, all courses were told to be endowing students with the “transferable skills” such as presentation, writing, reporting and so on.

I was also fortunate enough to witness student union elections at my hosting university. The candidates running for the head of the student union were advertising themselves just as if they were up for a job interview. They tried to represent how talented they were in combining formal coursework with additional responsibilities and duties voluntarily taken up. As I was interested in this rather peculiar student tradition, I found out that the student union offered special training on building employability skills through offering thematic training programmes such as leadership, time management, CV writing and so on. The whole setting that framed transition to higher education seemed to be underpinned by a thick discourse which placed responsibility on the young people, not only as students but as prospective workers. Young people were responsible for developing skills, investing in themselves such as an entrepreneur.

Although these were not unfamiliar themes for me, I was not observing similar concerns in a comparable intensity back in Turkey. Fear of unemployment loomed, but it was kept afar with the belief in the good old story of education being functional for helping an individual land in a good job. It appeared that Turkey was a developing country, every generation was supposed to be more educated than the previous one, and there was a vibrant world of work expecting to absorb new graduates. Yes, indeed there was the talk of leadership and entrepreneurship promoted by some non-governmental organisations, however, it was not as strongly backed by the student organisations themselves, the university offices and the lecturers at the same time. So the difference of atmosphere I observed in the UK and in Turkey led me to think about



the way young people may be experiencing the transition to higher education differently.

Despite the strong fear of unemployment in Turkey, there did not seem to be a discourse or a reaction among young people that encourage and promote entrepreneurial individual model, a sense of necessity to invest in one's self through various means which could be captured with the notion of individualisation as a societal process. Or was it the case, that there was a process under way which boiling in the capillaries of society, in the very daily interactions of young people? These were the simple curiosities emerged from my putative observations which grow into a study of a fragment of young people located in a particular historical moment in Turkey.

In Turkey, the common sense surrounding education, and higher education, in particular, involves pictures of direct correspondence between holding a degree and labour market so much that the diploma appears as the ticket of entry to an escalator that will take the individual up the ladder of success. This is backed by the government policies to expand higher education, and the demand from young people to be university graduates. This picture encourages young people to engage in further studies and hope for a successful life –indeed it somewhat motivates young people to pursue higher education and heightens expectations corresponding to education. Nevertheless, this picture begs the question whether transition to work is as smooth as common sense implies? Does higher education confer individuals increased life chances almost *automatically* or do the young people have to *figure out* their way into the labour market and tackle difficulties that keep coming up? On top of that what happens when young people are regarded as human capital, and mass production of university graduates take place while the setting is made up of an uncertainty and insecurity-ridden world of work? What if these factors come into play as to shape a critical point in lives of individuals?

Youth and experiences of young people are at the heart of this study. As such, from this point on, when I talk about youth I will be designating a social category as well as a critical time period in the life course which is a life phase, and loaded with social

expectations such as to get a job, to form a family and to settle down in life. In this regard, youth is a critical period in the life course of individuals. Following Wyn and Dwyer (1999), it can also be argued that young people today could be regarded as the pioneers of a new way of social organisation, which may be extended to include the world of work. For the sake of conceptual clarity and focus, most significant contexts in this study concern the higher education and the labour market, and they will be regarded as “conditioning” the transitions of young people. Likewise, the focus is on one particular life course event which is regarded to be highly critical as a formative experience and process, that is transition to work. In order to do this, this study will look into the post-graduation experiences of young people and seek to explore how the path from higher education to labour market is paved. Therefore, attention is paid to various factors such as family, education, and work. Furthermore, what does this process implies in terms of the influence of uncertainties of multiple forms stemming from both work and education on individuals is also a central concern. In this regard, this is a study of how young people construct their “self” within a specific historical and economic context (that is uncertainty and insecurity within education and work) at a particular life course event in lives of individuals (transition to labour market).

Youth transitions today are argued to have become more protracted, extended and uncertain for many. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) explain these with the metaphors of train and car quite vividly. The trajectories of young people in the 1960s and 1970s are compared to those of a train journey where there are rather structured tracks which cannot be modified easily and which have rather fixed destinations through which the individuals have little opportunity to change the course only at “interchanges”. On the other hand, the transitions after the 1980s are compared to car rides which give more control to the driver in the course and as well as higher individual responsibility. Though the use of “cars” rather than “trains” does not indicate that there are more choice and opportunity, but rather it means the previous inequalities are being reproduced through different pathways. In other words, young people fare through particular routes and paths which are contextually and institutionally bounded. As they steer these routes they may have their own agency in the form of choices they make

and their style of taking the paths, nevertheless, they are ‘conditioned’ by the conditions of the paths, the resources they have and the actions of other people. The university to labour market transition is one such transition event that is conditioned by the social, historical and economic context and the way individuals steer these contexts towards socially designated points. In this study, therefore there will be focus on both the “paths” as well as the “cars”.

As for the path, the context of transitions has been characterised with expansion of higher education on the one hand, and increased discussions of insecurity of professional middle classes, which require higher education, both in the world and in Turkey on the other. In this regard, the Turkish higher education system has experienced a significant boom in the last fifteen years both in terms of capacity and the subsequent increase in the rate of graduates in the total population. While higher education has become almost a social norm for the young people regardless of their social backgrounds, it cannot be argued that it provides relatively ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ outcomes or the middle-class lifestyles with which university education has come to be associated. Whilst the labour markets across the globe and in Turkey are not stable and it is likely that the young people come to face increased difficulties and have to make choices and negotiate constraints as they try to enter the labour market, increasing bodies of young people go through higher education and seek to enter the labour market. Hence there is an ever-swelling graduate body, which are decorated with similar credentials and qualifications resulting in increased competition among the young people.

### **1.1.Rationale and significance of the study**

There is a plethora of knowledge with regard to the higher education system and young people in the West as to how young people fare through it, how they perceive it and so on thanks to large-scale longitudinal data, and interest in the issue extending decades. In Turkey, however, there is somewhat limited interest into the corresponding issues. This is a problem given that the pioneers of higher education in the West as a means of social mobility and better living standards have started to discuss the

relevance of higher education in terms betrayed generations (Ainley, 2016), while in Turkey education is rather taken for granted. Despite the gravity of the problem of youth unemployment in Turkey, within an ever-changing economy, there is growing political concern to declare ever growing numbers of young people university graduates and concomitant social expectations to thrive through education, we have little insight as to how young people construct their selves in relation to the labour market, how they perceive themselves and the structural conditions surrounding them. It takes more fieldwork and in-depth focus on real experiences of real people in order to understand how they perceive and understand their lives within the particular structural conditions which they have to navigate as to transition to the labour market.

As for the question of this study, the focus is on a particular category of youth in a specific life course setting which has received relatively less attention in comparison to the traditional categories of youth studies, which is the “problem” youth who is likely to be delinquent, school dropout or economically deprived. The category of youth whose experiences, perceptions and strategies this study seeks to address is the university graduate youth in their transition to labour market. A study concerning this segment of the youth population in the given life course context is especially timely due to the increased significance of credentials and higher education in relation to changes in the economy on the one hand and the challenges posed by these transformations such as increasing competition in the labour market accompanied with rising uncertainty on the other hand. The significance of the study stems from the timeliness of the scrutiny of this issue, which is rather understudied in Turkey.

This study assumes that the higher education to work transition is significant in particular as a formative experience and turning point in the lives of individuals. Transition to work is significant on the one hand as it relates to a field which is not only about production in economic terms but also a field related to production and reproduction of society at large. Indeed, as Fuente and Ortega (2016) argue the success of neoliberal project may be related with the way young people naturalise it in transition to work, therefore the perceptions of young people under conditions of

intensified neoliberal practices is significant for making inferences about the mood that informs the present and will likely to influence future. For the vast majority of young people, transition to work is almost inevitable. Nevertheless, the paths into work are no longer clear-cut even for the presumably advantaged, and uncertainty looms in the field of work therefore, it is assumed young people have to develop particular responses to work and in the process reproduce and build into the prevailing work order as they make their ways into work and make work into their biographies.

On the other hand, higher education is pinpointed as the representative of the utmost culmination of a drive for credentials which are attached considerable social value both in cultural terms and in policy terms. As Bora et al. (2011) note, while university is no longer a guarantee for having a job and social status, the memory of university as such is still intact, influencing the experience of individuals, and especially white collars. Therefore, the case of transition from university to work in 2010s Turkey is appropriate for observing how the new generation of workers come to fashion themselves in relation to work as they navigate their way into an uncertain future. In other words, in transition to the labour market, we can understand how assumptions about work operate on the level of individuals as young people try to make their way into the world of work. The case of Turkey is further of interest because it presents us a particular context of accelerated practices of neoliberalism, intertwined economic and political uncertainties as well as an ever-increasing population of young people for whom higher education appears to be the socially-required path promoted by various agents.

I contend that it is crucial to point out the category of young people which is going to be studied at the very outset in order to be precise about my findings and discussions. While there are studies that focus on different categories of youth, there is a problem of limited number and scope of previous studies in Turkey. As İlkay Demir (2012) explains, youth studies in Turkey have been predominantly conducted in psycho-pedagogical nature and the limited field of sociocultural studies has been focusing on youth political participation, and some youth problems such as gecekondü youth and drug use. Apart from that, there has been an interest in youth values and the changing

youth values. All of these were fuelled by concerns about national identity on the one hand and concerns with a relationship with modernisation on the other. Meanwhile, all of the studies were corresponding to a mission that the youth has been held responsible for, namely to integrate the nation (Neyzi, 2001).

For its specific questions that will be outlined below, this study will try to adhere to the experiences of this particular group of young people who are assumed to be implicitly assigned a new ‘mission’ in a quite similar way as it has been the case throughout the history of the Turkish Republic (Saktanber and Beşpınar, 2016; Neyzi, 2011). This time, the ‘mission’ of the young people in contemporary Turkey is to ensure that they fuel economic success and growth, and eventually make Turkey a competitive place in the global market. For this reason, investment in Higher Education and increasing the human capital has become a prominent means of achieving the national goal of economic development, and this has become even more marked as Turkey continues to move through its “demographic opportunity window” (Tılıç and Çelik, 2016:7). However, the increased demand for university degrees and their rising prevalence have coincided with statistics that put doubt on the immediate promises of higher education. Yet, there is limited interest in how far outcomes match the social expectations that surround the higher education system, and the voice of the young people themselves in this process is usually limited to expressions regarding how difficult it is to meet the employers’ demands. Among studies which give due attention to experiences and responses of young people there is Çelik’s (2006) study which pointed out that the position of the university graduates to be worsened in the labour market. In 2011, Bora and his colleagues came up with the study of white-collar unemployment and cast a shadow of doubt on the relevance of higher education for a “good life”.

Besides, there is a lack of systematic data concerning young people’s higher education to work transitions. There have been policy-oriented studies about the relationship between youth and higher education. For instance, Demirer is concerned about the changing meaning of higher education and argues that “the real meaning” of education

is lost (2016: 821). On the other hand, Anık and Özkan (2016) emphasised the shortcomings of higher education system in Turkey. As a descriptive source of information specifically on higher education to work transition, there is also the report by Elhan (2016), which highlights some of the key issues that also appeared in the field of this study. Meanwhile psychology discipline has been interested in measuring the level of hopelessness regarding finding employment (Dursun & Aytaç, 2012; Üstün et al., 2014). Finally, from a sociological perspective Çelik and Beşpınar (2011) have pointed out that there is a need to focus on working youth, beyond the much highlighted youth unemployment, and shed light on the reasons of work among lower class young people. Therefore, the literature on youth transitions from higher education to work is very limited and needs much more attention. This is especially unfortunate given that there are concerns on expansion of the higher education as the higher education policy, it would be interesting to know how the policies actually influence lives of young people. Nevertheless, as a result of this study, although no systematic patterns will have been identified for a representative sample, I nevertheless aim to present a cross-sectional view of the lives of young people after graduation. Most pertinent observations would be on (a) the state of the purported link between higher education and the labour market, (b) the relevance of higher education for a higher social status and secure middle class life as perceived by the young people, and (c) the values, beliefs and attitudes that emerge on the way towards finding a place in the labour market. Finally, by considering these together, and regarding young people as a site of social reproduction, this study will provide insights into contemporary neoliberalism in the context of higher education to work transition.

## **1.2. Research question**

As I have noted, the recent trends of increased insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market have made transition from higher education to work for young people problematic. The stakes in obtaining higher education have increased, both materially and symbolically (in the form of value attributed to degrees), and yet the returns are increasingly volatile. Young people are now faced with difficulties in making their education work for themselves by finding a place in the labour market and to secure

an independent existence. Therefore, this study assumes that young people who have recently graduated and on the way to becoming a part of the labour market have to increasingly develop strategies and grapple with uncertainties surrounding their transitions.

It is also likely that owing to the increased stakes, they are more likely than ever to be legitimising insecurity and individualisation as strategies. The only way to examine our assumptions, however, is to engage with the subjective experiences of the young people themselves, which this study will intend to do. In doing so, the study will make observations regarding the patterns, strategies, outcomes, expectations, plans and the discursive implications that are produced or reproduced through interaction of life course as a field of interrelation between the personal and the historical/social.

Although the study uses the category “young people” as a general descriptive tool, not all young people are placed in an identical position with regard to the labour market. Most crucially, the graduate body is not homogeneous and different graduation fields are likely to offer different opportunities. That is to say that for instance the engineering graduates and social science graduates have different opportunities due to the different positions of the corresponding fields in the economy. Various studies documented the influence of perceived relevance of degree field in relation to the labour market, therefore the sense of uncertainty in relation to finding a job is a factor that affects significance of individualised strategies in transition to labour market (Tagoe, 2009; Stiwe and Jungert, 2010; Tholen, 2012; Sinn et al., 2016). For instance, engineering students in Sweden are reported to great emphasis on extracurricular activities such as job placement while the young engineers in Portugal are more reliant on the degree alone. Meanwhile social science graduates are more concerned with employability discourse on the basis of developing skills outside of university. This is especially related with the relative size of graduate bodies and the demand for the graduates in the labour market.

Sinn et al.’s (2016) study in Portugal emphasised women, who are more likely to face labour market exclusion, along with social science graduates are among the youth who



are more imbued with employability discourse and are more keen on increasing their employability by engaging in extracurricular activities.

On the other hand, it is also argued that social background is not essentially related with oppositional perspectives on the perceived need to develop individualised strategies. Moreau and Leathwood (2006), questioned whether being socially disadvantaged led to emergence of such perspectives and found that this is not the case. Their study documented that young people reproduced the policy discourse even when they are individually disadvantaged from the point of view of the higher education system. The systematic inequalities embedded in the higher education system that result in lower chances of finding employment are interpreted by the individual graduates as individual shortcomings.

As such, it becomes essential to first and foremost clarify whether the field of graduation have influence on the way young people perceive and construct their selves within the context of higher education to work transition?

Against this background, the main research question of this study is posed as follows: “Considering the high levels of unemployment in general and skilled labour unemployment in particular, how do young male and female social scientists and engineers construct their self in the process of higher education to labour market transition within the context of insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market?

In order to allow room for contextualisation of youth and trace the structural factors that operate on the individuals, the corollary question is formulated as: “What are the structural, institutional and subjective dynamics (such as degree field, gender, family) that influence the construction of the self in the context of transition to labour market?

The emphasis on construction of self is to ensure that the individual and the context within which they are located is conceptualised as a dynamic process of construction through constant interaction with the social contexts individual is located in. The study will focus on how the self is constructed in the interface between two institutional fields, those are higher education and work. Within the scope of this thesis, the concept

of self is used in order to point at the ways in which an individual locates and understands their position. In this sense, it is something to be constructed through interaction with social institutions. Hence, self is something that is reflected upon and worked upon. By looking into the construction of self, understood in this context, as strategies and responses that are engendered in relation to transition experiences, the present study hopes to make observations on how structural forces such as contemporary economic developments that place importance on knowledge, as reflected in various disciplines, youth unemployment, experiences of insecurity and uncertainty and increased competition due to expansion of education are played out in the individual biographies which are studied through a fieldwork conducted in 2017.

Young people will be conceptualised as situated in terms of social class, gender and family background, and in relation to the debates within youth transitions. Within these debates, we will take up a “middle ground” between those who emphasise agency and those who emphasise structure in managing the transition. Hence, I will ultimately aim to show that the young people perceive the transition and related structural factors from their limited point of view where they are situated at, and act upon accordingly. This is to say that agency is not totally up to the individual to be exercised in an unfettered way. Nor it is to say that structure stands in polar opposition to the individuals, as a factor that constantly undermines the agency. Rather, I want to emphasise their mutual relationship by referring to the way young people perceive the structural factors and how they shape their biographies as reflected in formation of self.

### **1.3.Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of the study follows the recent debates in youth sociology in order to approach its research question. In this sense, the contextual ground is laid out by the debates that follow the neoliberal transformation and its influences on self and on youth in particular. However, in order to do this, a ground work which situates this study in relation to the traditional transition studies in youth sociology is essential because the present study takes up transition as a context, but follows a particular strand in recent discussions that take up the issue of individualisation.

Youth transitions have been problematized since the 1980s and the question emerged in a particular historical and social context. The context in which studies on transition to work emerged is the West, where most of the young people were expected to be employed in manufacturing industries once they left work. For females, the expected pathway was into family formation as opposed to males who joined labour force or became trainees once they left education (Furlong, 2012). The original question of *transition to adulthood* took its main thrust from the concern to plot young people's lives onto a developmental schema based on psychology discipline's understanding resulting in normative questions about transition to adulthood being asked to the detriment of experiences of young people (Gillies, 2000).

The leitmotiv of the discussion was tensions between independence and dependence throughout main so-called thresholds of transitions, namely completion of education, entering to labour market, forming an independent family unit and moving to one's own home (Stokes and Wyn, 2007: 449) which are regarded as markers of progress. As such transition has become a "master metaphor" in youth sociology and policy. While being useful for making social life graspable in theoretical terms, it directed attention exclusively to the markers of progress, making young people's lives between these markers invisible (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014: 905). As a master metaphor, it is pernicious since it fosters orthodoxies concerning normative trajectories against which young people's actions are evaluated (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014).

Preoccupations regarding youth transitions changed with the changing social context after the 1980s. Young people started to stay in education longer than previous generations used to do, therefore entrance to labour market delayed while the youth labour market came to a state of stagnation leading to greater risk of unemployment (France, 2007; Brooks, 2009; Roberts, 2007). As such transition to labour market takes longer to achieve and is less straightforward (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999: 11). Gayle et al. (2009: 18) label this tendency in the literature as the "changing times consensus" in youth sociology where studies accepted that the context has changed, and sought for patterned changes in the lives of the young people. Specifically, for the question of

transition to labour market, the main structural factor became the prevalence of knowledge economy, periods of recession as well as political events (Brooks, 2009). These changes brought about a turn in the way transitions are discussed. A prolific literature heavily influenced by individualisation discussions whose forerunner is Beck started to develop. In this line of analysis, biographical dynamics of young people and notions of risk, uncertainty and complexity came to the foreground (France, 2007).

The changes were pointed out by Wyn and Dwyer (1999) who highlighted that the findings of studies from various countries converge on two common findings, that are, (a) young people are proactive in face of risk and uncertainty of outcomes, and actively work to make ‘pragmatic choices’ in order to preserve their aspirations, and (b) the linear model of transition to adulthood no longer applies for this generation of young people at late the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999: 5). In this context, it is argued that regardless of social class, gender, ethnicity or family, young people have to regard themselves as the sole person in charge of their life courses and actively work towards reducing risks (Evans, 2016).

Various studies, both qualitative and quantitative concur that young people are under a pressure to “construct their future for themselves”, through various strategies such as combining school and work, educational decisions and other activities. For instance, a landmark study in this field conducted in the Netherlands, have documented that young people construct their own biographies through blending various elements that used to be regarded as consecutive fields of activities (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). She argued that despite there are influences of social background and gender, and those who have a more advantageous social background have a significantly reflexive position, the prevailing trend is that young people are more reflexive in their uncertain investments for the future and seek self-fulfilment in what they regard as ‘life projects’. Drawing on Beck, the study introduced the notion of “choice biographies” as opposed to “normal biographies” which sparked controversy and debate in the sociology of youth (Woodman, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Threadgold, 2011). Meanwhile, other longitudinal studies continued to highlight that

[t]he young people do not experience their pathways pre-set or linear. Rather they report them as complex and interconnected, as involving false starts and redefined possibilities, as requiring negotiation and redefinitions.

(Looker and Dwyer, 1998: 17 cited in Wyn and Dwyer, 1999: 9)

If transitions require greater deliberation, than does that mean that transitions have become more complex and less ‘traditional’? Taking its main points of debate from arguments of Beck and Giddens, this has been the main question of youth studies recently (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). This led to a series of studies where sociologists of youth have questioned whether transitions have become “individualised”, whether biographies have become “choice biographies” rather than normal biographies and whether transitions into adulthood have become de-synchronised (Buchmann, and Kriesi, 2011). With the inclusion of these conceptual changes, and subsequent research agendas, there emerged a perceived over-emphasis on individualisation and individual in the literature, which resulted in more persistent search for stable patterns and relevance of so-called ‘traditional influences’ such as class and gender (Woodman, 2009; Furlong, Woodman, Wyn, 2011). This line of thought tended to assume that individualisation means everyone invents their lives anew from the scratch.

For instance, Gayle et al. (2009), asked whether the impact of “traditional” influences on transitions have diminished. They identified a pattern of social reproduction through comparing the transition to work outcomes over time in the UK. They argued that social class, gender and ethnicity still influence transitions. Nilsen and Brannen (2013; 2002) discussed the same issue in the context of perception of future through a cross-cultural comparative study. They concluded that: “...many young people continued to think about their lives in the future in ways that were set within their current local opportunity structures and the resources available to them. Even though they may not refer to them, social background, gender and educational qualifications permeate perceptions of possible futures” (Brannen and Nilsen, 2013: 97).

There are also rather middle-ground voices in the discussion such as Magda Nico (2014). She studies European Social Survey data regarding the youth transition

indicators for the prevalence of de-standardisation in biographical transitions. She concludes that there are

[...] different layers, variations and intensities of this phenomenon according to time and geographical and social coordinates: in its turn, this weakens the very idea of de-standardisation as one more manifestation of a coherent and completely different set/round of biographies, which the individualisation thesis tends to patronise.

(Nico, 2014: 179)

Nevertheless, she notes that while the patterns of transitions may not be as changing as the individualisation thesis would have it, the meanings attached to transitions need not be so stable. Similarly, Steve Roberts, who is a proponent of transition paradigm also recognises the fact that no generation's transition experience resembles another's, therefore each generation's transition experience is a challenge in its own right (Roberts, 2007: 266).

As exemplified, most of the studies in transition tradition sought to debunk individualisation thesis. However, while doing this, they do not engage with the question how young people have actually experienced transitions themselves and the values and discourses they produce and reproduce in relation to the labour market and therefore how they construct their self. For this reason, Beck's conceptualization of individualization and the associated debates revolving around structure and agency as well as self are central to the theoretical framework of this study. More recent theoretical developments in the youth literature that engage with the notions of political economy of youth, as proposed by Coté and concept of generation as proposed by Mannheim, but developed recently by Bessant et al. (2017) are also leading the thinking on young people's transitions in this study.

The concepts were taken up as to reconstruct the structural terrain on which young people stand and on which they see the world. In this sense, the notion of generation and generation units, as a category of individuals who react to similar conditions of existence, as age-based categories that functions as a social location (Mannheim, 1952) was particularly useful. Political economy of youth which was proposed by Coté and advanced by Bessant et al. helped me to position youth as a category in a particular

economic position which is in turn linked to the notion of livelihood as pinpointed by Beck in explicating individualization. By this way, the concepts of generation helped me to locate an age-based group of young people who have no essentially a consciousness for themselves on a ground based on similar objective structural conditions which they share collectively. The research question also necessitated me to engage with the subjective understandings of young people. Beck's conceptualization of individualization as a particular social structural phenomenon as well as a transformation of self as manifested in the logic of action was useful. Beck's discussion of individualization was integrated into the study in order to understand the mentality and logic that the young people produce in transition to labour market. By using these two perspectives together I aimed to show how collective experiences which are not experienced essentially on the basis of a community-like group could be influencing individuals similarly, and how these similarity does not essentially lead to collectively shared responses. That is the common experiences in transition to labour market from higher education leading to similar outcomes in terms of individualisation, despite subtle differences that may be noted in terms of gender and degree field. In this way, I attempted to bring a theoretical dimension into a field which is for the most part heavily empirically-laden. The theoretical insight helped me to make observations on how structural contradictions are played out on the level of individual subjects within a particular study field designated for the current work.

Young people who are 'transitioning' to labour market under conditions of fragmentation, insecurity and uncertainty are among the forerunners of a new economic, political and social terrain, hence adulthood may be in need of a new definition itself rather than being taken as a stable endpoint. For these reasons, this study uses the notion of "transition" as a metaphor in a way that it is divorced from normative assumptions about a successful transition to adulthood. This position is similar to Furlong, Woodman and Wyn's (2011) call for a convergence between two distinct research paradigms in the sociology of youth - a dialogue between transition studies which is deemed structure-oriented and agency-oriented cultural paradigms. They argued that while structural patterns may be persistent, the processes that give

rise to them may be changing, as well as the way young people perceive and give meaning to their experiences, which are not marginal to the persistence of these patterns. They propose the concept of social generation in order to think about young people's experiences in such a way that both material conditions and subjectivities can be considered simultaneously and without opposition to each other.

As this study is concerned with how young people negotiate the labour market and their position in regard to labour market in a particular life stage it is logically closer to understanding the experience of youth from a generational perspective in which individualisation and reflexivity are utilised as the concepts which frame the experience and perception of young people within material conditions that are constituted by increasing insecurity, uncertainty and a demographic pressure caused by current demographic composition of young people in Turkey that puts pressure on the "supply side".

#### **1.4.Method and research design**

In order to establish that young people are historically situated within social structures, the theoretical discussions were supplemented with a review of the literature. The literature review functions as a background as well as a setting within which fieldwork operated. The general patterns regarding education and work in Turkey, to the extent that it is related with higher education, is presented in the following chapter of this study.

Extant studies operationalise transitions based on "outcome" markers. However, focus on outcomes as 'objective' data misses the experience of young people as a process. Against this position, Stokes and Wyn (2007), have asserted that a conceptualisation based solely on the outcomes is misleading, and instead, transition should be on the focus as a process of identity development. This is so, especially because young people increasingly regard work, not as an endpoint in itself but as a site of learning. Therefore, transition is a process which involves "active investment" in order to "produce identities" (Stokes & Wyn, 2007: 495). Hence, their experiences are valuable if we are questioning how individual biographies and historical periods could



be thought together within the context of a ‘transition’, and formation of self therein. For this reason, this study adopted a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews.

Interviewees were selected among university graduates. Purposive selection was made in order to provide an insight into a segment of young people whose experiences may be comparable with those young people who are about to graduate from the vast majority of universities which are recently being established. University graduates are also a critical case because they represent the idealized path of transition to labour market in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The sample was aimed to be a snowball sample, however, it turned out that all of the respondents but one woman and one man despite having promised to help with more participants, did not turn out with further contacts. Therefore, the sample was chosen upon accessibility. There are ten graduates from social sciences and administrative sciences departments and seven graduates from the engineering fields. The choice was purposeful as to allow for variation in terms of both the skills and qualifications acquired through education and the perceived employability in the labour market through the skills and qualifications acquired. For the selection of respondents from engineering fields, the Chamber of Mechanical Engineers was contacted, the individuals were selected from their member database based on the criteria I provided as being graduate from Gazi University’s engineering departments in the last two to five years.

**Table 1:** Summary of interviewee profiles

Name	Age	Sex	Field of Study	Graduation	Employment after graduation	At the time of the interview
Altan	25	M	E	2016	Directly employed in an engineering-related field	Continues to work in his first job
Ayhan	29	M	E	2013	Brief unemployment due to health problems. Works at an engineering company.	Continues to work in his first job
Ayşe	27	F	SS	2014	Unemployed for 4 years. Worked as shop assistant.	Taking KPSS for the last three years
Cemal	28	M	SS	2012	Directly employed by one his lecturer's KPSS preparation course	Works as a teacher at the KPSS course, meanwhile continues his master's studies
Deniz	26	M	SS	2012	KPSS study for 2 years	Working as a civil servant for two years
Derya	26	F	SS	2014	Unemployed for 2 years	Work at the company where her deceased father worked as HR manager
Devlet	25	M	SS	2015	Studied for the KPSS for two years	Seeks to be employed through KPSS.
Engin	25	M	E	2016	Started to work at an engineering-related company quit job after 1.5 years of job experience	Dreams to become a chef
Filiz	25	F	SS	2015	Unemployed for 2 years	Study for the KPSS, Master's degree
Gökhan	28	M	E	2015	Unemployed for 1 year. Works at the Chamber of Engineers	Continues to work in his first job
Hazal	30	F	E	2013	Never formally employed. Received scholarship from the project she works at. Applied for other jobs but preferred to work in the academic field.	Continues masters degree education on TÜBİTAK scholarship.
Merve	27	F	SS	2013	Started work as lower-tier civil servant..Changed her position for a higher-tier job through KPSS	Cotinues to work in the second position she was hired at
Mehtap	27	F	E	2013	Switched jobs three times. All were low tier engineering jobs. Drop work for pregnancy	Expecting baby. Waits for her husband to be appointed in Ankara.
Özge	27	F	SS	2013	Directly started to work immediately at a big company specialised in accounting	Continues to work in teh same workplace
Selim	29	M	SS	2012	7 months in advertising sector. 5 months at a bookshop. 4 months as waiter	Looking for job, willing to accept unskilled work
Sena	25	F	SS	2015	Has been focusing on the KPSS	Continues work for the KPSS
Zafer	25	M	E	2014	Started to work at an engineering-related company.	Continues to work in his first job

The departments are among the three largest graduate bodies in the labour market according to TURKSTAT. TURKSTAT has been using UNESCO's educational field classification criteria, namely ISCED-F 2013 in its annual employment statistics. Though the classification criteria tend to conflate different levels of education, due to the absence of more specific indicators, the available official statistics allowed the greatest usefulness. When the statistics for the last three years, for which educational categorisation is available, are examined, it becomes clear that three fields namely "Engineering and Engineering Trades", "Social and Behavioural Sciences" and "Business and Administration" are the largest groups in the labour market. The data were checked against the Higher Education Council's official graduate statistics and it became certain that these three groups together comprise a significant share of the total body of graduates. Therefore, for a study that questions the transition process of young people to the labour market, it was considered appropriate to choose graduates exemplifying these three categories.

After determining the three broad educational fields, UNESCO's manual for ISCED-F 2013 (2011) was consulted in order to determine the specific fields included in the broad occupational classifications. As a result, mechanical engineering and chemical engineering were chosen for representing the "Engineering" field. The choice is for convenience for mechanical engineering is a department that is notorious for under-representation of female students, whereas chemical engineering department has higher numbers of female students which would enable us to have a more balanced sample in terms of gender. Department of management was chosen to represent the "Business and Administration" field and finally, economics was chosen as the department that represents "Social Sciences" broadly. Education, which is among the top three was omitted due to the highly structured education-to-work transition that is institutionalised within the education department's curricula itself.

**Table 2:** Employment and unemployment rates according to field graduated (TURKSTAT)

	Higher Education Total		Social and Behavioural Sciences		Engineering		Business and Administration	
	Unemployment	employment	unemployment	employment	unemployment	employment	unemployment	employment
<b>2014</b>	10.6%	70.7%	11.2%	69.6%	8.8%	79.7%	13.6%	68.6%
<b>2015</b>	11.0%	71.0%	11.7%	69.3%	8.8%	79.9%	13.3%	70.1%
<b>2016</b>	12.0%	70.1%	13.5%	65.4%	9.4%	79.4%	13.8%	69.5%

Another issue that needs to be settled was the choice of frame for the sample. In choosing the higher education from which the graduates will be interviewed, I decided to focus on an institution which is more comparable to the general trends in the higher education scene in Turkey. This means comparability in terms of number of students as well as medium of education and reputation. Gazi University, which is a public institution was chosen for this study. The medium of education in Gazi University is Turkish, therefore the graduates do not have a language skills premium attached to the graduates. This university is also one of the oldest universities in Turkey and ranks among the top ten universities in terms of numbers of graduates each year with its about 11.000 graduates annually (YÖK Database). Furthermore, for all the departments selected for the sample, it is seen that the candidate intake is from the first 15%, indicating that this university is still one of the most preferred ones among the public institutions. Given the recent growth trends in higher education system in Turkey, the Gazi University graduates, as young people who have graduated from a reputable and established university could provide as a point through which inferences could be made with regard to the newly established universities which are argued to

be in a more disadvantageous position in terms of physical facilities as well as staff (Anık and Özkan, 2016).

The individuals selected for the study are one to five years into their graduation. This time interval is chosen for convenience and aims to allow sufficient time for the young people after higher education in order to experiment and fashion themselves routes in the labour market. As Furlong and Cartmel (2009: 91) indicate, most studies investigate how well the graduates are doing only months after graduation and this approach is most likely to yield “pessimistic results”. However, I did not limit my group of interviewees with a criterion of being employed at the moment of interview, in order to allow room for those without linear lines of transition into labour market since there may be back and forward movements, which also complicate the transition process and needs consideration. Furthermore, my concern is not limited to understanding how “well young people fare into work”, as if it was an educational policy research. But I was interested in how young people construct their selves.

Furthermore, the choice of university graduates enables us to glimpse into the experiences of a segment of young people whose experiences are normalised as being more advantageous in terms of labour market position. As Steven Roberts (2015) argues, there is a tendency among studies focusing on youth to examine the experiences of spectacularly successful or the “dangerous”. For instance, a positive employment status is regarded as an indicator of a successful transition to adulthood, and the transition process is little studied in favour of a predominant focus on “outcomes” (Stokes and Wyn, 2007).

For this reason, since this study aims to examine the ‘process’ of transition to work from the point of view of young people, I interviewed young people who were in employment at the point of study as well as those who were seeking employment either for the first time or after quitting a job. It turned out that in terms of experiences regarding the “process” and their expectations about the “outcomes” showed similarities. In other words, there was no sound methodological reason to assume that those who are employed were successful in transition to labour market and done with

individual identity work on the one hand and to assume that those who are unemployed have no meaningful insights regarding transition to labour market in 2010s Turkey. Furthermore, it turned out that even among those relatively more advantageous engineers, there were perceived problems, and indeed the navigation of pathways into adulthood brought about similar outlooks and frames through which labour market, education and the individuals are located in relation to each other. Hence, transition to labour market is not only a technical policy matter but also an identity process as Stokes and Wyn (2007) argues.

The data collection method chosen for the study is the in-depth interview technique and the data collected is retrospective life histories pertinent to university and labour market experience as aspects of the university to work transition. The interviews aimed not only to capture experience but also perceptions and strategies of young people as they make their way into the ranks of the labour force. The interviews were recorded upon permission of the respondents and were transcribed by myself right after they were completed. I also took notes as I interviewed young people however, I tried to keep it as subtle as possible in order to enable young people to speak in a relaxed-conversation-like manner. Interviews lasted about fifty minutes to sixty-five minutes on average and took place in public places which were chosen according to suitability to the respondents. The places were mostly large-chain coffee-shops, while one interview took place at a respondent's house and another took place in a respondent's workplace.

In analysing the data, I highlighted the main themes that were transformed into the analysis chapters and sub-headings in the analysis chapter of this study. Upon identifying key themes in each interview, I, later on, grouped relevant quotes in an Excel sheet. This enabled me to identify patterns in the interviews as expressions pertaining to the similar themes were grouped together. Later on, I grouped smaller themes together in order to end up with perceptions and experiences with regard to three fields in each of which a different dimension of thinking about the self is located.

These fields are education, work and as a cross-cutting thematic field, thinking about the future in an abstract sense.

### **1.5.Youth studying youth**

Methodologically speaking, the position of the researcher has a significant bearing on the way the research questions are asked, they are formulated into field questions, the interactions in the field and the way the data are interpreted. Hence, the point of view on the young people studied matters in all stages of the research. One issue raised with the adult perspectives is the assumption that adults carry about the young people, that they are in a transitional phase and therefore less powerful in comparison to adult (Biklin, 2007). The ‘adult’ researcher, assuming that they have themselves been young themselves, holds a position as though they ‘know’ the experiences of the young generation they are studying (Dwyer& Wyn, 2004: 172).

This issue is underpinned by the social context within which the youth were experienced by the researchers themselves. Dwyer & Wyn (2004: 172) note that ‘previous generations whose lives had developed along the ‘normal’ lines of the established model are reading their own experience of youth into a generation that is facing the transition to adulthood in very different circumstances and on very different terms’. As a result, there is a tendency for the adult perspective to be ‘solidified’ upon the narratives and experiences of young people (Biklin, 2007).

If we were to think about a different subject where age-based hierarchies were to be the case, Weber’s position on empathic understanding where the researcher leaves the habits of thought that are they are accustomed to would have been helpful: “The means employed by the method of “understanding explanation” are not *normative* correctness, but rather, on the one hand, the conventional habits of the investigator and teacher in thinking in a particular way, and on the other, as the situation requires, his capacity to “feel himself” empathically into a mode of thought which deviates from his own and which is normatively “false” according to his own habits of thought.” (Weber, 1949: 41). In order to be able to understand the meanings of the respondent, the researcher has to put their own views on hold, according to this perspective.

However, in my situation, this would be rather difficult if not unhelpful for I was in a more or less similar social position with the interviewees.

As a researcher who was turning twenty-five as this thesis study started to proceed and who considers oneself as part of the group called 'youth', I am hoping that I can have a particularly situated insight into how the subjects of this study make sense of the world. I am at the beginning of a 'career', and still at the point of contemplating how to pursue my desired ends. I am located in a rather shifting economic, social and political ground, all of which complicates my plans and understandings regarding the future. I am experiencing, like many of my peers a profound sense of uncertainty myself. This study will look into these feelings and thoughts in a particular life course transition of transition into labour market. Through this exploration, I am intending to shed light on the mentality that is constituted and constituting the young people as workers in the labour market.

However, being a young person asking questions about the processes of which I myself was a part was not unproblematic. There were personal difficulties I experienced as a young person as well as problems that emerged to be stemming from my position as a researcher. Both of these needs coverage in detail for they turned out to be limitations as well as strengths.

My field experience and interactions with the interviewees with whom I had no acquaintance beforehand was striking for one reason. My concerns about future, about my present location in the face of work, my perception of uncertainty and insecurity were indeed not isolated experiences but were experienced in various degrees and intensities by young people from various backgrounds. Therefore, grappling with their experiences, their narratives of frustration and handling their narratives of remorse turned out to be emotionally tiring and mentally over-stimulating especially in the analysis part of this study. For it is one thing to talk about, for instance, individualisation as a structural process which can be diagnosed through real individual experiences, and it is another thing to pinpoint these in narratives of actual lived experience and internal contradictions. Furthermore, contradictions are also



significant for as Sennett explains, while spending hours listening to people, the interviewer needs to be alert to any contradiction, where and when it emerges and what it may point out to the interviewee (Sennett, 2006). In my case, the contradictions were reminders of the need pay respect to the field itself, and a caution as to the way the concepts which we use to imagine the reality as researchers come to interact with the field through the analysis the researcher conducts.

At times it was difficult to draw the line between what I thought was being told to me and what is being plainly put into words. The difference lies in what I read into the narratives as a researcher and what is emerged through the interpretive analysis of interviews. This was indeed a struggle with the position of the researcher as put by Weber (1949) who starts from questions that are subjectively relevant for oneself. While it is essential to know why I am asking the questions I am asking, it is also equally essential to ensure that my position does not distort the research process. Therefore, I had to constantly remind myself of my position as a researcher in interpreting the data collected. Indeed, the tables I constructed in order to map out and group the themes and issues emerging in the interviews was of great help in doing this despite it risked oversimplifying the complexity of lived realities. Nevertheless, interpretation is a process of selective reading of a given material for I have leading questions and concepts that give the study a structure.

Another difficulty I experienced during the field was the position of an outsider I was at points placed. For the unemployed young people especially I was in a position to be aspired to. Some respondents were rather too hasty to forget that I myself was working on a contract-based fixed-term employment scheme, whose continuity was tied to my educational status. Some respondents compared themselves with me, pointing out that I was in a better situation. The assumption that I was in a successful position at times worked as a wall to be broken down, at times me talking about my own situation in order to avoid the conception that I may be judging the respondents due to any perceived lack of qualification or unemployment. This was a struggle given that I was

hoping to be able to establish a basis of equal communication and dialogue albeit in a subtly structured format.

Another problem was when I was talking with the male respondents, they were more tending to avoid the difficulties or negative emotions in their narratives as if they had a pre-drafted life plan which they followed. They tended to go vague about their negative experiences and had to be probed. However, this is also significant for the gender dynamic in this study for the attitude of male and female respondents indicate that individualisation is manifested differently by gender and male and female young people perceive and experience uncertainty and insecurity differently.

### **1.6.Overview of the study**

The remainder of this thesis is divided into three main body sections. In the second chapter, the reader can find a literature review which contextualises the debates along with theoretical framework that will be utilised in the study. This section is a combination of depiction of structural factors with the assistance of political economy of youth and the concept of generation in order to argue that the social category of youth and the people pertaining to it are historically situated under specific conditions that frame their transition experiences. The chapter commences with individualisation discussions coming from Ulrich Beck and aims to provide analytical tools for making meaning out of subjective experiences of young people.

Chapter three reflect the spirit in political economy of youth discussions and individualisation together as to depict how young people are understood in the 2010s Turkey in terms of transition experiences to work and how young people regard themselves in these conditions. In other words, this chapter aims to present a picture of how young people see the world around themselves within the context of transition to work. The chapter avoids repeating the details regarding structural transformations in Turkey, as they are already presented along with the structural transformations in education and in work at the beginning of the theoretical framework chapter.

Chapter four closely follows the responses of young people themselves to the world as they perceive it and traces the strands out of which the self is woven in transition to work. The chapter is particularly sensitive to how young people locate themselves in structural conditions and how they go about responding to the changes they are experiencing. The chapter ends with development of four ideal typical models that summarise the way young people work on their selves and construct their selves in the process of transition to labour market.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study seeks to understand formation of self of youth in a particular life course setting in a particular context of Turkey. However, it must be born in mind that self is not constructed in a vacuum and the social, cultural and economic context has much bearing on how the self is constructed. Locating the individual in a social vacuum without emphasis on historical conditions of its existence and to place the magnifier on the “inner” operations of the individual could distort the findings to be presented as well as the study at large. In methodological terms, this is the equivalent of constituting the analytical categories as real ontological things. In order to avoid falling into the trap of individualistic thinking, then, I would like to emphasise the context within which young people experience and respond to transition processes. For this ends, this section will delve into a theory of young people and their location in the contemporary transformations through drawing on discussions on of political economy of youth, which utilize the notion of generation as a historicized category. The theoretical discussion which is utilised to contextualise young people, then is followed by a theoretical discussion on the notion of individualization in order to link the theoretical perspectives outlined above with the unit of analysis of this study, that is individual experience. Therefore, this study needs a combination of a theory of economic changes and how they are related to mentalities, a theory of young people’s location within the contemporary global economy and a theory of social action in cooperation. This perspective will be constructed in this theoretical section. However, before turning to these issues, I will provide an overview of the structural changes that underpin the context within which the aforementioned theoretical discussions emerged.

## **2.1. Changing work and changing education**

Transition to work takes place under specific conditions, which needs to be addressed in order to contextualise young people's experiences. In this section, changes in two main intuitional fields, namely education and work, in the world and in Turkey will be presented.

### **2.1.1. Changing work and education in the last decades**

The conditions that frame transitions to labour market today were culminated in the 1970s and 1980s as an outcome of a policy-framework that created profound changes in the way not only economy is organised but also in the social organisation of life. While this study is not going to approach transition processes as a matter of ideological dissemination, in order to put the young people's experiences into perspective a brief historical outline is in order. This takes the issue back to the 1973 economic crisis which marks a turning point for the global economy, until which post-war economy which was based on mass production and mass consumption remained intact (Harvey, 2014: 163). The Fordist regime has not only been a regime of production of standard goods but it has been a way of life at large which was upheld by national governments' interventions towards protection of workers against insecurities of the markets (Harvey, 2014: 158). Therefore, more stable employment patterns were expected for the large part of the working population, along with stable and predictable life courses in the post-war European nations.

However, with the shattering of this regime, causing profound implications in the economy, which in turn lead to profound changes in the production system and the way people engaged in the practice of work. Changes at work came about especially due to criticisms as to the declining rates of profitability in manufacture were unleashed (Bradley, et al., 2000: 34). The Keynesian policies at that time were especially criticised for being unfavourable for sustaining economic growth as they were creating rigidities which hindered accumulation (Harvey, 2014: 192; Gorz, 2006: 46). Thus, growth came to be tied to the condition of flexibility in labour and the adoption of "rolling contracts" in replacement of security (Bauman, 2005: 41). Thus,

a post-Fordist regime which is characterised by flexible accumulation entailing flexibility in labour processes, labour markets, products and consumption patterns were established.

The culmination of the new economic regime is underpinned by the emergence of new production sectors, new financial services, the emergence of new markets and increased pace of commercial, technological, organisational innovations (Harvey, 2014: 170). While traditional economic sectors contracted and service sector ascended, the globalised economy also witnessed corporate mergers, huge bankruptcies and economic crises, adding the scene more sense of insecurity and spectre of change as an immanent characteristic of the new economy of insecurities. The employers, in conditions of unemployment, labour market fluctuations and weakening of syndicates pushed for a radical restructuring of the labour market which involved more flexible work regimes and contracts in order to cut down on labour costs (Harvey, 2014:171). The outcomes of which shapes contemporary world of work in which youth transitions take place.

The overall outcome of these changes in the sphere of work is flexible employment and flexible contracts which are not subject to guarantees provided by the Fordist regime for the laws and regulations are increasingly permissive of such work and employment arrangements (Frade & Darmon, 2005). By implication, the young people today, and young people in Turkey which has experienced these processes differently now engage in an economy which is underpinned by the principles emerged in this era. On the other hand, back then, the governments pursued policies to “re-educate the workforce into a new mindset, where the emphasis is on flexibility, individualism and entrepreneurialism, rather than collectivism and rigidity” (Bradley et al, 2000:58). As a result, a situation came about which is described by Beck as “never before have working people, irrespective of their talents and educational achievement, been as dependent and vulnerable as they are today, working in individualised situations without countervailing collective power, and within flexible network whose meaning and rules are impossible for most of them to fathom” (2000: 86). Since the new

production sectors increasingly lean on co-operation between workers as a way of increasing efficiency, a new workforce is envisaged. Thus the workers have to have different skills; they need to be adaptable instead of highly specialised, and they need to have more “soft” skills such as teamwork which is usually deceiving in the sense that it serves to mask intense competition between individual workers during the performing of a task. Thus, the work ethic is oriented towards individual achievement and individual development of skills (Sennett, 1998).

In the new work ethic, workers are constituted by individuals imagining themselves as an enterprise (Kelly, 2013). In turn, self has to be cultivated as an enterprise as to be put into work in the workplace. Kelly’s play on words is worth noting here. He is not talking about managing self as ‘if it was’ an enterprise but he talks about ‘self as an enterprise’, that is almost an extension of the economy. In other words, there is no talk of a self that is distinct and separate from the prevailing “context”. According to Kelly, this ethics of enterprise “provides frameworks for coming to know and understand how one should act, behave and think in relation to specific ends, and in particular, limited, fields of possibilities” (Kelly, 2013: 6). Kelly draws on the Foucauldian notion of ‘care of the self’. He argues that to care for the self is to equip oneself with particular truths that give the individual a set of rules and prescriptions as to regulate themselves (2013: 42).

In this context, self-realization was made an institutional demand. For instance, post-Fordist production regimes draw on the idea that individual workers contribute to work through their own autonomous decisions and initiatives. This is a way through which work absorbs and utilises the demand that individuals engage in self-realisation at work. As an outcome in the work, individuals have to present themselves in increasingly more “flexible” ways as to be able to expect success (Honneth, 2004: 472). To illustrate, even mundane aspects of work, such as career websites become signals of this new min set. Handley (2017), who studied career websites argues that, the neoliberal mindset is enshrined in employers’ expectations from young people. She argues that career websites function as a mechanism of anticipatory socialisation,

through reminding to-be graduates and graduates of the expectations of the employers. She asserts that the employers signal out the terms through which young people can constitute themselves as ‘employable graduates’. According to Handley, the employers do not demand particular skills but rather they demand particular kinds of individuals who are “passionate, bold, hard-working, committed, flexible and malleable” (Handley, 2017: 252).

More than thirty years have passed since the structural changes have started to come into play, and this has created various generations of young people trying to grapple with the labour market under ever-changing conditions. While it may be true that the experiences have formal resemblance in the sense that young people find employment, and transition to labour market takes place, the conditions under which it occurs has been changing. As it has been outlined, the mentality that regulates the world of work has been changing. Mannheim once argued that (1952: 300) “[t]he up-to-datedness of youth consists in their being closer to the ‘present’ problems, and in the fact that they are dramatically aware of a process of de-stabilisation and take sides in it.” For this reason, young people today who experience a different world of work, which is rapidly changing not only in the world but also in Turkey stand as a ripe field for understanding the current changes, and how young people ‘take sides in’ the on-going changes.

In connection with changes in the economy, there have been changes in education systems and higher education in particular. Two major developments took place. The first is that breaking down of the prevailing post-war arrangements that were expected to continue to sustain young people in terms of employment opportunities. The assumption was broken down with problems of youth unemployment and underemployment. In response to this, governments called for young people to continue pursuing education as to increase their chances of finding employment in the labour market (Bessant, 2018). Dwyer and Wyn (2001) call this attitude in policies ‘utilitarian hope’. That is the expectation that education in the long run will provide a stable career. Secondly, as a result of this, higher education gained a new meaning and relevance in for the current generation of young people not only in Turkey but in the



world. University education, which was once an experience of an elite has become a mass experience. With the advent of mass higher education, transition from higher education to work became a significant issue for the policymakers as well as social scientists (Cuzzocrea, 2015). That is becoming a sorting mechanism through gearing education policies towards business in line with the recommendations of transnational organisations such as the OECD (2001: 191).

Furthermore, studies found that, for the higher education graduates, there are problems such as job instability, underemployment, “inappropriateness” of training in relation to the job, disparity of integration conditions according to the field of studies”. This is to say that not everyone fares equally smoothly into the labour market. Males and applied sciences graduates were found to be more integrated into the labour market, while females, education, human sciences and arts and letters graduates were among the ones who were least likely to be integrated to the labour market two years after graduation (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001: 181).

All of these hold despite the expectation that higher education is related with better outcomes for the individuals. A study by Brown et al. (2011) inquire into this point and question why in a knowledge-driven economy, university graduates are not faring better. They engage with the question whether an economy that is presumably knowledge-driven creates conditions that demand employees with higher education. In other words, they question whether increasing skills in terms of education credentials is valid in modern economy. From a global perspective, they compare the demand for higher education in the West and in developing economies and argue that “there is a secret war for positional advantage as people are forced to depend on a job market unable to cope with the rising tide of individual, social and political expectations” (Brown et al., 2011: 11). While individuals are placed in a field of competition from the very beginning, the authors, based on their interviews with 200 executives, managers and policymakers from different countries, conclude that higher education does not necessarily equip employee with what the labour market is seeking. Instead, the current situation where the young people pursue higher credentials without

definitive outcomes, produces cheap labour through credential inflation (Collins, 2011).

The concept of credential inflation is useful in order to locate the variables in the broader political economic landscape of transition to labour market. According to Collins (2011: 228), higher education has expanded as the value of education in labour market increased. However, “as the number of persons with academic degrees has gone up, the occupational level for which they have provided qualifications has declined.” (Collins, 2011: 228). Collins defines credential inflation as a process, and points out that it is a self-driven one that “feeds on itself” where the higher the demand for a given level of credential is, the less value it carries in terms of labour market as an occupational credential.

According to Brown et al, who dwell on a similar theme as Collins, the current situation is promoted by the governments, who promoted expansion of higher education, to create conditions for the young people to make themselves marketable at individual costs such as taking loans (Brown et al., 2011: 5). Hence, the higher education expansion policies, and the anticipation of “innovative age of high-skill, high-wage work” has promoted the belief that higher education will deliver high standards of life for the employee, yet, the structural realities do not match the cultural expectations. It is for this reason that Collins also includes ideology as a dimension of credential inflation. The ideology of education’s value for high-tech and the ideology of education is a democratic opportunity serves as a protective coating to the drive on education’s value (Collins, 2011: 234).

### **2.1.2. Transformation work in Turkey**

Young people’s transition to work takes place in a particular context, that is the Turkish labour market. Then what I need at this point is a brief description of what labour market looks like in 2010s Turkey. For this reason, I will point out some basic

**Table 3:** Employment indicators by educational attainment and sex in Turkey (TURKSTAT)

Educational attainment	Labour force participation rate						Employment rate						Unemployment rate					
	Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Illiterate	18,7	18,9	31,9	32,2	15,9	16,1	17,9	18,0	29,5	29,2	15,5	15,7	3,9	4,6	7,4	9,1	2,4	2,8
Less than high school	49,0	48,9	69,3	69,2	28,1	28,1	44,7	44,5	63,3	63,1	25,5	25,3	8,8	9,1	8,7	8,8	9,1	9,8
High school	54,4	55,7	71,8	71,6	32,9	36,5	47,5	48,4	64,5	64,4	26,4	29,1	12,8	13,1	10,3	10,0	19,6	20,3
Vocational high school	66,9	67,2	83,4	82,2	41,4	42,8	60,6	59,4	77,5	74,9	34,2	34,3	9,5	11,6	7,0	8,9	17,4	19,8
Higher education	80,0	80,4	86,9	86,8	71,3	72,7	71,9	71,1	79,7	79,8	62,2	60,6	10,1	11,5	8,3	8,0	12,9	16,6
Total	52,5	53,0	72,5	72,6	32,9	33,9	47,5	47,7	66,3	66,2	29,2	29,5	9,4	10,2	8,6	8,8	11,2	13,0

employment indicators in selected fields and refer to a number of studies that illustrate the recent trends in Turkey.

The recent statistics indicate that higher education graduates are the largest segment of population that participated in the labour market. It is also clear that they are more likely to be employed. However, their unemployment rate is significantly close to vocational higher education graduates. Another point is that there is a disparity between unemployment rates of women and men. Women are more likely to be unemployed in all levels of education than men. A closer look into field-specific unemployment rates is more telling in terms of a broader picture of labour market trends in Turkey.

**Table 4:** Unemployment rates in business and administration, social sciences and engineering fields in Turkey (in percentage) (TURKSTAT)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Business and administration</b>	16,1	15,1	14,1	14	13,5	13,6	13,3	13,8
<b>Social sciences</b>	11,8	10	10	9,3	10	11,2	11,6	13,5
<b>Engineering</b>	11,9	10,5	9,7	8,6	8,4	8,8	8,8	9,4

Unemployment rates by degree fields have been provided by TURKSTAT starting from the year 2009. Prior to this year, there is no field-specific unemployment or employment statistics. In passing, it is worth noting that the recent interest in field-specific data seems to reflect an interest in devising of higher education towards particular outcomes on the part of the state in recent years. It is seen that, in each year for which data is available, the social science fields face greater rates of unemployment in comparison to engineering departments. This may be related to higher number of graduates in social sciences departments and the fact that graduates of such fields are usually regarded as interchangeable elements of labour force. The statistics also reflect a fluctuating trend. The rates are highest in the year 2009, right after 2008 global economic crisis. After that, the rates slightly fall only to rise in 2016. Therefore, it is safe to say that, in any given moment, there is a structural pattern of unemployment these graduate fields, which are also among the top three degree fields selected for this study. Yet, it must be noted that unemployment rates are not a sufficient indicator for understanding the young people for in Turkey where entering paid employment is a problem in itself, working youth are usually the working poor who are dependent on their family despite employment situation (Çelik, 2013: 34). Therefore, we may assume that there are young people who are under-employed or employed in poor conditions, which further increases the picture of insecurity.

One significant trend in the labour market in Turkey is the increasing concentration in ‘white collar’ jobs such as professionals, semi-professionals, service workers, office

workers (Lordoğlu and Koçak, 2015: 104). By implication, this development has increased the expectation that there is a link between higher education and better jobs, which is a common sense expectation that was reported as early as in 1998 report on Turkish Youth by Konrad Adenauer Foundation (33-35). This is partly explained with the fact that Turkey has been following a growth model that does not create employment, does not significantly address unemployment and instead of alleviation of unemployment, targets relocation of unemployment (Lordoğlu and Koçak, 2015). Starting with 2002, governments in Turkey have endorsed flexibilisation of the labour market as a key policy target. Flexibilisation was included in the programme of the 60<sup>th</sup> government in 2002 and has been enshrined in National Employment Strategy which was accepted in 2014 (Lordoğlu and Koçak, 2015: 113). According to the strategy document drafted in 2012, Turkey suffers from rigidity in labour market that results in unemployment and the problem can be tackled by means of flexibilisation. As such, flexibilisation operates as a dogma in policy making (Man: 2013). The strategy document, which sets the goals and mentality for the period of 2012-2023 is a significant documental example of the way government perceived and framed the prevailing economic conditions in line with the on-going neoliberal trends.

Another condition that needs to be highlighted is insecurity in the labour market. In this context, insecurity could be regarded as an overarching term that covers uncertainty in terms of duration of employment, control at the workplace, wages, and redundancies (Lordoğlu and Koçak, 2015: 118). Insecurity is an integral element of the institutionalised setting of the labour market (Bora and Erdoğan, 2011), and it threatens the youth more than the other sections of society as it is the young people who are more likely to engage in non-standard forms of work as to support themselves in various means such as supporting oneself throughout education (Temiz, 2004).

The cultural constitution of work is also worth considering because with the transforming employment patterns and economic conditions, there was changes in the subjective experience of work cultures too (Sennett, 2006). Çoban's (2016) analysis of job adverts targeting first-time job-seekers is also informative. She argues that most

of the job adverts seek prior job experience despite being targeted to newly-graduated young people. Furthermore, there is a demand for technical skills which are neither related to university education nor are obtainable without job experience. There is also uncertain job definitions and explicit expectations from applicants to be prepared to adapt to shifting job contexts, including working time, work site and payment. In other words, there is greater demand for flexibility. Finally, Çoban notes that there is greater chance for engineering graduates to be employed in fields requiring their expertise than the social scientist. Yıldırım Şentürk (2013) argues that after the 2008 crisis, new ways for maintaining profits were adopted by businesses which promoted a new culture of work. The new methods, which are originating from big companies with human resources departments working on “objective criteria” for managing labour is based on cutting down on labour costs systematically. By implication, he argues a new culture of work has come into being in Turkey. This point bears similarity to Richard Sennett’s argument in *New Culture of Capitalism* (2006), where it was argued that capitalism has invented new methods for maintaining itself, leading to formation of a new culture of capitalism, that emanates from economic centres of the world and influences all sectors. In this regard, Şentürk’s findings are significant in marking local repercussions of a global trend. According to Şentürk, the following patterns are increasingly more common in Turkey: workers aim to catch the eye of the employer by standing out with their differences; what is perceived as exploitation and pressure is naturalised by professionals; a particular way of life that draws on consumption is juxtaposed with legitimacy of corrosive work conditions; a pressure to promote infinitely in the world of work. Furthermore, as for the implications in transition to work, Şentürk points out that many graduates are not aware of the demands of businesses at the point of graduation and they can get to discover the demands only through prolonged periods of internships and trial periods.

All these developments have been coincided with the increased significance of the middle class in Turkey. Turkey’s neoliberal globalisation after 1980s has resulted in profound effects in the country. In Turkey, market hegemony increased through efforts of political intervention and business demands through the 1980s and 1990s.

Professional-managerial class in Turkey expanded with the result of urbanisation and higher enrolment to higher education (Emrence, 2008). As a result of these transformations the “middle class ways of life” come to the prominence in Turkey. According to Yıldırım (2016) based on Goldthorpe’s class scheme, there is a 170% increase in middle classes between 1980-2012. Among them, the greatest increase was among the mental workers, with a rise of 357%. Yıldırım interprets this development as the offshoot of the neoliberal economic policies which were implemented.

As such, economy which is increasingly associated with precarity on the one hand, and work ethic that underlines individual responsibility on the other has become one of the key dimensions of youth population’s common experiences. The transition to labour market cannot be understood without regard to these factors that frame the youth experience from a subjective as well as objective aspect.

### **2.1.3. Expansion of higher education and declining quality**

The recent policies have a key role in bringing about the conditions that gave rise to the major question of this study since the state channels “flows of interest and desire by making undesirable activities costly” and by promoting more desirable activities that (Read, 2009: 29). Turkish case is no exception to the global trends in terms of the policy thinking that links increased levels of education with increased chances of getting better jobs and being more employable as individuals. For instance, in line with this arguments, the proliferation of higher education institutions across country and the abolishment of higher education fees are landmark moves.

Major policy documents are useful for identifying this situation in Turkey. For instance, a major policy document, the 10<sup>th</sup> Growth Plan, which covers 2014-2018 period, clearly relates the number and quality of universities with the aim of raising “qualified human power that the country needs”:

Within the period of Ninth Development Plan, in the field of higher education, 36 public universities and, 41 private universities were established and the number of universities has reached 170 by May, 2013. Hence, while access to education has been widened, there is persistent need to increase quality. In order to establish development on firm ground and to achieve the development

goals set for our country for the long term, raising the qualified human power that the country needs is a priority.

(T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013: 47)

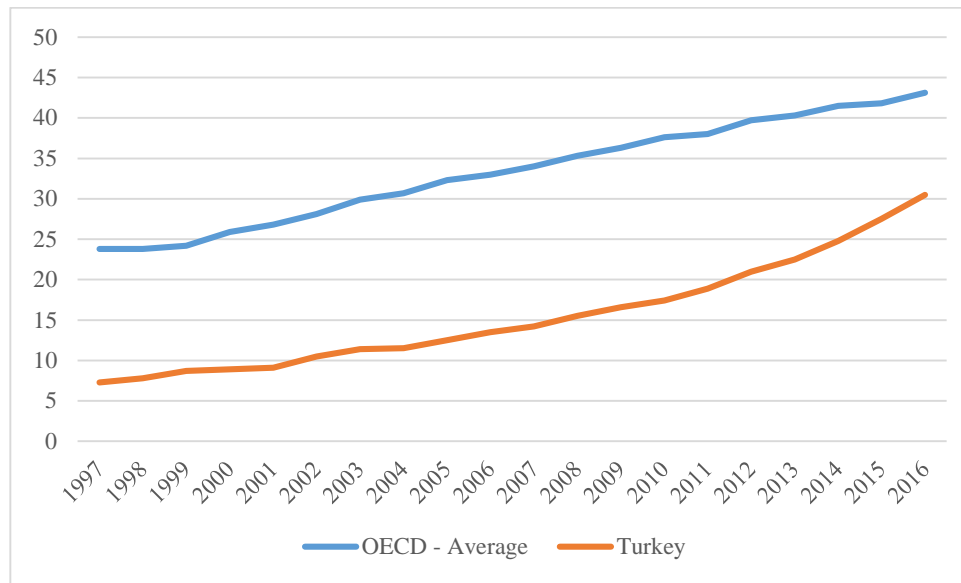
Likewise, the document established a direct link between increased education levels and employability of individuals by stating that:

By increasing the education level of labour power, its employability will be increased and life-long learning schemes will be prioritised in order to give people the skills demanded by the labour markets.

(T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013: 47)

Review of studies on social policies addressing young people reveals that while the youth is regarded as demographic capital, yet, there is limited recognition of young people as autonomous agents and they are understood in relation to family. Such social policies targeting the youth are implemented by diverse actors, including the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which was established in 2011, other ministries and governmental and non-governmental agencies. In general, the government perspective on youth is that they are the future of the country for economic reasons, especially in relation to the demographic window of opportunity. As such, youth is encouraged to develop skills through education. As it has been the case in other changing economies in the world (Woodman& Wyn, 2013), government policy in Turkey too aimed to increase the quality of education in order to ‘increase’ human capital of the country (Akay, 2017: 7). For this reason, universities were established across the country and there is now at least one university in each province of Turkey as the outcome of “a university to all provinces” policy (Anık and Özkan, 2015). While in 1982, there were 27 universities in Turkey, the number reached 176 in 2014 (Çetinsaya, 2014) and the current figure stands at 206 according to Higher Education Council of Turkey (YÖK, 2018).





**Figure 1:** Population with higher education, 25-34 year-olds (in per cent), 1991 – 2016 (OECD,2017)

Indeed, the access to higher education has widened as a result of the ongoing policies. This is directly reflected in the statistics and illustrated in the graph above. As a result of the policies that promote higher education in Turkey, the population of young people with tertiary education has grown threefold in the last ten years. This means that higher education is increasingly becoming a norm for the young people, and it must be born in mind that an increasing population with higher education does not only stand for increased human capital in policy terms but also imply segments of population with increasing social and cultural expectations, as I have outlined in the theoretical chapter of this study.

Factually speaking, while around seven per cent of the population aged 25-34 in Turkey held a tertiary education diploma in 1997, by 2016, the percentage has reached about 30 per cent, showing a rather dramatic increase. As the graph indicates, the higher education has been increasing significantly in recent years, a trend that closely tails the global trends. Higher education is perceived to be even more significant given that vocational education is believed to be of lesser social esteem, a fact that is has made its way into official statistics (YÖK: 2017). On the other hand, the criticism must

be born in mind that there is no established and institutionalised web of relations between school-work-market in Turkey (Çelik, 2013) which echoes in criticism of employers who claim that young people “do not like the jobs on offer” (Çelik and Kalaycıoğlu, 2016). Furthermore, it is also highlighted that the education system does not enable skills and talents to be channelled in particular streams, rather it is based on success as measured by examination schemes and influence of family on decision making in choice of education (Çelik, 2013: 35). Therefore, a growth in the education system should not gloss-over the deeply entrenched contradictions that are played out through young people’s subjective experiences.

From this point of view, it could be argued that for the youth in Turkey, recently higher education attainment has become a cultural, political and economic mantra. This has not only reflected in the popular culture and political discourse but also has reflected in the statistics as in increasing education levels in Turkey. As such, participation to higher education has become one of the key tenets of the common experiences of the youth population in Turkey.

At this point, considering the swelling of the percentage of population with higher education in Turkey, it is worth noting a strand of criticism which also holds true for the Turkish case. Hence, in order to understand the position of higher education graduates in labour market, the notion of credential inflation needs to be noted since the analysis chapter will show that young people are concerned with the phenomenon themselves, and derive a subjective pressure due to perceived credential inflation.

## **2.2. Contextualising youth as a social category**

Since my question calls for an emphasis on historical conditions constituting the labour market, as a social institution, which is regarded as the structural dynamics in this study, I believe the political economy of youth perspective is a fruitful starting point for a discussion since it has the merit of historicising agency within particular, historically specific economic and cultural context that makes up the world of work and education along with the position young people are socially allocated to within the labour market. By this way, the social expectations that shape the category of youth in

the context of structural transformations in the worlds of work and education can be highlighted.

### **2.2.1. Political economy of a generation**

The political economy of youth perspective is most notably proposed by James Cote in 2014. It aims to operate on a macro level of analysis, whereby the youth, as a whole is considered as a social segment that faces deteriorating economic conditions in their relationship with the adult population who is already established in the labour market. This perspective can serve as a starting point for thinking about the social context within which young people make their way into the labour market, and how they negotiate the conditions and or resist/reproduce them in their strategies. As Sukarieh and Tannock (2016) argue, the notion of political economy helps to think about the structural conditions and the experiences of young people within them. Moreover, this perspective is worth recognising for it directs attention to the way “young people play a role in shaping, organizing or legitimating social, political and economic structures and practices generally and globally” (Sukarieh& Tannock, 2016: 1285). Indeed, the youth population has a significant place in social reproduction and the ways in which they legitimise or not legitimise the prevailing structural conditions is a significant point where agency can come into the picture too.

Coté points out that there are three major trends that influence the youth in terms of a political economy perspective these are: 1) massive wage decline since the 1980s for the young people with lower levels of education, 2) higher education does not provide massive levels of social mobility, and 3) it is postsecondary education that benefits the youth in terms of economic advantage, which, however, is bound to the social background of the families of young people.

He then turns to identifying how young people perceive these changes. For him, if 1) one group is exploited and marginalized by another, 2) there is widely accepted biological justification as to why one group is exploited by another and, 3) there is consciousness of the differences between groups, one social segment could be considered in a class-like way, especially in countries where policies do not support

youth and leave them open to exploitation (Coté, 2014: 528-530). Conversely, internalization of poor employment opportunities as justified could be a way where a kind of ‘false consciousness’ is established (Cote, 2014: 531). Coté, then, proposes that young people are marginalised by the adult population, that their marginalisation is justified on the basis of developmental frameworks as in psychology and that young people, owing to these have a possibility to understand themselves in a different way in comparison to their “oppressors”. If, however, young people internalise the arguments regarding why young people should be disadvantaged as opposed to the already established adult population, this is false consciousness, a distortion in classical Marxist terms.

Coté also argues that the under-employment and unemployment of post-secondary education graduates is a structural feature of capitalism today. He further claims that the higher education system “does what the secondary education system did for the past generation: compliance and conformity maintained for white-collar workers who believe they have ‘succeeded’ and thus accept alienated work roles, but this form of success is relative to those below them and thus largely illusory.” (2014: 536).

Coté’s call for a political economy of youth is answered in Bessant et al.’s (2017) volume titled: “The Precarious Generation: A Political Economy of Young People.” The study is an attempt to think youth as a social category which is constituted in a group-like fashion under specific historical conditions of 2010s neoliberalism. Bessant et al. advance a political economy perspective on young people using Bourdieu’s concepts as well as Mannheim’s notion of generation. They regard young people “precarious” in the broadest sense of the term as to highlight an existential precarity in relation to sustaining oneself within and through existing institutional settings.

Before constructing their argument, Bessant et al make some observations which locate the current generation of young people in neoliberal times. Their key observation is that despite the common sense which has been prevalent for rather a long time, young people today live in poorer economic conditions than their parents’ generations did. In other words, in terms of material prosperity, young people born

after 1980 share similar conditions of existence in terms of material deprivation. For this reason, the social expectation that each generation lives in better material conditions than the previous one is not fulfilled. Young people today live under conditions of neoliberalism, where work is no longer considered to be permanent and individual responsibility has become a motto.

Unlike Coté who regards young people as victims of a false consciousness, or Furlong and Cartmel (2006) who believe that young people suffer from an epistemological fallacy, Bessant et al. (2017) argue that young people are reflexively aware of their living conditions and how they make sense of themselves in a changing world is relevant for understanding the youth and society in 2010s. Therefore, Bessant et al. start their work by highlighting the notion of *generation* as to locate the young people (or individual) within structural transformations underway.

This study will be closer to Bessant et al.'s (2017) reading of the discussion in order to avoid constructing its object of study as an agent with pre-meditated ends in relation to politics. In other words, I will assume that young people do not have political or social motives besides the ones that emerge in a particular historical and social constellation. I believe that a researcher is not in a position to decide what the real interests of a group are and that formally derived interests from theoretical abstractions cannot be imposed upon a segment of population, which too is a construct of the researcher. Rather, the implications of young people's actions for this phenomenon such as neoliberalism needs to be understood in detail in order to establish that young people are not political dupes nor are they "consciously" making choices with regard to prevailing economic and political conditions. Rather, they are acting in a historical and social context which "condition" their actions, as such their actions are implicated in the prevailing context. This also has implications for avoiding a 'substantialist' account of young people in this study.

'Substantialist' account, is the way how Coté and his critics end up framing the discussion and therefore they are stuck within the structure versus agency dichotomy, according to Bessant et al. (2017: 35). They offer to use the concept of 'generation' in

order to transcend the divide between structure versus agency which they argue leads to substantialist thinking. They argue that how people *think and know* connects to what people *do* and *the circumstances* in which they act (Bessant et al., 2017: 41). In their view, a generation is not a thing with a given essence which is to be discovered, but rather it is a relation, a process which is contextually defined (Bessant et al., 2017: 42).

In making this point, Bessant et al turn to Dilthey who argues that “[e]ach period defines the life horizons that frame the outlook of those born into it, and to which, in turn, they orient themselves (2017:48).” They further quote Dilthey who draws on a notion of historical consciousness which is shaped by the historical events that cross-cut experiences of a group of individuals who are at similar points in their walk of life:

“Those who receive the same impressions during their formative years form a generation. In this sense, a generation consists of a close circle of individuals who make up a holistic unit through their dependence upon the same events and changes which they experienced during their formative years in spite of differences (Dilthey 1875, cited in Bessant et al 2017: 48).”

Bessant et al argue that each generation has a “Zeitgeist”, historical consciousness that is shaped by their historical location. This means that humans are not ‘rational’ in the sense of an abstracted rational calculating actor, but rather they are agents who are trying to understand the historical conditions in which they are embedded (Bessant et al, 2017: 48). Drawing on Mannheim, they conceptualize generation as a historical consciousness that guides individuals’ actions. However, as historical events commonly experiences shaped consciousness, they are mediated by geographical location, gender, class and ethnicity (Bessant et al, 2017: 49). This way of defining a generation is useful because it tackles essentialist definitions, and draws on the social relations conditioned by the social and historical context in a given time and place.

The authors argue that the common experiences of the post-1980 generation mean that the capitals which are utilized in various fields have also changed in their values. Education is one such significant capital whose value has faced dramatic change (Bessant et al, 2017: 44). Due to the changes in the education system:

“beyond all class differences, young people have collective, generational interests, because, quite apart from the effect of ‘anti-young’ discrimination, the mere fact that they have encountered different states of educational system means that they will always get less out of their qualifications than the previous generation would have got. There’s a structural deskilling of the generation. That’s probably important in trying to understand the kind of disenchantment that is relatively common to the whole generation.” (Bourdieu, 1993: 101).

For this reason, since education is experienced differently by each generation, there will be differences in the way it is perceived and utilised towards labour market. This is likely to reflect in the meaning of education at large and the particular significance of different degree fields.

Hence, young people have shared economic, political and social conditions. Furthermore, transitions are socially mediated life course experiences which are navigated by young people in different ways according to their location in the social space. In the following section, the structural conditions that condition youth transitions will be outlined as to gain an understanding of the context which young people draw on, and act towards at the same time. However, besides these, in the analysis chapter of this thesis, it will become clear that the immediate social ties of the young people, such as the family and friendships too have bearing upon the actions young people take.

### **2.2.2. Placing responsibility on the youth: employability**

In connection with the social expectations that shape the transition of young people, a brief reference may be made to discussions on employability discourse. The way the notion of employability is utilised in policy thinking is a significant example as to operation of the logic that places responsibility on the shoulders of individuals. The concept is used in a way that links the policy context to the way individuals think about themselves.

In the literature, employability as a concept captures both the skills that are deemed essential by the labour market and the way young people think about themselves in relation to the labour market is employability. According to Cuzzocrea (2015), today, young people are encouraged and expected to develop employability, even though

there may be no jobs to look for. She highlights that the concept and the related discourse emerged in a context where (Cuzzocrea, 2015). What is significant here is that the employability discourse came to prominence as education and employment are decoupled in the context of intensification of competition and increased flexibility of labour market and traditional graduate careers declined making education less of a guarantee for better jobs (Tomlinson, 2015; Cuzzocrea, 2015).

As Cuzzocrea explains, the

[l]ogic of employability corresponds to the perspective according to which worker, or an aspirant worker, is deemed responsible for making himself or herself desirable in the labour market in the eyes of an employer or potential employer in the profession or trade to which he or she aspires (Cuzzocrea: 2015: 557)

Hence, within the concept of employability, the individual young person and the employer are pitched against one another and variable such as individual biographical factors such as gender, social class, ethnicity and family background as well as the school attended, are all downplayed. Hence, the whole discourse is one of an economic event as foreseen in the human capital theory of Becker (Tholen, 2015) and coincides with the discussions on knowledge-driven economy (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). In this sense, the discourse of employability constructs the young people as economic agents in charge of skill development for the labour market.

The concept of employability most notably appears in the European context, and it was integrated into higher education policies with the spread of Bologna Process that is deemed to promote equal opportunities for the young people through the production of highly employable and mobile graduates (Cuzzocrea, 2015). The discourse was not only limited to policy documents however, it was integrated into the school curriculum, for instance in the UK under the heading of “employability skills” (Tomlinson, 2015; Holdsworth, 2018). The programmes seek to ensure that young people assume responsibility towards developing skills that would make them desirable for the employers.



There is a problem with the rush for skills too. Holdsworth (2018) critically notes that everyone is encouraged to develop a certain set of skills in line with employability. However, these set of skills which purportedly increase employability have become so pervasive that they are generic. Therefore, there is a paradoxical phenomenon of ‘generic distinctiveness’, which is the case when ‘universal, but similar, markers of distinction’ are promoted (Holdsworth, 2018: 2).

### **2.3. Individualised Responses**

In this study, on the basis of experiences and perceptions of a fragment of young population, I am trying to make observations regarding the contemporary youth at the intersection of higher education and labour market. For this reason, theoretically, it is necessary to link the particular subjective experiences and perceptions with broader social structures. To my interpretation, Beck’s analysis is pointing out a transformation of horizons of thinking, planning and acting. His concepts are useful thinking tools for bringing the structural transformations into the level of individual perceptions and actions. As such, the concept of individualisation is a key concept since it relies on the way individuals perceive the structural conditions and how they respond to it. After presenting Beck’s concepts and analyses, the chapter will give examples from key thematic areas in higher education to work transition.

This section will aim to establish a link between the political economy of youth perspective and the subjective dimension of youth transitions. In the recent discussions on youth transitions, Beck’s concept of individualisation has come to prominence (Furlong, 2012). It is argued that individualisation, as a concept which has been applied to youth “...works very well as a description and analysis of neo-liberal governmentality and can make important contributions to an understanding of how inequality is *experienced*” (Threadgold, 2011: 386). In this connection, my interpretation of Beck’s analysis is as a tool that facilitates description and understanding of the way subjects perceive change. The issue of structure and agency emerges in relation to the concept of individualisation. For this reason, this section will also touch upon the key issues that inform sociology of youth in terms of structure and

agency. Ulrich Beck's reading and responses to it will serve as the main discussion setting for this ends because substantial amount of energy has been spent on discussing whether Beck's analysis precludes the possibility of analysing the youth due to emphasis on agency with the expense of neglect of structure (Woodman, 2009; Threadgold, 2011; Roberts, 2012).

The notion of individualisation has multiple interpretations and indeed misinterpretations. For instance, it is criticised for a tendency it bears to emphasise individual choice and autonomy as the sole form of agency. One of the most vocal critiques, Brannen and Nilsen (2005) argued that to talk about 'choice' is a tendency that has become dominant in the Western literature, that permeates not only public discourse but also social science language. The focus on choice is criticised by Brannen and Nilsen as it eclipses and silences the notion of 'structure'. Brannen and Nilsen, argue that the individualisation thesis could generate generalisations at a macro level, however it is not attuned for small-scale research, a claim which they demonstrate through their research that is fuelled with C. W. Mills' contention that 'private troubles' can be understood only with due attention to 'public issues' thereby history and biography are linked to each other (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005: 414).

Beck's analysis has been used in youth literature as a caricature that is bashed as to support the argument that class and gender still matters (Woodman, 2009: 253). Since there is a dispute over the concept, some disclaimers are required before proceeding to exposition of this key concept, how it relates to reflexivity and how it may be useful to capture the current patterns that emerge in this study. Does individualisation mean individuals are free from all social context and history? According to Beck, individualisation, as a concept should be separated from the celebratory ideology as in individualism (2004: 62; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: xxi). It is not about an autarkic human self that derives action capacity from within itself. This is an ideological formulation of individualisation, and according to Beck has no relation whatsoever with *institutionalised individualisation*. Moreover, despite Beck's conceptualisation is over-emphasised as a theory of unfettered agency, Beck actually

aims to explain the trends that give rise to ‘choice biographies’ are actually also precluding the possibility of any unrestrained choice (Woodman, 2009). In this sense, the notion of individualisation and what will be referred to as choice biographies have emerged in a particular context which is characterised by neoliberal transformation.

In Beck’s language, the neoliberal transformations are referred to as second modernity, with this, he points at the post-1950s historical epoch which is characterised by a number of institutional shifts in the Western world whose impact still shape the world we are living in. According to Beck, in Second Modernity, individual has become the basic unit of social reproduction for the first time in history (2004: 63) because the society has become highly differentiated and individuals have to move between fields with different logics of their own, this constitutes institutionalised individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: xxi). What does it mean for the individuals to become the basic unit for reproduction of society? Farrugia opens this issue up by highlighting Beck’s notion of reflexivity. According to Farrugia, reflexivity, as conceptualised by Beck is about the form of social practice and not about individual rational deliberation (2015: 874). Reflexivity is a creative expression of the way social structures themselves structure the subject’s perceptions of themselves and the world and thus contributes to the articulation of these structures (Farrugia, 2015: 882). In other words, individuals give responses to these structural forces, making personal reflexivity the nexus where the structural is produced as the personal (2015: 883). This is because, according to Beck, central institutions of modern society, and in particular institutions after the 1950s are geared not towards groups, but towards individuals (2001: xxiii). As Gabe Mythen explains:

[...] reflexive modernisation refers to the way in which patterns of cultural experience are uprooted and disembedded by underlying changes in social class, gender, the family and employment... As structural certainties previously provided by governing institutions evaporate, people are pressed into routinely making decisions about education, employment, relationships, identity and politics. Consequently, in reflexive modernity individuals assume greater responsibility for the consequences of their choices and actions.

(Mythen, 2004: 17)

While individualisation in the sense that being freed from life paths that are pre-meditated and pre-decided is not a new phenomenon in itself and it has always been a part of modernity, what is significant here is the scope of the phenomenon (Sorensen and Christiansen, 2013: 41). Indeed, in the last thirty years, especially in the Western world, individuals “were compelled, urged, or encouraged, for the sake of their own future, to place their very selves at the centre of their own life-planning and practice.” (Honneth, 2004: 469).

Emanation of individualisation, as a way of thinking about self has an institutional basis. Especially, contemporary labour market, education and welfare state brings new demands and constraints to individuals. The intensification of competition, greater stress on individual education and declining collective structures underpin the individualisation emanating from the word of work (Beck, 1992). This is because the transformations underpinning the structural conditions of late modernity have brought about incalculable insecurities that necessitate a particular kind of attitude. Beck places the individual within the structural dynamics on the basis of “livelihood”. In Beck’s thinking, securing individual livelihood necessitates being economically active, therefore market is a virtually inescapable force (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: xxii). For Beck, structural insecurity driven by the labour market and the welfare state assumes an autonomous, self-responsible model of individual, and therefore creates structural conditions under which people have to self-design their lives (Farrugia, 2015: 875). According to Beck, this situation occurs because “[t]here has been a special surge of individualization of life situations and life paths... people are removed by mobility, education, competition, legal regulations, market relationships and so on from traditional commitments to the milieu of their birth and are turned over to their individual ‘labour market fate’ with all the concomitant risks” (Beck, 1998: 45, quoted in Mythen, 2005). Hence, in order to gain a livelihood, individuals are entangled in spirals of guidelines that cancel out any given foundations of social existence, he calls this disembedding without reembedding (2001: xxii). As a result, he argues individual becomes the central node for reproduction of social and therefore the distinctions

between objective and subjective, class and consciousness and infrastructure and superstructure are cancelled out (2001: xxii).

Does this imply that individualisation is to say that every individual creates socially unique paths for themselves? Indeed, according to Beck, “individualisation and fragmentation of growing inequalities into separate biographies is a collective experience” (xxiv). Although individualisation is about casting each individual with responsibility to act for themselves, as “modern guidelines compel self-organisation and self-thematisation of biographies” (Beck, 2001: 24), this is paradoxically a “standardised collective situation” (Beck, 2001: 31). In other words, we can argue that from the perspective of individuals, the way they see the demands on themselves may not be essentially common situations, however, they are *collectively shared* experiences.

According to an authoritative interpretation of Beck’s work by Woodman (2009: 248), Beck is interested in “what happens when unintended consequences lead to modern principles folding back on the institutions of modernity. He is interested in how processes emerge and work at multiple scales, from institutions to biographies, but does not see this in terms of a dialectic between structure and agency”. The concept of biography that he utilises is significant in this respect for it enables us to think about how processes in institutional dimension are operating in the lives of individuals. Beck believes that modernity is characterised with a new kind of biography which is different from what he calls normal biography. Normal biography is state, religion or tradition-sanctioned biography, while do-it-yourself biography or risk biography is the type of biography in which individuals are faced with regulations that demand that they constitute themselves as individuals (Beck, 2001:3). Individuals are compelled to import regulations regarding the institutions that surround them and they have to supply themselves with the regulations if they are to survive (Beck, 2001: 2). For instance, capitalist labour market, where individuals are positioned as owners of their own labour is a key location for this (Farrughia, 2015: 875). Individuals are more and

more dependent on the market, while they are more and more required to construct themselves as individuals (Sorensen and Christiansen, 2013:49).

Furthermore, success is bound to the ability to plan for the long-term and adapt to change, and according to Beck, individuals must “organise and improvise, set goals, recognise obstacles, accept defeats and attempt new starts” (2001: 4).

While this is the case, young people regard the future as uncertain and insecure, and they locate themselves in labour market insecurity and uncertainty with regard to the sense of insecurity in the labour market. A change in the mood with regard to the future in terms of biographical management of young people has been noted by Leccardi (2008). The way young people manage their skills and employability seems to align with what Leccardi discusses as change of mood regarding the future. The blurring perceptions of future in relation to work can also be regarded in a broader context of changing perceptions of future. As Leccardi (2008) reports in her study based on an Italian case, “the future is viewed both as an area of possible becoming and as a space of increasing insecurity.” (Leccardi, 2008: 125). This means that the future is regarded as insecure and uncertain, therefore the future is not regarded as a taken-for-granted period of advancement. Young people tend to develop futures without projects, Leccardi argues. Young people have an attitude of “extended present” rather than developing long-term goals – they stick to short-term goals. There is no longer “life-plans” in the conventional sense, but there is a mood for open possibilities, Leccardi argues.

With regard to thinking about the future, young people are under a pressure to “become” (Oinonen, 2018) argues. In her study focusing on social science students, Oinonen studied entrepreneurial discourse through asking students how they picture the future in order. She reports that students consider future as uncertain in relation to student life which is understood as stable. While they believed that their education will support them for a good future, they nevertheless highlighted self-reliance and individual responsibility. While students were confident that they would find a job anyways, they were concerned about their chances of finding jobs that match their

studies. They focused on labour-market-specific problems, such as the prevalence of temporary, non-standard forms of employment. Finally, they all endorse the view that they have to be “workable, adaptable, agile, flexible, and mobile” (Oinonen, 2018: 13).

In this context, failure is framed as personal failure and is not attributed to a class experience, the individual is blamed and attributed responsibility. Moreover, this is not an ideology, according to Beck, this is a culturally binding attribution (2001: 24). Individuals are then, not entirely free in the sense that they have to invent their lives in the most creative ways, on the contrary, they are bound by collective and global uncertainties (Sorensen and Christiansen, 2014: 49).

Ulrich Beck also makes a methodological note on thinking about individualisation as manifested in the form of do-it-yourself biography. He makes a distinction between life story, that is actually experienced life events and biography. While life story is about facts, biography is about narrative of life events from the perspective of the individual. If, according to Beck, individual talks more about “blows of fate”, “objective conditions”, and “outside forces” in their narratives of life events, then one could discard individualisation (Beck, 2001: 25). In other words, according to Beck, biography is the way life story is narrated by the individuals. If the narrated biography includes pre-determined paths, objective conditions, outside forces than it is to be interpreted that the individual does not perceive life as being actively shaped by oneself. On the other hand, if the narrative is about individuals “partly shaping themselves and the conditions of their lives, even or above all in the language of failure”, then it could be interpreted as an indicator as to the way individuals perceive their lives as “life of one’s own”.

Beck’s conceptualisation of individualisation and its manifestation through biography is a significant theoretical tool for this study. I focus on how young people perceive and experience a particular life event, therefore my interest lies in what Beck has conceptualised a biography. The emphases placed on particular dimensions of higher education to work transition will eventually give hints about the way young people experience structural dynamics and the extent to which they import structural

guidelines into their individual lives. From this angle, in my study, with the uncertainties associated with the outcomes and the concerns raised about the outcomes, higher education and the consecutive process of transition to labour market can be interpreted as processes of individualisation whose rules must be “perceived, interpreted, decided and processed by individuals themselves.” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 4). For this reason, “the life of one’s own is condemned to activity” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 24). Below, I will present some studies which run parallel with the concepts that are highlighted in Beck’s analysis of individualisation.

One early study by Tomlinson, questioned how young people leaving higher education “understood and began to manage their employability” (2007: 288) in the context of the UK. Tomlinson’s study operationalises employability as a mentality, that informs young people’s strategies and perceptions of work. According to Tomlinson, employability is a new way of thinking about the labour market - a decade prior to his study, rather bureaucratic career trajectories were expected (2007: 288). On the contrary, as Tomlinson depicts through his in-depth interviews with British students, young people perceive the labour market as consisted of high risks, flexibility, and uncertainty which necessitates that the individual ‘stays fit’. In turn, to the extent that the notion of staying fit features in young people’s perceptions of the labour market and transition to work, the rhetoric of “new economy” is deemed internalised (Tomlinson, 2007: 289).

The young people in Tomlinson’s study are aware that there are high levels of competition as thousands of young people graduate, therefore they mention the need to have added value to themselves which will serve as ‘distinction’ in the labour market (Tomlinson, 2007: 290; Tomlinson, 2008). Students tackle the problem of adding value to oneself through developing a discourse of employability around ‘economy of experience’ (Tomlinson, 2007: 291). This emerges as the main feature of instrumental rationality that informs transition to work, and according to author proves that transition to work has started to be seen as an active process involving active self-management of the young people themselves in an individualised discourse



(Tomlinson, 2015). Tholen (2012) also concurs that in a context where higher education is not directly attuned to the labour market, young people bring forward individual strategies in thinking about transition to labour market. University youth hold themselves for increasing employability, and they found that the youth held themselves along with the higher education institution (Sinn et al., 2016).

The implication of employability discourse is that a mentality of entrepreneurial self and associated attitude of self-blame is produced in relation to labour market prospects of young people. For instance, Pick and Taylor (2009) studied the attitudes of young people towards work and education in Australia through frame analysis and sense-making. They conducted qualitative studies with young people who are about to graduate from university. Setting their question how neoliberalism influences attitudes to labour market and education, the authors find that the young people have bought into the neoliberal worldview that holds individual responsible continuously reinvesting in themselves, that individual must bear the consequences of failure individually. Furthermore, flexibility and uncertainty are taken for granted by the respondents, therefore there is limited resistance to neoliberal work and education.

In a different context, in Portugal, Sin and their colleagues demonstrated the pervasiveness of this discourse among higher education students. Higher education attainment rate is below the EU average in Portugal, it has a problematic labour market to which absorption of graduates is difficult and the country was severely hit by an economic crisis which impacted most notably among all, the youth (Sin et al., 2016: 65). Based on their empirical research, the authors argue that despite Portugal's different higher education and labour market landscape, the notion of employability comes up as the young people discuss transition to work. The primary means which is believed to increase employability is engagement with extracurricular activities.

Employability thinking influences the way young people construct themselves in transition to labour market. Tholen (2012), based on a qualitative study studies how young people understand and experience the process of transition to work and competition varies by national institutional context. In his comparative qualitative

study on the Netherlands and the UK, Tholen has questioned how young people perceive and socially construct competition in different national contexts. He reports that in the Netherlands, where the higher education system is rather professionalised and transition paths are informed by professional orientations, young people perceive employability as an individual project and do not compare themselves with their peers unless in the context of application for jobs. They try to gather skills relevant to their profession and value absolute performance. On the contrary, in Britain, young people value relative performance, in the sense that they compare themselves with their peers and try to maintain a better position in comparative terms while keeping an eye on the employers' needs and try to collect relevant 'signals' of appropriate human capital.

Hence, with the future ridden with uncertainties, in the context of transition to labour market, there is a perceived pressure to develop new skills while one has to monitor their own employability at all times. In line with the notion of uncertainty implicit in the concept of the new economy, Vaughan (2005) coins a very interesting term to capture how skills are perceived by young people. She highlights as the outcome of her longitudinal study that focuses on young people who left tertiary education that young people are under pressure to pursue "just-in-case" qualifications in times of "just-in-time" production. She argues that young people, unable to foresee the future, tend to develop skills in order to be able to draw on them if need be.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS FROM THE YOUTH AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES IN TRANSITION TO WORK**

In order to express this point, we now turn to locate the individual, in theoretical terms, within social structures and try to show that transition to labour market is a life course event which is an intense period of self-formation at the interface of social structures. At this juncture, not only how the 'objective' structures operate but also how they are 'perceived' and acted upon needs to be highlighted. In order to do this, I will include in this chapter both the social expectations from the youth and the young people's perceptions of transition together. This is a theoretical choice I made in order to present the discussion in a way that does not place structure and agency into polar opposites but rather as mutually constitutive of each other. In other words, the perceptions of transition to work by young people and the social expectations from young people in context of transition will together make up the context within which the parameters of formation of self are constructed and therefore the concepts with which young people respond in transition to labour market will emerge in this section.

This section will present the social aspect of transition to work, that is the social expectations from the young people as perceived by themselves and young people's expectations regarding transition to work. The sections will highlight various aspects of transition to work such as the influence of family background, meaning of obtaining higher education, meaning of work and expectations from work and the limitations on the ability to make plans for the future. By this way, the influence of dynamics running in education and work fields on young people's perceptions will be highlighted as a preparation for understanding strategies of young people's construction of self.

### **3.1. Generational discrepancies in thinking about future**

Thinking about future is an integral dynamic of transition experiences, and indeed thoughts about future are marked by the contemporary structural dynamics of uncertainty most notably at work (Leccardi, 2008). My field observations showed that the way young people think about the future and the perspectives that their parents ask of them is markedly different in thinking about transition to work. The experienced and perceived reality is incompatible with the reality suggested by the families. While families suggest that their children should follow the path they have travelled, young people have different opinions which are framed in a way that recognises and highlights the differences. The following examples worth quoting in length:

My family still has expectations, strange expectations. I have a standard family. They have a broad perspective but their social expectations are a bit narrow. Why? Once you graduate, it is a standard thing to be looking for a job. They started to ask things like ‘are there jobs?’, ‘have you applied to this or that’... They even started to seek jobs on behalf of me! This was not what I wanted. I will work all my life anyways. All my life! I want to spare time for myself when I was still young and have energy I don’t want to be a standard individual – do you have kids? Buy a house, buy a car, buy another house, pay for the second house with the rent income from the first one... I don’t want to think in this way! [...] My family still has expectations from me, they talk to people on behalf of me and they ask me to send my CV to this and that people. I don’t want to do it; I don’t send my CV to these people. Their outlook is so standard when it comes to these. (Gökhan, Engineer)

Gökhan was especially troubled by the position of his family which acts as a constant reminder of life course expectations of the elder generation. The linear pathway is expected of Gökhan, he has to find a job and get married, own a house. His parents even assume the duty to find jobs for their son, who was rejecting working at that moment. The clear discrepancy is that Gökhan has different expectations from himself, and unlike while he was much younger, he thinks through more individualised terms that merits self-gratification.

Yet, the respondents are clearly aware of their generation is different in their experiences and conditions than the previous generation. The changing structural

conditions such as the number of graduates in a field and the changing significance attributed to a particular field are significant factors in this as Ayhan mentions:

My parents had high expectations about what the life would give me. Take my father – my dad expected me to earn like billions just because I'm an engineer. OK, forty years ago this was possible for the engineers but today, there are low-quality engineers being produced everywhere. Today, it's not like the way it was years ago. (Ayhan, Engineer)

It is clear that the young people feel that the experiences of the previous generation is not an example for shaping the current generation of young people's lives. For this reason, young people feel that they are in a position which cannot be compared to the experiences of the previous generation, therefore they have to make their own paths themselves. Yet, this does not take place in a vacuum, the contemporary educational institutions and work 'conditions' the way young people assume the attitude of making their way. As Bourdieu points out, educational institutions not only confer knowledge but they also confer aspirations on individuals, the higher the level of education is, the higher expectations young people have (Bourdieu, 1993: 97). As a result, there are aspirations ascribed into the system in an objective way, due to credential inflation, the aspirations are being upset. There is a mismatch between aspirations that the school system encourages. In other words, there are more people holding qualifications which, in the previous state would have conferred more privileges but now confer limited privileges for their value has eroded simply due to greater supply. In this sense, the individualised attitude is underpinned by general conditions, and in this sense, individualisation is not individual but rather societal, or more specifically generational.

### **3.2. Meaning of obtaining higher education**

In Turkey, there are cultural expectations attached to obtaining a higher education degree along with economic expectations. These are not only operating on the level of families, but also society at large promotes higher education. While higher education changes along with work, social expectations attached are not changing as rapidly and young people come to experience the social expectations and the actually experienced and perceived relevance of education in different terms. The juncture between the two

builds into the dynamic whereby young people come to highlight investment in themselves as a key strategy. Nevertheless, young people still keep a nervous relationship with university education.

Respondents interviewed within the scope of this thesis were all university graduates from engineering and social science departments of a prominent university in Ankara. Data collected, about construction of the self in transition to labour market included questions about the meaning and relevance of education, and especially higher education in relation to transition to labour market. Since higher education has become a key institution promoted by the government as a means of increasing human capital, and since education has been understood as a mechanism for social mobility in society, the way young people consider the influence of education as an institution on their construction of self in relation to the labour market was essential for this study. Furthermore, education itself is increasingly based on a competitive basis, where entrance to the best positions is understood to be essential for securing a better future. However, the placement system into education, the increased pressure coming from the vast pool of students and the increasing numbers of graduates increase a sense of uncertainty in relation to education.

For all the respondents, education appeared as a key turning point towards their trajectories to labour market. In Beck's theoretical framework this is an instance of evaporation of structural certainties which presses individuals into making decisions about education, employment, relationships (Mythen, 2004) as a result of which individuals assume a greater sense of responsibility over their own lives, strengthening what is conceptualised as risk biographies (Beck, 2001). However, the way the choices are made, that is as an outcome of negotiation of university entrance exam score, and family demands and individual wishes, seems to preclude a full-blown plan-making individual from emerging.

There were marked differences as well as striking similarities as to how education is perceived to be 'useful' or 'made useful' towards labour market by male and female young engineer and social scientist in this study. Based on the findings, I can argue

that higher education is understood as a key mediating field towards the market. In this sense, from the point of view of the respondents, it appears that each individual experience and perceive the labour market as they are pitched against the market on their own. Education is the field through which they can gain credentials which is potentially likely to endow with higher chances of perceived security, however, access to it is troubled with uncertainties surrounding the market.

Against this background, for a significant number of respondents, education was an indispensable requirement in the sense of an element of generic distinctiveness (Holdsworth, 2018). Even though its relevance may be questioned, it is accepted as a minimum qualification, simply because the labour market expects it as a minimum benchmark for the jobs the respondents aspire to. Indeed, some respondents pitied “all the young people studying in all these new universities” and others were concerned about “making young people believe that they can achieve through university”. Nevertheless, when asked if they had any other option but studying at the university, all respondents concurred that they have neither thought about any other option nor they had one. For the respondents, higher education is a socially sanctioned necessity, as Gökhan, a young engineer proclaimed: “When you mention the possibility of not studying, the reactions you receive comes to a level that suppresses you!”

Nevertheless, education period was also reflected upon with a rather negative mood which was experienced as though it was a work in itself which on the hindsight perceived to be undermining sufficient consideration of labour market. For these respondents, education was a period which was reflected upon with a feeling of remorse, out of which a self which was deemed “more suitable” for the labour market was narratively constructed if not fulfilled practically in actual experience. This chapter will cover both of these striking perspectives on education and will aim to locate how young people construct themselves in the conjunction between education and work. Therefore, the chapter will draw on respondents’ narratives on choice of educational fields and the meanings invested in education in imagining future employment as well as the meaning of education in hindsight.

### 3.2.1. Education as a prerequisite

It became clear that for the respondents in this study, there was no other viable option but to pursue higher education. It was understood as a necessity, and was unquestioned, almost as a mantra fostered by the perceived demands of the employers as well as the expectations of the parents too. Young people from working class background and middle class background alike agreed that university was indispensable. As two respondents put it:

There was no alternative other than the university. I mean, it is something you have to get into in one way or the other, and you will finish it. To work or not to work is up to me afterwards. (Mehtap, Engineering)

Since there is a general preference on the part of the employers to hire university graduates, I call university as a preparation for work. For most of the jobs today, university graduates are preferred. Since this is a reason to be preferred [by the employer] I call it preparation for work. At the university, you choose a field and specialise on that. This choice starts at the high school; it becomes more specific at the university. Afterwards, you get adapted to that specific subject and are able to have a job pertaining to that field – university is the answer to this question [of specialisation for job]. (Deniz, Social Science)

What could have been my alternative? If you are a *lady* then, you can't do anything without studying at the university... To study at the university was my only option (Derya, social science)

Here, Mehtap shows that university is a must and that this is not essentially tied to the expectation to work. What matters is the ability to be able to work in graduate jobs, if the individual wishes to do so. This is more so for the female respondents, who perceive their position as secondary to the males. Deniz, on the other hand, argues that a degree is essential because there is a preference in the labour market for university graduates. In other words, university degree has become a basic minimum. On the other hand, for Derya, women in Turkey cannot find a job unless they study at the university. Her response is curiously in line with the statistics presented in Table 3. Indeed, being a university graduate provides a boost for the young female individuals in Turkey in terms of employment, with university graduate females having the highest level of employment among all female categories with lower levels of education. However, to what extent university education is regarded as sufficient in itself is up



for discussion in the following chapter of this study. For the time being it suffices to say that female respondents were not content with university degree at all, perhaps even less content than the male respondents.

Besides being a basic minimum, for the respondents, being a university graduate had two layers of meaning. The first layer was about individual sense of value as a human being. Both engineer and social scientist respondents believed that having higher education elevates the individual above people who have no higher education.

Well, university life provides you with a worldview; the social circles, and the lecturers and so on have definitely some contribution to make. But more importantly, a university degree is a key to something. You need a diploma to get a job. This is one of the requirements. (Merve, Social science)

It's like you have a one-point greater level of culture. It's better to have university graduate people around you. It's not that it means a lot, but you have an aptitude for such people. Like some kind of classification. I would prefer to have university graduates around me; at least I can have a word or two to talk about. (Mehtap, Engineering)

As it is illustrated, being a university graduate goes in tandem with having a sense of distinction in comparison to those who have not. The sense of distinction also means that the individual who has the education feels entitled to greater social esteem, which is not necessarily realised as the following quote illustrates:

Looking back on my experiences from this point, graduating from this university does not mean a lot to me. They think of us as some kind of vocational school graduate<sup>1</sup> and I can understand why. It's not a very high-quality school. I hear such things from my social circles. Graduates from my school are looked down upon (Filiz, Social science)

Hence, the sense of self-worth conferred by the diploma is relative to the perceived prominence of the degree-conferring institution. Filiz expressed a sense of worthlessness due to the way her university was perceived by others. The discrepancy between the image of university diploma as a privilege and as a “key” and the actual experience marked by the actual and lived realities of the labour market exacerbate

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<sup>1</sup> The original quote is “bizi yüksek okul mezunu gibi görüyorlar”, referring to a category of vocational higher education in Turkey that lasts two years as opposed to four. This category of higher education institutions is perceived to be of lower prestige in comparison to university degree.

what might be experienced as a sense of low self-esteem into a form of social injury. This is significant because it shows that within the context of transition to higher education and the interface between education and labour market, qualifications received from social institutions are translated into measures of self-worth. Not only the individuals consider their qualifications to be a measure of self-worth, but also they reproduce the common sense surrounding the value of qualifications as they assess their self-worth with the language of market and failure. This is the case when individualisation comes to the foreground in late capitalism due to market dependence, where expectation to self-design brings about the language of failure along with a sense of higher responsibility of oneself (Beck, 2001). For the respondents in this study, within the logic of market dependence where individuals are expected to be self-designing, the placement into a perceived low-status institution results in a perceived failure of self-design as well.

The second dimension of the meaning of education why it makes it a necessity is constructed in relation to the value of education received in the economy of credentials at the labour market, that is the implicit question whether education makes the young graduates more employable in the face of the labour market. The meaning of education, in this regard also contributed to a sense of worth as a worker in the labour market. For instance, engineers argued that they are of higher value as employee, and deserve better working conditions than the ones on offer as starting positions. On the other hand, the social science graduates were troubled by the idea that the quality of education they receive rendering them interchangeable in the labour market, due to lack of specialised “technical” knowledge.

As illustrated below, prior to contact with the labour market through actual job search activities, the respondent believed that being an engineer would amount to receiving an “update”, a better version of the self, or a product with greater value:

Let's say that you graduated from the university... What was I expecting? I was thinking that 'yes, I am an engineer now. I'll get an update 2.0 and walk on this path in that way. Well, the truth is not like that. (Gökhan, Engineering)

A lecturer of us always said this: Let's assume that you are a product. With university, we are adding value to this product. I really liked this idea, I really think like this. It adds value to you. (Ayşe, economics)

While his expectations were not completely met in his experience of the labour market, Gökhan still believes that the education received at the engineering school makes them entitled to conditions better than the ones that are on offer. Hence, there is a perceived contradiction between the expectation to receive an update and the way labour market treats what is perceived as an update from the perspective of the individual. Similarly, Ayşe, adopts directly the market terms utilised by her lecturer in thinking about significance of education, and believes that it is an increase in economic value in actual terms.

Once the individual has received the credential, the aspirations are tuned towards a particular field of work involving particular work conditions along with particular living conditions which could be associated with middle-class ways of life. To put it in another way, a direct link is assumed between credentials and the desirable way of life that is perceived to be appropriate for an individual bearing the relevant qualification. Hence, gaining credentials is understood as a sense of increased social status.

It is a striking commonality, however, for all respondents that education confers a sense of self-worth that is realised in comparison to other graduates. The sense of self-worth and entitlement, or lack of it in the case of social scientists, in turn, influences the experience of transition to labour market. While a sense of self-worth feeds into a persistent sense of value within the labour market as in the case of engineers, the social scientists may end up seeking means to secure “guarantee” positions in the labour market. Therefore, it is clear that education is perceived broadly in instrumental terms as the individuals face and act towards the labour market while the market-related considerations about university degree appear to be more prominent at the bottom line drawn in reference to the world of work.

### **3.2.2. Education as incompatible with work**

While educational credentials are deemed essential for finding a desirable job, some students, both engineers and social scientist consider the practice of education itself as a barrier to successful preparation and training to the labour market. This is because education operates as a process which extends the youth period and postpones adulthood. This is also to say that facing with labour market, and the associated strategies are postponed. Firat (2012) has argued that young people has made being a student into an occupation in its own right, especially for the middle class background young people such as the ones in this study. Young people in this study too tend to perceive education as if it was a business in its own right, however, they tend to get a critical attitude towards their student selves in retrospect.

What follows a perceived disjuncture between two institutional fields, upon recognition of which respondents turn on to reflexively reconstruct particular ways of managing transition. Especially, they discursively promote a very specific form of self that is most notably related to the contemporary neo-liberal trends. The way young people identify the incommensurability of education and work also highlights the distinction young people perceive between these institutions. For this reason, transition to work, in other words, actual contact with the work, therefore market as an institution seems to be a factor that significantly influences how young people perceive themselves. This may be due to the gravity of thinking about livelihood. As Beck argued once thoughts about livelihood come up, the market is started to be experienced as an inescapable force (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Cemal, an economics graduate who is working in a private course that trains graduate for the Public Personnel Selection Exam, contrasted “being a standard student” to “normal life” and highlighted that the requirements of being a student can preclude an understanding of what the labour market demands of graduates in order to find an employment. Engineering graduates too brought about a similar point with an attitude which was rather frank in their tone:

We forget to prepare ourselves for the market as we are concerned about graduation [...] We actually can't even find time to develop ourselves as we are troubled with concern to finish the school. I tried to something, but I couldn't develop myself. If the lecturers had a broader vision, we could have more chance to develop ourselves. But they were focused on marks. (Gökhan, Engineer)

[Talking in reference to the meaning of self-development] I think it is difficult to think about these – to imagine these while we are students. You don't go like 'I need to know both theory and practice'. You have other business to mind at that time, you have courses to pass. (Zafer, Engineer)

Gökhan was a student who was interested in his hobbies such as photography and tried to pursue a career based on that during his education - but failed. He also took his Erasmus period very seriously and spent a significant deal of time travelling. He eventually had a prolonged period of education, at the end of which he was under pressure to graduate immediately and during the process, he expresses that he missed the point that he was required to develop himself for the labour market. In contrast to Gökhan, Zafer was more of a “standard student”, who was keen on academic work, and who ended up on a trajectory which is according to him rather exceptionally successful. Nevertheless, retrospectively, he also admits that he had a limited notion as a higher education student that he had to develop himself for the requirements of the labour market. Therefore, it appears that whether spend in immersion with academic work, or in other activities associated with being a young student, there is a tendency for young people to assume a direct correspondence of education with the labour market, which in retrospect, is perceived and expressed as a personal problem.

Female economics graduates had even more striking perceptions of education itself working almost as a barrier to preparation for the labour market. Sena, frequently compared the attitude of herself and her peers to the attitude of a high school student, meaning to say that the courses were the main agenda. Filiz who is another economics graduate explains that the main concern should have been the place desired in the labour market when it came to enrolling in courses, and yet the students, including herself, opted for being rather strategic in order to achieve higher grades for less effort. It is Ayşe, an economics graduate who sums up the whole point. She notes, in

retrospect, that being a student immersed in coursework could turn out to be a drawback in the face of the labour market:

We were not informed. It was really like take the course, finish the course, pass the exam. We never took a second to think about what would come after graduation. We never thought what the work life would be like. We thought all was easy, if we were informed beforehand, I could have been different. Everyone dreamed about being a civil servant but you don't know what it is like until you get there. You think that 'a bank will hire me anyhow', but it doesn't. They ask for some conditions. (Ayşe, social science)

The contrast made between being a conscious student and being an unconscious student is noteworthy. It is clear that the link between education and work is tended to be taken for granted, and this may turn out to be detrimental for the young graduates who do not engage in activities that may be called entrepreneurial. In other words, the practices required by the education, according to this young engineer and social scientists, constitute a job in its own right that blurs their vision on the labour market. Their reflections on the extent to which they could develop themselves as students thus place the student in a position of passive receiver of information. However, as Ayşe suggested the ideal student is the one who actively pursues to invest in oneself as a student, rather than passively receive training. Furthermore, the student is constructed in such a way that self-development is understood to be not any activity, but specifically an active and conscious orientation to the market. In other words, not only do we find the notion of individual responsibility but also the notion of individual coming into relation with the market in a specific way that all their actions are supposed to be leading to a market-ready individual. It must also be noted that these criticisms of student self are developed in a retrospective manner, and hence the frame of this criticism is derived from a different institutional setting, with different regulations – the labour market.

Therefore –in these narratives- within the context of education an “entrepreneurial” self is favoured over a professional student who engages only in educational activities for the sake of education. Inability to get prepared for the labour market is clearly framed as an individual deficiency and failure – hence it is constructed as an individual

problem, conveyed to me in a fashion which represent what Beck calls a risk or do-it-yourself biography which emerge under the pressure of gaining livelihood within a context of insecurity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This also marks the significance and relevance of contact with institutions for the formation of self among young male and female social scientists and engineers. By implication, as the individual reflects on their position in conjuncture between education and work self-sufficient and self-responsible individual prevails over an individual who indifferently flows in an educational stream towards an undifferentiated market. On the contrary, the real or imagined encounters with the labour market itself fosters concerns about the relevance and role of education towards finding a place in the labour market which links to broader considerations about the responsibility placed on the individual in “investing in the self” and planning one’s own life (Mythen, 2004).

### **3.2.3. Value of a degree: guarantee or uncertainty**

Not only degree is perceived to be essential but not sufficient. There is also different values attached to different degrees. All respondents assumed a link between higher education and work in the form of a one-on-one correspondence. Their thinking in this regard reflects the commonly held cultural assumptions surrounding education as well as the policy discourse that places higher education as a key tool for investment in human capital that will help the individual as well as the economy to flourish. I observed that despite my respondents invested in the belief that there is a direct relationship between education and labour market, their position was rather emphatically naïve.

Respondents believed that higher education was a basic minimum for “good jobs”, with the reservation that there indeed are certain fields of study that provide the graduate with an employment characterised by “guarantees”. This is the case when employment prospects are perceived to be wide. In other words, wider the employment prospects are the more guarantee the education yields. A diploma is perceived either as a source of feeling of guarantee to be sought after or a source of uncertainty realised in retrospect depending on the social position of the corresponding occupations

stemming from the field. It must be noted here that; the understanding of guarantee is based on increased ability/capacity for adaptation. This is an aspect of individualisation which Beck noted by stating that individuals must “organise and improvise, set goals, recognise obstacles, accept defeats and attempt new starts” (2001: 4).

Reflections on the choice of a university department is telling in this regard. At this point, engineering and social science students expressed different opinions. Engineering students believed that their degree provides them with a particular set of skills that are highly valuable in the labour market. On the other hand, social scientists lamented their choice of department telling that engineers had more “concrete skills” to rely on. Hence there is a strong association with the department and the beliefs about the degree of sense of guarantee afforded by the university to the individual. The engineering graduates were confident that their diploma can take them to a job. In contrast, the social scientists actively seemed to recite the idea that a degree is better than no degree when it comes to their own degree field, in an attempt to compensate for the implicit sense of lacking a “proper degree”, which was commonly compared to and understood in contrast to the natural sciences and engineering departments.

Respondents reflecting on why they chose the departments they graduated from clearly shows that studying in particular fields is perceived to be more advantageous in comparison to the others in terms of locating oneself in the labour market. In this sense, the departmental choice can be interpreted as a negotiation involving the individual’s wants, the university entrance exam grades and the labour market prospects in the future. The role of perceived labour market prospects cannot be overstated as the below statements illustrate:

Because my [university entrance exam] score was good; I chose an occupation with job prospects. I did not choose the job of my dreams. There is such a distinction. I filled in 14 different options from 10 different departments. Most of them were engineering fields. (Engin, 25, Engineer)

There are plain departments, not engineering. Chemical engineering was a low-score department except for the private universities. I wanted a public university. I wasn’t very ambitious, money spent would go to waste. I thought



if I study in a public university, I could find a job anyways. It was 80% certain that I will become a chemical engineer. My brother had many friends who were chemical engineers, its status wasn't as low as it is today. My brother suggested me to study chemical engineering. 'It's better than a plain department' he said. I could have as well studied chemistry, but when you add engineering it looks better. I thought that engineers could easily find a job, I didn't know that it was difficult. It was as though engineers can always find a job. (Mehtap, 28, Engineer)

Engineers were confident that their education is superior in terms of finding job opportunities. Engineering is clearly pinpointed as a department that endows the graduate with greater chances of adaptation to labour market. Since engineering is perceived as a sound ground, and as a profession, engineering graduates feel that they have a certain advantage of being flexible with the timing of development of skills towards the labour market. They believe that they can develop skills on demand, and on the spot, whenever they are required to do so. This gives them a sense of flexibility and adaptability to the demands of the labour market.

They told me that you have an occupation under your belt. So I say to myself this: I have an occupation, I can develop myself for engineering field at any time if I wish to do so. I've got it, right? (Engin, engineer)

For the social scientists, the situation is slightly different. The respondents who were graduates from administration and economy departments mentioned that they were initially interested in studying law, due to the job opportunities it would provide. The second best choice in terms of job opportunities was economy and administration due to their "vast area", as one of the respondents defined it. The imagined "vast opportunities in the labour market" legitimized and made up for the sense of loss caused by missing the chances of studying law at the university:

We had this law idealism in the family, there were judges, lawyers and so on. They expected me to carry that flag further, but unfortunately due to education and university system, having failed to make it to law school, I had to head for Administrative and Economic Sciences Faculty like everyone does (Özge, social science)

Ok, now, for all equal weight students<sup>2</sup> the dream occupation is to land in the law school. If you miss the law school, you end up in the administrative and economic sciences. In the university exam, this way my choice number four. I ended up here. (Cemal, social science)

As for the social science graduates, their graduation field is perceived as the second best option, and they are scarred by the sense of missing out guarantee-conferring fields, that is law. The way work fields associated with the degree are perceived influences the way young people perceive their standing and the way they work on their self in response. In this respect, there is a marked difference between engineering graduates and social science department graduates in terms of their perception of labour market and their standing in relation to the labour market and hence as a by-product the way they perceive and experience transition to labour market.

On the other hand, social scientists are uncertain as to how to make themselves more “employable” through investing in themselves. They frequently compare themselves with engineers and other so called “technical fields”, and sometimes wish that they had studied in such fields with clearer occupational outcomes:

I don’t have anything [concrete] in my hands. There is no guarantee that I’ll become something. There is no occupation for department of administration. You could become anything and nothing at the same time. If I had done an internship it could have been better. At the internship young could get to know the work fields at least a bit – but internship wasn’t compulsory for us. I something wish that I’ve done something technical, at least I’d be doing something concrete. (Mete, social science)

I wouldn’t want to study in the verbal field if I had the choice. I would study engineering or architecture. By that way you can directly enter the field, it’s sufficient if you work in a company for two year’s time. Then you start to move forward. Now I’m 25 and I still couldn’t settle down. If I was an engineer or an architect I would be studying at a company by now (Sena, social science)

I think that I’m only lacking in English. Before, I thought that I had no hope, that I could not develop myself at all. Since we don’t get an education related to an occupation, since it’s not like the engineers and we learn about work after we graduate I thought that I don’t need to develop myself [as a student] (Ayşe, social science)

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<sup>2</sup> Equal weight is one of the major educational tracks in the Turkish education system. All students choose between equal weight, verbal or quantitative tracks at high school.

People think that there is a vast work field and choose this department. There is a huge bulk of people. People should quit choosing this department.... They ask you what you'll do after you graduate, and you're frozen just like that. There is no job definition! Especially in Ankara there is no jobs available for social sciences but opportunities are vast for engineers (Filiz, social science)

Social science graduates, prior to entering employment, perceive their fields as infinitely malleable and adaptable to the world of work. They even believe that this is an advantage for them for they hope to have greater chances of finding employment due to the vast opportunities they hope to have. However, what is believed to be an opportunity turns out to be a peril for the young graduates, whose degree fields do not have direct occupational outcomes such as the engineering profession. Therefore, the fit between the education and profession is a significant institutional factor that influences the way young people perceive and experience transition to labour market. Furthermore, it seems that the very nature of the qualifications and the relevant high supply of the social science graduates, make them further vulnerable to sense of uncertainty, as exemplified by Filiz. Indeed, the credential inflation makes it further difficult for the young social science graduates to make their way into the labour market. Hence, credential inflation, combined with the nature of skills exacerbates the sense of uncertainty experienced by social science graduates, which in turn increases the promotion of entrepreneurial attitudes as an individualised solution to the perceived problems in the narratives of the respondents.

### **3.3. Meaning of transition to work**

Meaning of work and how work was understood and acted towards was an indispensable question for this study that aims to examine how young people construct their self in transition to labour market characterised by insecurity and uncertainty. This is also a crucial point due to the relationship between structural factors being characterised by uncertainty and emergence of individualised responses. As Beck explained, labour market is not only an inescapable force but also a significant node that emanates insecurities (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). For this reason, individuals are more prone to be influenced by insecurity as self-construction is dependent on the market (Sorensen and Christensen, 2015).

For the respondents in this study, work's basic meaning is instrumental, as a means to satisfaction of ends. It is a necessary evil, which is quite similar to the perception of work that has been in place for the last 200 years. These ends, as expressed by the respondents themselves include, a predictable life, stable living standards and ability to spend their money without much consideration. Work is about a sense of independence and self-reliance. While this is the case, on the negative side, the inability to land in employment soon generates profound sense of inadequateness, which directly counters the feelings expressed by a young female social scientist as follows:

I feel energised when I work, I have higher self-esteem. I have greater confidence. I can say that the feel that I'm really alive. (Ayşe, Social science)

As exemplified in this case, work is a central concern for the young people in this study. Work is frequently juxtaposed with "real life experience" and lack of it framed as a peril even though its meanings too are not essentially pleasant for the young people in this study. Then we need to ask the question how work is perceived and oriented towards in the context of transition to labour market? Within the scope of this study, I conceptualised experiences and perceptions of labour market as a general category as to include subjective meanings attached to work. As such, employment status was not given a causal variable position, but I attempted to understand the way young graduates reconstruct labour market and construct themselves in regard to the labour market as they perceive and experience it. Therefore, it became meaningful to include the subjective meanings of work as well as the expectations from work in the form of the subjectively defined "good work". By this was I aimed to understand if there was an idealised "model" of individual that was believed to be suitable for labour market, i.e. the discourse young people produce and reproduce in the context of transition to labour market. I believe that the way young people perceive labour market is intricately related to the way they construct themselves.

It turned out that young people perceived transition to labour market as a temporal break in their individual biographies. This temporal break is associated with feelings of uncertainty and subjective insecurity, which I regard as a form of generational

experience that frames the transition experiences of a group of young people that have started university in a context where growth policies favoured higher education as a pathway to promised prosperous lives both in Turkey and in the world on the one hand, and a context where these promises were increasingly questioned in the face of rising insecurity as the condition of labour in modern capitalism. In particular, graduation itself turned out to be a breaking point after which work was experienced and perceived more profoundly both as daily practice and as a mental experience, along with a recurring sense of uncertainty and insecurity; which is both economic and political.

Against this background, what young people expected to face in the labour market in the form of anticipated experiences and what they experienced seemed to influence the practices of young people such as intensification of experience building concerns, pursuing internships and seeking self-investment as in the form of certificates. Hence, there is a complex relationship between the perceived realities regarding work and labour market and the way young male and female social scientists and engineers.

### **3.3.1. Transition to work as a temporal break**

The break between education and work is clearly marked by some of the respondents. For some respondents, education feels as if it is a blight, however after formally graduating and coming to face the social expectation from their parents to find a job, young people experience transition to labour market as a process of insecurity and uncertainty which they recognise in full only after graduation.

You want to graduate as soon as possible in order to be free from it. But soon after graduation you understand that it's not [graduation is not] freedom at all!  
(Ayşe, social science)

Graduation is the utmost culmination of a new life phase for the respondents so much that some respondents pointed out that had they known what labour market was like they would have acted differently. It is clear that, although formal employment is only one dimension of getting to know labour market in actual experience, it is the most significant aspect of transition to labour market. Notions about work are circulating through media as well as social circles of the respondents, however, work itself is

understood under a new light once the student status is lost. Graduation is understood as a breaking point marked by loss of student status which I believe exacerbates the actual experience of facing the labour market. As Altan, a young engineer exemplifies:

Until end of being a student, until you get your title, no matter how old you are you are regarded as a kind of kid. People see you as innocent. But when you graduate that innocence slips away from you. To graduate is to lose this kind of thing, you are older now. The world you lived in as a child fades away slowly. At the point where university ends, you close the gates to that old world. (Altan, Engineer)

While the status of being a student has functioned as a cushion against potential perils of the labour market insecurity, once graduation strikes, the experience of perceived insecurity and uncertainty become more intense. The status of being a young student serves as a malleable ground for the self, marked by a relative sense of being free from responsibilities and ties in the labour market. The following quote illustrates the separation between youth on the one hand, and work on the other:

[To graduate from university] means that it is the closure of one episode of your life and the beginning of the period where you need to have a job (Selim, social science)

Once the boundary between education and work, that is graduation, crossed, future cannot be held at a distance, the individual feels necessity to take responsibility as to find job and make themselves a way through labour market, and therefore through “real” life. The expectations from adult status and youth status enhances the lived experience of uncertainty in the context of work. Another quote that depicts the sense of confusion and novelty with the loss of student status comes from a male engineer interviewee who regards graduation as loss of youth status:

I wish I had worked somewhere instead of studying for such a long time; at least I would have greater competency. There is just theoretical education at the school. You walk out of with as a fish out of water! Once you get a job, you get to learn everything, even how you should treat people. (Gökhan, Engineering)

The stark sense of break in the graduation is clear for this respondent too. Despite being an engineer, who goes through compulsory internship of a total of four months,

he emphasises that work is a different field which needs to be learnt from scratch as a “fish out of water”. The metaphor used by the respondent is a vivid illustration of the sense of incompatibility experienced in the interface between higher education experience and work as well as the limited information or sense of preparedness for work young people have however experience they may have. This could be an outcome of the sharp contrast respondents construct between a student self and a worker self as a result of which there is an enhanced sense of insecurity and uncertainty that is experienced in relation to the labour market. The sense of divide and sharp contrast is also indicative of an incommensurability between institutions, which in turn is an element of uncertainty that feeds the drive to find individualised solutions to the contradictions experienced in the market.

### **3.3.2. Work as “the real life experience”**

Respondents in this study gave a very striking interpretation of work – that is work as ‘real life experience’. As such, work is placed in contradistinction to the status of being a student, or being young. This is to say that, only at the moment in their lives young people come to think about work or look at the labour market directly in the eye, that young people start thinking about the matter of livelihood, therefore about uncertainty and insecurity. In other words, as Beck argued, the encounter with the labour market turns out to be a moment in young people’s lives where they feel compelled to adopt new regulations as to adapt to the labour market (Beck, 2001). Mirroring the perception of education, the perception of work as a distinct field indicates that young people experience it as a separate field of experiences. The association of work with real-life experience also reminds of the association Beck identifies between concerns of livelihood and the labour market, and labour market becoming an inescapable force in which responsibility to “self-design” life emerges (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

In relation to work, two themes emerged in particular. These are (a) a desire for individual autonomy and ability to make individual plans at work and (b) perceived necessity for adaptation. Both themes closely reflect Beck’s remarks about the

individuals' perceptions of themselves in the context of insecurity of the labour market. Respondents' perceptions of labour market as a field that requires adaptation on the one hand while young graduates in this study expressed that work means access to economic resources which enable a life separate from their parents, planned and lived as an individual. Work is related with ability to foresee future, without work, future is uncertain and unpredictable. This is however, not to say that work is seen as something that is taken for once and for all; indeed, changes in career track are anticipated, and on top of that, changes are desired as respondents, both young male and female social science and engineering graduates expressed with very similar wordings that they believe no one could be willing to do the same work all through their lives. Yet, it is certain that work stands as the ground for a vague notion of freedom which mostly stands for freedom from family and freedom to act in a way that is only accountable to oneself. However, there is also the other side of the medallion, freedom afforded by work comes with the necessity of adaptation to work life, which sometimes means concessions on the part of the individual. The following quotes illustrate the general frame of reference that young people draw on as they think about work:

To work means, on top of everything to have monetary freedom. Once you have completed undergraduate school, at that moment when your purity is gone [referring to status of being a student], if you are not earning your own money and spending your time at home, even if you are the first ranking student, you feel bad. (Altan, Engineer)

Work life is completely different; the real life experiences are there. If you don't work than you can't catch up with the real life experiences. Work life is somewhere at which you can gain such experiences and have monetary freedom. I can put it in this way. (Altan, Engineer)

Work is a step for my life. I need to work for I need money. [Without work] I can't see what lies ahead. (Sena, Social Scientist)

[Meaning of work for me] was to pursue a career three years ago, now it is to earn money. (Özge, Social Scientist)

Regardless of department, or gender, work is understood primarily as a means for access to economic sources. Economic sources in turn, are interpreted from a very



particular point of view. That point of view is the perspective of youth in neoliberal capitalist economy. Work is where real life experiences are gained, it hence real life experiences are experiences that one goes through on their own, as individuals which in turn necessitates income. In a labour market where individuals are positioned as owners of their own labour (Farrughia, 2015), dependence on market on the one hand and necessity to construct one's own identity on the other hand (Sorensen and Christiansen, 2018) is reflected in the way young people identify labour market as a source of individual freedom and identity. In other words, market dependence comes to the foreground in construction of identity, as a precondition. In this sense, labour market dependence is not only significant for the uncertainty that looms over livelihoods, but also capacity to present identities.

Their interpretation of work, could also be regarded as signalling a generational effect as the respondents link money earned through work directly with money to be spent on consumption in the way that pleases them. The money they earned is not associated with savings, or making plans for the future. Money is to be spent right away, without the question of savings, therefore work provides a source for immediate self-gratification:

I work and spend all my time at work. So I want to spend all my money in the way I want it! OK, it's important to have an eye on the future but I don't want to be stuck between these standards as a young person. (Gökhan, Engineer)

You don't essentially have to like working. You will go there for a designated time period and do what you have to do. The money you earn is to finance the life outside of work. You work to live that life. (Selim, Social science)

Economic freedom is not only deemed essential by the individuals; it is also required by respondents' parents. Therefore, young people are under a pressure to become "free" – in a way that reminds of Beck's point that in contemporary society, due to individualisation, "life of one's own is condemned to activity" (Beck and Beck-Gersnheim, 2002). Filiz, a young female social scientist who is unemployed also points out that the primary meaning of work is economic freedom. She explains that without economic freedom achieved, she would have been considered as a failure by her

family. Therefore, work also has a function to fulfil individual worth with respect to the family.

As I explained so far, work is juxtaposed with the notion of ability to act as an individual. It serves as a base for capacity of individual action. Although being employed does not mean that individuals are free in an absolute sense, work is nevertheless understood as a ground for the sense of a capable self. However, work also means transformation of the self, through adaptation, which also hints a sense of giving concessions.

Merve explains how she feels about work based on her work experience as a student as follow:

I did not want to be so harsh to myself because I was a student after all. I am a student and I'll never come back to this age again, I don't want to make concessions on myself. At that work people whom I wouldn't even bother to look in the face on the street treat me in a negative way and you have to put up with it. You always have to be easy going, you can't just say 'look I studied this and that!'. It doesn't work there. At that age, I wasn't satisfied with work, I couldn't get the satisfaction I got from university from working (Merve, social science)

While her point posits work as something to be adapted to, this is not to be endured while the individual is a student. In other words, work is understood as something that demands adjustments on the part of the individual, however, this sense of adjustment which is understood as giving concessions is unacceptable while the individual still holds the status of an undergraduate student. In this sense the status of being a student is incompatible with a total engagement with work from a subjective point of view. Being a student enables the young people to reject some dimensions of work which are later naturalized once the individual has graduated. In other words, graduation is a breaking point which also marks what is normalized and what is not acceptable by the individual. Hence, after graduation, in line with the social expectation to find employment, young people have different attitudes on work which is indicated within the theme of adaptation.

[demands of work which contradict the prior expectations the individual has of work upon entering formal employment] You have to put up with that. If you can stand it, you start to change. To put up with it, to get into the rhythm of things at work could turn you into a different individual. (Engin, Engineer)

The above quote follows a very technical explanation regarding why demands of work are different from what is taught at the university. The respondent explained how the engineering knowledge that he aims to utilise is curtailed precluded by business considerations of profit making. The respondent finds this a situation to put up with and believes that this could cause deeper changes in the individual self. However, it also summarises the break between education and work and the perceived necessity to adapt to work, to adopt regulations demanded by the work as one's own (Beck, 2001). In this way this mimics the expectation of work life outlined by Oinonen (2018: 13) – to be “workable, adaptable, agile, flexible, and mobile”.

All of this is also framed by a time pressure experienced by the young people. To put it in different words, for young people in transition to labour market, passing of time is more than just a matter of days passing. Passing of time turns out to be a real pressure on them for they feel that they are no longer young and youth is as much a capital as much as it's a hindrance in the labour market. Respondents reported that young applicants have higher chances, while as they grow older, they are either discarded or have make explanations for the time spent out of work.

During my interviews, I observed that young people from social science backgrounds were more concerned with time, than the engineers. This may be because of the fact that engineering graduates were more quick to land in jobs, and social scientists experienced prolonged periods of unemployment.

The perceived time pressure leads young people to pursue jobs in multiple paths at the same time. Therefore, time pressure also fuels an approach which is not strictly oriented to a plan, but rather oriented towards securing an employment in the short-term.

There is an age limit in the private sector. Being born in the year 1992 is the last limit. In one-year time you will be unable to apply for the post of assistant

inspector position in most of the banks. You have to do it as soon as possible and try your luck. I applied too. (Filiz, social science)

The sense of being late may also lead to more desperate measures, as in the case of Selim who looked for low-qualified jobs, such as working as a waiter and as a shopkeeper in a bookshop upon realising that he was being late to find a job in his own field. He tells his experience in the following way:

[In banking sector] you have to deal with people and it's an ugly business. They told me that they can't put me behind that counter because they told me that I can't do it. I was getting old anyways. After the age of 26 or 27 it is more difficult. (Selim, Social science)

If the employer has landed in a job already, then age operates as a temporal reminder of the trajectory the individual is located in. Young people may feel too old to change trajectory and keep on doing what they are doing even if there is limited, if no job satisfaction at all:

I landed on a path while I was reaching the age of 27 and once that age has passed, the sector you are located in is determined, it's set. Therefore, all my other plans until the plan Z are put on hold now indefinitely. (Deniz, social science)

In other words, the notion of age, within the context of work comes to resonate with a feeling of being stuck in place. This is greatly in contrast with the picture of youth engaged in youthful exploration. On the contrary, being located in a job is taken for granted, and the risks and uncertainties associated with a prospect of change, deter the youth from considering such options, making their current trajectories inevitable.

### **3.3.3. Expectations from work: Projections of the self through imagining good work**

While work is immediately associated with monetary reward and adaptation to conditions which are usually not in perfect harmony with initial expectations, young people also carry normative views about work that are expressed through their descriptions of a good work. In order to understand their normative expectations from the work and the kind of work the respondents were willing to accept as legitimate, I

asked them what they expected from work, and to describe the type of work they would like to do as well as what kind of work they would not do.

What is deemed to be a “good work” by the respondents would give me insights into what the respondents normalise in relation to the labour market and what they regarded as unacceptable. According to the discourses produced upon these questions, work appeared to be devoid of an inherent meaning for the respondents. Nor do they referred to any particular features “internal” to the work practice in imagining and defining what counts as “good work”. Respondents, both social scientist and engineer, men and women used broad strokes of brushes while outlining the form of work they considered as good work. Nevertheless, however wide strokes they made in their descriptions, there were patterns visible once I looked into their responses grouped together. There were two basic themes being referred to in definition of good work: self-expression and predictability. There were also some gender-specific remarks relating to rather traditional notions of security as opposed to the individualised form of notion of security that emerges throughout the responses.

Gender emerged as a layer that influences the perceptions about work among some female respondents. Female responses mentioned “jobs suitable for women” as they articulated what kind of work they consider as good work for them. Accordingly, some female respondents believed that there was a higher risk of being subject to adverse work conditions in private sector, as female workers unless they were working in a so called “highly institutional” setting. By implication, public sector was highlighted as a kind of safe haven in comparison to private sector as exemplified by the following comments:

I think that in general, being a civil servant is more suitable for a woman. Private sector is more deteriorating than the public sector. Women can't get permission to leave, there is limited pregnancy leave and you're hired if you take the leave. Your rights are immensely violated. So I'm not in favour of working in the private sector unless it is highly institutional. (Ayşe, Social science)

Another respondent who experienced small companies as part of her work experienced, who was working in a larger company at the time of interview explained

that she is content with the work as long as there is room for variety in job tasks and stable work days. After explaining various incidents of sexual harassment at work, the respondent detailed her perception of a good work as follows:

I don't want to work on weekends. It should finish at six and be close to my house. There is no earlier finish time in the private sector. I want a good work environment, with like-minded people. Of course I want good pay too. But I mean, two and a half [thousand liras] is enough. It's OK if I can get a job I can do under these conditions. It's low as an engineer salary, but it would make me content. Oh! I also want to sell variety of products. But I don't want too much work load. In my last job there were three phones, always ringing at the same time! (Mehtap, engineer)

Variation in perceptions of female and male young people also emerged within the comparison among the engineers. Engineers became a case in point especially because the different strategy emerged despite the sense of guarantee enjoyed by all engineers alike. Despite defining good work as stable work strictly, female respondents did not dismiss working with lower pay. Mehtap exemplifies this clearly, for instance while for Mehtap 2500 Turkish Liras is an acceptable salary, for Ayhan, a male chemical engineer, the same amount of salary turned out to be outrageous and disappointing. Similarly, Gökhan told that he rejected jobs offering the same amount of salary as unacceptable for an engineer. In other words, female respondents are more likely to forsake the sense of entitlement conferred by the degree they hold when they faced adverse conditions where they feel insecurity deeply. On the other hand, male engineering graduates turned out to be looking down on options which they believed to be unsuitable for engineers like themselves. In this sense, the sense of entitlement tended to be negotiated with gender and young female university graduates turned out to be more willing to sustain insecurity if they have to.

From the perspective of female respondents, then, there is a stronger emphasis on non-work and work distinction, as well as a stronger emphasis on the rights they have as workers. These points stand in contrast with the more entrepreneurial and vicious kind of subject envisaged in other contexts, therefore the gendered dimension which remains latent yet present hints to a gendered experience of transition to labour market.

### **3.3.3.1. Desire for autonomy and self-expression at work**

Self-expression was a significant aspect of the work desired by the respondents in this study. It appears that respondents recognise that there is little room for self-expression in the work through commanding authority, and displaying creativity. However, they long for at least a minimum degree of creativity in their work, this was the case both for the respondents who are employed and who were unemployed alike, male and female and engineer and social scientist. For instance, Deniz, who works as a civil servant expresses deep resentment with his job as he believes that neither the practice nor his identity as a worker represents who he really feels he is:

This job does not reflect me at all. I work at a job that does not reflect me. I wear clothes I don't like, I'm always with people whom I don't like. This is not what I would say if I was to be asked where I see myself in five or ten years ago. I put up with it just because I have to, in order to earn money and continue my livelihood (Deniz, social science)

Space for self-expression at work could be a very intense concern as to lead deep questionings regarding the meaning of work and the life plans at large. Engin, an Engineer who studied engineering but actually wanted to be a chef argues that work as an engineer leaves limited room for self-expression:

After starting my job, I started to assess whether or not I can like it. But I was filled with anxiety at the same time. I was earning money; I was an engineer *but* I was concerned. For the rest of my life, there will always be eight to six shifts. What am I working for? I was asking myself will I help others thrive or will I thrive myself? Then I decided to help myself to thrive. (Engin, engineer)

In this context, self-expression is a key component of what makes a good work, that is work desirable for the young graduates. Regardless of the specific content, or the sector of the work in question, they imagine and/or celebrate being in a work where they feel there is room for them to express themselves in work. This indeed is not the same as expression of an artist or an artisan through their work, but rather about very subjective feeling at the right place or being able to set their own terms within the work.

While self-expression is partly related with the space allowed for identity at work, it is also partly related with the responsibilities assumed and the degree of control exerted at work. This may go to rather extremes as in the following cases that illustrate how insecurity is normalized, and the extent to which young graduates seem to imagine themselves as if they were journeymen at work. What makes “good work” has a very interesting component, which was rather unexpected for me. The respondents believed that if they had autonomy and initiative to the extent that they keep on thinking about the jobs they have at their hand, then they feel that their work is interesting. The following remarks come from two very different job context. It is striking that as young people who have recently found their place in the labour market, they celebrate work that spills out into the non-work time as “good work”:

If you can make at least some contribution, albeit small; if your job gives you headache from thinking about it when you get back to home, you can be satisfied even if you don't like the job because you feel that you are producing something (Altan, engineer)

On some days you get an assignment that you can't come across every day. You do your research and figure out how to do it. You think on it like: 'It means this if we write it this way, and it means that if we put it that way'. For instance, we meet up with friends from work at night and end up talking about this job. Such days are good days for us. We don't meet up to talk about the work, but when we meet we end up at that topic somehow (Merve, social science)

The responses indicate that at least for the respondents in this study, total imbueement of self with the work is a common expectation and it is elevated to become a pillar of what is counted as “good work”. For instance, above, Merve almost celebrates the way her work comes to dominate her social activities. Similarly, Altan is fond of the way a job task could literally (and figuratively) give him a headache due to the sense of being challenged. While neither of the respondents express any positive feeling directed towards their jobs, they nevertheless celebrate the state of being challenged. Although I would expect respondents to be deploring blurring line between work and non-work, in these responses there is an interesting tendency to normalise the common sense division between work and non-work that is also criticised as increasing insecurity. This indeed may be traces of a new work culture that is not limited to a city and a



context, and that disseminates through cultural capillaries through daily practices and day-to-day contacts, as Sennett argues (2006). This indeed is an example of how young people adopt “new regulations” as to shape their lives with (Beck, 2001). And the normalisation of this as the common experience of the current generation may be a dimension that brings about individualised strategies and responses within the context of labour market transition as well.

### **3.3.3.2. Predictability and ‘institutional’ context**

Working at a highly institutional setting is the second dimension of definition of a good work. Respondents wish to work in institutional settings for a number of reasons, all of which boil down to a persistent theme of predictability. In this context an institutional setting refers to a setting in which organisational dimensions of work are clearly visible – in a that resembles Weberian bureaucracy. Predictability, in this context is understood as having a ground to foresee what the next step will be in particular situations experienced in relation to work. The emphasis placed on institutional settings marks the deep longing for predictability and the entrenched sense of uncertainty which the respondents have been experiencing. I observed that the more uncertain the young people felt the more interested they became in predictable forms of employment and work.

What is significant here is that the respondents do not essentially look for “security” as a value. They especially do not anticipate employment security in the sense of having a job for life. Rather they look for predictability by means of engaging directly with institutional arrangements rather than face-to-face employment relations as it is the case in smaller companies which are informally regarded as “boss companies”. While respondents believed that their degrees would bring them guarantees, with the perception of good work being constructed on the basis of predictability rather than security, we can infer that respondents actually talk about a very individualised sense of “guarantee” that is more often related with having the individual confidence in the face of the labour market as to make appropriate bargaining towards securing one’s

own place. In other words, this is about ability to be able to calculate adaptability in case of changes.

For the respondents the idea of working in a small company is not appealing for the reason that they do not want to be in direct face-to-face relationship with their employer. Direct relation with the employer implies that there is room for personal negotiation and unwanted social closeness with the employer as Altan, a young engineer explains:

In a small company you have to deal with your bosses. You are always in contact with them in everything you do. There are layers in an institutional company. Yes, there are some positive aspects of working with the boss, you feel that you're a part of something and you can learn how your boss thinks, how they do things. But there are downsides to it. For instance, if you are to ask for permission of leave you have to ask from your boss. In an institutional company, you may leave on the second part of the day just like that, no questions asked. But in a small company where you ask for leave from the boss, he can develop an unprofessional attitude and can dare to ask you 'why'. (Altan, engineer)

Some respondents also believe that there are uncertainties with regard to the functioning of smaller companies, where decisions are directly emanating from the employer, without passing through layers of decision making mechanisms. The reason why this is problematic, because the boss comes to evaluate you as a person rather than a worker. Hence the individual feels compelled to act in a way that the boss likes. Therefore, this is another reason why institutional settings are preferred as a working environment at which business as usual is compared to working of a clockwork:

If the working times are suitable for me, and if the work environment is institutional, then I prefer to work there. [...] In an institutional company things work out just like a clockwork, there is no personal relations as if they're your brother and you are their sibling. (Özge, Social Scientist)

Institutional settings are also hailed as providing stable standards, which allow room for making plans. The emphasis on "brother-sister relations" is important as the point clearly contrasts the uncertain dynamics in family relations with those in work. With the family-like relations being transferred in work, the predictability dimensions are undermined. As Gökhan explains, what is most significant at work is the capability to

provide predictable working conditions and benefits. As such, the job could be made instrumental towards other plans in the life:

Because they can sustain a standard in your life. Just for this reason. It's not that I won't work for a small company, if they can sustain a standard I can work there too. I want to be happy, I want to work at a workplace where I won't find out that there are people showing up at noon while I come to work early in the morning. I want there to be a mechanism that tracks you. If I work, so I want my money on time – after all, I have plans for my life too. (Gökhan, engineer)

It seems that institutionalized work settings also significant for the social prestige they afford, Derya, who works in the workplace of her deceased father, explains that she works in a rather family-like environment which is comfortable for her. However, she argues that she would surely prefer to work in a plaza if she has the opportunity:

Of course I'll accept the offer if I was to be offered a position in a plaza. I'm not looking for a job at this time. I'm not paying for the commute and for food at work. Even the civil servants are paying these themselves. I've got a shuttle at disposal all the time. Moreover, since it's like a family company everyone is everyone else's child, uncle or auntie. The bosses know me since my childhood. But I can change my mind later, I may start to want more. I know I'll start looking for it once I get to that point. Once I start looking for more, if I get a better opportunity on my way, I'll of course take it. (Derya, social science)

It is interesting for young people to be willing to work in a context that is commonly associated with the new culture of capitalism (Sennett, 2006), that is by all means not characterised with security and guarantees. For this reason, the demand for guarantees could only be related with individual capacity that the self is endowed with. In this sense, insecurity and individualisation of responses and perceptions are once again clearly inter-related.

### **3.3.3.3. Downsides of seeking institutional context: KPSS, job interviews and clientelism**

Seeking for institutional context is not a smooth process for young people. In the case of public sector, which appears as the crystallisation of young people's imagined good work ideals in terms of predictability, the KPSS is a process which the young people have to go through. On the other hand, job interviews emerge as a problem to be

tackled. In both cases, there emerges the issue of clientelism which is to say that young people do not actually believe that the recruitment in neither public sector nor the private sector are done through meritocratic means. Nevertheless, the concerns about employability at large remains as a general motivation which is not essentially precluded by what is to be discussed in this section.

In the Turkish case, there is particular relevance of the public sector's opportunity structure which for the great part hires through a central examination system. Decision to take part in this system results in delaying of work altogether in order to pursue a path in the public sector through Public Personnel Selection Exam (KPSS). In this section, I will briefly present some examples from my field work regarding the degree of uncertainty that young graduates are willing to face in order to secure predictable forms of employment.

Often times the public sector appeared as though it is a safe haven free from uncertainty, in contrast to private sector. This is the case for many respondents, as entering public sector also does away with the necessity to work the university degree one holds for themselves. However, KPSS is an option that is highly uncertain not only because it depends on individual performance in a highly competitive examination process that is compared to university entrance exam but also because of the uncertainty associated with the selection processes that are based on job interviews as a result of which a minimum of one year's study could be nulled. Furthermore, there are also uncertainties as to the city and position where the individual will be working, which leaves young people with little margin of choice as to shaping their future. Therefore, a choice for KPSS path means submitting oneself to an institutionalised selection process which is itself ridden with multiple layers of uncertainty. Furthermore, taking the KPSS path also means putting other paths on hold, therefore it significantly delays the activities that are deemed useful for increasing chances of securing employment in the private sector. Therefore, the longer the uncertainty persists in this path, the higher the sense of uncertainty comes to be normalised for the individual.

Clientelism indeed is expected and deemed normal despite it places another layer of uncertainty regarding employment processes. Having a man in the court was another point that emerged in the field, and it was not foreseen by the extant literature discussing how young people think about their employability in transition to labour market. In the case of Turkey, what looks like a remnant of pre-modern times still features as a significant capital in transition to labour market. I was indeed rather surprised to find out that regardless of field and gender, availability of right contacts or lack of them was the first considerations that were taken up in thinking about labour market outcomes and planning future. The following quote illustrates a widespread line of thought in relation to planning about the labour market:

I didn't have a man in the court and I did not want to take such an exhausting process just to successfully become a civil servant. Besides I've got so many skills, why should I bother to be successful in the same system as those graduates from provincial universities who have been doing nothing as student! (Özge, social science)

Derya is a social science graduate who tried to make her way into the labour market through KPSS. Her experience speaks for itself:

I felt terrible. You work so hard you are rejected at one point just because you don't have anyone to help you, even though you know all the answers, you are rejected. I was rejected at a point where I really believed that I was about to be accepted. Just at that point you are so close to that which you have been wanting so much you are rejected just because you have no man in the court to help you! (Derya, social science)

Availability of a man in the court or in more formal terms "reference" is so significant for the respondents, that lacking one is felt as a greater trouble once applications are turned down:

I was lucky to do paid military service before I graduate because I studied at the university for eight and a half years. But all big companies asked me why it took so long to finish the school. I think I gave them sufficiently convincing responses, but then I was stuck due to not having anyone I know within companies to help me with my applications. *Reference*. The man in the court. Everyone has somebody to help them move on. (Gökhan, engineer)

Another respondent argues that lack of “social circles”, is the main cause of her feeling stuck in Ankara. Despite being an engineers who has bright qualifications, Mehtap laments not having contacts and believes that she would have been in a better position if she and her family had more contacts to promote her to employers:

I got stuck in Ankara. Partly because of lack of language skills and partly because of lacking social capital... Lack of a man in the court to put it specifically. There were people around me who were worse than me in terms of qualifications and who nevertheless get to better places than I did. Because they do hiring covertly. For instance, there is a vacancy before even putting up a public job advertisement, they recruit their relatives... As for the big companies, you are not hired because you are underqualified. (Mehtap, engineer)

The thoughts about availability of a man in the court remains as a paradox to me. It is a paradox because respondents look for predictability and promote individualised processes of investing in oneself almost in an entrepreneurial fashion as the means to achieving this end. Yet, in case of failure or difficulty, they externalise the responsibility through bringing up the problem of lack of a man in the court. Following Beck (2001) it was pointed out that the existence of misfortunes and structural conditions in personal accounts indicates normal biographies. For this reason, the references made to man in the court in this context complicates the overall picture as to how young people subjectively perceive and experience market transition and how they construct their self in connection to their perceptions and experiences. The paradox is partly explicable with the fact that none of the respondents give up on arguments supporting self-investment, nor do they give up trying to secure a position through the KPSS, or other job applications due to lack of contacts. While it is used as a way of externalising the problem, it is regarded as a fact in the labour market, naturalised and normalised.

### **3.4. Making plans versus going with the flow**

My interviews showed that all young people implicitly expect that young people should have plans as to what they will be doing after graduation. Therefore, they expect that young people are able to make plans for the long terms, which is an aspect of

individualisation as identified Beck, for under conditions of uncertainty individuals are pressured to make plans (Beck, 2001: 4). As respondents talked about and criticised the fact that young people do not know that to do in the future, at the same time they were talking about themselves. While having general notions of necessity to invest in themselves and the need to be an individual who can make plans for the future, they emphasised what they felt they lacked and constructed in the negative space of their arguments what is deemed normatively essential in the contemporary society.

Respondents in this study, male and female, engineer and social scientists had little agency in making plans while entering university. Their pathways are shaped by an elimination process, the university entrance exam, on which they had no influence. Since the exam process works on a logic of “take it or leave it”, young people were compelled to strategize and navigate the exam system in a way that they end up in a department that is deemed more likely to lead to wide labour market outcomes.

At that point, when most of the respondents were at the age of eighteen, it was the family and the teachers that plotted the designated paths for the youth. At this point, the parents’ generation is in a position of projecting their own generation’s experiences and expectations when they were themselves in labour market onto the young people’s experiences. In other cases, the parents insist that their children “end up in better positions” than themselves. What is implicit here is the homology between the comparison made by young people between diplomas with guarantees and the parent’s perception of working as an engineer being better than working as a civil servant:

It was a bit complicated. My mom and dad were civil servants – they wanted their children to be in a position where they will receive greater social acceptance. Since my score was good, I chose a department with job opportunities. It wasn’t the field in my dreams. (Engin, Engineer)

Similarly, the family experience regarding labour market in the previous generations is significant as exemplified in the following case of a middle class family consisted of engineers, the youth is more likely to be already oriented to the relevant fields such as Gökhan:

There are so many engineers in our family. You see them and you take them as examples and you have a picture in your mind. There were also so many teachers but I did not want it at all because to raise an individual is a risky business; you may affect their whole life in case you make a mistake. Then, I would either become a computer engineer or a mechanical engineer. As a consequence of our *perfect education system* [pun intended] I moved on as a mechanical engineer. (Gökhan, Engineer)

It must also be noted that there is an overtly gendered layer as the plans were made on behalf of the young people. Male and female children are channelled towards particular fields which are deemed suitable for males and females. While engineering was designated valid for the respondents, there were gendered fields within the engineering departments such as chemical engineering being suitable for women, and mechanical engineering being suitable for men. The distinctions are less subtle for social science graduates I interviewed within the scope of this study. However, gender plays a significant role in both limiting the fields designated suitable for the young person and the way young person experiences the plans that are to a great extent imposed by the family.

In Turkey, if you are a man, if you have studied the quantitative track, you'll either become an engineer or a doctor. So wanted to be a doctor like anybody else, but I failed on my first trial at the exam. In the second trial, I had to stay in Ankara, I was born and raised here after all. I know my capacity, I know what I can and can't do. Gazi mechanical engineering seemed suitable, so I decided to study for that (Zafer, Engineer)

The narrative of female engineer Hazal is also striking for it emphasises the lack of agency she experienced at the point of choice of university department. For her, the plans about future were not her but were "placed within her head" virtually from the outside, by her family.

Originally, I was planning to be a lawyer at the high school years. Then, my elder brother who was studying in the verbal track opposed to my plans arguing that in Turkey it is too difficult to find a job having been graduated from a verbal department<sup>3</sup>. As such that idea was drawn out of my mind. I couldn't be a lawyer; I couldn't defend someone who I believe that cannot be defended. Then, in time I started to lean towards quantitative departments. By

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<sup>3</sup> The interviewee is referring to the departments which do student intakes mainly based on the so called verbal section in the university entrance examination.



the way, I was good at quantitative skills it was not that I opted for law just because I wasn't good at maths. Anyhow, this idea was *removed from my mind* and slowly but surely engineering departments were replaced instead. (Hazar, engineering)

Young people are also constrained by the availability of university in their own regions by their families. If the score received from the entrance exam is sufficient for entering a university in the home city of the respondent's family, then the location of family becomes the de facto decision-maker about the university and department to study. At that point, the locality and closeness to family seems to weigh harder than rational deliberation about the future prospects of the department studied. Regardless of gender, young people are expected to study in close vicinity to their families, if they can:

Like anybody else in Turkey, you have an aim while starting to study for the university. I as an equal weight student so I was aiming for law. Then I couldn't get the enough score and made my preferences according to the score I've got. Since my family is at Ankara, I decided to study at Gazi University (Merve, social science)

At the high school private course and counselling teachers guided me. My mum wanted me to stay in Ankara. So I thoughts it's best to study here at Gazi rather than going to other universities outside of Ankara. It was good. (Mete, social science)

Therefore, family's decisions and family background is a significant factor in combination with gender and the institutionalised selection procedure. At this initial stage, there is a clear lack of agency in narratives about plans about future. The following narrative exemplifies the whole picture:

I couldn't get the sufficient score in the first time I took the exam. In administrative and economic sciences, the departments were limited. So, there were departments such as economics, administration, international relations and so on... One of the patients of my mum advise my mum that I studied at Gazi University if my score was fit for that so that I can be better prepared for the KPSS. As for the department, he suggested economics because graduates from that department had more options in the KPSS. Because my score was enough to get me into Gazi University economics department, because I couldn't take the risk of studying for the university exam another year, and because I did not want to sacrifice my social life, I opted for Gazi. I had no idea

about the meaning of economics. I ended up in this department as the outcome of a series of coincidences. (Deniz, Social science)

Hence, young people do not essentially make plans for the future at the point of entry to education, they rather bring various factors, like gender, location and proximity to family with the exam system's outcome into negotiation. Therefore, they do not feel as if they were making a plan or actively shaping their future, for their ties with family and traditional gendered expectations holds them in a certain place. This, however, will come to change once the young people moves further into the point of leaving education as to constructing their path through work. I believe this marked turn emphasises the significance of work in fostering individualisation through intensification of competition in the labour market as argued by Beck (Mythen, 2005). Hence, the interplay between structure and agency is marked as young people come into contact with work, they start to develop new ways of thinking and new values about it with which they can navigate themselves. It could be argued that the perceived insecurity feeds into the image of entrepreneurial individual through promotion of a figure of responsible, planning individual.

At the point of entry to the university, even though having a plan is normatively emphasised as a necessity, there was limited space for any clearly outlined and drafted plan that could work as a course of action. Rather there was vague thoughts and a sense of extended present as argued by Leccardi (2008). As for the plans about future after graduation, there are some similar pattern. The following comments outlines from the perspective of social science graduates from the prominent university feel unable to make plans:

[I chose this path] because of necessity, I don't think that we have much chance in the private sector except for the banks. If you have graduated from this university and you can't speak English, you start with average and below-average salaries in the private sector. Most of my friends ended up unemployed or started to get prepared for the KPSS. For this reason, I also took the KPSS, I worked one year for the KPSS. Other than that, I did not look for jobs (Deniz, social science)

The inability to make plans is especially emphasised by social science graduates, rather than engineers. This may be because of the perceived significance of education for

employment prospects. Therefore, the time spent in the degree field and the familiarity gained with the department and the field has bearing on the way young people think about future after graduation. Engineering graduates were keen on making money through drawing on the skills and credentials they have already gained. This does not mean that engineers are making long-term plans for themselves while the social scientists cannot in absolute terms. This means that young social science graduates are likely to feel a sense of uncertainty greater than the engineering graduates in comparative terms. While, due to the flexible nature of skills obtained through social science departments, the graduates were left with degrees that do not essentially pertain to the labour market (with the exception of traditional professions) and therefore talk about a realisation regarding making plans which comes only after graduation. Only when they graduate they realise that the skills, such as language skills are inadequate, and furthermore university degree is insufficient in terms of leading directly to a job.

People have no plan as for the future. They have no idea what they will be doing once they graduate. Some departments are imposed upon you by the society and by your families. At that point there is the choice between KPSS and the private sector. Since students don't have good income levels, there are no entrepreneurs. So the university is no good for neither private sector nor the public sector. (Deniz, Social science)

I think the graduates from administrative and economic sciences are in a vacuum. The graduates from this department are usually those people who were unable to decide on the department that suits them and ended up in their departments thinking that they will find a job anyways. For this reason, most of them are not driven by their ideals. (Filiz, social science)

It is also evident that the sense of openness of possibilities afforded by the nature of the skills associated with the degree turns out to be a problem in itself, given that the respondents think of university as a kind of work in itself. The kind of outlook that they develop out of contact with the labour market, makes them perceive the labour market under a new light, which also influences the way they construct their self. Therefore, work, as an institution stands as a force that pressures young people into a particular vision of themselves which in turn influences how they construct themselves. Beck argues that Individuals are compelled to import regulations

regarding the institutions that surround them and they have to supply themselves with the regulations (Beck, 2001: 2). In contemporary capitalist labour market, individuals are more likely to perceive themselves as owners of their own labour (Farrughia, 2015: 875).

When invited to talk about plans about post-graduation, and in particular transition to labour market, respondents seemed to be rather uncomfortable. It was because they were not prepared to think about and reflect on the process after graduation, and because the question reminded them of the discrepancies they experienced when faced with their families. As a young researcher, who also shared similar questions about post-graduation, however, respondents were more comfortable talking openly. For instance, Ayşe, a young social science department graduate who was struggling to score high in KPSS, admitted very emphatically that she had no plans whatsoever regarding post-graduation:

I had no plans while I was about to graduate! I really mean it! It was so empty! There was none! Honestly, I had no plan at all! (Ayşe, social science)

This was indeed, the case for most of the respondents in this study, although they did not explain it in this way. Especially the male respondents seemed to be more keen on presenting themselves as if they had clearly-outlined and well-thought plans, however when I probed them to explain them in more detail, I could not get responses that lived up to the appearances. As Sennett notes, the new capitalism requires an individual that is oriented to the short-term despite looking for coherent narrative of life (2006: 5). The respondents in this study were oriented to the short term to the extent that future seemed impossible to be figured out at the present time. Yet, the coherent narrative regarding life seemed to be underpinned by a search for security in face of uncertainty. This was a clear theme running through the respondents' thoughts about future after graduation – a tense relationship with sense of security. This could be a contradiction experienced between the experienced sense of necessity to adapt and stick to the short term on the one hand, and a tendency to construct a coherent narrative on the other.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **YOUNG PEOPLE RESPONDING TO TRANSITION EXPERIENCES**

Having presented how young people perceive the structural factors which they have to go through in transition to work, this chapter takes up the related issue of young people's responses to these conditions. In other words, this chapter will highlight the strategies young people follow as to navigating their way into the world of work that is perceived to be characterized by uncertainty and insecurity. As such, it will be argued that self is constructed in a particular individualized way which is actually a response to the perceived structural factors. By this way, it will be argued that individualization is beyond a matter of ideology, or simply reflection of neoliberalism but rather a process that could be vividly observed in the particular life course event of transition to work from university.

#### **4.1. Seeking guarantees through work**

As opposed to the sense of insecurity, uncertainty and risk experienced by the young people, there emerged a concern to choose paths that provides "guarantee". Indeed, the notion of guarantee emerged as a strong theme that shaped the outreach for the future, at least in a discursive level. Young people are expected to make choices among departments that provide "guarantee" for its graduates. Their sources of knowledge about how to reach such positions is their families, their friends, their teachers and the Internet. However, the Internet usually features as a secondary source that is used to affirm the already existing ideas and beliefs coming from the family. When it comes to defining a "guarantee occupation", during my field work three fields were highlighted: engineering, law and medicine. The purportedly brightest individuals were expected to study either law or medicine, depending on their educational track.

In case that these were missed, the second best option was engineering and Administrative and Economic Sciences respectively:

We had this law idealism in the family, there were judges, lawyers and son on. They expected me to carry that flag further, but unfortunately due to education and university system, having failed to make it to law school, I had to head for Administrative and Economic Sciences Faculty like everyone does (Özge, social science)

You make your degree preferences in a guarantee-seeking way rather than seeking ideals, just like most other people. For instance, I used to like dealing with music, with sports and theatre. I worked on the stage and behind the stage. I directed plays and played in plays. I actually wasn't in science field when I was in high school. I wanted to get into the Conservatory but under the pressure from my family and from my private course teachers suggested that – like 90% of young people in the country- I study engineering first, and then I would have time to engage in music and arts. They tell you to study first and finish the school, then you may ditch your occupation if you wanted to. But you realise that this is not possible only when you grow up, you can't intervene in your process in time (Altan, engineer)

There are family-specific variations that come into play when it comes to leading the young people to pathways which are deemed to be providing guarantee. As the following example illustrates, the family might charge the young person with the duty to take care of itself, especially when the father is missing from the household:

My parents are separated. I live with my mother and grandmother. This influenced me. We are three people and I'm the only man at home, I couldn't leave them. So I sought guarantee. You look at the guarantee occupations and choose one that you feel suits you. Mechanical engineering was among these guarantee occupations so I chose it. (Altan, Engineer)

In such cases, the agency of the young person is diminished and an indefinite future trajectory is shadowed by the decisions promoted by the family on behalf of the young individual. Meanwhile the respondents do not overtly challenge the perspectives of their families as they are placed on particular trajectories towards particular –expected- outcomes.

In a similar vein, some respondents expected to have a plethora of job opportunities while choosing the department. The perceived abundance of job options substitutes for the sense of security and guarantee provided by the so called guarantee occupations:

When you are entering Administrative and Economic Sciences departments you think like this: where is a vast field of job opportunities and private sector is so vast. If we can get to work in the public sector, then it's great! (Filiz, social science)

I choose a department in the Administrative and Economic Sciences Faculty because when I researched it, there were comments constantly saying that there are huge job prospects for it. I wasn't very well-informed so choose a department from this faculty. (Ayşe, Social Science)

Hence, it appears that choosing the department is oriented towards one aim: that is "guarantee". Before entering university, the notion of guarantee emerges in a way that it is constituted by low to limited necessity for further deliberation. Young people hope to land in an occupation which will place themselves in a job trajectory that will hold for an indefinite period of time. In this sense, it could be virtually any job, as long as it pertains to their education and provides them a sense of guarantee in the sense of continuity.

At the point of graduation, the theme persisted. All of my respondents were aware of the conditions that framed their transition experiences to the labour market. There was no denial of credential inflation, nor a blind eye was turned on the increased competition among the graduates with similar qualifications. They were indeed alarmed by a sense of insecurity and uncertainty and in response to that hoped for security through work. Yet, as it is also emphasised in the sections on education, work and investing in oneself, the primary understanding of security is defined in relation to predictability which can only be secured through individual strategies that is supposed to be constructed in parallel with an entrepreneurial self. This is also a break with the initial plans and thoughts on future, for in these plans and thoughts there is little impact of family, and the potential influence of family in plotting a course for navigation is clearly repudiated.

The tendency to seek for security through employment in the public sector is strong among the female social science graduates. Merve, who has worked in private sector during her university years, later on decided that she needs security in employment and security is associated with the public sector:

My family started to suggest that I work in the public sector. In year three I took courses that may be relevant for the KPSS. In the year four I started a KPSS courses. I think this has something to do with your instinct to secure yourself. In the private sector you can't even defend yourself if your rights are violated. In Turkish conditions you want to be a person with guarantee. (Merve, social science)

Another respondent Derya, believed that her chances through the KPSS path was limited. However, in an astounding way she was incessant in working for the KPSS. I asked her why she still kept working for it if she believed she had little chance. She replied:

“Yes, I'm a person who likes the idea of guarantee. It's fine if I have a small salary as long as it is regular. I don't want to worry about being sacked for instance if I get a bank loan to buy a house. (Derya, social science)

Again, what Derya understood as security and guarantee was predictability. Predictability is best achieved in the public sector, according to the respondent. Her concern is to achieve predictability so that she can have long term plans in the future. It must also be noted that predictability is characterised on the basis of location of individual in a particular institutional setting. In this setting, Derya assumes that the public sector employment is predictable for there are little chances that she may lose her job. On the other hand, it could also be noted that taking the KPSS path, is a strategy for deferring the actual contact with the labour market. It is a strategy of keeping the future at a distance, such as Devlet, who declared that he wanted nothing else but working in the public sector.

However, the search for guarantees is not always as smooth as Derya makes it appear and the perceived sense of wide job opportunities does not always live up the expectations of the young people in the reality of the labour market. As a result, search for guarantee by social science graduates puts them on the KPSS track which is as discussed above, a difficult process that is packed with multiple forms of uncertainties not only about the economy, but also about the political atmosphere and availability and strategic use of social capital. Usually, the perceived sense of competition and the sense of being replaceable in the labour market fuel the strategy of *trying* the KPSS process. There is also a sense of lack of choice, and low chances at the private sector.



As a result, respondents feel obliged to try the KPSS path since they see limited options as a young social science graduate. Deniz explains this point in their own words:

[I chose this path] because of necessity, I don't think that we have much chance in the private sector except for the banks. If you have graduated from this university and you can't speak English, you start with average and below-average salaries in the private sector. Most of my friends ended up unemployed or started to get prepared for the KPSS. For this reason, I also took the KPSS, I worked one year for the KPSS. Other than that, I did not look for jobs (Deniz, social science)

KPSS has multiple aspects. The respondent may delay finding a job and make the KPSS process a work in itself. If succeeded, the young person does away with the necessity to pursue multiple forms of skill and qualification since most of the skills required in the public sector are developed on the job, as one of my respondents (Merve) explains. However, I would like to emphasise that the process also works as to individualisation of the risk associated with the whole process, as the following quote strikingly illustrates:

I took this path in order not to regret afterwards. If I do what it takes for the thing I want, and fail afterwards then it means that I don't have the qualification that it takes. But I won't be regretful, I will not say 'I wish I've done it', for this reason I took this path and went to this course. (Ayşe, social science)

The outcome of the KPSS process, is clearly perceived as a marker of individual self-worth and success. The respondent clearly assumes the value-assigning role of the exam as an individual and is willing to accept the outcome as the verdict. KPSS, in this context functions as an institutional mechanism of individualisation embedded in transition to labour market experiences of young people. The fact that it is utilised to establish individual capability is what makes it an individualising process. For it takes hard work and dedication to be able to receive a desirable mark, the respondents do not question the logic of the system or whether they are reduced into a bulk of graduates without discernible skills, rather they focus on whether they can or cannot do well as the outcome. Which sits well with Beck's remarks on the biographies, and

how they are constructed. Instead of structural problems, young people talk about individual misfortunes when it comes to finding a job through KPSS.

While the selection process is ridden with uncertainties, to be working in the public sector does not automatically imply a life free from sense of uncertainty too. This is due to the intra-organisational examinations for promotion, the outcomes of which determine the life-long chances of young people, which in turn is perceived as a source of uncertainty and insecurity. To be unable to fulfil the promotion criteria through examinations means a loss of status, which is repeatedly emphasised by Merve, who was fortunate enough to find employment in the public sector through KPSS in her first attempt:

You end up being a simple civil servant, if you can't satisfy the language requirement even if you pass the qualifying exam, you are not appointed as an expert civil servant. They allow you two more years to qualify in language, if you fail they appoint you to a suitable simple civil servant position. It's a lower-tier job, like preparing data etc. (Merve, civil servant)

Another male respondent who works in the public sector and whose wife was also a social science graduate like himself, but currently unemployed experienced the uncertainties even more profoundly and expressed himself in rather dramatic terms which worth quoting in length for illustration purposes:

For me, to work means to overcome an obstacle at the moment. [this phase] is a tough process and we took extremely serious exams. Unless you pass these tests you can't get to a good position. Unless you pass these you can't make career plans. This exam will be one of the significant turning points in my life, only after this I'll be able to make plans. I wasn't expecting that I would need to pass so many tests. I didn't know that I would lose my job if I failed these tests. Furthermore, it's not just the work on which you are being tested for [talking in reference to political dynamics] (Deniz, social science)

Deniz's words are even more striking for he reminds that the uncertainty in the public sector is not only associated with individual performance at examinations in the initial periods of employment. Indeed, he feels that there is a social and cultural assessment going on as well. The kind of assessment is the one that is directed from both the co-workers and the superiors about display of piousness through attending Friday prayers,

and the displayed conservative attitude in daily life. Hence, it is worth noting that in Turkey, the labour market uncertainties are not limited to the ones that stem from pure market logic, but there are intervening levels of uncertainty caused by political conditions.

#### **4.2. Justifying insecurity in the name of experience building**

Respondents seek predictability in their imagined good works, yet, in a paradoxical way, they also normalise uncertainty in actual experience. In this context, from uncertainty, I understand the inability to make predictions about the outcomes of actions, and a thick sense of unpredictability that blurs the perspective on the future. Hence, this includes labour market-related insecurity as well as the selection processes that stem from standardised examinations outcomes of which are absolutely uncertain even if high scores are achieved. In this sense, various forms of insecurity are normalised and these include the *cheap labour* that young people are believed to necessarily go through as part of “trial periods” or “internships”. Respondents, also go on to follow, as Vaughan (2005) observed, “just in case” measures in order to tackle uncertainty that they perceive to be prevailing in the labour market. Others, believe that there are so many comparable candidates that they have to accept lower conditions which do not essentially align with their expectations.

Both engineers and social scientists recognise various forms of uncertainty and insecurity at work. As they have newly graduated from a degree field, they were not expecting to be employed in high paying positions with significant social benefits. However, their recognition of trial periods and newly-graduate positions is not fully positive. Rather, they point at a sense of necessity in talking about those situations which are unfavourable for them. Indeed, the sense of necessity was so strong that when I asked what kind of jobs they would find unacceptable, respondents unanimously said that they could do anything if they had to implying an openness to be flexible and malleable as to self-direction of life as Beck (2005) pointed out. Lack of an essentially critical tone on the issue, seems to me that indicates an implicit

acceptance of the prevailing conditions. In other words, they are taken for granted rather than reacted to or criticised.

Lack of experience was a common theme that came up when young people normalised their disadvantaged position in the labour market. This reminds of the point made by Côté (2015) about the way young people legitimise their position to themselves using the common denominators of the labour market which is already established. Normalisation of insecurity is evaluated as an element of individualisation in this context. This is clearly exemplified in the following quote. When I asked Altan, an engineer who had a strong narrative of self-construction, for whom transition to labour market is easier, he responded by saying:

It's easier for candidates who are not picky on the jobs available. This is the most important thing. The label does half of the trick. If you have double major, if you can speak a foreign language and if you can use computer software, you can find a job anyways. But there may be cases when you can't. For instance, you may not show up in the job application system, so you should not be picky. (Altan, Engineer)

According to Altan, the job seeker should not be picky if they have to find a job, simply because there are too many applicant and you may simply be lost among the pool of applicants. For this reason, Altan explained, one has to drop being picky and try to make oneself noticed "one step at a time". His explanation is significant, for while some respondents were unhappy with the entry-levels jobs in the labour market, Altan's strategy seems to reflect the spirit of how insecurity and uncertainty for youth is justified in the labour market, especially if job experience was a perquisite which did not come in abundance. Hence, the narrative of adaptability and flexibility turns out to be the terms with which insecurity is justified – and hence this in turn feeds into individualised responses and perspectives of young people. The following quote illustrates the perceived necessity to have experience and justification of insecurity in turn:

I decided to work in accounting, but no one hired me as an employee who doesn't know the job. Since I didn't like my field I declined to work on this. I asked myself what I could do and decided to be a waiter. A job anyone can do,

right? I started work as a waiter in İzmir but couldn't agree on the terms.  
(Selim, social scientist)

Respondents believed that most of the jobs demanded high levels of experience and indeed, some employers asked for prior experience such as the Selim's case. For instance, social scientist believed that they had to have at least two to three years of job experience if they were to find a job in Ankara. On the other hand, engineers were less concerned with prior job experience while applying to jobs however, discourse of experience building was still prominent in their narratives. The perceived sense of lack of experience and the subsequent sense of necessity to increase experience leads to justification of uncertainty and insecurity in the labour market. Young people recognise that they have limited experience, therefore in order to build experience, certain conditions such as low pay and unspecific, or flexible jobs have to be accepted. The following quote illustrated how employment insecurity understood as flexible job tasks and low pay is justified by young people with reference to their individual sense of inadequacy in the face of labour market:

[The employer] asks maximum performance and give you, in return minimum level of salary. There is actually no definition of the maximum performance. Then you have to define it by yourself. You can't simply say that you're bored and go home! You have to complete the task and meet the deadline. But when it comes to monetary return, they tell you you're a new graduate. You have to put up with it in order to learn how things work. [...] There is the trial period in the beginning and they pay you TL 1800. At the end of one year of work I earned TL2700, which is the minimum engineering salary. If you chance your job and get to different field, you start over from ground zero. (Engin, engineer)

The way structural conditions perceived is relevant for culmination of particular attitudes on the labour market and the self. The recognition of credential inflation too turns into a justification of insecurity in the labour market. Gökhan, who is an engineer explains the situation in an expert-like fashion by making maths based on assumed figures, which indeed underestimate the reality:

I guess there are 52 engineering faculties. Let's say that 100 people graduate from each every year. What do you get? Oh! The figure scared me! 5200. OK let's just assume that there are 2500 graduates every year. Well, what do you make of so many graduates. Where do you get them to work? Can you offer all of them engineering jobs? They apply for engineering jobs. So the employer

says: there is 2500 of you anyways, if one of you declines to work for this amount of money, the next one would do it. And if you are not born to a rich family, you need money. Then you can't get pass the competition and accept the job for 1500-2000 liras. I can't blame them, it is the system (Gökhan, Engineer)

While Gökhan, says that he blames the conditions, it must be noted that his attitude too is one of helplessness, and individual retreitism. It seems that the justification and normalisation of insecure forms of employment due to lack of experience is not limited to the private sector. Another female young engineer, Hazal, who is aspiring to be an academic explains that she worked as a project assistant without getting paid, and without social security. Due to unavailability of research assistant positions and the tight competition in her field, despite the fact that she was receiving job offers, in order to stay close to the field the finds more suitable for herself, she normalises to work without formal employment.

For the social scientists, there is no great difference. Indeed, Selim's following words clearly illustrate the meaning of experience in graduate labour market in a witty way:

Let's talk about us, the economics graduates. You apply as a graduate for the first time. You generally work for no salary. You have to brace yourself for it. So that you can put it on your CV. You get 'I worked' in return of no pay. You put these 'I worked's on your CV. At the end of two or three years you can find a proper job. (Selim, Social science)

Again, it is clear that working with no pay is perfectly normalised in the narrative and the significance of developing experience in the form of qualification is highlighted. For the young people in 2010s Turkey, then, being young is a justification for living in insecurity in the labour market. It seems that the prevailing sense of competition in the labour market, which is pinpointed by Beck as an element of individualisation processes at the world of work (1992), and the perceived scarcity of available job openings leads young people to consider themselves under pressure to develop themselves in terms of experience.

The only difference between engineers and social scientists at this point is that engineers are more confident in finding a first job, while social scientist takes longer

to find a job and to stay in perpetual sense of uncertainty, especially through KPSS, a path to labour market which particularly amplifies sense of uncertainty.

### **4.3. Investing in oneself as the strategy against insecurity**

As the sense of insecurity and uncertainty experienced intensifies, so does the perceived necessity of becoming a self-investing subject. Young people tend to emphasise the individual responsibility to invest in themselves or to “develop their employability” as a strategy that is likely to make them feel more secure in their future in work. As Beck argued, in this context a secure livelihood is a key concern that underpins the necessity to consider the self as a site of investment.

The work lives that are aspired for and that are subjectively constructed rest on particular expectations and assumptions on the part of the respondents. These are the expectation that there will be competition and insecurity on the one hand and the sense of predictability sought for the individual. These were intricately related with particular narratives of self, formed in relation to education and work. For the respondents in this study, both social scientist and engineers alike, there was unanimity about the perceived necessity to actively work on oneself, to invest in oneself and to keep oneself ready for different options and possibilities. This is not surprising, as Sennett argues the spectre of uselessness that haunts the modern capitalist world of work, and the emphasis placed on the potential ability leads individuals to cultivate themselves since “potential ability focuses only on the self” (Sennett, 2006: 123). Through the interactions in the field, and the interviews, it turned out that an entrepreneurial form of self is discursively constructed if not actively brought into life. This chapter will draw on how young people think about themselves in relation to labour market in terms of skills and qualifications. The section could also be interpreted as a follow-up for the self constructed out of criticism of student self.

#### **4.3.1. Becoming a self-investing individual**

All respondents concur that they have to “develop themselves” and “invest in themselves” in order to be employed, or to be employable graduates. Young people

tend to reduce employability to possession of particular skills in the first place. The key skill that features in this initial period of transition to employment is the knowledge of computer software on the part of the engineers. On the other hand, the social science graduates mention necessity of having “experience”, mainly in reference to work experience, however, they are vaguer when it comes to spelling out specific skills that will facilitate their employment. This indeed is a very individualising outlook since their outlook disregards other social aspects such as gender, ethnicity and region of origin as potential influences on employment prospects and assume that labour market operates on the basis of fair competition among particular acquired skills. Hence, they assume a self-designing individual in the labour market just like the one assumed by the insecurity-driven labour market (Beck, 2001).

Self-investing entrepreneurial subject is also framed as a higher level of “conscious” to which one has to arrive. Being such an individual is constructed as, having a high level of reflexivity, and discursively affirming and promoting entrepreneurial self. It is significant that, they regard being self-investing a kind of higher order development stop, which is embedded in the experience of growing older through transition to work. It is also significant that, by implication, this narrative frames growing older in such a way that it is intermeshed with thinking with and through market terms. Ayhan, a young engineer tells how he regrets not working on employability as a student in a narrative of remorse:

I regret not having attended to the career days. I worked so hard to finish the school. I didn't learn about how to get a work, how to make a career and stuff like that. I had a friend who did that and reaped the fruits of it perfectly well. He was interested in the field of energy. He went to every seminar related to energy, paid and unpaid. He attended the career seminars and professional seminars. He then started to work for a big company right after the military service. He's now a candidate for a managerial position, I'm sure he'll be a manager too. I did not do any of these. He had this consciousness much earlier than me, at year two or three at the university. He did not do these just for the sake of doing. He created his own social circles at all of these events. (Ayhan, Engineer)

Ayhan frames his friend as an exemplar case, compares himself with his friend and comes up with the conclusion that it is better to arrive at a particular ‘consciousness’



earlier. For him, a particular attitude that prioritises investing in oneself with reference to the labour is a state of awareness which needs to be developed at an earlier phase of education. Yet, for the engineers, it seems it is never really late to invest in themselves.

Engineers usually pursue computer software training in various institutions such as the Chamber of Engineers after graduation for they believe that university education is lacking in terms of giving them skills that pertain directly to the labour market. They complain about the theoretical nature of education at their department and tell that extra training is a necessity in order to align themselves with the world of work:

By the time I started university, I haven't have got much from school. I mean I couldn't get much from school since I was younger... I learnt much from the courses I attended outside of school. For instance, I came here [to the interview] from a course to learn about something I did not learn at the school.  
(Altan, engineering)

Engineering graduates have the advantage of having the prospect of integrating to a field which demands clearly specified skills which usually come in computer software and analysis techniques. Engin, an engineer, who was not interested in his field and aimed to work as a chef at the time of the interview argued that he was less concerned with developing skills because:

It doesn't take much time to learn to use a software anymore. You can learn as much as you need in a very short time and develop yourself. So I did not feel a big pressure to develop myself. I learnt some of the software I'm currently using at my workplace. (Engin, engineer).

However, he does not dismiss the necessity of a "skills package" altogether:

This is not a very difficult process, but in order to start working you need to have a package of knowledge and skills. (Engin, Engineer)

Respondents are also pressured into seeking further qualifications through interactions with their friends. For instance, if there are students who are learning to use a certain programme, so they develop interest in such programmes. While this creates a sense of competition and pressure to develop knowledge, their anxiety is partially alleviated by the nature of skills that they are going to use in the labour market. Engin's case exemplifies this clearly:

Everyone at the school tries to learn a different software, you see people working on it and you get curious. You come across software you have never heard of. You see what others are studying on. You realise that the field is so vast and so specialised, and therefore you feel pressure. You feel that you have to specialise in something. One reason for this [feeling in this way] could be that you don't know what you're going to do. (Engin, engineering)

I had friends who have graduated before me. I learnt from their experiences that two years ago to be able to use AUTOCAT was very important, but now everyone can use it. For that reason, you *need to stand out, you need a distinction*. (Zafer, engineer)

Interactions with friends, foster concerns about investing in the self through developing new skills. Having skills which are rather rare on the market means having a sense of distinction. Sense of distinction is also generated by working on marketing oneself to the employers through studying techniques to improve a CV. Another respondent mentioned the tactics that he believed would support him towards securing employment in the market:

I think I'm good at rhetoric. I researched the importance of the cover letter and its impact on the HR people. I had my CV ready before I did the military service. (Ayhan, Engineer)

On the other hand, for the social scientists, the path to enhanced 'employability' seems more complicated and insecure as explained by Selim, an economics graduate who failed to make himself a careers in advertising industry where he worked for about a year as a low-paid trainee:

Let's talk about us, the economics graduates. You apply as a graduate for the first time. You generally work for no salary. You have to brace yourself for it. So that you can put it on your CV. You get 'I worked' in return of no pay. You put these 'I worked's on your CV. At the end of two or three years you can find a proper job. (Selim, Social science)

Selim, naturalises working in insecure conditions in order to build experience for the social scientists. In his narrative, a social scientist should be prepared to embrace and endure insecurity and uncertainty if they are to develop enough amount of work experience. Selim also emphasises that low paid employment as a young graduate is also a necessary evil because in order to reach work experience, you need prior work

experience which is a scarcity for the social scientist. Hence, he feels that there is no much chance to choose but to endure insecurity.

Another social science graduate picks up the issue of relevance of university education and how to make it work for oneself. The emphasis she places on the individual motivation and capability is telling:

University life is too theoretical while the working life is practical. For instance, there is no room for my theoretical knowledge in the HR department. The university did not teach me much as to converting the theory into practice. I don't think there is anywhere which can help you do that. This is more about the individual capacity. It's not up to the university to develop the individual in this sense. It is up to the individuals themselves. (Derya, social science)

In a contradictory way, education is also mentioned as a form of further investment. Regardless of education field, having an undergrad diploma is sometimes deemed insufficient and higher levels of education is believed to serve as a facilitator towards finding a job. The following quotes illustrate this point:

I'm telling this to all my friends: don't stop at the undergraduate degree. If you can do it do a graduate degree. I realised this: anyone who develops themselves does not end up unemployed in this country (Cemal, social science)

You need to be different from other people. Even a master's degree is not enough. You need to write an outstanding thesis. In the past, the master's degree was precious, now you need to write an industry-oriented thesis work so that you can stand out. (Zafer, engineer)

Sometimes the experience of elder siblings is taken as a blueprint for the current experiences, Hazal, a young female engineer who is aspiring for an academic career explains how she felt undergraduate education was insufficient upon constant contact with her elder brother:

My elder brother has double degree in aerospace engineering and in electronic engineering. He can speak both French and English. He has been working in this company for a very long time. Soon afterwards he realised that those who hold a graduate degree or a PhD are always ahead of you in terms of seniority. You remain as an expert engineer while they are ahead because they have PhD's. You have made sacrifices to get to that position in the company, but they are ahead of you! Upon experiencing these he told me that I should not be

content with an undergraduate degree. Well, employers are right in their own way, I can't blame them for this. (Hazal, Engineer)

The reference to increased levels of education indicates conflicting set of ideas about the relevance and value of education. In discussing the significance of education, it was mentioned that education, as a process perceived to be a work in itself, in which the actions taken for success are not necessarily in harmony with those necessitated by the labour market. On the other hand, educational qualifications are still demanded by the employers as a criterion for promotion. Hence, respondents have a tendency to unreflexively bring up education as a means of increasing chances of securing employment.

Many narratives of investing in oneself are constructed in retrospect. The respondents also express that they have not known what they would be required of prior to graduation. At the point where uncertainty related to labour market is felt in a more profound way, and that it cannot be deterred through being in education, a voluminous CV is what is referred to as a potential way out from sense of individual guilt. Narratives of remorse and regret constitute a significant aspect of thoughts transition to labour market. Narratives of remorse construct a very individualised perspective on transition to labour market, that is underpinned by the perceived necessity to invest in oneself. Filiz, who is an unemployed young economics graduate tells that:

I think I spent my time for nothing. I could have developed myself. I could definitely have done many internships and take part in various education programmes. But I did not like my field and just wanted to be done with it as soon as possible. (Filiz, Social Science)

Filiz further explains that not having any certificates that she can bring up where relevant gives her a sense of lacking in skills. Indeed, she cannot tell where and when she might have needed the certificates and qualifications even after graduation, and experiencing the labour market, nevertheless she believes that at least having certificates in possession would have made her feel more successful.

[If I had more certificates] at least I could regard myself as more successful. I could have had them under my belt, at my disposition. Maybe, if I had them, I could have made use of them. It seems to be something that opens gates for

you, they're not directly useful for you but if you're asked about them at a job interview you can tell them that you have done an internship. It gives you additional points. (Filiz, social science)

What is exemplified in this narrative of remorse is a crystallisation of individualised experiences of transition processes. Filiz's narrative compares herself with an idealised entrepreneurial type of individual. The model that is held as an example is a figure who constantly pursues to expand their experience in work through internships, who collects certificates and qualifications as to demonstrate capabilities and skills so that they can adapt to any job application. However, the remorse in Filiz's narrative also demonstrates two further aspects of individualised experiences of transition to labour market, those are about the degree field and gendered nature of transition processes, points that will be opened up in the following sections.

Sena, another female social science graduate also presents the idealised model of individual in a narrative of remorse. In her narrative she compares herself with the idealised version of herself:

Personally speaking, I should have developed myself. I should have seen abroad. I should have improved my language skills. I could have at least done Erasmus. I regret most for doing nothing in summers. I did nothing fruitful in summer times. I could have done more reading about my degree field, and I could have better command in English. I could at least have an experience of abroad. I heard that there are people who do internships, but I didn't see anyone doing internship in my department. (Sena, social science)

She too is not clear as to what she should have done if she was to feel herself more sufficient for work, however, there is a clear stress on spending summer breaks working towards experience building, developing language skills and engaging in internships.

Also implicit to these narratives is the way in which sense of incompatibility with the labour market is translated into a sense of individual deficiency. At the point of sense uncertainty, it is young people turning to themselves for further help, this not only signifies a lack of perceived alternatives, but also a culmination of individualisation. Apparently, young people cannot think of other institutions or agents to support

themselves in relation to transition to labour market – in the absence of sufficient and relevant social capital, which too is also another individualised solution to the systemic contradictions. Therefore, the individual is not only an individual worker who cannot land in a job but also an insufficient individual in person. The inability to make her education work for oneself in terms of work, then is experienced as an individualised peril, which undermines the self too. For this reason, here it can be argued that DIY biographies become apparent (Beck 2001: 25).

#### **4.3.2. Gendered perceptions on experience building**

The future is uncertain, and young people find it difficult to foresee what skills they will need in the future. For this reason, they keep to keep themselves as flexible as possible in terms of skills and qualifications they have. They try to decorate themselves with skills and qualifications which can be traded into economic gains in the labour market. The following quote is a typical example of this attitude as exemplified by a male respondent.

I do things like for instance, going to this software course which has nothing to do with my current job in order to develop myself... I develop myself in terms of software skills, I develop my language skills and keep myself sharp at all times. I want to work in companies which will enable me develop an international outlook. I have such plans for the future. I have this kind of a general plan for the future which I'm constantly thinking on and which I'm always moving towards. I try to be at the right place on the right time. You need to assess your position well and move swiftly. Meanwhile in order to be prepared for surprises, I try to leave some empty spots. (Altan, engineer)

The significant aspect of this narrative is the emphasis placed on acquisition of skills even if they are not related to the immediate goals. However, the respondent is certain that he will use the software knowledge in the future, therefore for him, it is a sound investment. Another respondent overtly dismisses the “CV building as follow:

I never tried to fill up my CV, I find it meaningless. It has no use if you say that you speak seven languages to an employer who looks for just English language skills. You need to be aiming for that position with relevant skills. If I am to aim for a position which requires competence of seven foreign languages, then yes, I can fill up my CV. (Engin, Engineer)

On the other hand, when a similar attitude features in female respondents' narratives, the terms used are much more referring to an uncertain future:

I was studying administration in the open university. My mum suggested me to study administration because it has a much more *general* content in comparison to other degree programmes. It seems that there are so many job opportunities for the administrative sciences. At that time administration was a very popular department. But before I could receive the diploma, its popularity faded away. If you have the administration diploma, then you can work at an accounting department. You can generalise it. I did it just to have it. If I can't work as a chemical engineer, then I can work as an accountant. It's not like I must be an engineer. I can do either this or that. (Mehtap, engineer)

I got certificate of inspection of hazardous materials. For instance, there are certain standards regulating how hazardous matters are transported on the roads and between factories. Soon there will be compulsory inspections in Turkey. So I went to a course on road transport of hazardous material. So, I have it in my pocket, just in case, that I need it. So that I can inspect five different gas station. It's good for additional income, so that I can pursue PhD without looking for jobs. (Hazal, Engineer)

Both of the respondents talk about gaining extracurricular skills which will not be essentially necessary for their work. While Mehtap emphasises the general character of the second diploma she is working for, for Hazal, the significance of the certificate is that she may utilise it for extra income, for she feels extremely insecure in her unpaid assistantship position. For Mehtap, the case is even more striking since as an engineer who is more likely to enjoy a diploma which is more attuned to the labour market, she is pursuing extra diploma just because the field, business administration appears to be paving way to a variety of opportunities. What is also significant in both of these female respondent's narratives is that the problems they believe they may face are themselves uncertain in other words, they do not know whether they will experience the uncertainties they anticipate in the future. However, the mere fact of anticipation of uncertainty, feeds into their present strategies on acquiring various skills and certificates towards securing alternative means of subsistence. They nevertheless aim to gain qualifications "just in case" they need it.

The difference between Altan's and the female respondent's narratives is subtle, yet significant. For Altan, there is a marked and identified future job, for which present

action is necessary in case of an investment for a future anticipation. The anticipated future is having a positive content, as in an expected job. On the other hand, neither Hazal nor Mehtap was expecting a job or position they could clearly identify. The way they positioned themselves in labour market was that of marginal positions. Mehtap's work trajectory was full of breaks and cuts with three different employment periods following her graduation, none of them being longer than a year. Hazal, on the other hand was pursuing academic career but lacked a formal employment, and she never had such a position although she got pecuniary income from various grants. Altan, on the other hand, like other male engineers, was highly confident that he had a strong upper hand in bargaining for individual job positions. Therefore, was more confident when it came to making plans for the future. For these reasons, I believe male and female respondents perceive uncertainty differently, and hence they act upon themselves differently. The male respondents believe that they are making clear investments for the future, while for the female respondents the future for which they are acting upon themselves is uncertain, and requires multiple activities for uncertain goals.

Other similar examples were found among female respondents in social science departments. The case for social science graduates was slightly different since they were, as a group concerned about lack of clearly specified positions in the labour market that correspond to their skills and qualifications. The uncertainty about the future career path also influences the young social scientists' thoughts about investment in oneself, because until they are certain about the path they have chosen, young social science graduates work towards both public sector and private sector at the same time, and their perceived skill and experience demands are markedly different as the following quote clearly illustrates:

At that point you believe that an internship will help you. If you have a sizeable CV, you think that all roads will be lying ahead open. But it doesn't work like that in reality... For instance, my wife did an internship at the provincial office and had no positive impact of that. He's doing a whole different job. Internship isn't something that I can say I'm glad having done them. If I was working at



the private sector, then it would have been more helpful. (Merve, social science)

I have no experience other than internships. Internship wasn't compulsory but I did it just so I can present them if I work in the private sector. The internships I did in the public sector were helpful only getting to know the public institutional bodies so that I can make sure that I don't want to work there! The internship I did at the bank was for me to learn things. I wanted these internships so that I can put them in my CV. There was also this thing called the leadership school where I got certificates for effective presentation techniques, project management and leadership. Are they really helpful? *Well* [in a rather ironical tone], not really, but at least I have them all in my CV. (Özge, social science)

I didn't want to continue academic work and wanted to get my hands on work life proper. This company was my first and only shot, if I couldn't get in I would allow myself some more time to do things to develop myself. I was so fed up, I wanted to see how work life works. (Özge, social science)

It is clear that female social scientist respondents emphasise possession of a variety of certificates and qualifications in case they are essential in the CV. Since social science graduates apply to multiple positions in a number of workplaces, they need to have a CV composed of a variety of components enabling them to adapt to various positions. While they are reflexively question the relevance and use of the certificates in the CV, they do not dismiss self-investment discursively. On the contrary, they promote it in various ways, as explained above, and they engage in various activities as to acquire credentials and qualifications. In other words, they have to be flexible in terms of their skills. On the contrary, a social science graduate male, Mete was aiming for the KPSS path and expressed that he deemed extracurricular activities irrelevant for his options for he was planning to work in the public sector, to serve the state. In a similar pattern, Selim, another social science graduate who engaged in multiple unskilled jobs after failing to work in creative sector explained that he did not engage in work of collecting certificates since he was not dreaming of becoming a white collar. Deniz, whose wife is a social science graduate who was unemployed, argued that her wife had a variety of skills and qualifications yet, none of them were helpful, therefore he argued he did not believe in possession of a variety of skills. This shows that the male respondents do not tend to "invest in themselves" thinking about future uncertainties like the female respondents do. In other words, the uncertainty experienced and perceived by female

respondents in the context of transition to labour market seems to be qualitatively different from that of male respondents. As such their strategies result in affirmation of self-investing entrepreneurial type of individualism as a way of coping with the labour market. Young female respondents are more likely to reaffirm entrepreneurialism and neoliberal values in transition to labour market, even more clearly outlined than male respondents at some points. For this reason, it can be argued that being in a disadvantaged position may be fuelling individualised strategies even further as it is likely to be related with a sense of having nothing but the individual self to rely on. Therefore, instead of arguing that gender is less of relevance, it may be more fruitful, from a theoretical point of view, to question how the historical and cultural baggage that these categories come to interact with the contemporary conditions.

#### **4.4. What facilitates transition to work?**

What might be the individualised solutions and assets that facilitate the transition experience? Interviewees also talked about the characteristics that works as a leverage in the context of transition to labour market. Their portrayal of an idealised smooth fare through the interface between education and work is based on an individual who is endowed with particular characteristics. The following quotes lay out the basic features of the image of individual that is believed to prevail in transition to labour market:

For people who are open to learning, who are determined, who are aware that they are learning for themselves, and most importantly for those who are willing. (Zafer, engineering)

I think the most important thing is to have self-confidence, to be able to explain oneself clearly, to be solution-oriented, and to be able think outside of the box. You need to widen your horizons and put the blinders off. Self-confidence, solution-orientedness and developing yourself. (Derya, social science)

For people who are built to work, for people of ideals, and for people who know right people at the right positions. Once the young person has graduated, they should expect to do anything that works for them rather than the job they want. Now there are people who would do any work. (Gökhan, Engineer)

In the face of labour market, individual is held responsible to develop certain skills, which chime with the human resources management language. Interestingly, when asked about who is more likely to experience a smoother transition than others, no respondent mentioned specific skills that can be acquired through education or training but they mentioned characteristics which seems to be inherent to the individual. This attitude, which is illustrated above, in my opinion highlights the intimate relationship that individuals develop with their selves in the context of insecure and uncertain labour market. The point raised about confidence is striking as neoliberal discourse champions an individual that is confident in oneself in order to act (Holdsworth, 2018: 12). Only one respondent mentioned social background as a resource that facilitates transition to labour market. However, he too brought up the idea of a calculating subject, who takes responsibility to make plans for the future:

I think that if someone is to study at the university and start the life at the age of 30, then it would be much easier [to find a job] if they chose the same occupation as their parents. Apart from that, if they are to make themselves, then they need to have a plan. They need to be able to think five or six years ahead. This process is much easier for someone with a plan. (Engin, engineering)

Therefore, the individual is perceived to be alone in the face of the labour market, and is understood to be based on oneself and charged with the task of making plans as to fare through the labour market after graduation. As outlined in discussion about biographies, respondents do not talk about external constraints, and great misfortunes, but they talk about themselves and their responsibilities. The perceived sense of uncertainty that accompanies individuals in this study also leads to normalisation of insecure forms of employment along with expectations to individually manage one's way out of insecurity, through "putting up with insecurity". On the other hand, in the case of public sector, the perceived prospect of dodging insecurity through employment in the public sector, leads many social scientists to apply to KPSS, a process that is market with profound insecurity as well. I now turn to experiences of uncertainty and insecurity as perceived by the respondents in this study.

#### **4.5. Formation of self in the process of transition from education to work: Four models**

The analysis made it clear that the way structural factors are perceived have bearing on the way young people respond to the structural conditions such as youth unemployment, insecurity, and credential inflation in transition to labour market. For this reason, it is possible to identify some patterns based on the field data. As such, the analysis also hints the theoretical connection between structural conditions as the context within which youth transitions take place, and the formation of self through individualised strategies. As such, there is a link between contemporary labour market conditions and higher education and individualisation, which is likely to be a rather resilient aspect of lives of the cohort of young people from which this study presented a cross-sectional view.

This section will provide an ideal typical description of the ways young people construct their selves in the process of higher education to work transition as to broaden the understanding how young people work on their selves in the process of transition from higher education to work. The ideal types which will be provided are based on the actual strategies taken by the respondents and the normative ideals that they assert for the young people at large. Both of these are accepted as elements of reflexive creation of self (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006: 5) in contemporary society, since they emerge as young people try to interpret their experiences in a way that may help them to form a coherent biography. Young people who are university graduates trying to make their way into the labour market come from family backgrounds that are dissimilar to their own in terms of education or try to embark in labour market conditions which are not comparable to that of their parents' generation. On other words, the experience of the previous generation is not entirely helpful for construction of selfhood in "biographical project of youth" (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006: 5). For this reason, the following ideal typical models for thinking about and acting upon self are aiming to summarise and crystallise the possible ways in which self could be constructed by young people under contemporary conditions of uncertainty and insecurity at work, increased competition and credential inflation.

The data yields four main patterns which may have overlapping aspects. However, in constructing these categories, the main thrust of young people's strategies and associated views on youth self was taken into consideration. Each model will be presented on the basis of general characteristics. The models are not self-contained and one does not simply fall in one category to stay there, indeed there may be movement between categories.

#### **4.5.1. Career oriented-independents**

Career oriented-independent model of constructing self was represented by four male respondents, three of which were engineers and one was social science graduate. All of the respondents in this group have embarked on work from a very early period onwards right after their graduation and have never experienced unemployment. Respondents grouped under this category had interest in "developing themselves" and "having distinctions" from university onwards. All of them regarded work as an element of developing themselves. All of the respondents from the engineering department in this category told me that they have been investing in themselves by learning to use computer software and working on "interview techniques" to impress the employers. Moreover, they believed that the individual is responsible for oneself in making themselves employable, and to invest in themselves. They regarded university education in itself missing in terms of preparation for work, and suggested that individuals should pursue higher levels of degrees such as master's degree. One respondents highlighted that the thesis must be oriented to the industry as to stand out among other graduates. Overall, these young people keep the individual responsible for investing in themselves and to be employable. Their position becomes even more curious once their social backgrounds in terms of families is considered.

The respondents in this category had limited family support under their belt. The two of them from middle class family background with father being short in terms of economic support due to divorce in one case and due to bankruptcy in other. The two respondents, one of which was social science graduate on the other hand, were coming from lower class families from smaller towns. All the respondents believed that they

were responsible for themselves and for their families in terms of taking care of them. Cemal, the social science graduate from small town in this category, on the other hand, having been performed social mobility, had a very firm grip on his career and had a very individualistic attitude and boasted that anyone who worked hard could be successful. On the whole, all of the respondents regarded career as the ultimate means for ensuring economic stability. They believed that working and earning money was the only possible option and therefore upheld career. The over-representation of engineering graduates on the other hand, implied that engineering graduates could integrate to the labour market easier than the other graduates, for all of the respondents in the category followed particular paths and learnt to use particular software which they learnt from their social circles that they will make use of at work. For this reason, the career-oriented young people seem to have one eye on the future, through more clear plans.

Finally, the career-oriented independents may stop pursuing their careers in an act of individual self-fulfilment and seek to follow a different path for their own, that is not envisaged neither by the society nor by the families. This path leads to the risk-taker category.

#### **4.5.2. Risk-takers**

The risk-takers group is also represented by three respondents, two of which are from engineering departments and one from social science department. What is common for these young people is that all of them have families to support themselves and that they have willingly left their original career tracks. Like other respondents, the risk-takers have not followed a path into university because they wanted, but because their families believed that they will have better life chances should they worked in the fields that they have studied. The typical pattern for these respondents entails graduation followed by working in a job which is associated with their own fields, a job they do not regard as a part of a career, but regarded as temporary, and leaving of the original field for pursuit of dreams which proves to be very risky. Selim, the social science graduate has worked in advertising sector for seven months, at the result of

which he has experienced burnout. He tried to engage in other insecure forms of employment such as working as a waiter and working at a bookshop as a shop assistant as to earn money. Despite this, for Selim, he was an individual case of failure who felt short in playing by the rules of the game, which he readily naturalises.

Although their strategies for transition to work are different from the first category, young people in this category too emphasise individual characteristics as facilitating transition to work. They also tend to emphasise that it is normal for young people to land in insecure work such as lengthy internship periods, and working in trial periods in return of low wage, or as engineers, they emphasise that young people should not be picky in terms of jobs. In this sense, despite exercising agency in terms of their pathways, and seeming to refuse the social expectations that are placed on young people as individuals, their position is one of limited agency.

Their agency is limited because despite following a different path in their own right, their path is enabled by the family support which, as respondent report, is not expected to be unlimited in provision but yet sufficient enough to try pursuing a different path for a limited time. In case of failing to land in a different path, the respondents in this category are, as exemplified by Selim, likely to accept any job that is likely to sustain themselves in terms of providing a livelihood. The respondents in this pattern hope to fashion an independent self, however they may get stuck on the take-off and continuously try and re-try. However, within the scope of this thesis, limited data emerged as to foresee what might become of young people who work on their selves as risk-takers.

#### **4.5.3. Guarantee-seekers**

Guarantee-seekers is the fourth category that emerged in the field study. All of them are employed All but one of the respondents in this category are female respondents. The common strategy that these respondents pursue is a strong commitment to just-in-case activities of self-investment and in the case of social science graduates, they seek to be employed through KPSS along with self-investment. Over-representation of

female respondents in this category is significant because it indicates how young female people regard themselves to be more insecure in comparison to their counterparts. Furthermore, the fact that both female social science graduates and engineers engage with just-in-case activities indicate that gender dimension overrides the sense of security afforded by the degrees themselves. This is to say that regardless of employment status and graduation, female engineering respondents all reported pursuit of certificates to that may help them earn money in case they got stuck.

All female social science graduates in this category on the other hand have tried to land in employment through KPSS or have planned to do so in case they were not employed in another field. One respondent in this category who is a social science graduate but has never attempted to take the KPSS explains she did not do so because she was already employed in a private company. However, she too mentioned collecting different certificates. Another respondent, who tried the KPSS path but ended up being employed by the company where her father worked upon his sudden death, argued that the individual has to prove oneself and translating the “theory into practice”. The only male respondent in this category, Deniz, was pursuing guarantee because he was married at a rather early age and have assumed responsibility of his own family, unlike most of the respondents in this study. For this reason, he was tending to opt for more guarantee on the basis of considerations of family.

Although all respondents in this category had family support, they nevertheless emphasised individual means for investing in oneself as a means of ensuring guarantees. This is to say that investment in self as a strategy for providing guarantees is a significant feature of transition to work as young people tend to rely on themselves more and more than the family or the state or other institutions.

Guarantee-seekers may end up becoming career-oriented independents through securing greater independence and autonomy from their families. On the other hand, in cases that they are stuck in their path due to reasons like lack of job opportunities, or repeated failure in the KPSS path, young people could turn into undeterred ones.



#### 4.5.4. Undeterred ones

Respondents in this category are named undeterred in a rather ironical way. All young people in this category are social science graduates and all but one of them keep on trying to land in employment through KPSS, the outlier to this category is Filiz who nevertheless is placed in this category because she was incessant in pursuing the path she has ended up in as a result of trying the others. The respondents in this category seem to be suffering from a sense of lack of alternatives and have believed that the path that is most suitable for themselves is the KPSS path.

All respondents in this category express strong remorse over not having thought about post-graduation and not investing in themselves *sufficiently*. All respondents, but one female social science graduate in this category are from middle class family background who are supported by their families. The remainder too has a lower class family background and is under strong pressure to be employed in the KPSS. Therefore, one aspect of undeterred trials of their current path is about meeting family expectations. In this sense they are similar to the young people reported in Çelik's (2008) study, where young unemployed people were supported by family in return, follow their parents' instructions about life plans.

Young female respondent from lower class background expressed deep resentment with the whole process of KPSS she has been repeating over the years incessantly, and expressed that she was at the verge of giving up. Having been unemployed for a lengthy period of time, and given the family pressure to be employed, this respondent is most likely to end up being in the category of unemployed youth.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to analyse formation of self in transition from higher education to work as a critical life course event. Hence, it was devised as an inquiry that would come up with an understanding as to how young people make sense of the labour market and the world of work in the context of transition to labour market, and to discuss the traces of shift in mentality with regard the labour market, the world of work; which are connected to how people live. Therefore, transition to labour market is understood not only as an economic event, but also a social and cultural event through which social structural conditions are negotiated and mentalities are constructed through contact with the labour market.

In order to do this, the study assumed a theoretical position which aimed to place individual (young people) and structure (education and work) into dialogue by attending to both the objective factors, and the subjective representations of these factors which also build into the structural factors. As a result of these, a particular type of self emerged which is a strategy that young people assume to tackle the insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market.

While the common wisdom assumed that higher education is a secure way of enhancing future prospects for individuals, the statistics and recent studies pointed at a different direction. Especially the trends of increased insecurity and uncertainty at work further makes this assumption problematic and young people, as I showed in my fieldwork are increasingly aware of the conditions that frame their transition to work. Despite higher education and attainment of middle class lives is a high-stakes game nowadays, the means that lead to it are increasingly volatile. Conditions that enabled

stable transitions to work becomes a structural factor that add up to increased uncertainties while policy considerations keep on assigning the youth with the role of enhancing economic prospects of the country. However, actual experiences of this category of population finds limited representation in its right, and this study aimed to bring this issue under light through asking the following research questions:

Does the field of graduation have influence on the way young people perceive and construct their selves within the context of higher education to work transition?

Indeed, the perceived labour market prospects of the degree field is a significant factor that turned out to be affecting the way young people demonstrated individualised responses in transition to labour market. Despite all respondents' uncertainty and insecurity due to credential inflation, high unemployment rates and high number of graduates waiting to be hired, engineering and social science graduates placed different intensities of stress on the individualisation discourse. Besides, social science graduates were more concerned with employability-related issues such as courses and experience building while engineering graduates seemed to be more determined in their courses of action as to making their degrees work for themselves.

Considering the high levels of unemployment in general and skilled labour unemployment in particular, how do young male and female social scientists and engineers construct their self in the process of higher education to labour market transition within the context of insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market?

And following this, as to contextualise: What are the structural, institutional and subjective dynamics (such as degree field, gender, family) that influence the construction of the self in the context of transition to labour market?

These questions were answered based on field data, which was collected to provide insight into how young people perceive themselves and locate themselves in the process of transition to labour market and how they go about constructing their selves. It became clear that the process is experienced as a break and that student status and graduate status carried different meanings as being youth, i.e. more child-like and as

being a graduate i.e. more adult-like, charged with the task to be self-directing. It turned out that at least for my respondents, the thought about livelihood on the basis of labour market was delayed as much as possible – this is more so for the middle class background students. Only after graduation do the young people in this study perceived labour market as a site of uncertainty and insecurity. Indeed, they made sharp contrasts between education and their student selves and the post-graduation experiences.

After graduating, work, came to symbolise the utmost experience of being an independent and autonomous individual. However, this also implied that they have to be self-relying. In other words, they came to experience themselves as if they are owners of their labour, or self, which they continuously have to endow with particular skills and qualifications. The self had to be made open to work, to be flexible and to be adaptable. Most of the respondents believed that while being a student, they had limited chances to get to know the world of work and therefore they did not have questions about investing in themselves, which emerged as a theme that runs across the fieldwork and turned out to be the implication of what is conceptualised as individualisation on the field.

Therefore, against the insecurity and uncertainty in the market, young people seek to ensure that they are themselves employable – this is to say that they must develop individual skills and sources as to find employment. There may be increased competition on the supply side of the labour market, so do the young people have to compete, sometimes in a “friendly” environment against their fellow peers. If in doubt, there must always be room for “just in case” investments such as an additional diploma, especially if the individual is aware of the discrimination on the basis of gender in the labour market. In other words, guarantees are not sought in the institutions themselves, or in the way the education system is devised. The guarantee is constructed on the basis of individual’s ability to adapt to potential changes. Therefore, there is an individualised notion of guarantee coupled with adaptability, which is assigned as the meaning of work. Higher education is a basic minimum in

this context, and the advice the respondents would give to their younger selves and actually to younger generations of young people is that they take investment in their selves seriously. As such, at the current juncture in Turkey, individualisation increasingly becomes the norm under which transition to labour market has to be navigated.

As the outcome of this study, these overall themes unrolled four models with which how young people work on their “self” in the process of higher education to work transition can be understood. The four models of construction of self in the process of transition to labour market are distinguished by the responses that young people give to the perceived conditions that they are going through in the process of transition to labour market. It turns out that there are four main patterns among young people the ones who are career-oriented independent, the guarantee-seekers, the undeterred ones and the risk-takers. While the way they approach the labour market and locate themselves within it are different at the first glance, there is one particular tendency which cross-cuts all of these categories. That is the tendency to perceive themselves in terms of a do-it-yourself biography and to emphasise individualised responses towards the conditions they are experiencing in the labour market.

All of these categories demonstrate how perceived insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market and individualised responses are related to each other from different aspects. The career-oriented independents are confident that they have made their way into the labour market as individuals who rely on themselves, and emphasise that it takes hard work to successfully move into the labour market. For them, career is a matter of self-development and the individuals who have prepared better can simply land in better jobs. For the male respondents who constituted this category, there is limited room for uncertainty and insecurity since they had skills to rely on, namely engineering skills and they are speaking from the advantage of landing in employment earliest among the all respondents. On the other hand, the guarantee-seekers, who were predominantly female, and again were in employment positions had a different attitude. They believed that there is always a risk of experiencing misfortune in the

labour market and emphasised the importance of investment in themselves as individuals. They have, starting from the university, attempted to collect certificates “just-in-case” and are likely to be collecting certificates that may enable them to better adapt to labour market conditions “in case they need it” even if they are at work. Their perspective on investing in themselves is constituted of a more “just-in-case” mentality and therefore they tend to rely on their individual capability to absorb shocks.

The other groups were more complicated and faced greater risks. The undeterred ones tended to stick with the course of action they are located on in any given moment. They too believe that individuals are responsible for themselves however given the absence of alternatives for themselves, they tend to repeat the same actions over and over without essentially hoping for outcomes. They are more likely to turn into unemployed youth out of disappointment. Finally, the risk-takers were the ones who decided to leave their original courses of action and embark on a new field other than the fields expected from their degree fields. While seeming to be displaying a form of agency, their agency is not one that challenges the conditions that bring them to their position. They seek to make their way into more desirable fields through combining individual efforts with family financial support. Young people in this category, do not engage with just-in-case thinking and rather aim to fulfil what is expected of them first and turn to what they believe is more suitable for themselves as individuals. However, they too legitimise insecurity in the labour market conditions and their solutions to their problems are individual solutions. While they may be regarded as extending transition to adulthood, and delaying work, their position, cannot be regarded as an anti-capitalist, reaction (Firat, 2013).

On the whole all young people referred to structural factors that have shaped their courses of action. They do recognise unemployment of youth and skilled population, as well as insecurity in the labour market. All were expressing concern due to increasing numbers of graduates and competition in the labour market. However, all respondents turned to themselves or to their “individual self” as a way of solutions to their problems in the process of transition to labour market. In the case of failure, they

kept themselves responsible and emphasised the responsibility of individuals as to make themselves employable in the labour market. This may be interpreted as internalisation of market discourse on the one hand, but the study clearly demonstrates that the young people's daily interactions are also a part of the process, therefore their position cannot be disregarded as being political dupes, or simple victims.

While the young people in this study were not autonomous themselves, the respondents in this study demonstrated an attitude that champions autonomy of individual in making life decisions and reaching for the future. In a contradictory manner, the family kept at the background as a source of support, and while the respondents emphasised individual solutions and individualised responses, they nevertheless did not reject the family support where available. Indeed, it could even be argued that, in the case of Turkey, individualisation may be enabled by presence of family support rather than being precluded by the presence of it. Indeed, in a context like Turkey, where family has a significant role to play in terms of lives of young people, it is striking to find individualisation and dependence on family at the same time. A problem which is not particularly foreseen in the original theoretical discussions informed most notably by Beck.

In this sense formation of self is characterised with individualised responses and an active process which involves constant negotiation between the location of the youth in the life course and the way social structures are perceived from that particular point of view. As such, formation of self comes to be entangled with concerns to act on the labour market insecurity and uncertainty at the point of transition to work. In this process, uncertainty and insecurity that characterized the conditions of transition to labour market than, is translated into individualized responses on the subjective level.

While these observations hold true for all the young people in this study, there was a striking tendency which needs to be pinpointed for its potential to opening up to new questions for sociological inquiry. These questions eventually directed my attention to a political problem on the one hand and a sociological question on the other. This is the tendency for the young people who feel more disadvantaged to be more eager to

uphold the conditions which they themselves seemed to be suffering from. It was the social scientists who believed that investing in themselves was a goal and that engineers were more tending to disregard engaging in extracurricular activities as a means for increasing chances for employment. While investing in oneself was seen as a necessity, the expressed concerns on this issue was more visible on the part of the social science graduates rather than engineers. Similarly, it was female respondents (both social science graduates and engineers alike) who tended to bring up the notion of “just in case” while thinking about investing in themselves. And furthermore the young female respondents were actually more likely to be taking courses to make themselves more employable against all odds while the male respondents believed that they should act only if there is necessity demanded by actually existing conditions. Indeed, these tendencies is the utmost crystallisation of the link between insecurity characterizing structural conditions and the insecurity experienced on the individual level which in turn leads to individualization of responses and construction of self.

All these are likely to have social and political consequences on the present time and in the future. This is most clearly sensed in the tension experienced over ability to make plans for the future. Young people were still felt unable to make plans regarding future, therefore cherished presence in perpetual presence. However, they at the same time criticised their selves who cannot make plans and normatively asserted ability to make plans for the future as a desirable characteristic for themselves. In actual practice, as their contact with the labour market intensified, the more prominent thinking about the future became for themselves, and the more they thought their trajectories as do-it-yourself trajectories tied with the world of work. All respondents in this study emphasised development of themselves or as the technical language in this study conceptualised it, investing in themselves as a duty for the individual. The individual, in this regard had to view themselves as an enterprise and invest in desirable qualifications. There was limited thought about the social background or the context of employment when it came to thinking about becoming employable. Indeed, some respondents believed that individual attributes such as being willingness, determined and hardworking as the factors that facilitated employability. Therefore, while keeping



the individual responsible, in the face of contemporary conditions, there is a tendency that mimics the individualisation of responses, that they tend to overlook inequalities and assume that they are individual problems to tackle.

For this reason, young people tend to reproduce the conditions which they seemed to be suffered from. Furthermore, the stronger the sense of insecurity was, the more intensely individualization was observed. For this reason, this study also brought up a very significant question which perhaps needs to be questioned more than ever, that is why does the more disadvantaged social groups tend to reproduce the conditions and values which create the conditions which they seem to be suffering from?

The answer, as this study aimed to show cannot be reduced to the concept of ideology or being influenced by a particular ideology or discourse. Rather it may be only one part of the problem, and the answer, it seems lies in the very fabric with which the daily life is woven. For this reason, a close attention between structural factors and individuals is essential and the public dimension of private troubles needs to be kept in mind. This study made the case for presence of individualisation of youth transitions in Turkey, a diagnosis which needed to be established for further questions to follow.

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## APPENDICES

### A. HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800  
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY  
T: +90 312 210 22 91  
F: +90 312 210 79 59  
ueam@metu.edu.tr  
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr  
Sayı: 28620816/207

05 NİSAN 2017

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

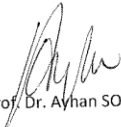
İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu


Sayın Doç. Dr. Fatma Umut BEŞPINAR;

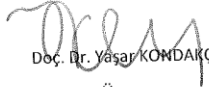
Danışmanlığını yaptığınız yüksek lisans öğrencisi Ekin BOZKURT'un "*Gençlerin Üniversiteden Çalışma Yaşamına Geçiş Deneyimleri*" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay 2017-SOS-066 protokol numarası ile 28.04.2017 – 30.11.2017 tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

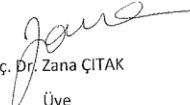
Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

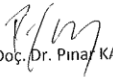
  
Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN  
Başkan V


  
Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL  
Üye

  
Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Yaşar KONDARCI  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Zana ÇITAK  
Üye

  
Yrd. Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN  
Üye

  
Yrd. Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK  
Üye

## B. TÜRKÇE ÖZET/ TURKISH SUMMARY

Türkiye’de yüksek öğrenime dair genel kanı diploma sahibi olmanın gençlerin iyi işler olarak adlandırılan işlere yerleşmesini sağlayacağı yönündedir. Öyle ki diploma, bir geçiş bileti gibi algılanagelmektedir. Son yıllarda Türkiye’de hükümetlerin izlediği yüksek öğrenim politikaları da eğitim sisteminin genişlemesi ve diploma sahibi olan gençlerin sayısının atmasını öngörmektedir. Bu hedefler ve gelişmeler, söz konusu alanda belirleyici bir aktör olan kurumlardan YÖK’ün raporları ile Kalkınma Planlarında da yer almaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda, gençler yüksek öğrenime yoğun talep göstermektedirler. Ancak bu talep, üniversiteden çalışma yaşamına geçişin dünyada da gittikçe sorunlu bir geçiş süreç haline geldiği bir döneme denk gelmektedir. Bir diğer deyişle, günümüzde gençlerin çalışma yaşamına geçiş süreci, yüksek öğrenimin kitleselleştiği ancak bir o kadar da eskiden sağladığı güvenceleri sağlama kapasitesini yitirdiği bir süreçte yaşanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, değişen küresel ve yerel bağlamı göz önünde bulundurarak, bireylerin hayatlarında kritik bir dönem olarak değerlendirilen bir geçiş sürecini gençlerin deneyimleri ışığında incelemeyi amaçlamıştır.

Gençlerin yetişkinliğe geçiş süreçleri günümüzde gittikçe daha da uzamakta, esnemekte ve belirsizleşmektedir. Furlong ve Cartmel (1997)’e göre, 1960 ve 1970lerde geçiş deneyimleri demiryollarında ilerleyen trenlerin hareketine benzemektedir. Doğrultular çizgisel ve belirgin olduğu kadar öngörülebilir. Öte yandan 1980’lerden günümüze değin, geçiş süreçleri otoyollardaki otomobillerin devinimlerine benzerlik göstermektedir. Bu geçişlerde bireylerin özneliği ve seçimleri ön planda yer almaktadır. Bu çalışmanın teorik duruşuna göre günümüzde hem yolların kendisi, hem de yollarda hareket eden taşıtlara değinmek gerekmektedir. Gençlik, bu çalışmada, bir toplumsal kategori ve düzenli yaşam kurmak, iş bulmak, evlenmek gibi toplumsal beklentileri de içeren kritik bir yaşam süreci olarak değerkendirilmektedir. Günümüzde gençler, Wyn ve Dwyer’in de belirttiği üzere (1999) yeni bir toplumsal örgütlenmenin öncüleri olarak da değerlendirilebilirler. Bir

başka ifade ile gençler, Mannheim'ın belirttiği (1951) üzere toplumsalın güncelliğine yakın konumları dolayısıyla gelişmekte olan eğilimlerin de merkezinde yer alma potansiyeline de sahiptirler Çalışma yaşamına geçiş, bu bağlamda değerlendirilmiş olup, gençlerin bu bu geçiş döneminde kendiliklerini ele alıp kendilikleri üzerinde çalışmalarının değerlendirilmek de bu çalışmanın temel amaçlarıdır. Bu anlamda, yüksek öğrenimden çalışma yaşamına geçiş, bir süreç olarak ele alınmış ve bu iki noktayı gençlerin yaşantıları içinde birbirlerine bağlayan deneyim ve pratikler ön plana alınarak incelenmiştir. Geçiş sürecinin içinde cereyan ettiği yapısal koşulların niteliği olan belirsizlik ve güvencesizlik koşulları ile gençlerin nasıl etkileşime geçtikleri de bu koşullara ilişkin algıları ışığında analize dahil edilmiştir.

Her ne kadar Batı'da üniversite sistemlerinin dönüşümü ve bu kapsamda yaşanan gelişmelere ve gençlerin geçiş süreçlerinin bu alandaki yerine ilişkin literatür bulunsa da Türkiye'de bu konuda literatür oldukça sınırlıdır<sup>4</sup>. Bu nedenle güncel gelişmelerin gençlerin deneyimlerini ne yönde etkilediğini ve hatta etkileyip etkilemediğini, tarihsel karşılaştırmalı veriler ışığında ortaya koymak güçtür. Oysa ki üniversite fikrinin ortaya çıktığı ve üniversitenin bir toplumsal hareketlilik aracı olarak değerlendirildiği Batı toplumları bağlamında bile üniversitenin güncel işlevleri ve gençlerin toplumsal hareketliliği açısından değeri ve anlamı sorgulanmaktadır (Ainley, 2016). Türkiye'de ise konu hakkında veri ve çalışma kısıtlı olduğu gibi, genç işsizliği ve nitelikli iş gücü işsizliği gibi konular ekseninde gençlerin çalışma yaşamına geçiş süreçlerinin ne yönde şekillendiği konusunda da oldukça sınırlı sayıda çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bu konuyu gençlerin deneyimleri ışığında gençlerin kendiliklerini inşa stratejilerine eğilerek katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Çalışmanın araştırma sorusu, şu şekilde belirlenmiştir: Farklı alanların ekonomi ile ilişkilene düzeyleri düşünüldüğünde (Tagoe, 2009; Stiwne and Jungert, 2010; Tholen, 2012; Sinn et al., 2016) sosyal bilimler ve mühendislik alanlarından mezun olmanın gençlerin çalışma yaşamına geçiş süreçlerindeki deneyimlerine etkisi nedir?

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<sup>4</sup> Konuya siyasa odaklı ya da psikoloji açısından eğilen çalışmalar için bkz. (Çelik ve Beşpınar, 2011; Dursun, 2012; Üstün ve diğerleri, 2014; Anık ve Özkan, 2016; Demirer, 2016; Elhan, 2016)

Bu soruyu takiben, yüksek genç işsizliği ve artan mezun sayıları dikkate alındığında, sosyal bilim ve mühendislik alanlarından mezun olmuş genç kadın ve erkeklerin çalışma yaşamına geçiş süreçlerinde kendiliklerini 2010’lu yıllar Türkiyesinde nasıl inşa etmektedirler? Çalışma yaşamına geçiş sürecinde kendilik inşasını etkileyen yapısal, kurumsal ve öznel (aile, toplumsal cinsiyet, mezun olunan alan) faktörler nelerdir?

Bu soruların yanıtlanması amacıyla üniversite mezunu gençlerden bir kesit alınmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu kesitin bağlamı olarak Türkçe eğitim verdiği, ve mezun sayısı bakımından Ankara’daki en büyük üniversite olduğu için Gazi Üniversitesi tercih edilmiştir. Yine Türkiye’deki istatistiki sınıflamalara göre, mezunlar arasında en yüksek ağırlığa sahip olmaları nedeniyle sosyal bilimler ve mühendislik alanlarının mezunları görüşme için tercih edilmiştir. Ayrıca görüşmecilerin mezuniyeti üzerinden en az bir en çok beş yıl geçmiş olması şartı aranmıştır, böylece görüşmecilerin çalışma yaşamına ilişkin deneyim biriktirmelerinin mümkün olması ve yeni mezun olma haline bağlı değişkenler sürecin dışında bırakılması amaçlanmıştır. Görüşmeciler ile yüz yüze derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılmış ve görüşmeler, görüşmecilerin onayları alınarak kaydedilmiş, daha sonra araştırmacı tarafından deşifre edilerek analiz edilmiştir. Analizde görüşmelerde en sık tekrarlanan temalar belirlenmiş ve bu temalar ekseninde yanıtlar derlenerek örüntülere erişilmiştir.

Çalışmanın verilerinin değerlendirilmesinde kullanılan teorik çerçeve farklı kanallardan beslenmiştir. Çalışma her ne kadar geçiş sürecine odaklansa da, bunu gençlik çalışmaları literatüründe yer alan “geçiş paradigması” kapsamında ele almamıştır. Zira geçiş paradigması, her ne kadar bir ana metafor olarak yaygın kullanıma yerleşmiş de olsa, örtük olarak gündeme getirdiği beklentiler, yani lineer geçiş beklentisi, geçiş deneyimlerinin tek yönlülüğü beklentisi gibi sebeplerden dolayı tehlikeli olarak nitelendirilmiştir (Cuervo ve Wyn, 2014). Geçiş metaforu ayrıca aralarındaki geçişin incelendiği eşiklerin arasında kalan süreçleri görünmez kılmaktadır, zira eşik olarak nitelendirilecek temel göstergeler başarılı şekilde iş bulmak, ev kurmak, evlenmek gibi normatif kriterler olarak belirlenmektedir. Oysa ki

bu çalışma, geiş srelerini bir kimlik inşası sreci gibi deęerlendirmeyi tercih ederek, sre boyutunu ve sre iinde genlerin deneyimlerindeki dnşmleri ve dnşmlerin neticesinde beliren kendilikleri ncelemektedir.

Son yıllarda genlik literatrndeki geiş sorunsalında Ulrich Beck’ten esinlenen bireyselleşme tartışmaları egemen olmuştur. Bu grşe gre genlerin geiş deneyimlerini son yıllarda şekillendiren deneyimleri kavramak iin biyografik dinamikler, risk ve belirsizlik gibi kavramlar kullanılmalıdır (France, 2007). Bu tartışmalar ekseninde genlerin geiş deneyimlerini şekillendirmek amacıyla aktif olarak seimler yapmaları gerektięi vurgulanmıştır ve yetişkinliğe geişin lineer modellerinin son yapısal gelişmeler nedeniyle geersiz kılındığı kabul edilmiştir. yle ki genler artık nceki nesillerin izledięi yolları izleyerek doęrultularını belirleyememektedirler, kendilerini inşa etmek ynnde baskı altındadırlar ve bu srete risklerden kaınmaya abalamaktadırlar (Evans, 2016).

Bu çalışma kapsamında ise, ncelikli olarak, genlięin bir kategori olarak gncel yapısal koşullar iinde nasıl konumlandığına yer verilmiştir. Bu amaçla Karl Mannheim’ın (1951) ne srdę kşak kavramından yola ıkılmıştır. Kşak kavramı, bu kapsamda genleri yaşı-temelli bir toplumsal konuma yerleştirmekte kullanılmıştır. Sosyal bir sre olan yaşı, ve her yaştan sosyal beklentilere sahip genlerin bir toplumsal kategori olarak deneyimlerinin erevesini etkilemektedir. Bu kapsamda, yksek ęrenimin yaygınlaşması, mezun sayısının artması, diplomaların deęersizleşmesi (Bora ve dięerleri, 2013) gibi koşulların yanı sıra, alışma yaşıamında esneklięin ve belirsizlięin gndeme gelmesi gen kşaęın deneyimlerinin erevesini oluşturmaktadır.

Sz konusu ereve, ncelikli olarak James Coté (2014) tarafından ortaya konulan “genlięin politik ekonomisi” tartışmaları ve bu tartışmaları kşak baęlamına yerleştiren Bessant ve dięerlerinin alışmaları ekseninde izilmiştir. Yapılan literatr taraması neticesinde, Trkiye’nin de dnyada olduęu gibi diplomaların deęersizleştięi bir ortama sahip olmasının yanı sıra alışma yaşıamındaki neoliberal dnşmler sonucunda alışma yaşıamındaki başarı, tutunma, ilerleme gibi mevzularda bireysel



sorumluluğun ön plana geldiği görülmüştür. Bu gelişmelerin bir uzantısı olarak ise, dünyada istihdam edilebilirlik kavramının gençlerin çalışma yaşamı ile kurdukları ilişkinin kavramsallaştırılmasında önemli bir yer tutara, gençlerin işsizliğinin bireyselleştirildiği bir kavramsal çerçevenin ortaya çıktığı saptanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, çalışma yaşamında gençlerin daha yoğun bir biçimde bireysel sorumluluk almak ve kendilerini geliştirmek yönünde hareket etmeye teşvik edildikleri gösterilmiştir.

Özellikle beşeri sermayenin, “demografik fırsat penceresi” (Tılıç ve Çelik, 2016) içinde geliştirilmesi kaygısıyla Türkiye’de bir toplumsal aktör olarak gençlere eğitim yoluyla kendilerini geliştirme beklentisi atfedilmiştir. Dolayısıyla Türkiye’de siyasal aktörler gençlerin sorumluluk almalarını bu bakımdan önemserken, çalışma yaşamında ise gençlerin yer alacağı koşullar gittikçe daha güvencesiz hale gelmekte ancak gençlerden beklentiler ise bir o kadar yükselmektedir. O halde gençler, çalışma yaşamına geçiş sürecinde kendilerini nasıl konumlandırmaktadırlar? Gençlik için kendilik ne şekilde şekillendirilmektedir?

Bu tartışmanın teorik bir zemine oturtulması için Ulrich Beck’in bireyselleşme kavramsallaştırmasına başvurulmuştur. Bu çalışma kapsamında, bireyselleşme, neoliberal koşullarda gençlerin kendileri hakkında düşünüş biçimlerini betimleme ve analiz etmek için bir araç olarak ele alınmıştır. Bireyselleşme kavramıyla kast edilmek istenen, gençlerin yaşantılarını yeni baştan kurmaları değil, bireysel düşünmek ve birey-odaklı sorumluluk almak konusunda daha yoğun adımlar atmak durumunda kalmalarıdır. Bunun nedeni, Beck’e göre, bireyselleştirmeyi ilerleten faktörler, çalışma yaşamındaki değişimler ekseninde kolektif güvencelerin ortadan kalkması, eğitimin yaygınlaşması ile artan rekabettir (Beck, 1992). Buna göre bireyler, yaşamlarını sürdürmek için piyasa koşullarına daha yoğun biçimde tabi kalmaktadırlar ve bu nedenle piyasa terimleri ile düşünme ve eyleme baskısı altında kalmaktadırlar. Piyasaki artan güvencesizlik ve belirsizlik bu anlamda bireyselleşmeyi yoğunlaştıran bir anlam taşımaktadır. Bireyler, artık normal biyografiler yerine “kendin yap” tarzı biyografiler ile kendilik anlatılarını kurmaktadır. Aile, sınıf ve toplumsal cinsiyet

temelli beklentiler, yaşantıları daha az şekillendirirken; bireyler kendilerini “inşa edilecek bir proje” olarak görerek daha fazla rol almak durumunda kalmaktadırlar (Beck ve Beck-Gersheim, 2001).

Gençlerin çalışma yaşamlarına geçiş süreçlerinde piyasa nezdinde deneyimleyecekleri belirsizlik ve güvencesizlik nedeniyle piyasa ile ilişkilendikçe belirli stratejiler ve bunun sonucunda belirli kendilik tipleri geliştirecekleri düşünülmüştür. Saha çalışmasında ise bu varsayımın gerçekleşip gerçekleşmediği, gerçekleşiyorsa ne şekilde gerçekleştiği incelenmiştir.

Saha çalışması 2017 yılının Haziran-Eylül ayları aralığında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Kişisel kontaklar aracılığıyla araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden görüşmeciler ile Ankara’da kendi belirledikleri mekanlarda yüz yüze görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmele kırk beş dakika ila bir buçuk saat aralığında sürmüştür. Saha verilerinin incelenmesinde iki basamaklı bir yol izlenmiştir. İlk basamak gençlerin geçiş deneyimlerini şekillendiren faktörler ışığında çalışma yaşamının ve yüksek öğrenimin nasıl algılandığı, gençlerin bu süreçte kendilerinden beklentileri ve gençlerin gözünde gençlerden toplumun beklentilerinin nasıl algılandığına ağırlık verilerek incelenmiştir. Ardından gençlerin bu yapısal faktörlerin bütününe dair algıları ekseninde geçiş deneyimlerini nasıl inşa ettikleri ve bu süreçte verdikleri tepkiler ile kendiliklerini nasıl inşa ettikleri incelenmiştir ve bu inceleme neticesinde ideal tip kabilinden dört örüntü saptanmış ve tanımlanmıştır. Bunlar, değişen otonomileri dikkate alınarak sırasıyla kariyer odaklı bağımsızlar, risk alanlar, garanti arayanlar, yılmayanlar olarak adlandırılmıştır.

Gençlerin, geçiş deneyimlerini ailelerinden farklı algıladıkları saptanmıştır. Görüşmecilere göre ailelerinin ve üst kuşağın deneyimleri çalışma yaşamındaki güncel deneyimlere ışık tutmaktan uzaktır. Bu noktada gençler özellikle ailelerinin beklentilerini şekillendiren algılar ile kendi deneyimleri arasındaki makasa işaret etmektedirler.

Gençler açısından yüksek öğrenim sahibi olmak, ailelerinin beklentilerine benzer bir anlam taşımaktadır: hayatın geri kalanı için bir ön koşul. Gençler, yüksek eğitimi

çalışma yaşamına geçiş noktasında değerlendirilecek bir ön koşul olarak görmektedirler. Ancak bu konuda bütün diplomaların eşit değere sahip olmadığına da farkındadırlar. Özellikle mühendislik, hukuk, tıp gibi geleneksel mesleklerle ilişkilendirilen eğitim alanları daha yüksek güvence sağlayıcı olarak görülürken, diğer alanlar ikincil plandadırlar ve en iyi ihtimalle üniversite diploması sahip olma aracı olarak görülmektedirler. Bu anlamda eğitime dair tercihler, biyografilerin şekillenmesinde önemli bir noktada dururken, gençlerin bu konudaki tercih kapasitesi sınav sistemi ve aile beklentileri kısıncında belirlemektedir. Bu bakımdan eğitime dair tercihler, Beck'in öngördüğü gibi bir dönüm noktası olarak algılanırken Türkiye örneğinde bunun bir plan yapma basamağı olarak değerlendirilmesi sınırlıdır. Bir başka ifadeyle, Beck'in ön gördüğünün aksine, plan yapan gençlere ilişkin bir gözlem yapmak güçtür.

Eğitim, Holdsworth'un (2018) belirttiği üzere bir tür *genel-geçer ayrıksılık* (*generic distinctiveness*) aracı haline gelmiştir. Bir başka deyişle, eğitimin sağladığı ayrıksılık hissi ve beklentisinin sağlanması bir önkoşul halinde kendini göstermektedir. Görüşmeciler için de bu benzer şekilde cereyan etmiştir. Üniversite eğitimi tek olası yol olarak gören orta sınıf kökenli gençlerin yanı sıra, ailesi alt sınıf kesimlerinden gelen bireyler de eğitimi kendilerine değer katmak için tek geçerli yol olarak görmektedirler.

Öte yandan gençler, eğitim ve çalışma yaşamı arasında iki açıdan uyumsuzluk olduğunu düşünmektedirler. Gençler öncelikli olarak üniversite eğitiminin çalışma yaşamına hazırlık konusunda yetersiz kaldığını dile getirmektedirler. Bunun yanı sıra, öğrencilik sürecinde çalışma yaşamına ilişkin düşünmeye fırsatlarının olmadığını, öğrenciliğin kendi içinde bir iş gibi deneyimlendiğini, ödevlerin ve sınavların daha önemli olarak görüldüğünü belirten gençler, öğrenci kendilikleri ve çalışan kendilikleri arasında bir ayrım kurarak çalışma yaşamına hazırlanan girişimci bir genç tipini söylemsel olarak normatif bir düzeye taşımaktadırlar.

Çalışma yaşamı ise belirsizlik ve güvencesizlik hisleri ile tanımlanmaktadır. Gençler için, çalışma yaşamına geçmek bir kırılma olarak deneyimlenmektedir ve bu

dönemeçle birlikte kendiliğın üzerinde çalışmak için farklı stratejiler geliştirilmesi gerektiğı fikri öne çıkmaktadır. Çalışma yaşamını “gerçek hayat” olarak adlandıran gençler, gerçek yaşam deneyimlerinin elde edilmesinde çalışma deneyimlerinin rolüne dikkat çekmektedirler. Her ne kadar güvencesizlik çalışma yaşamından temel bir beklenti olsa da gençlerin “iyi iş” tanımları da bu süreçten beklentilerini ortaya sermekte ve stratejilerinin nasıl oluştuğunu yansıtmaktadır. Gençlerin işten temel beklentisi öngörülebilirlik ve kendini ifade edebilecekleri bir çalışma biçimidir. Bunun anlamı ise gençlerin çalışma deneyimlerinden çalışma koşullarına dair ve çalışmanın kendisine ilişkin söz sahibi olabilmeyi ve süreçlerdeki değişimleri öngörebilmeyi bekledikleridir. Ancak buradaki öngörülebilirlik, garanti ve güvence kavramları ile karıştırılmamalıdır. Gençlerin ön görülebilirlik olarak adlandırdıkları durum daha ziyade işveren ile aralarında ilişkinin niteliğini tanımlamaktadır, bu nedenle örneğın büyük firmalarda çalışmak, işverenle gayrişahsi kurumsal ilişkiler yerine enformel kişisel ilişkilerin gündeme gelmesi beklenen bir firmada çalışmaktan daha çok arzu edilmektedir. Böylelikle, öngörülebilirlik kavramında ortaya çıkan beklentiler bireyselleşme çerçevesinde yorumlayabileceğimiz, bireysel plan yapabilmenin olanağı olarak işveren ile ilişkilerin öngörülebilir olmasıdır. Gençler ayrıca çalışma yaşamının kendisini bir adapte olma süreci olarak tanımlayarak yine değişen koşullara karşı hazırlıklı olma sorumluluğunu bireylere atfetmektedirler.

Bu süreçte her ne kadar plan yapan bir birey olabilmek gerektiğine dair güçlü bir kanı dile getirilse de, gençlerin çok azı gerçekten uzun erimli planlar yapabilmekte ve daha ziyade süregiden bir güncellik hissi içinde düşünmektedirler. Oysa ki plan yapabilir olmak düşüncesi normatif bir beklenti olarak hem kendilerine, hem de diğer gençlere atfettikleri bir özelliktir.

Gençlerin tüm bu süreçleri dikkate alarak, geçiş sürecine ilişkin bir takım tepkiler geliştirdiklerini söyleyebiliriz. Bu tepkiler, en yalın ifade ile bireyselleşmiş tepkilerdir ve genel olarak yapıya ilişkin tanımlanan faktörlere bireysel tepkiler geliştirmek üzerine kurgulanmıştır. Bir başka ifade ile, formel süreçlere ilişkin söz söylemek

yerine gençler bireysel olarak çalışmaya uyumlu ve açık hale gelmeyi önemsemektedirler.

Gençler, öncelikli olarak garanti sağlaması beklenen işlere yönelmektedirler, özellikle de sosyal bilim mezunları açısından bu eğilim daha yoğun olarak gözlenmektedir. Bu bakış açısına göre KPSS ile devlet kurumlarına atanmaya çalışmak bir garanti elde etme yolu olarak görülmektedir. Her ne kadar KPSS sürecinin kendisi belirsizlik ile örülü bir süreç olsa da, gençler bu süreci kimi zaman tekrar tekrar denemektedirler. Öte yandan bu süreci uzun yıllar boyu denemek, iş aramaktan kaçınmanın ve gençlik halinin oldukça belirsiz bir süreç içinde aileye bağlı olarak sürdürülmesine neden olmaktadır.

Gençler, çalışma yaşamına geçiş bağlamında güvencesizlik ve belirsizliği normalleştirmektedirler. Özellikle deneyim eksikliğinden yakınan gençler, çalışma yaşamına geçiş için asgari düzeyde deneyim sahibi olunması gerektiğini belirtip, bu deneyimin elde edilmesi için gerekirse ücretsiz olarak çalışmanın göze alınabileceğini ifade etmektedirler. Kimi görüşmeciler için ise bu süreçte “iş seçmemek” en önemli stratejidir, öyle ki piyasadaki artan yeni mezun havuzu da bu noktanın dayanağını oluşturmaktadır. Gençlere göre piyasada çok sayıda mezun bulunuyor olması ve mezun sayısının artıyor olması gençlerin işverenler nezdinde pazarlık gücünü azaltmaktadır. Kendilerini kolayca yenilenebilir ve gözden çıkartılabilir gören gençler, bu nedenle düşük ücretli ve güvencesiz işleri kabul etmek gerektiğini ifade etmektedir. Özellikle kadın görüşmeciler ise gerekli hallerde “yalnızca eğitim alanıyla uzaktan bile ilgili olması” koşuluyla işleri kabul edebileceklerini ifade etmektedirler.

Bu süreçte, gençlerin en çok vurguladıkları yaklaşım ise “kendine yatırım yapmak”tır. Çalışma kapsamında görüşme yapılan görüşmecilerin tümü çalışma yaşamına geçişi kolaylaştırmak için kendilerine yatırım yapmak, kendilerini geliştirmek gerektiğini ifade etmiştir. Kimi zaman iş deneyimi elde etmek biçiminde kendini geliştirmeyi öneren gençler, kimi zaman ise bilgisayar programlarını öğrenmek için kurslara gitmeyi ya da liderlik ve iletişim becerileri gibi kişisel gelişim alanlarında sertifika almayı önermektedirler. Kadın ve erkek görüşmeciler arasında bu noktada bir ayrım

saptanmıştır. Özellikle genç kadın görüşmeciler, güvencesizlik karşısında daha fazla “elimde bulunsun bir gün lazım olur” stratejisine başvurmuşlardır. Öyle ki mühendislik mezunu genç kadınlar da her ne kadar kendi alanlarında iş bulabiliyor olsalar da “elimde bulunsun” diyerek sertifikalar elde etmeyi sürdürmektedirler. Benzer şekilde sosyal bilimler mezunu genç kadınlar da aynı mantıkla sertifikalar toplamış ve hatta topladıkları sertifikaların yetersizliğinden yakınmışlardır. Sertifika sahibi olmanın kişiye bir güç verdiğini öne süren gençler için, sertifikalar adapte olabilme becerisini sağlayan bir kaynak olarak görülmektedir. Böylece farklı deneyim ve faaliyetlerle çeşitlenmiş bir CV sahibi olmak, olası olumsuzluk durumlarında bir güvenlik ağı gibi işlev görebilecek olarak algılanmaktadır. Bu anlamda kendini geliştirme sorumluluğu hem piyasa dilinin benimsenmesi anlamına gelmektedir, hem de gençlerin gündelik hayatlarını sürdürmek için geliştirdikleri bir stratejinin sonucu olarak bu dili benimsemektedir.

Bu tutumu destekler nitelikte bir başka tepki ise, gençlere çalışma yaşamına geçişin kimin için daha kolay olduğu sorulduğunda gündeme gelmiştir. Görüşmeciler, bu süreçte bireysel becerilerin yanı sıra, hedef odaklı olma”, “kararlı olma”, “girişken olma” gibi özellikleri sıralayarak sürecin işleyişini bireysel özelliklerin varlığı ya da yokluğu üzerinden anlamlandırma yoluna gitmişlerdir. Tüm bu eğilimlerin dağılımı incelendiğinde dört ana kategori ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlar, kariyer-odaklı bağımsızlar, risk alanlar, garanti arayanlar ve yılmayanlar olarak adlandırılmıştır.

İlk kategori tümüyle erkeklerden ve yoğunluklu olarak mühendislerden ortaya çıkmış olup çalışma yaşamına geçişte kendini geliştirmiş olmanın önemli olduğu, gerekirse iş seçilmemesi gerektiği ve bireylerin kendilerini ayrıksı kılmaları gerektiği gibi görüşler öne sürülmüştür. Bu grupta yer alan görüşmecilerin tamamı mezuniyetlerinden kısa bir süre sonra işe yerleşmişlerdir. Risk alanlar erkek görüşmeciler olup, aile desteklerinin sağladığı imkan zemininde ailelerinin kendileriden beklentilerine sırt çevirerek kendi alanları dışında işlere yönelmeye çalışan gençlerdir. Bu kategorideki gençler daha önce iş deneyimi elde etmiş ve kendi alanlarında çalışma deneyimi de elde etmişlerdir ancak kendilerine ilişkin planları toplumun ve ailelerinin kendilerine

ilişkin beklentilerinden farklıdır. Bu gençler her ne kadar bireysel öznelliklerini ortaya koyuyor ve bağımsız bir tutum sergiliyor gibi değerlendirilebilecek olsalar da tutumlarının imkan zemini aile desteğidir ve bu bakımdan kısıtlı bir öznellik noktasında durmaktadırlar. Kendilik inşasında bir başka yaklaşım ise garanti arayışları üzerinden şekillenmiştir. Bu kategori ise ağırlıklı olarak kadın görüşmecilerden oluşmuştur ve en önemli boyutu görüşmecilerin tamamının garanti sağlamak amacıyla kendilerine yatırım yapma stratejisini sertifika toplamak yoluyla elde etmiş olmalarıdır. Bu kategoride yer alan gençler garanti arayışları çerçevesinde belli bir alanda uzun süre devam etmeye çalışmaları ve bu halde umutlarını yitirmeleri halinde bir sonraki kategoriye kayabilme ihtimali göstermektedirler. Son kategori olan yılmayanlar ise aile desteğine sahip olup, farklı bir alternatifleri olmadığı düşüncesiyle KPSS gibi süreçleri tekrar tekrar deneyen ve sonucunda hayal kırıklığı yaşararak işsiz gençler kategorisine kayma eğilimi gösteren gençlerdir.

Tüm kategorileri ortak kesen yaklaşım bireyselleşmenin farklı açılardan tekrar tekrar üretiliyor olmasıdır. Özellikle tüm kategorilerden gençler bireysel sorumluluk almak gerektiği fikrinde hemfikirdirler. Yapısal koşulların farkında olup bunlara bireysel yanıtlar geliştirmek noktasında durmaktadırlar. Ayrıca ilk kategorideki gençler dışındaki kategorilerdeki gençler bütünüyle otonom olmamakla beraber otonomluğu varsayan bir pozisyonda kendiliklerini konumlandırmaktadırlar. Bunu mümkün kılan zemin aile desteğinin varlığıdır, böylelikle bireyselleşme neticesinde ailenin etkisinin zayıflayacağını tartışan literatürün aksine, Türkiye bağlamında ailenin varlığı bireyselleşen tutumların da imkan zemini olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bunu Türkiye'nin özgül bir koşulu olarak değerlendirmek mümkündür.

O halde, çalışma yaşamına geçiş süreci, yoğun bir kendilik oluşum süreci olarak değerlendirilecek olursa, bu süreçte kendiliğin bireyselleşmiş bir şekilde, bireysel stratejiler sonucunda inşa edildiğini söylemek mümkündür. Kendilik ve kendiliğe yapılan yatırımlar neticesinde girişimci olarak adlandırılabilen bir kendilik tipi tüm görüşmeciler tarafından söylemsel olarak inşa edilmiş ve benimsenmiştir. Bu durumda piyasa ile çatışmak yerine piyasa ile uyumlu hale gelmeye çalışan gençlerin

oluşturduğu benliğe bakılarak piyasa değerlerinin yaygınlaşmasının ve benimsenmesinin bir tepeden inme ideoloji sorunu değil, bir gündelik hayat pratiklerinin şekillenmesi sorunu olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Öte yandan gençler, bireysel sorumluluk fikrini ön plana çıkarırlarken analiz neticesinde beliren öznel farklılıklara denk düşen farklı yaklaşımları göz ardı etmişlerdir. Burada en çok dikkat çeken nokta, piyasa açısından daha dezavantajlı konumda olan sosyal bilim mezunları ve kadınların hissettikleri güvencesizlikle orantılı olarak kendilerine yatırım yapma stratejisini çok güçlü bir şekilde gündeme getirmeleridir. O halde ortaya önemli bir politik ve toplumsal sorun da ortaya çıkmaktadır. Neden yapısal koşullar açısından dezavantajlı olan gruplar, kendi dezavantajlı pozisyonlarını üreten değerleri benimsemektedirler ve yaşadıkları yapısal sorunları yapısal sorunlarla açıklamak yerine kişisel nedenlerle algılamaktadırlar?

Bireyselleşmenin güvencesizlik ve belirsizlik hisleri ile ilişkisini tayin eden çalışma neticesinde, Türkiye’de 2010lu yıllarda belirsizleşen çalışma yaşamına geçiş sürecinde farklı kesimlerden gelen gençler için bireysel stratejilerin önem kazandığı saptanmıştır. Bir başka saptama ise, piyasa koşulları ile ilişkilendikçe bu tutumların daha da güçlenerek gençlerin kendilik kurgularına sirayet etmesidir. O halde denilebilir ki, yapısal sonuçlar sonucunda ve onlara “çözüm” olarak üretilen tepkiler, esasen aynı yapısal koşulları yeniden üreten ve onları destekleyen bir sonuç vermektedirler. Bu çalışmanın odak konusunu oluşturan gençlerin toplumsal örgütlenmenin geleceğine katkıları düşünüldüğünde, bu yaklaşımın gelecek yıllarda da etkisini gösteren bir boyutu olacağını söylemek mümkündür. Wyn ve Dwyer (1999)’ın ifadesi yeniden hatırlanacak olursa, gençlerin benlik kurgularında ortaya çıkan bireyselleşme durumunun gelecekteki düşünüş, kavrayış ve algılayış biçimlerini de besleyen bir boyutu olması kuvvetle muhtemeldir.



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#### YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname : BOZKURT  
Adı / Name : EKİN  
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